A2 Sociology

T1: The Relationship Between Ownership & Control of the Mass Media
## The AQA Specification: What Do I Need to Know?

### Specification Content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Vocabulary and Concepts</th>
<th>Private Service Broadcasting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Concentration of Media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private Media Ownership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State Media Ownership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Globalisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Synergy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marxism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neo-Marxism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agenda-Setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gate Keeping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pluralism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ownership</td>
<td>Private and State Ownership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public Service Broadcasting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trends in Media Ownership (UK &amp; Globally)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Theoretical Perspectives on Ownership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Marxism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neo-Marxism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pluralism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Ideology and the Media

|                         | Ideology and the Media |
# WHO OWNS AND CONTROLS THE MEDIA?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic 1 Outline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.1. Who Owns the Media?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The Growth of the Media Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The Changing Face of Media Ownership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The 'Big Players' in the Media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The Concentration of Media Organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.2. Formal Controls on the Media</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Ofcom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.3. Who Controls the Media? The Manipulative/Instrumental Model</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Traditional Marxism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.4. Who Controls the Media? The Dominant Ideology/Hegemonic Approach</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Neo-Marxism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.5. Who Controls the Media? Pluralism</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Trends in Media Growth
Over the past thirty years the media industry has grown significantly, whilst this growth on the surface presents a larger degree of choice to the consumer, it may not be, as it seems.

As, despite the expansion and increasing choice of media products now available to the consumer, there has been a declining pool of sources from which these products come, Williams (2003) describes this process as:

THE CONCENTRATION OF MEDIA ORGANISATIONS:

"fewer and fewer large companies increasingly own what we see, hear and read":

Sociologists argue this process is occurring due to a number of developments.
HOW ARE MEDIA ORGANISATIONS CONCENTRATING?

1.) **Vertical Integration**: This is the process in which a media organisation/company attempts to control all aspects of their industry to maximise profits e.g. Hollywood has and continues to be the dominant figure in world cinema, not only does Hollywood produce films, it also distributes them.

2.) **Horizontal Integration (Cross-Media ownership)**: This is the process in which a media organisation acquires different kinds of media e.g. News Corp: not only does the organisation own a number of Newspapers in the UK and Australia it also owns TV companies such as SKY and Star TV (Asia’s biggest satellite company.).

3.) **Globalisation**: Living in a globalised world, boundaries have eroded surrounding media markets. As a result, there has been an increased competition between media organisations, because of this, many companies have become *global conglomerations*: large organisations with an international presence who have a wide range of products and services across many companies e.g. News Corp.

4.) **Synergy**: Two-fold process. Firstly, media companies are not only producing and selling their primary product e.g. a film, but they are also producing several products associated with it e.g. merchandise - games, soundtracks, and action figures, they then, using other companies they own, sell the products, increasing their profits and market position.

   Secondly, media companies often produce a product and advertise it through their own means e.g. The Sun advertises Sky products - both owned by News Corps.
5.) Technological Convergence: The process whereby several technologies are put into one media product e.g. SmartPhones and Tablets. This technological development has seen a growth in companies who would normally work separately come together (converge) e.g. Orange and Sony.

Bagdikian ‘The Media Monopoly’ (2004) examined the ownership and control of the media. His research highlighted how the concentration of media ownership is not new, but has been present throughout history, yet today, it is just intensifying! Examining the USA, he describes how in 1983, 50 corporations were involved in media ownership, but by 1992, only 22 corporations controlled 90% of media outlets and by 2004 this number was reduced to 7 corporations.

Although the Media in the UK is largely free to report and show whatever it chooses, we live in a society free from state censorship, there are formal controls to Media freedom. Sociologists whilst acknowledging the ‘formal controls’ of media have also suggested three sociological theories surrounding the idea of media control.

1.2: Formal Controls on the Media
THE LEGAL SYSTEM
The law regulates, restricts and prohibits the media’s freedom to report anything they choose in anyway they like. Laws associated with control of the media include:

The Laws of Libel, prevent the publication of untrue statements.

The Racial and Religious Hatred Act (2006) and Equality Act (2010) forbid the publication of opinion that will encourage hatred of and discrimination against people because of their gender, ethnicity or religious belief.

The Obscene Publication Act (1995) forbids the publication of anything a court deems obscene and indecent.

THE GOVERNMENT
In addition to legal and regulatory bodies the government controls the output of media in various other ways:

- Holding official government press conferences and briefings to ensure the government line is presented.
- The employing of ‘spin-doctors’ who attempt to manipulate the media placing a positive/favorable slant on a news item which maybe unpopular or damaging to the government.
- Refusing broadcast license/use software to limit communication.
- Electronic surveillance of emails, calls and websites.

OFCOM

The Office of Communications was established in 2003 to regulate the Mass Media. The organisation ensures:

- A range of high-quality media services with a broad appeal.
- Protection to the public from offensive and harmful broadcasts.
- Protection to people from being treated unfairly in TV or Radio.
- Complaints and issues are dealt with in a fair and timely manner.
1.3: Marxism and the Media

The mass media is a societal institution that transmits and controls the masses through the transmission of **IDEOLOGY**.

Marxists argue there is a **DOMINANT IDEOLOGY** within society that is akin to the **DOMINANT CLASS**. For Marxism, this is the **BOURGEOIS**.

Traditional Marxists argue the media is controlled and owned by a very small group of people (it is concentrated), this allows for a very narrow range of media material to be published/broadcast/presented.

The owners of the media (media moguls, members of the Bourgeois) **directly** control and manipulate its content and as a result, the audience. Profits are protected and the dominant ideology continues to prevail, allowing them control over the Proletariat.

**Marxist writers, such as Ralph Miliband** (*The State in a Capitalist Society, 1973*) argue the media is a tool used by the dominant group (white, male and middle class) to control the masses and convince them the widespread inequalities are inevitable within a capitalist society; Miliband suggests the mass media is the “**NEW OPIUM OF THE PEOPLE**.”

This control is not only imposed on the masses but also **economically** on the media’s workforce (e.g. editors, managers and journalists) as they have little choice in their work and must produce what their bosses want so they keep their jobs. Because of this, media content is biased, one-sided and often attacks, ridicules or ignores
ideas from groups that seem to threaten or criticize the interests of the dominant class, ensuring the status quo within society.

Traditional Marxists assume the media audience is passive, easily manipulated, unthinking and uncritical robots, who swallow every opinion and biased report found in the media. The theory argues media audiences are fed a dumbed-down media diet of undemanding, trivial and uncritical content to avoid them focusing on serious issues or are encouraged to interpret serious issues in a manner which supports/favours the dominant class.

**DO THE RULING CLASS CONTROL THE MEDIA CONTENT? YES:**

😊: **Italy**: Support for Marxist ideas can be found by examining the Italian media-industry. Ex-Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, owned 3 TV channels with had an audience figure of 40% of the Italian population, he used this media outlet to help him win election in 1994.

😊 - **Curran and Seaton (2010)** investigated the content of newspapers and found evidence to support the claim that newspaper owners often did interfere with the newspaper content. For example, in February 2003, Rupert Murdoch strongly supported the War in Iraq; all 175 News Corporation publications also supported the war. Coincidence? Murdoch himself admitted to this at a 2007 House of Lords Communication Committee: “I was hands on both economically and editorially.”

😊- **Tunstall and Palmer (1991)** argue that governments are no longer interested in controlling or regulating media conglomerates; instead they offer ‘regulatory favours’ in return for support or disinterest in government policy, thus allowing media owners to publish and broadcast whatever they wish. Moreover, **The Leveson Inquiry (2012)** adds further support to this claim; during its investigation into culture, practice and ethics of the press it uncovered a range of links between media owners and governments, with the media often giving support to political parties in return for favourable policy.
DO THE RULING CLASS CONTROL THE MEDIA CONTENT?

- **Neophilacs**, those who adopt the use of new media suggest the rise in new digital media, the internet and citizen journalism has undermined the influence and control of media owners, giving more power to the masses.

- **Independent bodies** such as Ofcom regulate the media and as a result of the Leveson Inquiry changes are occurring within the media industry.

1.4: Neo-Marxism and the Media

Both Neo and Traditional Marxists agree the media is a tool used by the ruling class to transmit the **DOMINANT IDEOLOGY**.

SO WHAT MAKES MARXISTS AND NEO-MARXIST DIFFER?

Neo-Marxists have developed the ideas of Traditional Marxism and suggest a number of ways this transmission occurs.

A key idea for Neo-Marxists is **HEGEMONY**. This is a concept developed by Neo-Marxist, Gramsci. It argues through the use of ideas and values the Bourgeois are able to control the Proletariat. Because the **DOMINANT IDEOLOGY** is constantly reinforced and proclaimed within society, it is accepted and seen as the 'norm,' thus, allows, the Bourgeois to keep control.

The media is key in the transmission of values and can be considered part of what Neo-Marxist, Althusser, calls the **IDEOLOGICAL STATE APPARATUSES** - agencies within society that seek to induce the masses into a **FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS** - an acceptance of their position and status within the Capitalist Society.
The key difference between Marxists and Neo-Marxists is seen in discussions surrounding the **INFLUENCE** of media owners.

Neo-Marxists suggest media owners have **LESS** direct influence and control upon the day-to-day content of the media, instead, they argue, this is selected and influenced by media professionals, e.g. managers and journalists. However, despite the lack of direct influence and degree of autonomy by media professional, they continue to produce media products that support the **DOMINANT IDEOLOGY**.

**DO MEDIA PROFESSIONALS CONTROL THE MEDIA CONTENT? YES:**

😊: The Glasgow Media Group (GMG) who are particularly associated with the Neo-Marxist perspective suggest most journalists, who typically are: **WHITE, MIDDLE CLASS AND MALE** as a byproduct of their socialisation process, produce content which supports the dominant, capitalist system. Personal values, translate into professional values, and as such, media professionals often produce content that is 'middle of the road'—often coinciding with the media owner’s view. The representation of ideas which may threaten the status-quo are deemed, unreasonable, extremist, trivial, funny or are attacked, mocked or ignored completely. As a result, items are often excluded from the media, and focus is given to some events rather than others e.g. in the 2011 riots, more attention was given to **WHAT** damage was caused than to **WHY** people were rioting.

😊: Two processes are key for an understanding of the Neo-Marxist perspective: **AGENDA-SETTING** and **GATEKEEPING**.

**AGENDA-SETTING**: the showcasing of limited items within the media, so that the audience has a fairly narrow agenda for discussion e.g. Coronation Street rather than Development Issues.

**GATEKEEPING**: the refusal to showcase items.

**Philo (2012)** in a study of the media coverage surrounding the Global Financial Crisis highlights these processes. He suggests, the media only broadcast
solutions to the crisis as presented by the three main political parties and the bankers themselves (Agenda Setting) whilst completely ignoring solutions from other avenues were not reported (gatekeeping).

**DO MEDIA PROFESSIONALS CONTROL THE MEDIA CONTENT? NO:**

ゼ: Sometimes, media professionals, using their 'NEWS VALUES' see the need to present material which may seem critical of the dominant ideology. This will 'strike a cord' with the audience, attracting them to media outlets and subsequently boost profits for the media owners e.g. highlighting wrongdoings by large corporations and excessive bankers bonuses.

ゼ: The approach underestimates the true power of media owners. After all, it is the owners who have the final say in the appointment of media professionals and often their choice to dismiss those who step too far out of line. A former Sun editor: David Yelland highlighted the high level of control held by Murdoch suggesting: "all Murdoch’s editors go on a journey where they end up agreeing with everything Murdoch says and often have the mantra: "What would Rupert think about this in their head."

 электро - British Sociologist, Stuart Hall argues although the dominant class will control the ideas within the media, they will never total dominance and because of this, there is the possibility that society could chang

1.5: Pluralism and the Media

Pluralists argue power within society reflects a broad range of social interests it is spread among the people, there is a range of competing interests and no single individual or group has a monopoly of power.
**Pluralism and the Media**

The Pluralist Model is in contrast to the Marxist and Neo-Marxist model of media control.

Rather than suggesting media ownership is concentrated among the very few, and its content is produced with an ideological basis, Pluralists argue; the media is driven by 'economic factors' - fight for profits, media owners achieve this by competing with each other e.g. high circulation and high audience numbers.

Rather than individuals or groups of individuals controlling the media, the content is decided via **CONSUMER CHOICE** or as Pluralists suggest, **'MARKET MECHANISM'**. In free-market economies (e.g. UK) it is the people, through their purchase power who are the real power holders.

Media professionals act with autonomy, they produce stories, television programmes and news bulletins etc. that interest and attract the most audience numbers.

**DO AUDIENCES CONTROL THE MEDIA CONTENT? YES:**

😊: There is clear evidence of 'media diversity' in the contemporary world - this suggests that as public demand increases for something, the public will eventually get it. This highlights how it is the public, not 'owners' who control media content. The media must response to the audience as they are free to 'pick 'n' mix.'

😊: Support for Pluralist’s ideas can be also be found in **POSTMODERNISM**. Postmodernists, e.g. *Levene (2007)* argue media ownership is not 'CONCENTRATED' BUT 'FLUID'. Public opinion is influential in what the media shows.
Pluralist’s see the existence of ‘PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING’ as evidence to support their theory. They acknowledge that a significant share of the UK’s media market is PSB (e.g. the BBC) this they argue has a worldwide reputation for being ‘impartial’ & ‘diverse’. The BBC is governed by a royal charter (1926) which stipulates it has a duty to provide programming and entertainment for a variety of audiences. This was updated in 1999.

Whale (1997) suggests media owners have ‘global problems’ therefore they cannot concern themselves with the day to day running of the media outlet/content of their media.

New Media and Citizenship Journalism – audience now produce their own media.

DO AUDIENCES CONTROL THE MEDIA CONTENT? NO:

Has choice affected media quality? Although today there are numerous media avenues has this changed the media’s output? Curran et al (2009) in a content analysis of the UK, USA and Denmark, argues in order to attract more audiences all of forms of media have become less serious and ‘dumbed’ down - the process of tabloidization has occurred. Instead of serious news reporting, documentaries and current affairs programmes the media now focuses upon human interest stories, entertaining and sensationalizing, soaps, reality shows and celebrity culture.

Media organisations are limited in what they can offer the public because of advertising restraints, regardless of their demands e.g. in 1992 Madison Magazine displayed a ‘plus-sized’ model and their advertisers threatened to withdraw their contract.