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Chapter 16

New Media and Communication

As we learned in Chapter 15 "Media, Technology, and Communication", media and communication work together in powerful ways. New technologies develop and diffuse into regular usage by large numbers of people, which in turn shapes how we communicate and how we view our society and ourselves. The transition over the past twenty or so years from “old media” to “new media” marks a significant change in how we use technology to communicate, as devices and the messages carried on them move from “mass” to “micro” and our relationship with new media becomes much more personal and social than it was with old media. This chapter is just an introduction to the dynamic area of research and development involving new media and communication. Given that this area of study changes rapidly, I will supplement the information in this chapter with content on my blog, which you can find through my website: <http://www.richardgionesjr.com>.

16.1 New Media Technologies

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Trace the evolution of new media.
2. Discuss how new media are more personal and social than old media.

So what makes “new media” *new* media? When we consider “old media,” which consist of mainly print, radio, and television/movies, we see that their presence in our lives and our societies was limited to a few places. For example, television and radio have long been key technology features in the home. Movies were primarily enjoyed in theaters until VCRs and DVD players brought them into our homes. The closest thing to a portable mass medium was reading a book or paper on a commute to and from work. New media, however, are more personal and more social than old media, which creates a paradox we will explore later in this chapter, as we discuss how new media simultaneously separate and connect us. In this section, we will trace the evolution of new media and discuss how personal media and social media fit under the umbrella of new media.

The Evolution of New Media

New media, as we are discussing them here, couldn’t exist without the move from analogue to digital technology, as all the types of new media we will discuss are digitally based. Eugenia Siapera, *Understanding New Media* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012), 3. **Digital media**¹ are composed of and/or are designed to read numerical codes (hence the root word *digit*). The most commonly used system of numbers is **binary code**², which converts information into a series of 0s and 1s. This shared code system means that any machine that can decode (read) binary code can make sense of, store, and replay the information. **Analogue media**³ are created by encoding information onto a physical object that must then be paired with another device capable of reading that specific code. So what most distinguishes analogue media from digital media are their physicality and their need to be matched with a specific decoding device. In terms of physicality, analogue media are a combination of mechanical and physical parts, while digital media can be completely electronic and have no physicality; think of an MP3 music file, for example. To understand the second distinction between analogue and digital media, we can look at predigital music and how various types of analogue music had to be paired with a specific decoding device. To make recordings using old media technology, grooves were carved into vinyl to make records or changes were made in the electromagnetic signature of ribbon or tape to make cassette tapes. So each of these physical objects

1. Media that are composed of and/or are designed to read numerical codes.
2. The most commonly used digital code, which consists of 0s and 1s.
3. Media that are created by encoding information onto a physical object that must then be paired with another device capable of reading that specific code.

must be paired with a specific device, such as a record player or a cassette deck, to be able to decode and listen to the music. New media changed how we collect and listen to music. Many people who came of age in the digital revolution are now so used to having digital music that the notion of a physical music collection is completely foreign to them. Now music files are stored electronically and can be played on many different platforms, including iPods, computers, and smartphones.

In news coverage and academic scholarship, you will see several different terms used when discussing new media. Other terms used include *digital media*, *online media*, *social media*, and *personal media*. For the sake of our discussion, we will subsume all these under the term *new media*. The term *new media* itself has been critiqued by some for setting up a false dichotomy between new and old. The technology that made new media possible has been in development for many years. The Internet has existed in some capacity for more than forty years, and the World Wide Web, which made the Internet accessible to the masses, just celebrated its twenty-first birthday in August of 2012.



Analogue media like videocassette recorders (VCRs) are only compatible with specific media objects that have been physically encoded with information.

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So in addition to the word *new* helping us realize some key technological changes from older forms of media, we should also think of *new* as present and future oriented, since media and technology are now changing faster than ever before. In short, what is new today may not be considered new in a week. Despite the rapid changes in technology, the multiplatform compatibility of much of new media paradoxically allows for some stability. Whereas new technology often made analogue media devices and products obsolete, the format of much of the new media objects stays the same even as newer and updated devices with which to access digital media become available. Key to new media is the notion of technological convergence. Most new media are already digital, and the ongoing digitalization of old media allows them to circulate freely and be read/accessed/played by any digital media platform without the need for conversion. Eugenia Siapera, *Understanding New Media* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012), 47. This multiplatform compatibility has never existed before, as each type of media had a corresponding platform. For example, you couldn't play records in an eight-track cassette tape player or a VHS tape in a DVD player. Likewise, whereas machines that printed words on paper and the human eye were the encoding and decoding devices needed to engage with analogue forms of print media, you can read this textbook in print, on a computer, or on an e-reader, iPad, smartphone, or other handheld device. Another characteristic of new media is the blurring of lines between

producers and consumers, as individual users now have a more personal relationship with their media.

Personal Media

Personal media is so named because users are more free to choose the media content to which they want to be exposed, to generate their own content, to comment on and link to other content, to share content with others, and, in general, to create personalized media environments. To better understand personal media, we must take a look at personal media devices and the messages and social connections they facilitate.

In terms of devices, the label *personal media* entered regular usage in the late 1970s when the personal computer was first being produced and plans were in the works to create even more personal (and portable) computing devices. Marika Lüders, “Conceptualizing Personal Media,” *New Media and Society* 10, no. 5 (2008): 684. The 1980s saw an explosion of personal media devices such as the Walkman, the VCR, the camcorder, the cell phone, and the personal computer. At this time, though, personal media devices lacked the connectivity that later allowed personal media to become social media. Still, during this time, people created personalized media environments that allowed for more control over the media messages with which they engaged. For example, while portable radios had been around for years, the Walkman allowed people to listen to any cassette tape they owned instead of having to listen to whatever the radio station played. Beyond that, people began creating mix tapes by recording their favorite songs from the radio or by dubbing select songs from other cassette tapes. Although a little more labor intensive, these mix tapes were the precursor to the playlists of digital music that we create today. Additionally, VCRs allowed people to watch specific movies on their own schedule rather than having to watch movies shown on television or at the movie theater.

While mass media messages are the creation of institutions and professionals, many personal media messages are the creation of individuals or small groups whose skills range from amateur to professional. Marika Lüders, “Conceptualizing Personal Media,” *New Media and Society* 10, no. 5 (2008): 683. Personal computers allowed amateurs and hobbyists to create new computer programs that they could circulate on discs or perhaps through early Internet connections. Camcorders allowed people to create a range of products from home videos to amateur or independent films. As was mentioned earlier, portable music recording and listening devices also allowed people to create their own mix tapes and gave amateur musicians an affordable and accessible way to make demo tapes. These amateur personal media creations weren’t as easily distributed as they are today, as the analogue technology still required that people send their messages on discs or tapes.

Personal media crossed the line to new and social media with the growing accessibility of the Internet and digital media. As media products like videos, music, and pictures turned digital, the analogue personal media devices that people once carried around were no longer necessary. New online platforms gave people the opportunity to create and make content that could be accessed by anyone with an Internet connection. For example, the singer who would have once sold demo tapes on cassettes out of his or her car might be now discovered after putting his or her music on MySpace.

Social Media

Media and mass media have long been discussed as a unifying force. The shared experience of national mourning after President Kennedy was assassinated and after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, was facilitated through media. Online media, in particular, is characterized by its connectivity. This type of connectivity is different from that of the mass media we discussed in [Chapter 15 "Media, Technology, and Communication"](#). Whereas a large audience was connected to the same radio or television broadcast, newspaper story, book, or movie via a one-way communication channel sent from one place to many, online media connects mass media outlets to people and allows people to connect back to them. The basis for this connectivity is the Internet, which connects individual computers, smartphones, and other devices in an interactive web, and it is this web of connected personal media devices like computers and smartphones that facilitates and defines social media. Technology has allowed for mediated social interaction since the days of the telegraph, but these connections were not at the mass level they are today. So even if we think of the telegram as a precursor to a "tweet," we can still see that the potential connection points and the audience size are much different. While a telegraph went to one person, Olympian Michael Phelps can send a tweet instantly to 1.2 million people, and Justin Bieber's tweets reach 23 million people! Social media doesn't just allow for connection; it allows us more control over the quality and degree of connection that we maintain with others. Eugenia Siapera, *Understanding New Media* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012), 5.

The potential for social media was realized under the conditions of what is called Web 2.0, which refers to a new way of using the connectivity of the Internet to bring people together for collaboration and creativity—to harness collective intelligence. Tim O'Reilly, "What Is Web 2.0?" *O'Reilly: Spreading the Knowledge of Innovators*, accessed November 3, 2012, <http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html>. This entails using the web to collaborate on projects and problem solving rather than making and protecting one's own material. Megan Boler, "Introduction," in *Digital Media and Democracy: Tactics in Hard Times*, ed. Megan Boler (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 39. Much of this was achieved through platforms and websites such as Napster, Flickr, YouTube, and Wikipedia that encouraged and

enable user-generated content. It is important to note that user-generated content and collaboration have been a part of the World Wide Web for decades, but much of it was in the form of self-publishing information such as user reviews, online journal entries/diaries, and later blogs, which cross over between the “old” web and Web 2.0.

The most influential part of the new web is **social networking sites (SNSs)**⁴, which allow users to build a public or semipublic profile, create a network of connections to other people, and view other people’s profiles and networks of connections. Danah M. Boyd and Nicole B. Ellison, “Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship,” *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication* 13, no. 1 (2008): 211. Although SNSs have existed for over a decade, earlier iterations such as Friendster and MySpace have given way to the giant that is Facebook. Facebook, which now has more than 955 million monthly active users is unquestionably the most popular SNS. “Key Facts,” Facebook Newsroom, accessed November 8, 2012, <http://newsroom.fb.com/content/default.aspx?NewsAreaId=22>. And the number of users is predicted to reach one billion by the end of 2012. Christy Hunter, “Number of Facebook Users Could Reach 1 Billion by 2012,” *The Exponent Online*, January 12, 2012, accessed November 8, 2012, http://www.purdueexponent.org/features/article_8815d757-8b7c-566f-8fbe-49528d4d8037.html. More specific SNSs like LinkedIn focus on professional networking. In any case, the ability to self-publish information, likes/dislikes, status updates, profiles, and links allows people to craft their own life narrative and share it with other people. Likewise, users can follow the narratives of others in their network as they are constructed. The degree to which we engage with others’ narratives varies based on the closeness of the relationship and situational factors, but SNSs are used to sustain strong, moderate, and weak ties with others. Kathleen Richardson and Sue Hessey, “Archiving the Self?: Facebook as Biography of Social and Relational Memory,” *Journal of Information, Communication, and Ethics in Society* 7, no. 1 (2009): 29.

4. Sites that are an influential part of Web 2.0 and allow users to build a public or semipublic profile, create a network of connections to other people, and view other people’s profiles and networks of connections.
5. A decentralized model for problem solving in which people from various perspectives and positions offer proposals or information to solve a problem or create something new.

Let’s conceptualize social media in another way—through the idea of collaboration and sharing rather than just through interpersonal connection and interaction. The growth of open source publishing and creative commons licensing also presents a challenge to traditional media outlets and corporations and copyrights. Open source publishing first appeared most notably with software programs. The idea was that the users could improve on openly available computer programs and codes and then the new versions, sometimes called derivatives, would be made available again to the community. **Crowdsourcing**⁵ refers more to the idea stage of development where people from



Social media enable interactivity between individuals that share a social network and also allow people to broadcast or

various perspectives and positions offer proposals or information to solve a problem or create something new. Daren C. Brabham, "Crowdsourcing as a Model for Problem Solving: An Introduction and Cases," *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 14, no. 1 (2008): 76. This type of open access and free collaboration helps encourage participation and improve creativity through the synergy created by bringing together different perspectives and has been referred to as the biggest shift in innovation since the Industrial Revolution. Wendy Kaufman, "Crowd Sourcing Turns Business on Its Head," *NPR*, August 20, 2008, accessed November 8, 2012, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=93495217>. In short, the combination of open source publishing and crowdsourcing allows a community of users to collectively improve on and create more innovative ideas, products, and projects. Unlike most media products that are tightly copyrighted and closely monitored by the companies that create them, open source publishing and crowdsourcing increase the democratizing potential of new media.

"narrowcast" their activities and interests.

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The advent of these new, collaborative, participative, and democratizing media has been both resisted and embraced by old media outlets. Increased participation and feedback means that traditional media outlets that were used to one-way communication and passive audiences now have to listen to and respond to feedback, some of which is critical and/or negative. User-generated content, both amateur and professional, can also compete directly with traditional mass media content that costs much more to produce. Social media is responsible for the whole phenomenon of viral videos, through which a video of a kitten doing a flip or a parody of a commercial can reach many more audience members than a network video blooper show or an actual commercial. Media outlets are again in a paradox. They want to encourage audience participation, but they also want to be able to control and predict the media consumption habits and reactions of audiences. Eugenia Siapera, *Understanding New Media* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012), 56.

“Getting Real”

The Open Source Philosophy in the Professional World

No matter what career you go into, you will interact with something that is “open source.” It will likely be some type of open source software, since that is the area in which open source product development is most commonly applied. Daren C. Brabham, “Crowdsourcing as a Model for Problem Solving: An Introduction and Cases,” *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 14, no. 1 (2008): 81–82. When something is open source, its essential elements are available to anyone who may want to use and/or improve on the product. So, for example, when software is open source, the code is available to anyone who may want to edit it as long as they continue the open philosophy of product development by then making their version, often called a derivative, available to anyone who may want to edit it. Within this philosophy, the synergy that is created when a group of people with different levels of knowledge, experience, and expertise work collaboratively leads to innovative ideas and products that are then shared with the commons rather than kept as proprietary. One example of this type of free, open source software that is used in many professional settings is Mozilla’s Firefox web browser, which I’m sure many of you use.

Another example of open source innovation that we may soon be interacting with frequently in our professional and personal lives is 3D printing. 3D printers are already being used to print custom prosthetics used in knee and hip replacement surgeries, replacement parts for electronic and mechanical devices, custom guitars and shoes, food, and even skin that can be used on humans for skin grafts. “Pushing Dimensions: Charting the 3D-Printing Landscape,” *3D-Printer Hub*, accessed November 20, 2012, <http://3dprinterhub.com/3d-printer-news>. Although the rapid advances in 3D printing have so far been limited to a small group of inventors, specialty scientists, doctors, and early adopters, 3D printers for professional and personal use are now commercially available. The community of people using these printers is committed to keeping them open, which means that when a user designs a program to print a plastic test tube holder that can be put on a standard drill to create a centrifuge, he or she will make that design available for anyone to use and/or modify. This type of do-it-yourself production could have implications for all types of businesses, who could, for example, save money on design, production, and shipping by printing their own custom or specialty products.

1. Discuss some of the advantages and disadvantages of the open source model of product development and innovation.
2. Based on your current career goals, how might open source products (like computer software and 3D printers) play a role in your day-to-day job duties?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- New media consist mostly of digital media, which are composed of and/or designed to read numerical code (such as binary code).
- New media are distinct from old media in that they are less linked to a specific media platform and are therefore more transferable from device to device. They are also less bound to a physical object, meaning that information can be stored electronically rather than needing to be encoded onto a physical object.
- New media are also distinct from old media in that they are more personal and social. As the line between consumers and producers of media blur in new media, users gain more freedom to personalize their media experiences. Additionally, the interactive web of personal media devices also allows people to stay in touch with each other, collaborate, and share information in ways that increase the social nature of technology use.

EXERCISES

1. Getting integrated: Identify some ways that you might use new media in each of the following contexts: academic, professional, personal, and civic.
2. How do you personalize the media that you use? How do digital media make it easier for you to personalize your media experiences than analogue media?
3. Aside from using social media to maintain interpersonal connections, how have you used social media to collaborate or share information?

16.2 New Media and Society

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Discuss the relationship between new media and democracy.
2. Evaluate the ethics of intellectual rights and copyrights in new media.
3. Evaluate the ethics of content filtering and surveillance in new media.

Media studies pioneer Marshall McLuhan emphasized, long before what we now call “new media” existed, that studying media and technology can help us understand our society. In short, he didn’t believe that we could study media without studying society, as the two are bound together. Eugenia Siapera, *Understanding New Media* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012), 2. The ongoing switch from analogue to digital, impersonal to personal/social, and one-way to dialogic media is affecting our society in interesting ways.

The days of analogue media are coming to an end and, indeed, are over in many places. As a speech teacher, one of the technology struggles I have faced over the years is recording student speeches. For the past several years, while teaching at different schools, I was continually flustered by the difficulty of finding an easy way to digitally record and have students access their speeches. When I first started teaching, we rolled a camcorder into the classroom on speech days and each student brought his or her own VCR tape to class and would pop it in, hit record, do the speech, and then pop it out. It was the easiest method of recording I have ever used. It didn’t require waiting to upload, having to deal with length or file size issues when trying to post to YouTube or e-mail, or dealing with compatibility issues. But the last time I asked my students to bring a VCR tape was about five years ago, and when I asked, the students looked at me like I had five heads. “Where can we find one of those?” “Where am I going to play it? I don’t have a VCR!” It was at that moment that I knew the analogue era had come to an end, which is evident elsewhere. Now digital television conversion is complete in the United States and the European Union, and many old media formats are being digitalized—for example, books and documents scanned into PDFs, old home movies being turned into DVDs, and record players with USB outputs digitizing people’s vinyl collections.

These technological changes haven’t solved some problems that are being carried over from old media. Some of the same problems with representation and access for which the mass media were criticized are still present in new media, despite its

democratizing potential. As we discussed earlier, new media increase participation and interactivity, giving audience members and users more control over content and influence over media decisions. Media critics point out, though, that participants are not equally distributed. Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 241. Research shows that new media users, especially heavy users who are more actively engaged, tend to be male, middle class, and white.

New Media and Democracy

Scholars and reporters have noted the democratizing effect of new media, meaning that new media help distribute power to the people through their personal and social characteristics. Many media scholars have commented on these changes as a positive and more active and participative alternative to passive media consumption. Eugenia Siapera, *Understanding New Media* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012), 55. Instead of the powerful media outlets exclusively having control over what is communicated to audiences and serving as the sole gatekeeper, media-audience interactions are now more like a dialogue. The personal access to media and growing control over media discourses by users allows people to more freely express opinions, offer criticisms, and question others—communicative acts that are all important for a functioning democracy.

A recent national survey found that young people, aged fifteen to twenty-five, are using new media to engage with peers on political issues. “Social Media Powers Youth Participation in Politics,” *Newswise: The University of Chicago News Office*, June 26, 2012, accessed November 8, 2012, <http://www.newswise.com/articles/social-media-powers-youth-participation-in-politics>. The survey found that young people are defying traditional notions of youthful political apathy by using new media platforms to do things like start online political groups, share political videos using social media, or circulate news stories about political issues.

These activities were not included in previous research done on the political habits of young people because those surveys typically focused on more traditional forms of political engagement like voting, joining a political party, or offline campaigning. Political engagement using new media is viewed as more participatory, since people can interact with their peers without having to go through official channels or institutions. But the research also found that this type of participatory political engagement also led to traditional engagement, as those people were twice as likely to vote in the actual election. “Social Media Powers Youth Participation in



Politics,” *Newswise: The University of Chicago News Office*, June 26, 2012, accessed November 8, 2012, <http://www.newswise.com/articles/social-media-powers-youth-participation-in-politics>. Although the digital divide is a continuing ethical issue, new media have had a more positive effect on places that are often left out of such technologies. For example, although many people in developing countries still do not have access to dependable electricity or water, they may have access to a cell phone or the Internet through NGO programs or Internet cafés. Many people, especially US Americans, may think the days of Internet cafés (also called cyber cafés) are over. Although Internet cafés were never as popular or numerous in the United States, communal and public Internet access is still an important part of providing access to the Internet all around the world. Sonia Liff and Anne Sofie Lægran, “Cybercafés: Debating the Meaning and Significance of Internet Access in a Café Environment,” *New Media and Society* 5, no. 3 (2003): 307–12.

New media are being used by people, especially young people, to engage with political causes and participate in the democratic process by sharing news stories and “liking” and commenting on other people’s postings.

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“Getting Plugged In”

Social Media and the 2012 Presidential Election

The election of 2012 has been called the “social media election.” Perhaps in today’s hyperconnected world of social media, we shouldn’t be surprised with the rate at which people took to their Facebook timelines and/or Twitter feeds to announce who they planned on voting for or to encourage others to vote for a particular candidate. In fact, about 25 percent of registered voters told their Facebook friends and Twitter followers who they would vote for. Alex Byers, “Study: Facebook, Twitter Users Divulge Votes Online,” *Politico*, November 6, 2012, accessed November 8, 2012, <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1112/83418.html>. Candidates are aware of the growing political power of social media, as evidenced by the fact that, for the first time, major campaigns now include a “digital director” as one of their top-level campaign staffers. Steve Friess, “5 Social Media Questions 2012 Will Answer,” *Politico*, November 5, 2012, accessed November 8, 2012, <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1112/83343.html>. These “social media gurus” are responsible for securing targeted advertising on outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Pinterest, and Reddit (among others), which now have the capability to narrowcast to specific geographical areas and user demographics. The digital directors are also responsible for developing strategies to secure Facebook “likes,” Twitter followers, and retweets. Smartphones also present new options for targeted messaging, as some ads on mobile apps were “geotargeted” to people riding a certain bus or attending a specific public event. Steve Friess, “5 Social Media Questions 2012 Will Answer,” *Politico*, November 5, 2012, accessed November 8, 2012, <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1112/83343.html>.

Aside from new methods of advertising, social media also helped capture the much-anticipated Election Day, including some of the barriers or problems people experienced. People used YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook to document and make public their voting experience. One voter in Pennsylvania recorded a video of a voting machine that kept switching to Romney/Ryan every time the person tried to choose Obama/Biden, and before the day was over, the video already had more than two million views. Jeff Balke, “Projection: Social Media Wins Big in 2012,” *Houston Press: Blogs*, November 7, 2012, accessed November 8, 2012, http://blogs.houstonpress.com/hairballs/2012/11/projection_social_media_wins_b.php. People also used social media to document long lines at polling places and to share the incoming election results. The 2012 election was the most-tweeted-about political event ever with

approximately 20 million tweets posted on election night and more than 11 million uses of the hashtag “#election2012.” When Obama’s campaign tweeted “Four more years” after he had been declared the winner, it was retweeted more than 225,000 times. Marisol Bello, “Voters Document Election on Social Media,” *FreeP.com*, November 7, 2012, accessed November 8, 2012, <http://www.freep.com/article/20121107/NEWS15/121107005/Presidential-election-social-media-Twitter-Facebook-YouTube>.

1. How did you and/or your friends and family use social media during the 2012 election?
2. What are some of the positives and negatives of the increasingly central role that social media play in politics?

Issues of ownership and control are present in new media as they are in traditional mass media. Although people may think they are multitasking and accessing different media outlets, they may not be. To help keep users within their domain, some large new media platforms like Facebook and Yahoo! create expansive environments that include news, social media connections, advertising, and entertainment, which allow users to click around and feel like they are moving freely even though they are not leaving the general owner’s space.

New media provide ways of countering some of the control and participation issues that audiences have typically faced as the lines blur between producers and consumers of media. The phrase *alternative media* is often associated with new media. **Alternative media**⁶ include a range of voices with diverse cultural identities and experiences, which counter the mainstream media outlets that are controlled by and include the voices and perspectives of more privileged people. Alternative media is very similar to and in fact overlaps with tactical media, which are more activist oriented and include dissenting and “radical” perspectives that challenge the status quo. From a truly democratic perspective, which is supposed to invite and encourage dissent, a plurality of voices, and civil debate, alternative and tactical media are welcome additions to the traditional media landscape that tries to diminish, rather than encourage, competing voices.

6. Media that include a range of voices with diverse cultural identities and experiences, which counter the mainstream media that are controlled by and include the voices and perspectives of more privileged people.

Blogs were the earliest manifestation of Web 2.0 and marked the beginning of the turn to more user-generated content and the democratization of information gathering and sharing. While “web logging” existed in various forms before 1999, that year marked blogging’s “big bang” as the software application Blogger made it easy for people who did not know HTML (the computer code used to build websites)

to compose and publish their blog as well as link to other blogs and relevant content. Megan Boler, "Introduction," in *Digital Media and Democracy: Tactics in Hard Times*, ed. Megan Boler (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 40. Just as then, today's blogs provide information that varies in terms of depth, quality, and credibility. Blogs that are most relevant to our discussion of democracy are those whose authors engage in citizen journalism and/or gatewatching.

Blogs are an accessible and popular outlet for **citizen journalism**⁷, which is reporting done by individuals or small groups outside of the media establishment as a corrective to mainstream journalism, which may inaccurately report or underreport a story. Megan Boler, "Introduction," in *Digital Media and Democracy: Tactics in Hard Times*, ed. Megan Boler (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 40. Citizen journalists increasingly play a part in shaping local and national discussions of news and have received positive and negative evaluations from mainstream media and audiences.

One corrective function of alternative media and citizen journalists is the gatewatching function. Recall that earlier we discussed the gatekeeping function of mass media through which reporters, editors, executives, and advertisers influence what content and how much of it makes it to audiences. Citizen journalists revised this notion to be more actively involved in the process, so **gatewatching**⁸ refers to a media criticism practice that seeks to correct or expand mainstream media reporting. These citizen journalists look for stories or information that will be relevant to their often smaller more niche audiences. Since many people use new media to access information, they seek out information specifically targeted toward their interests and needs. New media make this type of "micro media" a viable alternative to mass media. The citizen journalists then transmit that information to their audience through a blog or microblog, such as Twitter. In this sense, they act as gatewatchers for the mass media and serve the traditional gatekeeper function for their niche audiences. They may comment on how one media outlet covered a story while another did not or how one outlet used more credible sources than the other. They may also critique a media outlet for shallow coverage or overcoverage. Interestingly, the information generated by these citizen journalists increasingly influences the mainstream media's coverage. Stories that may not have been picked up by a major media outlet now get covered after they receive much attention through new and social media. People in such cases may demand that major media outlets cover the story, or the outlet may choose to cover it on their own to capitalize on the popularity of the story.

7. Reporting done by individuals or small groups outside of the media establishment as a corrective to mainstream journalism, which may inaccurately report or underreport a story.

8. A media criticism practice that seeks to correct or expand mainstream media reporting.

New Media and Ethics

If you buy a song from iTunes, should you be able to play it on any device you wish? Should ideas or knowledge that can lead to positive change for many people (like an

approach to international conflict mediation or a scientific discovery that could lead to a new lifesaving medication) be protected and kept from the public through intellectual property laws? How much information and creative works should be available in the public domain to help further knowledge and inspire further innovation and creativity, and how much of that should be protected? These questions aren't easy to answer, and many answers spark controversy as they bring up issues of censorship and information control.

Censorship, which is the suppression, limiting, or deleting of speech, is an issue that predates the advent of mass media and new media but one that has become more prevalent as the amount, access to, and diversity of information has increased. Censorship is based on the notion of freedom of speech, which is a foundational principle of the US Constitution and was declared a universal human right by the United Nations. Ronald J. Deibert, "Black Code Redux: Censorship, Surveillance, and the Militarization of Cyberspace," in *Digital Media and Democracy: Tactics in Hard Times*, ed. Megan Boler (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 140. I have chosen to discuss censorship in the section on new media because the Internet, which is the basis for most new media, has been envisioned as an avenue toward and an outlet for more free speech. Censorship is enacted and free speech limited in two primary ways on the Internet: through intellectual property rights and copyrights and through content filtering by governments or other entities. Ronald J. Deibert, "Black Code Redux: Censorship, Surveillance, and the Militarization of Cyberspace," in *Digital Media and Democracy: Tactics in Hard Times*, ed. Megan Boler (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 140.



In recent years lawmakers, law enforcers, and media companies have taken more steps to deter and/or prosecute people who violate copyright laws.

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Intellectual Property Rights and Copyrights

As we learned earlier, one of the technological changes that made the birth and explosion of new media possible is the near universal compatibility of digital content. This along with the absence of a physical object onto which media content is coded (a DVD instead of a digital file on a computer or other device) has created issues with increased **piracy**⁹, which refers to the unlawful reproduction and/or distribution of intellectual property or other copyrighted material. Ronald J. Deibert, "Black Code Redux: Censorship, Surveillance, and the Militarization of Cyberspace," in *Digital Media and Democracy: Tactics in Hard Times*, ed. Megan Boler (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 140. This problem gained much attention following the mass popularity of the peer-to-peer (P2P) file-sharing program Napster. Despite the numerous lawsuits and legal challenges that Napster faced, P2P

9. The unlawful reproduction and/or distribution of intellectual property or other copyrighted material.

file-sharing programs like Limewire, Vuze, and bitTorrent became the new way to legally and illegally share files ranging from software to video games, documents, books, music, and movies.

Once anything is digitized and makes its way to one of these networks, it becomes nearly impossible to control or limit its circulation. For example, media corporations and law enforcement and government agencies have tried to prosecute individuals, require Internet service providers to take action against users who illegally download materials or visit suspect sites, or shut down domain names based in the United States. Jared Newman, "SOPA and PIPA: Just the Facts," *PC World*, January 17, 2012, accessed November 8, 2012, http://www.pcworld.com/article/248298/sopa_and_pipa_just_the_facts.html. None of these measures has been very effective, especially for sites based outside of the United States, but a renewed effort on the part of interest groups that represent the entertainment industry led to the introduction of two pieces of legislation that stirred up quite a backlash. The Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) and the Protect IP Act (PIPA) were introduced into the House of Representatives and the Senate in order to make it more difficult for sites, in the United States and abroad, to distribute pirated copyrighted materials ranging from movies, to music, to digital books. Although many people applaud the effort to stop the circulation of pirated material, many were also afraid that the regulations could lead to restrictions on other forms of information circulation such as open source sharing and crowdsourcing. Larry Magid, "What Are SOPA and PIPA and Why All the Fuss?" *Forbes*, January 18, 2012, accessed November 8, 2012, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/larrymagid/2012/01/18/what-are-sopa-and-pipa-and-why-all-the-fuss>. To protest and raise awareness of these laws, several high-profile sites and hundreds of other online supporters engaged in the largest act of cyberprotest to date. On January 18, 2012, sites like Wikipedia, Google, and Craigslist "went black," limited content, or displayed information about SOPA and PIPA. Within a few days, support for the laws had dwindled, and both are now on indefinite hold.

Most new media scholars and commentators do not question the fact that some information should be protected as intellectual property and that many artistic creations should be copyrighted. Such practices help ensure that innovation and creativity are recognized and that the people who create them are duly compensated. Such protections actually help promote and protect freedom of speech and provide an incentive for people to expend considerable time and effort to produce innovative and creative products and exchange ideas and art that circulate and enhance our society. Ronald J. Deibert, "Black Code Redux: Censorship, Surveillance, and the Militarization of Cyberspace," in *Digital Media and Democracy: Tactics in Hard Times*, ed. Megan Boler (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 140. Intellectual property rights and protections are newer and more difficult to enforce and even define than are copyrights. After all, putting protections on "knowledge"

or “information” is more ambiguous than putting a copyright on a discrete item like a book or song. In the realm of academia, especially, the philosophy of open and shared knowledge has been applied to academic research and scholarship. Ideas and findings are free to circulate and be used and adapted (with the proper citation and/or credit given) in order to further knowledge and provide a system of transparency and accountability. Corporations and companies have long had a more closed policy to knowledge and information, keeping many product ideas and designs to themselves and considering them proprietary information. Such practices, including issuing patents for inventions or considering certain information confidential, help keep individuals and businesses striving for better and/or more competitive products or ideas. The increase in corporate-like application of such protections to intellectual property in academia and other scientific areas that were historically more open and collaborative has received much criticism. To reiterate, these issues exist independently of new media, but the fact that most ideas and creations are now in digital form and that the Internet provides for sharing and then rapid and uncontrollable diffusion of such material is what creates the issue relevant to our discussion. And the issue of enforcement is what brings us back to the notion and ethics of censorship.

One way such protections have been enforced is by actually building new codes directly into the content or technology. Again, this alone isn’t enough to constitute an ethical violation. But one media scholar and critic sums up the oppositional view of such practices in the following statement: “Many believe the restrictions are leading to the suffocation of works in the public domain for scholarship and a wholesale erosion of the global commons of information.” Ronald J. Deibert, “Black Code Redux: Censorship, Surveillance, and the Militarization of Cyberspace,” in *Digital Media and Democracy: Tactics in Hard Times*, ed. Megan Boler (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 141. The main criticism in terms of infringement on intellectual work rests on the increase in copyrights and intellectual property laws on the circulation of academic findings and publications. The Internet is seen by many as a tool to enhance academic research and sharing and as a place for collaboration, but such laws have limited or shut down some academic databases and the circulation of electronic journals and articles.

The main criticism in terms of infringement on creative works rests on the loss of revenue for artists, authors, and musicians whose works are pirated and losses for their representatives, such as distributors, record labels, or movie studios. Since piracy, which is the illegal or unauthorized reproduction of a copyrighted product, hasn’t been successfully curtailed through threats of prosecution, the codes that I mentioned earlier have become the new means of protection. This practice, called **digital rights management (DRM)**¹⁰, involves embedding device- or program-specific codes into a digital product that limit its ability to be reproduced and/or used on multiple devices. DRM has raised much concern and controversy. I’m sure

10. Practice that involves embedding device- or program-specific codes into a digital product that limit its ability to be reproduced and/or used on multiple devices.

we've all been frustrated that we can't get a song we downloaded from iTunes to play on a "nonapproved device" or experienced the annoying unintended effects of DRM. Even though that content belongs to us and we bought it legally, we are not able to take advantage of the portability and cross-platform compatibility that we learned earlier is so characteristic of new media. The use of these codes is critiqued because they limit choice for those who legally and/or rightfully purchased the content and because they lead to a dependency on certain companies (usually large powerful ones) like Microsoft or Apple, which can limit the ability of people, especially those who are already marginalized in terms of socioeconomic status, to access and use certain technology or products.

Content Filtering and Surveillance

Research shows that Internet content filtering is increasing as new technologies allow governments and other entities to effectively target and block Internet users from accessing undesirable information. For example, in 2002 only two countries, China and Saudi Arabia, were known to actively filter Internet content within their borders. Presently, many more countries, including the United States, engage in such content filtering. Content filtering can happen at different levels. "About Filtering," OpenNet Initiative, accessed November 8, 2012, <http://opennet.net/about-filtering>. Filtering or blocking can happen at the Internet backbone level, which is the method most often used to limit information at the national level. In such cases, content is filtered out at an infrastructure or gateway point before it ever enters the country. Internet service providers can also block or censor content at the request of governments or other groups. Institutions can block certain content using software or other technical means. This type of blocking may be carried out to meet the objectives or values of a particular institution—for example, to block sexually explicit information from school computers. Finally, censorship can occur at the individual computer level. In such cases, parents or others may want to control the information available with filtering software that is customizable.

Typically, blocked content includes pornography or other materials deemed sexually explicit, information deemed harmful to national security or public safety (e.g., bomb-making information), and information that challenges a government or regime's power. Ronald J. Deibert, "Black Code Redux: Censorship, Surveillance, and the Militarization of Cyberspace," in *Digital Media and Democracy: Tactics in Hard Times*, ed. Megan Boler (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 144. In 2009, Bahrain was reported to make the most substantial increase in filtering of any country, as it limited many social,



While it is difficult to control what individuals put on the

religious, political, and human rights sites. Robert Faris and Jonathan Zittrain, "Web Tactics," *Index on Censorship* 38 (2009): 91. In terms of politics and human rights blocking, China blocked access to Twitter in the lead-up to the twenty-year anniversary of the Tiananmen Square protests. Saudi Arabia has taken a more targeted approach by blocking the accounts of two prominent human rights activists. Robert Faris and Jonathan Zittrain, "Web Tactics," *Index on Censorship* 38 (2009): 93. Religiously offensive material can also be blocked as evidenced by Pakistan's practice of blocking information that is offensive to Islam. The "Getting Critical" feature explores in more detail the often controversial practice of censorship for religious reasons.

Internet, governments and other groups have been very effective at blocking certain content at the "backbone" level of the Internet.

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“Getting Critical”

YouTube and Free Speech: Should Religiously Offensive Material Be Blocked?

The issue of censoring information deemed to be religiously offensive gained worldwide attention in September of 2012 when a video trailer for an anti-Islamic movie made in the United States made its way onto YouTube, which sparked protests in Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Pakistan, Tunisia, Indonesia, Iraq, Lebanon, and many other countries. In response to calls from some of these countries for the United States to remove the video from YouTube, Secretary of State Hilary Clinton condemned the video but affirmed that the video is protected under the right to free speech promised by the US Constitution. Google, which owns YouTube, also stated that the video doesn't violate US law or Google's terms of service and would therefore not be removed in the United States. Google did make the unprecedented decision, in the wake of an attack on the US embassy in Libya that killed four US Americans including ambassador Chris Stevens and in the face of increasing protests, to block the video in Libya, Egypt, Indonesia, and India. Rebecca J. Rosen, “What to Make of Google's Decision to Block ‘The Innocence of Muslims’ Movie,” *The Atlantic*, September 14, 2012, accessed November 8, 2012, <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2012/09/what-to-make-of-googles-decision-to-block-the-innocence-of-muslims-movie/262395>.

1. Should the United States have completely removed the video from YouTube in the wake of the protests and violence it sparked around the world? Why or why not?
2. Discuss Google/YouTube's decision to block the video in several countries. Do you think this was the right or wrong decision on the part of the company?
3. Review YouTube's “Community Guidelines,” which can be accessed at the following link: https://www.youtube.com/t/community_guidelines. In your opinion, should anything be removed from or added to these guidelines?

To further limit information, some governments also block access to foreign news or information from human rights organizations. Robert Faris and Jonathan Zittrain, “Web Tactics,” *Index on Censorship* 38 (2009): 90–96. Blocking software can now also limit access to translation sites, which a person could use to get around the filtering since most of the information that is blocked is in the native language(s) of the

country. This was the case in Bahrain, which blocked access to Google Translate in 2009. Web access can also be limited due to security reasons. In 2009, the US Marines announced that soldiers would no longer have access to social media networks, because they can lead to cyberattacks or allow people to leak information. Some of the major critiques of this practice include the collusion of corporations who own certain Internet platforms with governments that block content. For example, a company could turn over, at the request of a government, logs or archives of information about the Internet use of a dissident. At the request of the Chinese government, Yahoo! turned over e-mail records of three people, which led to their arrest. Additionally, people have raised concerns about the fact that US companies supply many of these countries, with whom the United States doesn't have relationship with or with whom those relations are strained, with the software that is then used in ways that go against US and UN policies for the protection of free speech and human rights. Ronald J. Deibert, "Black Code Redux: Censorship, Surveillance, and the Militarization of Cyberspace," in *Digital Media and Democracy: Tactics in Hard Times*, ed. Megan Boler (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 149.

Electronic espionage has been around since communication technologies like the telegraph, sound-recording devices, and radios were invented. Many countries, including the United States, have long had limitations on and protections against the use of electronic surveillance on US citizens, but after 9/11, these restrictions have been lessened, loosely interpreted, or only selectively enforced. With new media come new opportunities for electronic surveillance. Internet based "wiretaps"—the unauthorized and unknown monitoring or collection of e-mail, web-surfing data, or even keyboard strokes—are now employed, and that information may be shared with law enforcement or intelligence agencies. Ronald J. Deibert, "Black Code Redux: Censorship, Surveillance, and the Militarization of Cyberspace," in *Digital Media and Democracy: Tactics in Hard Times*, ed. Megan Boler (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 151.

Such surveillance techniques are not just used by government or intelligence agencies; they are also used by companies. If you're like many others and me, you are now used to clicking "accept" on those lengthy terms of use agreements and privacy policies without looking at them. What we may not know (and may not care about) is that who or whatever is asking us for our agreement or disagreement may want to track our usage of their program or product. Sometimes this tracking is meant to improve the functionality of the product or to connect us with services that we or the program has identified as useful to or relevant for us. The amount of data that exists on each one of us is now astounding, and more web users are demanding that browsers and other Internet services allow them to either opt out of tracking or monitor who is tracking them. A recent "add-on" called Collusion for Mozilla's Firefox has received attention for allowing users to visualize who is

tracking them in real time. “Collusion,” Add-ons, accessed November 8, 2012, <https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/collusion>.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- New media have had a democratizing effect on society, as they help distribute power to people through their social and personal characteristics. Instead of media outlets having sole control over what is communicated to audiences, media-audience interactions are now more like a dialogue. The personal access to media and growing control over media discourses by users allows people to more freely express opinions, offer criticisms, and question others—communicative acts that are all important for a functioning democracy.
- The digitalization of media products allows them to be more easily reproduced and disseminated. Due to increasing rates of piracy, media outlets have started a more aggressive campaign to reduce copyright infringement through threats of prosecution, collaboration with media providers to identify offending users, and digital rights management (DRM).
- The democratizing nature of new media hasn’t been welcomed by all, as governments, institutions, and individuals engage in various types of content filtering.
- The connectivity afforded by social and personal media also create more possibilities for surveillance in terms of electronic “wiretaps” by law enforcement and collection of web-browsing, consumption, and online communication data by corporations and organizations.

EXERCISES

1. Discuss the ways in which new media have democratized access to information and allowed people to participate in more of a dialogue with media outlets, government officials, political candidates, and/or individuals.
2. *Democracy Now* is an alternative media outlet that is accessible in many different new media platforms. You can visit their main page at the following link: <http://www.democracynow.org>. Take a few minutes to visit the website and watch or listen to the most recent broadcast. How does the content of this news differ from mainstream media?
3. Discuss digital rights management (DRM). What are some of the positive and negative effects of limiting the ability of a digital media file to be reproduced or used on multiple devices?

16.3 New Media, the Self, and Relationships

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Discuss the relationship between new media and the self.
2. Identify positive and negative impacts of new media on our interpersonal relationships.

Think about some ways that new media have changed the way you think about yourself and the way you think about and interact in your relationships. Have you ever given your Facebook page a “once-over” before you send or accept a friend request just to make sure that the content displayed is giving off the desired impression? The technological changes of the past twenty years have affected you and your relationships whether you are a heavy user or not. Even people who don’t engage with technology as much as others are still affected by it, since the people they interact with use and are affected by new media to varying degrees.

New Media and the Self

The explicit way we become conscious of self-presentation when using new media, social networking sites (SNSs) in particular, may lead to an increase in self-consciousness. You’ll recall that in [Chapter 1 "Introduction to Communication Studies"](#) we talked about the role that communication plays in helping us meet our identity needs and, in [Chapter 2 "Communication and Perception"](#), the role that self-discrepancy theory plays in self-perception. The things that we “like” on Facebook, the pictures we are tagged in, and the news stories or jokes that we share on our timeline all come together to create a database of information that new and old friends can access to form and reform impressions of us. Because we know that others are making impressions based on this database of information and because we have control over most of what appears in this database, people may become overfocused on crafting their online presence to the point that they neglect their offline relationships. This extra level of self-consciousness has also manifested in an increase in self-image and self-esteem issues for some users. For example, some cosmetic surgeons have noted an uptick in patients coming in to have facial surgeries or procedures specifically because they don’t like the way their chin looks on the webcam while chatting on Skype or because they feel self-conscious about the way they look in the numerous digital pictures that are now passed around and stored on new media. Since new media are being increasingly used in professional capacities, some people are also seeking cosmetic surgery or procedures as a way of investing in their personal brand or as a way of giving them an edge in a tight job

market. Jessica Roy, "Facebook, Skype Give Cosmetic Surgery Industry a Lift," *BetaBeat.com*, July 11, 2012, accessed November 8, 2012, <http://betabeat.com/2012/07/facebook-skype-plastic-surgery-cosmetic-increase-07112012>.

The personal and social nature of new media also creates an openness that isn't necessarily part of our offline social reality. Although some people try to address this problem by creating more than one Facebook account, according to the terms of use we all agreed to, we are not allowed to create more than one personal profile. People may also have difficulty managing their different commitments, especially if they develop a dependence on or even addiction to new media devices and/or platforms. New media blur the lines between personal and professional in many ways, which can be positive and negative. For example, the constant connection offered by laptops and smartphones increases the expectation that people will continue working from home or while on vacation. At the same time, however, people may use new media for non-work-related purposes while at work, which may help even out the work/life balance. **Cyberslacking**¹¹, which is the non-work-related use of new media while on the job, is seen as a problem in many organizations and workplaces. However, some research shows that occasional use of new media for personal reasons while at work can have positive effects, as it may relieve boredom, help reduce stress, or lead to greater job satisfaction. Jessica Vitak, Julia Crouse, and Robert LaRose, "Personal Internet Use at Work: Understanding Cyberslacking," *Computers in Human Behavior* 27, no. 5 (2011): 1752.

Personal media devices bring with them a sense of **constant connectivity**¹² that makes us "reachable" nearly all the time and can be comforting or anxiety inducing. Devices such as smartphones and computers, and platforms such as e-mail, Facebook, and the web, are within an arm's reach of many people. While this can be convenient and make things more efficient in some cases, it can also create a dependence that we might not be aware of until those connections are broken or become unreliable. You don't have to look too far to see people buried in their smartphones, tablets, or laptops all around. While some people have learned to rely on peripheral vision in order to text and walk at the same time, others aren't so graceful. In fact, London saw the creation of a "text safe" street with padding on street signs and lamp poles to help prevent injuries when people inevitably bump into them while engrossed in their gadgets' screens. Follow this link to read a story in *Time* magazine and see a picture of the street: <http://www.time.com/time/business/article/0,8599,1724522,00.html>. Additionally, a survey conducted in the United



The constant availability of the Internet allows people to engage in a wide variety of cyberslacking at work, such as online gaming, shopping, and chatting.

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11. The non-work-related use of new media while on the job.
12. A quality of personal media whereby we are "reachable" nearly all the time, which can be both comforting and anxiety inducing.

Kingdom found that being away from social networks causes more anxiety than being a user of them. Another study found that 73 percent of people would panic if they lost their smartphone. Brittney Fitzgerald, "Social Media Is Causing Anxiety, Study Finds," *Huffington Post*, July 11, 2012, accessed November 8, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/07/10/social-media-anxiety_n_1662224.html.

Of course, social media can also increase self-esteem or have other social benefits. A recent survey of fifteen thousand women found that 48 percent of the respondents felt that social media helped them stay in touch with others while also adding a little stress in terms of overstimulation. Forty-two percent didn't mention the stress of overstimulation and focused more on the positive effects of being in touch with others and the world in general. When asked about how social media affects their social lives, 30 percent of the women felt that increased use of social media helped them be more social offline as well. Bonnie Kintzer, "Women Find Social Media Make Them More Social Offline, Too," *Advertising Age*, July 9, 2012, accessed November 8, 2012, <http://adage.com/article/guest-columnists/women-find-social-media-makes-social-offline/235712>. Other research supports this finding for both genders, finding that Facebook can help people with social anxiety feel more confident and socially connected. Tracii Ryan and Sophia Xenos, "Who Uses Facebook? An Investigation into the Relationship between the Big Five, Shyness, Narcissism, Loneliness, and Facebook Usage," *Computers in Human Behavior* 27, no. 5 (2011): 1659.

New Media and Interpersonal Relationships

How do new media affect our interpersonal relationships, if at all? This is a question that has been addressed by scholars, commentators, and people in general. To provide some perspective, similar questions and concerns have been raised along with each major change in communication technology. New media, however, have been the primary communication change of the past few generations, which likely accounts for the attention they receive. Some scholars in sociology have decried the negative effects of new technology on society and relationships in particular, saying that the quality of relationships is deteriorating and the strength of connections is weakening. Kathleen Richardson and Sue Hessey, "Archiving the Self?: Facebook as Biography of Social and Relational Memory," *Journal of Information, Communication, and Ethics in Society* 7, no. 1 (2009): 29.

Facebook greatly influenced our use of the word *friend*, although people's conceptions of the word may not have changed as much. When someone "friends you" on Facebook, it doesn't automatically mean that you now have the closeness and intimacy that you have with some offline friends. And research shows that people don't regularly accept friend requests from or send them to people they

haven't met, preferring instead to have met a person at least once. Kathleen Richardson and Sue Hesse, "Archiving the Self?: Facebook as Biography of Social and Relational Memory," *Journal of Information, Communication, and Ethics in Society* 7, no. 1 (2009): 32. Some users, though, especially adolescents, engage in what is called "friend-collecting behavior," which entails users friending people they don't know personally or that they wouldn't talk to in person in order to increase the size of their online network. Emily Christofides, Amy Muise, and Serge Desmarais, "Hey Mom, What's on Your Facebook? Comparing Facebook Disclosure and Privacy in Adolescents and Adults," *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 3, no. 1 (2012): 51. As we will discuss later, this could be an impression management strategy, as the user may assume that a large number of Facebook friends will make him or her appear more popular to others.

Although many have critiqued the watering down of the term *friend* when applied to SNSs, specifically Facebook, some scholars have explored how the creation of these networks affects our interpersonal relationships and may even restructure how we think about our relationships. Even though a person may have hundreds of Facebook friends that he or she doesn't regularly interact with on- or offline, just knowing that the network exists in a somewhat tangible form (catalogued on Facebook) can be comforting. Even the people who are distant acquaintances but are "friends" on Facebook can serve important functions. Rather than Facebook users seeing these connections as pointless, frivolous, or stressful, they are often comforting background presences. A **dormant network**¹³ is a network of people with whom users may not feel obligated to explicitly interact but may find comfort in knowing the connections exist. Such networks can be beneficial, because when needed, a person may be able to more easily tap into that dormant network than they would an offline extended network. It's almost like being friends on Facebook keeps the communication line open, because both people can view the other's profile and keep up with their lives even without directly communicating. This can help sustain tenuous friendships or past friendships and prevent them from fading away, which as we learned in [Chapter 7 "Communication in Relationships"](#) is a common occurrence as we go through various life changes.

A key part of interpersonal communication is impression management, and some forms of new media allow us more tools for presenting ourselves than others. Social networking sites (SNSs) in many ways are platforms for self-presentation. Even more than blogs, web pages, and smartphones, the environment on an SNS like Facebook or Twitter facilitates self-disclosure in a directed way and allows others who have access to our profile to see our other "friends." This convergence of different groups of people (close friends, family, acquaintances, friends of friends, colleagues, and strangers) can present challenges for self-presentation. Although Facebook is often thought of as a social media outlet for teens and young adults, research shows half of all US adults have a profile on Facebook or another

13. A network of people with whom users may not feel obligated to explicitly interact but may find comfort in knowing the connections exist.

SNS. Jessica Vitak and Nicole B. Ellison, “‘There’s a Network Out There You Might as Well Tap’: Exploring the Benefits of and Barriers to Exchanging Informational and Support-Based Resources on Facebook,” *New Media and Society* (in press). The fact that Facebook is expanding to different generations of users has coined a new phrase—“the graying of Facebook.” This is due to a large increase in users over the age of fifty-five. In fact, it has been stated the fastest-growing Facebook user group is women fifty-five and older, which is up more than 175 percent since fall 2008. Anita Gates, “For Baby Boomers, the Joys of Facebook,” *New York Times*, March 19, 2009, accessed November 8, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/22/nyregion/new-jersey/22Rgen.html>. So now we likely have people from personal, professional, and academic contexts in our Facebook network, and those people are now more likely than ever to be from multiple generations. The growing diversity of our social media networks creates new challenges as we try to engage in impression management.

We should be aware that people form impressions of us based not just on what we post on our profiles but also on our friends and the content that they post on our profiles. In short, as in our offline lives, we are judged online by the company we keep. Joseph B. Walther, Brandon Van Der Heide, Sang-Yeon Kim, David Westerman, and Stephanie Tom Tong, “The Role of Friends’ Appearance and Behavior on Evaluations of Individuals on Facebook: Are We Known by the Company We Keep?” *Human Communication Research* 34 (2008): 29. The difference is, though, that via Facebook a person (unless blocked or limited by privacy settings) can see our entire online social network and friends, which doesn’t happen offline. The information on our Facebook profiles is also archived, meaning there is a record the likes of which doesn’t exist in offline interactions. Recent research found that a person’s perception of a profile owner’s attractiveness is influenced by the attractiveness of the friends shown on the profile. In short, a profile owner is judged more physically attractive when his or her friends are judged as physically attractive, and vice versa. The profile owner is also judged as more socially attractive (likable, friendly) when his or her friends are judged as physically attractive. The study also found that complimentary and friendly statements made about profile owners on their wall or on profile comments increased perceptions of the profile owner’s social attractiveness and credibility. An interesting, but not surprising, gender double standard also emerged. When statements containing sexual remarks or references to the profile owner’s excessive drinking were posted on the profile, perceptions of attractiveness increased if the profile owner was male and decreased if female. Joseph B. Walther, Brandon Van Der Heide, Sang-Yeon Kim, David Westerman, and Stephanie Tom Tong, “The Role of Friends’ Appearance and



People fifty-five and older are using new media in increasing numbers.

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Behavior on Evaluations of Individuals on Facebook: Are We Known by the Company We Keep?" *Human Communication Research* 34 (2008): 41–45.

Self-disclosure is a fundamental building block of interpersonal relationships, and new media make self-disclosures easier for many people because of the lack of immediacy, meaning the fact that a message is sent through electronic means arouses less anxiety or inhibition than would a face-to-face exchange. SNSs provide opportunities for social support. Research has found that Facebook communication behaviors such as “friending” someone or responding to a request posted on someone’s wall lead people to feel a sense of attachment and perceive that others are reliable and helpful. Jessica Vitak and Nicole B. Ellison, “‘There’s a Network Out There You Might as Well Tap’: Exploring the Benefits of and Barriers to Exchanging Informational and Support-Based Resources on Facebook,” *New Media and Society* (in press). Much of the research on Facebook, though, has focused on the less intimate alliances that we maintain through social media. Since most people maintain offline contact with their close friends and family, Facebook is more of a supplement to interpersonal communication. Since most people’s Facebook “friend” networks are composed primarily of people with whom they have less face-to-face contact in their daily lives, Facebook provides an alternative space for interaction that can more easily fit into a person’s busy schedule or interest area. For example, to stay connected, both people don’t have to look at each other’s profiles simultaneously. I often catch up on a friend by scrolling through a couple weeks of timeline posts rather than checking in daily.

The space provided by SNSs can also help reduce some of the stress we feel in regards to relational maintenance or staying in touch by allowing for more convenient contact. The expectations for regular contact with our Facebook friends who are in our extended network are minimal. An occasional comment on a photo or status update or an even easier click on the “like” button can help maintain those relationships. However, when we post something asking for information, help, social support, or advice, those in the extended network may play a more important role and allow us to access resources and viewpoints beyond those in our closer circles. And research shows that many people ask for informational help through their status updates. Jessica Vitak and Nicole B. Ellison, “‘There’s a Network Out There You Might as Well Tap’: Exploring the Benefits of and Barriers to Exchanging Informational and Support-Based Resources on Facebook,” *New Media and Society* (in press).

These extended networks serve important purposes, one of which is to provide access to new information and different perspectives than those we may get from close friends and family. For example, since we tend to have significant others that are more similar to than different from us, the people that we are closest to are likely to share many or most of our beliefs, attitudes, and values. Extended contacts,

however, may expose us to different political views or new sources of information, which can help broaden our perspectives. The content in this section hopefully captures what I'm sure you have already experienced in your own engagement with new media—that new media have important implications for our interpersonal relationships. Given that, we will end this chapter with a “Getting Competent” feature box that discusses some tips on how to competently use social media.

“Getting Competent”

Using Social Media Competently

We all have a growing log of personal information stored on the Internet, and some of it is under our control and some of it isn't. We also have increasingly diverse social networks that require us to be cognizant of the information we make available and how we present ourselves. While we can't control all the information about ourselves online or the impressions people form, we can more competently engage with social media so that we are getting the most out of it in both personal and professional contexts.

A quick search on Google for “social media dos and don'ts” will yield around 100,000 results, which shows that there's no shortage of advice about how to competently use social media. I'll offer some of the most important dos and don'ts that I found that relate to communication. Alison Doyle, “Top 10 Social Media Dos and Don'ts,” *About.com*, accessed November 8, 2012, <http://jobsearch.about.com/od/onlinecareernetworking/tp/socialmediajobsearch.htm>. Feel free to do your own research on specific areas of concern.

Be consistent. Given that most people have multiple social media accounts, it's important to have some degree of consistency. At least at the top level of your profile (the part that isn't limited by privacy settings), include information that you don't mind anyone seeing.

Know what's out there. Since the top level of many social media sites are visible in Google search results, you should monitor how these appear to others by regularly (about once a month) doing a Google search using various iterations of your name. Putting your name in quotation marks will help target your results. Make sure you're logged out of all your accounts and then click on the various results to see what others can see.

Think before you post. Software that enable people to take “screen shots” or download videos and tools that archive web pages can be used without our knowledge to create records of what you post. While it is still a good idea to go through your online content and “clean up” materials that may form unfavorable impressions, it is even a better idea to not put that information out

there in the first place. Posting something about how you hate school or your job or a specific person may be done in the heat of the moment and forgotten, but a potential employer might find that information and form a negative impression even if it's months or years old.

Be familiar with privacy settings. If you are trying to expand your social network, it may be counterproductive to put your Facebook or Twitter account on “lockdown,” but it is beneficial to know what levels of control you have and to take advantage of them. For example, I have a “Limited Profile” list on Facebook to which I assign new contacts or people with whom I am not very close. You can also create groups of contacts on various social media sites so that only certain people see certain information.

Be a gatekeeper for your network. Do not accept friend requests or followers that you do not know. Not only could these requests be sent from “bots” that might skim your personal info or monitor your activity; they could be from people that might make you look bad. Remember, we learned earlier that people form impressions based on those with whom we are connected. You can always send a private message to someone asking how he or she knows you or do some research by Googling his or her name or username.

1. Identify information that you might want to limit for each of the following audiences: friends, family, and employers.
2. Google your name (remember to use multiple forms and to put them in quotation marks). Do the same with any usernames that are associated with your name (e.g., you can Google your Twitter handle or an e-mail address). What information came up? Were you surprised by anything?
3. What strategies can you use to help manage the impressions you form on social media?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- New media affect the self as we develop a higher degree of self-consciousness due to the increased visibility of our lives (including pictures, life events, and communication). The constant connectivity that comes with new media can also help us feel more connected to others and create anxiety due to overstimulation or a fear of being cut off.
- New media affect interpersonal relationships, as conceptions of relationships are influenced by new points of connection such as “being Facebook friends.” While some people have critiqued social media for lessening the importance of face-to-face interaction, some communication scholars have found that online networks provide important opportunities to stay connected, receive emotional support, and broaden our perspectives in ways that traditional offline networks do not.
- Getting integrated: Social networking sites (SNSs) can present interpersonal challenges related to self-disclosure and self-presentation since we use them in academic, professional, personal, and civic contexts. Given that people from all those contexts may have access to our profile, we have to be competent in regards to what we disclose and how we present ourselves to people from different contexts (or be really good at managing privacy settings so that only certain information is available to certain people).

EXERCISES

1. Discuss the notion that social media has increased our degree of self-consciousness. Do you agree? Why or why not?
2. Do you find the constant connectivity that comes with personal media overstimulating or comforting?
3. Have you noticed a “graying” of social media like Facebook and Twitter in your own networks? What opportunities and challenges are presented by intergenerational interactions on social media?