



On 5 November 1956, James Dibble presented the first ABC television news bulletin to Australian audiences. Since that time, the make-up of Australia's media organisations has continually changed and evolved over the years.

## AUSTRALIAN MEDIA ORGANISATIONS

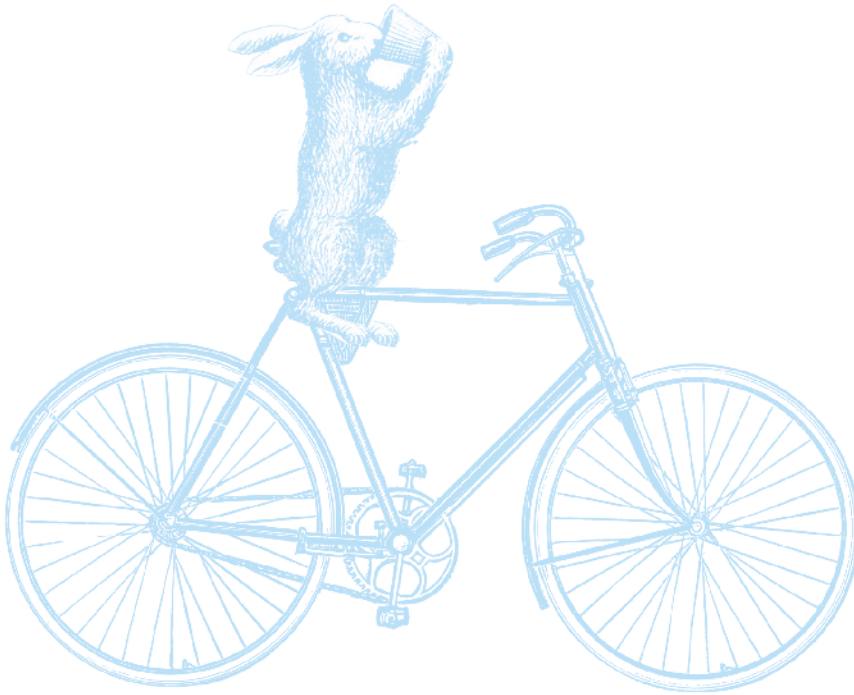
Whoever controls the media—  
the images—controls the  
culture.

Allen Ginsberg, US poet

The Australian media landscape has a combination of styles and models of ownership. The current mix of commercial, public, community and even alternative media outlets influences the nature and production of the information distributed to the public. These models, in turn, will appeal to different audiences with diverse sets of needs and wants. Apart from the print and online sectors, all Australian media organisations are constrained by government regulation, which aims to enforce strict controls and review standards on the industry. It is important to understand who owns and controls the media, and how this relates to power and influence in Australian society.

This chapter examines Australia's media industry, the profile of the Australian media audience, and the nature of media regulation and ownership in Australia.

# AUSTRALIA'S MEDIA ORGANISATIONS



## COMMERCIAL MEDIA

Commercial media organisations are those set up to make a profit from their operations, with much of their income coming from advertising revenue. Commercial media organisations exist to make money, and this profit motive shapes the content they produce and distribute to the public.

Commercial media organisations are rarely owned by an individual; they are usually part of a larger company, corporation or conglomerate, which may own a number of media outlets either within the same medium (such as television) or across media types (such as television, radio and newspapers).

## FREE-TO-AIR TELEVISION

Most people are familiar with commercial television whether in free-to-air, subscription or online format. In Australia, commercial television is consolidated into a number of networks. In the capital cities, the free-to-air networks are Seven, Nine and Ten. In regional areas, the networks share the same content as their urban counterparts, but often provide some additional services, such as local news. In Victoria, these networks are Prime, WIN, and Southern Cross (partnered with Seven, Nine and Ten respectively).



**FIGURE 4.1.1** Logos of Australia's major commercial television networks—Seven, Nine and Ten

Imparja Television is a commercial television company that operates out of Alice Springs, Northern Territory. The company purchases programming from the Nine Network and locally produces Indigenous programs to promote Aboriginal culture and values.

The commercial aspect of these television networks is that they exist to make a profit for the companies and shareholders that own them. Profit is generated by selling commercial break advertising that goes to air during the broadcasts. Advertising rates vary according to the time of day the commercial is shown, the type of audience likely to be watching and the total number of people expected to watch the program. A program that is screened at two in the morning will attract few viewers; therefore, the cost of advertising will be less compared to a program that airs at eight in the evening to a projected large audience.

Advertising in television is generally sold in thirty-second sections or 'slots'. A thirty-second slot during the AFL Grand Final broadcast can cost up to \$100 000.

All the major television networks also run additional niche stations, such as 7mate, GO! and OneHD, which run alongside and complement their main channel programming. The networks also provide an online presence with websites that offer viewers additional content, and create another avenue to sell advertising slots and promote major programming.

## SUBSCRIPTION TELEVISION

Subscription television is another form of commercial television. In this case, the television signal is not broadcast free-to-air; viewers are required to pay a fee to receive the signal, either by satellite or fibre-optic cable.

FOXTEL is the largest pay television provider in Australia. When it was first introduced in 1995, subscribers received content without advertising, their subscription fees were covering the cost of the service. However, increasingly, paid advertising is being seen on subscription television channels.

## ONLINE TELEVISION

Television content is also provided online by commercial media organisations, usually via a partnership with an online or digital provider. Partnerships include networks Nine and Microsoft® and Seven and Yahoo!®, which work together to deliver supplementary content to audiences such as sneak previews, behind-the-scenes footage and fan forums for their favourite programs. Telstra is also a commercial media distributor via its BigPond service that streams media content to users' televisions, such as films, sport, news and music, through a broadband internet connection.

## INCOME AND TELEVISION PROGRAMMING

How a media company receives its income/funding has a profound effect on what content is made and delivered to Australian audiences. In the case of commercial television, ratings and popularity drive the type of program that is broadcast. The increasing trend has been for major commercial networks to purchase content from outside production houses, both locally and overseas, rather than produce their own material. No matter where the work is produced, the networks buy what they believe will be popular and rate well with audiences, which will give their advertisers maximum exposure to their target

markets. Subscription television does have the ability to produce some niche programming, as advertising is not their sole source of income.

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1 How do commercial television networks obtain their income?
- 2 What role do ratings play in commercial television?
- 3 What advantages and disadvantages for both viewers and producers can you identify when television content is driven by ratings?
- 4 Why do you think the major commercial television networks have smaller subsidiary stations, such as 7mate, GO! and OneHD?
- 5 Imagine that you are working for a major commercial television network and you have been given the task of creating a new, top-rating series. You will need to write a one-page proposal of your series to submit to network bosses that includes information about:
  - the content of the series (what it is about, who will star or present it)
  - the intended audience and why they will want to watch it
  - the potential advertisers that you believe will be interested in purchasing commercial slots
  - what makes your series unique and worth producing.

## PRINT MEDIA

The major players in print media are the companies News Limited and Fairfax, who, between them, own virtually every daily newspaper and suburban weekly, and dominate the Australian commercial newspaper industry. Magazine production is also in very few hands with News Corporation, PBL and Pacific Magazines producing most of Australia's magazine titles.

As with commercial television broadcasting, the main purpose of the commercial print media is to make a profit. This profit largely comes from selling advertising space in the publication. However, unlike free-to-air television, print consumers generally pay for the product, although this fee does not reflect the true cost of producing the publication. Some print products are free to the public, such as *mX* (owned by News Corporation) and suburban weeklies (most of which are owned by News Limited and Fairfax). These publications are sustained solely by advertising.



Advertising revenue in print media has traditionally come from two sources: display advertising and classified advertising. Display advertisements are generally found in the body of the publication and vary from a full page to a small section of the page. Display advertisements are usually purchased by companies rather than individuals, often form part of a larger marketing campaign and are usually repeated a number of times. The overarching focus is usually selling a brand, rather than selling a specific product or service. Classified advertisements are usually purchased by individuals (or real estate companies on behalf of individuals) and are usually selling a specific product or service. Classifieds are generally not scattered throughout the publication, but placed in sections such as 'employment' or 'cars'.

Classified advertisements have traditionally been a major source of income for newspapers and have been referred to as 'rivers of gold'. The increased use of online media sources has led to a drying up of these rivers in print, and most newspapers now display their classifieds in an online format (such as Fairfax's Drive website).



**FIGURE 4.1.3** Technology has enabled instant reporting from almost anywhere. This journalist is working on a news story on the roof of a US marine base, in Iraq in 2004, during the Iraq War.

**FIGURE 4.1.2** Advertising is a prominent feature of commercial print media.

While there is a journalist code of ethics and a tradition among print journalists of not letting commercial interests interfere in reporting or news gathering, along with a strong belief that the content should not be shaped by these interests, it is an aspect of print media that is important to consider.

Commercial print media not only exists on paper; it also exists online. Crikey is an Australian, online commercial news publication that was launched as an alternative source of news to the established print media organisations. It largely provides news commentary and analysis, although its reporters do break stories, and is available as both an advertisement-free newsletter to paying subscribers or a free, condensed version on the website with advertisements.



## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1 What is the main source of revenue for commercial print publications?
- 2 What potential conflicts of interest do you think could occur under the commercial print media model?
- 3 What impact do you think online publications are having on traditional print publications? Do you think there is room for both? Explain your answer.
- 4 Would you pay to access news online? Why or why not?

### RADIO

Commercial radio in Australia is dominated by five major broadcast networks that account for 75 per cent of the radio market, including Austereo Group, Australian Radio Network, DMG Radio Australia and Fairfax News Network. Commercial radio is broadcast over the traditional analogue AM and FM frequencies and in digital format.

As with other commercial media organisations, advertising revenue covers the cost of commercial radio production and is the source of profits. This style of media organisation influences the content broadcast in radio media. Critics claim that commercial radio provides 'safe' and 'bland' broadcasting that appeals to, or does not offend, the largest number of people, and that minority tastes and groups are not catered for.

Commercial radio is also often linked with major music distribution networks. This relationship has led to a number of scandals locally and internationally, including reports of music companies paying radio stations to play their music over that of rival companies. Commercial radio stations tend to select the music they play (the playlist) from the popular music charts.

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**The music charts are rankings based on music sales. The position of a song on the charts reflects how many people have purchased the song. There have been a number of attempts by artists and music companies to manipulate the charts, such as rigging sales figures, which would lead to the song receiving more radio airplay.**

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## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1 Do you listen to commercial radio? Why or why not? If yes, how does it meet your needs and wants?
- 2 What potential conflicts of interest do you think could occur under the commercial radio media model?
- 3 What might be a disadvantage for artists and music companies who attempt to manipulate the music charts?

### PUBLIC MEDIA

Unlike commercial media organisations, public media organisations are not privately owned; they are owned by the Australian people. It is taxpayers via the government who fund public media organisations.

### THE ABC AND THE SBS

The two largest publicly funded organisations are the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS). Although the government funds both organisations, they are independently operated by boards of management, which include members of the Australian public.

The ABC and the SBS broadcast television, radio and online services throughout Australia and overseas. Their boards operate under charters that set out their aims, goals and the guidelines and principles under which they operate.

The ABC was established in 1932 in response to public sentiment that the narrow interests of the commercial broadcasters were not meeting the needs of all Australians. The ABC charter lists the functions of the corporation as to inform, entertain, educate and represent the cultural diversity of the Australian community.

Similarly, as Australia became a more culturally diverse country in the twentieth century with several waves of post-war immigration, the SBS was founded in 1975 to 'provide multilingual and multicultural radio and television services that inform, educate and entertain all Australians and, in doing so, reflect Australia's multicultural society'.



**FIGURE 4.1.4** Logos of Australia's major public media organisations—the ABC and the SBS



**FIGURE 4.1.5** The children's program *Bananas in Pyjamas* is one of the ABC's most successful products. It is viewed in seventy countries and the program's extensive range of merchandise has been extremely profitable for the ABC.

The funding arrangements have largely kept the public media organisations free of commercial interests, although the SBS has limited advertising to create additional income. Both broadcasters fiercely defend their independence from government and their non-commercial interests, but in the past have been accused of neglecting their charters, of chasing ratings and of becoming increasingly centralised, and in doing so, disregarding the needs of all Australians, particularly those in regional and remote areas.

### NATIONAL INDIGENOUS TELEVISION

National Indigenous Television is a public broadcaster that was formed in 2005 to inform, educate and entertain Australians from an Indigenous perspective. It is also run by a board of management whose members are of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin or have a strong connection with Indigenous traditions. Some National Indigenous Television charter obligations are to tell Indigenous stories, to give a voice to Indigenous peoples and to provide training and opportunities for members of Australia's Indigenous community.

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1 How are public media organisations funded?
- 2 Why do you think there is a need for public media organisations?
- 3 Review the ABC and the SBS charters and watch or listen to three hours of an evening's programming on their broadcast channels. What evidence can you identify of the ABC and the SBS meeting their charter obligations?
- 4 Create a proposal for a new television series for a public broadcaster that caters for a group in society that you think has been neglected for content. Your one-page proposal should include information about:
  - the content of the series (what it is about, who will star or present it)
  - the intended audience and why they will want to watch it
  - how the series meets the public broadcaster's charter obligations
  - what makes your series unique and worth producing.

## COMMUNITY MEDIA

Most community media organisations in Australia are radio broadcasters. This has much to do with the fact that radio is a relatively cheap medium to produce and community organisations are constantly restrained by their funding (or lack thereof). Community media organisations receive a small amount of government funding, but many rely on sponsorship from businesses and individuals in the local community to pay for their operational costs. Channel 31 is a community television broadcaster that services the Melbourne and Geelong areas, and operates under the same aims and conditions as community radio.



**FIGURE 4.1.6** Logos of some of Melbourne's public media organisations—3CR, PBS, RRR, and SYN radio broadcasters

Georgia Webster, general manager of Melbourne youth community radio station SYN, summarises community broadcasting in Australia and at SYN:

Community broadcasting in Australia is media owned, governed and run by the community. There are more than 300 community radio and television stations across Australia, which work alongside other broadcasters from the commercial and public media sectors. Community radio stations are powered by volunteers, and all are not-for-profit organisations. Each station holds a licence to broadcast, which is allocated to serve a community of interest (e.g. ethnic and multicultural, youth, specialist music, educational, religious, Indigenous, fine music, print handicapped or general).

SYN is youth-run and aims to provide opportunities in broadcasting, digital media making and organisational management to young people. All SYN volunteers are aged 12–25. We have a regular rotation of our program grid to ensure access is maintained for new young people to have a go at making radio. At SYN we also make television in partnership with Channel 31 in Melbourne. In 2010, we created eleven hours per week of live television with C31. We are really active online too at [syn.org.au](http://syn.org.au) and across many social media platforms. We are a cross-platform community broadcaster, and focus on youth participation in the media-making process.

Community media organisations must be self-funded and self-managed, and another condition of their licences is that they do not broadcast advertising (although they are permitted a limited amount of sponsorship announcements). The variety of community broadcasting organisations in Australia is the result of local communities, or sections of the general community, feeling dissatisfied with commercial and public media offerings and taking steps to meet their needs and have their voices heard.

Libby Jamieson, station manager of Melbourne community radio station 3CR, explains:

3CR is 'owned' by the Community Radio Federation, a body made up of representatives from affiliated organisations, financial members and volunteers who work at the station. The body is elected annually and meets quarterly to oversee the running of the station. A Committee of Management is drawn from that group, which meets monthly and oversees the good governance of the station, while the station manager coordinates the day-to-day running of the station. Therefore, 3CR is 'owned' by the people who are members of the station such as subscribers, volunteers and affiliated organisations.

3CR was established in 1976 with a specific aim to provide a voice for those denied access to the mass media, particularly the working class, women, Aboriginal peoples and the many community groups discriminated against by the mass media. 3CR is different [to other community media] because it doesn't rely on sponsorship dollars to run the station. The station has a diversity of income streams that enable it to function relatively independently; the station owns the building and the land and equipment where the transmitter site is located.





**FIGURE 4.1.7** Community radio stations are powered by passionate and hard working volunteers who donate their time to contribute to the community aims of the organisation, while learning about the media-making process. 3MDR (Mount District Radio) is a community radio station that broadcasts for the Dandenongs and Yarra Ranges area in Victoria.

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1 What makes community media organisations different to commercial and public media?
- 2 Choose a Melbourne-based community media organisation, such as 3CR, PBS, RRR, SYN, Channel 31 etc., or a community media organisation in your local area. Research the organisation online and listen to or watch a variety of their programming, then answer the following questions:
  - a What community group or groups does the organisation cater for?
  - b Are there certain groups or types of sponsors for the organisation? Who are they and why do you think they sponsor the organisation?
  - c How can people become involved in the organisation?
- 3 Your local area needs a new radio station to cater for a specific group in the community. Write a letter to the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) that outlines the aims of the new station, why a new licence should be granted, how current needs are not being met by established media outlets and how your station

would cater to these needs, who would support the station and how it would be funded. Provide an example of a week's program guide to accompany your letter.

## COMMUNITY MEDIA AND THE GLOBAL MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

Community media organisations play an important role in a media landscape that is becoming increasingly global and dominated by large media conglomerates. Traditional media organisations are continually looking at ways to have a presence in the global market; Australian productions may initially be made for a local market, but the producers often have international sales in mind. Critics have expressed worries that this increasing global market is leading to the production of 'safe' programming that appeals to the widest possible audience and ignores local community needs.

New media technologies, such as the internet, mobile and audio devices, have brought about a change in how media content is accessed and viewed or listened to. The increased presence and availability of online content that knows no country boundaries offers audiences a great deal of choice on a global scale.



Community media organisations feel that their role in the media landscape is as relevant as ever in a global, digital media world.

The relevance of radio hasn't changed with the increasing use of other means of listening to or accessing media. Radio still has an audience. In fact, surveys conducted for community radio suggest that the audience of community radio is increasing. Radio is a cheap, accessible means of communication and community radio provides the opportunity for individuals or groups in a community to come together and create their own media.

Libby Jamieson, station manager of 3CR  
community radio

Radio is still a very personal medium. [Listeners] connect with a station and the announcer. As it is primarily audio, the power of music and talk are still relevant, maybe more so now in a click-through environment. We certainly see technology as an opportunity to explore, but in the end it is all about content, loyalty and trust.

Adrian Basso, general manager of PBS  
community radio

The digital media environment is complementary to terrestrial radio broadcasting in many ways, and SYN is a great example of cross-platform media making that shows how important radio remains in this landscape. We stream our radio live at syn.org.au and post podcast versions of programs online too. Radio provides a backdrop to people's lives—it offers news, music, ideas and perspectives that can be heard while listeners are doing other things. People continue to want and need that information, entertainment and soundtrack, and the exciting thing about digital media platforms and technologies is that we can offer them that in a range of ways—mobile devices, traditional receivers, on their home or work computers. At SYN we are embracing digital media platforms and social media, because they offer fantastic ways to connect with our community—young people in Melbourne, and beyond!

Georgia Webster, general manager of SYN  
community radio

## case study

### ALTERNATIVE MEDIA: STICKY INSTITUTE ZINES

Sticky Institute is a Melbourne-based organisation that helps people create and distribute zines—small, self-published print publications.

Unlike other media organisations, Sticky Institute operates as an artist-run initiative or what could be termed a 'collective' and has applied this model to zine creation and distribution. The organisation acts as a producer and facilitates other people's production by providing typewriters, photocopiers and staplers for creators to put their zines together. The ethos behind Sticky Institute is an open access, do-it-yourself approach to media production and distribution. Through Sticky Institute, creators are able to make zines and distribute and put them on display for readers to purchase. The organisation receives government arts funding and also acquires 20 per cent of the zine selling price to cover its operational expenses.

**Artist-run initiatives originate from the art industry and are set up to allow artists to exhibit their work in a space run by the artists themselves. The establishment of artist-run initiatives has given lesser-known creators a means to share their work with an audience, and bypass the traditional art galleries that tend to make decisions about what to display based on commercial grounds. In return, the initiative receives a percentage of the earnings from exhibitions to fund its operation.**



**FIGURE 4.1.8** Eloise Peace and Luke Sinclair at work at the Sticky Institute in Melbourne

Eloise Peace, director of Sticky Institute, explains zine production and the work of Sticky Institute as a media organisation.

### **What is a zine?**

Zines are low-budget, independent publications usually made with photocopiers and circulated within their own informal or underground networks. They are difficult to define too precisely; it is the freedom of what may or may not constitute a zine that allows zines to experiment with form and play with various print-based mediums. There's no set page numbers to a zine, no set content or prescribed style, no set dimensions and basically no rules whatsoever.

Zines are best defined by their intentions, and the intention is usually an unprofessional labour of love, rather than a money-making exercise with high production values and established distribution networks. So zines can often be considered subversive because they bypass an entire established system. They are not interested in being 'discovered'; they are comfortable 'underground' and they don't care what other people think.

Zines may be sequential, an ongoing series, or one-off creations. The freedom and fluidity within zine culture makes it an all-encompassing and ever-changing medium, and the ephemeral nature of zines makes them difficult to follow or trace after the fact. They are the best.

### **What makes Sticky Institute different from other media organisations?**

Sticky is a not-for-profit incorporated association, so it's not a privately run business, and we're managed by an appointed board. We derive income mainly through government grants for arts organisations that we receive both from state and federal levels to pay the rent and cover our operational costs. We do take a 20 per cent commission from the cover price of the zines we stock, but that maybe covers our postage costs for the year. As an incorporated association, our 'stakeholders' are our members, the people who have their work with us and help out, and the bodies that fund us.

Sticky is unique in that we're the only artist-run initiative dedicated entirely to zines in Australia. The best way to dedicate yourself to zines is to get a shopfront, deck it out in zines, and be open for people to come in, use our typewriters, photocopier and long-armed staplers, and check zines out for themselves. Everyone at Sticky is a zine maker, including our volunteers, director and legendary co-founder and in-house creative consultant. Artist-run initiatives are usually artist-run galleries, and Sticky is much more than a gallery space—it's a making space and a shop space.

## **case study activities**

### **ALTERNATIVE MEDIA: STICKY INSTITUTE ZINES**

- 1** Re-read the interview with Eloise Peace, director of Sticky Institute and conduct your own research into zine production to answer the following questions:
  - a** How do you define a zine?
  - b** How and why are zines produced?
  - c** Who makes zines?
  - d** Who reads zines?
- 2** With reference to what you know about Sticky Institute, answer the following questions:
  - a** What is Sticky Institute?
  - b** Who owns and runs the organisation?
  - c** Who profits from Sticky Institute's work?
  - d** How does the organisation work from a creator's point of view?
  - e** How does Sticky Institute distribute media products and how does it differ from other media distribution/broadcast models?
  - f** How does Sticky Institute differ from other Australian media organisations?

# AUSTRALIAN MEDIA AUDIENCES



As discussed earlier, commercial media organisations in Australia operate as businesses. Indeed, there are more than twenty media companies listed on the Australian Securities Exchange (ASX). While some of these companies derive income from producing media products and selling them either within Australia or overseas, the organisations obtain most of their income from advertising. The equation for making money in commercial broadcast media is simple: the more people watching or listening to your program the higher your ratings and the more you can charge advertisers to place their commercials.

With this in mind, the commercial media industry needs to have a very good understanding of its audiences. All key players within the commercial media industry including broadcasters, content makers, advertising buyers and advertising agencies access audience data and research to help make their business decisions. Monitoring and marketing information about what Australians watch, listen to (and read) is a multimillion dollar industry.

## WHO'S WATCHING THE TELLY?

The ratings for Australian television metropolitan audiences are monitored by a privately owned company called OzTAM. OzTAM is owned by the metropolitan television networks, Seven, Nine and Ten, and provides observer status at its board meetings for the ABC and the SBS, Australian Association of National Advertisers (AANA), Media Federation of Australia (MFA) and Australian Subscription Television and Radio Association (ASTRA).

OzTAM collects and markets the free-to-air television ratings for the five metropolitan markets of Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth and for subscription television nationally. For metropolitan free-to-air ratings, OzTAM monitors the television viewing habits of a panel of randomly chosen people from over 3000 homes, representing a cross-section of the community. Subscription television ratings are drawn from 1200 homes nationally, including metropolitan and regional subscribers. The viewing habits of these people are recorded on devices called 'people meters'. This information is then sold to television networks, program suppliers, advertisers, media buyers and advertising agencies. On its website, OzTAM refers to ratings as the 'currency' of the Australian television industry.





**FIGURE 4.2.1**

Since its invention in the late-nineteenth century, the radio has become a standard household appliance.

**FIGURE 4.2.2** Collecting television viewing habits of Australians is a lucrative business.



## WHO LISTENS TO THE RADIO?

According to the commercial radio industry body Commercial Radio Australia, almost all homes in Australia have at least one radio. The ratings for broadcast radio programs are monitored by a market research company called Nielsen.

Nielsen estimates that there are 22 million radio sets across the five metropolitan markets of Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth with an average of 4.2 sets per household.

Each year, eight radio surveys are conducted with consumers filling in radio listening diaries. As with television viewing research, listeners are chosen at random from across a sample of the community. The data is then collated and a radio ratings report is produced, discussing audience measurement and demographics.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

With commercial media organisations relying on the sale of advertising to make profits, advertisers need to know *how many* people are watching or listening to a broadcast program and, just as importantly, *who* the audience is. In short, they need to know the characteristics of audiences to be able to make decisions about how they will market their products and services.

The statistical study of media audiences is referred to as demographics. Very few products are marketed to everyone; advertisers are hoping to reach a target market (e.g. teenagers, retirees etc.) when publicising their products and services. For example, expensive luxury cars are not marketed to teenage first-car buyers, but rather to older, more affluent drivers, and usually men. From this small amount of information, you can already see that advertising such cars during television programs aimed at teenagers would be a waste of time and money. To use the industry jargon, advertisers would be missing their target audience, or their demographic.



**FIGURE 4.2.3** Demographic studies have traditionally focused on the family unit known as the 'nuclear family', typically seen as a husband, wife and two children. Is this an accurate reflection of modern-day Australian families?

To provide accurate and meaningful information to the media industry and advertisers, both radio and television ratings provide extensive demographic data. Television ratings are broken down into minutes watched and quarter hours watched, as well as audience share overall. Within these breakdowns, there is further analysis of the audience in categories including age, gender, occupation, income, education and size of household.

According to Nielsen, in the average working week, 26 per cent of people listen to the radio in the car between 5:30 a.m. and 9:00 a.m. while 48 per cent of people listen while driving between 4:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m.

Similarly, radio surveys examine overall listeners and audience share as well as the lifestyle factors of the audience, such as time spent listening to the radio, where and when the audience listens. As well as the categories examined for television audiences, radio surveys provide specific information, such as the listening habits of the main grocery buyer in each household. Specific information gathered about audience demographics informs the decisions of advertisers and media buyers about where and when they will place their advertising to reach their target audience.

## LEARNING ACTIVITY

1 Examine the below list of products and services:

- luxury cars
- dishwashing liquid
- aftershave
- snack foods
- toys
- computer/video games
- insurance
- beauty therapies.

Thinking from the perspective of an advertiser, identify:

- a which group of people (demographic) you think would buy each product or service (Remember, the person who buys it is not necessarily the person who uses it.)
- b which medium you would use to advertise each product (Consider television, radio and print outlets.).

## MEDIA MONITORING

Advertisers and market researchers are not the only people interested in the make-up of media audiences and what they are consuming. Governments, corporations and lobby groups subscribe to media monitoring services to find out what is being discussed in the media and what topics audiences are listening to or showing interest in.

Every day, media monitoring agencies record and make transcripts of talkback radio programs and news reports. Reports and transcripts are provided to clients based on areas of interest and specified topics. These topics routinely include any mention or discussion of the client, its products, its policies, its public profile and any similar discussion of its competitors. More and more, audience research generates the topics talked about and debated in parliaments and in news and current affairs.

# MEDIA REGULATION



## INDUSTRY BODIES, SELF-REGULATION AND CODES OF PRACTICE

Australia's commercial media providers have formed industry associations to represent their interests and to lobby governments for media reforms that would help their companies function more effectively and return greater profits. The major media industry bodies include:

- Free TV Australia (represents the free-to-air television networks)
- Commercial Radio Australia (represents commercial radio broadcasters)
- Australian Subscription Television and Radio Association (represents subscription television and radio companies)
- Australian Press Council (represents the print media)
- Australian Association of National Advertisers (represents the advertising industry).

In accordance with government policy, these bodies abide by rules and regulations agreed upon by the members of their industry. Such sets of rules are referred to as codes of practice. The free-to-air television industry, for example, operates under a set of regulations governing program classifications, reporting in news and current affairs programs, time occupied by advertising, classification and placement of commercials, and the handling of complaints.

The publicly owned ABC network also has a set of rules that it must adhere to. Like the industry codes of practice, the ABC charter sets standards by which the broadcaster must abide.

## GOVERNMENT REGULATION

The major government bodies responsible for media regulation in Australia are the:

- Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA)
- Classification Board
- Classification Review Board.



## AUSTRALIAN COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA AUTHORITY (ACMA)

The ACMA is a federal government funded body that oversees various areas of Australian media operations and practices including broadcasting, the internet, radio communications and telecommunications. The ACMA was established in 2005 after a merger of the Australian Broadcasting Authority and the Australian Communications Authority.

The ACMA's responsibilities, as outlined on their website, include:

- promoting self-regulation and competition in the communications industry, while protecting consumers and other users
- fostering an environment in which electronic media respects community standards and responds to audience and user needs
- managing access to the radiofrequency spectrum
- representing Australia's communications interests internationally.

The ACMA's specific tasks as a broadcasting regulator include allocating channels for radio and television services, issuing and renewing broadcasting licences, regulating radio and television content, and administering ownership and control rules for broadcasting services. It also has the responsibility of regulating online content and enforcing Australia's anti-spam laws.

Perhaps the ACMA's highest profile role is that of its complaint handling procedure. When a member of the public is offended by something that a broadcaster has put to air they are within their rights to complain to the broadcaster. Should they believe their complaint has been dealt with unsatisfactorily by the broadcaster, the person can take the complaint to the ACMA who are responsible for investigating the matter further. The ACMA's investigations aim to establish whether or not there has been a breach of the broadcaster's licence conditions or a breach of their industry code of practice. A breach in licence conditions can result in a range of measures, including fines and undertakings to ensure no further breaches, through to possible cancellation of the broadcaster's licence.

### Nine's AFL Footy Show breaches code for ridicule; agrees to pay \$200 000 for any future breach

A Sam Newman segment on Nine's *The AFL Footy Show* has been found likely to have provoked severe ridicule and breached the commercial television code. Nine has agreed to pay \$200 000 to charity in the event of any future breach by Mr Newman of the relevant code provision.

The likely ridicule was against a Malaysian man on the basis of colour and race in a segment broadcast last year.

Presenter Sam Newman commented on the marriage of a Malaysian man to a much older woman. The ACMA found Mr Newman's repeated reference to someone as a sub-human primate (such as a monkey) and the statement that he is 'not long out of the forest' was a serious ridicule.

A lack of reasonableness and good faith meant the exemption in the code for satire did not apply.

'Nine's offer of an enforceable undertaking, whereby it would pay \$200 000 to an agreed charity for any future breach by Mr Newman of the code provision, confirms both the seriousness of the breach and the seriousness with which Nine is approaching future compliance,' said ACMA Chairman, Chris Chapman.

'Ridiculing or racially abusing dark-skinned people by comparing them to monkeys has recently received much media attention in Australia, particularly in and around the sporting arena.'

'We believe a sporting commentator such as Mr Newman would have been aware of these incidents and should therefore have been aware that using the word monkey in this manner would be likely to provoke severe ridicule,' Mr Chapman said.

GTV Nine also agreed to a number of other provisions in the enforceable undertaking, including significant senior management overview of the materials to be used by Mr Newman and a broad-ranging reporting regime and training obligation...

...In March 2009, the ACMA found that GTV Nine had breached the same code provision during the 'Sam's Mailbag' segment of *The AFL Footy Show*. On this previous occasion it was found that the broadcast material had been likely to have provoked severe ridicule on the grounds of gender.

ACMA media release 108/2010, 7 September 2010

*The AFL Footy Show's* breach of the code of practice illustrates how media regulation is overseen and investigated by the ACMA. A member of the audience was offended by something that a broadcaster had put to air, the complaint was investigated, a breach of the code was identified, remedial action was applied and a penalty was put in place.

However, this case also underlines one of the major criticisms of media regulation and its monitoring by the ACMA. The penalty in this case was an enforceable undertaking by the Nine Network to ensure that such a breach would not occur again. Nine offered to donate \$200 000 to an agreed charity should Mr Newman breach that specific provision of the code once again. Presumably, Nine's money is safe with the network taking steps to ensure another breach does not occur. Even if Nine did have to part with \$200 000, the amount would quickly be recuperated from the revenue the network collects from its advertisers. Top-rating television programs such as *The AFL Footy Show* can charge many thousands of dollars for the thirty-second advertising slots in their programs.

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1 Examine the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) website to find and outline, in your own words, the procedure for making a complaint against a broadcaster.
- 2 Visit the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) website and find details of a past investigation into a breach of a broadcaster's code of practice. Outline the process, the details of the breach and the result of the investigation.

## CONTENT REGULATION

An important area of media regulation is that of content. Broadcasters' licence conditions state they must broadcast specific amounts of Australian content, locally produced drama and children's programming.

The intention of such content legislation is to foster a strong film and television industry in Australia. Having prescribed levels of local content written into the broadcasters' licence conditions ensures that jobs remain and are created in the Australian media production industry. Without such legislation it would be very tempting for broadcasters to simply import all programming from overseas at a cheaper cost.

Regulation for specified amounts of children's programming ensures that broadcasters service all audiences and not just the people with disposable income that advertisers are targeting.

Another important reason for Australian content regulation is to maintain and develop Australian culture through the media.

## LEARNING ACTIVITY

- 1 Visit the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) website to find the answers to the following questions:
  - a What is the amount of Australian content required on commercial free-to-air television?
  - b What are the Australian content requirements for subscription television?
  - c What is the required amount of Australian drama on commercial free-to-air television and subscription television?

## CLASSIFICATION BOARD

The Classification Board is a branch of the Attorney-General's Department responsible for the classification of every film, DVD, video and computer game before it is made available to the Australian public whether through cinema release, rental or retail sale. The Classification Board also classifies some publications and on occasion will be asked to provide classification advice to law enforcement officials and the ACMA (e.g. with websites and video developed for mobile phone distribution).



**FIGURE 4.3.1** The Classification Board's classification markings

The Classification Board places advice on products to help audiences make informed choices about the material they consume (and allow their children to consume).

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### In 2007–08 the Classification Board made decisions on:

- 4673 videos or DVDs for sale or hire
  - 961 computer games
  - 383 films for public exhibition
  - 322 publications
  - 14 ACMA internet referrals
  - 96 enforcement referrals.
-

Classification decisions are made based on guidelines provided in the *Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995*. Films and computer games are submitted for classification and viewed or played by members of the Classification Board. Films can be classified into these categories:

- G (general)
- PG (parental guidance recommended)
- M (recommended for mature audiences)
- MA 15+ (not suitable for people under 15)
- R 18+ (restricted to 18 years and over)
- X 18+ (restricted to 18 years and over; material of sexually explicit nature)
- RC (refused classification).

The same classification markings apply to video and computer games, with the exception of R 18+ and X 18+. Any game with content deemed to be in these categories is given an RC rating and refused release in Australia. This has caused debate in the gaming community, as some players feel that they are being denied the same access to restricted content that film viewers receive.

The needs of the Australian public are varied and the classification decisions seek to strike a balance between permitting adults to make choices about their viewing, gaming and reading habits, while at the same time respecting the wishes of others to not be exposed to material they find confronting, and to have measures in place to protect children from inappropriate content.



**FIGURE 4.3.2** The Classification Review Board ruled for the 2010 remake of *The Karate Kid* film to be given a PG rating, overturning an earlier decision by the Classification Board to rate it M.

### **Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995**

Under the Act, each of the following matters must be taken into account when classifying publications, films and video and computer games for release in Australia:

- 1 The standards of morality, decency and propriety generally accepted by reasonable adults.
- 2 The literary, artistic or educational merit (if any) of the publication, film or computer game.
- 3 The general character of the publication, film or computer game, including whether it is of a medical, legal or scientific character.
- 4 The persons or class of persons to or among whom it is published or is intended or likely to be published.

Australian Government Classification website, 2010

### **National Classification Code**

Under the Code, classification decisions are to give effect, as far as possible, to the following principles:

- 1 Adults should be able to read, hear and see what they want.
- 2 Minors should be protected from material likely to harm or disturb them.
- 3 Everyone should be protected from exposure to unsolicited material that they find offensive.
- 4 The need to take account of community concerns about:
  - i depictions that condone or incite violence, particularly sexual violence, and
  - ii the portrayal of persons in a demeaning manner.

Australian Government Classification website, 2010

## **LEARNING ACTIVITIES**

- 1 Visit the Australian Government Classification website and outline the classification guidelines for G, PG, M, MA 15+, R 18+ and X 18+ ratings.
- 2 What happens to a film that is refused classification?
- 3 Do you think films should be refused classification? Explain your answer.
- 4 Should there be a classification beyond R 18+ and X 18+? What arguments can you think of for and against creating another rating?



## CLASSIFICATION REVIEW BOARD

The Classification Review Board meets to review classification decisions that have been appealed by film distributors or game publishers. For example, a production company wanting to market a film to an under 15 audience would be very concerned with a MA 15+ classification. Not only is the film prohibited from screening to audiences under 15 years of age, but the trailer cannot be shown at G, PG or M rated cinema sessions, which obviously limits the advertising reach of the film. In certain circumstances, the Attorney-General can appeal a classification decision as can someone who feels 'aggrieved' or offended by the film.

## MEDIA ETHICS

As mentioned previously, media organisations have a responsibility to meet their licence conditions and abide by their industry codes of practice. Since the emergence of newspapers as a means of mass communication in the nineteenth century, journalists have been expected to demonstrate values of honesty and integrity and be champions of democracy. The Australian print media body, the Australian Press Council, operates under a Statement of Principles that states:

First, the freedom of the press to publish is the freedom, and right, of the people to be informed. These are the justifications for upholding press freedom as an essential feature of a democratic society. This freedom includes the right to publish the news, without fear or favour, and the right to comment fairly and responsibly upon it.

Second, the freedom of the press is important more because of the obligation it entails towards the people than because of the rights it gives to the press. Freedom of the press carries with it an equivalent responsibility to the public. Liberty does not mean licence. Thus, in dealing with complaints, the Council will give first and dominant consideration to what it perceives to be in the public interest...

Australian Press Council Statement of Principles

Many journalists and news organisations in both print and broadcasting media strive to meet such principles daily. However, as media organisations have become trading commodities in the share

market their responsibilities to shareholders have started to compete with the principles of honest and honourable journalism. Many media companies are also part of much larger corporations, which exposes these organisations to serious conflicts of interest. For instance, would media companies that have interests in mining or gambling want their outlets reporting negative stories about these industries?



**FIGURE 4.3.3** Media ethics involves investigating situations where business interests have got in the way of fair and impartial news gathering and journalism.

With this in mind, perhaps it is up to Australia's media consumers to hold the media to account. Australian audiences should never be afraid to complain about something that a media organisation has published, which they find offensive or unjust. Perhaps being a media consumer is as much about being an active citizen as it is about being entertained.

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In 2011, News Corporation's ethics were called into question. Its UK tabloid newspaper *News of the World* was shut down after an investigation revealed employees of the tabloid had engaged in illegal phone hacking, along with claims that journalists had paid police for information.

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## LEARNING ACTIVITY

Either individually or working with a classmate, create your own a list of principles that you believe all media organisations should adhere to. Consider things such as truth in news reporting and conflicts of interest.

# MEDIA OWNERSHIP



## MEDIA MONOPOLIES

Does it matter who owns the media? Most people do not know who owns the television networks, radio stations or newspapers whose media products they consume every day. Audiences tend to concentrate on content. They know when their favourite television program is on, what their preferred radio station frequency is, and where to find the sports section of the newspaper.

Imagine the content you are so familiar with and used to accessing on a daily basis suddenly changed. Imagine a media where the news stories are never critical of the government but always full of praise. Imagine a media where the behaviour and practices of people in the public service, such as the police, the ambulance service or the fire brigade, are never questioned. Imagine a media where unethical business practices, such as price-fixing, are never exposed. Imagine a media where the top-rating television programs and sports telecasts are exclusive to subscription television channels. This is the type of media that exists in countries where media ownership and control is dominated by a few powerful entities and is often described as a monopoly or oligopoly.

The history of the mass media is full of examples of governments being propped up by media monopolies and oligopolies. In the early 1930s, Adolf Hitler's National Socialist German Workers' Party (commonly known as the Nazi Party) enjoyed the support of many of Germany's newspapers. At the January 1933 general election, Hitler was installed as Chancellor of Germany with his party receiving 43.9 per cent of the vote. When the Nazi Party gained power they took over the media completely, and until the end of the Second World War (1939–45) there was very little criticism of Hitler or his party in the German media. Communist regimes like the former Soviet Union also controlled the media and therefore the information that flowed to the people. In 2010, the political regimes in the People's Republic of China and North Korea continued this tradition of dictatorial media ownership and control.

Democracies are not immune to media monopolies either. Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi is a major broadcast media owner in his country, which presents serious conflict of interest concerns. One might ask: how can his government be held accountable when he owns and controls three of the country's seven television networks and several leading newspapers? In the lead-up to the 2010 Italian election, the government-owned television network



**FIGURE 4.4.1** China has one of the world's most stringent systems of media censorship. In 2010, after lengthy disputes with the government, China's Google branch agreed to censor content appearing on its pages to fall in line with Chinese law.

RAI Italia decided to implement a 'fairness doctrine' in which the network would refrain from broadcasting political programming until after the vote. This meant that the bulk of pre-election discussion on Italian television was on the Berlusconi-owned channels of the Mediaset network. This kind of situation contributed to Italy placing forty-ninth on the 2010 Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Index. Australia ranked eighteenth in the same survey; perhaps in part because of the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992*, which includes laws designed to limit cross-media ownership and control.



**FIGURE 4.4.2** Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi on the set of a program that airs on the Italian public broadcasting network RAI

It is a generally accepted notion that a healthy democracy requires a broad and diverse media where political and social debate can take place and where governments can be freely questioned and held accountable. Having a variety of media owners also prevents the situation where governments can be held to ransom by powerful media owners. Remember, it is argued that the media can be a powerful tool for setting news agendas and shaping public opinion. Governments are always wary of upsetting media magnates in case they find themselves suffering a barrage of negative publicity. With this in mind, Australian audiences should always demand a diversity of ownership and opinion in the media.

The landscape of Australian media ownership, control and diversity has gone through many changes. In 1886, there were nearly fifty daily newspapers available in Australia's cities. That number has diminished dramatically over the past century to fewer than fifteen.



## CROSS-MEDIA OWNERSHIP

Cross-media ownership refers to organisations or individuals having a controlling interest in more than one form of media, such as a television network and a newspaper, which operate within the same geographical area.

Cross-media ownership has been a prominent feature of the Australian media landscape, particularly since the introduction of television in 1956. When the first television broadcasting licences became available in 1953 they attracted the attention of newspaper owners, radio broadcasters and publishers. In Melbourne, the first television broadcasting licences were given to GTV-9, which was partly owned by *The Argus* newspaper, and HSV-7, of which *The Herald and Weekly Times* newspaper company had controlling interests. A similar situation arose in Sydney where the licence for TCN-9 was given to Frank Packer, the publisher of the *Women's Weekly* magazine.

While it seems logical business sense for a media company to expand through acquiring other media companies, the practice leads to a situation of concentrated media ownership, and the problems associated with media monopolies. According to Screen Australia, a government agency providing support to Australian film, television and digital media makers, the fifty-five commercial television licences issued in 2008 by the Australian government were owned by just seven groups. The groups (by audience size and revenue) were:

- Seven Media Group
- PBL Media
- Ten Network Holdings
- WIN Television
- Prime Media Group
- Macquarie Media Group
- Imparja Television.

In 1987, the Australian government passed legislation to regulate cross-media ownership in an effort to make the controlling interests of the Australian media more diverse. Since the *Broadcasting Services Amendment (Media Ownership) Act 2006* was passed the restrictions on cross-media ownership have loosened and there has been more variation in the ownership and control of newspapers, television and radio licences. Under the amendments, it is now possible to own and control two of a commercial television licence, a commercial radio licence, or a mass circulation daily newspaper in the same media market.



**FIGURE 4.4.3** Australian-born Rupert Murdoch has become the world's largest media owner. Among his holdings are most Australian newspapers (under News Corporation) and the Fox broadcasting television network. As a US citizen he has also been able to acquire US media outlets.

For example, in 2007, Fairfax Media Limited, the publisher of *The Age* in Melbourne and *The Sydney Morning Herald*, bought several radio licences including Melbourne's 3AW and Sydney's 2UE, which are both influential and popular news/talkback radio stations. In Perth, the chairman of the Seven Network, Kerry Stokes, also has an interest in the city's only daily newspaper *The West Australian*. It remains to be seen if the concentration of ownership and control will enhance or erode the quality of the media in Australia.

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1** Do you think it matters who owns the media in Australia? What might be the effects on Australian society if one or two people owned all the media outlets? Explain your answer.
- 2** Does media ownership necessarily mean control? Can an owner of a media outlet control the content? How do you think this could happen?

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Australian media organisations can be divided into three categories: commercial, public and community. Alternative media is also an emerging sector. Each area has its own characteristics, which influence both the industry and the type and style of content it produces and distributes.
- Australian media audiences are diverse and media organisations find it is important to track and record the media consumption habits of audiences.
- The Australian Communications Media Authority (ACMA) is the body responsible for regulating television, radio, telecommunications and the internet in Australia. Self-regulation also exists through commercial organisations and other bodies, such as the Australian Press Council.
- The content of films, video games and some other publications is regulated through a classification system. Works can be refused classification, which means it is illegal to hire, exhibit or sell them in Australia.
- Media ownership in Australia is largely in the hands of a few individuals or corporations. This highly concentrated media landscape can have an impact on the content that is delivered to Australian audiences.
- The media organisations landscape is continually changing and evolving but the essential characteristics, such as the industry sectors, tend to remain the same.

## ASSESSMENT TASKS

- 1 Research and report on an Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) investigation into a breach of a code of practice or broadcasting licence conditions. Present your findings as a work of investigative journalism either in print, video or radio format. Be sure to include the production specifications traditionally found in your chosen media format. For example, a print product should have a design layout that is typical of a newspaper or magazine (e.g. heading, by-line, text boxes and eye-catching images etc.).
- 2 Create an original zine of 8–16 pages that focuses in depth on the topic of zine production, media ownership or media education. Your emphasis on your chosen topic can include an objective analysis or a personal response about the media industry, but, as with any media product, you must not defame people, be libellous or offensive.
- 3 Visit the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) website and find out more about the current cross-media ownership rules and regulations. Summarise the rules and regulations in a short report.
- 4 Visit the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) website and search the Media Control Database to see which companies or individuals control your favourite television networks and radio stations. Present your findings to the class in the form of a short spoken report or a Microsoft® PowerPoint® presentation.