Lecture 2: Audience Formations and Audience Research
Defining the Audience

- Formations of people
- Power relations
- Importance of research
The Developing Audience

- Audiences are becoming increasingly complex.
- Some events invite the audience to take part through voting – BigBrother, X-Factor
- Environment still governed by power relationships.
- Mass audience of the 20th century replaced by audience formations in the 21st century.
History of the Audience

- History of the audience is related to public (spaces) e.g. Greek and Roman public life took place in public spaces - theatres and forums (see Sullivan, 2013 Ch.1)

- Invention of printing press led to mediated audiences not oral audiences

- 17th Century - the crowd was “mindless, ignorant, defenceless, naïve and manipulated or exploited.” Powerful institutions like the Roman Catholic church gained power over the people using the written word

- 18th C – the Enlightenment - John Locke, John Stuart Mill argued that ordinary citizens should govern themselves
History of the Audience cont.

- 19th C – feared because of their agency

- 20th C – film/radio/TV leads to rise of the “mass audience” - passive, susceptible to political and social propaganda of large conglomerates

- 21st C – rise of the Internet leads to notions of online audiences, and social media audiences – active AND passive
Is Social Media accurate?

- Boston bombings were covered by mass media AND social media (bystanders had phones)
- Mass media mistakenly identified 2 Chechen brothers (and others)
- Social media made same mistakes, especially Reddit.com
Audiences as Publics

- Essential in a democracy
- Utilises the public sphere
- Mass media can control and dumb down public discourse
Audiences as Markets

- Essential in a capitalist society.
- The market manages populations on behalf of institutional interests.
- Mass media is a tool to promote consumerism.
- Audiences become units sold to advertisers.
What are Publics?

- People in public discussion.

- The press became integral to national publics.

- Do media control publics?

- Are the media a tool for publics?
There are 4 competing views of media audiences:

1. Media audiences as Public Good
2. Media audiences as Marketplaces
3. Media audiences as Communities
4. Media audiences as Producers
Mass Media as a Public Good

- Powerful connection between the individual and the Public Sphere.

- Media represents the public to itself

- Problems occur when the mass media itself is influenced by government, private sector, or individuals

- Recent media reports re Julia Gillard and Kevin Rudd are not neutral not solely informative
Mass Media as a Marketplace

- TV media content is produced for profit
- Media space can be used to sell commodities to audiences via advertising
- Focus on maintenance of capitalism
- Audience research focuses on ratings and market share
Effects Research in Media

- Typical of academic communication/health research
- Affected by prevailing social and cultural concerns
- Assesses the efficiency of marketing strategies
- Effects of violent media on children
- Effects of pornography on adults
- Hypodermic needle model of media
Models of Media Effects

- Typically looks at violence and sex video games -> violence, pornography -> rape, attitudes, identity
- Confusing, not transferable
- Effects small or non-existent
- The power of the media is likely to be as a probable explanation, not as a cause.
Models of Media Communication

- Context affects the receipt of a message
- Lasswell’s model – “who says what to whom in what channel to whom with what effect”
- As amended: SENDER $\rightarrow$ (other factors) $\rightarrow$ MESSAGE $\rightarrow$ (other factors) $\rightarrow$ RECEIVER
- Stuart Hall worked with cultural context
Communal nature of cultural expression

The general public responds to mass media

Consumers respond to advertisements

Introduces ethnographic research
Ethnographic research

- Originally used by anthropologists to study “primitive” cultures in situ
- Now used by media academics to study all kinds of cultures and subcultures
- The ordinary things we do are studied to examine how we see the world and ourselves
- See video: Anthropological take on social networking
Media Audiences as Producer

- 21st C technologies – YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, reality TV, hypertext novels, mobile phone apps
- No single sources of media, and multiple reception platforms
- Problems arise in terms of ethics, accuracy, credibility
Ethics issues re audiences as producers

If someone says something on someone else’s Facebook page, who is responsible?

Answer: the owner of the Facebook page. High Court of Australia, reported by ABC News, 6 August 2012.

Latest Twitter abuse