

Mass Communication

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Mass communication is the term used to describe the academic study of the various means by which individuals and entities relay information through mass media to large segments of the population at the same time. It is usually understood to relate to newspaper and magazine publishing, radio, television and film, as these are used both for disseminating news and for advertising.

Field of study

Mass communication research includes media institutions and processes such as diffusion of information, and media effects such as persuasion or manipulation of public opinion. In the United States, for instance, several university journalism departments were remodeled into schools or colleges of mass communication or "journalism and mass communication".

In addition to studying practical skills of journalism, public relations or advertising, they offer programs on "mass communication" or "mass communication research." The latter is often the title given to doctoral studies in such schools, whether the focus of the student's research is journalism practice, history, law or media effects. Departmental structures within such colleges may separate research and instruction in professional or technical aspects of mass communication. With the increased role of the Internet in delivering news and information, mass communication studies and media organizations tend to focus on the convergence of publishing, broadcasting and digital communication. The academic mass communication discipline historically differs from media studies and communication studies programs with roots in departments of theatre, film or speech, and with more interest in "qualitative," interpretive theory, critical or cultural approaches to communication study. In contrast, many mass communication programs historically lean toward empirical analysis and quantitative research--from statistical content analysis of media messages to survey research, public opinion polling, and experimental research. Interest in "New Media" and Computer Mediated Communication" is growing much faster than educational institutions can assimilate it. So far, traditional classes and degree programs have not been able to accommodate new shifts of the paradigm in communication technologies. Although national standards for the study of interactive media have been present in the U.K. since the mid-nineties, course work in these areas tends to vary significantly from university to university. Graduates of Mass Communication programs work in a variety of fields in traditional news media and publishing, advertising, public relations and research institutes. Such programs are accredited by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (ACEJMC).

The Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) is the major membership organization for academics in the field, offering regional and national conferences and refereed publications. The International Communication Association (ICA) and National Communication Association (formerly the Speech Communication Association) include divisions and publications that overlap with those of AEJMC, but AEJMC historically has stronger ties to the

mass communication professions in the United States.

The terms 'Mass' and 'Communication'

The term 'mass' denotes great volume, range or extent (of people or production) and reception of messages. McQuail: McQuail's Mass Communication Theory, p. 13. The important point about 'mass' is not that a given number of individuals receives the products, but rather that the products are available in principle to a plurality of recipients. Thompson: The Media and Modernity, p. 13.

The term 'mass' suggests that the recipients of media products constitute a vast sea of passive, undifferentiated individuals. This is an image associated with some earlier critiques of 'mass culture' and Mass society which generally assumed that the development of mass communication has had a largely negative impact on modern social life, creating a kind of bland and homogeneous culture which entertains individuals without challenging them. Thompson: The Media and Modernity, pp. 13-14. However, with the advancement in Media Technology, people are no longer receiving gratification without questioning the grounds on which it is based. Thompson: The Media and Modernity, p. 14. Instead, people are engaging themselves more with media products such as computers, cell phones and Internet.

These have gradually become vital tools for communications in society today. The aspect of 'communication' refers to the giving and taking of meaning, the transmission and reception of messages. The word 'communication' is really equated with 'transmission', as viewed by the sender, rather than in the fuller meaning, which includes the notions of response, sharing and interaction. McQuail: McQuail's Mass Communication Theory, p. 14. Messages are produced by one set of individuals and transmitted to others who are typically situated in settings that are spatially and temporally remote from the original context of production. Therefore, the term 'communication' in this context masks the social and industrial nature of the media, promoting a tendency to think of them as interpersonal communication. Hartley: "Mass communication". Furthermore, it is known that recipients today do have some capacity to intervene in and contribute to the course and content of the communicative process. Thompson: The Media and Modernity, p. 14. They are being both active and creative towards the messages that they are conveyed of. With the complement of the cyberspace supported by the Internet, not only that recipients are participants in a structured process of symbolic transmission Thompson: The Media and Modernity, p. 14., constraints such as time and space are reordered and eliminated. 'Mass communication' can be seen as institutionalized production and generalized diffusion of symbolic goods via the fixation and transmission of information or symbolic content. It is known that the systems of information codification has shifted from analog to digital. Thompson: The Media and Modernity, pp. 14-15. This has indeed advanced the communication between individuals. With the existence of Infrared, Bluetooth and Wi-Fi, cell phones are no longer solely a tool for audio transmission. We can transfer photos, music documents or even games and email at any time and

anywhere. The development of media technology has indeed advanced the transmission rate and stability of information exchange.

Characteristics of Mass Communication: Five characteristics of mass communication have been identified by Cambridge University's John Thompson.

Firstly, it "comprises both technical and institutional methods of production and distribution"Thompson: The Media and Modernity, p. 15.. This is evident throughout the history of the media, from print to the Internet, each suitable for commercial utility.

Secondly, it involves the "commodification of symbolic forms",Thompson: The Media and Modernity, p. 16. as the production of materials relies on its ability to manufacture and sell large quantities of the work. Just as radio stations rely on its time sold to advertisements, newspapers rely for the same reasons on its space.

Mass communication's third characteristic is the "separate contexts between the production and reception of information",Thompson: The Media and Modernity, p. 17. while the fourth is in its "reach to those 'far removed' in time and space, in comparison to the producers".Thompson: The Media and Modernity

Mass communication, which involves "information distribution". This is a "one to many" form of communication, whereby products are mass produced and disseminated to a great quantity of audiences.Thompson: The Media and Modernity, p. 18.