

### *Mass Media and its role in the Life*

It goes without saying that mass media has become part and parcel of any contemporary society. The press, the radio and television play a very important part in the life of the Society. They inform, educate and entertain people. They also influence the way people look at the world and make them change their views. As sociologists say news is not what happens, it is what you see or read about in mass media. In other words, mass media plays a very important role in moulding public opinion.

Millions of people watch TV and read newspapers in their spare time. The daily paper dominates family life at breakfast. Most of people can't do without a newspaper in the underground or during the lunch break. Say, my family subscribes to some newspapers, because they are informative, interesting and objective. Pretty often I buy ... at the newsstands, as I'm interested in ... .

TV also dominates the life of the family most of the time. It's needless to say that the TV set is not just a piece of furniture. It is someone who is "one of the family". It is also a habit-forming drug impossible to resist. The radio is turned on most of the time, creating a permanent background noise. In fact it does not interfere with your activities. I can easily listen to the radio while doing Maths, peeling potatoes or doing the washing up.

Generally I'm not very keen on politics, but I do watch news and various commentary and discussions called forum. At a forum several authorities exchange views on social economic and political problems, as well as on books of common interest. A number of sides is represented so that the listeners or the viewers could hear various opinions. In fact such broadcasts are very popular with audience, as people are able to see their leaders, deputies and presidents.

Various radio and TV games, such as a panel game or a quiz programme also attract a large audience. During a radio panel-game people send questions to the studio to be answered by the members of the panel, who compete for the best results.

It's no secret that some of the TV and radio stations are owned by big corporations, thus the owners can advertise whatever they choose. Very often the firms and joint ventures sponsor shows and programmes, thus giving common people a good chance to make a fortune or to win a valuable prize.

I dare say that mass media stimulates science and progress. To advertise their goods commercial firms buy TV and radio time. So most of the up to-date goods, new inventions and technologies become popular and well known with the help of mass media. So mass media promotes quality and progress into our every day life.

Of course advertising promotes business and benefits businessmen. However it annoys the general public. The play you are watching on TV may be interrupted several times by an appeal to use anew perfume or detergent, or drink a certain beer. And though we are used to everything being advertised, watching such programmes gives one a headache instead of providing relaxation.

However it wouldn't be fair to say that our mass media do not try to raise the cultural level of the people or to develop their artistic taste. I'm generally too short of time to attend an exhibition or to go to theatre, but I watch a play or a ballet on TV with great pleasure. Thus mass media can save us a lot of time, money and efforts, keeping people aware of what is happening in the world around us.

### *What is Mass Media?*

#### *Effects of mass media*

In psychology, communication theory and sociology, media influence or media effects refers to the theories about the ways the mass media affect how their audiences, think and behave.

The shift of media and media industry over the past few years into new forms, such as DVD and the internet, changes the modalities available for audiences to (consumption)(economics) (consume) and receive media. The change has caused some media theorists to call into question the influence that the media have over (attitude) (psychology) (attitude)s and (belief)s.

Urbanization, industrialization and modernization created social conditions in which the mass media developed. The bulk of the content of the mass media is not designed to challenge or modify the social and political structure of a nation, either in a one party state or in a democratic society. The mass media play a crucial role in forming and reflecting public opinion: the media communicate the world to individuals and reproduce the self-image of society. Critiques in the early-to-mid twentieth century suggested that the media weaken or delimit the individual's capacity to act autonomously - sometimes being ascribed an influence reminiscent of the telescreens of the dystopian novel 1984. Mid twentieth-century empirical studies, however, suggested more limited effects of the media. Current scholarship presents a more complex interaction between the media and society, with the media generating information from a network of relations and influences and with the individual interpreting and evaluating the information provided, as well as generating information outside of media contexts. The consequences and ramifications of the mass media relate not merely to the way newsworthy events are perceived (and which are reported at all), but also to a multitude of cultural influences that operate through the media.

The media has a strong social and cultural impact upon society. This is predicated upon its ability to reach a wide audience which often sends a strong and influential message. Marshall McLuhan uses the term "the medium is the message" as a means of explaining how the distribution of the message can often be more important than the message itself. [1] It is through the persuasiveness of mediums such as television, radio and print media that reach the target audience. These have been influential mediums as they have been largely responsible in structuring the daily lives and routines of Australians. Television broadcasting has a large amount of control in influencing the content that society watches and the times in which they are viewed. This is a distinguishing feature of traditional mediums and although they are by no means redundant, the development of the internet has challenged the traditional participation habits involved in mediums such as television. The internet has lifted some of the restrictions placed on society by allowing for diversification of political opinions, social and cultural differences and heightened level of consumer participation. There have been suggestions that allowing consumers to produce information through the internet will lead to a bombardment of too much information. It can however allow society a medium for expressing opinions and moving away from the political restrictions placed on society.

#### *New media*

Theorists such as Louis Wirth and Talcott Parsons have emphasised the importance of mass media as instruments of social control. In the twenty-first century, with the rise of the internet, the two-way relationship between mass media and public opinion is beginning to change, with the advent of new technologies such as blogging.

Mander's theory is related to Jean Baudrillard's concept of 'hyperreality'. We can take the 1994 O.J. Simpson trial as an example, where the reality reported on was merely the catalyst for the simulacra (images) created, which defined the trial as a global event and made the trial more than it was. Essentially, hyperreality is the concept that the media is not merely a window on to the world (as if a visiting alien were watching TV), but is itself part of the reality it describes. Hence (although additionally there is the question of navel-gazing) the media's obsession with media-created events. It is this which lead Marshall McLuhan in the 1960s to say that "the medium is the message", and to suggest that mass media was increasingly creating a "global village". Thus, for example, there is evidence that Western media influences in Asia are the driving force behind rapid social change: "it is as if the 1960s and the 1990s were compressed together." A notable example is the recent introduction of television to Bhutan, with dramatic effects in terms of very rapid Westernization. This raises questions of cultural imperialism' (Schiller) – the de facto imposition, through economic and political power and through the media, of Western (and in particular US) culture.

### **An instrument for social control**

Social scientists have made efforts to integrate the study of the mass media as instrument of control with the study of political and economic developments in the Afro-Asian countries. David Lerner (1958) has emphasised the general pattern of increase in standard of living, urbanization, literacy and exposure to the mass media during the process of transition from traditional to modern society. According to Lerner, while there is a heavy emphasis on the expanding of the mass media in developing societies, the penetration of the central authority into the daily consciousness of the mass has to overcome profound resistance.

### **Government and Mass Media**

They include licensing in advance; censorship of offending material before publication; seizure of offending material; injunctions against publication of a newspaper or book or of specified content; requirement of surety bonds against libel or other offense; compulsory disclosure of ownership and authority; post publication criminal penalties for objectionable matter; post publication collection of damages in a civil action; post publication correction of libel and other misstatements discrimination in granting access to news source and facilities; discrimination and denial in the use of communications facilities for distribution; taxes; discriminatory subsidies; and interference with buying, reading and listening.

### **The public sphere**

#### **Structural transformation**

Habermas believed that society becomes increasingly polarised into spheres of "public authority" - referring to the emergence of the state and associated political activity - and the "private" - the intimate domain of private relationships and the family. Jurgen Habermas believed that the development of mass media was a crucial factor in the transition from an absolutist regime to liberal-democratic society. With the invention of the printing press and then the availability of newspapers and other forms of printed literature, Habermas claimed the emergence of an intermediate sphere which according to him is the bourgeois public sphere. This space will provide individuals with a chance to gather together to critically access, discuss and evaluate important contemporary issues of utmost importance for the people. He claimed that this will resemble the Greek agora. Habermas claims that this public use of reason not only acts as a regulatory mechanism over the state, which is now highly visible, but also as a catalyst for the replacement of the absolutist regime with a liberal democratic government.

### **Mass media and modern public sphere**

In political behaviour, opinion leading tends to correlate positively with status, whereas this is not the case in consumer behaviour. So for political behaviour, the general conclusion that the media merely fixes (confirms) people's opinion is not supported. Hovland, using experimental psychology, found significant effects of information on longer-term behaviour and attitudes, particularly in areas where most people have little direct experience (e.g. politics) and have a high degree of trust in the source (e.g. broadcasting). Since class has become a less reliable indicator of party (since the surveys of the 40s and 50s) the floating voter today is no longer the apathetic voter, but likely to be more well-informed than the consistent voter — and this mainly through the media.

There is also some very persuasive and empirical evidence suggesting that it is 'personal contact, not media persuasiveness' which counts. For example, Trenaman and McQuail (1961) found that 'Mon't knows' were less well informed than consistent voters, appearing uninterested, showing a general lack of information, and not just ignorance of particular policies or policies of one particular party. During the 1940 presidential election, a similar view was expressed by Katz and Lazarsfeld's theory of the two-step flow of communication, based on a study of electoral practices of the citizens of Erie County, Ohio. This examined the political propaganda prevalent in the media at the time during the campaign period to see whether it plays an integral role in influencing people's voting. (In terms of generalising their results, one should note that there are questions about short term versus long term influence). The results contradict this: Lazarsfeld et al (1944) find evidence for the Weberian theory of party, and identify certain factors, such as socio-economic circumstances, religious affiliation and area of residence, which together determine political orientation. The study claims that political propaganda serves to re-affirm the individual's pre-disposed orientation rather than to influence or change one's voting behaviour.

Thompson does not see 'mediated quasi-interaction' (the monological, mainly one-way communication of the mass media) as dominant, but rather as intermingling with traditional face-to-face interactions and mediated interactions (such as telephone conversations). Contrary to Habermas' pessimistic view, this allows both more information and discussion to come into the public domain (of mediated quasi-interaction) and more to be discussed within the private domain (since the media provides information individuals would not otherwise have access to).

### **Mass Media in a free enterprise society**

Although a sizeable portion of mass media offerings—particularly news, commentaries, documentaries, and other informational programmes—deal with highly controversial subjects, the major portion of mass media offerings are designed to serve an entertainment function. These programmes tend to avoid controversial issues and reflect beliefs and values sanctified by mass audience. This course is followed by Television networks, whose investment and production costs are high. Jerry Mander's work has highlighted this particular outlook. According to him, the atomised individuals of mass society lose their souls to the phantom delights of the film, the soap opera, and the variety show. They fall into a stupor; an apathetic hypnosis Lazarsfeld was to call the 'narcotizing dysfunction' of exposure to mass media. Individuals become 'irrational victims of false wants' - the wants which corporations have thrust upon them, and continue to thrust upon them, through both the advertising in the media (with its continual exhortation to consume) and through the individualist consumption culture it promulgates. Thus, according to the Frankfurt School, leisure has been industrialised. The production of culture had become standardised and dominated by the profit motive as in other industries. In a mass society leisure is constantly used to induce the appropriate values and motives in the public. The modern media train the young for consumption. Leisure had ceased to be the opposite of work, and had become a preparation for it.'

### Mass media, mass culture and elite

The relation of the mass media to contemporary popular culture is commonly conceived in terms of dissemination from the elite to the mass. There are periods when this process is reversed. During the 18th century it was the utmost chic for the aristocrats of the French Court to assume the guise of shepherds and peasants in their restive outings.

The long-term consequences of this are significant in conjunction with the continuing concentration of ownership and control of the media, leading to accusations of a 'media elite' having a form of 'cultural dictatorship'. Thus the continuing debate about the influence of 'media barons' such as Conrad Black and Rupert Murdoch. For example, the UK Observer (March 1st 1998) reported the Murdoch-owned HarperCollins' refusal to publish Chris Patten's *East and West*, because of the former Hong Kong Governor's description of the Chinese leadership as "faceless Stalinists" possibly being damaging to Murdoch's Chinese broadcasting interests. In this case, the author was able to have the book accepted by another publisher, but this kind of censorship may point the way to the future. A related, but more insidious, form is that of self-censorship by members of the media in the interests of the owner, in the interests of their careers

### *Vocabulary*

*the media noun* [uncountable] all the organizations, such as television, radio, and newspapers, that provide news and information for the public, or the people who do this work:

- The event attracted interest from the national media.

*the press noun* [uncountable] newspapers and news magazines, or the people who work for them:

- The case was widely reported in the press.

*reporter noun* [countable] someone whose job is to write about news events for a newspaper, or to tell people about them on television or on the radio:

- We depend on news reporters to be the watchdogs of our government and large corporations.
- He started his career as a cub reporter (=someone who is learning to be a reporter) on the Yorkshire Post.

*editor noun* [countable] the person who is in charge of a newspaper or magazine, or part of a newspaper or magazine, and who decides what should be included in it:

- Editors have a responsibility to present many different views in their papers and not be biased toward single ideas.
- the Business Editor of the New York Times

*edition noun* [countable] the copies of a newspaper or magazine that are published at the same time:

- The story appeared in the Sunday edition of the newspaper.

*tabloid* (also tabloid newspaper) noun [countable] a newspaper that has small pages, a lot of photographs, and stories mainly about sex, famous people etc rather than serious news:

- Tabloids tend to emphasize sensational stories.

*broadsheet* noun [countable] a newspaper printed on large sheets of paper, especially a serious newspaper:

- The broadsheets carry about 70% more business news than the tabloids.

*compact* noun [countable] British English a serious newspaper printed on small sheets of paper like a tabloid:

- Compacts such as The Independent are designed to be easier for commuters to read on the bus or train.

*article* noun [countable] a piece of writing about a particular subject in a newspaper or magazine:

- an article in a scientific journal

*editorial* (also leader) noun [countable] a piece of writing in a newspaper that gives the editor's opinion about something, rather than reporting facts:

- an editorial in The Times
- The leader in The Daily Telegraph criticized the Prime Minister.

*feature* noun [countable] a piece of writing about a subject in a newspaper or a magazine, or a special report on television or on the radio:

- a magazine full of interesting articles and features

*column* noun [countable] an article on a particular subject or by a particular writer that appears regularly in a newspaper or magazine:

- She writes a sports column for the Dallas Evening News.

*review* noun [countable] an article in a newspaper or magazine that gives an opinion about a new book, play, film etc:

- All the papers published reviews of his latest film.

review verb [transitive] to write a short article describing and judging a new book, play, film etc:

- She reviewed the album in a national paper.

*scoop* noun [countable] an important or exciting news story that is printed in only one newspaper or shown on only one television station before any of the others know about it:

- In their rush to publish the scoop, they overlooked a number of historical inaccuracies in the report.

roadcast verb [intransitive and transitive] to send out radio or television programmes:

- It was in 1954 that BBC TV broadcast its first national news summary, introduced by Mr Richard Baker.

*broadcast noun* [countable]:

- a news broadcast

*televise verb* [transitive] to broadcast something on television:

- a plan to televise court cases

*transmit verb* [intransitive, transitive usually + adverb/preposition] to send out electronic signals, messages etc using radio, television, or other similar equipment:

- The first commercial radio station started transmitting in 1920.

*frequency noun* [uncountable and countable] technical the number of radio waves, sound waves etc that pass any point per second. Each radio station or television channel has its own frequency so that people can always find it on their radio or TV:

- Several frequencies were re-allocated to community radio stations.

*channel noun* [countable] a television station and all the programmes that it broadcasts:

- A lot of people switch channels during the commercials.

*radio station noun* [countable] an organization which makes radio broadcasts, or the building where this is done:

- KBNO is among more than 600 radio stations across the country that now broadcast in Spanish.

*national radio noun* [uncountable] a radio service owned or controlled by the central government of a country:

- a daily national radio programme

*local radio noun* [uncountable] a radio service that broadcasts programmes for a particular area of the country:

- This page provides details of the local radio stations in Essex.

*show noun* [countable] a general word for a programme on TV or radio, especially one that is intended to entertain rather than educate:

- Her new show combines theatre, comedy, and magic acts.

*commercial* (also advertisement or advert British English) noun [countable] a short film or message encouraging people to buy a particular product or service, which is broadcast on television or radio:

- Several well-known film directors started their careers directing commercials for TV.

*news bulletin* noun [countable] British English

a) a short news programme on radio or television, reporting only the most important information:

- the main evening news bulletin American

b) a very short news programme on radio or television, broadcast suddenly in the middle of another programme when something very important has happened:

- a news bulletin that shocked and saddened the world

*satellite television* (also satellite TV) noun [uncountable] television programmes that are broadcast using satellites in space, and which you can watch only if you have a special piece of equipment:

- The introduction of satellite television completely revolutionized the media market.

*digital radio/digital television* noun [uncountable] a system of broadcasting using digital signals:

- The digital radio revolution is offering new levels of opportunity to advertisers.
- The transition to digital television could take much longer than expected.

*network* noun [countable] a group of radio or television stations, which broadcast many of the same programmes, but in different parts of the same country:

- a 24-hour news network
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- a daily national radio programme

local radio noun [uncountable] a radio service that broadcasts programmes for a particular area of the country:

- This page provides details of the local radio stations in Essex.

programme British English, program American English noun [countable] something that you watch on television or listen to on the radio:

- The Broadcasting Standards Commission compiles data on complaints about television programmes.

show noun [countable] a general word for a programme on TV or radio, especially one that is intended to entertain rather than educate:

- Her new show combines theatre, comedy, and magic acts.

commercial (also advertisement or advert British English) noun [countable] a short film or message encouraging people to buy a particular product or service, which is broadcast on television or radio:

- Several well-known film directors started their careers directing commercials for TV.

episode noun [countable] a television or radio programme that is one of a series of programmes in which the same story is continued each week:

- The final episode will be broadcast next week.

news bulletin noun [countable] British English

a) a short news programme on radio or television, reporting only the most important information:

- the main evening news bulletin American

b) a very short news programme on radio or television, broadcast suddenly in the middle of another programme when something very important has happened:

- a news bulletin that shocked and saddened the world

airtime noun [uncountable] the amount of time that a radio or television station gives to a particular subject, advertisement etc:

- The researchers found that only 20 percent of Channel One airtime is spent on coverage of "recent political, economic, social and cultural stories."

cable television (also cable TV) noun [uncountable] a system of broadcasting television programmes by cable:

- The college provides cable television service to all rooms in college residences, as well as to all classrooms and offices.

satellite television (also satellite TV) noun [uncountable] television programmes that are broadcast using satellites in space, and which you can watch only if you have a special piece of equipment:

- The introduction of satellite television completely revolutionized the media market.

pay-per-view (also PPV) adjective [only before noun] a pay-per-view television channel makes people pay for each programme they watch:

- a pay-per-view broadcast

pay-per-view noun [uncountable]:

- The match will be available live on pay-per-view.

digital radio/digital television noun [uncountable] a system of broadcasting using digital signals:

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- a 24-hour news

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