

## Functionalist perspective

Functionalists see the contribution that technology and media provide to the stability of society, from facilitating leisure time to increasing productivity. **Charles Wright (1975)** identified several ways in which mass media contributes to creating equilibrium in society. He claimed that the **media** provides information that is **valuable to our culture**. The **media are powerful agents of socialisation**. Through the media, culture is communicated to the masses. Serving society through social control, the media act as stress relievers which keep social conflicts to a minimum.

### Criticisms:

- The functionalist perspective seems to hold the image of **people as passive individuals**, in the sense that they accept media messages as they are presented unquestioningly. This is the result of functionalism's 'ignorance' of the ways that audience deal with media products.
- The functionalist perspective has an almost totally **positive stance towards the media and its role in society**.

## Feminist perspective

The feminist perspective argues that women are **portrayed in a certain way in the media**, arguing that this idealised image of femininity is crucial in creating and reinforcing stereotypes. For example, **Ferguson (1980)** studied women's magazines and concluded that media representations were structured around the cult of femininity. The representations were based on traditional, stereotypical gender roles and values, e.g. caring, family oriented, related to marriage, and focused on outward appearance. According to **Almy et al. (1984)**, media portrayals of gender are significant as they reinforce a dominant (hegemonic) ideology, representing men as superior and women as subordinate. **Gaye Tuchman's (1978)** concept of symbolic annihilation refers to the under-representation of women in a limited set of social roles. At the same time, men are represented in a wide range of social and occupational roles.

**Critics** would state that the feminist perspective seems to hold the image of **people as passive individuals**, in the sense that they accept media messages as they are presented unquestioningly. Also, new media has an arguably positive impact on women as it allows for the voices of women from a wider array of backgrounds and countries, with or without traditional power, to be heard.

## Postmodernist perspective

Postmodernists see the **media as central to globalisation** and emphasise the **positive effects** media globalisation has on society. Postmodernists argue that media saturation means there is now an incredibly diverse array of voices and opinions online. This challenges the traditional '**metanarratives**' – or any viewpoint which holds that there is one truth – as is found with traditional religions and political ideologies such as Marxism and science. As a result of **media saturation**, people are now more sceptical of the 'truth claims' of experts, which means it is harder for those with power to manipulate people because 'they know better'.

According to French postmodernist thinker **Jean Baudrillard**, the advent of electronic mass media, such as television, has transformed the very nature of our lives. In our contemporary social world, Baudrillard argued that the border between reality and representation has collapsed, so we cannot longer separate out representations from reality. The media representations are part of the hyperreal world and cannot be seen as separate from it. To Baudrillard, **we are trapped in a hyperreal world**, as our knowledge about social reality and its events is largely, if not totally, defined by mass media images.

### Criticisms:

- Postmodernists **overestimate** the significance of the media. Not everyone, especially those in the working class and those who are older, has access to new media, and therefore not everyone is exposed to its messaging.
- **Marxists** still highlight that **transnational conglomerates** are owned by rich, wealthy individuals and therefore they still promote **dominant ideologies**. This considered, media may not be a force for good.