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WHAT'S ON OPINION

# Media studies: Course for concern or the genuine article?

Journalism lecturer Dr John Jewell believes m... studies is definitely not a waste of time. Put down your mobile phone, tablet and newspaper and discover why



By **John Jewell**

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## The majority of five-16 year olds now own a mobile phone

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From time to time various Tory politicians, journalists and misinformed misanthropes rise from their bunkers to exclaim: 'Do you know that redbrick polyversity they study that Beckham fellow? [How standards have dro](#)

With this month's imminent A-level results, we expect the routine trashing media studies and related subjects.

It's not a new criticism of course, those of us involved in teaching or researching the media are met almost daily with the accusation that we are wasting our time and 'their' money on Mickey Mouse degrees which have little intellectual value and even less currency in the 'real world' (whatever the hell that is).

Utter rubbish. But let's stop and think about the importance of the media.

That we live in a media saturated society is without question. When one accounts for all that is around us including television, the internet, mobile phones, and advertising in general, we are exposed to more mass media messages in one day than we were in one month just a generation ago.

The media is central to our lives.

For most of us it is our main source of information about the world we live in. It's not so



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their own tablet PC.

Three in five five-16s have their own televisions. Seven in 10 five-16 year olds own a mobile phone, and three in five owners now go online on their mobiles.

Modern society is utterly dependent upon the media.

We cannot understand how politics works, for example, if we don't study the media.

What the Leveson enquiry and the phone hacking scandal taught us was that the relationship between sections of the newspaper industry and successive governments was suffocatingly close.

We need to monitor patterns of ownership and control. It matters, surely, that one man (Rupert Murdoch) exerted so much power over successive governments and that his newspapers espoused his personal views.

One of the subjects I teach at the School of Journalism in Cardiff is advertising and the consumer society. Here students are taught not how to construct advertisements, they are taught about the effect of ubiquitous advertising on society and culture.

The principle reason for commercial advertising is to get us to buy and to buy ever more, to replace what we have rather than repair what we have – we can plainly see that advertising's collective power and our collective response to it has had, and continues to have, a profound and adverse effect upon our personal lives and upon the planet we share. It's plain now that we are reaping the effects of our throwaway culture.

So my module looks at the impact of advertising on culture and the influence of the USA.

I am concerned with increasing globalisation and the strategies of leading multinational companies. Has the world become one homogenous market? Has the ubiquity of Coke, McDonald's, Disney and Nike had a detrimental effect on indigenous cultures? Is the value system of the USA globally dominant?

We consider the rise of India and China and examines whether advertising (along with other media forms) helped to create a cross national youth culture that listens to the same music, drinks the same brand of drink and eats the same brand of hamburger.



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We all know advertising is everywhere.

Big brands are ever seeking out new unadulterated spaces to fill with their logos. Even the night sky is up for grabs.

**[Academic Frank J. Balsamello](#)** has outlined how space advertising is economically and strategically viable. Over time, he argues, as space becomes more accessible and is used for a wider array of human activities; it may gradually become more acceptable and appealing for companies to advertise in space itself.

Imagine the night sky festooned with the Nike swoosh or the McDonald's golden arches!

Actually, it's not that far away – in May, a Japanese drinks manufacturer announced plans to place the first advert on the Moon.

**[According to the Independent, Otsuka Pharmaceutical](#)** says it wants to use private space companies to deliver a 1kg 'Dream Cap' in the shape of a can of their most popular soft drink, Pocari Sweat, to the lunar surface.

We need to study the media and we need to subject the David Beckham phenomena, or the Simpsons, or **[Harry Potter](#)** to rigorous scrutiny.

Not to blithely say how great or poor they are without critical examination.

But to analyse and investigate their impact on society, on culture, on individuals, on behaviour patterns.

Popular culture in this sense is studied so it can tell us about ourselves and the times we live in.

But in this world of tuition fees and rising debt what about the value of a degree in media?

In terms of career prospects, it's actually, comparatively speaking at least, a very good time to be a media graduate.



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Also, it is not like 20 years ago when where a journalism degree may have led you into the conventional spheres of broadcasting and newspapers.

Now, in the digital and social media age, all major (and many not so major) companies have PR departments, communication strategies and the like.

As I'm so fond of telling my students, I read some years ago that in theory, a university degree should, irrespective of the subject, 'hone a person's critical analysis skills while teaching them the value of acquiring expert knowledge in a particular area.'

We hope that our graduates have attained the ability to research, write and critique according to highest academic standards.

That they have the skills to work both independently and in groups.

That they recognise the importance of intelligence, objectivity, preparation, meeting deadlines – and most importantly, that they are as citizens better prepared for a life in a media dominated world.

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So to not study the media? That would be a negation of the duty of any university.

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