

Sociology 43 Survey of Mass Media

- Instructor: Tom Streeter,
thomas.streeter@uvm.edu
- Online syllabus: [http://www.uvm.edu/
~tstreete/Courses/soc43syllabus/](http://www.uvm.edu/~tstreete/Courses/soc43syllabus/)

What Sociology 43 is about

Some Key Sociological Concepts

- Modernization: what is different between, e.g., Afghanistan and Holland?
- Structure and Change: what binds people together, what tears them apart?
- Meaning and Symbols: how do communication systems shape structure, change, and modernization?

I. Structure Matters

- Mass media do what they do in society to a large degree because of how they are *organized* or structured. (It's *not* just "giving people what they want")
- Things that determine structure include: technology, funding and economics, and legal regulation
- Structural determinants can be can be classified in three interacting layers: 1) Technical, 2) Logical, and 3) Content.

II. Culture and the Imagination Matter

- The media do not make things, they make signs and symbols
- Signs and symbols only work in the context of a shared culture, a shared system of meaning
- How people interpret the media is as important as what the media produce

III. Ideas Matter

- People do what they do, in media and elsewhere, because of what they (often implicitly) believe: e.g., what is authorship? what is intellectual property? is advertising freedom or oppression?
- The media are NOT driven just by market or other external forces; therefore, what principles people use to understand the media will shape the way the media are.

IV. The Media are Changing

- The media have never been that stable, but they are in a period of flux now
- How the media matter in modern society, therefore, will be determined by what the media become in the future, not just by what they are now
- How the media change is a matter of political and social choice, not just a matter of technology and money

Therefore: the media are
not just a thing that
happens to you; if you're
willing to think about it
and take some action,
the future of the media
is (at least partly) up to
you.