

reason is that networks are relational structures that emphasize and reinforce existing relations between people embedded in social structures. The relation between units is reinforced in particular when people use the new media as tools. For example, social inequality in most developed and developing societies was already increasing when a type of information inequality arrived that is marked by unequal digital skills (see Chapter 7). It happens to be that the higher educated, who usually have the best digital skills, increase their advantage on the lower educated with less.

FROM MASS SOCIETY TO NETWORK SOCIETY

A systematic comparison

Finally, we are ready to understand the main characteristics of the network society as compared to that of the mass society. This comparison is made in Table 2.2. It will serve as a summary of the argument in this section and an introduction to the following chapters where the network society is described in detail.

The mass society was defined earlier in this chapter as a social formation with an infrastructure of groups, organizations and communities ('masses') that shapes its prime mode of organization at all levels. The main components of this formation are all kinds of relatively large collectivities. Historically, the mass society characterizes the first phase of the era of the global web as it is called by the McNeills (2003). This society evolved during the industrial revolution when large concentrations of people came

TABLE 2.2 A typology of the mass society and the network society

Characteristics	Mass Society	Network Society
Main components	Collectivities (Groups, Organizations, Communities)	Individuals (linked by networks)
Nature of components	Homogeneous	Heterogeneous
Scale	Extended	Extended and Reduced
Scope	Local	'Glocal' (global and local)
Connectivity and Connectedness	High within components	High between components
Density	High	Lower
Centralization	High (few centres)	Lower (polycentric)
Inclusiveness	High	Lower
Type of community	Physical and unitary	Virtual and diverse
Type of organization	Bureaucracy Vertically integrated	Infocracy Horizontally differentiated
Type of household	Large with extended family	Small with diversity of family relations
Main type of communication	Face-to-face	Increasingly mediated
Kind of media	Broadcast mass media	Narrowcast interactive media
Number of media	Low	High

together in industrial towns and trading centres. Typical of these concentrations was that the traditional communities already existing in neighbourhoods and villages were largely maintained when they were combined on a larger scale in cities and nations.

The basic components of mass society are large households and extended families in the rather tight communities of a village or a city neighbourhood. In large companies, other mass associations appear, such as closely cooperating shifts and departments. The basic components or units of the mass society are homogeneous. This does not mean that internal conflict or opposition is absent, but that all units concerned largely reveal the same characteristics and social structures. For example, the large households consist of standard nuclear families with a mother, father and many children. Local communities also are relatively homogeneous or unitary and they are marked by physical proximity.

The mass society is marked by scale extension. Corporations, governments and other organizations grow larger and larger and they become bureaucracies. They spread across nations and the world at large to create a global web of 19th-century empires and multinationals. However, the scope of the mass society remains local: the organization of its basic components is tied to particular places and communication is still overwhelmingly local. The mass society is an assembly and connection of relatively homogeneous separate local places. These basic components or units of the mass society are marked by the physical co-presence of their members. This means

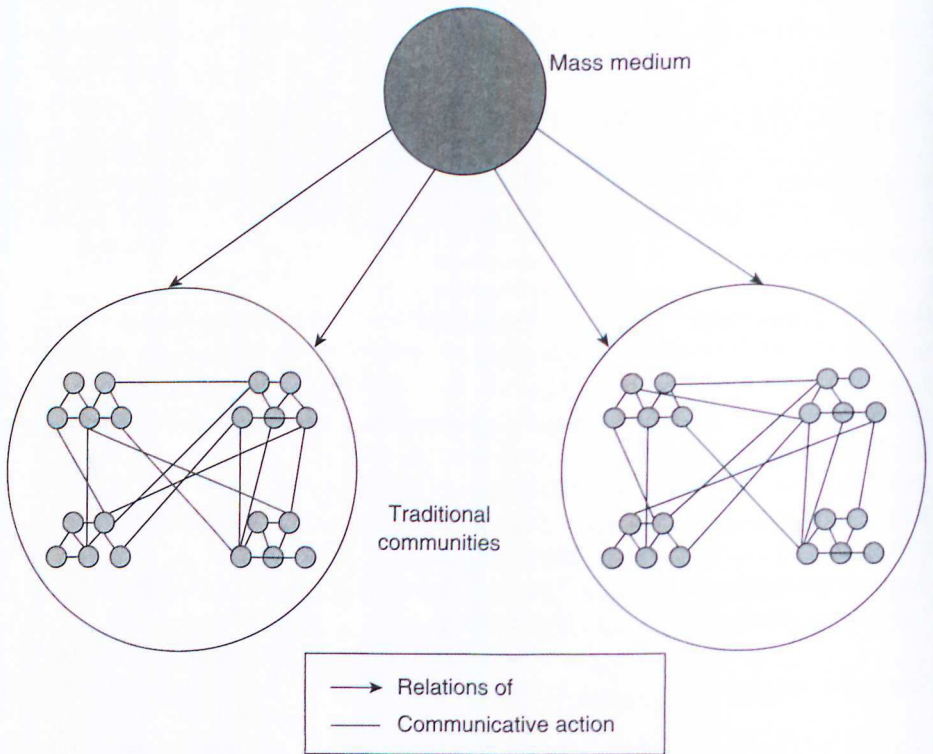


FIGURE 2.3 The structure of mass society

high connectivity inside and relatively low connectivity outside. The mass society is very much clustered with strong ties of high density (in local communities and extended family structures) and it contains relatively few weak ties connecting these clusters at long distances in diffuse network structures.

The internal relations in the units of the mass society are centralized. Bureaucratic and vertically integrated modes of organization prevail. There are relatively few very influential centres: the national, regional and local state, the army, a number of large corporations, churches or other cultural institutions and a limited number of mass media. The complement of centralization is that the inclusiveness of relations is high as well. The number of connected members is high and few of them are isolated or excluded. The mass society is marked more by solidarity than the network society.

In the mass society, every unit (community, household) has access to only one or perhaps a few of each type of mass media, such as one local newspaper, followed by one national newspaper and one or a few radio and television channels. So, the number of media is relatively low as compared to the current standards in network societies. Essentially, they are all broadcast media. However, generally speaking, face-to-face communication is much more important than mediated communication in the mass society.

In Figure 2.3 an attempt is made to depict the social and communicative structure of the mass society.

In the course of the 20th century, the structures of the mass society were gradually replaced by the structures of the network society. This happened first of all in developed or modern societies. The reasons for this replacement will be discussed in the following chapters, as they derive from problems of organization and communication in the economic, political and cultural systems and the general social infrastructure of these societies. The characteristics of the network society are described below in order to compare them with the mass society.

Characteristics of the network society

As has been argued above, in the contemporary process of individualization, the basic unit of the network society has become the individual who is linked by networks. Traditional local collectivities such as communities, extended families and large bureaucracies are fragmenting. This is caused by simultaneous scale extension (nationalization and internationalization) and scale reduction (smaller living and working environments). Other kinds of communities arise, consisting of people who on the one hand continue to live and work in their own families, neighbourhoods and organizations, but on the other hand frequently move around in large-scale social networks that are much more diffuse than the traditional ones. Daily living and working environments are getting smaller and more heterogeneous, while the range of the division of labour, interpersonal communications and mass media extends. So, the scale of the network society is both extended and reduced as compared to the mass society. The scope of the network society also is both global and local, sometimes indicated as 'glocal'. The organization of its components (individuals, groups, organizations) is no longer tied to particular times and places. Aided by