

People's Conceptions of the Mass Media

A study about the people's conceptions as to the significance of the mass media and their functions before and after the introduction of television

1. Background of the Investigation¹⁾

This report deals with several questions concerning the people's conceptions of the mass media – especially in a situation when the introduction of a new medium, television, is changing the field of mass communication. The questions dealt with in this descriptive survey are the following. First of all, what is the significance or importance attached by people to television, and, what are the functions which they consider television to fulfill for them; secondly, how does the introduction of television affect conceptions as to the significance and functions of the other mass media; thirdly, what advance ideas do people have as to the importance and functions of television, and how do these advance ideas correspond to their actual experience; and lastly, what are the factors underlying the conception of television as significant or important in general and as a means of fulfilling certain functions, such as the transmission of news, general information, art and entertainment. – The way in which these questions are formulated is similar to that in certain earlier Finnish investigations of people's conceptions of the significance and functions of the mass media. It has to be noted that we are concerned here exclusively with *the subjective images people have formed of the mass media*; not necessarily with the true objective functions of the media.

2. Conceptions as to the Significance of the Mass Media

In this first section we deal with the importance or significance attached by people to the mass media, and the way in which these conceptions are altered when television is introduced as a new factor in the media field. Conceptions as to the significance of the media were elicited in the following question: If all of the media listed on this card suddenly ceased existing, which of them would you miss the most? And the second most?