

Marxist perspective

The **Marxist perspective** of the media holds that **media owners control media content**, and that the media performs ideological functions. The primary role of the media is to keep a largely passive audience from criticising capitalism to maintain the status quo. Media owners are part of the ruling class elite, and they consciously manipulate media content to transmit a conservative ideology to control the wider population and maintain their wealth and privilege. Marxists see the audience as passive and easily manipulated.

Criticisms:

- It is **impractical** for media owners of large corporations to control all output on a day-to-day basis.
- It can be argued that **audiences are not just passive and unthinking**, they are active and critical, and thus not easily manipulated: they can easily choose to switch off if they don't like what they see.

Neo-Marxist perspective

Neo-Marxists argue that **cultural hegemony** explains why we have a limited media agenda. Journalists have more freedom than traditional Marxists suggest, and the media agenda is not directly controlled by owners. However, journalists share the world view of the owners and use gatekeeping and agenda setting to keep items which are harmful to elites out of the media agenda, thus spreading the dominant ideology.

Criticisms:

- Traditional Marxists argue that this view **underestimates** the importance of economic factors. For example, the power of owners to hire and fire journalists.
- The **role of new media** may make this perspective less relevant. It is now much harder to maintain the dominant ideology.
- **Pluralists** point out that this perspective tends to assume the audience are passive and easily swayed by the dominant ideology. The **audience may be more active and critical**.

Pluralist perspective

Instead of ownership concentration, pluralists believe there is **a wide variety of media available** from a wide variety of sources and owners.

Media content is not driven by a dominant ideology or the political interests of owners, but instead the fight for profit through high circulation and audience figures. There is a wide range of competing media platforms and products that reflect a wide range of audience interests and choices. The media is generally free of government intervention and ownership and can present whatever viewpoint they want.

Audiences are free to 'pick and mix' whatever interpretation suits them, they have the freedom to accept, reject or reinterpret media content in accordance with taste and beliefs. Pluralists would argue that journalists are not simply the pawns of their employers but have some professional and editorial honesty and independence. Pluralists would state there must be diversity in the media, as the wide-ranging audience has different tastes and not doing so would force the companies out of business.

Criticisms:

- The owners have the **power** to hire and fire journalists and they do have the power to select high level editors who have similar views to themselves, which may subtly influence the media agenda.
- It requires a lot of money to establish a large media company, and ownership remains **very concentrated**.
- Owners, editors and most journalists share an upper middle-class background and a conservative worldview.
- The pressure to maintain profits has led to **narrowing of media content** with more moves towards uncritical, sensationalist entertainment.