

## Media Communication (COM1010) – Essay 1

**Name:** Hagen Dittmer

**Student Number:** 19454821

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**Tutorial Details:** Maya Ranganathan  
Thursday, 2pm, Menzies Building – W403

**Question:** Discuss the role of Media Studies in making sense of the political, economic and cultural meaning of everyday life.

(1357 words)

## COM1010 – First Essay

In the ever changing world in which we live, media plays an increasingly important role in our communities, societies and everyday lives. Media Studies enable us to delve into and make sense of the many forms of media that exist and the various techniques employed to involve target audiences. With an inconspicuous but powerful influence, media makes itself known in many aspects and processes of political, economic and cultural/social life, and by doing so, is also able to design and mould specific images in the minds of the audience – subtly present ideas and through specific techniques, gently force the ideas and opinions on us. Thus, studying media equips people with knowledge and the ability to be aware of such circumstances; not only be aware, but also to take the form of media, the sign or meaning, and analyse it. How it is working (techniques employed), why it is working, and to whom it is aimed at. When equipped with these ‘abilities’, one is able to, much like a mathematical formula, take a form of media and place it into a ‘flexible’ equation, resulting in making sense of many media related aspects that exist in virtually all avenues of our everyday life. In particular, Media Studies enable us to look at and understand three of the most significant and infiltrative aspects of media; political, economic and cultural/social meanings, as previously mentioned. Although Media Studies is looked upon as a controversial and unstable field, it is none the less a hugely important and immensely powerful field that instils the ability to create meaning in all media related cases (Idea from; **Bazalgette**. Cary, ‘*Why Media Studies is Worthwhile*’ in D. Fleming’s ‘Formations’, A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Media Studies Textbook, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2000, pp. 5). Media Studies is undeniably an essential tool that enables the public to not only make sense of, but more importantly understand everyday signs and their meanings.

Although Media Studies makes sense of many everyday aspects of our lives, it does have specific areas of greater presence and as a result,

influence. One of the fields Media Studies excels in making sense of is that of the often blurred subject of political meaning. “The media are viewed as a vital conduit of relations between state and society” (O’Neil, Patrick H., ‘*Communicating Democracy: The Media and Political Transitions*’, Published by Lynne Rienner of Boulder, CO, 1998, pp. 1)

There is a common understanding of the strong relationship that exists between media and politics or political transition. P. O’Neil draws on the point that the relationship is not only strong between media and politics, but vital. Simply put, for democracies to function, society requires access to information as a means to make ‘informed’ political choices – their new government, prime minister/president etc. However, media does not only work in favour of the voting public, but for the very politicians we may be voting for; their requirements of media quite possibly out way that of the general public’s; media is a way to gain an understanding of the public’s voting direction, interact with society and importantly, present their ideas and views. Although it is undeniably clear that politics is indeed heavily reliant on media as a form of communication with the wider community, Trevor Barr, author of ‘*Newmedia.com.au: The Changing Face of Australia’s Media and Communication*’ (Published by Allen and Unwin, Sydney, July 2003, pp 212) adopts Jürgen Habermas point of “where the common people have become alienated from (the) political system...” (pp. 213). Barr looks at a theoretical situation where a governing body alienates itself from the public, as a result of abandonment of media. Consequently, without the use of media as a ‘public seer’, the government is unable to keep track of public opinion and public scrutiny, and distance is brought between the government and the general public.

What was the last thing you bought? Why did you buy it? Why did you want to buy it? And most importantly, was it advertised...?

Media is, as already covered, significantly present in politics and communication with the community, but when comparing its use in economy, really looks like child’s play. The predominant use of media in economics is justified by the huge influence it has for commodity sales, stock fluctuation and globalisation progress. Referring to the questions

posed previously, media is used in economics to influence the public's decisions regarding (in particular) products, services and commodity sales/purchases. It is such a powerful tool in this area that it is being progressively utilised by more and more companies, institutes and manufacturer's in order to harness a mere sliver of media's potential communicative power.

The nineteenth century historian Carlyle, introduced a theory in which he describes the ability of an seemingly unimportant entity to perform a vital role in society, and names it the 'fourth estate', a term we today commonly refer to in studying media and communications. "It matters not what rank he has, what revenues or garnitures: the requisite thing is that he have a tongue which others will listen to; this and nothing more is requisite" (Carlyle. T, *On Heroes: Hero Worship and the Heroic in History*, Published by H. R. Allenson, London, 1905, pp. 349-350). This relates directly to media's position in the hierarchy of 'powers'; media as the fourth estate. Media possess enough influential power to be defined as one of the four major powers in our everyday lives. In comparison, an important role media plays in economics is that of public awareness; media is able to present products to the public and perform the role of 'advertiser'. This role, although a very normal everyday experience, is one of the most vital components of media/economy interaction and can understandably be seen as a significant benefactor of economy – local and international.

In much the same way media acts as a means of communication between organisations and the public, it enables a myriad of cultural aspects of life to be presented to the entire community. Obviously culture is something that changes in each region of the world, so in order for media to work as a communication tool for cultural aspects of everyday life, it needs to adopt cultural specifics for it to apply to and have any effect on the targeted 'audience'. An accurate theory of this culture specific adaptation comes from the author J. Fiske; "...'reality' is always encoded, or rather the only way we can perceive and make sense of reality is by the codes of our culture"... "what passes for reality in any culture is

the product of the culture's codes, so 'reality' is always already encoded, it is never 'raw'," (*Television Culture*, Published Methuen, London, 1987, pp. 4-5). Fiske informs that media personalises its information through the use of 'signs' specific to that culture. This gives it much more meaning to the audience and additionally, effect. M. **McLuhan's**, *The Global Village: Transformations in World Life and Media in the 21st Century*, (Oxford University Press, New York, 1992, pp. 85) defines the idea of the global village; that the increasing use of modern technologies, is bringing us, although not physically, closer and closer together. By bring individuals together, various cultures have also come together. And through this same process, cultures are presented to other cultures and the global village notion becomes even more prominent.

Media Studies is brings into it, many facets of everyday life and is therefore a very broad subject. It deals with in particular the political, economic and cultural aspects of communities and societies. Media can be classified in so many different ways; we are at the point now where it becomes difficult to even determine what is and isn't media so much information is communicated to the public through media, yet many of us are unaware of the many different techniques and manipulations media has adopted. Media is a powerful communication tool "that dominate(s) public life and public perceptions" (*The Media and Communications in Australia*, Edited by S. **Cunningham** & G. **Turner**, Published by Allen & Unwin, Australia, 2002, blurb) and in order to make sense of everyday life, it is essential to have knowledge of the forms of media around you.