

What Is Mass Media?

Think about this for a second: whenever you want to hear your favorite song, watch your favorite show, or see the latest current events, where do you go? You more than likely turn on your television, radio, or computer. The source that the majority of the general public uses to get their news and information from is considered mass media.

Mass media means technology that is intended to reach a mass audience. It is the primary means of communication used to reach the vast majority of the general public. The most common platforms for mass media are newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and the Internet. The general public typically relies on the mass media to provide information regarding political issues, social issues, entertainment, and news in pop culture.

Types of Mass Media

The mass media has evolved significantly over time. Have you ever wondered how the latest news and information was communicated in the past? Well, before there was the Internet, television, or the radio, there was the newspaper. The newspaper was the original platform for mass media. For a long period of time, the public relied on writers and journalists for the local newspapers to provide them with the latest news in current events.

Centuries later, in the 1890s, came the invention of the radio. The radio would soon supersede the newspaper as the most pertinent source for mass media. Families would gather around the radio and listen to their favorite radio station programs to hear the latest news regarding politics, social issues, and entertainment.

Later on down the line came the invention of the television. The television would soon replace the radio for the most effective platform to reach the general public. Today, the Internet is the most relevant form of mass media and has become a major tool for news outlets. Since the evolution of the Internet, the general public is now able to access those same news outlets in an instant with just a click of a mouse, instead of having to wait for scheduled programs.

The Influence of Mass Media

Through mass media, news outlets have a major influence on the general public and a major impact on the public's opinion on certain topics. In many cases, the mass media is the only source that the general public relies on for news. For example, when Neil Armstrong landed on the moon in 1969, mass media made it possible for the public to witness this historical event.

Characteristics of mass media

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Characteristics

Five characteristics of mass communication have been identified by sociologist John Thompson of Cambridge University:^[1]

- "[C]omprises both technical and institutional methods of production and distribution" – This is evident throughout the history of mass media, from print to the Internet, each suitable for commercial utility
- Involves the "commodification of symbolic forms" – as the production of materials relies on its ability to manufacture and sell large quantities of the work; as radio stations rely on their time sold to advertisements, so too newspapers rely on their space for the same reasons
- "[S]eparate contexts between the production and reception of information"
- Its "reach to those 'far removed' in time and space, in comparison to the producers"
- "[I]nformation distribution" – a "one to many" form of communication, whereby products are mass-produced and disseminated to a great quantity of audiences

Mass vs. mainstream and alternative

The term "mass media" is sometimes erroneously used as a synonym for "mainstream media".

Mainstream media are distinguished from alternative media by their content and point of view.

Alternative media are also "mass media" outlets in the sense that they use technology capable of reaching many people, even if the audience is often smaller than the mainstream.

In common usage, the term "mass" denotes not that a given number of individuals receives the products, but rather that the products are available in principle to a plurality of recipients.^[2]

Mass vs. local and speciality

Mass media are distinguished from local media by the notion that whilst mass media aims to reach a very large market, such as the entire population of a country, local media broadcasts to a much smaller population and area, and generally focuses on regional news rather than global events. A third type of media, speciality media, provide for specific demographics, such as specialty channels on TV (sports channels, porn channels, etc.). These definitions are not set in stone, and it is possible for a media outlet to be promoted in status from a local media outlet to a global media outlet. Some local media, which take an interest in state or provincial news, can rise to prominence because of their investigative journalism, and to the local region's preference of updates in national politics.

rather than regional news. *The Guardian*, formerly known as the *Manchester Guardian*, is an example of one such media outlet; once a regional daily newspaper, *The Guardian* is currently a nationally respected paper.⁴⁸

Forms of mass media

Broadcast



A family listening to a crystal radio in the 1920s.

Main articles: Radio broadcasting and Television

The sequencing of content in a broadcast is called a schedule. With all technological endeavours a number of technical terms and slang have developed. Please see the list of broadcasting terms for a glossary of terms used.

Radio and television programs are distributed over frequency bands which are highly regulated in the United States. Such regulation includes determination of the width of the bands, range, licensing, types of receivers and transmitters used, and acceptable content.

Cable television programs are often broadcast simultaneously with radio and television programs, but have a more limited audience. By coding signals and requiring a cable converter box at individual recipients' locations, cable also enables subscription-based channels and pay-per-view services.

A broadcasting organisation may broadcast several programs simultaneously, through several channels (frequencies), for example BBC One and Two. On the other hand, two or more organisations may share a channel and each use it during a fixed part of the day, such as the Cartoon Network/Adult Swim. Digital radio and digital television may also transmit multiplexed programming, with several channels compressed into one ensemble.

When broadcasting is done via the Internet the term webcasting is often used. In 2004, a new phenomenon occurred when a number of technologies combined to produce podcasting. Podcasting is an asynchronous broadcast/narrowcast medium. Adam Curry and his associates, the *Podshow*, are principal proponents of podcasting.

Film

Print media is a form of communication that comes in many different types. Messages can be sent out and printed on fliers, in newspapers, billboards and magazines. Once the pieces are printed, they are distributed to their proper audience. The communication can be used to send information on promotions or updates on news or events.