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Chapter 15

Media, Technology, and Communication

We live in a media-saturated world and rely on a variety of old and new media for information, entertainment, and connection. The beginnings of mass media and mass communication go back 560 years to the "print revolution" that occurred in Europe in the fifteenth century. As we progressed through the centuries, mass communication evolved from a mechanical process to electronic transmission, which paved the way for the digitized world of today. While technological advances are an important part of the narrative regarding media, the effects of media are also important to consider. In this chapter, we will discuss some functions and theories of mass communication and some of the key ethical issues related to media and communication.

15.1 Technological Advances: From the Printing Press to the iPhone

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Summarize the technological advances of the print, audiovisual, and Internet and digital media ages.
2. Identify key effects of various mass media on society.
3. Discuss how mass media adapt as new forms of media are invented and adopted.

It is only through technology that mass media can exist. While our interpersonal interactions are direct, our interactions with mass media messages are indirect, as they require technology or a "third party" to facilitate the connection. As you'll recall from Chapter 1 "Introduction to Communication Studies", mass communication involves transmitting messages to many people through print or electronic media. While talking to someone about a movie you just watched is interpersonal communication, watching the Academy Awards on a network or in clips on the Internet is mass communication. In this section, we will trace the development of various forms of technology that led to new channels (media) of communication and overview the characteristics of some of the most common mass media.

As we trace the development of different forms of mass media, take note of how new technologies and competition among various media formats have made media messages more interpersonal and personalized. In short, the mass media that served large segments of the population with limited messages evolved into micromedia that serve narrow interest groups.Charles C. Self, Edward L. Gaylord, and Thelma Gaylord, "The Evolution of Mass Communication Theory in the 20th Century," *The Romanian Review of Journalism and Communication* 6, no. 3 (2009): 29. The brief discussion here of these recent changes in how media operate in our lives will be expanded more in the following chapter on new media and communication. It is also interesting to note the speed with which technologies advanced. As we move closer to our current digital age of media, we can see that new media formats are invented and then made available to people more quickly than media that came before. For example, while it took 175,000 years for writing to become established, and about 1,000 years for printing to gain a firm foundation as a medium, audiovisual media (radio, television, and movies) penetrated society within a few decades, and digital media gained prominence in even less time.Marshall T. Poe, *A History of Communications: Media and Society from the Evolution of Speech to the Internet* (New York: Cambridge, 2011), 164.

Print Mass Media

The printing press and subsequent technological advances related to paper manufacturing and distribution led to the establishment of print as the first mass medium. While the ability to handwrite manuscripts and even reproduce them existed before the print revolution, such processes took considerable time and skill, making books and manuscripts too expensive for nearly anyone in society except the most privileged and/or powerful to possess. And despite the advent of many other forms of mass media, print is still important as a channel for information and as an industry. For example, in the United States, about 3.1 billion books, 1,400 daily newspapers, and 19,000 magazines are published a year.Marshall T. Poe, *A History of Communications: Media and Society from the Evolution of Speech to the Internet* (New York: Cambridge, 2011), 133. Let's now look back at how we progressed from writing to print and trace the birth of the first mass medium.

The "**manuscript age**[1]" is the period in human history that immediately predated the advent of mass media and began around 3500 BCE with the introduction of written texts and lasted until the printing revolution of 1450 CE.Marshall T. Poe, *A History of Communications: Media and Society from the Evolution of Speech to the Internet* (New York: Cambridge, 2011), 73. Of course, before writing emerged as a form of expression, humans drew cave paintings and made sculptures, pottery, jewelry, and other forms of visual expression. The spread of writing, however, as a means of documenting philosophy, daily life, government, laws, and business transactions was a necessary precursor to the print revolution. Physical and technical limitations of the time prevented the written word from becoming a mass medium, as texts were painstakingly reproduced by hand or reproduced slowly using rudimentary printing technology such as wood cutouts. The high price of these texts and the fact that most people could not read or write further limited the spread of print.

The German blacksmith and printer Johannes Gutenberg, often cited as the inventor of the printing press, didn't actually invent much, as most of the technology needed to print, such as movable type, already existed and had been in use for many years. In fact, the mass reproduction and distribution of texts began in East Asia around 700 CE, more than 700 years before Gutenberg, as the Chinese used a wood-block printing method to mass produce short Buddhist texts.Marshall T. Poe, *A History of Communications: Media and Society from the Evolution of Speech to the Internet* (New York: Cambridge, 2011), 103–5. However, Gutenberg's use of a press to mash the paper against the typeset, as opposed to the Chinese method of manually rubbing the paper against the typeset, made the process faster and more effective. Additionally, the rise of printing in East Asia didn't become a "print revolution," because the audience for the texts was so limited, given low literacy rates.

1. The period of human history that immediately predated the advent of mass media and began around 3500 BCE with the introduction of written texts and lasted until the printing revolution of 1450 CE.

Although the technology needed to print mass quantities of text had existed for many years, increasing literacy rates in Europe created more of a demand for printed text, which led to the "print revolution."

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Increasing literacy rates in Europe in the two centuries before Gutenberg undoubtedly contributed to the success of his printing efforts, since literacy creates a market for printed texts. The impact of the printing press, as introduced to Europe by Gutenberg starting with his first printing shop in 1439, should not be underestimated. His press helped usher in the Age of Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution that swept Europe during the 1600s. This spread was aided by aristocratic and religious leaders who turned to the printing press as a way to both spread Christian thought and seek to improve society by educating individuals. In 1454, Guttenberg's famous forty-two-line Bible was the first book that was mass produced by modern methods and not transcribed by hand, which had been the practice for thousands of years. With this, the "**print age**[2]" began, which extended from 1450 to 1850 and marked the birth and rise of the first mass medium.Marshall T. Poe, *A History of Communications: Media and Society from the Evolution of Speech to the Internet* (New York: Cambridge, 2011), 116.

Books

The explosion of printing following 1450 definitely proves that print was the first mass medium. **Books**[3] of the time were often shorter than today, but they were still the earliest form of communication to be distributed to the masses, which led to significant cultural and social transformation. Between 1454 and 1500, 30,000 books and pamphlets were published in Europe. In the 1500s, between 150,000 and 200,000 separate titles were printed. Remember, these numbers represent each separate book and not the total copies of each of those titles that were printed. The total number of copies is much more staggering. Between 1450 and 1500, 20 million individual books were printed. During the 1600s, between 150 and 200 million books were printed in Europe. Given that Europe's population at the time was only 78 million, that's about three books for each person.Marshall T. Poe, *A History of Communications: Media and Society from the Evolution of Speech to the Internet* (New York: Cambridge, 2011), 110–11. Of course, books weren't evenly distributed, since most people couldn't read or write and had no use for them. At the same time, though, cheaper, shorter materials were printed that included content that catered more to the "common" person. These early publications were similar to tabloids in that they were sold as news items but featured stories about miracles, monsters, and other sensational or fantastical events. Although not regarded for their content or positive effect on society, these publications quickly grew into what we would recognize today as newspapers and magazines, which we will discuss later.

2. The period that extended from 1450 to 1850 and marked the birth and rise of the first mass medium.

3. The earliest form of communication to be distributed to the masses, which led to significant cultural and social transformation.

The printing and distribution of books led to cultural transformation, just as radio, television, and the Internet did. The rise of literacy and the availability of literature, religious texts, dictionaries, and other reference books allowed people to learn things for themselves, distinguish themselves from others by what they read and what they knew, and figuratively travel beyond their highly localized lives to other lands and time periods. Before this, people relied on storytellers, clergy, teachers, or other leaders for information. In this way, people may only be exposed to a few sources of information throughout their lives and the information conveyed by these sources could be limited and distorted. Remember, only a select group of people, usually elites, had access to manuscripts and the ability to read them. Publishers still acted as gatekeepers, just as mass media outlets do today, which limited the content and voices that circulated on the new medium. But despite that, the world was opened up for many in a way it had never before been.

Demand for books quickly expanded in the United States in the late 1700s and early 1800s. Technological advances in the manufacturing of paper and cheaper materials for binding books—for example, using cloth covers instead of leather—helped reduce the cost of books. Dime novels were very popular in the United States in the mid to late 1800s. These books, also called pulp fiction, had content that was appealing to mass audiences who enjoyed dramatic, short fiction stories. During this time, publishing became more competitive and profit driven—characteristics that still apply to the industry today. While radio and magazines flourished in the first half of the twentieth century, the book industry didn't fare as well. Many people turned to these new media over books, since radio and magazines were generally cheaper and provided more timely information about major world events like the World Wars and the Great Depression.

The book industry today caters to a variety of audiences and markets. The following are the major divisions of book publishing and their revenue from 2009, which is the most recent Census data available:"Table 1137, Book Publishers' Net Shipments: 2007 to 2010," United States Census, accessed September 20, 2012, http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/tables/12s1137.pdf.

- Textbooks (K–12 and college)—$9,891,000,000
- Children's books—$2,522,000,000
- Reference books—$625,000,000
- Professional, technical, and scholarly books—$3,838,000,000
- Adult fiction, nonfiction—$5,862,000,000

These numbers show that the book industry is still generating much revenue, but books, like other forms of media, have had to adapt to changing market forces and technologies. Whereas local bookstores used to be the primary means by which

people acquired new and used books, the expansion of chain bookstores and the advent of online book purchasing have led to a dramatic decline in local and independent booksellers. Well-known independent bookstores in larger cities—for example, Tattered Cover in Denver, Colorado; Powell's Books in Portland, Oregon; Strand Book Store in New York City; and Left Bank Books in St. Louis, Missouri—compete against national chains to attract customers. The closure of nearly four hundred Borders bookstores in 2011 after the company filed for bankruptcy also shows that even chain bookstores are struggling. In terms of technological changes, many book publishers have embraced e-books in the past few years as a way to adapt to new digital media and devices such as e-readers, but they have also had to develop new ways to prevent unauthorized reproduction and "pirating" of digital versions of books. In 2011, for the first time, e-books became the number one format for adult fiction and young adult titles, surpassing print.Andi Sporkin, "Bookstats 2012 Highlights," *Association of American Publishers*, July 18, 2012, accessed September 20, 2012, http://www.publishers.org/press/74. Despite this fact, brick-and-mortar stores are still the primary channel through which books are sold—but for how much longer?

Newspapers

Newspapers[4], more than books, serve as the chronicle of daily life in our society, providing regular coverage of events, both historic and mundane, and allowing us to learn about current events outside of our community and country. While radio, television, and online news serve that function for most people now, newspapers were the first mass medium to collect and disseminate such information. The first regularly (weekly) published newspaper emerged in Paris in 1631, and others popped up in Florence, Rome, and Madrid over the next few decades. The first daily newspaper was published in Leipzig, Germany, in 1660. In just a little over a hundred years, in the late 1700s, large European cities like London and Paris had around two hundred newspapers, some published daily, some weekly, and some at other intervals. Not surprisingly, literacy rates also increased during this time.Marshall T. Poe, *A History of Communications: Media and Society from the Evolution of Speech to the Internet* (New York: Cambridge, 2011), 112. Also around 1700, newspapers were published in the colonies that would later become the United States. The following timeline marks some of the historical developments in newspaper publishing from colonial times to the Internet age.

4. The first medium to serve as the chronicle of daily life in our society, providing regular coverage of events, both historic and mundane, and allowing us to learn about current events outside of our community and country.

Timeline of Events in Newspaper Publishing James Breig, "Early American Newspapering," *Colonial Williamsburg Journal* (Spring 2003), accessed September 20, 2012, http://www.history.org/foundation/journal/spring03/journalism.cfm; Richard Campbell, Christopher R. Martin, and Bettina Fabos, *Media & Culture: An Introduction to Mass Communication*, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: Bedford St. Martin's, 2007), 274–230.

- **1690.** First newspaper in North America is published in Boston. Due to its anti-British tone, it is banned after the first issue is printed.
- **1704.** The *Boston News-Letter* is the first newspaper in the colonies to be published regularly. Its content is not timely, since its focus on European events means the information is weeks to months old by the time it is published.
- **1721.** James Franklin, Benjamin Franklin's older brother, publishes the *New England Courant* in Boston, which caters to business and political leaders.
- **1729.** Benjamin Franklin runs the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, which is well respected for the quality of its contents and also generates revenue through advertisements.
- **1784.** The first daily newspaper is published in the United States—*The Pennsylvania Packet and Daily Advertiser*."Today in History: September 21," *The Library of Congress: American Memory*, accessed September 20, 2012, http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/today/sep21.html.
- **1833.** Benjamin Day, founder of the *New York Sun*, changes the pricing, distribution, and content of newspapers by cutting the cost of the paper to one penny per issue and selling them individually on the streets and through vendors rather than through subscriptions, which are cost prohibitive for many people. The *Sun* focuses more on "human-interest stories," which attracts readers and begins a surge of other competing "penny papers" using a similar model.
- **1848.** The *Associated Press* is formed when six New York City papers agree to share incoming information from dispatched reporters and other news sources far away. The news is transmitted through telegraph and other cable/wire services—the label "wire service" or "news wire" is still used today.
- **Late 1800s.** Many newspapers practice "yellow journalism" to be competitive, meaning they publish sensational news items like scandals and tragedies and use attention-getting (in terms of size and wording) headlines to attract customers. The *New York Times* begins to distance itself from yellow journalism and helps to usher in a period of more factual and rigorous reporting and a split between objective and tabloid publications that begins in the early 1900s and continues today.
- **1955.** The *Village Voice* is published in Greenwich Village, New York, which marks the beginning of the rise of underground and alternative newspapers.
- **1980.** The *Columbus Dispatch* is the first newspaper to publish content online.
- **1982.***USA Today* is launched, which challenges long-standing newspaper publishing norms and adopts a more visual style. The size, layout, use of color and images, and content is designed to attract a new newspaper audience, one used to watching television news.

- **1998.** The *Drudge Report*, an online gossip and news aggregation site, gains national attention when it breaks a story about *Newsweek* magazine delaying the publication of a story about then-president Clinton's affair with intern Monica Lewinsky.Tony Rogers, "Website Profile: The Drudge Report," *About.com*, accessed September 20, 2012, http://journalism.about.com/od/webjournalism/a/drudge.htm. Although online news sites have been around for years, this marks the beginning of the rise of Internet-based news gathering and reporting by people with little to no training in or experience with journalism. Traditional journalists criticize this practice, but such news outlets attract millions of readers and begin to change the way we think about how news is gathered and reported and how we get our news.

Newspapers have faced many challenges in recent decades—namely, the increase of Internet-based news, leading to a major decline in revenue and readers. In recent years major papers like the *Rocky Mountain News* have gone out of business completely, and others like the *Seattle Post Intelligencer* have switched to online-only formats. Additionally, major newspapers like the *Chicago Sun Times* and the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* have declared bankruptcy due to heavy debt burdens.Paul Grabowicz, "The Transition to Digital Journalism," *UC Berkeley: Knight Digital Media Center*, September 8, 2012, accessed September 20, 2012, http://multimedia.journalism.berkeley.edu/tutorials/digital-transform/print-editions-decline. To deal with these financial issues, papers have laid off employees, cut resources for reporters, closed international bureaus, eliminated rural or distant delivery, reduced frequency of publication, and contracted out or partnered on content. This last strategy received national attention recently when it was found out that hundreds of newspapers were using the services of a company called Journatic to create hyperlocal content for them to publish.Hazel Sheffield, "Journatic Busted for Using Fake Bylines," *Columbia Journalism Review: Behind the News*, July 6, 2012, accessed September 20, 2012, http://www.cjr.org/behind_the_news/media_start-up_journatic_buste.php. Hyperlocal content includes information like real-estate transactions, obituaries, school lunch menus, high school sports team statistics, and police activities, which are a considerable drain on already strained newsrooms. However, readers and media critics were surprised to learn that Journatic was paying people in the Philippines to write this content and then publish it under fake names. After news of this spread, many papers announced that they would go back to generating this content using their own resources.David Folkenflik, "Fake Bylines Reveal Hidden Costs of Local News," *National Public Radio*, July 6, 2012, accessed September 20, 2012, http://www.npr.org/2012/07/06/156311078/fake-bylines-reveal-true-costs-of-local-news.

Magazines

Although newspapers were the first record of daily life in the United States, **magazines**[5] were the first national mass medium, reaching people all over the growing nation of the late 1700s and into the 1800s. Although the reach of magazines made them the first national medium, they were generally unsuccessful, and the content of the early magazines was not highly regarded.

Magazine publishers had a difficult time finding success, since postal carriers either refused to deliver magazines because of their weight or charged high postage rates that limited subscribers.

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The high cost of transportation and delivery made magazine subscriptions unaffordable for most people, and the content consisted mostly of stories reprinted from newspapers with the occasional essay on the arts or current events. Toward the middle of the 1800s, magazines began to play a more central role in society. At the time, magazines devoted more content to important issues such as slavery and women's right to vote.Richard Campbell, Christopher R. Martin, and Bettina Fabos, *Media & Culture: An Introduction to Mass Communication*, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: Bedford St. Martin's, 2007), 307. Magazines as a mass medium overcame early challenges to enjoy a period of relative success in the early 1900s and then met one of their biggest challenges, the rise of television, in the mid-1900s. The following timeline traces some of the most important developments and changes in magazines.Richard Campbell, Christopher R. Martin, and Bettina Fabos, *Media & Culture: An Introduction to Mass Communication*, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: Bedford St. Martin's, 2007), 307–26.

Timeline of Events in Magazine Publishing

- **1741.** Colonial magazines are published. As with colonial newspapers, Benjamin Franklin plays a central role getting them started. Unlike newspapers, magazines face more challenges in terms of postage rates and finding an audience. Over the next thirty years, about one hundred magazines are published and go defunct.
- **Early 1800s.** The number of magazines increases to about one hundred in circulation by 1825. Although they generate some revenue through advertising, they still face financial struggles. Most magazines serve a specific community or area and still consist of content that is mostly reprinted from other sources.
- **1820s.** Specialized magazines catering to niche audiences begin to emerge. For example, literary magazines feature the writing of people

5. The first national mass medium, reaching people all over the growing United States of the late 1700s and into the 1800s.

like Mark Twain and Ralph Waldo Emerson, and magazines focus on specific professions or topics such as farming, law, education, or science.

- **1821.** The *Saturday Evening Post* is founded and becomes the longest-published magazine in the United States and the first general-interest magazine to be successfully marketed to a national audience.
- **1828.** The first women's magazine, *Ladies' Magazine*, is founded and marks the beginning of the trend toward targeting women as a distinct audience.
- **1850s.** Magazines pioneer the use of images in printed texts, reproducing high-quality illustrations and sketches, though not photographs.
- **1865.** The *Nation* is published, which focuses on political opinion and caters toward a more educated and liberal readership.
- **1879–early 1900s.** The Postal Act of 1879 is passed, which lowers the cost of postage for magazines. This, along with improvements in rail transportation and mass-production printing, leads to a surge in the number of magazines and the number of subscribers. These changes attract more advertisers, which allows magazine publishers to drop the price per issue below what it actually costs to produce the magazine. This attracts more readers, which attracts more advertisers and allows publishers to make up the loss between subscription and production rates with ad revenue.
- **1900–1960.** This is a peak time for magazine success. The early 1900s sees a rise in investigative journalism that goes into much more depth than newspaper coverage. The 1920s and 1930s see the rise of general-interest magazines such as *Reader's Digest*, *Time*, and *Life*. Magazines play a key role in providing in-depth coverage of the World Wars and start to cover the cultural revolutions of the 1960s when they run into new challenges.
- **1960s and 1970s.** As television explodes as the new mass medium of choice, national magazines lose advertisers to the new audiovisual medium. Audiences (now viewers instead of readers) turn to nightly news programs to follow the civil rights movement, the sexual revolution, and the Vietnam War.
- **1970s–present day.** Magazines adapt to changing times by devoting pages or entire publications to the covering of television and movies. Magazines like *People*, launched in 1974, provide news on a wide range of celebrities. Magazines also adapt by becoming more specialized, trying to appeal more to niche rather than general-interest audiences.

While television forced magazines to adapt to an increasingly popular visual medium, radio and magazines coexisted relatively well. But the clash between print, audio, and visual media in the early 1900s marks an interesting time in the history

of mass media. The growth and spread of print as a mass medium took hundreds of years, which seems like an eternity when compared to the spread of audiovisual media. The lack of and resistance to literacy made the printed medium spread less quickly than audio and visual media, which is not surprising from an evolutionary perspective. Humans evolved to talk, look, and listen, as evidenced by the fact that we have body parts/organs that help us do these things. We did not evolve to read and write, which is why the process of teaching those things is so difficult and time consuming.Marshall T. Poe, *A History of Communications: Media and Society from the Evolution of Speech to the Internet* (New York: Cambridge, 2011), 114. In general, people enjoy watching and listening more than reading and writing. While we had to adapt our brains to decode written language and our arms, hands, and fingers to be able to produce written text, the turn to listening to the radio and watching and listening to television and movies was much more comfortable, familiar, and effortless.

Sound Mass Media

The origins of sound-based mass media, radio in particular, can be traced primarily to the invention and spread of the telegraph.Richard Campbell, Christopher R. Martin, and Bettina Fabos, *Media & Culture: An Introduction to Mass Communication*, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: Bedford St. Martin's, 2007), 113. The **telegraph**[6] was invented in the 1840s and was made practical by Samuel Morse, who invented a system of dots and dashes that could be transmitted across the telegraph cable using electric pulses, making it the first nearly instant one-to-one communication technology. Messages were encoded to and decoded from dots and dashes on either end of the cable. The first telegraph line ran between Washington, DC, and Baltimore, Maryland, in 1844, and the first transcontinental line started functioning in 1861. By 1866, we could send transatlantic telegraphs on a cable that ran across the ocean floor between Newfoundland, Canada, and Ireland. This first cable could only transmit about six words per minute, but it was the precursor to the global communications network that we now rely on every day. Something else was needed, though, to solve some ongoing communication problems. First, the telegraph couldn't transmit the human voice or other messages aside from language translated into coded electrical pulses. Second, anything not connected to a cable—like a ship, for instance—couldn't benefit from telegraph technology. During this time, war ships couldn't be notified when wars ended and they sometimes went on fighting for months before they could be located and informed.

6. Communication device invented in the 1840s that transmitted Morse code across cables using electric pulses, making it the first nearly instant one-to-one communication technology.

Wireless Sound Transmission

As the telegraph was taking off around the world, the physicist Heinrich Hertz began to theorize about electromagnetic energy, which is measurable physical energy in the atmosphere that moves at light speed. Although Hertz proved the

existence of this energy all around us in the atmosphere, it was up to later inventors and thinkers to turn this potential into a mass medium.John R. Bittner, *Mass Communication*, 6th ed. (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1996), 159. Hertz's theories fascinated Italian-born Guglielmo Marconi, who in his late teens began capitalizing on Hertz and others' theories of electromagnetism to inform and further his own experiments. By 1895 his work had enabled him to send a wireless signal about a mile and a half. With this, the **wireless telegraph**[7], which used electromagnetic waves to transmit signals coded into pulses and was the precursor to radio, was born. Marconi traveled to England, where he received a patent on his wireless telegraph machine in 1896. By 1901, Marconi successfully sent a wireless message across the Atlantic Ocean. Marconi became extremely successful, establishing companies in the United States and Europe and holding exclusive contracts with shipping companies and other large businesses. For example, the Marconi Telegraph Company had the communications contract with White Star Lines and was responsible for sending the SOS call that alerted other ships that the Titanic had struck an iceberg. For years, Marconi essentially had a monopoly on the transmission of wireless messages. His success at adapting the already existing system of Morse code to wireless transmission was apparently satisfying enough that Marconi showed little interest in expanding the technology to transmit actual sounds like speech or music.

Although the wireless telegraph machine was the forerunner to radio broadcasting, its inventor did not envision the possibility of sending speech or music instead of Morse code.

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After Marconi, the road to radio broadcast and sound-based mass media was relatively short, as others quickly expanded on his work. As is often the case with rapid technological advancement, numerous experiments and public demonstrations of radio technology—some more successful than others—were taking place around the same time in the late 1800s and early 1900s. This rapid overlapping development has created debate over who first accomplished particular feats. Although working separately, Nathan B. Stubblefield, a melon farmer from Kentucky, and Reginald A. Fessenden, a professor from Pittsburgh, paved the way for **radio**[8] as a mass medium when they broadcast speech and music over a wireless signal in the 1890s.John R. Bittner, *Mass Communication*, 6th ed. (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1996), 160. Although these men were able to transmit weather updates and music, their equipment was much too large and complicated to attract a mass of people eager to own it. Inventions by J. Ambrose Fleming and Lee de Forest paved the way for much more controlled and manageable receivers. Lee de Forest, in particular, was interested in competing with Marconi by advancing wireless technology to be able to transmit speech and music. Despite the contributions of the other inventors mentioned before, de Forest patented more than three hundred inventions and is often referred to as the

7. Communication device that used electromagnetic waves to transmit signals coded into pulses and was the precursor to radio.

8. The first mass medium to carry audio in the form of speech and music over a wireless signal.

"father of radio" because of his improvements on reception, conduction, and amplification of the signals—now including music and speech—sent wirelessly. His improvements on the vacuum tube made the way for radio and television and ushered in a new age of modern electronics.Richard Campbell, Christopher R. Martin, and Bettina Fabos, *Media & Culture: An Introduction to Mass Communication*, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: Bedford St. Martin's, 2007), 116–17. Since the technological advances that paved the way for radio and television happened during this time, we can mark this as the beginning of the "**audiovisual age**[9]" that spanned the years from 1850 to 1990.Marshall T. Poe, *A History of Communications: Media and Society from the Evolution of Speech to the Internet* (New York: Cambridge, 2011), 168.

The Birth of Broadcast Radio

As the technology became more practical and stable, businesses and governments began to see the value in expanding these devices from primarily a point-to-point or person-to-person application to a one-to-many application. It wasn't until 1916 that David Sarnoff, a former Marconi telegraph operator, proposed making radio a household necessity. He suggested that his new employer, the Radio Corporation of America (RCA), invest in a household radio that contained all the necessary parts in one box. His pitch was made more appealing by his suggestion that such a device would make RCA a household name and attract national and international attention.John R. Bittner, *Mass Communication*, 6th ed. (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1996), 161.

Sarnoff's plan to make radio a centerpiece of nearly every US American household was successful, and the still relatively new medium of sound transmission was on its way to becoming the primary means of entertainment and information for many. With the technology now accessible, other key elements of radio as a mass medium like stations, content, financing, audience identification, advertising, and competition began to receive attention.

Timeline of Developments in Radio Thomas H. White, "United States Early Radio History," accessed September 15, 2012, http://earlyradiohistory.us.

- **1909.** First commercial radio station signs on the air as an experimental venture by Dr. Charles David Herrold in San Jose, California, which he primarily uses to advertise for his new School of Radio.
- **1919.** First noncommercial radio station goes on the air at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.
- **1920.** KDKA, the station often credited as signaling the beginning of the age of commercial broadcast radio, receives financial backing from

9. The period that extends from 1850 to 1990 and marks the invention and spread of radio, movies, and television.

Westinghouse (a major company) and gains much national attention for airing election returns following the 1920 presidential election.
- **1921.** The US Commerce Department licenses five radio stations.
- **1922.** The first broadcasting network is created by New York station WEAF to give advertisers a discount and allow them to reach a larger audience at once.
- **1923.** More than 600 commercial and noncommercial radio stations are in operation and about 550,000 radio receivers have been sold to US consumers.
- **1925.** 5.5 million radios are now in use in the United States, making radio a powerful mass medium.
- **Late 1920s.** The National Broadcasting Company (NBC), the largest radio network, begins to form affiliate relationships with independent stations that will broadcast NBC's content to supplement their own programming (a practice that is still used today by radio and television networks). The network/affiliate model allows major networks to concentrate news broadcasting, acting, singing, and technical talent in one place and still have that programming reach people all over the country, which saves time and money.
- **1927.** 25–30 million people listen to a "welcome home party" for Charles Lindbergh, who had just completed the first solo transatlantic flight, making it the largest shared audience experience in history until that point.

How Radio Adapted to Changing Technologies

The 1920s boom in radio created problems as radio waves became so crowded that nearly every radio had poor or sporadic reception. The Radio Act of 1927 and the Federal Communications Act of 1934 helped establish some order and guidelines for frequency use and created a policy that stated any broadcaster using the now government-owned airwaves had to act in the public's interest. As reception became more reliable, programming content became more diverse to include news, dramas, comedies, music, and quiz shows, among others, and radio entered its "golden age." During the 1930s and 1940s, the radio was the center of most US American families' living rooms. Later, as television began to replace the radio as the central part of home entertainment, radio was forced to adapt to the changing marketplace.Richard Campbell, Christopher R. Martin, and Bettina Fabos, *Media & Culture: An Introduction to Mass Communication*, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: Bedford St. Martin's, 2007), 125–45. For example, during the 1950s, radio technology had advanced to the point that it could now be made portable. Since radio was being forced outside the home, radio capitalized on its portability by marketing pocket-sized transistor radios that could go places television could not. Radio also partnered with car manufacturers and soon became a standard feature in new automobiles, something that was very uncommon before the 1950s. Radio also

turned to the music industry to replace the content it had lost to television. Stations that once aired prime-time dramas and comedies now aired popular music of the day, as the "Top 40" format that played new songs in a heavy rotation was introduced. Talk radio also began to grow as radio personalities combined the talk, news, traffic, and music formats during the very popular and competitive "drive time" hours during which many people still listen to the radio while traveling to and from work or school. Even more recently, radio stations have turned to online streaming and podcasts so their content can still make its way to computers and portable devices such as smartphones. Just as radio caught on quickly, however, so did television and movies. In the end, the combination of audio and visual offered by these new media won out over radio.

Visual Mass Media

Humans like to both watch and listen to something at the same time. For at least 140,000 years, humans have been entertained and informed by watching and listening to the things going on around them.Marshall T. Poe, *A History of Communications: Media and Society from the Evolution of Speech to the Internet* (New York: Cambridge, 2011), 154–55. But whether it was watching other humans or listening to the sounds of the forest, it had to happen in the moment, as there was no artificial way to convey images or sounds. It wasn't until about 40,000 years ago that we know our ancestors first began to explore visual media including drawings, paintings, and sculptures. We later know that performing arts became a popular visual medium in societies like ancient Greece, for example, where plays were an important but still relatively new and controversial form of entertainment. Plato's early critiques of theater mirror those that have been targeted toward television and movies more recently.

Plato decried the fact that playwrights seemed to focus their plots on the most unpleasant and unrefined aspects of society, such as lust, greed, and violence. What Plato may not have realized was that the Greek playwrights were continuing a theme that started with the earliest producers of visual media. The drawings, paintings, sculptures, and plays produced until that point shared some human themes—namely, sex, food, drink, wealth, and violence. I'm sure Plato would not be pleased to learn that these themes continue today in more modern forms of visual media like television and movies. Although we can see that visual media have long been a part of human history, they didn't constitute a mass medium until the late 1800s and early 1900s with the advent of motion pictures and television.

Although not a mass medium, ancient Greek theater as a visual medium was critiqued for its content much like movies and television have been in more modern times.

Technology Leading to Visual Mass Media

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As with the birth of any mass medium, technological advances had to take place to move us from interpersonal or group engagement with visual media to mass engagement. In the 1830s, the technologies needed to create photographs were put together in Europe, and photos were in regular circulation by the 1840s. By the late 1800s, photographs could be mass-produced and included in existing print-based mass media like books, newspapers, and magazines. As soon as photographic technology began to circulate, people began to experiment with its limits to see what other potential it held. In the late 1870s, experiments with serial photography were under way, which was the precursor to motion pictures.Tim Dirks, "The History of Film: The Pre-1920s," *Filmsite*, accessed September 15, 2012, http://www.filmsite.org/pre20sintro.html. In the 1890s, Thomas Edison commercialized film, creating a motion picture company and demonstrating the new technology at expos and fairs and inviting guests to come watch short movies of people doing mundane things—for a fee, of course. At the same time, advances in sound recording and wireless transmission of sound were occurring, which was essential to bring together the audio and visual elements of modern movies and television. **Movies**[10] became the first mass medium to combine audio and visual electronic communication. Movie technology developed more quickly than television because it didn't have to overcome challenges presented by electromagnetic transmission and reception.

As was the case with radio, several people were simultaneously working to expand the technology that would soon be known as television. The earliest television was mechanical, meaning that it had to be turned or moved rather than relying on electronics. In 1884, Paul Nipkow invented a mechanical television-like device that could project a visual image of the then famous Felix the Cat. It took a while for this crude version of a television to be turned into a more functional electronic version. In 1923, Vladimir Zworykin improved on this technology, followed closely by John Baird and Philo Farnsworth.Marshall T. Poe, *A History of Communications: Media and Society from the Evolution of Speech to the Internet* (New York: Cambridge, 2011), 158. Collectively, these men are responsible for the invention of **television**[11], which was the first mass medium capable of instantly and wirelessly transmitting audio and visual signals.

Timeline of Developments in Television Technology Federal Communications Commission, "Historical Periods in Television Technology," accessed September 15, 2012, http://transition.fcc.gov/omd/history/tv.

- **Late 1800s.** The cathode ray tube is invented, which serves as the basic picture tube for later televisions. Paul Nipkow invents a scanning disk that separates a picture into small pinpoints of light that can be

10. The first mass medium to combine audio and visual electronic communication.

11. The first mass medium capable of instantly and wirelessly transmitting audio and visual signals.

transmitted line by line and decoded to recreate a rough (low-resolution by the standards of early television) image.

- **1923.** Vladimir Zworykin develops the iconoscope, the first television camera tube capable of converting light rays into electrical signals. At the same time, Philo Farnsworth patents an electronic image dissector tube and John Baird improves on Nipkow's disk. Baird, working in Great Britain, transmits the first live moving pictures in 1926, and Farnsworth, working in the United States, transmits a picture (of a dollar sign) in 1927.
- **1935–39.** Public demonstrations of television capture the attention of people around the world, culminating in the famous demonstration of television by RCA at the 1939 World's Fair.
- **1940.** The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) adopts standards for television transmissions that help commercialize and turn television into a mass medium.
- **1940s–70s.** Television is in its "golden age," dominating the visual medium market.
- **Late 1970s–80s.** Satellite and cable providers challenge network television's dominance.

Television's Golden Age

Television's initial success as a mass medium came largely from formats and programming strategies already tested and used by radio stations. From the perspective of successful radio stations, television stole the best ideas from radio, including prime-time programming and show ideas and even the stars of the shows. For example, the radio show *Candid Microphone* became the television show *Candid Camera,* and radio stars like George Burns became even larger television stars.Richard Campbell, Christopher R. Martin, and Bettina Fabos, *Media & Culture: An Introduction to Mass Communication*, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: Bedford St. Martin's, 2007), 153. Television also secured advertising and sponsorship from many of the same sources as radio, which started a fierce competition between radio and television.

Television's rising popularity and its effect on other forms of entertainment are documented in many ways. For example, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, cities with television stations saw a drop in nightclub attendance, radio listening, and library book circulation, as well as a 20 to 40 percent drop in movie ticket sales.Richard Campbell, Christopher R. Martin, and Bettina Fabos, *Media & Culture: An Introduction to Mass Communication*, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: Bedford St. Martin's, 2007), 156. By 1951, television's status as the most important mass media of the time was cemented, as sales of television sets surpassed radios for the first time. From the mid-1950s until the cable and satellite boom of the 1980s, broadcast television

was in its "golden age." Television was made more prominent with the advent of color broadcasting, which by 1966 was standard for the prime-time lineup at the three major networks (NBC, CBS, and ABC). The rush to include color programming is just one of many examples of the intense competition among the three major networks.

During the golden age of television, the major networks aired very similar types of programs, all aimed at gaining higher ratings and audience shares than the others. Programming was primarily divided into two main categories: information and entertainment. In terms of information, the three big networks viewed their nightly news programs as flagships that helped establish their credibility as a network and helped attract a loyal viewer base. Even today, the networks' news programs are among some of the highest-rated programs on network television. In addition, to meet the requirement by the FCC that stations serve the public interest and offer more informational programs, the networks offered newsmagazines as a more dramatized source of news. These programs, including *Nightline*, *Dateline*, *60 Minutes*, and *20/20*, are still important features of the network lineup that draw in large audiences.

Since the major networks broadcast to the whole country and the three options (NBC, CBS, and ABC) needed programming that appealed to mass audiences, television producers and executives were sometimes reluctant to stray from proven models of success. The typical lineup of sitcoms, hour-long dramas, news programs, sketch comedy and variety shows, and soap operas persisted from the 1950s until the 1980s. During this thirty-year period, the three main networks accounted for 95 percent of prime-time viewership, which meant that almost everyone in the country watching television was watching one of these three networks.Richard Campbell, Christopher R. Martin, and Bettina Fabos, *Media & Culture: An Introduction to Mass Communication*, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: Bedford St. Martin's, 2007), 172. The days of only having three options was about to change, however, and network television saw its influence decline starting in the 1980s. The introduction of FOX as a fourth network signaled a programming change as the new network tried to appeal to a more specific audience with some of its shows. Adult-oriented prime-time cartoons like *The Simpsons* and more diverse sketch comedy shows like *In Living Color* shook up the rather predictable lineup of the other three networks. The networks soon had more than three channels to compete with, however, as cable and satellite became more accessible and affordable and offered many more programming options.

Cable and Satellite Television

Cable and satellite television offered customers many more channel choices, for a fee, and forced broadcast networks to rethink their programming and business model.

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Network and broadcast television was forever changed by the growth of cable and satellite technology. Although the mass medium is still the same (moving images sent from one place to many television sets), the increased competition led to further development and changes to how we, as users, interact with and experience the medium.National Cable and Telecommunications Association, "History of Cable Television," accessed September 15, 2012, http://www.ncta.com/About/About/HistoryofCableTelevision.aspx. Until the early 1970s, the major networks had lobbied the FCC to control and regulate cable television to reduce the potential for competition. Although cable television technology had been around for thirty years, it wasn't until the FCC changed policies in 1972 that cable got the green light to compete directly with the networks. Time, Inc. (which is still a part of Time-Warner Cable) launched a satellite to relay its HBO signal in 1975, and cable magnate Ted Turner launched a satellite for his WTBS station (still on cable as TBS) in 1976. Turner's Cable News Network (CNN) also competed with the networks' monopoly on televised news coverage. Cable television then grew steadily and quickly for the next several years, and many more channels were quickly introduced. Cable was especially attractive to people who lived in mountainous, hilly, or rural areas that had difficulty receiving the broadcast channels' signals. Many people were also happy to give up ugly rooftop antennae that required readjustment for each channel change or to compensate for other signal interference. The price for the access and convenience, however, was a monthly cable charge, which was a big change from the public and free broadcast channels. As cable's subscriber base and channel options grew, different pricing options helped make cable an "easier sell" to potential customers. Additionally, cable companies and satellite television providers compete fiercely with each other, which helps reduce cost. In 2012, 90 percent of US households with televisions subscribed to cable, satellite, or fiber-optic television."Cross Platform Report: Q3 2011," *Nielsen*, accessed September 20, 2012, http://www.nielsen.com/content/corporate/us/en/insights/reports-downloads/2012/cross-platform-report-q3-2011.html. Although this number makes it clear that the days of broadcast networks entering viewers' homes free over the airwaves are over, there is a growing trend of people who are turning back to the free airwaves as a primary source of television. The "Getting Plugged In" box discusses this new phenomenon of "cord cutters" and broadcast television's growing popularity over cable among a new generation of television viewers.

“Getting Plugged In”

Cord Cutters and the New Challenge to Cable Television

For the past few years, cable companies have grown increasingly nervous about a new trend in television-viewing habits. The practice of *cord cutting* refers to people who cancel their cable television packages and rely on broadband Internet service and traditional broadcast television signals to watch the programming they used to receive through monthly cable subscriptions.Mark Rogowsky, “Are Cable TV Carriers Seeing Meaningful Subscriber Degradation Due to Young People Not Signing Up?” *Forbes.com*, June 20, 2012, accessed September 19, 2012, http://www.forbes.com/sites/quora/2012/06/20/are-cable-tv-carriers -starting-to-see-meaningful-subscriber-degradation-due-to-more-young-people -not-signing-up-for-cable-or-satellite-tv-in-their-homes. Although the number of television households in the cord-cutter category increased by approximately one million in 2011, they still only account for about 5 percent of total television households.

Age as a demographic category is key to understanding this phenomenon. There is a generation of television viewers that grew up on free broadcast television, didn’t get cable or satellite when they became popular in the 1980s and 1990s, and still doesn’t pay for television and never will. Market analysts note that this segment of the market is elderly and will not be around for much longer. Many baby boomers who saw the advent of cable and satellite and have long enjoyed the diverse programming their subscriptions offer view their monthly bills as a standard utility and will likely continue subscribing until they die. Generation Xers, who are currently in their thirties and forties, are caught in the middle. Many of these people are technologically savvy and know how to access (and occasionally do access) online television and movies. Many of them may also find their monthly cable or satellite bills annoying but acceptable. This group of people will likely keep their subscriptions as well, out of convenience, but could be tempted to cut the cord if they hit a financial hardship and/or the process of going to an online-only viewing model became easier. Last, we have a generation of people who are in college or are recent graduates who happen to be coming of age during a harsh economic crisis. They have also spent much of their lives watching online videos, television shows, and movies. The thought of committing to a monthly cable or satellite bill that would likely run them upwards of $100 a month when money is tight and they know how to access their entertainment elsewhere doesn’t sound like a winning proposition. In a time when we can get unlimited streaming on

Netflix and Hulu Plus for about $8 a month each, a la carte access to programs through iTunes or Amazon Streaming, or illegal downloads of shows through torrent services, cable and satellite have to face challenges that many of us couldn't have imagined just ten years ago. Even though 98 percent of television viewing still occurs through traditional means (cable, satellite, broadcast, or telephone company), 9 percent of US Americans have cut the cord to rely only on online viewing content, and an additional 11 percent are considering doing the same, which points to the fact that this practice is only going to increase over the coming years."Broadcast TV-Broadband Only Homes Rising Fast," *Marketing Charts*, February 13, 2012, accessed September 19, 2012, http://www.marketingcharts.com/television/broadcast-only-broadband-tv-homes-rising-fast-21076. Luckily for the cable and satellite companies, many subscribers don't cut their services completely, since they may also rely on the company to provide the Internet access they need to switch to online-only viewing.

1. How do you access your television shows and movies? What is your preferred way? How do you think your age group/generation feels about monthly cable/satellite subscriptions?
2. Do you think cable and satellite companies have a future in providing television programming? Why or why not? As we have learned in this chapter already, many forms of media have to adapt as technologies change and competition increases. How might cable and satellite adapt to these changing forces?

The Internet and Digital Media

The "**Internet and digital media age**[12]" began in 1990 and continues today. Whereas media used to be defined by their delivery systems, **digital media**[13] are all similarly constructed with digital, binary code made up of ones and zeros. Instead of paper being the medium for books, radio waves being the medium for sound broadcasting, and cables being the medium for cable television, a person can now read a book, listen to the radio, and access many cable television shows on the Internet. In short, digital media read, write, and store data (text, images, sound, and video) using numerical code, which revolutionized media more quickly than ever before.Shirley Biagi, *Media/Impact: An Introduction to Mass Media* (Boston, MA: Wadsworth, 2007), 173–74.

Just as technological advances made radio and television possible, the Internet would not have been possible without some key breakthroughs. The **Internet**[14] is a

12. The period extending from 1990 until today that has seen the explosion of digital, computer-networked media.
13. Media similarly constructed with digital, binary code made up of ones and zeros.
14. A decentralized communications and information network that relies on the transmission of digital signals through cables, phone lines, and satellites, which are then relayed through network servers, modems, and computer processors.

decentralized communications and information network that relies on the transmission of digital signals through cables, phone lines, and satellites, which are then relayed through network servers, modems, and computer processors. The development of digital code was the first innovation that made way for the Internet and all digital media. Surprisingly, this innovation occurred in the 1940s, leading to the development of the first computers. Second, in 1971, microprocessors capable of reading and storing electronic signals helped make the room-sized computers of the past much smaller and more affordable for individuals. Last, the development of fiber-optic cables in the mid-1980s allowed for the transmission of large amounts of information, including video and sound, using lasers to create pulses of light. These cables began to replace the copper cables used by telephone, television, cable, and satellite companies. Because of these advances, information now travels all around us in the form of light pulses representing digits (digital code) instead of the old electrical pulses.Richard Campbell, Christopher R. Martin, and Bettina Fabos, *Media & Culture: An Introduction to Mass Communication*, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: Bedford St. Martin's, 2007), 45–47.

The birth of the Internet can be traced back to when government scientists were tasked with creating a means of sharing information over a network that could not be interrupted, accidentally or intentionally. More than thirty years ago, those government scientists created an Internet that was much different from what we think of as the Internet today. The original Internet was used as a means of sharing information among researchers, educators, and government officials. That remained its main purpose until the Cold War began to fade and the closely guarded information network was opened up to others. At this time, only a small group of computer enthusiasts and amateur hackers made use of the Internet, because it was still not accessible to most people. Some more technological advances had to occur for the Internet to become the mass medium that it is today.

The information that speeds around us through fiber-optic cables, satellites, and wireless signals is made up of binary code—also called digital code because it is made up of zeros and ones.

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Tim Berners-Lee is the man who made the Internet functional for the masses. In 1989, Berners-Lee created new computer-programming codes that fixed some problems that were limiting the growth of the Internet as a mass medium.Shirley Biagi, *Media/Impact: An Introduction to Mass Media* (Boston, MA: Wadsworth, 2007), 177. The main problem was that there wasn't a common language that all computers could recognize and use to communicate and connect. He solved this problem with the creation of the hypertext transfer protocol (HTTP), which allows people to make electronic connections or links to information on other computers

or servers. He also invented hypertext markup language (HTML), which gave users a common language with which to create and design online content. I actually remember learning HTML code and creating my first (very simple by today's standards) website in 1996. Learning HTML code wasn't something that the masses were going to rush to do, but new software programs and webpage building programs emerged that allowed people to build web content without having to know the code. As if inventing HTTP and HTML wasn't enough, Berners-Lee also invented the first browser, which allowed people to search out information and navigate the growing number of interconnections among computers. Berners-Lee named his new network the "World Wide Web," and he put all his inventions into the public domain so that anyone could use and adapt them for free, which undoubtedly contributed to the web's exploding size. The growing web was navigable using available browsers, but it was sometimes like navigating in the ocean with no compass, a problem that led to the creation of search engines. Yahoo! launched in 1995 and became an instant phenomenon. I remember thinking how cool I was when I got my first yahoo.com e-mail address in 1996! Yahoo's success spawned many more tech companies and the beginning of the "tech bubble" of the late 1990s and early 2000s. The following timeline provides an overview of some of the key developments related to the Internet:

Timeline of Developments in the Internet

- **Late 1960s.** The US Defense Department's Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) begins to develop a communications network called ARPAnet ("the Net" for short) with numerous points of connection (rather than a message coming from one place and going to many) for military and research use that was not as vulnerable to failure related to a technical malfunction, natural disaster, or planned attack.
- **1970–82.** The Net is in its developmental stage, being used primarily by academic and government researchers to send text-based information using e-mail and bulletin boards. Bulletin boards contained information on specific topics such as computer programs, historical events, and health issues.Richard Campbell, Christopher R. Martin, and Bettina Fabos, *Media & Culture: An Introduction to Mass Communication*, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: Bedford St. Martin's, 2007), 44.
- **1982–93.** The Net is in its entrepreneurial stage after an investment by the National Science Foundation is used to create a high-speed communications network with connection points all across the country. The collapse of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s brings an end to the military uses of ARPAnet. By that time people with computer know-how outside of the military had already begun to create many thousands of new connections on the Net, which meant

ARPAnet couldn't ever be turned off (finally fulfilling its original purpose).

- **1993.** The Net has now developed to the point that pictures, video, and sound (in addition to text) can be transmitted. The rapid growth of the Internet during this time is something that none of the developers could have imagined. The number of Internet users doubled each year during the 1990s.
- **2005.** Web 2.0 is realized as the Internet use becomes more social and communal, as evidenced by the popularity of such platforms and websites as Flickr, YouTube, Wikipedia, and Facebook that encourage and enable the creation and sharing of user-generated content.

From the beginning, the Internet was a mass medium like none other. The majority of the content was user generated and the programs needed to create and navigate online content were in the public domain. This fusing of free access to information and user creativity still forms the basis of digital "new media" that are much more user controlled and personal. Demand for Internet access and more user-friendly programs created the consumer side of the net, and old media companies and regular people saw the web as another revenue generator.

A major source of revenue generated by the Internet goes to Internet service providers (ISPs), who charge customers for Internet access. The more reliable and fast the connection, the more expensive the service. Interestingly, old media providers like cable companies (who were competing against satellite companies) and phone companies (who were also struggling after the growth of cell phone and e-mail communication) are the largest providers of high-speed Internet access. In the late 2000s, these companies were bringing in more than $30 billion a year from these services.Shirley Biagi, *Media/Impact: An Introduction to Mass Media* (Boston, MA: Wadsworth, 2007), 182.

Many others make money from the web through traditional exchanges of goods or services for money or by selling space to advertisers. These methods of commerce are not new for any mass media, as they were used in print, radio, and television. Online auction sites like eBay and online stores like Amazon simply moved a traditional commercial exchange to the realm of cyberspace. Advertising online, however, is quite different from advertising in other media. Old media advertisers measure their success with ads based on a corresponding increase or decrease in sales—a method that is not very precise or immediate. Online advertisers, on the other hand, can know exactly how many people see their ads based on the number of site visitors, and they can measure how effective their ad is by how many people click on it. This can allow them to revise, pull, or buy more of an ad quickly based on the feedback. Additionally, certain online environments provide even more user data to advertisers, which allows them to target advertisements. If you, for

example, search for “vacation rentals on Lake Michigan” using a search engine, ads for lake houses or vacation spots may also show up. The social networks that people create on the Internet also create potential for revenue generation. In fact, many people have started to take advantage of this potential by monetizing their personal or social media sites, which you can read more about in the “Getting Real” box.

“Getting Real”

Monetizing the Web: Entrepreneurship and Digital/Social Media

The “Getting Real” boxes in this book have focused on how the concepts we are learning relate to specific careers. Although you might not make a whole career out of being a web entrepreneur, many people are turning to the Internet as an extra source of income. People have been making money off the web for decades now, but sites like eBay really opened people’s eyes, for the first time, to the possibility of spinning something you already have or already do into some extra cash. Anyone can establish a web presence now, whether it’s through starting your own website, building a profile on an existing website like a blog-hosting service, or using a space you already have like your Facebook or Twitter account. Next, you need to think about what it is you’re offering and who it is that might want it. For example, if you have a blog that attracts a regular stream of readers because they like your posts about the weekend party scene in your city, you might be able to utilize a service like Google’s AdSense to advertise on your page and hope that some of your readers click the ads. In this case, you’re offering content that attracts readers to advertisers. This is a pretty traditional way of making money through advertising just as with newspapers and billboards.

Less conventional means of monetizing the web involve harnessing the power of social media. In this capacity, you can extend your brand or the brand of something/someone else. To extend your brand, you first have to brand yourself. Determine what you can offer people—consulting in your area of expertise such as voice lessons, entertainment such as singing at weddings, delivering speeches or writing about your area of expertise, and so on. Then create a web presence that you can direct people back to through your social media promotion. If you have a large number of followers on Twitter, for example, other brands may want to tap into your ability to access that audience to have you promote their product or service. If you follow any celebrities on Twitter, you are well aware that many of their tweets link to a product that they say they love or a website that’s offering a special deal. The marketing agency Adly works with celebrities and others who have a large Twitter audience to send out sponsored tweets from more than 150 different advertisers.Courtney Friel, “Celebrities Finding New, Lucrative Ways to Monetize Their Social Network Presence,” *Foxnews.com*, August 19, 2011, accessed September 19, 2012, http://www.foxnews.com/entertainment/2011/08/19/business-celebrity-tweets. Two movie studios now include in actors’

contracts terms that require them to make a certain number of social mentions of the project on all their social media sites. Another online company, MyLikes (http://www.mylikes.com), works with regular people, too, not just celebrities, to help them monetize their social media accounts.Damian Davila, "How Twitter Celebrities Monetize Their Accounts," *Idaconcpts*, accessed September 19, 2012, http://idaconcpts.com/2011/01/11/how-twitter-celebrities-monetize-their-accounts.

1. How do you think your friends would react if you started posting messages that were meant to make you money rather than connect with them?
2. Do you have a talent, service, or area of expertise that you think you could spin into some sort of profit using social or digital media?
3. What are some potential ethical challenges that might arise from celebrities using their social media sites for monetary gain? What about for people in general?

Internet access is also following people away from their home and work computers, just as radio followed people into their cars. Smartphones and the development of cell phone networks capable of handling data traffic allowed cell phone providers to profit from the web. The convergence of the Internet with personal electronics like smartphones and the use of the Internet for social purposes are key parts of the discussion of personal media and social media that we will take up in Chapter 16 "New Media and Communication".

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Technological advances made possible newer forms of media that displaced others.
    - **The Print Age.** The development of the printing press in Europe around 1450 was the key technological advance that moved us from the manuscript era to the print era. As paper and bookbinding materials became cheaper, books spread around the world and literacy rates increased. Cheaper paper, more advanced printing presses, and faster and more reliable transportation technologies also contributed to the rise of newspapers and magazines as print media.
    - **The Audiovisual Age.** Wireless telegraphy paved the way for radio and television broadcasts. Advances in signal transmission and reception as well as vacuum tube technology made televisions and radios more reliable and compact. Cable and satellite television began to compete with broadcast television, as they provided access to more channels and service in areas where broadcast signal reception was unreliable.
    - **The Internet and Digital Media Age.** The development of digital code, microprocessors, and fiber-optic cables were key technological advances that made the Internet and digital communication possible. Rapid developments around 1990, such as the creation of HTTP and HTML coding and Internet browsers, created what we know today as the World Wide Web.
- Each form of mass media affected society in important ways. Books allowed people to educate themselves and be more selective about the information to which they were exposed rather than relying solely on teachers or clergy. Newspapers chronicled the daily life of societies and provided a public forum for information sharing and debate. Magazines were the first medium to make major advances in the mass printing of photographs, which brought a more visual medium to their audience before the advent of television. Radio allowed masses of people to experience something at the same time, which helped create a more unified national identity and also brought entertainment and news programs into people's homes. Television copied many of radio's ideas and soon displaced the radio as the centerpiece for entertainment in people's homes. The Internet brought a new decentralized and

communal form of media that could not be controlled by any one government or business and allowed for the creation of user-generated content.

- Electronic media especially has had to adapt as new forms of media are invented. Radio, for example, lost much of its advertising revenue to television, which led radio to adapt its programming from news and entertainment to broadcasting music. Radio also took advantage of new technologies to become portable and follow people out of their house. Broadcast television had to diversify its program lineup as cable and satellite providers offered many more channels. All these media, even print, had to adapt to the advent of the digital age. Copyright violations—pirating—become a problem when old media content is digitized, which makes it more easily reproducible and sharable.

EXERCISES

1. Getting integrated: Discuss how technology affects your communication in various contexts including academic, professional, civic, and personal. Also discuss how your engagement with technology changes from context to context. For example, do you use online technology more in one context than another? In what contexts/situations might you prefer "old media" like phone, written letter, or even face-to-face communication?
2. Print and broadcast media have been struggling to survive in a digitized world. Do some research on one of these media to see what some of the current issues are. Why are they struggling? What do you think they could do to remain profitable and relevant?
3. As more media products become digital, issues of ownership and copyright get more attention. Identify some pros and cons of limits on sharing digital media and stricter copyright laws.

15.2 Functions and Theories of Mass Communication

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify key functions of the mass media.
2. Explain how the media functions as a gatekeeper.
3. Discuss theories of mass communication, including hypodermic needle theory, media effects, and cultivation theory.

How does mass communication function differently than interpersonal communication? Do we have relationships with media like we have relationships with people? To answer these questions, we can look at some of the characteristics and functions of mass communication. One key characteristic of mass communication is its ability to overcome the physical limitations present in face-to-face communication. The human voice can only travel so far, and buildings and objects limit the amount of people we can communicate with at any time. While one person can engage in public speaking and reach one hundred thousand or so people in one of the world's largest stadiums, it would be impossible for one person to reach millions without technology.

Another key characteristic of mass communication in relation to other forms of communication is its lack of sensory richness. In short, mass communication draws on fewer sensory channels than face-to-face communication. While smell, taste, and touch can add context to a conversation over a romantic dinner, our interaction with mass media messages rely almost exclusively on sight and sound. Because of this lack of immediacy, mass media messages are also typically more impersonal than face-to-face messages. Actually being in the audience while a musician is performing is different from watching or listening at home. Last, mass media messages involve less interactivity and more delayed feedback than other messages. The majority of messages sent through mass media channels are one way. We don't have a way to influence an episode of *The Walking Dead* as we watch it. We could send messages to the show's producers and hope our feedback is received, or we could yell at the television, but neither is likely to influence the people responsible for sending the message. Although there are some features of communication that are lost when it becomes electronically mediated, mass communication also serves many functions that we have come to depend on and expect.

Functions of Mass Media

The mass media serves several general and many specific functions. In general, the mass media serves information, interpretation, instructive, bonding, and diversion functions:

- **Information function.** We have a need for information to satisfy curiosity, reduce uncertainty, and better understand how we fit into the world. The amount and availability of information is now overwhelming compared to forty years ago when a few television networks, local radio stations, and newspapers competed to keep us informed. The media saturation has led to increased competition to provide information, which creates the potential for news media outlets, for example, to report information prematurely, inaccurately, or partially.
- **Interpretation function.** Media outlets interpret messages in more or less explicit and ethical ways. Newspaper editorials have long been explicit interpretations of current events, and now cable television and radio personalities offer social, cultural, and political commentary that is full of subjective interpretations. Although some of them operate in ethical gray areas because they use formats that make them seem like traditional news programs, most are open about their motives.
- **Instructive function.** Some media outlets exist to cultivate knowledge by teaching instead of just relaying information. Major news networks like CNN and BBC primarily serve the information function, while cable news networks like Fox News and MSNBC serve a mixture of informational and interpretation functions. The in-depth coverage on National Public Radio and the Public Broadcasting Service, and the more dramatized but still educational content of the History Channel, the National Geographic Channel, and the Discovery Channel, serve more instructive functions.
- **Bonding function.** Media outlets can bring people closer together, which serves the bonding function. For example, people who share common values and interests can gather on online forums, and masses of people can be brought together while watching coverage of a tragic event like 9/11 or a deadly tornado outbreak.
- **Diversion function.** We all use the media to escape our day-to-day lives, to distract us from our upcoming exam, or to help us relax. When we are being distracted, amused, or relaxed, the media is performing the diversion function.

The Media as Gatekeeper

Just as a gate controls the flow of traffic, the media acts as a gatekeeper, allowing some messages to travel through and others not.

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In addition to the functions discussed previously, media outlets also serve a **gatekeeping function**[15], which means they affect or control the information that is transmitted to their audiences. This function has been analyzed and discussed by mass communication scholars for decades. Overall, the mass media serves four gatekeeping functions: relaying, limiting, expanding, and reinterpreting.John R. Bittner, *Mass Communication*, 6th ed. (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1996), 11. In terms of relaying, mass media requires some third party to get a message from one human to the next. Whereas interpersonal communication only requires some channel or sensory route, mass media messages need to "hitch a ride" on an additional channel to be received. For example, a *Sports Illustrated* cover story that you read at SI.com went through several human "gates," including a writer, editor, publisher, photographer, and webmaster, as well as one media "gate"—the Internet. We also require more than sensory ability to receive mass media messages. While hearing and/or sight are typically all that's needed to understand what someone standing in front of you is saying, you'll need a computer, smartphone, or tablet to pick up that SI.com cover story. In summary, relaying refers to the gatekeeping function of transmitting a message, which usually requires technology and equipment that the media outlet controls and has access to, but we do not. Although we relay messages in other forms of communication such as interpersonal and small group, we are primarily receivers when it comes to mass communication, which makes us depend on the gatekeeper to relay the message.

In terms of the gatekeeping function of limiting, media outlets decide whether or not to pass something along to the media channel so it can be relayed. Because most commercial media space is so limited and expensive, almost every message we receive is edited, which is inherently limiting. A limited message doesn't necessarily mean the message is bad or manipulated, as editing is a necessity. But a range of forces including time constraints, advertiser pressure, censorship, or personal bias, among others, can influence editing choices. Limiting based on bias or self-interest isn't necessarily bad as long as those who relay the message don't claim to be objective. In fact, many people choose to engage with media messages that have been limited to match their own personal views or preferences. This kind of limiting also allows us to have more control over the media messages we receive. For example, niche websites and cable channels allow us to narrow in on already-limited content, so we don't have to sift through everything on our own.

15. Media outlets function to effect or control the information that is transmitted to their audiences.

Gatekeepers also function to expand messages. For example, a blogger may take a story from a more traditional news source and fact check it or do additional research, interview additional sources, and post it on his or her blog. In this case, expanding helps us get more information than we would otherwise so we can be better informed. On the other hand, a gatekeeper who expands a message by falsifying evidence or making up details either to appear more credible or to mislead others is being unethical.

Last, gatekeepers function to reinterpret mass media messages. Reinterpretation is useful when gatekeepers translate a message from something too complex or foreign for us to understand into something meaningful. In the lead-up to the Supreme Court's June 2012 ruling on President Obama's health-care-overhaul bill, the media came under scrutiny for not doing a better job of informing the public about the core content and implications of the legislation that had been passed. Given that policy language is difficult for many to understand and that legislation contains many details that may not be important to average people, a concise and lay reinterpretation of the content by the gatekeepers (the media outlets) would have helped the public better understand the bill. Of course, when media outlets reinterpret content to the point that it is untruthful or misleading, they are not ethically fulfilling the gatekeeping function of reinterpretation.

In each of these gatekeeping functions, the media can fulfill or fail to fulfill its role as the "fourth estate" of government—or government "watchdog." You can read more about this role in the "Getting Critical" box.

“Getting Critical”

The Media as “Watchdog”

While countries like China, North Korea, Syria, and Burma have media systems that are nearly if not totally controlled by the state regime, the media in the United States and many other countries is viewed as the “watchdog” for the government. This watchdog role is intended to keep governments from taking too much power from the people and overstepping their bounds. Central to this role is the notion that the press works independently of the government. The “freedom of the press” as guaranteed by our First-Amendment rights allows the media to act as the eyes and ears of the people. The media is supposed to report information to the public so they can make informed decisions. The media also engages in investigative reporting, which can uncover dangers or corruption that the media can then expose so that the public can demand change.

Of course, this ideal is not always met in practice. Some people have critiqued the media’s ability to fulfill this role, referring to it instead as a lapdog or attack dog. In terms of the lapdog role, the media can become too “cozy” with a politician or other public figure, which might lead it to uncritically report or passively relay information without questioning it. Recent stories about reporters being asked to clear quotes and even whole stories with officials before they can be used in a story drew sharp criticism from other journalists and the public, and some media outlets put an end to that practice. In terms of the attack-dog role, the twenty-four-hour news cycle and constant reporting on public figures has created the kind of atmosphere where reporters may be waiting to pounce on a mistake or error in order to get the scoop and be able to produce a tantalizing story. This has also been called being on “scandal patrol” or “gaffe patrol.” Media scholars have critiqued this practice, saying that too much adversarial or negative reporting leads the public to think poorly of public officials and be more dissatisfied with government. Additionally, they claim that attack-dog reporting makes it more difficult for public officials to do their jobs.Shelia S. Coronel, “The Media as Watchdog,” Harvard-World Bank Workshop, May 19, 2008, accessed September 19, 2012, http://www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/pnorris/Conference/Conference%20papers/Coronel%20Watchdog.pdf.

1. In what ways do you think the media should function in a democratic society?

2. Do you think the media in the United States acts more as a watchdog, lapdog, or attack dog? Give specific examples to support your answer.
3. In an age of twenty-four-hour news and instant reporting, do you think politicians' jobs are made easier or more difficult? Do you think reporters' jobs are made easier or more difficult? Support your answers.

Theories of Mass Communication

Theories of mass communication have changed dramatically since the early 1900s, largely as a result of quickly changing technology and more sophisticated academic theories and research methods. A quick overview of the state of the media in the early 1900s and in the early 2000s provides some context for how views of the media changed. In the early 1900s, views of mass communication were formed based on people's observation of the popularity of media and assumptions that something that grew that quickly and was adopted so readily must be good. Many people were optimistic about the mass media's potential to be a business opportunity, an educator, a watchdog, and an entertainer. For example, businesses and advertisers saw media as a good way to make money, and the educator class saw the media as a way to inform citizens who could then be more active in a democratic society. As World War I and the Depression came around, many saw the media as a way to unite the country in times of hardship. Early scholarship on mass media focused on proving these views through observational and anecdotal evidence rather than scientific inquiry.

Fast forward one hundred years and newspapers are downsizing, consolidating to survive, or closing all together; radio is struggling to stay alive in the digital age; and magazine circulation is decreasing and becoming increasingly more focused on microaudiences. The information function of the news has been criticized and called "infotainment," and rather than bringing people together, the media has been cited as causing polarization and a decline in civility.Charles C. Self, Edward L. Gaylord, and Thelma Gaylord, "The Evolution of Mass Communication Theory in the 20th Century," *The Romanian Review of Journalism and Communication* 6, no. 3 (2009): 29. The extremes at each end of the twentieth century clearly show that the optimistic view of the media changed dramatically. An overview of some of the key theories can help us better understand this change.

Hypodermic Needle and Beyond

In the 1920s, early theories of mass communication were objective, and social-scientific reactions to the largely anecdotal theories that emerged soon after mass media quickly expanded. These scholars believed that media messages had strong effects that were knowable and predictable. Because of this, they theorized that controlling the signs and symbols used in media messages could control how they were received and convey a specific meaning.Charles C. Self, Edward L. Gaylord, and Thelma Gaylord, "The Evolution of Mass Communication Theory in the 20th Century," *The Romanian Review of Journalism and Communication* 6, no. 3 (2009): 34.

Extending Aristotle's antiquated linear model of communication that included a speaker, message, and hearer, these early theories claimed that communication moved, or transmitted, an idea from the mind of the speaker through a message and channel to the mind of the listener. To test the theories, researchers wanted to find out how different messages influenced or changed the behavior of the receiver. This led to the development of numerous theories related to media effects. Media businesses were invested in this early strand of research, because data that proved that messages directly affect viewers could be used to persuade businesses to send their messages through the media channel in order to directly influence potential customers.

The hypodermic needle theory of media effects claimed that meaning could be strategically placed into a media message that would then be "injected" into or transmitted to the receiver.

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This early approach to studying media effects was called the **hypodermic needle approach**[16] or bullet theory and suggested that a sender constructed a message with a particular meaning that was "injected" or "shot" into individuals within the mass audience. This theory is the basis for the transmission model of communication that we discussed in Chapter 1 "Introduction to Communication Studies". It was assumed that the effects were common to each individual and that the meaning wasn't altered as it was transferred. Through experiments and surveys, researchers hoped to map the patterns within the human brain so they could connect certain stimuli to certain behaviors. For example, researchers might try to prove that a message announcing that a product is on sale at a reduced price will lead people to buy a product they may not otherwise want or need. As more research was conducted, scholars began to find flaws within this thinking. New theories emerged that didn't claim such a direct connection between the intent of a message and any single reaction on the part of receivers. Instead, these new theories claimed that meaning could be partially transferred, that patterns may become less predictable as people are exposed to a particular stimulus

16. An early theory of mass communication that suggests a sender constructs a message with a particular meaning that is "injected" or "shot" into individuals within the mass audience.

more often, and that interference at any point in the transmission could change the reaction.

These newer theories incorporated more contextual factors into the view of communication, acknowledging that both sender and receiver interpret messages based on their previous experience. Scholars realized that additional variables such as psychological characteristics and social environment had to be included in the study of mass communication. This approach connects to the interaction model of communication. In order to account for perspective and experience, mass media researchers connected to recently developed theories in perception that emerged from psychology. The concept of the gatekeeper emerged, since, for the first time, the sender of the message (the person or people behind the media) was the focus of research and not just the receiver. The concepts of perceptual bias and filtering also became important, as they explained why some people interpreted or ignored messages while others did not. Theories of primacy and recency, which we discussed in Chapter 9 "Preparing a Speech", emerged to account for the variation in interpretation based on the order in which a message is received. Last, researchers explored how perceptions of source credibility affect message interpretation and how media messages may affect viewers' self-esteem. By the 1960s, many researchers in mass communication concluded that the research in the previous twenty years had been naïve and flawed, and they significantly challenged the theory of powerful media effects, putting much more emphasis on individual agency, context, and environment.Denis McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*, 6th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2010), 457.

The next major turn in mass communication theory occurred only a few years after many scholars had concluded that media had no or only minimal effects.Denis McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*, 6th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2010), 459. In the 1970s, theories once again positioned media effects as powerful and influential based on additional influences from social psychology. From sociology, mass media researchers began to study the powerful socializing role that the media plays but also acknowledged that audience members take active roles in interpreting media messages. During this time, researchers explored how audience members' schemata and personalities (concepts we discussed in Chapter 2 "Communication and Perception") affect message interpretation. Researchers also focused more on long-term effects and how media messages create opinion climates, structures of belief, and cultural patterns.

In the late 1970s and into the 1980s, a view of media effects as negotiated emerged, which accounts for the sometimes strong and sometimes weak influences of the media. This view sees the media as being most influential in constructing meanings through multiple platforms and representations. For example, the media constructs meanings for people regarding the role of technology in our lives by including

certain kinds of technology in television show plots, publishing magazines like *Wired*, broadcasting news about Microsoft's latest product, airing advertisements for digital cameras, producing science fiction movies, and so on. Although these messages are diverse and no one person is exposed to all the same messages, the messages are still constructed in some predictable and patterned ways that create a shared social reality. Whether or not the media intends to do this or whether or not we acknowledge that how we think about technology or any other social construct is formed through our exposure to these messages is not especially relevant. Many mass communication scholars now seek to describe, understand, or critique media practices rather than prove or disprove a specific media effect.

Additionally, mass communication scholars are interested in studying how we, as audience members, still have agency in how these constructions affect our reality, in that we may reject, renegotiate, or reinterpret a given message based on our own experiences. For example, a technology geek and a person living "off the grid" have very different lives and very different views of technology, but because of their exposure to various forms of media that have similar patterns of messages regarding technology, they still have some shared reality and could talk in similar ways about computers, smartphones, and HD television. Given the shift of focus to negotiated meaning and context, this view of mass communication is more in keeping with the transactional model of communication.

More recent media effects theories acknowledge that media messages do affect the receivers but that receivers also have some agency to reject or reinterpret the message.

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Media Effects

Media effects[17] are the intended or unintended consequences of what the mass media does.Denis McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*, 6th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2010), 465. Many of the key theories in mass communication rest on the assumption that the media has effects on audience members. The degree and type of effect varies depending on the theory. In general, we underestimate the effect that the media has on us, as we tend to think that media messages affect others more than us. This is actually so common that there is a concept for it! The third-person effect is the phenomenon just described of people thinking they are more immune to media influence than others. If this were true, though, would advertisers and public relations professionals spend billions of dollars a year carefully crafting messages aimed at influencing viewers?

17. The intended or unintended consequences of what the mass media does.

There are certain media effects that are fairly obvious and most of us would agree are common (even for ourselves). For example, we change our clothes and our plans because we watch the forecast on the Weather Channel, look up information about a band and sample their music after we see them perform on a television show, or stop eating melons after we hear about a salmonella outbreak. Other effects are more difficult to study and more difficult for people to accept because they are long term and/or more personal. For example, media may influence our personal sense of style, views on sex, perceptions of other races, or values just as our own free will, parents, or friends do. It is difficult, however, to determine in any specific case how much influence the media has on a belief or behavior in proportion to other factors that influence us. Media messages may also affect viewers in ways not intended by the creators of the message. Two media effects that are often discussed are reciprocal and boomerang effects.Denis McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*, 6th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2010), 466.

The **reciprocal effect**[18] points to the interactive relationship between the media and the subject being covered. When a person or event gets media attention, it influences the way the person acts or the way the event functions. Media coverage often increases self-consciousness, which affects our actions. It's similar to the way that we change behavior when we know certain people are around and may be watching us. For example, the Occupy Movement that began on Wall Street in New York City gained some attention from alternative media and people using micromedia platforms like independent bloggers. Once the movement started getting mainstream press attention, the coverage affected the movement. As news of the Occupy movement in New York spread, people in other cities and towns across the country started to form their own protest groups. In this case, media attention caused a movement to spread that may have otherwise remained localized.

The **boomerang effect**[19] refers to media-induced change that is counter to the desired change. In the world of twenty-four-hour news and constant streams of user-generated material, the effects of gaffes, blunders, or plain old poor decisions are much more difficult to control or contain. Before a group or person can clarify or provide context for what was said, a story could go viral and a media narrative constructed that is impossible to backtrack and very difficult to even control. A recent example of such an effect occurred at the University of Virginia when the governing body of the university forced President Teresa A. Sullivan to resign. The board was not happy with the president's approach to dealing with the changing financial and technological pressures facing the school and thought ousting her may make room for a president who was more supportive of a corporate model of university governance.Richard Pérez-Peña, "Ousted Head of University Is Reinstated in Virginia," *New York Times*, June 26, 2012, accessed November 11, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/27/education/university-of-virginia-reinstates-

18. The interactive relationship between the media and the subject being covered through which the media attention received by a person or event influences the way the person acts or the way the event functions.

19. Media-induced change that is counter to the desired change.

ousted-president.html?pagewanted=all. When the story picked up local and then national media coverage, students, faculty, and alumni came together to support Sullivan, and a week later she was reinstated. Instead of the intended effect of changing the direction and priorities for the university, the board's actions increased support for the president, which will also likely add support to her plans for dealing with the issues.

Cultivation Theory

Cultivation theory[20] is a media effects theory created by George Gerbner that states that media exposure, specifically to television, shapes our social reality by giving us a distorted view on the amount of violence and risk in the world. The theory also states that viewers identify with certain values and identities that are presented as mainstream on television even though they do not actually share those values or identities in their real lives.Em Griffin, *A First Look at Communication Theory*, 7th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2009), 352–53. Drawing on cultivation as it is practiced in farming, Gerbner turned this notion into a powerful metaphor to explain how the media, and television in particular, shapes our social realities. Just as a farmer plants seeds that he or she then cultivates over time to produce a crop, the media plants seeds in our minds and then cultivates them until they grow into our shared social reality.

Over decades of exploring cultivation theory, Gerbner made several well-supported conclusions that are summarized as follows:

- Prime-time television shows and weekend morning children's programming have been found to contain consistently high amounts of violence over the past thirty years.
- Older people, children, African Americans, and Latino/as are more likely to be shown as victims of violence than are their young-adult, middle-aged, and/or white counterparts. This disparity is more meaningful when we realize that these groups are also underrepresented (relative to their percentage in the general population) on these shows while their vulnerability to violence is overstated.

Cultivation theory states that heavy television viewing cultivates, or grows, certain ways of thinking about the world that are distorted.

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20. Media effects theory that states that media exposure, specifically to television, shapes our social reality by giving us a distorted view on the amount of violence and risk in the world.

- The effects of television viewing on our worldview build up over years, but in general, people who are more heavy viewers perceive the world as more dangerous than do light viewers. Gerbner coined the phrase "mean world syndrome," which refers to the distorted view of the world as more violent and people as more dangerous than they actually are.
    - Heavy viewers predict that their odds of being a victim of violence within the next week are 1 in 10, while light viewers predicted 1 in 100. Real crime statistics give a more reliable estimate of 1 in 10,000.
    - Heavy viewers fear walking alone on the street more than do light viewers, believing that criminal activity is actually ten times more prevalent than it actually is.
    - Heavy viewers believe that more people are involved in law enforcement and that officers draw and use their weapons much more than is actually the case.
    - Heavy viewers are generally more suspicious of others and question their motives more than do light viewers (the basis of the mean world syndrome).
- Given that most people on television are portrayed as politically moderate and middle class, heavy viewers are more likely to assume those labels even though heavy users tend to be more working class or poor and more politically conservative than moderate. In short, they begin to view themselves as similar to those they watch on television and consider themselves a part of the mainstream of society even though they are not.

"Getting Competent"

Applying Media Theories

Although most do not get mass public attention, there are many media criticism and analysis organizations that devote much time and resources to observing, studying, and/or commenting on how the media acts in practice, which often involves an implicit evaluation of media theories we have discussed so far, in particular media effects theories. Media outlets and the people who send messages through media outlets (i.e., politicians, spokespeople, and advertisers) are concerned about the effects and effectiveness of their messaging. As we already learned, the pervasive view of media effects today is that media messages do affect people, but that people have some agency in terms of how much or little they identify with or reinterpret a message.

To understand media effects, media criticism organizations do research on audience attitudes and also call on media commentators to give their opinions, which may be more academic and informed or more personal and partisan. In either case, taking some time to engage with these media criticism organizations can allow you to see how they apply mass communication theories and give you more information so you can be a more critical and informed consumer of media. You can find a list of many media criticism organizations at the following link: http://www.world-newspapers.com/media.html. Some of these organizations have a particular political ideology or social/cultural cause that they serve, so be cautious when choosing a source for media criticism to make sure you know what you're getting. There are also more objective and balanced sources of media criticism. Two of my personal favorites that I engage with every week are CNN's show *Reliable Sources* (http://reliablesources.blogs.cnn.com) and the public radio show *On the Media* (http://www.onthemedia.org). *Reliable Sources* even has an implicit reference to reciprocal effects in its show description, stating, "The press is a part of every story it covers.""About This Show," *CNN Reliable Sources*, accessed September 20, 2012, http://reliablesources.blogs.cnn.com. *On the Media* ran a story that implicitly connects to cultivation theory, as it critiques some of the media's coverage of violence and audiences' seeming desensitization to it.Bernie Bernstein, "The Story of the Times Gory Empire State Shooting Photo," *On the Media*, August 24, 2012, accessed September 20, 2012, http://www.onthemedia.org/blogs/on-the-media/2012/aug/24/story-times-gory-empire-state-shooting-photo1.

1. Of the "functions of mass media" discussed earlier in the chapter, which functions do media criticism organizations like the ones mentioned here serve? Specifically, give examples of how these organizations fulfill the gatekeeping functions and how they monitor the gatekeeping done by other media sources.
2. Since media criticism organizations like *Reliable Sources* and *On the Media* are also media sources (one a television show and one a radio show), how might hey be contributing to reciprocal effects?
3. Using the links provided, find a substantial article, study, or report that analyzes some media practice such as the covering of a specific event. Apply some aspect of media effects from the chapter to the story. How might media effects theory help us understand the criticism being raised?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The mass media serves information, interpretation, instructive, bonding, and diversion functions.
- As a gatekeeper, the media functions to relay, limit, expand, and reinterpret information.
- The hypodermic needle theory of mass communication suggests that a sender constructs a message with a particular meaning that is "injected" into individuals within a mass audience.
- Theories of media effects explore the intended or unintended effects of what the media does. Theories have claimed strong effects, meaning that media messages can directly and intentionally influence audience members. They have also claimed weak effects, meaning that media messages have no little power over viewers. More recently, theories have claimed negotiated effects, meaning that media messages do affect viewers but that viewers also have some agency to identify with, reject, or reinterpret a message.
- Cultivation theory explores a particular kind of media effect claiming that media exposure, specifically to television, shapes our social reality by giving us a distorted view on the amount of violence and risk in the world.

EXERCISES

1. Which function of mass media (information, interpretation, instructive, bonding, or diversion) do you think is most important for you and why? Which is most important for society and why?
2. What ethical issues are created by the gatekeeping function of the media? What strategies or suggestions do you have for bypassing this function of the media to ensure that you get access to the information you want/need?
3. Getting integrated: Discuss media messages that have influenced or would influence you in a professional, academic, personal, and civic context.

15.3 Mass Communication and Ethics

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Discuss patterns of ownership and control as they currently exist in the media.
2. Explain the relationship between the media and globalization.
3. Evaluate the diversity (or lack thereof) of representations in the media and discuss potential effects.
4. Employ media-literacy skills to evaluate media messages.

Given the potential for mass communication messages to reach thousands to millions of people, the potential for positive or negative consequences of those messages exceed those of interpersonal, small group, or even public communication messages. Because of this, questions of ethics have to be closely considered when discussing mass communication and the media. In this section, we will discuss how media-ownership regulations, globalization, and representations of diversity tie in with mass communication ethics.

Media Control and Ownership

Media interests and ownership have become more concentrated over the past few decades as a result of deregulation. Deregulation refers to the overturning or revising of policies that were in place to ensure that media outlets serve the interests of the public and include diverse viewpoints, programs, and ownership. Deregulation occurred as a result of the rapid technological changes in the 1980s and 1990s, including the growth of cable and satellite outlets. The argument for deregulation was to make the overall market for network, cable, satellite, and other media outlets more competitive.

Timeline of Changes Made by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Caridad Austin, "Overwhelmed by Big Consolidation: Bringing Back Regulation to Increase Diversity in Programming That Serves Minority Audiences," *Federal Communications Law Journal* 63, no. 3 (2011): 746–48.

Restrictions on the number of radio and/or television stations a single person could own have lessened over the years, allowing individuals to control multiple media outlets.

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- **1954–84.** National ownership is limited to seven stations and each station is required to be in a separate geographic market.
- **1984.** The FCC expands ownership to twelve stations as long as the number of stations owned doesn't reach more than 25 percent of the national market
- **1996.** The Telecommunications Act eliminates a maximum on number of stations that one person or entity can own, as long as they do not reach more than 35 percent of the national market.
- **2003.** Cross-media ownership rules are relaxed, which allows for a person or entity to own both newspaper and broadcast outlets and radio and television outlets. The FCC increases the maximum audience one person or entity can reach to 45 percent of the national market, but Congress intervenes and reduces that to 39 percent.

The pressure to lessen regulations came as media outlets struggled to keep up with increased competition and technological changes and saw mergers and consolidations as a way to save money and keep a competitive edge. Television was one of the first forms of electronic mass media to begin to merge. Companies that you're familiar with now but probably didn't know were once separate entities include Time-Warner Cable (formed from the 1989 merger of Time, Inc. and Warner Communications, Inc.). General Electric, a company we may know for making refrigerators and stoves, bought the NBC television network in 1986. These are just two of the many megamergers that have occurred in the past few decades."Media Mega Mergers: A Timeline," *Common Cause: Holding Power Accountable*, accessed September 20, 2012, http://www.commoncause.org/site/pp.asp?c=dkLNK1MQIwG&b=4923181. The merger of these media companies was meant to provide a synergy that could lower costs and produce higher profits by, for example, merging Disney (with its expertise and market share of children's entertainment) and the broadcast network ABC (with its expertise in television and news).

As computers and the Internet began to enter households, media companies wanted to take advantage of the prospect of providing additional media services under one umbrella. **Media convergence**[21] refers to the merging of technologies that were previously developed and used separately.Philip Rayner, Peter Wall, and Stephen Kruger, *Media Studies: The Essential Resource* (London: Routledge, 2004), 249. One such convergence that affects many if not most of you reading this book is the creation of broadband Internet access through existing cable lines and the bundling of cable and high-speed Internet services. This marked the beginning of a rush, on the part of media conglomerates, to own the methods of distribution for media messages as a means of then controlling the devices and technology that can be used on them. A recent and well-known example of this was iPhone's exclusive contract with AT&T. For the first few years that iPhones were on the market, AT&T was the only service provider that worked with the phones. To handle the data load needed to service all the new phones, AT&T had to rush and spend millions of dollars to upgrade its cellular network. These moves help preserve the media conglomerates' power, because smaller, independent, or competing companies cannot afford the time, resources, and money needed to build a competing or even functional distribution mechanism.

Consolidated media ownership has led to a decrease in localism in terms of local news and local reporters, radio DJs, and editors.Caridad Austin, "Overwhelmed by Big Consolidation: Bringing Back Regulation to Increase Diversity in Programming That Serves Minority Audiences," *Federal Communications Law Journal* 63, no. 3 (2011): 734. Since business is handled from a central hub that might be hundreds or thousands of miles away from a market the media outlet serves, many of the media jobs that used to exist in a city or region have disappeared. While media consolidation has led to some structural and cultural changes in the United States, similar forces are at work in the process of globalization.

Media and Globalization

Globalization[22] refers to a complex of interconnecting structural and cultural forces that aid the spread of ideas and technologies and influence the social and economic organization of societies. Just as modernization in the form of industrialization and then later a turn toward an information-based society spread across the globe, so do technologies and the forms of media they create. In all these cases, the spread of ideas, technologies, and media is imbalanced, as we will discuss more later. This type of cultural imperialism is often criticized as being a part of globalization, and scholars acknowledge that cultural imperialism is largely achieved through media messages.Eugenia Siapera, *Understanding New Media* (London: Sage, 2012), 23–26.

21. The merging of technologies that were previously developed and used separately.

22. A complex of interconnecting structural and cultural forces that aid the spread of ideas and technologies and influence the social and economic organization of societies.

Media imperialism[23] refers to the domination of other countries through exported media and the values and ideologies they contain.Philip Rayner, Peter Wall, and Stephen Kruger, *Media Studies: The Essential Resource* (London: Routledge, 2004), 242. Just as corporations have helped further globalization, media companies have expanded into multinational conglomerates in such a way that allows them to have power and influence that is difficult for individual nations to regulate or control. During the first seventy or so years of electronic mass media, countries could more easily control messages that were sent through cables or other hard structures. For example, telegraph, telephone, and television lines could be cut and even radio television stations that broadcast over the airwaves could be taken offline by cutting the power to the transmitter. As more information became digitized and sent via satellite, countries had much more difficulty limiting what could get in and out of their borders.

Media-fueled cultural imperialism is critiqued because of the concern that the imported cultural images and values will end up destroying or forever changing the cultural identity of the countries being "occupied" by foreign media. The flow of media is predictable and patterned. The cultural values of more-developed Western and Northern countries flow via media messages to the global East and South, mimicking the flow of power that has existed for centuries with the western and northern hemispheres, primarily Europe and the United States, politically and economically dominating countries in the southern and eastern hemispheres such as those in Asia, South America, and Africa. As with any form of imperialism, the poorest countries are the ones who are the most vulnerable and subjected to the most external control.Philip Rayner, Peter Wall, and Stephen Kruger, *Media Studies: The Essential Resource* (London: Routledge, 2004), 243. The reason more-developed countries dominate the media in other countries stems from available resources and knowledge needed to produce and transmit media content. Developing countries lack the same level of infrastructure (such as fiber-optic cables and satellite systems), technical expertise, and technology needed to produce their own content, which makes it cheaper to purchase Western, predominantly US American, content to fuel the growing desire of people in these countries to have access to media. This creates a negative cycle in which poorer countries use what resources they do have to carry Western content, which prevents them from investing in additional organic and local content and creates a demand for more Western content. Critics have also focused on the quality of the content that is exported, which is only representative of a narrow range of Western identities and values. Content tends to be dramatized programs like *Baywatch*, which at one point was the most-watched television program in the world. Dramas are preferred because humor is more likely to be lost in translation, while viewers can often identify with stock plot lines in dramas, which make the shows easier to translate and attracts a larger audience. The downside to this is that these narrowly chosen shows that run over and over in a specific country contribute to a stereotypical view of what life in the United States is like.

23. The domination of other countries through exported media and the values and ideologies they contain.

Not all the discussion of and scholarship on globalization and the media is negative. More recently, much research has focused on the notion of cultural hybridity and the ways in which some cultures take in foreign, predominantly Western media messages and representations and integrate them into existing cultural beliefs and practices. For example, one scholar writes about a quartet in Africa that takes European chamber music and incorporates African rhythms and another group that takes American hip-hop music and gives it a more traditional African flair.Philip Rayner, Peter Wall, and Stephen Kruger, *Media Studies: The Essential Resource* (London: Routledge, 2004), 246. Additionally, the emergence of social and personal media allows users in specific countries to generate their own content and adopt and utilize media platforms in their own ways. As we will learn later, social and personal media have been used to overthrow oppressive governments and to increase the flow of information in places where it was once restricted. So, in these cases, we can see that the ability of certain forms of communication to cross borders has led to positive change.

We can even examine the spread of personal media and social media as an example of globalization. Here, rather than a specific message or set of cultural values being distributed around the world, a platform was made available and adopted in a more democratic, less imperialistic way. Social media, unlike more traditional modes of media, bring people together in more self-determined ways. For example, people can connect over the Internet to a blogger with a shared interest and interact with one another via comments or other means.

Media and Representation

Another area of concern for those who study mass media is the representation of diversity (or lack thereof) in media messages. The FCC has identified program, ownership, and viewpoint diversity as important elements of a balanced mass media that serves the public good.Caridad Austin, "Overwhelmed by Big Consolidation: Bringing Back Regulation to Increase Diversity in Programming That Serves Minority Audiences," *Federal Communications Law Journal* 63, no. 3 (2011): 736–42. This view was enforced through the Fairness Doctrine that was established in 1949 and lasted until the early 1980s when it began to be questioned by those in favor of media deregulation. The Fairness Doctrine was eventually overturned in 1987, but the FCC tried in 2003 to reinstate policies that encourage minority ownership of media outlets, which they hoped in turn would lead to more diverse programming. It remains to be seen whether or not minority-owned media outlets will produce or carry more diverse programming, but it is important to note that the deregulation over the past few decades has led to a decrease in the number of owners of media outlets who come from minority groups.

Scholars have raised concerns about the number of characters from minority groups on television relative to the groups' percentage of the population. Perhaps even more concerning is the type of characters that actors from minority groups play and the types of shows on which they appear. Whether we want them to be or not, the people we see featured in media messages, especially those who appear frequently on television, in movies, in magazines, or in some combination of the three, serve as role models for many that view them. These people help set the tone for standards of behavior, beauty, and intelligence, among other things. **Social learning theory**[24] claims that media portrayals influence our development of schemata or scripts, especially as children, about different groups of people.Nancy Signorielli, "Minorities Representation in Prime Time: 2000–2008," *Communication Research Reports* 26, no. 4 (2009): 324. For example, a person who grows up in a relatively homogenous white, middle-class environment can develop schemata about African Americans and Latina/os based on how they are depicted in media messages. Cultivation theory, which we discussed earlier, also supports the notion that media representations affect our perceptions and actions. Since media messages, overall, are patterned representations, they cultivate within users a common worldview from the seeds that are planted by a relatively narrow set of content. For example, people in television shows are disproportionately portrayed as middle-class professionals. In reality, about 67 percent of people working in the United States have blue-collar or service-industry jobs, but they only make up about 10 percent of the people on television.Em Griffin, *A First Look at Communication Theory*, 7th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2009), 351.

African Americans, Latina/os, and women are underrepresented in television, and people over the age of sixty-five are the most-excluded group.Em Griffin, *A First Look at Communication Theory*, 7th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2009), 351. Studies show that there is less diversity in mediated messages relative to the population as a whole and that the images and messages in the media contain certain themes that rely on stereotypes and further reduce the complexity of our society. Over time, these recurring images and messages affect what we think and how we view the world. In particular, research based on social learning and cultivation theories find that people who watch more television have views that reflect what they see in the programming they watch.

Even though the majority of workers in the United States classify as blue-collar or service workers, they only make up about 10 percent of the people on television.

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Looking specifically at television, representations of African Americans on prime-time shows (those that air between 7 and 11 p.m.) are actually proportional to their percentage of the population. Whites, however, are

24. States that media portrayals influence our development of schemata or scripts, especially as children, about different groups of people.

overrepresented, meaning there is a larger percentage of white people on prime-time shows than there is in our actual population. This disparity can be accounted for by pointing out that Latina/o, Native, and Asian Americans, as well as African American females, are underrepresented if not invisible in much of the media.Nancy Signorielli, "Minorities Representation in Prime Time: 2000–2008," *Communication Research Reports* 26, no. 4 (2009): 324–27. For example, a study of minority characters on prime-time television between 2001 and 2008 found that Latina/os make up 5 percent of the characters despite being 16 percent of the population.

As the number of minority-focused programs, especially sitcoms, has decreased in the past ten years, minority characters have diffused more into other shows. While this integration is positive in some ways, there are still many examples of shows on which a minority character is the lone person of color or gay or lesbian person. From the view of social learning and cultivation theory, this is problematic, since many people, especially children, may form their early perceptions of difference based on interactions with characters in media messages. So unless viewers intentionally seek out diverse programming, they will likely mostly see people with dominant identities represented in the media they consume.Nancy Signorielli, "Minorities Representation in Prime Time: 2000–2008," *Communication Research Reports* 26, no. 4 (2009): 333–34.

Unfortunately, there has been a similar lack of diversity found among new media. In a first-of-its-kind study of gender representation in online news sources, the Global Media Monitoring Project found after analyzing news stories on seventy-six websites in sixteen countries that only 36 percent of the stories were reported by women, and women were the focus of only 23 percent of all the stories written.Global Media Monitoring Project, 2010, "Who Makes the News?" accessed November 11, 2012, http://whomakesthenews.org/images/stories/restricted/highlights/highlights_en.pdf. Another look at popular, blog-style news sites such as *The Huffington Post*, *The Daily Beast*, *Slate*, and *Salon* found that representations of minorities conformed to stereotypes. For example, African Americans were featured primarily in stories about athletics, Latino/as appeared in stories about immigration, and Native and Asian Americans were absent.Janine Jackson, "New Media—but Familiar Lack of Diversity," *Extra!*, June 2012, accessed September 20, 2012, http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=4551. Even when a major source for online information like *The Huffington Post* tries to include more diverse viewpoints, it does so under criticism. The website decided to add a section focused on information and news of interest to African Americans after adding twenty-six other sections ranging from information on travel to divorce. Although the editor of the section wanted to have a nuanced discussion about race, many of her ideas were discounted because they were not "buzzy enough," meaning they might not attract enough readers. So instead of starting a dialogue about race, most of the

stories featured on the first day were more "buzz worthy" and, ironically, written by white reporters.Janine Jackson, "New Media—but Familiar Lack of Diversity," *Extra!*, June 2012, accessed September 20, 2012, http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=4551.

Some people who study and/or work in the media view media diversity as a means of expanding public dialogue, creating a more-informed citizenry, and enhancing our democracy through positive social change. Some online news sources have taken up such a call, but they fall short of the popularity or profitability of more mainstream news outlets. The online investigative news outlet *ProPublica* has received positive attention and awards for their coverage of a wide range of issues, including stories that focus on underrepresented communities."About Us," *ProPublica: Journalism in the Public Interest*, accessed September 20, 2012, http://www.propublica.org/about. The advent of new and personal media makes it easier for individuals and independent rather than corporate-owned media outlets to take advantage of new technologies and platforms to produce quality media products on a budget. As consumers of media, we can also keep a critical eye open for issues of representation and seek out media that is more inclusive and diverse. This type of evaluative and deliberate thinking about the media is an important part of media literacy, which we will discuss next.

Developing Media Literacy

Media literacy[25] involves our ability to critique and analyze the potential impact of the media. The word *literacy* refers to our ability to read and comprehend written language, but just as we need literacy to be able to read, write, and function in our society, we also need to be able to read media messages. To be media literate, we must develop a particular skill set that is unfortunately not taught in a systematic way like reading and writing. The quest to make a more media-literate society is not new. You may be surprised, as I was, to learn that the media-literacy movement began in the 1930s when a chapter of the American Association of University Women in Madison, Wisconsin, created a newspaper column and a radio program called "Broadcast on Broadcasts" that reviewed and evaluated current media messages and practices.Janet Dunlop and Angel Kymnes, "Analysis of Media Literacy Curriculum: The Center for Media Literacy's Media Kit," *Smile* 7, no. 3 (2007), 3. Despite the fact that this movement has been around for eighty years now, many people still don't know about it.

Media literacy isn't meant to censor or blame the media, nor does it advocate for us to limit or change our engagement with the media in any particular way. Instead, media literacy ties in with critical thinking and listening, which we have learned about throughout this book already. Media-literacy skills are important because media outlets are "culture makers," meaning they reflect much of current society

25. Our ability to critique and analyze the potential impact of the media.

but also reshape and influence sociocultural reality and real-life practices. Some may mistakenly believe that frequent exposure to media or that growing up in a media-saturated environment leads to media literacy. Knowing how to use technology to find and use media is different from knowing how to analyze it. Like other critical thinking skills, media literacy doesn't just develop; it must be taught, learned, practiced, and reflected on.

Media-literacy skills teach us to analyze the media and to realize the following:"Core Principles of Media Literacy Education in the United States," *National Association for Media Literacy Education*, accessed September 20, 2012, http://namle.net/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/NAMLE-CPMLE-w-questions2.pdf.

- All media messages are constructed (even "objective" news stories are filmed, edited, and introduced in ways that frame and influence their meaning).
- Media structures and policies affect message construction (which means we need to also learn about how media ownership and distribution function in our society—a growing concern that we discussed earlier in this section).
- Each medium has different characteristics and affects messages differently (e.g., a story presented on *The Colbert Report* will likely be less complete and more dramatized than a story presented on a blog focused on that topic).
- Media messages are constructed for particular purposes (many messages are constructed to gain profit or power, some messages promote change, and some try to maintain the status quo).
- All media messages are embedded with values and beliefs (the myth of objectivity helps mask the underlying bias or misrepresentation in some messages).
- Media messages influence our beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors, including how we perceive and interact with others and how we participate in larger society.
- Media messages can prevent change (intentionally presenting manipulated or selectively chosen content to inhibit change).

We learn much through the media that we do not have direct experience with, and communication and media scholars theorize that we tend to believe media portrayals are accurate representations of life. However, the media represents race, gender, sexuality, ability, and other cultural identities in biased and stereotypical ways that often favor dominant identities.Brenda J. Allen, *Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity*, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2011), 29, 34. Since the media influences our beliefs, attitudes, and expectations about difference, it is important to be able to critically evaluate the mediated messages that we receive.

The goal of media literacy is not to teach you what to think but to teach you how you can engage with, interpret, and evaluate media in a more informed manner. Media literacy is also reflective in that we are asked to be accountable for those choices we make in regards to media by reflecting on and being prepared to articulate how those choices fit in with our own belief and value systems.

There are some standard questions that you can ask yourself to help you get started in your media criticism and analysis. There are no "true" or "right/wrong" answers to many of the questions we ask during the critical thinking process. Engaging in media literacy is more about expanding our understanding and perspective rather than arriving at definitive answers. The following questions will help you hone your media-literacy skills:Brenda J. Allen, *Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity*, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2011), 29.

1. Who created this message? What did they hope to accomplish? What are their primary belief systems?
2. What is my interpretation of this message? How and why might different people understand this message differently than me? What can I learn about myself based on my interpretation and how it may differ from others'?
3. What lifestyles, values, and points of view are represented or omitted in this message? What does this tell me about how other people live and believe? Does this message leave anything or anyone out?
4. Why was this message sent? Who sent it? Is it trying to tell me something? To sell me something?

After asking these questions, media-literate people should be able to use well-reasoned arguments and evidence (not just opinion) to support their evaluations. People with media-literacy skills also know that their evaluations may not be definitive. Although this may seem like a place of uncertainty, media-literate people actually have more control over how they interact with media messages, which allows them to use media to their advantage, whether that is to become better informed or to just enjoy their media experience.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Media control and ownership has been deregulated over the past few decades, which has led to increased consolidation and merging of media outlets.
- The media aids globalization by exporting Western beliefs and values to other countries. This trend in exporting has been termed *media imperialism,* since Western media tend to dominate in many countries. Certain stereotypes about the West, particularly the United States, are maintained through the narrow range of messages that are exported. Other countries do not just passively receive Western media messages, however. Some messages are reinterpreted by the local culture, creating hybrid media texts.
- Deregulation has contributed to lack of media outlet ownership by minorities. Additionally, representation of most minority groups in media messages is not proportional to their numbers in the actual population. When minorities are included in media messages, it is often in stereotypical ways. Social learning theory states that these representations are important because they influence the schemata we develop about other groups of people, which points to how these distorted representations can actually influence how people think and act in their real lives.
- Media-literacy skills allow us to critique and analyze the potential effects of media. Media-literate people ask critical questions about all the media messages they receive, not just the ones with which they disagree. Doing so leads people to be more accountable for their media choices and to have more control over the role that media plays in their lives.

EXERCISES

1. Visit the FCC's webpage to view its mission: http://www.fcc.gov/what-we-do. Based on what you read there, how do you think the FCC is doing?
2. As we learned, many of the media messages that are exported from the United States to other countries end up supporting narrow stereotypes about US Americans. What media messages do you think would be better to export in order to allow other countries to see a more "accurate" picture of American life? Try to think of several examples of television programs, movies, websites, and so on.
3. Think about the diversity in some of the shows that you watch. Before doing any research, write down the different cultural identities that you think are represented in a couple of your favorite shows or movies. Then go and actually research the show or movie (look up the cast online, etc.) to see if your perceptions matched up with reality. Are the shows diverse? Why or why not? If there are minority characters, are they portrayed in stereotypical or narrow ways?