

How much time do you spend consuming media each day? What are you really doing when you scroll through social media, watch streaming shows, or listen to music? Media consumption seems like a personal, individual choice—what you watch, listen to, and read is entirely up to you. Yet sociology reveals that our media habits are deeply social: they’re shaped by our class position, our demographics, our available time and resources, and the algorithmic systems that decide what we see. This research application asks you to track your own media consumption and analyze what it reveals about yourself and society.

This exercise develops four essential sociological skills:

1. Systematically documenting personal behavior and habits
2. Recognizing patterns in data and understanding what they reveal
3. Applying sociological theory to everyday practices
4. Reflecting critically on how individual choices connect to broader social forces

Assignment Overview

In this research application, you will track your media consumption across multiple platforms and devices for 1-3 days (depending on your level). You’ll record what you’re consuming, how long you spend, what device you’re using, and the context. You’ll then organize this data into visualizations and analyze patterns: When do you consume media? Which platforms dominate? What’s the balance between active engagement and passive consumption? Finally, you’ll interpret these patterns through sociological concepts and reflect on how your individual media habits reflect broader social trends about leisure, inequality, and digital culture.

The specific requirements for what you need to do vary depending on what grade you would like to earn: Basic (75), Proficient (87), or Advanced (100). Students who come close but do not satisfactorily complete the requirements for a level will be allowed to revise and resubmit their application.

In your submission, clearly state which level you are attempting: “Basic,” “Proficient,” or “Advanced.” You must complete all components of that level to earn the grade.

Basic Level (250-word minimum, not counting Appendix)

To earn a basic score, you must:

- Track personal media consumption for 4 hours
- Record **basic information** for each media interaction (media type, time spent, content)
- Create a **simple media diary** to be included in the appendix

- Include **2 screenshots** documenting your media consumption
- Identify **3+ patterns** in your personal media habits
- Connect your observations to **one course concept** from the textbook (e.g., digital leisure, active audiences, taste publics)
- Include at least **one table or chart** summarizing total time by media type
- Reflect on your personal awareness of media consumption patterns

Proficient (400-word minimum, not counting Appendix)

Includes all Basic requirements plus:

- Track personal media consumption for **6 hours**
- Record **detailed information** (media type, time, content, context, mood)
- Create a **comprehensive media diary** with time stamps in the appendix
- Include **4 screenshots** showing varied media consumption activities
- Identify **5+ specific patterns** in your personal media habits
- Analyze media consumption by **time of day and purpose**
- Connect observations to **two course concepts** from the textbook (e.g., high vs. popular culture, media effects theories, interpretive communities)
- Analyze how your media consumption reflects trends discussed in the textbook (decline of public life, digitization of leisure, commodification of leisure)
- Include **visual representation** of media consumption patterns
- Compare personal habits to **relevant research** on media consumption
- Discuss how your media habits reflect broader social patterns

Advanced (600-word minimum, not counting Appendix)

Includes all Proficient requirements plus:

- Track personal media consumption for **24 hours**
- Develop a **specific research question** about your personal media habits
- Create a **detailed media diary** with a categorization system in the appendix
- Include **5+ screenshots** showing diverse media interactions
- Create **detailed media consumption visualizations** (charts/graphs)
- Analyze **content themes** across different media types

- Compare weekday vs. weekend consumption patterns
- Connect observations to **three** or more **course concepts** from the textbook
- Apply a specific **media theory** from the textbook (e.g., hypodermic needle theory, uses and gratifications paradigm, encoding/decoding model) to explain your personal habits
- Propose **specific changes** to media habits based on your findings

Project Structure

Use the Research Report Template.

Introduction

- Briefly describe the purpose of your media tracking project
- Explain your interest in understanding your own media habits
- Present your research question (required for Advanced Level)
- Identify how this investigation connects to broader course themes

Methods

- Describe your data collection approach:
 - What information did you track?
 - How did you record it? (diary format, app, etc.)
 - When did you track it? (time periods, reminders used)
 - What categorization system did you develop?
- Explain your analytical approach:
 - How did you organize and analyze the collected data?
 - What tools did you use to create visualizations?
 - What specific patterns did you look for?

Findings

- Present a summary of your overall media consumption (time, types, etc.)
- Include relevant tables or charts illustrating key metrics
- Identify specific patterns you observed, such as:
 - Distribution across different media types
 - Timing patterns (time of day, duration, etc.)

- Content preferences and themes
- Contextual factors affecting consumption
- Attention levels during different media activities
- Weekday vs. weekend differences (Advanced Level)
- Include screenshots documenting specific instances of media consumption
- Support your observations with specific examples from your media diary

Discussion: Sociological Synthesis

- Connect your findings to relevant course concepts—**bold them** (e.g., **digital leisure**, **active audiences**, **media effects**, **cultural capital**, **commodification**)
- Depending on your level:
 - **Basic:** Connect to one course concept
 - **Proficient:** Connect to two course concepts
 - **Advanced:** Connect to three or more course concepts, applying a specific media theory
- Analyze how your personal habits reflect or diverge from broader trends discussed in the textbook
- Examine the potential influences of demographic factors (age, class, gender, etc.) on your media choices
- Reflect on surprising or unexpected patterns
- Evaluate the positive and negative aspects of your current media habits
- Propose specific changes you might make based on your findings
- Discuss limitations of your tracking method and analysis: What couldn't you capture? What assumptions did you make?

Conclusion

- Summarize key insights gained from the project
- Reflect on what you learned about your relationship with media and its connection to broader social forces
- Suggest how this awareness might influence your future media choices and understanding of society

Appendix

- Include your complete media diary
- Include any additional charts or visualizations not in the main text
- Provide references for any outside research cited

Tips for Successful Completion

Media Diary Format

Consider including these elements in your tracking diary:

- Date and precise time of media engagement
- Duration of the activity
- Media type (social media, streaming video, music, news, etc.)
- Platform/source (TikTok, Netflix, Spotify, New York Times, etc.)
- Device used (smartphone, laptop, TV, etc.)
- Content description (what specific content you consumed)
- Context (location, simultaneous activities, social setting)
- Purpose (entertainment, information-seeking, social connection, etc.)
- Attention level (focused vs. background consumption)

Effective Data Collection

- Set regular reminders to record media usage
- Consider using screen time tracking apps to support your manual tracking
- Take screenshots at different times of day showing various media activities
- Note both active and passive media consumption
- Be honest about habitual or automatic media behaviors

Potential Analysis Approaches

- Calculate total time spent with different media types
- Identify peak usage times and patterns
- Examine the relationship between media use and mood
- Look for connections between context and media choices
- Consider how different devices facilitate different types of engagement
- Analyze the balance between purposeful and passive consumption

- Evaluate the level of your active engagement with different media
- Identify which media conglomerates dominate your consumption
- Consider whether your media consumption has replaced traditional third places