



جامعة عباس لغرور خنشلة
ABBES LAGHROUR UNIVERSITY KHENCHELA



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Media Audience Studies

Pedagogical support for third-year undergraduate students in Information and
Communication Sciences

Specialisation: Communication

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technology–audience interaction or platform-mediated communication.

Course introduction and syllabus overview:

This course examines the dynamic relationship between media and audiences through theoretical and methodological inquiry. Students explore key concepts—from audience typologies to digital ethnography—to understand how audiences are constructed, represented, and active. The curriculum is designed to cultivate the analytical rigour necessary for advanced research and professional practice in media and communication industries.

Axis 1 — Understanding Media Audiences: Historical Foundations and Conceptual Development

Week/Date	Topic
Week 1	Course introduction and syllabus overview
Week 2	Foundational Contributions to Media Audience Studies: Mass Society and the Passive Audience
Week 3	Audiences from Passive Recipients to Selectively Influenced Actors: Minimal and Limited Effects Perspectives (1938–1960)

This axis focuses on how Media audience studies began and evolved historically. It aims, as a **first step**, to highlight the main concepts and early assumptions about audiences as a passive mass by introducing the different perspectives on media effects. As a **second step**, it aims to explain how audiences later came to be seen as active interpreters through the cultural studies approach.

Lesson 2: Foundational Contributions to Media Audience Studies: Mass Society and the Passive Audience

A significant observation emerges from both the etymology of the word audience and the evolution of its dictionary definitions: its meaning has undergone substantial shifts in response to technological transformations in communication media. Consequently, the definition of “audience” varies markedly across historical periods, from the term’s origins to contemporary definitions in the third decade of the 21st century. These changes can be traced through the following distinct phases

- Early Ideas (1930s–1950s): Passive Audience
- Shift to Active Use (1960s–1970s): Active Audience
- Cultural Studies (1970s–1980s): Active but Socially Shaped (from active interpreters (Cultural Studies)) = Active but socially shaped
- Everyday Life & Participation (1990s–2000s): Beyond Audience (everyday cultural participants) = Beyond “audience” → user, participant, prosumer
- Digital Age (2000s–today): Prosumer / User

2. Early Ideas (1930s–1950s): Passive Audience

A central concept that marked the beginning of media audience studies is the notion of the “passive audience.” This idea emerged prominently from the contributions of several key scholars and theorists working within the framework of mass society theory during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Gustave Le Bon, in his seminal work “**The Crowd**”: **A Study of the Popular Mind (1895)**, described crowds as irrational, highly suggestible groups in which individuals lose personal responsibility and autonomy, submerging into a collective mind dominated by emotion, contagion, and hypnotic-like suggestion rather than rational deliberation.

José Ortega y Gasset, in **The Revolt of the Masses (1930)**, portrayed the modern “mass-man” as an inert, self-satisfied figure—neither intellectually distinguished nor capable of self-direction—who remains passive in the face of cultural and political forces, demanding comfort and uniformity while rejecting excellence or individual effort.

Although **Émile Durkheim** did not directly examine media audiences in his major work *Suicide* (1897), he supplied the conceptual tools necessary to comprehend the modern condition that produces the “mass” and, by extension, the “passive audience.”

Collectively, these above-mentioned thinkers helped and contributed to establish the view of large, undifferentiated publics or masses as passive receivers - susceptible to propaganda, manipulation, and uniform influence- rather than active, critical interpreters of social or mediated messages.

Harold Lasswell's 1927 book, “Propaganda Technique in the World War”, is a crucial text for anyone seeking to understand the origins of media audience studies. It is widely considered a foundational work that implicitly characterizes the audience as passive receivers of media messages. By examining key passages from the book, we can highlight the core ideas that support this interpretation of audience passivity. For instance, on the third page, Lasswell states, “The mass of the people are not capable of independent thought...” This suggests a clear lack of agency. Another direct statement, such as, “The audience is not composed of individuals with free will...” would present a clear and direct characterization of the audience as a uniform, non autonomous entity. The view of the audience as a passive mass is captured as well in the phrase: “The mass mind is not a collection of minds, it is a single organism responding to stimuli.” This reflects a mechanistic metaphor, suggesting that the audience, like a machine, can be triggered and controlled by specific media stimuli.

Lasswell's view revealed in the text page 72, that "The propagandist must assume that the audience will accept the message unless actively opposed" rests on a fundamental assumption of the audience's default passivity.

3. "Media effects" perspective and Mass Society Theory:

To fully understand media effects, we must consider the broader conceptual framework of Mass Society Theory, which - as previously noted - emerged from the work of several key European thinkers during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Although primarily focused on society rather than media per se, this sociological theory contends that modern industrial society has eroded traditional social bonds, leaving individuals increasingly isolated and therefore susceptible to manipulation by mass media and elites.

Mass Society Theory emerged in a specific context in different fields (sociology, political science, communication studies) as a response to traditional society. It is a Macro-Level Theoretical Perspective, "big picture" approach or in another way a large-scale social diagnosis to understanding society. This theory gained prominence after World War I, during the early 20th century, amid the rise of totalitarian regimes such as Nazi Germany and Stalinist USSR, when mass media and propaganda appeared to exert significant control over populations who were seen as a collection of isolated, vulnerable individuals (McQuail, 2010).

Gustave Le Bon is considered the father of crowd psychology, one of the principal founders and earliest articulators of the ideas that would become Mass Society Theory. His 1895 French notable book, "The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind" (Psychologie des Foules), was a landmark text that directly shaped the theory and influenced many thinkers, including Harold Lasswell, who further contributed to the concept of audience passivity (Le Bon, 1895; Lasswell, 1927; McQuail, 2010). "Le Bon" introduced the concept of the "collective mind," which suggests that individuals in crowds lose their rationality and become highly manipulable, foreshadowing the idea of a passive mass in Mass Society Theory (Le Bon, 1895 ; McClelland, 1989).

The mass society paradigm roots can be summarized as follows: Durkheim highlighted modernity's erosion of traditional social bonds, resulting in isolated and disoriented individuals. Le Bon provided the psychological explanation, showing that atomized people are particularly vulnerable to suggestion and demagogic influence. Mass society theorists applied this logic broadly, portraying the public as a "mediated crowd." Ortega y Gasset warned of the outcome: a mass society breeds a "revolt of the masses" that undermines excellence, subtlety, and authentic leadership, opening the path to authoritarianism.

Harold Lasswell extended these prior concepts and advanced Mass Society Theory in his propaganda research, which focused on mass manipulation. He demonstrated that isolated, atomized individuals are highly vulnerable to media influence, arguing that the passive nature of the masses allows elites to mold public opinion through symbolic communication, mass media, and propaganda (Lasswell, 1927).

Although Mass Society Theory provides some insight into how modern society functions and remains relevant to some extent today, many critics view it as overly pessimistic (McQuail, 2010). It assumes that people are passive and easily manipulated, overlooking the role of active audiences, which later theories such as Uses and Gratifications and Reception Theory address (Blumler & Katz, 1974; Hall, 1980). It is crucial to recognize that Mass Society Theory serves as a critique of modernity. While modernity promised progress, freedom, and rationalization, mass society theorists warned of its darker consequences: atomization, loss of individuality, and the emergence of a passive, manipulable mass (Ortega y Gasset, 1930; McQuail, 2010).

4. Which theory assumes audiences are like zombies, passively absorbing media messages?

The theory we are referring to is most commonly known as the Hypodermic Needle Theory, also called the Magic Bullet Theory. In media audience studies, we distinguish two key periods when the public was viewed as passive individuals within the context of Mass Society Theory. The first period, spanning from 1895 to the 1930s, predates the formal naming of the “Hypodermic Needle Theory” or “Magic Bullet Theory.” During this time, the phenomenon was observed descriptively rather than as a formalized theory. Scholars noted that media and propaganda—such as World War I propaganda, mass rallies, newspapers, and radio—exerted strong, uniform effects on audiences. Thinkers assumed that the media had a direct and powerful influence on “the masses.”

After the mid-20th century, scholars such as **Schramm**, **DeFleur**, and others in the 1940s and 1950s sought a way to label the early assumption about mass media effects. This led to the emergence of the term “Hypodermic Needle Theory” or “Magic Bullet Theory” to describe the belief in the direct and powerful influence of media on passive audiences.

The German term “**Zauberkeugel**” (“magic bullet”) was used by Paul Ehrlich in his theoretical and early experimental work in the medical field, particularly in the context of chemotherapy, as presented in his 1908 Harben Lectures in London (Thibault, 2016). However, the phrase “magic bullet” in media studies emerged later. Elihu Katz and Paul F. Lazarsfeld popularized the term in their influential 1955 book,

Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications, where it was used to describe the early assumption of direct and powerful media effects on passive audiences, often associated with the Hypodermic Needle Theory. (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Zbar, 2022). Media messages, according to the Hypodermic Needle or Magic Bullet Theory, are likened to bullets that are shot directly into the minds of passive, vulnerable audiences, instantly altering their thoughts, feelings, or behaviors. They called it the Hypodermic Needle or Magic Bullet model, to capture the idea of a message being “injected” into a passive audience.

In summary, as modern society underwent profound transformation and traditional social bonds eroded, individuals became increasingly isolated and disconnected. In this context, when mass media such as radio, film, and newspapers delivered powerful, centralized messages, there existed no robust community structures to filter, interpret, or resist them. Consequently, the media could function like a “magic bullet,” not primarily due to its own inherent potency, but because the passive and socially vulnerable audience lacked the collective resistance necessary to counteract its influence.

Lesson 3: “Audiences from Passive Recipients to Selectively Influenced Actors: Minimal and Limited Effects Perspectives (1938–1960)”

Mass Society Theory was the dominant perspective initially, arguing that media had a direct and powerful influence on passive audiences. The Limited Effects Paradigm emerged later as a direct challenge to this view, particularly as a critique of the “magic bullet” or “hypodermic needle” model, supported by new empirical evidence that suggested media effects were more limited and mediated by social factors (Lasswell, 1927; Cantril, 1940; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955).

The evidence supporting Mass Society Theory is largely philosophical and theoretical, emphasizing broad societal observations rather than systematic empirical investigation (Lasswell, 1948; Lowery & DeFleur, 1983). In contrast, Limited Effects Theory—also referred to as the Minimal Effects Model—is grounded in empirical research, as demonstrated by early studies such as *The People’s Choice* by Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1944), which showed that media influence is often mediated by social networks and personal relationships, making its effects more selective and limited (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955).

According to “*The People’s Choice*”, the Princeton Radio Research Project (later the Office of Radio Research) was central to the shift from the “powerful

effects” view to the “limited effects” paradigm in communication research (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Lowery & DeFleur, 1983).

The Princeton Radio Research Project was the central shift as we have already pointed it out because it produced systematic, empirical evidence that challenged the assumption of powerful media, introduced new theoretical concepts such as selectivity, interpersonal mediation, and the two-step flow of communication, and institutionalized a new paradigm of communication research—the limited effects model (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Lowery & DeFleur, 1983; Pooley, 2006).

The official output of the Princeton Radio Research Project (PRRP) largely took the form of technical reports, journal articles, and methodological studies, but its first major book-length publication was **The People’s Choice** (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944).

1. Two step flow theory and opinion leadership

The Two-Step Flow of Communication theory as a theory or as a model proposes that mass media messages do not directly reach the general public. Instead, they are first received by "opinion leaders," a specific group of influential individuals. These opinion leaders interpret and filter the information before disseminating it to a broader audience, their less active associates, through interpersonal communication. Thus, under this theory, people are more influenced by their peers—particularly trusted, informed individuals—than by the media itself (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Katz, 1957; Rogers, 2003).

The conceptual seeds of the Two-Step Flow of Communication and opinion leadership were first observed in *The People’s Choice* (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944), with the formalization and naming of the theory occurring later in *Personal Influence* (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). Paul F. Lazarsfeld was undeniably the most significant contributor to the development and coinage of these concepts: the Two-Step Flow, opinion leadership. The Two-Step Flow model challenged the notion of direct media effects (Lazarsfeld et al., 1944), and subsequent research further elaborated on the role of opinion leaders (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955).

Opinion leadership is the key element that makes the two-step flow model work. It refers to the process by which certain individuals within a social network influence the attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors of others through interpersonal communication, often with greater impact than mass media or formal institutions. Opinion leaders are not necessarily experts, celebrities, or authority figures; rather, they are trusted, active, and well-connected individuals whom others rely on for advice, interpretation, or validation (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Rogers, 2003; Weimann, 1994).

2. Key Characteristics of Opinion Leaders.

Opinion leaders are more exposed to and engaged with mass media than their followers and peers. They are typically the first to encounter media messages, which they then interpret and pass on. Often more cosmopolitan and informed, opinion leaders play a crucial role in filtering and disseminating information within their social networks (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955, p140 ; Rogers, 2003, p. 252.; Weimann, 1994).

Opinion leaders occupy central positions within interpersonal networks and are far from isolated. Highly active in their social circles, they frequently engage in discussions with others, serving as key nodes through which information flows (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955 p. 139.; DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989, p. 178.).

Opinion leaders are perceived as credible, earning the trust of their followers not necessarily because they are experts, but because they are relatable, sharing similar social status, values, and lifestyles. They are seen as dependable, thoughtful, and not self-serving, making them influential within their social networks (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Rogers, 2003, p. 254).

Opinion leaders are typically classified as early adopters, being among the first to embrace innovations and serving as role models for others. They drive the diffusion curve by influencing the early majority, facilitating the spread of new ideas and behaviors within their social networks (Rogers, 2003, pp. 249–254; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Bass, 1969, pp. 215–227.).

Opinion leaders act as filters, doing more than merely transmitting information. They infuse mass media content with their own judgment, emotion, and interpretation, making the message more meaningful and socially relevant to their followers by translating it into language and frames that resonate with the group (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955, p. 141.; Rogers, 2003, p. 27; DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989, p. 179.).

One of the key findings of the Two-Step Flow model is that formal authority does not guarantee influence. Opinion leaders are not necessarily more educated or wealthier than their followers; rather, their influence derives from their personality and social engagement, not from socioeconomic status (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955, p. 143.; Rogers, 2003, pp. 27–28; DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989, p. 177.).

Modern consumers increasingly rely on “micro-opinion leaders”—individuals with expertise in specific niche domains, such as skincare, gaming, or veganism—rather than general influencers. For example, a person may be an

opinion leader in matters of clothing but not in politics, as influence is often segmented by topic (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955, p. 144.; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010, pp. 1–17).

3. Interpersonal Relay in the two steps flow model of communication

The concept of the “social transmission of media content” was formally defined and empirically demonstrated in the landmark book *Personal Influence* (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). It describes the process by which mass media messages are first received and interpreted by opinion leaders, who then pass them on—infused with their personal interpretations—to their social networks, thereby shaping public opinion and behavior (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955, p.140; DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989).

The interpersonal relay is a social and psychological process initiated by opinion leaders who decode media messages, blend them with their own opinions and values, and re-encode them for their followers. This step is where media influence is often mediated, reinforced, or even negated by personal influence (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Rogers, 2003; DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1989).

Recent studies in the digital era highlight the evolution of the Two-Step Flow model with the advent of the internet and social media. The interpersonal relay is no longer seen as a simple, linear two-step process but as a complex, multi-directional network. This new form, known as the Multi-Step Flow, reflects the dynamic and interconnected nature of information dissemination in digital environments.

Bennett and Manheim (2006) contend that the traditional two-step flow model of mediation is undergoing significant transformation as a result of digital media characteristics, giving rise to networked and multi-directional communication flows in the contemporary era.

In their 2016 work, Weimann and his co-authors explicitly reconceptualize opinion leadership in light of the networked character of digital media, departing from the conventional two-step model.

According to Klinger and Svensson (2015), platform logics give rise to intricate, interconnected patterns of information circulation that define a new model of multi-step communication processes.

The interpersonal relay is now viewed as a dynamic, multi-step process of information diffusion within social networks. It involves various nodes—individuals, algorithms, bots, and influencers—that receive, create, modify, and share content. This relay is often public, archived, and can occur simultaneously across multiple networks, blurring the distinction between mass and interpersonal communication (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010; Bakshy, Rosenn, Marlow, & Adamic, 2012).

4. The principal criticisms:

The early findings of the Two-Step Flow theory sparked a significant revolution, challenging the dominant view of direct media effects that prevailed until the 1940s and reshaping the understanding of media influence at the time. However, within a few years, the proposed model faced substantial criticism. In the following sentences, we will highlight several of these critiques to provide a clearer picture.

The direct effects model overestimated the power and impact of mass media while simultaneously underestimating the role of the audience. This view prompted studies that challenged the simplistic, black-and-white perspective on mass media, overturning much of its established legacy. However, the Two-Step Flow model, which emerged as a response, persisted for some time before falling into a similar error of oversimplifying the communication process by reducing it to just two steps.

Communication is inherently multidirectional and recursive. The public can influence opinion leaders, who in turn engage in mutual debates and influence one another while also being shaped by public sentiment. Additionally, media outlets respond to public feedback. This perspective better conceptualizes the communication process as a dynamic network rather than a one-way pipeline (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Rogers, 2003; Bennett & Manheim, 2006; Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013).

“Information flows through complex, overlapping networks... not through isolated ‘leaders’ but through structural holes between clusters.” Burt, R. S. (1992), p. 12)

In conclusion, the limited effects framework can be illustrated through the following analogy: media messages are akin to a light rain, whereas audiences possess umbrellas—their pre-existing beliefs—and stand under roofs—their social groups. As a result, they absorb only minimal influence and remain largely unaffected, thereby demonstrating **an active** rather than **passive role** in the communication process.

Axis 2 — Theoretical Foundations of Audience Studies: Typologies, Constructs, and Socio-Demographic Composition

Week/Date	Topic
Week 1	Understanding “Audience” – Definitions and Key Concepts
Week 2	Core Typologies of "The Audience": From Couch Potatoes to Super-Spreaders: Understanding Media Audiences
Week 3	Socio-Demographic Profiles

The second axis is devoted to the theoretical foundations of audience studies. Its primary objective is to examine the concept of the audience—its definitions,

constructions, and theoretical imaginings—followed by an analysis of audience typologies aimed at delineating the socio-demographic profiles of media audiences.

Lesson 4: Understanding “Audience” – Definitions and Key Conceptual Constructs

1. Audience definition:

According to the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d), an audience is defined as "the group of people gathered in one place to watch or listen to something," framing the concept primarily as a collective of receivers.

Regarding the conceptual origin of "audience," it is worth mentioning that, according to the Online Etymology Dictionary (n.d), the word has etymological roots in Old French "audience", which itself derives from Latin origin word "audientia", meaning "a hearing, listening," from verb "audire", means "to hear."

The word began to be used in the late 14th century to mean "the act of hearing or listening." Thus, one can observe how the meaning has gradually shifted from "the people who hear" to encompass "the people who watch or listen to a performance," a transition that aligns with the Cambridge Dictionary definition provided earlier.

This definition connects to related terms that have more specific connotations:

1. Viewers: this word typically and mainly refers to screen-based audiences.
2. Crowd: describes a physical gathering of people whatever it is its purpose, which is clearly not always assembled for an artistic or media purpose.
3. Spectators are typically observers of sports or live events.
4. Listeners: it implies someone or some people who listens/listen, especially to a radio programme.
5. Readers: obviously for written content (books, articles, blogs).
6. Public: is a general word that means a broad, general body of people addressed (we use it largely to refer to the public opinion)
7. Attendees: focuses on the physical attendance at an event.
8. Fans: are an audience that demonstrates sustained interest and active engagement with media content; therefore, they constitute a highly participatory audience.

McQuail in his book *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory* (2010, pp. 398–401). defines the audience as "the group of people who receive, interpret, and respond to media messages, whether through television, radio, print, film, or digital platforms."

In "Propaganda Technique in the World War" (1927), Harold Lasswell described the audience as a uniform, passive collective that absorbs media messages in a direct, predictable, and largely uncritical manner, exhibiting minimal resistance or individualized interpretation. It's worth mentioning that this viewpoint

persisted until the late 1950s and was reflected in theories such as the Hypodermic Needle/Magic Bullet Model and Mass Society Theory.

Katz defines the audience not as a passive mass but as a network of individuals whose interpretations and decisions are shaped through interpersonal communication and the influence of opinion leaders (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955, p. 32–33).

From the perspective of cultural studies, audiences actively decode media messages according to their cultural backgrounds and social positions, producing dominant, negotiated, or oppositional readings (Hall, 1980, pp. 136–138). Audience members are viewed as active agents who engage with media to fulfill specific needs, such as information, personal identity, integration, social interaction, and entertainment (Blumler & Katz, 1974, pp. 20–21)

Audiences interpret television content differently based on their social class, gender, and cultural background, demonstrating that meaning is actively constructed (Morley, 1980, pp. 15–18). “The concept of the audience must be expanded to include the practices, routines, and interactions through which people engage with media in everyday contexts.” (Livingstone, 1998).

From another analytical perspective, audiences are viewed as prosumers who blend consumption and production. As Jenkins (2006) observes, “Media audiences are not simply consumers of content; they are active participants who seek out new information, share it, and even produce content themselves in participatory culture” (pp. 22–28).

Lesson 5: Core Typologies of "The Audience": From Couch Potatoes to Super-Spreaders: Understanding Media Audiences



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During this lesson, we will examine the intellectual journey undertaken by communication scholars and media theorists in their understanding of the audience—that is, you as a participant in media processes. The trajectory begins with early twentieth-century models that depicted audiences as **largely passive**, homogeneous, and susceptible entities—often described as a receptive “mass” vulnerable to direct media influence. Over time, this conception gave way to more nuanced frameworks that position the audience as an **active agent**: an interpreter who selectively decodes messages according to cultural background and social position, **a powerful co-creator** of meaning, and, in the digital era, an active producer and circulator of content within participatory and networked communities.

1. The Passive Audience



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The passive audience constitutes a cornerstone of mass society theory. It was first conceptualized not as viewers or receivers, but as a crowd. This notion emerged from the idea of the “collective mind,” according to which individuals in aggregates lose their critical autonomy and become a suggestible mass. The framework is sociologically grounded in the normless, atomized condition of modern individuals, rendering them particularly vulnerable to external influence. In the twentieth century, this dynamic was emigrated to the media context, where the audience came to be reconstituted as spectators participating in a simulated collective consciousness.

In the points below there is a detailed breakdown of the key characteristics of the passive audience, anchored in foundational communication and sociological theory.

❖ Receptivity Without Critical Engagement

This characteristic implies that the audience functions primarily as a passive container that absorbs media messages. Communication flows in a single direction—from a centralized producer to a vast, undifferentiated mass of recipients. As previously noted, the audience’s role is limited to absorbing content, without questioning, reinterpreting, or responding in ways that influence or alter the production cycle (Laswell, 1927). This is the core assumption of the Hypodermic Needle or Magic Bullet Theory (Harold Lasswell, 1920s; later critiqued). It posits a direct, powerful, and uniform effect of media on a defenseless public.

❖ Hook and Metaphor to retain : The Hypodermic Syringe

Everyone can imagine a giant syringe - let us call it “the media” (such as a major television network). We could replace the usual liquid with a media message - for example, “Buy this soda!” or “This politician is good!” - and inject it directly into a passive, unthinking audience. The underlying assumption was that such messages would produce an immediate and uniform effect on all recipients.

In this model of the passive audience, every individual receives the same “injection” and responds in an identical manner: everyone would purchase the advertised soda, and everyone would vote for the endorsed politician.



→ This image was generated using AI

❖ Loss of Individuality and the "Collective Mind"

Within the framework of the passive mass, individual critical faculties and personal identity are suppressed and supplanted by the collective dynamics of the crowd. As **Gustave Le Bon** explains, the audience ceases to operate as a simple aggregation of individuals; instead, it constitutes a distinct psychological entity possessing a reduced intellectual capacity, heightened emotionality, and greater impulsiveness (Le Bon, 1895).

❖ Susceptibility to Persuasion and Manipulation

Frankfurt School theorists applied this framework to argue that the passive, uncritical, and homogenized nature of the mass audience makes it highly susceptible to propaganda, advertising, and ideological control. The very passivity of the audience constitutes its attractiveness as a target for elites or institutions aiming to manufacture consent or direct collective behavior (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1947).

❖ Atomization and Anonymous Sociality

The audience consists of isolated individuals (often described as “atoms”) who are socially disconnected from one another yet share the simultaneous experience of consuming identical media content. They form a “mass” of strangers, bound together solely by their common exposure to the same messages rather than by any interpersonal or communal ties. Kornhauser (1959) elaborates that, in mass society, individuals lack strong intermediate group attachments—such as family, community, religious organizations, or professional associations—leaving them rootless and directly accessible to elite manipulation through the media, thereby rendering them highly available for mobilization (Kornhauser, 1959).

2. The selective Audience - The "Picky Eater" Model

A picky eater is a just metaphor to refer to someone who is very selective or fussy about the foods they eat — often refusing to try new foods or only eating a limited range of familiar ones. or is a person, especially a child, who avoids many types of food and prefers a few specific dishes, usually due to taste, texture, appearance, or familiarity.



- This image was generated using AI
- ❖ Selective and Purposeful Use (Uses and Gratifications)

Katz and his colleagues discussed the concept of **the active audience** in their seminal 1973 article, "Uses and Gratifications Research." This foundational work argues that audiences are goal-directed and employ media as one resource among many to satisfy various needs. Accordingly, audience members actively select and use media content to fulfill specific psychological and social needs, such as entertainment, information-seeking, social integration, and identity construction. This perspective fundamentally shifts the power dynamic in media effects research from "what media do to people" to "what people do with media" (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973)

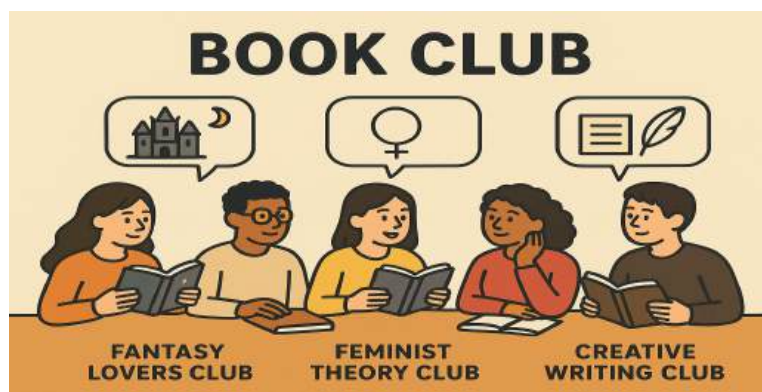
- ❖ Hook and Metaphor to retain : The Buffet Restaurant

In this metaphor, the media environment is likened to an extensive buffet, with television shows, news, music, and social media content constituting the available dishes. The "picky eater" represents the active audience member who refuses to accept everything indiscriminately. Rather than consuming passively, they navigate the selection, choose according to personal preferences, and frequently combine elements in unique ways. This deliberate and selective engagement underscores the shift toward viewing audiences as active participants rather than passive recipients.

- ❖ People actively use media to satisfy specific needs:
- Surveillance: "I watch the news to know what's happening." (I'm checking the weather at the buffet.)

- Personal Identity: "I watch that influencer because her style reflects who I am." (I'm choosing food that fits my diet.)
- Integration and Social Interaction: "I watch *Game of Thrones* so I can talk about it with my friends." (I'm choosing a dish everyone is raving about.)
- Entertainment: "I scroll through TikTok to relax and laugh." (I'm just here for the ice cream!)

3. The Audience as "Interpretative Communities" : Critical Interpretation and Decoding



→ This image was generated using AI

The interpretative audience constitutes the core of Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding Model (1973). Hall identified three possible positions from which audiences may decode media messages: the dominant-hegemonic position (acceptance of the preferred reading), the negotiated position (partial acceptance combined with adaptation or resistance), and the oppositional position (complete rejection of the preferred reading).

According to Hall, audiences do not passively absorb messages; rather, they actively interpret, negotiate, or oppose the intended or "preferred" meaning encoded by media producers. Meaning therefore emerges in the dynamic interaction between the text and the viewer (Hall, 1980).

❖ Hook and Metaphor to retain : The Book Club

"Let's say five different book clubs are all reading the same novel.

→ The Fantasy Lovers Club focuses on the world-building and magic system.

- The Feminist Theory Club analyzes the representation of female characters.
- The Creative Writing Club critiques the author's prose style.

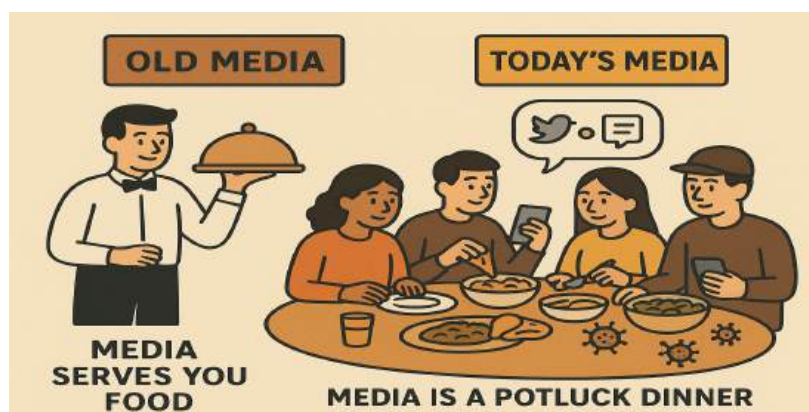
They all read the same book, the same content, but they get different meanings out of it. Why? Because they are part of different 'interpretative communities' with shared rules and perspectives."

❖ Key Theory and Example: Reception Theory (Stuart Hall)

A media content is encoded by the producer (they put a message in), to be later decoded by the audience. And we can decode it in three main ways:

1. Dominant Reading: You accept the intended message. (You watch an army ad and think, "I should join the army.")
2. Negotiated Reading: You accept the general idea but modify it for your own life. ("The army is important for the country, but it's not for me.")
3. Oppositional Reading: You understand the intended message but completely reject it. ("This ad is glorifying war and I am a pacifist.")

4. The Productive Audience - The "Super-Spreader" Model



The productive audience paradigm argues that audiences are not merely interpreters of media texts but active producers who generate new Media content, modify existing media material, and directly contribute to shaping cultural ecosystems. This perspective redefines the audience's role, shifting it from that of a

passive consumer within a unidirectional communication circuit to that of a participant in collaborative, peer-based networks of cultural production.

The Productive Audience model represents the current frontier of audience theory. It argues that:

- Audiences are co-creators of media ecosystems (Bruns, 2008)
- User-Generated Content (UGC) and Platformed Participation (van Dijck, 2013)
- Participatory Culture and Collective Intelligence (Jenkins, 2006)
- Productivity is a form of labor with economic value (Terranova, 2000)
- Creation occurs within platform-governed and algorithmically-shaped environments (Gillespie, 2018)

This framework is crucial for analyzing social media economies, fan production, meme culture, and crowdsourced platforms. It complicates the simple empowerment narrative of participation by highlighting the dual reality of audience agency and exploitation, creativity and capture. The productive audience is both the engine of Web 2.0 and its primary commodity.

❖ Hook and Metaphor to retain : The Potluck Dinner

In this metaphor, traditional media can be likened to a restaurant that serves prepared food to passive diners. By contrast, today's media resembles more a potluck dinner, where every participant brings a dish - be it a tweet, a TikTok video, a meme, or a blog post - to share with others. In this setting, the audience is no longer merely a consumer; it becomes an active contributor.

Moreover, these contributions can spread rapidly and widely, much like a virus. A single meme created by an individual in their bedroom may achieve viral status and reach millions of viewers. Thus, members of the audience function as "super-spreaders" of content.

❖ Theory: Participatory Culture (Henry Jenkins) and The Prosumer (Axel Bruns).

The traditional line separating producers from users has been significantly blurred. Contemporary audiences are best described as prosumers is a hybrid role that integrates new responsibilities, behaviors, and characteristics. They now produce content while simultaneously consuming and engaging with it.

- Fan Fiction: Writing your own stories about Harry Potter.
- Memes: Taking a template and adding your own caption.
- TikTok Duets/Stitches: Directly interacting with and adding to someone else's video.

→ Wikipédia: Writing and editing encyclopedia entries.

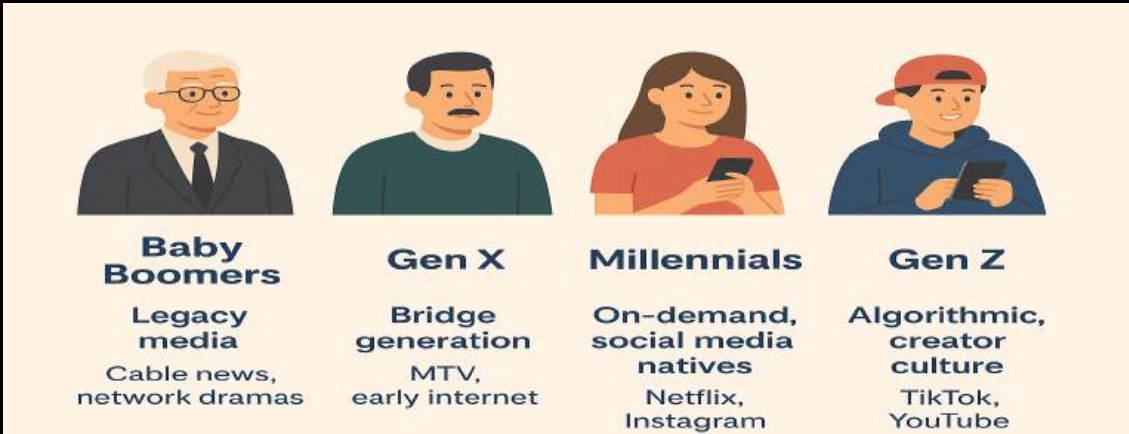
Lesson 6: The Sociodemographic Profile of the Audience”

This lesson aims to provide students with the ability to analyze media audiences through socio-demographic lenses. By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

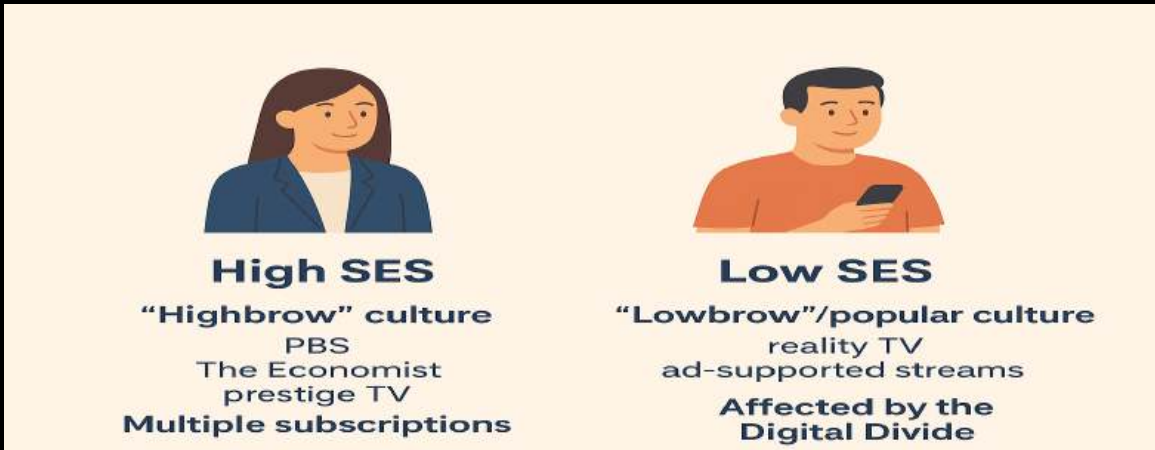
1. Identify the key socio-demographic factors used to analyze media audiences.
2. Explain how each factor influences media consumption patterns and preferences.
3. Apply these concepts by analyzing a real-world media text and its intended audience.
4. Critique the uses and limitations of demographic segmentation.

Present the following five factors as interconnected lenses. Use relatable, contemporary examples.



Factor	Core Concept & Scholar	Concrete Examples & Implications
Age and Generation	<p>In media audience socio-demographic research, generation is not merely an age cohort but a “social location” shaped by shared formative historical, economic, technological, and cultural experiences. This conception serves as the essential foundation for generational analysis, as it systematically explains differences in media access, content selection, interpretation, trust, and participatory behavior across audience segments. (boyd, 2014)</p> <p>(Howe & Strauss, 2000)</p>	<p>Baby Boomers: Legacy media (Cable news, network dramas).</p> <p>Gen X: Bridge generation (MTV, early internet).</p> <p>Millennials: On-demand, social media natives (Netflix, Instagram).</p> <p>Gen Z: Algorithmic, creator culture (TikTok, YouTube).</p>




Socioeconomic Status (SES)	<p>Socioeconomic Status (SES) is a core, multifaceted sociodemographic variable that powerfully structures media access, use, skills, and outcomes. It's more predictive than almost any other single factor. What you watch, read, and listen to (e.g., documentary vs. reality TV) is an act of social positioning that reproduces class hierarchies. (Bourdieu, 1984).</p> <p>The divide is not just about having a smartphone for example (first-level divide), but about what you can do with it—using it for job-seeking vs. entertainment, for example (second-level divide).(van Dijk, 2005)</p>	<p>High SES: "Highbrow" culture (PBS, <i>The Economist</i>, prestige TV). Multiple subscriptions.</p> <p>Low SES: "Lowbrow"/popular culture (reality TV, ad-supported streams). Affected by the Digital Divide.</p> <p><u><i>highbrow: a person who is only interested in serious art or complicated subjects:</i></u></p>
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<p>Gender</p>	<p>Gender is absolutely a core sociodemographic variable that fundamentally shapes how audiences consume media content. It influences what media is chosen, how it is interpreted, and the social context in which it is used. However, it is not a monolithic predictor. The strongest evidence shows that gender's effect is always modified by other factors. (Radway, 1984; Ang, 1985)</p>	<p>Traditional Coding: Sports (masc.) vs. Rom-coms (fem.) – though breaking down. Platform Use: Trends on Pinterest vs. Reddit.</p>
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 <p>Pinterest</p>	 <p>Reddit</p>
<p>537–570 million</p>	<p>~1 billion</p>
<p>Gender Breakdown ~70% female, ~23% male, ~7-8% unspecified/non-binary</p>	<p>Gender Breakdown ~64% male, ~35% female, ~1% unspecified</p>
<p>Gen Z (18-24: 30–42%), Millennials (25-34: 27%)</p>	<p>Younger skew (18-29: ~50%), but broad (up to 50-64: 38% for some segments)</p>
<p>Visual inspiration (recipes, fashion, DIY, wellness); 80% of users discover new products/brands here</p>	<p>Discussions (tech, gaming, news, memes); high engagement in STEM/academic communities</p>




Traditional Coding



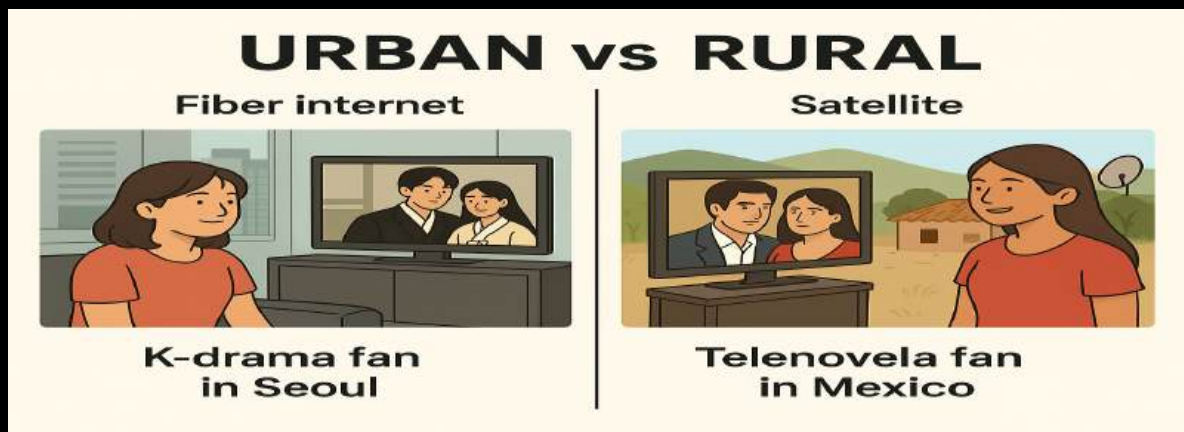
**Sports, horror
movies (masc.)**



**Rom-coms,
cooking programs**

<p>Ethnicity and Race</p>	<p>Stuart Hall argues that representation is constitutive of race. The media does not merely reflect racial differences but actively produces and naturalizes them through stereotypes (e.g., the "slave figure," the "native," the "clown/entertainer"). He introduces the concept of "racialized regimes of representation." (Hall, 1997)</p> <p>Audiences decode media through these pre-existing racial codes.</p> <p><u><i>Black Panther:</i></u> <u><i>This success showed that representation is not only socially important but also commercially powerful</i></u></p>	<p><u>Mainstream vs. Niche:</u> Consumption of both mainstream media and ethnic media (BET, Telemundo).</p> <p><u>Representation:</u> The commercial success of films like <i>Black Panther</i> demonstrating audience power.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u><i>Niche: interesting to, aimed at, or affecting only a small number of people</i></u> • <u><i>BET: Black Entertainment Television</i></u> • <u><i>Telemundo: is an American Spanish-language terrestrial television network</i></u> <div> <p>MAINSTREAM NICHE</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div>  <p>Mainstream media</p> </div> <div>  <p>Ethnic media</p> </div> </div> <p>Representation</p>  <p>Commercial success of films like <i>Black Panther</i> demonstrating audience power</p> </div>
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<p>Geography</p>	<p>Audiences are always situated in specific places (a home, a neighborhood, a nation) that shape how they interpret global media. Their local identity is formed in relation to, not isolation from, global media flows (Massey, 1994).</p> <p>so location determines access, content relevance, and cultural context.</p>	<p><u>Urban vs. Rural:</u> Fiber internet vs. satellite; different local news agendas.</p> <p><u>National/Regional:</u> A K-drama fan in Seoul vs. a telenovela fan in Mexico.</p> <p><u>telenovela = soap opera:</u> <u>a television program, usually broadcast five days a week, about the lives of a particular group of characters</u></p>
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Axis 3: Constructing and Measuring the Audience: Theories and Techniques

Week	Topic
Week 1	How Media Industries Construct Audiences
Week 2	Techniques of Audience Measurement
Week 3	Limits and Critiques of Measurement

This axis focuses on the conceptual construction and empirical measurement of media audiences. It examines how the notion of “audience” is theoretically constructed within different frameworks. The analysis concludes with a critical

evaluation of the main limitations and criticisms associated with these measurement approaches.

Lesson 7: How do Media Industries Construct Audiences?

The central question guiding this lesson is:

“How do media industries conceptualize, segment, and construct their audiences, and why are these processes significant for the content that is produced and consumed?”

→ *Segment: to divide something into different parts*

By the end of the lesson, students should be able to:

1. **Define** how media industries conceptualize and construct “the audience.”
2. **Explain** key theories such as audience commodification and imagined audiences.
3. **Analyze** examples of how platforms (e.g., Netflix, TikTok, Spotify) use data to construct target audiences.
4. **Critically assess** the implications of audience construction for diversity, representation, and content visibility.

The lesson is structured around the following key concepts and theoretical foundations, presented in the table below:

Concept	Description	Key Authors
Audience Construction	The process by which media producers define who their audience is and tailor content or marketing accordingly.	Philip Napoli (2011)
The Managed Audience	The audience as it is cultivated, segmented, and targeted through marketing, branding, scheduling, and algorithmic recommendation.	Philip Napoli (2011)
Imagined Audiences	The audience, as envisioned by producers or algorithmic systems, is not necessarily reflective of real viewers.	Nancy Baym, danah boyd
Commodification of Audiences	Audiences are “sold” to advertisers; their attention becomes the product.	Dallas Smythe (1981)

Audience Measurement	The industrial techniques to quantify and segment audiences (ratings, metrics, data analytics).	Philip Napoli (2011)
Algorithmic Curation	Platforms use recommendation algorithms to shape and re-construct audience behavior.	Taina Bucher (2018); José van Dijck (2013)

1. The constructed audience

Philip Napoli (2011) defined audience construction as the process by which media organizations identify, define, and shape their audiences—not just as passive groups of people, but as commodities that can be measured, analyzed, and sold to advertisers.

In simple terms: Media companies and organizations don't simply find and serve audiences; they create conceptualizations of the audience - they actively create and package them in ways that make them valuable to advertisers. This involves using data, demographics, and behavior to build a picture of who the audience is, so they can be marketed to effectively. and these constructions have real economic, cultural, and regulatory consequences (Napoli, 2011). Media companies don't just find an audience; they actively build a specific, predictable, and sellable product out of the raw material of viewers.

The "constructed audience" (in french : Le « public construit ») is the how. It's the process of taking a messy, diverse group of real people and turning them into a neat, packaged commodity that advertisers want to buy.

- Think of this process as analogous to the work of a butcher. A butcher does not sell a live cow whole to a restaurant; instead, the butcher segments the raw animal into specific, standardized cuts, each carrying a defined market value and directed to the appropriate buyer.
- Similarly, in the context of media or audience studies, raw cultural content or mass communication is processed, categorized, and packaged by institutions or platforms into discrete units that can be efficiently distributed, consumed, and monetized. This metaphor helps illustrate how value is assigned and circulation is managed, highlighting the structured and selective nature of information flow in contemporary media ecosystems.

Media companies do the same with the audience as it is constructed

- Raw Material: (La matière première) The millions of random people who tune in or log on.

- The Construction Process (Le processus de construction): The media company uses shows, algorithms, and content to sort and shape this crowd.
- The Finished Product (Le produit fini): A specific "audience cut" that is easy to describe and sell to advertisers.

Example : TikTok's Algorithmically Constructed "Core"

- The Raw Material: A billion users with wildly different, unpredictable interests.
- The Construction: The TikTok "For You" algorithm is the ultimate audience constructor. If you linger on videos about skateboarding, vegan recipes, and miniature painting, the algorithm will feed you more and more of that content.
- The Sellable Product: Within weeks, TikTok has constructed "you" as a distinct audience segment: the "Skateboarding Vegan Miniature Painter." It can then offer hyper-targeted ad slots to a company selling eco-friendly skateboard decks or specialized model paints. They constructed a niche audience that didn't formally exist before.

★ Exemple 2 : La chaîne M6 et le « public des cuisiniers en herbe »

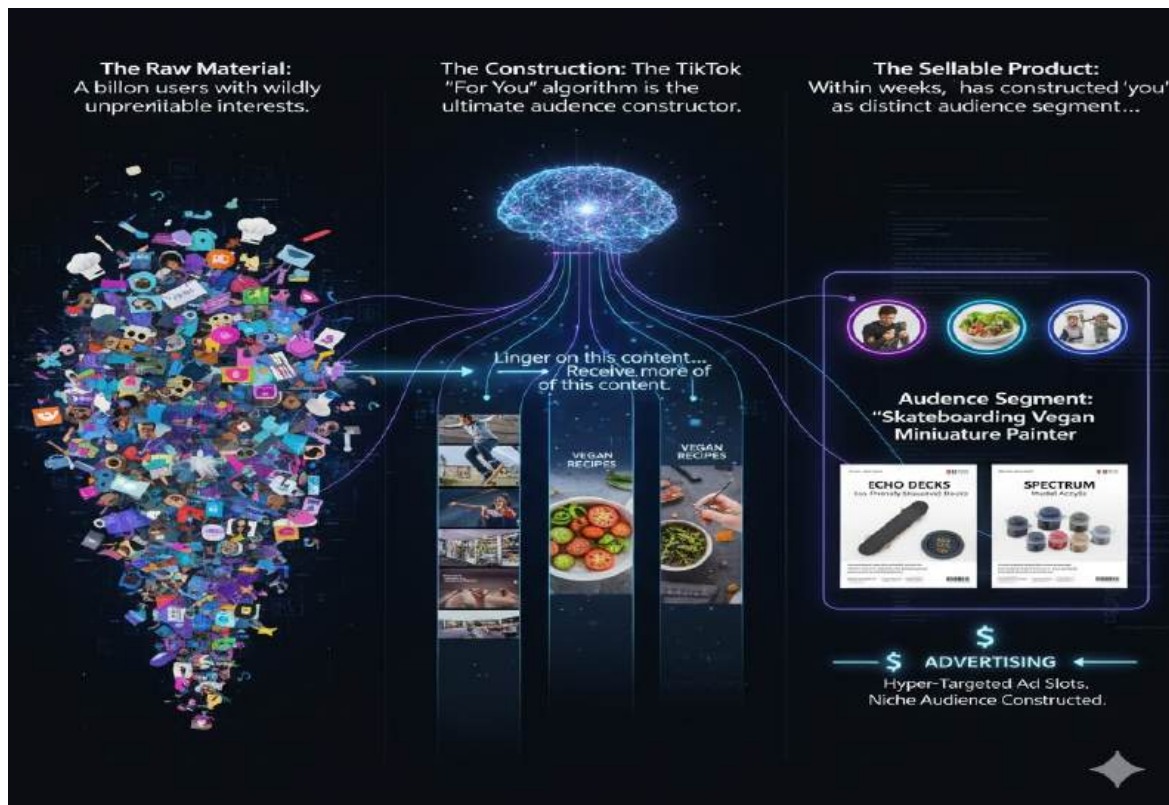
La matière première
Des millions de téléspectateurs aux goûts variés



6 La construction
M6 diffuse des émissions comme Top Chef et Cauchemar en cuisine. En faisant cela, elle construit activement un public de « personnes intéressées par la gastronomie et la cuisine ». Elle filtre ceux que cela n'intéresse pas et attire ceux que cela passionne.

Le produit vendable
M6 va voir des annonceurs comme Moulinex, Maille ou Monoprix et leur dit : « Nous pouvons vous offrir un public concentré et pur de passionnés de cuisine. Ne gaspillez pas votre argent sur une chaîne de sport. Le public a été construit pour avoir de la valeur aux yeux de ces acheteurs »





2. The imagined audience:

When you post on social media, you're not talking to everyone who *might* see it; you're talking to a specific "ghost audience" in your head that you *imagine* will see it, and this imaginary crowd shapes what you create.

The "Imagined Audience" is The internal, conceptual model that content creators, producers, and writers hold in their minds as they create media texts. It is the audience they "write to" or "create for." (Napoli, 2011). It is the mental picture you have of the people who will see your content. It's who you think you're talking to.

- It's Not Real: It's a fiction you create in your mind.
- It's Influential: This fiction directly controls what you post, how you write, the jokes you make, and the parts of your life you share.
- It's a Filter: You curate your online self for this imagined group, not for the actual, unpredictable crowd that might see it.

Think of it like writing a letter. You don't write a letter to "Anyone who might read this." You write it to "Aunt Susan" or "My Best Friend." On social media, "Aunt Susan" or "My Best Friend" is the Imagined Audience you have in mind, even though others might snoop and read it.

★ Example 1: The "Cool and Funny Friend" Persona

- The Situation: You're about to post a funny story about an embarrassing thing that happened to you.
- The Imagined Audience: In your head, you are picturing your close friends and peers. You imagine them laughing and commenting with inside jokes.
- How It Shapes the Post: You write the story in a casual, witty way, using slang your friends understand. You feel comfortable being vulnerable because you imagine a supportive audience. You might not post it if you suddenly remember your strict boss follows you, because that ruins your "imagined audience."



lesson 8: Techniques of Audience Measurement, The Science (and Art) of Counting People

We will begin this lesson by posing the following question: If television networks are selling audiences as a product to advertisers, they must assign a price to that product. This price is determined by numbers. But how does one accurately count millions of invisible viewers dispersed across an entire country? Welcome to the investigative world of audience measurement.

Techniques of Audience Measurement – From Analog to Digital

1. The Diary Method:

The traditional diary method, long considered the classic approach to television audience measurement, involves recruiting a carefully selected panel of households. These households are provided with paper diaries in which participants manually document the television programs viewed, the precise times of viewing, and the identity of each person present in the viewing room.

However, this method relied primarily on participants' memory, which resulted in several significant limitations: low compliance due to the hassle involved, and an inability to track minute-by-minute channel switching (Beville, 1988; Webster et al., 2014)

This method works like asking a friend at the end of the week, "So, what did you do every day?" You'd get a general, often inaccurate picture.

2. The People Meter (The Industry Revolution – 1980s onward)

Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.) defines a People Meter as an electronic device placed in households to electronically record which television programmes are being watched, along with the number and demographic profile (age, gender, etc.) of the viewers present. The resulting data are used by broadcasters, advertisers, and media planners to assess audience size, composition, and commercial value .

The People Meter is a small electronic device attached to each television set in a selected household. Each family member is assigned a personal button or receives a personal remote, which they must press to indicate when they begin or stop watching television (Visitors could log in with a "guest" code). The device automatically records the channel being viewed and logs the demographic information of the person(s) presumed to be watching. However, this method has several notable limitations. Participants frequently forget to press their button — a problem commonly referred to as "button-pushing fatigue." Additional concerns relate to the accuracy of the data: for example, it is impossible to determine whether a person has actually left the room or simply fallen asleep while the television remains on (Nielsen, 2023).

- ★ Leading organizations, notably **Nielsen** (a name became synonymous with television ratings in the United States) and Numeris, have historically dominated audience measurement practices.



*The People Meter

3. The Portable People Meter (PPM) – For Radio and Out-of-Home

The Portable People Meter (PPM) is developed by Arbitron (now Nielsen Audio) is a pager-like device that panelists wear to automatically detect exposure to audio-encoded media content anywhere they go (at a gym, in a taxi, at a friend's house) . It measures out-of-home and background media consumption that traditional meters missed (Arbitron, 2007).

It should be emphasized that the Portable People Meter (PPM) is completely passive — no button pressing is required from participants. They simply need to ensure that the green indicator light remains on to verify that the device is operating correctly. The meter must be charged every day (much like a smartphone). Participants receive a small monthly compensation, generally between \$5 and \$10 (Arbitron, 2007)



*Arbitron PPM

4. Set-Top Box and Smart TV Data (The Big Data Flood)

According to the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.), a set-top box is “an electronic device that enables the reception of digital television broadcasts on conventional television sets”, while a smart TV is “a television set equipped with internet connectivity and interactive capabilities”.

Cable and satellite television providers, along with smart TV manufacturers (such as Samsung and LG), automatically collect viewership data from millions of households. The information gathered from set-top boxes and smart TVs includes precise records of which programmes are watched, at what times, and for how long.

This approach delivers enormous scale, approaching census-like coverage of actual viewing behaviour. However, the demographic information is often limited, typically restricted to the billing account holder’s name and basic subscription details, with little or no reliable indication of who in the household was actually watching at any given moment.

Example: Netflix collects highly granular data, including the exact moment a viewer pauses, rewinds, fast-forwards, or binges an episode. This constitutes census-level measurement of individual viewing patterns.



*Set-Top Box

5. Digital Analytics (The Present and Future)

Digital Analytics is the continuous, automated collection, measurement, and analysis of user behavior across digital platforms and channels. Its primary purpose is to generate actionable insights that enable organizations to understand user interactions, optimize digital experiences, and drive monetization, often in or near real time.

This approach represents a fundamental shift from traditional media measurement, which focused primarily on **aggregate exposure and reach**, to the **detailed tracking of individual user journeys** across devices, platforms, and time periods.

- Traditional TV ratings resemble counting cars passing along a highway: they provide volume-based estimates of audience size but offer limited insight into individual paths or outcomes.
- Digital analytics is analogous to following a single driver's complete journey: recording the starting point, every turn and stop, points of interest encountered, and the final destination.

❖ Nielsen ratings:

Nielsen ratings are a classic example of how audiences are measured, constructed, and commodified, tying directly to the ideas of Dallas Smythe and Philip Napoli.

In simple terms:

- Nielsen uses surveys, panels, and digital tracking to estimate who is watching what TV shows, when, and for how long.

- These ratings turn viewers into data (breaking them down by age, gender, income, location, etc).
- Media companies (like TV networks) use this data to define and package audiences (e.g., “women aged 18–34”) and sell them to advertisers.
- So, the “audience” isn’t just real people watching TV, it’s a constructed category built from ratings data, designed to be attractive to brands.

Connection to key theories:

- Dallas Smythe (1981): Nielsen ratings help turn audiences into the commodity sold to advertisers. You’re not watching TV for free—you’re “working” by watching ads, and Nielsen measures that labor.
- Philip Napoli (2011): Nielsen is a tool for audience construction—it doesn’t just observe audiences; it actively shapes how media companies understand and define them.

**Nielsen doesn’t just count viewers,
it helps create the “audience” as a marketable product.**

❖ Audience Measurement in Western Countries and some other key countries

Country / Region	Main Organization	Device or Technique	Notes
United States	Nielsen	<i>People Meter, Portable People Meter, Audio fingerprinting</i>	Measures live, time-shifted and streaming viewing.
United Kingdom	BARB (<i>Broadcasters’ Audience Research Board</i>)	<i>Meter box + Online viewing tracker</i>	Each participating home has a box on every TV set; measures live and on-demand viewing.

France	Médiamétrie	<i>Audimètre (People Meter)</i>	Installed in ~5,000 homes; uses button per viewer and audio-matching technology.
Germany	AGF Videoforschung (formerly GfK)	<i>GfK Media Meter</i>	Uses watermarking and audio matching; integrates streaming data.
Italy	Auditel	<i>Meter + "SuperPanel"</i>	Measures linear and digital TV.
Spain	Kantar Media	<i>People Meters + Return Path Data (RPD)</i>	Combines panel and smart TV data.
Canada	Numeris	<i>Portable People Meters (PPM)</i>	Detects encoded audio signals across media, including TV and radio.
India	BARC (Broadcast Audience Research Council)	<i>BAR-O-Meter</i>	Installed in ~40,000 homes; measures rural and urban viewing.
China	CSM Media Research (now CCData)	<i>Set-top box return data + panel meters</i>	Uses smart TV and cable box data.
Japan	Video Research Ltd.	<i>TV Meters + Smartphone tracking</i>	Also integrates online video platforms.

❖ North Africa and the Arab World

Country / Region	Main Organization	Method / Technology	Notes
Egypt	IPSOS Egypt and DMS (Digital Media Services)	<i>People meters (in major cities) + digital tracking</i>	IPSOS operates a national TV audience panel. DMS provides digital ad measurement for MBC Group.
Morocco	CIAUMED (Centre Interprofessionnel d'Audimétrie Média-tique)	<i>Audimétrie Télévisuelle (TV meters) + audience panels</i>	Created in 2008. Measures live and delayed viewing across Morocco's main broadcasters (2M, Al Aoula, etc.).

Tunisia	Sigma Conseil	<i>Diaries</i> (manual viewing logs) + <i>online audience analytics</i>	Smaller market; measurement still largely survey-based but expanding to digital.
Saudi Arabia / Gulf Region	Saudi Media Measurement Company (SMMC)	<i>People Meter + Hybrid Data System</i>	Launched with Kantar; measures live TV and online platforms.
UAE (Dubai, Abu Dhabi)	TAM (Television Audience Measurement) by the <i>UAE Media Council</i>	<i>Meter-based panel + return path data</i>	First large-scale audience measurement in the Arab world, with ~1,000 households.

Note: Many Arab broadcasters (like MBC Group, Al Jazeera, or Rotana) also use IPSOS MENA for cross-country measurement, covering Egypt, KSA, UAE, Lebanon, and Morocco.

❖ Sub-Saharan Africa

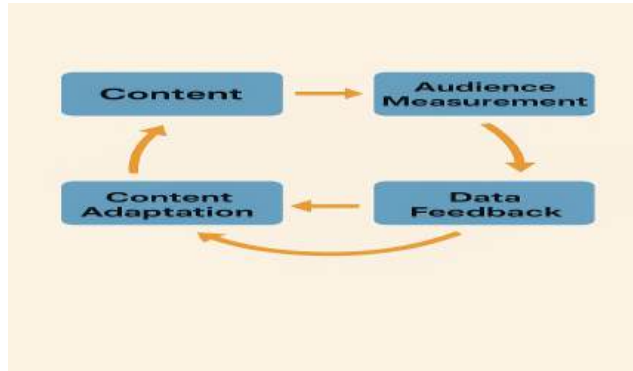
Country	Main Organization	Method / Device	Notes
South Africa	BRC (Broadcast Research Council) + TAMS (Television Audience Measurement Survey)	<i>Set meters</i> installed in households	Managed by Kantar; the most advanced audience measurement system in Africa.
Nigeria	Media Planning Services (MPS) + GeoPoll	<i>Mobile-based surveys + return path data from decoders</i>	GeoPoll uses SMS and mobile data collection; fast and cost-effective for emerging markets.
Kenya	GeoPoll + IPSOS Kenya	<i>Mobile audience measurement</i>	Collects real-time data via mobile surveys across East Africa.
Ghana	GeoPoll	<i>Mobile audience tracking</i>	Used for TV and radio ratings; no physical meters needed.

GeoPoll (headquartered in the U.S. but focused on Africa) is a major innovator — it measures audiences **via mobile phones** instead of physical devices, because:

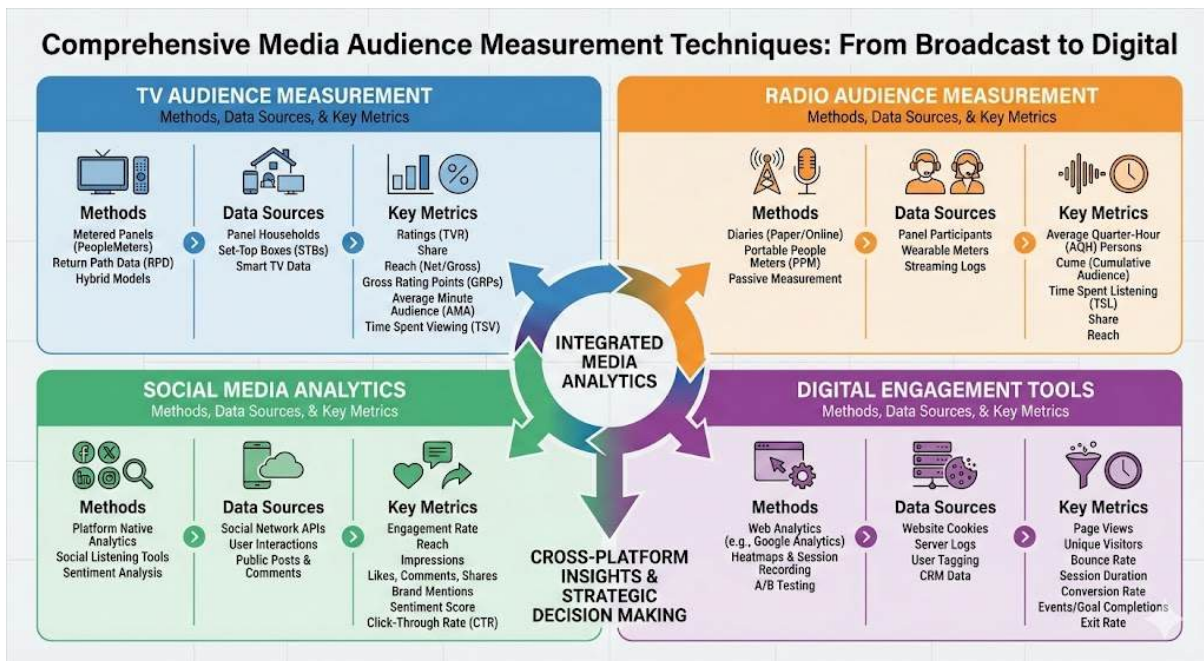
- TV infrastructure varies widely.
- Smartphones are widespread.
- It's cheaper and faster for large populations.

At the end of this axis, it is essential to summarize the complete iterative cycle—from the construction of the audience profile through audience measurement, to the design of

media content, and ultimately to the adaptation of that content based on the data collected. This forms a continuous, data-driven feedback loop that underpins modern media strategy and optimization.



Use diagrams showing the flow: *Content* → *Audience measurement* → *Data feedback* → *Content adaptation*.



Lesson 09: Limitations and Critiques of Media Audience Measurement

The core challenge in media audience measurement is that we are using industrial-age tools to understand a digital-age ecosystem. The gap between what is measured and actual media consumption is significant, with profound implications for advertisers and planners.

One of the fundamental limitations in audience measurement stems from the definition problem: ambiguity regarding exactly what is being measured. In practice, the industry often conflates or attempts to quantify at least four distinct conceptual layers of "audience," each representing a progressively deeper level of interaction and value. This lack of clarity leads to mismatched expectations, incomparable metrics across platforms, and challenges in attributing real commercial or strategic outcomes.

❖ Exposed Audience or, potential Audience:

This metric represents the number of individuals or devices to which the content or advertisement has been delivered, irrespective of whether it was actually viewed, heard, or noticed. For example, in television advertising, an impression is counted when the set is powered on and tuned to the relevant channel during the commercial, even if no one is present in the room. This metric measures **potential visibility only**; it does not confirm actual consumption or attention
example: Traditional ratings (e.g., Nielsen household-level data) often operate primarily at this level.

❖ Viewed / Consumed Audience (Actual Exposure)

This metric captures individuals whose eyes and ears are present and in contact with the delivered content specifically, those actively in front of the screen, page, or device during playback or display, even if only briefly or passively

However, this metric does not differentiate between passive background play and intentional, focused attention. Streaming platforms and many digital environments frequently report metrics at this level. For example, someone may be physically present in the room while the content plays, yet remain distracted, perhaps using a phone, cooking, or sleeping.

❖ Engaged / Attentive Audience (Active Interaction)

This layer reflects meaningful attention, involvement, or cognitive processing—indicating the content held interest beyond mere presence.

Metrics: Completion rates, dwell time, scroll depth, active video views (e.g., 50–100% completion), interaction signals (likes, shares, comments), or emerging attention scores (eye-tracking proxies, mouse movement, active seconds).

Limitation: Attention is subjective and context-dependent; measurement relies on proxies that vary widely by platform and vendor. Recent industry efforts (e.g., IAB/MRC Attention Measurement Guidelines) aim to standardize this, but consensus remains incomplete.

❖ Converted / Responsive Audience (Outcome-Oriented)

This represents the subset that took a desired action attributable to the exposure—such as a purchase, sign-up, subscription, download, or brand lift.

Metrics: Conversions, attribution-modelled sales, incremental lift, return on ad spend (ROAS), or post-exposure surveys (e.g., brand recall, intent).

Limitation: Causality is difficult to prove in fragmented, multi-touch environments; privacy restrictions limit deterministic tracking, forcing reliance on probabilistic models or aggregated data.

3. ATTENTION AUDIENCE (Actually watching)

- Actively engaged
- But maybe multitasking

4. COMPREHENSION AUDIENCE (Understanding/remembering)

- Processing content
- But interpretations vary

Key Limitations and Biases

- Panel fatigue and unrepresentative demographics: Long-term panel members often change their behavior, and panels rarely reflect the full population (especially younger, minority, or rural audiences).
- Inaccurate capture of "background" viewing: TV sets left on without active attention are often counted as full viewers.
- Poor measurement of out-of-home (OOH) viewing: Bars, offices, gyms, airports, and public screens are largely invisible to traditional meters.
- Incomplete time-shifted and on-demand viewing: DVR, streaming catch-up, and platform apps (Netflix, YouTube, TikTok) are undercounted or estimated with delays.
- Device fragmentation: Second screens, smartphones, tablets, and smart TVs split attention but are not always linked to the same viewer.

- Privacy regulations and opt-out trends: Increasing use of ad blockers, VPNs, and consent refusals reduces sample accuracy.
- Overreliance on small samples extrapolated nationally, amplifying sampling error.

Impact on Media Planning & Buying

- Inflated or distorted ratings lead to inefficient budget allocation and overpayment for reach.
- Undercounting of younger and cord-cutting audiences causes missed opportunities and skewed campaign targeting.
- Lack of cross-platform comparability makes it hard to optimize between TV, digital, and social.
- Advertisers either overspend on "safe" overreported channels or undervalue emerging platforms with growing real audiences.

These ongoing flaws are why the industry bodies and tech companies are pushing toward census-level data, return-path data from set-top boxes, and big data integrations – though those bring their own privacy and accuracy challenges.

Axis 4 – The Methodological Toolkit: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches to Studying Audiences

Week	Topic
Week 1	Quantitative Methods
Week 2	Qualitative Methods
Week 3	Mixing Methods

The study of media audiences relies on a diverse methodological toolkit that combines quantitative and qualitative approaches to capture both the measurable patterns and the lived experiences of media consumption. Quantitative methods such as surveys, ratings data, audience measurement panels, content analytics, and large-scale digital tracking, provide structured, generalizable insights into audience size, composition, viewing behavior, demographic segmentation, and exposure levels. These techniques are particularly valuable for identifying statistical trends, assessing reach, and informing industry decisions related to programming and advertising.

Qualitative methods, in contrast including in-depth interviews, focus groups, ethnography, discourse analysis, reception studies, and digital ethnography, offer deeper understanding of how individuals interpret, negotiate, and give meaning to media texts within their specific social, cultural, and personal contexts. These approaches illuminate subjective processes such as sense-making, identity construction, emotional engagement, resistance, and the role of social networks in shaping reception.

Rather than viewing these two paradigms as mutually exclusive, contemporary audience research increasingly adopts mixed-methods designs that integrate the strengths of both: the breadth and statistical reliability of quantitative data with the contextual depth and interpretive richness of qualitative inquiry. This combined toolkit enables researchers to move beyond surface-level metrics and toward a more comprehensive understanding of audiences as complex, situated, and dynamic actors within evolving media environments.

Lesson 10: Quantitative Methods in Audience Research

Core Concept: Quantitative research is in simple way measuring audiences with numbers, it aims to measure and quantify audience patterns, trends, behaviours, and demographics by collecting numerical data from a representative sample. This approach enables statistically valid inferences

that can be generalized to larger populations. It primarily addresses questions such as “how many,” “how much,” and “how often.”

Learning Objectives:

- Identify the key components and principles of a robust survey design.
- Design valid, reliable audience surveys using probability sampling.
- Understand fundamental statistical concepts (descriptive vs. inferential statistics) and their application in audience analysis.
- Apply descriptive/inferential statistics to analyze audience data.
- Interpret SPSS/R outputs for media consumption patterns.
- Critique limitations of quantitative approaches in audience contexts.

❖ **Why Qualitative ?**

➤ **Audience Measurement:**

1. **TV and Radio ratings:** provided by (Nielsen) measure television viewership and radio listeners initially in the United States, indicating both the number of viewers/listeners and their demographic composition (age, gender, income, etc.). These metrics serve as the primary currency for dealing with the advertisers (buying and selling television advertising). (Nielsen, 2023)

Key concepts: (Nielsen, 2023)

- Rating: The percentage of all television and radio-owning households in the U.S. that were tuned to a specific program.
 - Share: The percentage of households with televisions turned on at that time that were watching the program.
 - Demo rating (short for demographic rating) is the metric most valued by advertisers: For example, “Adults 18–49: 1.8” means that 1.8% of all U.S. individuals aged 18–49 who have access to a television were watching the program.
2. **box office figures:** the total amount of money earned from ticket sales for a movie while it is playing in theaters (cinemas). Nothing else is included: no streaming, no DVD, no TV rights. In a nutshell the previous concept means:

“How much money people actually paid to watch the film in theaters.”
(Nielsen, 2023)

3. **web and social media analytics:** the measurement, collection, analysis, and reporting of data about how people use a website or app or social media platforms, so you can improve it and make more money.

II. Survey Design :

1. **Sampling:** Who Do We Ask? Concept of a population vs. a sample.

Sampling Strategies: (Babbie, 2020; Bryman, 2016)

- **Probability:** Simple random, Stratified random sampling (e.g., by age/income for streaming habits). (to ensure subgroup representation). The gold standard for generalizability.
- **Non-probability:** Convenience vs. quota sampling. snowball. Acknowledge its common use in student projects and its limitations. snowball sampling: a way of finding a large number of people so that you can get and study their opinions about something, by finding a few and then asking them to find others
- **Questionnaire Construction:**
 - Avoid leading questions: "Don't you agree Netflix is better?" → "Rate your satisfaction with Netflix (1–5)." Bad: "Don't you think social media is a waste of time?"
 - Good: "On a typical day, approximately how much time do you spend on social media platforms?"
 - Question Types: Differentiate between closed-ended (Likert scales, multiple choice, ranking) and open-ended questions, emphasizing why quantitative research favors the former.
 - Operationalization: How do we turn a fuzzy concept like "media addiction" into a measurable variable? (e.g., "On a scale of 1-5, how often do you...")
 - Scale design: Likert (attitudes), semantic differential (perceptions), behavioral frequency (e.g., "How often do you watch TikTok?").
- **Pilot Testing:** Importance of cognitive interviewing to pre-test question clarity.

III. Data Analysis and Statistical Tools

1. Descriptive Statistics: Summarizing the Data

- Frequencies and Percentages: "for example: 60% of our sample watches streaming daily." so the frequency and percentage high.
- cross-tabs it is super important in descriptive statistics for example e.g., age vs. news source preference.
- Measures of Central Tendency: three famous measures - Mean (average), Median (middle), Mode (most frequent).
- Measures of Dispersion: another famous measures try to find to how extend the answers are spread out for example : Range, Standard Deviation.
- Visualization: Introduce simple charts (bar charts, pie charts, histograms) and their appropriate use.

1. Inferential Statistics: Making Predictions

Using sample data to make inferences about the population that's what we call the inferential statistics. Introduce what is known as **p-value** conceptually as the "**probability this finding is due to chance.**" (A p-value < 0.05 is conventionally seen as significant).

- T-tests/ANOVA: used to compare means . for example: Do Generation Z and Boomers differ in podcast consumption?
- Chi-square: used to test associations . for example: Is political affiliation linked to news outlet trust?
- Correlation/Regression: used to predict public behaviors. for example: "How does screen time predict social media fatigue?. Correlation: Explain as a relationship between two variables, for instance the question is : is there a correlation between age and preference for traditional news media?
- Crucial Point: it's important to mention that correlation does not equal causation!
- Software Demo: SPSS/R basics: Importing data, running frequencies, cross-tabs, and t-tests.

IV. Critical Discussion of and Workshop

- Limitations:
 - Oversimplifies complex behaviors , for example likes ≠ engagement depth.

- Context blindness which means no index analyse the context . for example survey can't capture the question of context as: why someone skips ads.
- Workshop:
 - Task: Design a survey of 10 items on a topic such as **Social Media News Consumption.**
 - Deliverables: Sampling strategy, 2 scaled questions, 1 open-ended item, analysis plan.

Lesson 11: Qualitative Methods in Audience Research

What Qualitative Methods Do in Audience Research

Qualitative methods are designed to do what quantitative can not do. designed to explore how **meanings are created**, to dig into **motivations**, try to explain **emotions, narratives**, and **social contexts** underlying **how audiences behave and interpret media, cultural products, messages, and experiences.** Unlike quantitative methods (e.g., surveys, experiments with numerical outputs), qualitative approaches aim for rich, contextual, textured understanding rather than broad statistical generalization.

These methods are especially useful for:

- uncovering **why** audiences behave in certain ways revealing a particular behaviour.
- exploring **how** people are capable interpret media messages differently.
- mapping **complex patterns** of motivations and perceptions
- identifying emergent **themes** not pre-defined by researchers.

1. In-Depth Interviews What They Are?

In-Depth Interviews refers to one-on-one conversations between a researcher and participant, structured around open-ended questions that aims to **explore making meanings process, experiences, opinions, and perceptions.**

→ Key Variants

1. Semi-structured interviews: Guided by a flexible protocol with main questions.
2. Unstructured interviews: Very open, conversation-like, emergent.

3. Narrative or life story interviews: Focus on personal histories and longitudinal experience.

→ Applications: we apply In-Depth Interviews in the following aspects:

1. Understanding individual motivations (about motivation)
2. Exploring personal interpretations of media messages (meaning)
3. Examining emotional responses and values
4. Generating detailed narratives on user experience

→ Examples

1. Exploring why viewers prefer certain streaming genres.
2. Deep insights into how news consumption affects civic engagement.

→ Strengths: the point as follows

- Rich, nuanced data
- Flexible and adaptive to participant responses
- Can probe underlying motivations and latent meanings
- Good for sensitive or personal topics

→ Limitations

- Time-intensive to conduct and analyze
- Risk of interviewer bias
- Findings are not statistically generalizable
- Requires skill in probing without leading

2. Focus Groups: What It Is?

Focus Groups is a sort of Group discussion led by a moderator where participants interact and respond to prompts. The group dynamic itself generates data about social meanings and collective sense-making.

→ Applications: we apply Focus Groups in the following

1. Testing media concepts, messages, or creative stimuli
2. Exploring shared norms and group attitudes
3. Observing social dynamics around media use
4. Generating ideas in early design stages

→ Examples

1. Testing pilot advertisements with target audiences.
2. Exploring how different demographic groups perceive a brand.

→ Strengths

1. Interaction reveals consensus, disagreement, social norms
2. Efficient data collection from multiple people at once
3. Good for exploring language, metaphors, shared narratives

→ Limitations

1. Group effects can suppress dissenting voices
2. Dominant participants may skew discussion
3. Requires skilled moderation
4. Not ideal for highly sensitive personal topics

3. Ethnography and participant Observation: What It Is?

Ethnography is a Longer-term immersion in people's real life contexts to live the same way other live, to observe every single kind of behaviors, interactions, routines, and environments. Sometimes the researcher participates, sometimes observes.

→ Applications

- Uncovering real-world behaviors and routines
- Observing media use in context
- Studying cultural practices and community norms
- Understanding how media fits into daily life

→ Examples

- Observing how teenagers use smartphones in natural settings.
- Studying viewing habits in family households over time.

→ Strengths:

- Highly contextualized, holistic understanding

- Uncovers behaviors participants may not articulate
- Reveals meanings embedded in social settings
- Ideal for cultural analysis

→ Limitations

- Very time- and resource-intensive
- Researcher presence can influence behavior
- Data complexity makes analysis demanding
- Harder to coordinate on a large scale

4. **Textual and Discourse Analysis What It Is?**

Interpretive analysis of texts, talk, transcripts, and communicative forms to understand how meanings are produced.

→ Applications

- Analyzing audience-produced content (comments, blogs, social media)
- Studying metaphors, framing, and narrative structures
- Exploring how audiences talk about media and identity

→ Strengths

- Works with naturally occurring data
- Reveals patterns of language use, identity, and ideology
- Useful for media content as well as audience dialogue

→ Limitations

- Interpretation can be subjective
- Less direct about lived behavior or motivations
- Must be supplemented with other methods for context

5. **Diaries, Journals and Media Diaries: What It Is?**

Journals and Media Diaries means that participants record daily reflections, behaviors, or experiences over a defined period.

→ Applications

- Tracking media consumption over time
- Capturing emotions and experiences close to the moment
- Observing routines and temporal patterns

→ Strengths

- Minimizes recall bias

- Deep longitudinal insight
- Participants reveal personal subjective experiences

→ Limitations

- Participant fatigue or inconsistent reporting
- Requires motivation and clarity of instructions
- Harder to standardize data

6. Visual and Creative Methods What They Are?

Includes photo-elicitation, video diaries, mapping exercises, collages, and other visual tools to help participants express meaning non-verbally.

→ Applications

- Exploring perceptions where language alone is limiting
- Understanding aesthetic or experiential aspects
- Engaging audiences creatively

→ Strengths

- Elicits data that words alone can't capture
- Can empower suppressed voices
- Rich multimodal insight

→ Limitations

- Requires careful interpretation
- Not always systematic or comparable

→ Where Qualitative Methods Excel

- Uncover complexity, nuance, and context
- Explore why and how, not just what
- Reveal contradictions, ambivalence, emotion
- Generate grounded theory and design insights

→ Common Limitations to Watch

- Non-representative samples — not generalizable
- Interpretation and researcher bias
- Resource and time intensity
- Ethical concerns (privacy, power dynamics, consent)

7. Choosing the Right Method:

The table below presents different research goals and the qualitative methods most suitable for addressing them

Research Goal	Best Qualitative Methods
<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Deep personal meanings➤ Group norms & social interaction➤ Real-world behavior➤ Language & cultural meanings➤ Daily media habits➤ Creative expression	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ In-depth interviews➤ Focus groups➤ Ethnography➤ Discourse analysis➤ Diaries➤ Visual methods

→ Tips for Stronger Qualitative Audience Research

- Triangulate multiple methods: that means use more than one method to collect data, for example, use interviews, observations, and document analysis to increase the credibility and validity of the findings because different sources or methods can confirm or complement each other.
- Use reflexivity to check biases: super important point in qualitative Audience research it refers to the Reflect on your own assumptions, background, and influence on the research process. It helps identify and reduce bias, ensuring your interpretation of data is not unduly shaped by your own perspective.
- Develop clear but flexible guides: this tip focuses on creating structured guides for interviews or observations, allowing room for adaptation in the order of ensuring cover important topics consistently while still responding to participants' perspectives.
- Pilot instruments before full study: it is crucial to test the interview questions, surveys, or observation checklists on a small group before the main study to identify ambiguities, confusing wording, or practical issues. to make sure the study would be credible and valid (improving reliability and effectiveness).
- Prioritize ethical consent and comfort: it Always to obtain informed consent and ensure participants feel safe and respected. in the purpose of protecting participants' rights and well-being and maintaining ethical research standards.

Lesson 12: Commodification of Audiences: media sell viewers' attention to advertisers.

The commodification of audiences constitutes a central concept in the political economy of media. Dallas Smythe's seminal contribution, the notion of the "audience commodity," fundamentally reshaped the analysis of how audiences are transformed into economic assets within capitalist media structures (Smythe, 1977/1981).

Dallas Smythe argued that in commercial media systems (television, radio, online platforms, etc.), the real product being sold is not the content itself, but the audience. Advertisers purchase access to viewers/listeners/users, and it is this audience attention that generates revenue for media companies.

Later, Eileen Meehan (1984) refined this idea. She pointed out that what is actually bought and sold in the market is not the living audience, but a statistical representation of the audience — the ratings and audience-measurement data produced by firms such as Nielsen. These quantified audience figures become the commodity that circulates between media companies and advertisers.

★ Example 1: using Facebook or Instagram:

You scroll through your feed for free. You post pictures of your dog, and you "like" pages about hiking and camping. Suddenly, you see ads for hiking boots, pet food, and tents. What's happening?

- The Commodity: Your data (your interests, likes, location, age) and your attention.
- The Seller: Meta (Facebook's parent company).
- The Buyer: The outdoor and pet companies.

In light of the commodification of audiences discussed earlier, Meta exemplifies this process in a particularly advanced form. The company collects and processes users' personal data to construct highly detailed "audience commodities" for example, demographic-behavioral segments such as "individuals aged 25–35 who are interested in dogs and hiking." These precisely defined audience segments are then sold to advertisers at a premium price, allowing brands to purchase access not to content, but to targeted groups whose attention and behavioral patterns have been quantified and packaged as marketable products.

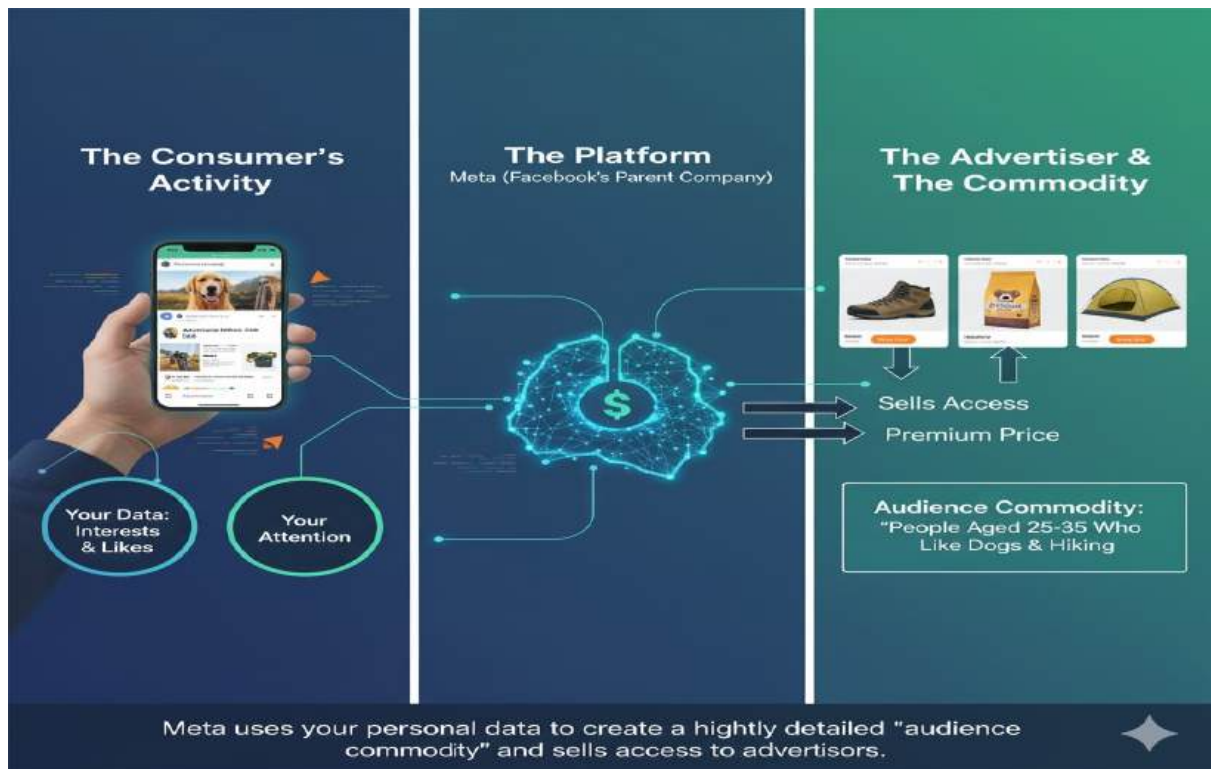


photo is generated by AI

★ Example 2: a detailed example for commodification of audience using Traditional Broadcast TV

- When you turn on NBC, MBC, Fox, or any other television channel and watch American Idol, Star Academy, or any other program, you pay nothing directly, the show is free-to-air.
- While you are watching the program, the network and its advertisers are not primarily watching the content. They are watching you. Through ratings companies such as Nielsen, your viewing behavior is measured, aggregated, and packaged into a quantifiable demographic product. For example, "females aged 18–34 with disposable income" or "males aged 35–55 with high socioeconomic status."
- Your attention and your potential purchasing power constitute the raw material being commodified.
- NBC's (or any network's) sales team then approaches companies such as Coca-Cola, Toyota, or other advertisers and presents the following offer: "We deliver 15 million units of a premium demographic segment (women aged 18–34) every Thursday night from 8:00 to 8:30 p.m. Would you like to purchase access to this audience?"

- The actual commercial transaction takes place between the television network and the advertiser. You, the viewer, are not a party to this deal: you are the commodity being sold.
- At 8:15 p.m., the program pauses for a commercial break. This is the moment of delivery: the network fulfills its promise by delivering your attentive eyes and ears to the advertiser.
- The advertisement for a new shampoo or soft drink is the message inserted into the “product” – that is, into you, the audience commodity – for the benefit of the true customer, the advertiser.
- The advertiser pays the television network thousands (or even millions) of dollars for these 30-second slots or commercial blocks.
- The network uses this revenue to finance the production of more programs and content.
- The “free” show resumes, continuing to manufacture additional units of the audience commodity for the next sale.

lesson 12: data-driven audiences:

personalization, algorithmic profiling, and demographic targeting.

data-driven audiences « publics basés sur les données » (Data-Driven Audiences)

Instead of guessing who you are based on the TV show you're watching, companies now use your personal data to know exactly who you are and what you want, creating hyper-specific audience groups for advertisers.

"Data-driven audiences" is the modern, super-powered version of the "constructed audience." It moves from assumption to certainty.

- **Old Way (Traditional):** "You're watching a sports channel, so you *probably* like sports drinks." → Based on context.
- **New Way (Data-Driven):** "We know you are a 28-year-old man who lives in Paris, jogs 3 times a week, just searched for 'best running shoes' on Google, and follows Nike on Instagram. Therefore, you are in the **'Urban Male Runner' audience.**" → Based on your personal data.

The "data" is the digital breadcrumbs you leave everywhere online and in the real world.

Example 3: The "Lapsed Gym-Goer" Audience

- The Data Collected:
 - You downloaded a fitness app in January but haven't used it since March.
 - Your purchase history at a sports store shows you bought protein powder 4 months ago.
 - You watch fitness videos on YouTube but haven't searched for a gym recently.
- The Data-Driven Audience: A data broker packages you into a segment called "Fitness-Interested, Recently Lapsed."
- The Sale: A local gym or a new fitness app can target you with ads saying "Get Back on Track!" or "Special Offer for Returning Members!" They are using data to identify people who have shown interest but need a nudge.

Lapsed Gym-Goer

The Data Collected



Fitness App Downloaded (January), Inactive Since (March)



Purchase History: Protein Powder (4 months ago)



Watches YouTube Fitness, No Recent Gym Searches

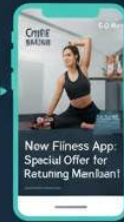
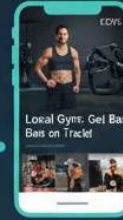
The Data-Driven Audience



Data Broker Packages You Into Segment:

"Fitness-Intrested, Recently Lapsed."

The Sale





Targeted Ads


Using data to identify people who need a nudge!


A local gym or a new fitness app can target you with ads saying "Get Back on Track!" or "Special Offer for Returning Members!" They are using data to identify people who have shown interest but need a nudge.

Exemple 1 : Le public "Vacances en Famille Aisée"

 Vous avez cherché "poussettes haut de gamme" sur Amazon

 Vous avez visité le site web de Disneyland Paris 3 fois la semaine dernière

 Vos données de localisation montrent que vous vivez dans un code postal aisé

 Vous avez récemment cliqué sur une publicité pour des SUV familiaux



Le public data-driven : Un algorithme combine ces données et vous place dans un segment appelé "Familles aisées planifiant des vacances"



photo is generated by AI

It is crucial to mention that audience construction and measurement do not occur sequentially, as if they were two chronological steps. Instead, they represent two distinct perspectives or logics in how media industries conceptualize audiences

1. Audience Construction → A cultural and industrial process:

This idea comes from media studies and critical theory (like Dallas Smythe or Philip Napoli). It means that audiences don't naturally exist – **they are created or shaped by:**

- Media content,
- Platform algorithms,
- Marketing segmentation (who advertisers target).

2. Audience Measurement → A technical and statistical process

This comes from media economics and data science.

It's about counting and quantifying how many people watch or engage, who they are, and for how long.

Tools: **Nielsen ratings** (TV), **Google Analytics** (web), or **Meta Ads Manager** (social).

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