

Theory Workshop #7: Entertainment

Comm 181F

San Jose State U

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This Workshop

These workshops are self-paced overviews and information references that provide critical knowledge to help you succeed in this course.

This workshop covers theories of entertainment and the entertainment industry that provide background for your course research project.

This workshop is based in part on material from:

Burentt, R. and Marshal, P.D. (2003). *Web Theory: An Introduction*. New York: Routledge

Traditional Media Trends



Consolidation: economies of scale lead media to consolidate into progressively larger entities.

Conglomeration: Cross ownership between media and non-media organizations.

Re-regulation: organized lobbying by corporations and trade groups to reduce taxes, shift costs, and change regulations to benefit incumbents.

“Hits” Model: The Pareto principle (also known as the 80-20 rule or the *Law of the Vital Few*) states that, for many events, 80% of the effects (profits) come from 20% of the (content)causes (eg. most movies don’t make money).



That's Entertainment?

It's all fun and games until someone gets hurt, then its entertainment!
-anonymous

As we have discussed in previous workshops, the web and digital media is highly disruptive of traditional media. Dominant media maintained control due to the limitations of traditional mediums.

High Capital Costs: Creation; Production; Exploitation; Distribution

High Expertise Threshold: Limited number of professionals; Internal training

Artificial Scarcity: Spectrum space; Cable Franchise; Limited venues; Regulatory barriers

Collusion: Proprietary formats; Deals with manufacturers; Barriers to entry; self-imposed (MPAA) or distributor imposed (Walmart) standards





Seizing the Means of Production (and distribution)



Traditional media maintained control via limited and expensive production and distribution processes.

The internet and digital technology break the control over production (perfect, limitless copies) and distribution. So you no longer need factories to burn CDs or trucks and physical stores (or TV/radio) stations to get content to consumers.

The effects of this process was first seen in the creation of Napster and the rise of file sharing (eg. “stealing” music).

Why File Sharing?

The way radio, retail, and the record companies govern the music is whack - playola, payola, and censorship make artists into one track ponies. -Chuck D, Public Enemy

File sharing emerged out of a complex set of factors including the availability of broadband at major US universities, the absence of the expected reduction in the cost of CDs, a perceived drop in the quality of artists/albums (one hit wonders), and the unwillingness of the music industry to embrace digital distribution. Napster stepped into this void and consumers followed.

Some researchers have argued that the drop in recording industry revenue and CD sales is more due to consumers finishing the process of replacing vinyl records in the 1990s and more recently the rise in use of single track downloads.

Recent research finds that users of file sharing services, as a group, are much more likely to purchase music.

Regardless of the legal and ethical questions - the culture of music online has shifted and it will take more than lawsuits to reverse the trend.

Case Study: iTunes



Introduced in 2001 during the height of file sharing, Apple provided the only reasonable alternative for recording companies. Without the threat of file sharing, it is doubtful that Jobs would have gotten industry cooperation.



Apple now sells 27% of all music sales (69% of digital downloads) in the US and is the largest retailer of music.

That means in less than 10 years, Apple has gone from 0% to a quarter of the market.

Media as a Commodity



A good or service whose **wide availability** typically leads to **smaller** profit margins and diminishes the importance of factors (as brand name) other than price (HP v. Dell PC).

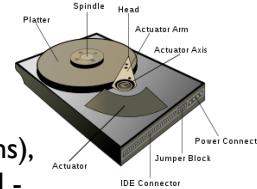
One that is subject to ready exchange or exploitation within a market <stars as individuals and as commodities of the film = box office>

Commodity fetishism: People within capitalist societies find their material life organized through the medium of commodities. They trade their labour-power for a special commodity - **money** - and use that commodity to claim various other commodities produced by other people. Thus producer - consumer contact is brokered.

Due to **artificial scarcity**, limited distribution channels, and regulation, traditional media production and distribution (as opposed to those within these industries - mainly labor) are historically **not** commodities.



New Media



Broadband, disc storage (cost halving every 18 months), computers, pro/consumer electronics are - in general - commodities.

Most new media forms and the internet are **interoperable** (work together)

Production, exploitation, distribution, and exhibition become **commodities** under the impact of digital media and networks.

Expertise level **lowered** by automation and resource sharing

New media **threatens** to turn traditional media forms into mere commodities.

New Media Models

The ideas discussed in the Economics workshop for generating media profits have a basis in offline media efforts.

Customer Centrism (value) & Strategic Improvisation

The Grateful Dead (1965-1995)

Cater to loyal fans (premium service)

Direct ticket distribution



Give away music (bootlegs) to reach/create more fans (control impractical) If you care enough to bootleg, you will attend shows and buy other merchandise.

Strategic Improvisation: Flexibility, fast reaction

Familiarity = value as a creator



New Media Models

Insane Clown Posse (ICP) 1985-

ICP is a hip hop duo specializing in “horrocore” - supernatural and horror themes. Shunned by record labels, developed rabid fan base (“Juggalos”) and achieved success by:



- Developing close relationships with fans
- Develop ancillary profit streams (merch, events)
- DIY - keep costs low
- Make every concert and album an “event.”

Task

To earn credit you need to post a substantive 100+ word comment on this workshop's wiki page and complete the following tasks and bring them to class.

For the in class workshop think about how these concepts and ideas reflect, contradict, or interact with the week's readings and your own experiences with entertainment.

1. Select examples (1 each) from the workshop and C7 in Castells that focus on entertainment.
2. Write a sentence or two on how these examples relate to each other.
3. Write a few sentences on how these examples interact with your own experiences of online entertainment. How has the internet changed your consumption/rituals of media emtertainment?
4. Teams will discuss and compare their tasks and prepare a 10 minute presentation on the topic of the workshop. This is not just a reading of each students task submission but a coherent discussion where the elements interact and support each other. One team will be chosen at random to present.
5. Turn in tasks sheets for credit.

Discussion

For your discussions and comments this week, think about how you get your entertainment. Consider this; is it still useful to differentiate between watching a program live, on a DVR, on Hulu, on your mobile phone, or on a DVD? When do mediums become meaningless?

Next, how has your music consumption changed overtime? Radio, web radio, podcasts, streaming, downloads (legal/illegal), CDs, vinyl, etc. What fuels your choices?