

CHAPTER REVIEW

COMMON THREADS

One of the Common Threads discussed in Chapter 1 is the commercial nature of mass media. In controversies about media content, how much of what society finds troubling in the mass media is due more to the commercial nature of the media than to any intrinsic quality of the media themselves?

For some media critics, such as former advertising executive Jerry Mander in his popular book *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (1978), the problems of the mass media are inherent in the technology of the medium (e.g., the hypnotic lure of a light-emitting screen) and can't be fixed or reformed. Other researchers focus primarily on the effects of media on individual behavior.

But how much of what critics dislike about television and other mass media—including violence, indecency, immorality, inadequate journalism, and unfair representations of people and issues—derives from the way in which the mass media are organized in our culture rather than from anything about the technologies themselves or their effects on behavior? In other words, are many of the criticisms of television and other mass media merely masking what should be broader criticisms of capitalism?

One of the keys to accurately analyzing television and the other mass media is to tease apart the effects of a capitalist economy (which organizes media industries and relies on advertising, corporate underwriting, and other forms of sponsorship to profit from them) from the effects of the actual medium (television, movies, the Internet, radio, newspapers,

etc.). If our media system wasn't commercial in nature—if it wasn't controlled by large corporations—would the same "effects" exist? Would the content change? Would different kinds of movies fill theaters? Would radio play the same music? What would the news be about? Would search engines generate other results?

Basically, would society be learning other things if the mass media were organized in a noncommercial way? Would noncommercial mass media set the same kind of political agenda, or would they cultivate a different kind of reality? What would the spiral of silence theory look like in a noncommercial media system?

Perhaps noncommercial mass media would have their own problems. Indeed, there may be effects that can't be unhitched from the technology of a mass medium no matter what the economy is. But it's worth considering whether any effects are due to the economic system that brings the content to us. If we determine that the commercial nature of the media is a source of negative effects, then we should also reconsider our policy solutions for trying to deal with those effects.

KEY TERMS

The definitions for the terms listed below can be found in the glossary at the end of the book. The page numbers listed with the terms indicate where the term is highlighted in the chapter.

media effects research, 513
cultural studies, 513
propaganda analysis, 514
pseudo-polls, 515
hypodermic-needle model, 518
minimal-effects model, 519
selective exposure, 519
selective retention, 519
uses and gratifications model, 520

scientific method, 520
hypotheses, 521
experiments, 521
random assignment, 521
survey research, 521
longitudinal studies, 522
correlations, 522
content analysis, 522
social learning theory, 524

agenda-setting, 524
cultivation effect, 525
spiral of silence, 525
third-person effect, 526
textual analysis, 528
audience studies, 528
political economy studies, 530
public sphere, 530