

Why study the mass media?

The mass media control the information that we have about the world and so can influence our ideas. The media are a very important agency of socialisation.

The mass media are forms of communication that reach a lot of people over any given period of time.

Defining your terms. You should learn what the mass media are. They are forms of communication that reach a lot of people at a time.

Create a brainstorm of all of the different forms of communication that make up the Mass Media.

Why are the media more important now than they were in the past?

In the past, news was spread very slowly and a traveller would be given hospitality in exchange for news about the world. Ideas spread very slowly. Few people could read and even fewer could write.

The priest would tell them anything that was necessary for people to know in church on a Sunday. News of great national events such as a victory in battle or the death of a king would be spread by bonfires on hilltops known as beacons, or by the ringing of church bells.

The arrival of the printing press and the availability of cheap paper meant that gradually newspapers developed.

Exposure to the media

One of the reasons why the mass media are so important in people's lives is because we are exposed to so much of what they are telling us.

Almost everyone talks about what is happening on TV and for many people the media are their main hobby.

Women watch approximately 31 hours a week of television and people in social classes 4 and 5 watch an average of 35 hours a week. To understand how much TV this is, you should remember that a working week is 40 hours.

97% of the population have a TV set and 38% have a video recorder.

46% of the population listen to the radio every day and there were 53.3 million cinema visits made in 1984.

Almost 75% of the population read a daily newspaper and the Sun sells 4,000,000 copies daily. Total newspaper sales are about 36,000,000 daily.

You are a sociologist employed by a television company. You want to discover what kinds of programmes children like to watch on television.

Your hypothesis is:

Children enjoy a variety of different TV programmes.

Think of different methods that you could use to study what children like to watch on television.

Explain the advantages and disadvantages of each method you have suggested.

Do a small survey to find out how many televisions people in this class have in their houses. Your conclusion explains what this shows about the importance of television in our lives.