

2 Media use

By the end of this chapter you should:

- be more aware of your own media use;
- be aware of the nature of audiences for different contemporary media.

Introduction

This book is about the sociological significance of the mass media, especially as they are experienced in Britain. However, nowadays we cannot separate ourselves from the rest of the world. We live in a media-saturated world, where the media are all around us, where new technology has shrunk the globe and made global communication commonplace. Thirty years ago Marshall McLuhan referred to the creation of a 'global village' as follows:

After three thousand years of explosion . . . the Western world is imploding. Today, after more than a century of electric technology, we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both time and space as far as our planet is concerned. . . . The globe is no more than a village (McLuhan, 1964, pp. 11–12).

However the globe is not an idyllic, rural village, but one where different individuals and nations have different levels of power and where some of the villagers have louder voices and better technological networks for communicating their voices than the rest. We shall see that the power relationships are shifting considerably, and to discuss the changes simply in relation to the Western world would be at the very least ethnocentric (that is, judging something from our own viewpoint), but ultimately we would be ignoring the emergent power of the 'Pacific Rim' countries, which have become big game-players in the new technological developments.

Media use at home

What does 'media saturation' really mean? Our analysis has to start somewhere, so let's look at our own lives and discover how much of our time is taken up by the mass media. It will be interesting to see just how much time you and/or other family members spend with the media, and you might find the results of the exercise quite surprising!

Exercise 2.1

Media diary

Close your eyes for a moment and imagine your lives without television, radio, newspapers, magazines and music. How would you learn about events? What would you do with all the spare time that became available?

This exercise will help you to gauge your own media involvement and how much time you and the rest of your family actually spend with different kinds of media.

- a** Keep a media diary (ideally for one week, but for at least three days), noting down the time you spend with different media. It is quite a good idea to do this at the end of each day. You should also ask other members of your family to do the same.

These are the media that you might include: television; videoed programmes/films, cinema, radio, newspapers, magazines, computer games, music tapes, CDs, records, the Internet.

From your data answer the following questions:

- i** 1. Which family member spends most time watching television?
 - i** 2. When is the whole family engaged with the same medium, if at all?
 - i** 3. Who spends the most time reading newspapers and/or magazines?
 - e** 4. Write down your general conclusions about your family's use of the media. To what extent is it true to say that, in your family, the time taken up by the media is greater than any other leisure-time activity?
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Television and its audience

You might have found that television takes up the greatest proportion of your family's leisure time. This would be typical of families all over Britain, because in general people spend more time watching television than they do on any other single leisure activity. Television has reached virtual saturation point in Britain; 98 per cent of homes possess at least one television and in 1991 36 per cent had two or more sets (see Item C for European comparisons).

ITEM A**Participation¹ in selected home-based leisure activities: by social class, Britain 1993–94² (hours per week)³**

	AB	C1	C2	DE	All persons
Watching TV	13.5	15.4	17.5	20.2	17.1
Listening to the radio	9.2	8.7	11.6	10.9	10.3
Listening to CDs, tapes or records	4.3	4.0	3.4	4.4	4.0
Reading books	5.1	4.3	3.2	3.4	3.8
Reading newspapers	3.6	3.3	3.4	3.2	3.3
Caring for pets	2.6	3.1	3.2	3.5	3.1
Gardening	2.4	2.0	2.2	1.8	2.1
Cooking for pleasure	1.8	1.8	1.8	2.0	1.9
Watching videos of TV programmes	1.6	1.4	1.7	1.9	1.7
DIY or house repair	1.6	1.6	1.7	1.4	1.6
Sewing and knitting	0.9	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.3
Reading specialised magazines	1.2	1.1	1.0	0.8	1.0
Watching other videos	0.7	0.9	0.8	1.3	1.0
Reading other magazines	0.6	0.8	0.7	0.8	0.7
Exercising at home	0.6	0.8	0.4	0.5	0.5
Using games computer or console	0.5	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.5
Car maintenance	0.4	0.4	0.9	0.3	0.5

1. Time spent in an average week in the 3 months prior to interview by persons aged 16 or over.

2. Data relate to the 12 month period ending September 1994.

3. The classifications AB, C1, C2 and DE refer to social classes in Britain.

(Source: *Social Trends, Office for National Statistics vol. 25, 1996.*)

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ITEM A Exercise 2.2**a**

1. Using your sociology textbook, give an example of an occupational group for each of the social classifications AB, C1, C2 and DE.

i

2. In Item A, which social class spent most time watching television, including watching videos of television programmes?

aku

3. Suggest three social reasons why this might be the case.

ITEM B**TV-related equipment in the home in 1986**

% of viewers who have:	All adults	Adults with children
VCR	38	51
Home computer	18	33
Cable TV	1	2
None of the above	50	68

(Source: *Adapted from IBA Yearbooks, 1987/1995.*)

ITEM B Exercise 2.3

Examine the statistics in Item B.

i

1. Describe the differences between homes with and without children.

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2. How would a sociologist account for these differences?

ITEM C

Television and video ownership in Europe

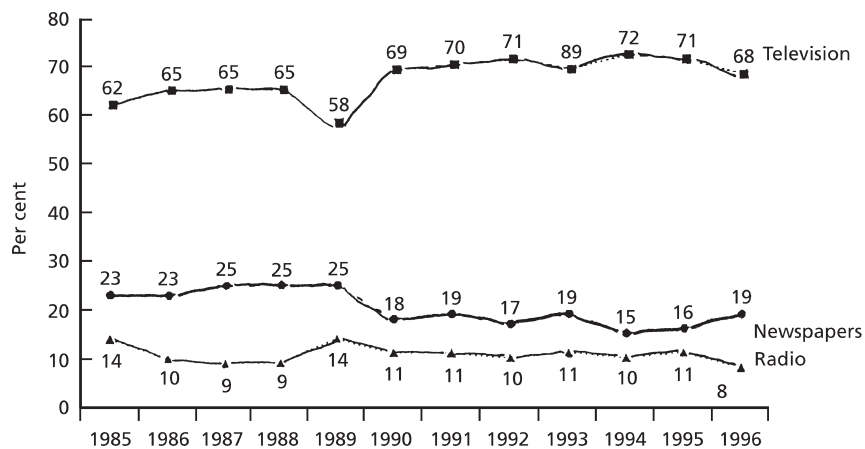
(% of households)	Two TVs	Video
UK	36	58
Italy	36	25
Spain	35	25
Netherlands	31	48
Germany	25	42
France	23	35
Greece	16	40

(Source: M. Denscombe, *Sociology Update*, Leicester; Olympus Books, 1992.)

Watching television is the single most frequent leisure pursuit of the British public, but it is not simply a time-passing activity. As well as having an entertainment role, television educates and informs – it is a highly credible source of information about the world. Items D and E show the results of various social surveys conducted over a period of twelve years in this country. The graphs illustrate the trends over that period.

ITEM D

Where people said they got their news 'about what is going on in the world today' (first-mentioned source), 1985–96¹

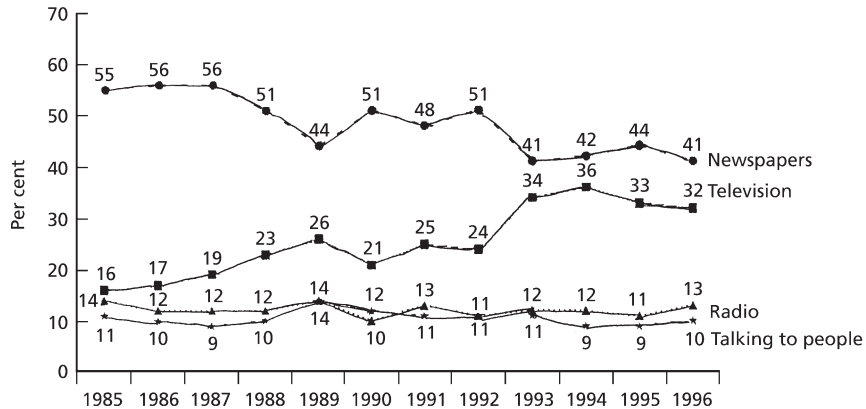


1. Based on surveys of 1000 adults (aged 16 and older) who had a working TV set in their household 'Don't knows' are excluded.

(Source: *Television: The Public's View*, Carel Press. Fact File 1997.)

ITEM E

Where people said they got their news about 'your local area' (first-mentioned source), 1985–96¹



1. Based on surveys of 1000 adults (aged 16 and older) who had a working TV set in their household.

(Source: *Television: The Public's View*. Carel Press. Fact File 1997.)

ITEMS D AND E **Exercise 2.4**

Look at Items D and E.

i

1. Identify one trend from each graph.

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2. How would you account for the differences between the media sources for world news compared with local news?

ai

3. What research methods might have been used to collect the data?

e

4. Assess the advantages and disadvantages of the kinds of data in Items D and E for sociological research.

TV viewing and age

According to Item F, age and viewing are correlated. The amount of viewing increases with age; although those aged 65 and over watched about two hours less in 1993 than in 1986. It is interesting to note that the age group least likely to watch television is children and young people aged four to fifteen.

ITEM F**Television viewing by age in Britain (hours and minutes per week)**

Age groups	1986	1991	1993
4-15	21:06	18:20	19:12
16-34	21:38	22:20	22:42
35-64	27:56	27:38	26:24
65+	37:47	37:27	35:41

(Source: *Social Trends*, Office for National Statistics, vol. 25, 1996, p. 216, © Crown Copyright 1998.)

ITEM G Exercise 2.5

Look at Item G. These are the television ratings for 23 July 1995. Take a current issue of the *Radio Times* or any other weekly television guide.

- i** 1. Check whether these programmes are still broadcast and how regularly they appear.
- ia** 2. Compare the current ratings against those in Item G. What do you find? (You will find TV ratings weekly in the quality press, for example in the *Guardian's* media section.)
- ku** 3. If you were a visitor to this country and had not watched any British television before, how would you describe the current viewing preferences of the television audience? (Complete this question in no more than 150 words.)
- ia** 4. What might you be able to predict about the tastes of the average viewer from your answer to question 3?

ITEM G**Television viewing figures for week ending 23 July 1995**

	Million viewers		Million viewers
BBC 1 Top 10		ITV Top 10	
1 East Enders (Tue/Sun)	15.68	1 Coronation Street (Mon/Wed)	17.10
2 National Lottery Live	11.24	2 Emmerdale (Tue/Thur)	11.00
3 Neighbours (Mon)	11.20	3 Home and Away (Tue)	10.58
4 Auntie's Sporting Bloomers	9.17	4 The Bill (Fri)	10.03
5 Casualty	8.35	5 Beaches	8.63
6 Till Murder Do Us Part (Fri)	8.32	6 Wycliffe	8.61
7 Fawlty Towers	8.04	7 The Russ Abbott Show	7.80
8 Birds of a Feather	7.84	8 Heartbeat	7.42
9 News/Sport/Weather (Sat)	7.13	9 World in Action	7.38
10 Nelson's Column	7.05	10 News at Ten (Mon)	6.88
BBC 2 Top 5		Channel 4 Top 5	
1 The Outer Limits	5.39	1 Brookside (Fri/Sat)	5.84
2 The Other Side of Love	4.20	2 ER	3.41
3 Golf: the Open (Sun)	3.72	3 Countdown (Tue)	3.26
4 The Travel Show	3.33	4 Ellen	3.20
5 One Foot in the Past	3.06	5 Hairspray	3.15

(Source: *Radio Times*, 19 August 1995. Printed in Fact File (1996) Carel Press.)

Newspapers and their readers

On average, in Britain today over 27 million people read at least one daily newspaper. The most popular title is the *Sun*, which has a circulation of approximately 4 000 000 (4 079 559 between January and June 1995) and a readership of approximately three times that figure.

Newspapers are divided into roughly three groups – quality, middle market and mass market (popular tabloids). Examples of the quality press are *The Times*, the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Guardian*; the middle-market includes the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express*; and the popular press includes the *Sun* and the *Daily Mirror*. The differences between these papers include the type of news reported, the feature articles, the layout and the nature of the readership.

Exercise 2.6

Take one copy of each of these three types of newspaper on the same day and concentrate on their advertisements.

- i** 1. Measure the space given over to advertising as a proportion of the whole paper.
 - i** 2. Which products have taken whole pages for their advertisements?
 - ia** 3. Choose two products, say cars and furniture, and compare the differences between the advertisements in the three papers in relation to price, luxury, style and 'taste'. What does this tell you about the socioeconomic background of each of the readerships?
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ITEM H **Exercise 2.7**

Look closely at the figures in Item H.

- i** 1. Which is the most popular 'quality' daily newspaper?
 - i** 2. Which social class is most likely to read: (a) the *Sun*, (b) the *Financial Times*, (c) the *Daily Express*?
 - ku** 3. Choose three Sunday newspapers and write a profile of their average reader (for example by gender and social class).
 - aku** 4. What sociological explanations can you put forward to explain these differences in readership?
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ITEM H

Readership of national newspapers by social class and gender¹

	Percentage reading each paper						Readership ¹ (millions)	Readers per copy	
	AB	C1	C2	DE	Males	Females			All adults
Daily newspapers									
<i>Sun</i>	7	18	29	30	25	19	22	9.9	2.5
<i>Daily Mirror</i>	7	13	22	20	18	14	16	7.1	2.8
<i>Daily Mail</i>	14	13	8	6	10	9	10	4.5	2.5
<i>Daily Express</i>	9	10	8	5	8	7	8	3.5	2.5
<i>Daily Telegraph</i>	6	6	2	1	7	5	6	2.6	2.6
<i>Daily Star</i>	1	4	7	7	7	3	5	2.2	2.9
<i>Today</i>	3	4	5	3	4	3	4	1.8	3.1
<i>Guardian</i>	8	3	1	1	3	3	3	1.3	3.4
<i>The Times</i>	8	3	1	1	4	2	3	1.3	2.9
<i>The Independent</i>	6	3	1	1	3	2	2	1.1	3.5
<i>Financial Times</i>	5	2	–	–	2	1	2	7.4	4.2
Sunday newspapers									
<i>News of the World</i>	11	23	36	36	29	26	27	12.4	2.6
<i>Sunday Mirror</i>	9	16	24	21	19	17	18	8.1	3.1
<i>The Mail on Sunday</i>	18	17	11	6	13	13	13	5.9	3.0
<i>The People</i>	6	12	16	15	14	11	12	5.6	2.8
<i>Sunday Express</i>	13	13	9	5	11	10	10	4.6	2.8
<i>The Sunday Times</i>	21	8	3	2	9	7	8	3.7	3.0
<i>Sunday Telegraph</i>	11	4	2	1	5	4	4	1.9	3.1
<i>Observer</i>	9	4	2	1	4	3	4	1.6	3.2
<i>Independent on Sunday</i>	7	3	1	1	3	2	3	1.2	3.5
<i>Sunday Sport</i>	1	2	3	3	3	1	2	9.0	3.5

1. Data relates to the 12 month period ending June 1994.

(Source: *Social Trends*, Office for National Statistics, vol. 25, 1996.) © Crown Copyright

Magazines

According to the *Media Guide 1997*, there are approximately 6500 magazine titles on sale in Britain at present. Of these, 4377 are professional titles and the rest are consumer magazines, paid for by readers. You might like to do an estimate of the magazines on sale at your local newsagent. Over the last ten years the number of magazines has increased by a third. This increase is the result of several factors:

- Revenue from magazine advertising.
- Desk-top publishing has reduced publishing costs.
- Niche marketing is more and more profitable despite small circulations. 'A Henley Centre report reckoned that magazines are sources of cohesion in an uncertain world . . . the traditional structures in society which segmented and distinguished between groups of individuals such as age, gender, class and religion are increasingly being overlaid by smaller groups based on individual taste and interest' (Peak and Fisher, 1996).

- Increases in men's non-porn magazines, emphasising style.
- Spin-off magazines from television programmes, focusing on gardening, antiques and cookery.
- The number of business magazines has doubled in five years.

In the past year the Periodical Publishers Association has acknowledged 548 new titles, with computing, football and magazines for men being among the most common. In February 1997 W. H. Smith decided to withdraw 'soft-porn' magazines from its shelves. This was not the result of a moral agenda, but rather that the sale of these magazines was slumping. In contrast to this decline, the sale of men's style magazines has dramatically increased:

Title	Publisher	Jan.-June circulation	Year on year %
<i>Loaded</i>	IPC	238 955	+87.2
<i>FHM</i>	EMAP	181 581	+100.4
<i>Men's Health</i>	Rodale	131 887	+14.7
<i>GQ</i>	Conde Nast	131 074	-3.0
<i>Maxim</i>	Dennis	113 264	n/a

Source: *Guardian*, 5 August 1996.

It is interesting to see how the newer magazines have become so successful so quickly. Three years ago men's titles together accounted for 300 000 sales a month, but today almost one million are sold. This has happened in parallel to the decline of feminist magazines such as *Sparerib* and *Everywoman*. According to Frazer Riddell, assistant editor of *The Media Business*, a cultural change is underway. . . . 'Men's magazines used to have their agenda set by women and now it is the kick-back. . . . The babe-content shot up with *Loaded* and everyone else has followed suit' (*Observer*, 11 August 1996).

New technology

The Internet

How many of you have already surfed the Internet? Some people find it invaluable as a resource while others find it a time-wasting activity. Whatever we think of it, it is likely that the Internet will play an ever increasing role in information technology and communication systems. Those who support it see it as a medium 'which is as revolutionary as the invention of printing. They say that by enabling everybody with a computer modem and phone line to publish to a global audience, the Internet is doing no less than altering media power balances' (Peak and Fisher, 1996, p. 216). Currently, there are about 30 million users world-wide and around one million in Britain. For approxi-

mately £12 per month (if you already have a computer, a modem and a telephone) you can be connected. However we have to take into account the fact that we are talking of the ‘media-rich’; it is unlikely that many of those with low incomes will be able to participate in this new ‘revolution’ in the near future.

Trowler (1996) outlines two main arguments about the social significance of the Internet – he refers to them as ‘digital liberation’ versus ‘digital corporatism’. He argues that ‘digital liberation’ will bring about:

- Decreasing costs of hardware and software; ‘tele-working’ and ‘tele-shopping’ from home will become the norm.
- More choice for consumers, who will themselves become interactive producers and directors.
- Interaction that takes place directly and instantaneously: ‘synchronously’.
- An end to copyright legislation – information will be freely given and used.
- An increased ‘democratisation’ of users as information will become freely available.

However the ‘digital corporatism’ model presents a more pessimistic picture:

- Megacorporations will buy specialised sections of the Internet and charge for access.
- Patterns of conventional media ownership will be replicated on the Internet services as subscriptions will be introduced.
- Individuals will become increasingly socially isolated in front of their computer screens, leading to a decrease in community action.

Gender and computer use

There is some concern that computer technology is less girl-friendly than it could be. You might test out this assumption by checking your school/college computer bases at different times of the day.

Exercise 2.8



Check your computer bases in your school/college at different periods during the day outside lesson times.

1. Count the number of male and female students using the computers. Is there any difference between the ratios at different times of the day?
2. Does one group monopolise the computers, or is there equality of use?

Research undertaken recently (SMRC Childwise Monitor 96/97) found that there is an increasing trend for boys to spend more time in

'the fantasy world of violent computer games, TV and 18 rated films'. The study found that:

- Nine out of ten children had a computer or games machine at home.
- Of 9–10 year olds, 44 per cent of boys had a computer in their own room, compared with 31 per cent of girls.
- Of all those with a computer at home, more boys (34 per cent) than girls (25 per cent) had it in their own room.
- Boys used the computers mainly to play games, the girls often used learning programmes.
- Boys bought more software programmes than did girls.

Young people and film

In December 1996 the Broadcasting Standards Council published its findings on young people's use of the media. Those in the 13–15 age group felt that they were not being taken into account by broadcasters, especially in relation to television programming. A third of those aged 10–12 admitted to having watched a violent, 18-rated film. 'The Silence of the Lambs', which had been broadcast on ITV, had been seen by 34 per cent of those under 12. Quentin Tarantino's 'Pulp Fiction' and 'Reservoir Dogs' had also been seen on video by 23 per cent and 18 per cent respectively of the under-12s. It is clear that the certification of films for cinema and video is not preventing large numbers of underage children and young people from viewing them.

Exercise 2.9



1. How many cinemas/cinema screens are there in your nearest town/city?



2. For any given week, list the different films that are being shown, their classification and their country of production. Set out the information you have gathered in a table like the one below.

Name of Film	Classification (PG etc.)	Country of production



3. From this information, decide which type of audience is most likely to be catered for.

Coursework suggestion

Several of the issues dealt with in this chapter could form the basis of a coursework assignment.

You might like to address the question of media use and gender as

a coursework enquiry. It would be interesting to link educational attainment with media consumption by taking a specific year group, possibly pupils who have just completed their SATS tests or GCSE examinations. Using a social survey, you could question them about their media use at home, linking it with the time they spend on homework.

A possible hypothesis would be: 'Pupils with higher levels of media consumption (for play rather than educational use) do less well in public examinations.'