

Mass communication

Mass communication is the study of how 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, magazine, and book publishing, as well as radio, television and film, as these mediums are used for disseminating information, news and advertising. Mass communication differs from the studies of other forms of communication, such as interpersonal communication or organizational communication, in that it focuses on a single source transmitting information to a large group of receivers. The study of mass communication is chiefly concerned with how the content of mass communication persuades or otherwise affects the behavior, attitude, opinion, or emotion of the person or people receiving the information.

Field of study

Mass communication is "the process by which a person, group of people, or large organization creates a message and transmits it through some type of medium to a large, anonymous, heterogeneous audience." ^[1] Mass communication is regularly associated with media influence or media effects, and media studies. Mass communication is a branch of social science that falls under the larger umbrella of communication studies or communication

The history of communication stretches from prehistoric forms of art and writing through modern communication methods such as the Internet. Mass communication began when humans could transmit messages from a single source to multiple receivers. Mass communication has moved from theories such as the hypodermic needle model (or magic bullet theory) through more modern theories such as computer-mediated communication.

In the United States, the study of mass communication is often associated with the practical applications of journalism (Print media), television and radio broadcasting, film, public relations, or advertising. With the diversification of media options, the study of communication has extended to include social media and new media, which have stronger feedback models than traditional media sources. While the field of mass communication is continually evolving, the following four fields are generally considered the major areas of study within mass communication. They exist in different forms and configurations at different schools or universities, but are (in some form) practiced at most institutions that study mass communication.

Advertising

Advertising, in relation to mass communication, refers to marketing a product or service in a persuasive manner that encourages the audience to buy the product or use the service. Because advertising generally takes place through some form of mass media, such as television, studying the effects and methods of advertising is relevant to the study of mass communication

Broadcasting

Broadcasting is the act of transmitting audio and/or visual content through a communication medium, such as radio, television, or film. In the study of mass communication, broadcasting can refer to the practical study of how to produce communication content, such as how to produce a television or radio program

Journalism

Journalism, is the collection and editing of news for presentation through the media, in this sense, refers to the study of the product and production of news. The study of journalism involves looking at how news is produced, and how it is disseminated to the public through mass media outlets such as newspapers, news channel, radio station, television station, and more recently, e-readers and smartphones.

Public Relations

Public relations is the process of providing information to the public in order to present a specific view of a product or organization. Public relations differs from advertising in that it is less obtrusive, and aimed at providing a more comprehensive opinion to a large audience in order to shape public opinion.

Major Theories

Communication researchers have identified several major theories associated with the study of mass communication. Communication theory addresses the processes and mechanisms that allow communication to take place.

- Cultivation theory, developed by George Gerbner and Marshall McLuhan, discusses the long-term effects of watching television, and hypothesizes that the more television an individual consumes, the more likely that person is to believe the real world is similar to what they have seen on television.^[2] Cultivation is closely related to the idea of the mean world syndrome.
- Agenda setting theory centers around the idea that media outlets tell the public "not what to think, but what to think about." Agenda setting hypothesizes that media have the power to influence the public discourse, and tell people what are important issues facing society.^[3]
- The spiral of silence, developed by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, hypothesizes that people are more likely to reveal their opinion in public if they believe that they are of the majority opinion, for fear that revealing an unpopular opinion would subject them to being a social outcast. This theory is relevant to mass communication because it hypothesizes that mass media have the power to shape people's opinions, as well as relay the opinion that is believed to be the majority opinion.^[4]
- Media ecology hypothesizes that individuals are shaped by their interaction with media,^[5] and that communication and media profoundly affect how individuals view and interact with their environment.^[6]
- According to the Semiotic theory, communication characteristics such as words, images, gestures, and situations are always interpretive. All sign systems, entitled to be "read" or interpreted, regardless of form, may be referred to as "texts." In the study of Semiotics, there is no such thing as a literal reading.^[7]

Methods of Study

Communication researchers study communication through various methods that have been verified through repetitive, cumulative processes. Both quantitative and qualitative methods have been used in the study of mass communication. The main focus of mass communication research is to learn how the content of mass communication affects the attitudes, opinions, emotions, and ultimately behaviors of the people who receive the message. Several prominent methods of study are as follows:

- Studying cause and effect relationships in communication can only be done through an experiment. This quantitative method regularly involves exposing participants to various media content and recording their reactions. To show causation, mass communication researchers must isolate the variable they are studying, show that it occurs before the observed effect, and that it is the only variable that could cause the observed effect.^[8]
- Survey, another quantitative method, involves asking individuals to respond to a set of questions in order to generalize their responses to a larger population.^[9]

- Content analysis (sometimes known as textual analysis) refers to the process of identifying categorial properties of a piece of communication, such as a newspaper article, book, television program, film, or broadcast news script. This process allows researchers to see what the content of communication looks like.^[10]
- A qualitative method known as ethnography allows a researcher to immerse themselves into a culture to observe and record the qualities of communication that exist there.^[11]

Professional organizations

The Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication^[12] is the major membership organization for academics in the field, offering regional and **national conferences and refereed publications**. The International Communication Association^[13] and National Communication Association (formerly the Speech Communication Association) are also prominent professional organizations. Each of these organizations publishes a different refereed academic journal that reflects the research that is being performed in the field of mass communication.

Notes

- [1] Pearce 2009, p. 624
- [2] Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Morgan, M., & Signorielli, N. (1986). "Living with television: The dynamics of the cultivation process" in J. Bryant & D. Zillman (Eds.), *Perspectives on media effects* (pp. 17–40) Hilldale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
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- [7] *Encyclopedia of Curriculum Studies*
- [8] Babbie, E. (2007). *The practice of social research*. Thomas Higher Education: Belmont, California. ISBN 0-495-09325-4
- [9] Babbie, E. (2007). *The practice of social research*. Thomas Higher Education: Belmont, California. ISBN 0-495-09325-4
- [10] Babbie, E. (2007). *The practice of social research*. Thomas Higher Education: Belmont, California. ISBN 0-495-09325-4
- [11] Babbie, E. (2007). *The practice of social research*. Thomas Higher Education: Belmont, California. ISBN 0-495-09325-4
- [12] AEJMC (<http://aejmc.org>)
- [13] ICA (<http://www.icaHQ.org/>)

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