

# AS Sociology

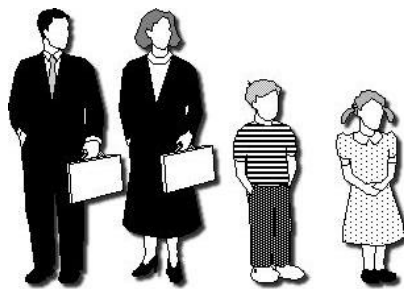
**Revision  
Mapping**

**Mass Media**



**“Different explanations of the relationship  
between the mass media and ideology”.**

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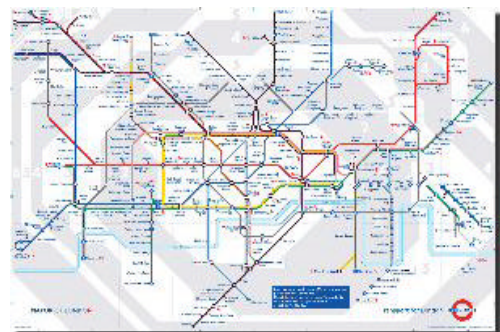
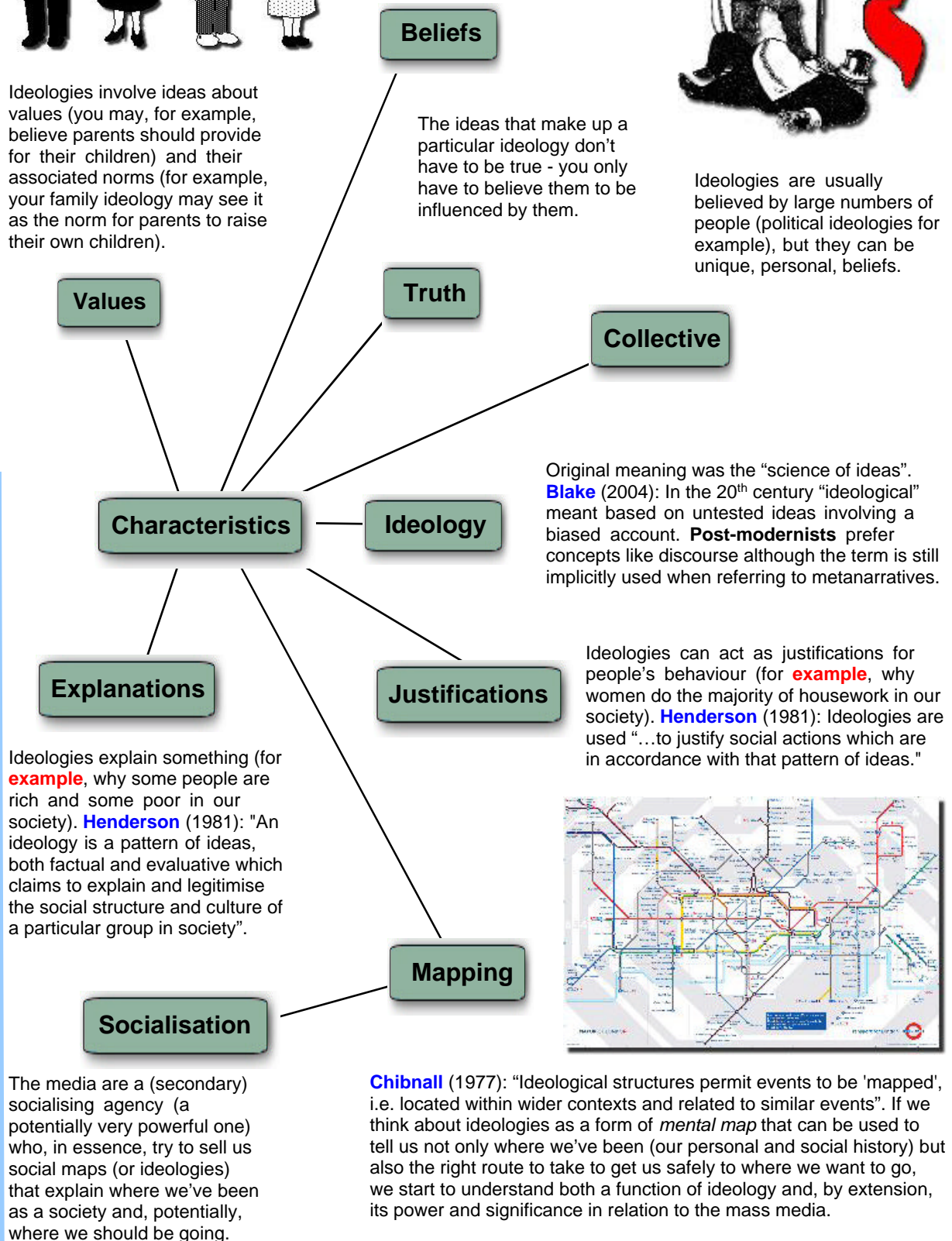


The beliefs we hold about something are related to each other. For example, you may believe the purpose of education is to achieve qualifications. This basic (or core) belief will influence other beliefs, such as how to achieve qualifications (through attending school, for example), your relationships with others in the education system and so forth.



Ideologies are usually believed by large numbers of people (political ideologies for example), but they can be unique, personal, beliefs.

Ideologies involve ideas about values (you may, for example, believe parents should provide for their children) and their associated norms (for example, your family ideology may see it as the norm for parents to raise their own children).



**Traditional  
(Instrumental)****Marxism****Policing**

From this perspective an important role of the media is one of "policing the values" of (Capitalist) society.

**Manipulation**

This perspective is sometimes portrayed as offering a manipulative model of media bias; those who own and control the media use it as a tool to manipulate public opinion in ways favourable to a ruling class.

**Ideology**

Media owners control ideas because they control the information people are allowed to have. The media are consciously biased; they propagate a *world view* (or ideology) that explicitly favours the rich and powerful.

**Owners****Controllers**

Both are powerful in terms of economic ownership and the ownership of ideas (control over the "mental means of production" - how people think about their world and how they behave on the basis of the beliefs they're encouraged by the media to hold).

**Control****Access**

The media is an important agency of social control and media ownership confers the ability to manipulate information and ideas; if you own a newspaper and want to put across a particular version of events there's no-one to stop you doing just that.

People whose views reflect those of media owners are given access to the media, whereas those whose views do not are denied access to air their (alternative or contradictory) ideas.

**Marginalisation**

**Hussain** (2002) : Alternative views are not simply ignored but explicitly attacked - alternative interpretations of events are pushed to the edges of any debate by being labelled as "extremist", "misguided", "lunatic" and so forth.

**Dominance**

Ideas favourable to a ruling class are consistently highlighted and promoted in the media and become part of the dominant ideology.

**Scapegoating**

This involves identifying particular social groups as the cause of social problems.  
**Example:** "asylum seekers" portrayed as the cause of "racial problems". For Instrumental Marxists, scapegoating is designed to create divisions within and between social classes, ethnic groups, genders and the like.

**Diversions**

The media is filled with entertainment and diversions that stop people thinking about how they're exploited and oppressed.



Traditional  
(Instrumental)  
Marxism

Role

The role of the media is to ensure the views and interests of a ruling class are presented to the rest of the population in such a way as to ensure people accept things like inequality as "normal and right".

Mass Society

**Ross** (1995): A *mass society* is one where "the masses" (as opposed to the small ruling elite) have certain characteristics:

Characteristics

Dispersal

Most people are not in daily face-to-face contact with each other because they are widely dispersed across a geographic area.

Isolation

People have little or no meaningful contact or social interaction. What interaction there is (work, for example) is largely *instrumental*. And people lack strong social ties binding them together in communities.

Anonymity

People rarely feel they are part of a functioning social group, community or society - which is where the media enters the picture because it can be used by powerful groups to create a (false) sense of community and culture.

Mass Culture

Artificial

This culture is artificial, in the sense of not being created by the people who consume it.

The "culture of the masses" (sometimes called *popular* or *low* culture to distinguish it from the *high* culture of the social elite) is the *social glue* that binds mass society. It provides the "things in common" (such as values and beliefs) socially-isolated individuals can share to create the *illusion* of a common culture.

Mass Produced

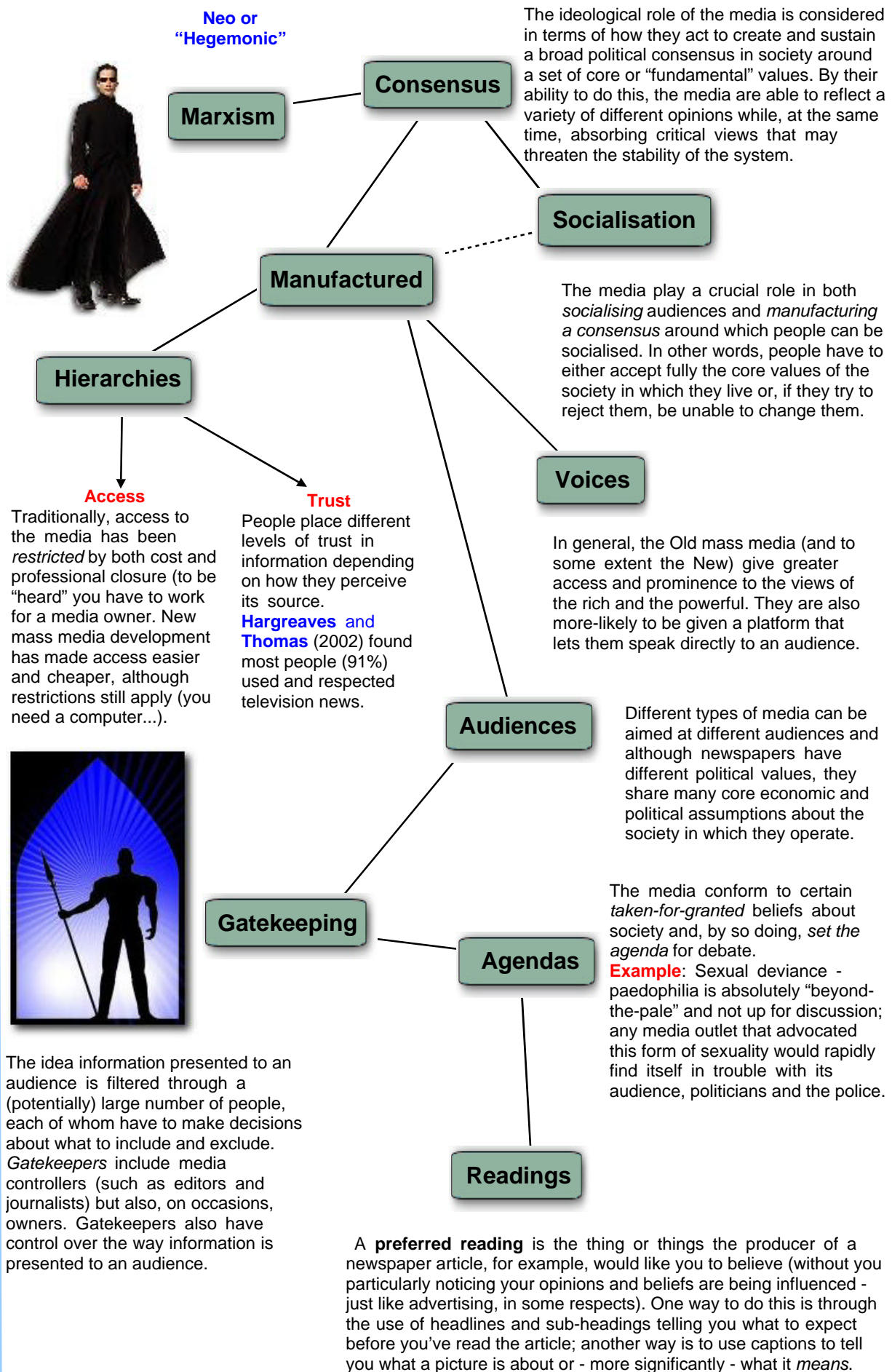
**Fiske** (1995): "The cultural commodities of mass culture - films, TV shows, CDs, etc. are produced and distributed by an industrialized system whose aim is to maximize profit for the producers and distributors by appealing to as many consumers as possible".

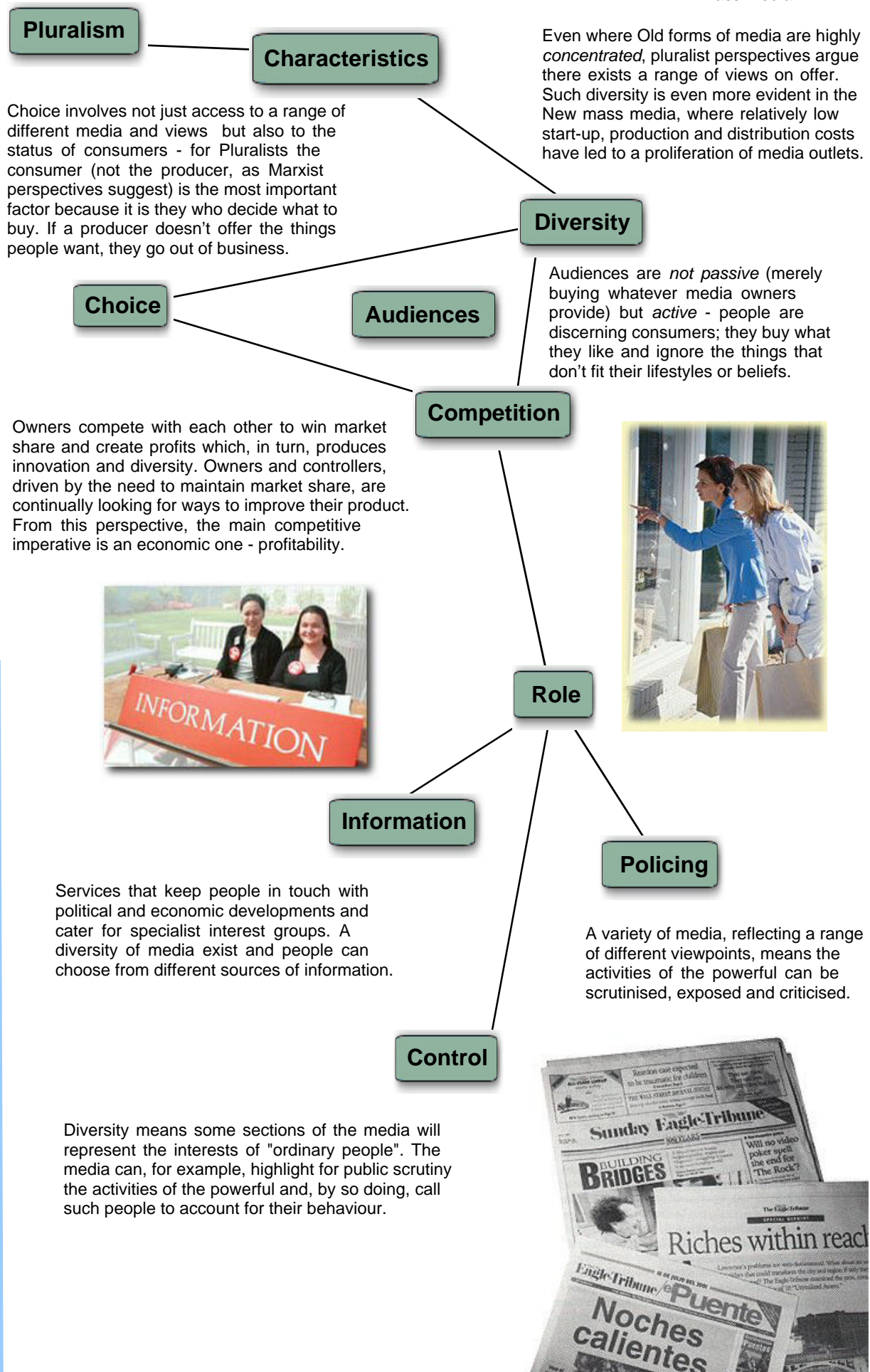
Simple

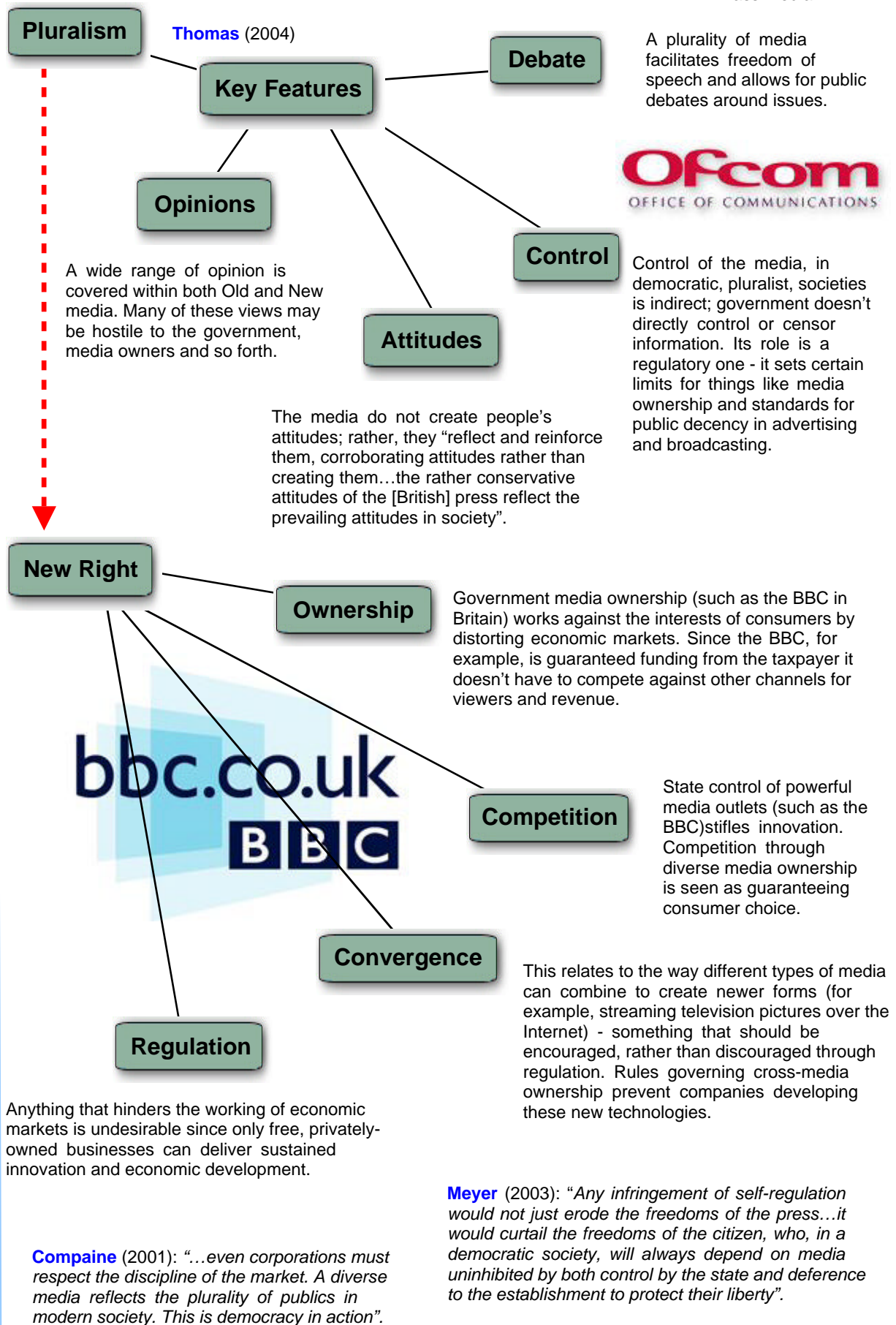
Mass culture appeals to the **lowest common denominator** - to appeal to "the masses" cultural products have to be safe, not intellectually demanding and predictable. To sell to "as many consumers as possible" mass culture has to be bland, inoffensive and simple to understand.









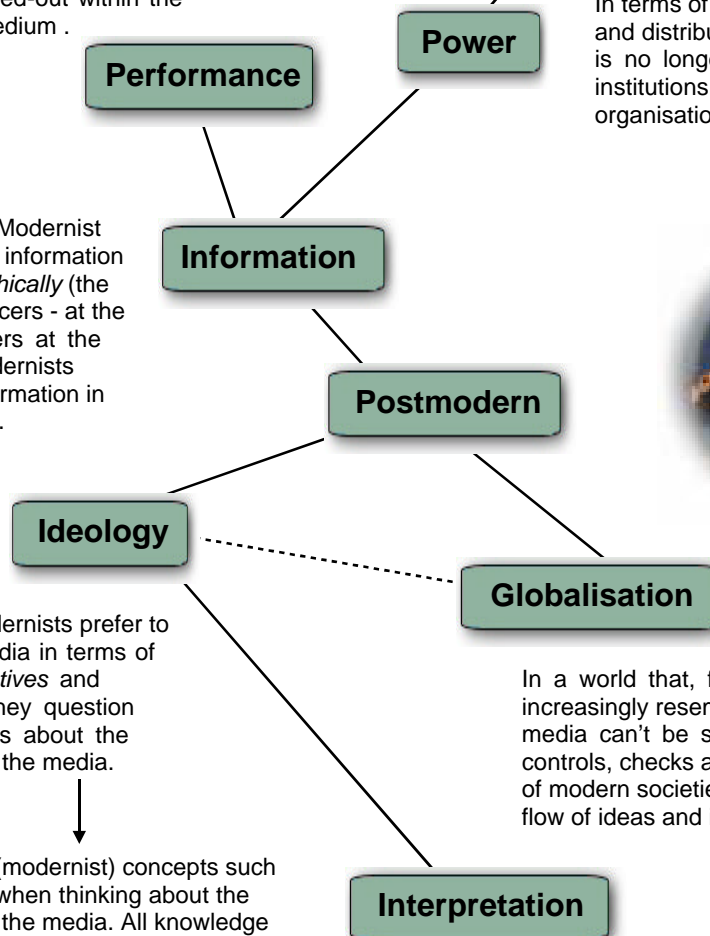


Social interaction is a *performance*; just like an actor in a play, we prepare and evaluate our *public* (or *frontstage*) performances “backstage” - in *private*, as it were. **Tuomi** (2002) argues that with something like a web log or chatroom there is no *backstage* - all interaction is played-out within the confines of the medium .



In terms of control over the production and distribution of information, power is no longer concentrated within institutions such as media organisations and governments.

**Castells** (1996): Modernist perspectives view information structures *hierarchically* (the flow is from producers - at the top - to consumers at the bottom). Postmodernists however view information in terms of *networks*.



Although postmodernists prefer to talk about the media in terms of discourses, *narratives* and *metanarratives*, they question Marxist arguments about the ideological role of the media.

In a world that, for **McCluhan** (1989), increasingly resembles a “global village”, the media can’t be subject to the kinds of controls, checks and balances - characteristic of modern societies - that restricts the free flow of ideas and information.

We must discard (modernist) concepts such as “truth / falsity” when thinking about the ideological role of the media. All knowledge is ideological - which makes it a fairly pointless exercise trying to argue some forms of information are “more (or indeed less) ideological” than any other form.

Media content reflects the way it is interpreted, in the sense that the way different people in the network interpret information contributes to the development of the media - a reversal and rebuttal of the Marxist idea of a *preferred reading*.





**2 marks**

Explain what is meant by the 'concentration of ownership' of the mass media.

**4 Marks**

Suggest two needs of consumers that the mass media might meet.

**Exam Questions****8 Marks**

Identify and briefly explain two criticisms of the Marxist view that the mass media simply serve capitalism.

**Item**

According to the pluralist view, the media simply respond to demand, providing what their viewers, listeners and readers want. If the media have any influence over people, it is because they reflect and reinforce society's basic values, not because they impose their ideas on the public. In fact, any attempt to do this would be likely to fail: the audience would simply tune to another channel or buy a rival newspaper closer to their own views. Any publisher or broadcaster who persisted in producing unpopular output would risk going out of business.

Today's society is composed of a great diversity of groups, none of which is able to dominate society or the media. Pluralists argue that the media reflect this diversity in their output, catering for many tastes and giving the public a wide range of choice. In recent years, technological advances such as the internet and digital broadcasting have increased the choices available.

**20 marks**

Using material from the Item and elsewhere, assess the pluralist view of the mass media.

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