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Chapter 6 : Communicating with the media - Interviews

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CHAPTER 6: COMMUNICATING WITH THE MEDIA; INTERVIEWS

Introduction

In communicating through Mass Media such as television, newspapers, radio, magazines, films, books, records, tapes and cassettes and CDs, professional communicators decide on the nature, content and goals of messages and send them to large and diverse audiences who attend to these messages and perceive them and respond to them selectively. However, these days the Internet, in allowing individuals to address a potentially large audience without the aid of professional communicators, blurs the distinctions made about Mass Communication.

Issues

Studies of media effects on the individual, on society, on the level of knowledge of news and politics, on attitudes shaped through persuasion and advertising, on tolerance for violence and on children's attitudes and fears, have led to a range of theoretical explanations for these effects. We need to ask ourselves how many of our ideas of what we regard as 'normal' come from television or other media.

A key concern of those interested in the media is its effect on shaping both national and international culture. Smaller countries find it hard to resist the spread of American culture and values through the media.

Cultural analysis including critical analytical analysis of ideology–ideas we live by, feminist/gender analysis, Marxist analysis and psychoanalytic analysis has led to considerations of the media's profit orientation, its control over or "gatekeeping" of what is important, its agenda setting, its ethical standards on such things as conflict of interest, invasion of privacy and the very creation of news by paying interviewees or using file tape footage as inappropriate illustration of issues. All these variables need to be considered in any analysis of the effects of mass communication upon individual and community values, beliefs and behaviour.

Individual task

Watch two episodes of Media Watch on the ABC. Write a paragraph using the format on p. 69 on "The issues discussed on Media Watch are important because ...." or "Media Watch is unduly critical of the media ...." giving reference to one or more of the analytic stances outlined above.

Team task: Media analysis

In his book on the use of file tape in television news Putnis (1994) showed that the file tape possessed by television studios appeared to influence how much time was devoted to a story. Stories with readily accessible images were more likely to be broadcast than those without. Putnis also showed that in a subtle way our concepts and images of ideas were being influenced by the images available to TV studios. For example, he showed that in a succession of stories the images of a group of Aboriginals sitting under a tree with their dogs and of a woman on a dusty outback road with her dog were recycled. Aboriginals were thus stereotyped by the constant use of the same images. In the same way working women were portrayed as factory workers rather than teachers or accountants, Asians were "symbolised by bar–girls", and Australians as "white–coated scientists".

Collect a tape of a week's news broadcast and make a record of any file tape, noting the way that it is used. What conclusions can you draw from this?

Paragraph and discussion

After discussing the issue in groups of three, write paragraphs using the format on p. 69 on whether the quotable quotes–

"We get the media we deserve"
"All the news that's fit to print"

apply to Australian media in the nineties.

Writing tasks

Essay topics:

- How do the mass media affect the values, attitudes and behaviours of their audience?

- Which theory or theories of mass communication best explains the effects of mass communication?

Choose one of the following issues –

1. Representations and effects of violence in the media
2. Privacy issues in the media
3. Democracy in the media
4. Censorship and the media

and demonstrate how particular cultural analysis and/or media research illuminated and developed discussion and furthered knowledge and understanding of this issue.

Report topic

Explore the issue of the effect of violence in the media. Write a report including your recommendations on what a new Minister for Communication should do about media violence and claimed links with actual violence.

Discussion task

Prepare a list of videos and their ratings. Do you think that the current system of video and film classification is adequate?

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