

# INTRODUCTION TO MASS COMMUNICATION

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Undergraduate, 2 credits

Tues 2:10-4pm

Are we living in what Marshall McLuhan calls the “Global Village” or Guy Debord's "Society of the Spectacle"? Is medium the message or is it the message? In this era of mass communication, we are now living in a highly mediated and artificial reality in which time and space are rapidly sped up through the infiltration/domination of information technology. Mass communication media has made it possible for millions of people throughout the world to be in touch with nearly any spot on the globe but it also creates new and perpetuates existing social, political and economic problems. In this course, we will discuss mass media as devices to provide information and as organisations that distribute cultural products and messages simultaneously to large heterogeneous audiences. It introduces major theories and research directions in mass communication studies and seeks to critically chart the historical development of mass media fields in discussing its cultural, socio-political and materialist implications. We will also seek to re-examine the possibilities and limitations of mass communication means as ideological apparatus which manufacture consensus and/or enable sites of resistance.

Course objectives:

1. To gain understanding of the keys concepts in theories of mass communication.
2. To understand the technological, historical, cultural and ethical underpinnings within mass media fields.
3. To become more aware of the effects of mass media upon society and enhance media literacy.
4. To be introduced to major research methods in mass communication studies.

Course requirements:

1. Course Reader: There will be a compiled package of all reading materials. Students should make a copy themselves, and finish the assigned readings before class.
2. Students are required to do a presentation in class, and submit a term paper by **3 January 2006**. Each student needs to sign up for at least a week's reading to do a critical-analytical presentation on, for 15-20 minutes long. The academic paper should be an attempt to apply the readings and discussion onto findings in our mass communication environment. The paper must include a title and a bibliography. The paper has to be written in English in no more than 10 pages (typed, 12 font size and double-spaced). There will be no extensions on all announced deadlines.
3. Students are expected to be open-minded in receiving new and/or controversial ideas. A significant amount of attention will be given to discussing the reading materials. Please be active and verbal within classroom.
4. Students who commit any acts of academic dishonesty, including plagiarism and cheating, will be failed.
5. Students who are absent from class are responsible for catching up with coursework.

Evaluation:

Oral Presentation: 30%

Class Participation: 20%

Term Paper: 50%

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Introduction

Week 1 (Sept 13)

Who are you? Who am I? Why are we here?

Week 2 (Sept 20)

Denis McQuail, "Concepts and Models", *Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction*, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage. Third edition, 1994.

Concepts and Contexts of "Mass" and of "Communication"

Week 3 (Sept 27)

Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, New York: Schocken Books, 1969.  
Screening of early cinema excerpts.

Week 4 (Oct 4)

Screening: Dziga Vertov, *The Man with a Movie Camera*

Please try to attend the talk by Dick Fontaine on documentary film education at National Film and Television School at Audio-Visual Lecture Hall, Da Yong Building, 6:40-9pm, Oct 4.

Week 5 (Oct 11)

Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi, "Forms of Media as Ways of Knowing", *Questioning the Media: a Critical Introduction*, John Downing, Ali Mohammadi, and Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi eds., London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage, 1995.

Week 6 (Oct 18)

Student presentations on previous topics.

Week 7 (Oct 25)

Brian Winston, "How Are Media Born and Developed?", *ibid.*

Week 8 (Nov 1)

Hanno Hardt, "On ignoring history: mass communication research and the critique of society", *Critical Communication Studies: Communication, History and Theory in America*, London: Routledge, 1992.

The Public Sphere and Consumer Culture

Week 9 (Nov 8)

John Berger, "Chapter 7", *Ways of Seeing*, London: Penguin and BBC, 1972.

Week 10 (Nov 15)

Mid-term

Week 11 (Nov 22)

Student presentations on print ads.

Week 12 (Nov 29)

Douglas Kellner, "Advertising and Consumer Culture", *Questioning the Media: a Critical Introduction*, John Downing, Ali Mohammadi, and Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi eds., London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage, 1995.

Week 13 (Dec 6)

Screening of TV commercials.

Week 14 (Dec 13)

Jurgen Habermas, "Institutions of the public sphere", *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. T. Burger, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989.

Week 15 (Dec 20)

John Thompson, "The theory of the public sphere", *Theory, Culture and Society*, M. Featherstone ed., London: Sage, 1993.

Week 16 (Dec 27)

Philip Elliott, "Intellectuals, the 'information society' and the disappearance of the public sphere", *Media, Culture and Society*, P. Schlesinger and C. Sparks eds., London: Academic Press, Vol. 4, 1982. Screening of TV news.

Week 17 (Jan 3)

Stuart Hall, "The rediscovery of 'ideology': return of the repressed in media studies", *Culture, Society and the Media*, M. Gurevitch et al eds. London: Methuen, 1982.

Paper due.

Week 18 (Jan 10)

James Curran, "Mass Media and Democracy Revisited", *Mass Media and Society*, James Curran and Michael Gurevitch eds., Second edition, 1997.