

## **Mass culture/mass communication/mass media**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

Our modern society changes continuously and many significant events are taking place in it. For example, the rise and fall of modern empires (the Soviet Union), the public deaths of world's personalities (the mass media mogul Robert Maxwell, the American president Robert Kennedy, the fashion designer Versace) or the pompous weddings of the European royal houses, the fierce political campaigns etc. bound people together and contributed to the appearance of Mass Culture. This paper is divided into three separate, individual parts that are, in the same time, connected. It will start with an Introduction where all the basic notions of the three fields will be presented. The First Part of the paper: Mass Culture will explain the importance of this field for our society that is a more technological one and will also concentrate on the relation between culture and mass media and culture and communication.

The Second Part of the Paper: Mass Communication will start with a presentation of the first methods of communication and continue with all the transformations that shaped the field of communication until present.

Finally, the Third Part of the paper: Mass Media presents the mass media means and tools used in our society. This part deals with different aspects of mass media from the physical ones to the legal and moral aspects.

This paper ends with the Conclusions that underline once again the strong connection between the three concepts and their influence on our society.

### **KEY WORDS:**

Mass culture, mass media, mass communication, modern society

### **INTRODUCTION**

All the three notions that are the main subject of my paper are important parts of our modern society. To understand their role and significance it is important to define first the modern society.

So, what is, in fact, a modern society?

Obviously, a modern society can be defined as people who live together in present and who share the same social, political and cultural background.

Societies develop and change permanently so, there are, as mentioned in the abstract, many important and significant events that take place.

To be able to cope with our modern environment, we, the members of modern society, must keep in touch with each other and always be aware of what happens around us.

As civilization evolved on this planet so did societies. Today, we cannot see our lives without all the commodities around us like television, computers, radio, tablets and many other more or less sci-fi gadgets that have only one purpose: to make our lives more pleasant and easy. It is an interesting experience to study the development of our society reflected in many ways. If, for example, our ancestors, believed that the height of civilization was to travel in a carriage driven by horses, today we can see cars that have more and more futuristic functions not to mention the

efforts that are made to construct cars that are driven by computers and do not need drivers any more. The possibility to travel with spaceships like the ones we see in sci-fi movies becomes a present reality. Slowly, the future becomes present or even past and another type of future begins.

Many other fields in our modern society evolve and transform our lives. The field of medicine where new cures are searched found and researched to cure diseases that until today seemed impossible to overcome. Or communications, media, culture, engineering are reflecting the modern society.

As I said before our world changes continuously and right between our eyes. We saw ancient empires appearing, conquering glory for their achievements and disappearing and then our modern empires that are build with the same purpose. They too appear have their peaks and then crumbled into separate entities.

A modern society needs strong, powerful personalities to rule and control it. And, there are many fields where such characters can be found.

It has always been interesting for the average population of a society to see the evolution of such individuals. Maybe our interest comes from the realization that they embody all our desires and aspirations. The world of celebrities has always been of great interest for everybody and when an important event like a wedding or a funeral occurs in their lives, everybody wants to know about it. I think, there are few persons who did not read a glossy magazine or watched a TV show that keeps us informed of every move and action of the world's celebrities. There are numerous examples in this regard starting with a vast range of music bands and their evolution continuing with the celluloid's world of stars or with the ever-changing political and presidential stage. Special points of interest are the royal members from the few monarchies that remained today. They raise a particular interest and are under constant scrutiny from the public mainly because the traditions and the structure of these monarchies are so different from the rest of the states.

This evolution of modern society also leads to the appearance and development of a new type of culture that added something new to the classic one namely the mass culture.

The fast development of new means of media and the increased interest of people for this field are reflected in the three parts of my paper that will be presented next.

### **THE FIRST PART: MASS CULTURE**

“To understand clearly the culture and media, it is essential to define precisely what we mean by culture. For anthropologists, culture includes everything that occurs in a society – all the customs and practices handed down from generation to generation. Culture covers the various forces that contribute to our behavior in a society. These contributions usually come from our formal institutions, such as churches, the state, and now the media; mores, or standards of behavior; laws; and conventional practices and customs.

#### **Popular Culture.**

Popular Culture can be defined as the culture of everyone in a society. It can be pervasive that we seldom notice it. In order for us to notice it, we must step back and consciously observe it. We can do that by really looking around us at the objects in our society and asking ourselves why we idolize the things we do, why we buy the things we do, and why we believe in the things we do.

Throughout history, every society has had its own popular culture. Most today's popular culture is mass-produced and is disseminated in large quantities through mass media. Popular music, cheap paperback novels, soap operas, videocassettes movies and a myriad of advertised

products from designer jeans to disposable razors make up our environment. Stephen King novels, Levi's jeans and the golden arches of McDonald's are instantly recognizable symbols of our modern-day pop culture.

Because of the mass meditation of our popular culture, another term, mass culture developed. This refers to the things in our culture that are mass produced and/or shared through the mass media.

During the past 20 years, the study of popular culture on college and university campuses has been growing. [...] Many additional courses examine the relationship of the mass media to the popular culture.

[...] In the early years, pop culture was looked down upon many academics who felt that the study of every day culture was not appropriate in a university setting where students examined the Western civilization, philosophy and the sciences. Supporters of the study of popular culture point out that it is part of our history and holds as much relevance as war, slavery and revolutions. They note that by examining the themes and the styles of a culture we can better understand the value of the people.”<sup>1</sup>

“Mass culture refers to how culture gets produced, whereas popular culture refers to how culture gets consumed. Mass culture is culture which is mass produced, distributed, and marketed. Mass culture tends to reproduce the liberal values of individualism and to foster a view of the citizen as consumer. Theodor Adorno was among the radical critics of mass culture.

"Mass Culture" is a set of cultural values and ideas that arise from common exposure of a population to the same cultural activities, communications media, music and art, etc. Mass culture becomes possible only with modern communications and electronic media. A mass culture is transmitted to individuals, rather than arising from people's daily interactions, and therefore lacks the distinctive content of cultures rooted in community and region. Adorno developed a critical methodology to analyze the production, texts, and reception of the artifacts of what became known as "popular culture," thus anticipating the approach of later forms of "culture and cultural studies."”<sup>2</sup>

“For about a century, Western culture has really been two cultures: the traditional kind—let us call it "High Culture"—that is chronicled in the textbooks, and a "Mass Culture" manufactured wholesale for the market. In the old art forms, the artisans of Mass Culture have long been at work: in the novel, the line stretches from Eugene Sue to Lloyd C. Douglas; in music, from Offenbach to Tin-Pan Alley; in art from the chromo to Maxfield Parrish and Norman Rockwell; in architecture, from Victorian Gothic to suburban Tudor. Mass Culture has also developed new media of its own, into which the serious artist rarely ventures: radio, the movies, comic books, detective stories, science fiction, television. It is sometimes called "Popular Culture," but I think "Mass Culture" a more accurate term, since its distinctive mark is that it is solely and directly an article for mass consumption, like chewing gum. A work of High Culture is occasionally popular, after all, though this is increasingly rare.

Like nineteenth-century capitalism. Mass Culture is a dynamic, revolutionary force, breaking down the old barriers of class, tradition, taste, and dissolving all cultural distinctions. Mass Culture is very, very democratic: it absolutely refuses to discriminate against, or between, anything or anybody.

There are theoretical reasons why Mass Culture is not and can never be any good. Culture can only be produced by and for human beings. For the masses are in historical time what a crowd is in space: a large quantity of people unable to express themselves as human beings because they are related to one another neither as individuals nor as members of communities—indeed, they are not related to each other at all, but only to something distant, abstract: a football game, or bargain sale, in the case of a crowd, a

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<sup>1</sup> MASS MEDIA/MASS CULTURE AN INTRODUCTION, Stan Le Roy Wilson, Ch. Culture and Communication: Basic Concepts, pag. 4-5, USA.

<sup>2</sup> [http://sociologyindex.com/mass\\_culture.htm](http://sociologyindex.com/mass_culture.htm)

system of industrial production, or a State in the case of the masses. The mass man is a solitary atom, uniform with and undifferentiated from thousands and millions of other atoms who go to make up "the lonely crowd," as David Riesman well calls American society. A folk or a people, however, is a community, i.e., a group of individuals linked to each other by common interests, work, traditions, values, and sentiments; something like a family, each of whose members has a special place and function as an individual while at the same time sharing the group's interests (family budget), sentiments (family quarrels), and culture (family jokes). A person is at once more important as an individual than in mass society and at the same time more closely integrated into the community, his creativity nourished by a rich combination of individualism and communalism. In contrast, a mass society, like a crowd, is so undifferentiated and loosely structured till its atoms, in so far as human values go, tend to cohere only along the line of the least common denominator; its morality sinks to that of its most brutal and primitive members, its taste to that of the least sensitive and most ignorant.”<sup>1</sup>

## THE SECOND PART: MASS COMMUNICATION

“Communication can be defined simply as the process by which individuals share information, ideas and attitudes. A key word in this definition is “share”. The word means to give or to receive a part of something, or to enjoy or assume something in common. Some people use the term send rather than share when they discuss the communication process. However, “sending” merely implies transmitting a message, while sharing implies that the source and the receiver are actively working together to a common understanding.

You will also note that we all call communication a process. This means that communication is ongoing and dynamic. It also means that it encompasses various components that interact with one another, causing specific consequences. For example, what information, ideas and attitudes are shared, how much is shared, when is it shared and what tools are used to share it are all variables in the process.

### Types of communication

Various types of communication exist. Intrapersonal communication describes a person talking to himself or herself. In interpersonal communication, two or three people are talking with one another in close physical proximity. Group communication describes a process whereby groups of people communicate with one another in a face-to-face encounter. In mass communication, professional communicators use a mass medium to communicate over some distances to large audiences.

There are several basic components in the communication process. While these components can be presented in a variety of diagrams and models, our basic model includes the source, the message, the channel and the receiver.

Source. The source (sometimes called the sender, communicator or encoder) is the person who shares information, ideas or attitudes with another person. The writer of this textbook is sharing his ideas on the definitions of the term source with you. The message is being disseminating to you through the process of mass communication – in this case, book publishing.

In mass communication, the source is usually a professional communicator who shapes the message to be shared. He or she might be a newspaper or television reporter or an entertainer who must gather information or ideas and then share them with the audience.

Message. The message is whenever the source attempts to share with someone else. It originates with an idea, which then must be encoded into symbols that are used to express that idea.

Symbols are words or objects that the source uses to elicit meaning in the mind of the receiver of the message. Words and pictures are the most common symbols used in communication. Words attempt to describe an object or concept, while pictures actually show a representation of the object or idea.

Channel. The channel is the way in which we send our message. In interpersonal communication we use the sense of sight, sound and touch to communicate messages. These are our channels. In mass communication, such technological devices as books, newspapers, magazines, movies, radio and television

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<sup>1</sup> <https://is.muni.cz/el/1421/jaro2008/ESB032/um/5136660/MacDonald - A Theory of Mass Culture.pdf>

are our communication channels. Mass communication differs from interpersonal communication in that its messages must be moved over greater distances. This movement is achieved through the use of the technological devices. Radio and television messages are transmitted electronically, while newspaper and magazine messages are reproduced on high-speed presses and distributed through the mails and via carriers.

**Receiver.** The receiver (sometimes called destination, audience or decoder) in the communication process is the person with whom the message is intended to be shared. Without the receiver, there is no communication. To properly share your message, you must also be sure that the receiver is listening and understanding what it is you have to communicate. [...]

The receiver in mass communication is usually a large audience that is often referred to as the masses.

**Feedback.** If the receiver or audience in the communication process transmits back to the source an observable response to the message, you have an added component called feedback. Feedback provides the source with the opportunity to determine if the message was correctly understood and, if it wasn't, with an opportunity to modify it.

Feedback can take many forms. It can consist of words, gestures, facial expressions or any other observable act. Feedback is absent or at best very much delayed in mass communication. This makes mass communication much more difficult than face-to-face communication. Messages in mass communication must be clearly constructed because there is seldom chance to restate their meaning.”<sup>1</sup>

### **THE THIRD PART OF THE PAPER: MASS MEDIA**

“Mass media is the means used to communicate to the general public. In this lesson, you will learn the different platforms for mass media and the influence that mass media has on society.

#### **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

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<sup>1</sup> **MASS MEDIA/MASS CULTURE AN INTRODUCTION**, Stan Le Roy Wilson, Ch. Culture and Communication: Basic Concepts, pag. 7-8, USA.

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.

Mass media also plays a critical role in educating the public; educational programs exist on channels such as PBS. The Internet also plays an essential role in educating the general public. With the information on the Internet, one could learn anything from something as simple as how to tie a tie, to the more complex, like how to build a computer.”<sup>1</sup>

### **FUNCTIONS OF MASS MEDIA**

The significance of mass media for human life cannot be overestimated. This is true because beyond the physical requirements of food and shelter everyone needs communication, entertainment and information. And, it's mainly mass media that can satisfy all these requirements at the same time.

Mass media are usually thought of as sources of news and entertainment; they also carry messages of persuasion. Important, though often overlooked, is how mass media messages bind people into communities even into nations. So the main functions of mass media are:

- pervasiveness
- information source
- entertainment source
- persuasion forum
- binding influence

Mass media are pervasive in modern life. Through the mass media we learn almost everything we know about the world beyond our immediate environs. How would we know about international news without the help of newspapers, television and other mass media? An informed and involved citizenry is possible in modern democracy only when the mass media work well. Also without the mass media our expressions would be limited to people within earshot and to we write letters, but the mass media makes our audience larger.

Another important function of the mass media is that it serves as an information source. The heart of the media's informing function lies in messages called news because news is reports on things that people want or need to know. Advertising is also a part of the mass media's information function. The media especially newspapers are bulletin boards for trade and commerce; they also can provide full information such as classified advertisements.

The mass media can be wonderful entertainers bringing together huge audiences. No matter how many people saw Charlie Chaplin on the vaudeville stage, more people saw him in movie houses. Almost all mass media have an entertainment component. The thrust of the American movie industry is almost wholly entertainment although there can be a strong information and persuasive elements. Even the most serious newspapers have occasional humour columns. Most mass media are a mix of information and entertainment.

People form opinion from the information and interpretations to which they are exposed, which means that even news coverage has an element of persuasion. The most obvious of the media messages designed to persuade is advertising. Ads exhort the audience to action - to go out and buy toothpaste,

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<sup>1</sup> <http://study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-mass-media-definition-types-influence-examples.html>

cornflakes, automobiles, etc. Public relations usually also tries to persuade and shape attitudes by persuading the mass media audiences to see this or that fact in particular light.

The mass media bind communities together by giving messages that become a shared experience. A rural newspaper editor may not be thinking how his work creates a common identity among readers but it does. The town newspaper is something everyone in town has in common. The importance of mass media in binding people into nationhood is clear in every revolution and coup d'etat.”<sup>1</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

So, in the conclusion, I'd like to say that mass media play a great role in our modern society and it seems to me that our life would be dull and uninteresting without these sources of information, communication and entertainment.

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