

Media, Culture, Society It is worth remembering that media is the plural of the term medium, which refers, essentially, to the means through which content is communicated between an origin and a destination. We will explore the possibility, then, that media have, in one way or another, become integral to what we might term the broader social and cultural environment, something that includes the distribution of wealth, power and influence, the operation of social structures and institutions, class, gender and ethnic relations, patterns of identity and community, ideas and understandings, practices of intellectual, artistic and creative expression and broader ways of life. Crucially, it is difficult to envisage a study of such questions about the make-up of society, the arrangement of social relations or the balance of structure and agency, that omits the cultural ways of life and expression which lie at the heart of all societies – and equally difficult to imagine how one might examine questions about cultural rituals, understandings, identities or creative practices without reference to the society in which they take place. The word culture, then, often refers simultaneously to creative practices and broader ways of life, whether in reference to the distinctive identities, rituals, practices and forms of expression associated with a particular group (as in 'punk culture'), or a certain activity (as in 'television culture'), or as a more general way to invoke the range of cultural features and practices across a broader range of people. Although contemporary large-scale 'mass media' figure heavily in our discussions, we'll focus on a broad range of different types and scales of communication involving a plethora of organisations, communities and individuals. After all, the practices of creative, artistic and intellectual expression in a given society encapsulate anything from the production and consumption of famous art, literature, music or television programmes to grassroots dancing, music-making, dress and acts of worship – all of which form an integral part of the overall ways of life of that society. Society particularly invokes an emphasis on social relations, including the detail of everyday interactions and the operation of broader social groupings and categories of social differentiation, such as those based on class, ethnicity and gender. Yet our concern here is with the use of artificial forms of media to enhance and extend our communicative capacity beyond the capabilities of our own bodies, transforming the range of expression open to us and mediating what we say over longer distances or to greater numbers of people, for example. At one extreme, such media may enable each of us to interact with friends or acquaintances without the need to be in the same room, city or even country, while on the other, they may enable a relatively small number of professional media producers to transmit large volumes of content to audiences of millions. Patterns of wealth, power and inequality are a further core element of societies, as are social institutions, including the apparatus of government and law, education systems, religious organisations, commercial corporations and smaller-scale organisational units such as the family. Together with established hierarchies of wealth, power and control, such institutions form a complex set of structures through which social relations are lived out.