Through time media culture has changed through various technological transformations. In the last decade a convergence of previously individual industries such as telecommunications IT and computing has occurred as their confines have become indistinct (Clinque (2015, p.20)). Such technical advances have led today’s society to become a visual networking and information society as we use computing software for economic pursuits, for education and for leisure purposes (Clinque (2015, p.17)). The instantaneous access to information as a result of technological advances means that mass media has more control and power over society than it ever has before. A dystopian outlook on Mass Media (Clinque (2015, p.17)) critiques that Mass media conglomerates are mass producing the same standardized products to society that are only geared at making a profit and in the process are creating a false reality that forces unrealistic perceptions and stereotypes within our modern society. This critique on mass culture arose in the early 20th century when there was an uprising in new forms of mass communication and a big emergence of an entertainment industry geared towards creating profit. Theorists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer were the first scholars to engage with these new cultural conditions at a critical level. They argued that advances in capitalism and technology were leading to ‘Cultural chaos’ (Adorno, 1999/1994). They believed that mass media at that time such as talent shows and radio were signs of society losing true freedom and individuality (Adorno, 1999/1994, p. 31) as these forms of media impressed the same artificial stamp on everything (Adorno, 1999/1994, p. 31). In today’s society Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s critique on the mass media and culture industry still has some relevance as it still remains somewhat true that ‘culture impresses the same stamp on everything’ (Adorno, 1999/1994, p. 32).

However this sameness in mass media and culture is mostly only evident on an artificial level and there are positive and negative ways to analyses the ramifications this has on society. Furthermore argumentatively it can be said that there is large scope of somewhat independent forms of media that aren’t necessary designed to appeal to the masses that still remain to have large followings and relevance in society in comparison to mass media produced by large media conglomerates.
Adoros and Horkheimers critique on the mass culture industry still has relevance today. Beside the fact that media and technology has rapidly advanced and changed, there is still a high level of an artificial mass culture controlled by major media conglomerates that has negative impacts on society. Originally Adorno and Horkheimer voiced and developed their critique on the culture industry through working with the Frankfurt School. The Frankfurt school was an institute of social research that was founded in 1992 with the aim of developing Marxist studies in Germany (Corradetti). The institute was the original source that developed critique on a capitalist society, its first generation of theorists including Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (Corradetti). Together these scholars argued that the mass media of their time such as Hollywood movies, talent shows, radio, mass produced journalism and advertising were a culture of ‘safe, standardized products’ (Adorno, 1999/1994, p. 31) motivated by appealing to the masses, making profit, giving entertainment and distraction from reality. As a result Adorno and Horheimer lamented that movies and radio ‘no longer pretend to be art” (Adorno, 1999/1994, p. 32) and therefore a great deal of highly publicized, film, performance, entertainment and music were only different on an artificial level and together were unauthentic, lacking in individuality and diversity.

This notion is still apparent in modern society today as major international media conglomerates such as Comcast, Google, News Corp, Time Warner and Sony Entertainment continue to mass produce the same argumentatively superficial forms of media. Across all areas of highly publicized film, television and music in media, the same motifs of unrealistic and stereotypical takes on reality occur and has the ability to generate unhealthy attitudes and perceptions in society. Arendt et al (2015) adds weight to this comment as the article suggests that some news media outlets depict certain social groups stereotypically and that long term exposure to such can create negative implicit attitudes that lead to explicit attitudes towards a certain social group. The article proves this hypothesis through showcasing research that was undergone using two cultural contexts, the results suggesting ‘that regular exposure to stereotypical news coverage creates negative implicit attitudes, which, in turn, alter explicit attitudes’. Thus it can it can be seen that mass media culture has the capability to influence peoples attitudes negatively and sometimes subconsciously without a consumer even realizing. Further on Another fairly evident example of how mass media is impacting society is through mainstream music, film and television offering the same repeated ideas and images. Holtzman (2015 p.30) sheds light on this as its stated that mainstream media such as ‘prime time television, popular music, and popular films offer images that are repeated over and over’. Its stated that no matter what format its presented, society is still receiving the same messages from popular media and despite any intellectual understanding people have, the repetition in media will influence society. Ultimately it can be argued that adorno’s and Horheimer’s early critique on mass media and culture has meaning in modern society through mass media’s often stereotypical implicit influence on people’s attitudes coupled with its artificial and sometimes-exploitive repetitiveness across all media forms. However contrastingly It can also be argued that perhaps consumption of such content is justifiable as individuals understand it doesn’t mirror true reality. Additionally against the
backdrop of the content that mass media conglomerates produce there still remains large scope for somewhat independent forms of media that are more authentic and still appear to have large followings and relevance in society.

Even though Adorno and Horkheimers critique on the mass culture industry still has relevance today, it can also be argued that audiences and consumers are aware of the superficial content they are consuming and are purely using it for personal enjoyment and entertainment which isn’t necessarily a negative concept. Bruhn (2013, p.257) demonstrates this argument through discussion of New York University Professor Roberts Stams concept of ‘the Myth of Facility’. He describes this concept as one that relates to the notion that films are argumentatively easy to make, pleasurable to watch and ‘easy to understand’. Thus the conclusion can be drawn that most viewers of popular media content have an intellectual understanding over the reality of what they are consuming is merely fiction. Furthermore it can be said that consumption of highly publicized mass media in the entertainment industry that appears to be strongly artificially orchestrated to appeal to the masses isn’t essentially a negative thing. This can be so as the fact that such content has to ability to be so ‘easy to understand’ and so clearly untrue to reality means that people can use it as a time to escape reality and enjoy themselves. Barton et al (2009) proves this as a research conducted on reasons why people watch reality television produced results showing that the second highest reason people watch it is to ‘forget about my problems’. Thus it can be said that mass produced media content such as reality TV are mostly consumed perhaps in order de-stress and unwind.

Although majority of mainstream mass media are owned and controlled by major media conglomerates aiming to appeal to the masses and in Adorno and Horheimer’s words ‘no longer pretend to be art’ (Adorno, 1999/1994, p. 32), there is still scope for independent forms of media that are more authentic and still appear to have large followings and relevance in society. Content such as popular independent films and independent music are examples of this as they are produced mostly outside of a major film or music studio system and are produced and distributed by independent entertainment agencies. Most of these agencies aim to create a piece of work for people to watch or listen to that is meticulous, unique and authentic and something that appeals to a smaller group of people. However it is evident that content created by these agencies has the potential to gain as much attention as content produced by mass media companies. Australian, Melbourne based electronica musician Chet Faker is a current living example of an artist who produces music within an independent record label and is very successful at the sometime. Signed to the independent label ‘Downtown Records’ (Downtown Records, 2016) Chet faker has managed to get his 2014 ‘Built On Glass’ LP to 2 on the album charts, along with achieving to get its lead single ‘Talk Is Cheap’ first place in the world’s biggest music poll’ (Chet Faker Still Dominating Charts Following Hottest 100 Win, 2015). Chet Fakers achievements prove that mass amounts of audiences are interested in content that is produced by independent agencies and that society has the
ability to recognize, enjoy and be influenced by media that is unaffiliated with powerful media conglomerates.

Adornos and Horkheimer’s lasting argument was that if humanity was to reach its full potential, capitalism in the mass media industry must be overthrown (Adorno, 1999/1994). Consequently their critique can be seen to be true in the modern world through mass media’s often-stereotypical implicit influence on peoples attitudes coupled with its artificial and sometimes-exploitive repetitiveness across all media forms. However it is evident that audiences do have some intellectual understanding of the media that are consuming and some purely engage in it for relaxation and enjoyment purposes only. Furthermore it is additionally evident that Adorno and Horkheimer’s critique that forms of media such as music ‘no longer pretend to be art’ (Adorno, 1999/1994, p. 32) doesn’t remain entirely true as independent and authentic artists such as Chet Faker prove that audiences do take interest in content outside of mainstream and mass produced media. Overall Adornos and Horkheimer’s early pessimistic criticize on mass culture overtly still has relevance in today’s modern world. Yet it is important to recognize that the capitalism of mass media isn’t leading to true ‘Cultural chaos’ as a large portion of society prove that they have an intellectual understanding of reality and other diverse interests and perceptions against the backdrop of the superficial media they interact with.

REFERENCES:


