Mass Media

The communication systems in which messages are delivered to very large audiences. The association to broadcasting led to the use of the expression mostly in relation to radio and television, but printed material, in particular newspapers and magazines, can also be considered mass media (Fragoso, 2008).

Summary Article: Mass Media

The "vehicles" that distribute information or entertainment content simultaneously to a wide or multiple audiences, such as television, radio, newspapers, magazines, advertisements, movies, books, CDs, Web sites, and video games. Mass media messages are characterized by the fact that they are created by a few for the consumption of a large, heterogeneous, and potentially widely dispersed audience. They are distinct from the more specialized media targeting a smaller audience, such as newsletters.

Mass media also refer to the organizations that produce and disseminate the content, such as television networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN), media companies (Time Warner, Viacom, News Corporation), and print publications (Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, Entertainment Weekly).

The term is often referenced in a larger cultural context relating to the societal effects of mass media content. Mass media can have profound cultural effects and can shape the way people perceive certain issues and ultimately behave. Debates surrounding such effects are perennial, and both defenders and critics of mass media bring forth fervent arguments. From an optimistic perspective, mass media are seen as a socializing force promoting shared experiences and common values. They can provide educational opportunities and possibilities for positive social change. A pessimistic view sees mass media as leading the creation of a mindless, dumbeddown culture.

Mass media—unlike a communication tool like the telephone—have generally been considered a one-way communication technology; that is, information flows to consumers, who cannot provide producers with immediate feedback. In recent years, however, some media providers—most notably Internet sites and some television programs—have created the means to allow consumers to provide instant comments on media messages. For further reading, see McLuhan and Powers (1989) and Postman (1985).

See also


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