# Introduction to Communication and Media Studies

# INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA STUDIES

J.J. SYLVIA IV

ROTEL (Remixing Open Textbooks with an Equity Lens) Project
Fitchburg, Massachusetts

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An anonymous student updated statistics about newspaper subscriptions through 2020 and added a section on AI-generated content.

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Section on Social Media Literacy added by an anonymous student.

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The case study from the following paper was also integrated into the chapter: Studying political disputes: A rhetorical perspective and a case study by Sophia Hatzisavvidou. CC BY-NC 4.0. Spelling was Americanized.

Student Frederick Hunter made updates throughout the chapter to examples.

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A case study has been incorporated into the chapter based on the following paper: Tracking Memes in the Wild: Visual Rhetoric and Image Circulation in Environmental Communication. By Madison Jones, Aaron Beveridge, Julian R. Garrison, Abbey Greene, and Hannah MacDonald. *Front. Commun*., 09 June 2022. Sec. Science and Environmental Communication. Volume 7 – 2022 | https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2022.883278. CC BY 4.0.

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A section on the Media System in Germany was added by an anonymous student.

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or slightly modified Learning Objectives, Key Takeaways, and Exercises for each section. I have added links to digitizations of phonograph recordings. I have also included information about connections to my local campus. References were re-formatted. Image captions were updated for accessibility.

Student Rika Nakano added a section on Kpop music from the 2010s to 2020s.

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A section on WANN was added. J.J. Sylvia IV updated images to comply with Creative Commons licensing, added original images, and in some cases added or slightly modified Learning Objectives, Key Takeaways, and Exercises for each section. I have also included information about connections to my local campus. References were re-formatted. Image captions were updated for accessibility.

An anonymous student created a video about the history of radio that was linked in the chapter.

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Student Nolan Carey made edits, corrections, and updates through section 14.1.

Student Nicky Romano substantially extended the section on The Rise of Nintendo, including interviews with Dr. Sam Tobin.

An anonymous student added sections on Consoles in the 2010s and beyond and COVID-19 and online gaming

Student Gavin Nathaniel Bayer added a section on Piracy, Live-Service, and the Software They War Over.

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An anonymous student contributed a case study on Budweiser's Branding.

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Student Maggie Serratore added a section on Image and Video Sharing.

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Student Connor Novack made edits throughout section 17.1.

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As part of ROTEL Grant's mission to support the creation, management, and dissemination of culturally-relevant textbooks, we must acknowledge Indigenous Peoples as the traditional stewards of the land, and the enduring relationship that exists between them and their traditional territories. We acknowledge that the boundaries that created Massachusetts were arbitrary and a product of the settlers. We honor the land on which the Higher Education Institutions of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts are sited as the traditional territory of tribal nations. We acknowledge the painful history of genocide and forced removal from their territory, and other atrocities connected with colonization. We honor and respect the many diverse indigenous people connected to this land on which we gather, and our acknowledgement is one action we can take to correct the stories and practices that erase Indigenous People's history and culture.

Identified tribes and/or nations of Massachusetts

Historical nations:

- Mahican
- Mashpee
- Massachuset
- Nauset
- Nipmuc
- Pennacook
- Pocomtuc
- Stockbridge
- Wampanoag

Present day nations and tribes:

- Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe
- Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head Aquinnah
- Herring Pond Wampanoag Tribe
- Assawompsett-Nemasket Band of Wampanoags
- Pocasset Wampanoag of the Pokanoket Nation
- Pacasset Wampanoag Tribe
- Seaconke Wampanoag Tribe

- Chappaquiddick Tribe of the Wampanoag Indian Nation
- Nipmuc Nation (Bands include the Hassanamisco, Natick)
- Nipmuck Tribal Council of Chaubunagungamaug
- Massachusett Tribe at Ponkapoag

In the event that we have an incorrect link or are missing an existing band/nation, please let us know so that we may correct our error.

Suggested readings

Massachusetts Center for Native American Awareness

A guide to Indigenous land acknowledgment

'We are all on Native Land: A conversation about Land Acknowledgements' YouTube video

Native-Land.ca | Our home on native land (mapping of native lands)

Beyond territorial acknowledgments – âpihtawikosisân

Your Territorial Acknowledgment Is Not Enough

# HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Please note that this book contains information about program and course offerings specific to Fitchburg State University. If you are adopting this book for your course, you may want to edit and update the text so it references local offerings at your own university

PART I

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA STUDIES

How did humans develop the ability to communicate? Are humans the only creatures on earth that communicate? What purpose does communication serve in our lives? Answers to these historical, anthropological, and social-scientific questions provide part of the diversity of knowledge that makes up the field of communication studies. As a student of communication, you will learn that there is much more to the field than public speaking, even though the origins of communication studies are traced back thousands of years to ancient Greek philosophers and teachers like Plato and Aristotle, who were the first to systematically study and write about speech. Communication students and scholars also study basic communication processes like nonverbal communication, perception, and listening, as well as communication in various contexts, including interpersonal, group, intercultural, and media communication. Additionally, media studies may include the study of rhetorical and cultural analysis of media and how those impact society.

Communication studies is a vital aspect of the field of media, particularly within a Communications Media department. Recognized as one of the most practical academic disciplines, it forms the backbone of media professionals' work. Even those engaged in theoretical and philosophical pursuits within the field are practitioners of communication. Whether or not one has formally studied communication, everyone has a lifetime of experience in communicating. This experiential knowledge serves as a foundational starting point for media professionals to build upon, enhancing their competence and ethical practices in communication. In the context of a communications media department, I often emphasize to my students that they are communication scholars during their time in my class. I welcome them to the beginning of their journey in communication studies, a path that can significantly enrich their professional lives. Whether this journey lasts a semester or extends further, the study of communication is essential for media professionals, offering the potential to deepen their understanding and practice in the media field.

# 1.1 COMMUNICATION: HISTORY AND FORMS

**Learning Objectives**

- Define communication.
- Discuss the history of communication from ancient to modern times.
- List the five forms of communication.
- Distinguish among the five forms of communication.
- Review the various career options for students who study communication.

Before we dive into the history of communication, we must have a shared understanding of what we mean by the word communication. For our purposes in this book, we will define **communication** as the process of generating meaning by sending and receiving verbal and nonverbal symbols and signs that are influenced by multiple contexts. This definition builds on other definitions of communication that have been rephrased and refined over many years. In fact, since the systematic study of communication began in colleges and universities a little over one hundred years ago, there have been more than 126 published definitions of communication[1]. In order to get a context for how communication has been conceptualized and studied, let's look at the history of the field.

1. Frank E. X. Dance and Carl E. Larson, *The Functions of Human Communication: A Theoretical Approach* (New York, NY: Holt, Reinhart, and Winston, 1976), 23.

# From Aristotle to Today: A Brief History of Communication

While there are rich areas of study in animal communication and interspecies communication, our focus in this book is on human communication. Even though all animals communicate, as human beings, we have a special capacity to use symbols to communicate about things outside our immediate temporal and spatial reality[2]. For example, we have the capacity to use abstract symbols, like the word education, to discuss a concept that encapsulates many aspects of teaching and learning. We can also reflect on the past and imagine our future. The ability to think outside our immediate reality is what allows us to create elaborate belief systems, art, philosophy, and academic theories. It's true that you can teach a gorilla to sign words like food and baby, but its ability to use symbols doesn't extend to the same level of abstraction as ours. However, humans haven't always had the sophisticated communication systems that we do today.

Some scholars speculate that humans' first words were onomatopoetic. You may remember from your English classes that *onomatopoeia* refers to words that sound like that to which they refer—words like *boing*, *drip*, *gurgle*, *swoosh*, and *whack*. Just think about how a prehistoric human could have communicated a lot using these words and hand gestures. He or she could use *gurgle* to alert others to the presence of water or *swoosh* and *whack* to recount what happened on a hunt. In any case, this primitive ability to communicate provided an evolutionary advantage. Those humans who could talk were able to cooperate, share information, make better tools, impress mates, or warn others of danger, which led them to have more offspring who were also more predisposed to communicate[3]. This eventually led to the development of a "Talking Culture" during the "Talking Era." During this 150,000-year period of human existence, ranging from 180,000 BCE to 3500 BCE, talking was the only medium of communication, aside from gestures, that humans had.

The beginning of the "Manuscript Era," around 3500 BCE, marked the turn from oral to written culture. This evolution in communication corresponded with a shift to a more settled, agrarian way of life[4]. As hunter-gatherers settled into small villages and began to plan ahead for how to plant, store, protect, and trade or sell their food, they needed accounting systems to keep track of their materials and record transactions. While such transactions were initially tracked with actual objects that symbolized an amount—for example, five pebbles represented five measures of grain—symbols, likely carved into clay, later served as the primary method of record keeping. In this case, five dots might equal five measures of grain.

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2. *ibid*, 43.

3. Marshall T. Poe, *A History of Communications: Media and Society from the Evolution of Speech to the Internet* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 27

4. *ibid*, 61–73.

During this period, villages also developed class systems as more successful farmers turned businessmen prospered and took leadership positions. Religion also became more complex, and a new class of spiritual leaders emerged. Soon, armies were needed to protect the stockpiled resources from others who might want to steal them. The emergence of elite classes and the rise of armies required records and bookkeeping, which furthered the spread of written symbols. As clergy, the ruling elite and philosophers began to take up writing, the systems became more complex. The turn to writing didn't threaten the influential place of oral communication, however. During the nearly 5,000-year period of the "Manuscript Era," literacy, or the ability to read and write, didn't spread far beyond the most privileged in society. While this was a significant advancement, it's crucial to note that literacy was a privilege not extended to all social classes, thereby perpetuating social inequalities. In fact, it wasn't until the 1800s that widespread literacy existed in the world.

The end of the "Manuscript Era" marked a shift toward a rapid increase in communication technologies. The "Print Era" extended from 1450 to 1850 and was marked by the invention of the printing press and the ability to mass-produce written texts. This 400-year period gave way to the "Audiovisual Era," which only lasted 140 years, from 1850 to 1990, and was marked by the invention of radio, telegraph, telephone, and television. Our current period, the "Internet Era," has only lasted from 1990 until the present. This period has featured the most rapid dispersion of a new method of communication, as the spread of the Internet and the expansion of digital and personal media signaled the beginning of the digital age.

The evolution of communication media, from speaking to digital technology, has also influenced the field of communication studies. To better understand how this field of study developed, we must return to the "Manuscript Era," which saw the production of the earliest writings about communication. In fact, the oldest essay and book ever found were written about communication[5]. Although this essay and book predate Aristotle, he is a logical person to start with when tracing the development of the communication scholarship. His writings on communication, although not the oldest, are the most complete and systematic. While Western scholars like Aristotle have significantly contributed to the field, it's essential to acknowledge the rich communication theories from non-Western cultures, such as the African concept of "Ubuntu," which emphasizes communal values in communication, or the Indian treatise "Natya Shastra," which explores the art of expression.

Ancient Greek philosophers and scholars such as Aristotle theorized about the art of rhetoric, which refers to speaking well and persuasively. Today, we hear the word rhetoric used in negative ways. A politician, for example, may write off his or her opponent's statements as "just rhetoric." This leads us to believe that rhetoric refers to misleading, false, or unethical communication, which is not at all in keeping with the usage of the word by ancient or contemporary communication experts. While rhetoric does refer primarily to persuasive communication messages, much of the writing and teaching about rhetoric conveys the importance of being

5. James C. McCroskey, "Communication Competence: The Elusive Construct," in *Competence in Communication: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, ed. Robert N. Bostrom (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1984), 260.

an ethical rhetor or communicator. So when a communicator, such as a politician, speaks in misleading, vague, or dishonest ways, he or she isn't using rhetoric; he or she is being an unethical speaker.

The study of rhetoric focused on public communication, primarily oratory, used in discussions or debates regarding laws and policy, speeches delivered in courts, and speeches intended to praise or blame another person. The connections among rhetoric, policy-making, and legal proceedings show that communication and citizenship have been connected since the study of communication began. Throughout this book, we will continue to make connections between communication, ethics, and civic engagement.

Figure 1: Much of the public speaking in ancient Greece took place in courtrooms or in political contexts. The image shows two people sitting at a desk and facing one another in a modern courtroom. Both are well-dressed and appear to be lawyers.

Ancient Greek rhetoricians like Aristotle were followed by Roman orators like Cicero. Cicero contributed to the field of rhetoric by expanding theories regarding the five canons of rhetoric, which include invention, arrangement, style, delivery, and memory. Invention refers to the use of evidence and arguments to think about things in new ways and is the most studied of the five canons. Arrangement refers to the organization of speech,

style refers to the use of language, and delivery refers to the vocal and physical characteristics of a speaker. Memory is the least studied of the five canons and refers to the techniques employed by speakers of that era to retain and then repeat large amounts of information. The Age of Enlightenment in the 1700s marked a societal turn toward scientific discovery and the acquisition of knowledge, which led to an explosion of philosophical and scientific writings on many aspects of human existence. This focus on academic development continued into the 1900s and the establishment of distinct communication studies departments.

Communication studies as a distinct academic discipline with departments at universities and colleges has only existed for a little over one hundred years[6]. Although rhetoric has long been a key part of higher education, and colleges and universities have long recognized the importance of speaking, communication departments did not exist. In the early 1900s, professors with training and expertise in communication were often housed in rhetoric or English departments and were sometimes called "professors of speech." During this time, tension began to build between professors of English who studied rhetoric as the written word and professors of speech who studied rhetoric as the spoken word. In 1914, a group of ten speech teachers who were members of the National Council of Teachers of English broke off from the organization and started the National Association of Academic Teachers of Public Speaking, which eventually evolved into today's National Communication Association. There was also a distinction of focus and interest among professors of speech. While some focused on the quality of ideas, arguments, and organization, others focused on coaching the performance and delivery aspects of public speaking[7]. Instruction in the latter stressed the importance of "oratory" or "elocution," and this interest in reading and speaking aloud is sustained today in theatre and performance studies and also in oral interpretation classes, which are still taught in many communication departments.

The formalization of speech departments led to an expanded view of the role of communication. Even though Aristotle and other ancient rhetoricians and philosophers had theorized the connection between rhetoric and citizenship, the role of the communicator became the focus instead of solely focusing on the message. James A. Winans, one of the first modern speech teachers and an advocate for teaching communication in higher education, said there were "two motives for learning to speak. Increasing one's chance to succeed and increasing one's power to serve[8]." Later, as social psychology began to expand in academic institutions, speech communication scholars saw places for connection to further expand definitions of communication to include social and psychological contexts.

Today, you can find elements of all these various aspects of communication being studied in communication departments. If we use President Obama as a case study, we can see the breadth of the communication field.

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6. William Keith, "On the Origins of Speech as a Discipline: James A. Winans and Public Speaking as Practical Democracy," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (2008): 239–58.

7. *ibid,* 240.

8. *ibid,* 253.

Within one department, you may have fairly traditional rhetoricians who study the speeches of President Obama in comparison with other presidential rhetoric. Others may study debates between presidential candidates, dissecting the rhetorical strategies used, for example, by Mitt Romney and Barack Obama. Expanding from messages to channels of communication, scholars may study how different media outlets cover presidential politics. At an interpersonal level, scholars may study what sorts of conflicts emerge within families that have liberal and conservative individuals. At a cultural level, communication scholars could study how the election of an African American president creates a narrative of post-racial politics. Our tour From Aristotle to Obama was quick but hopefully instructive. Now let's turn to a discussion of the five major forms of communication.

## Mass Communication

Public communication becomes **mass communication** when it is transmitted to many people through print or electronic media. Print media such as newspapers and magazines continue to be an important channel for mass communication although they have suffered much in the past decade due in part to the rise of electronic media. Television, websites, blogs, and social media are mass communication channels that you probably engage with regularly. Radio, podcasts, and books are other examples of mass media. The technology required to send mass communication messages distinguishes it from the other forms of communication. A certain amount of intentionality goes into transmitting a mass communication message since it usually requires one or more extra steps to convey the message. This may involve pressing "Enter" to send a Facebook message or involve an entire crew of camera people, sound engineers, and production assistants to produce a television show. Even though the messages must be intentionally transmitted through technology, the intentionality and goals of the person actually creating the message, such as the writer, television host, or talk show guest, vary greatly. The president's State of the Union address is a mass communication message that is very formal, goal-oriented, and intentional, but a president's verbal gaffe during a news interview is not.

Figure 2: Technological advances such as the printing press, television, and the more recent digital revolution have made mass communication a prominent feature of our daily lives. The image features a woman in a red shirt facing away from the camera. She is surrounded by paper and various technological devices and screens. There is a window in front of her overlooking a city.

Mass communication differs from other forms of communication in terms of the personal connection between participants. Even though creating the illusion of a personal connection is often a goal of those who create mass communication messages, the relational aspect of interpersonal and group communication isn't inherent within this form of communication. Unlike interpersonal, group, and public communication, there is no immediate verbal and nonverbal feedback loop in mass communication. Of course, you could write a letter to the editor of a newspaper or send an e-mail to a television or radio broadcaster in response to a story, but the immediate feedback available in face-to-face interactions is not present. With new media technologies like Twitter, blogs, and Facebook, feedback is becoming more immediate. Individuals can now tweet directly "at" (@) someone and use hashtags (#) to direct feedback to mass communication sources. Many radio and

television hosts and news organizations specifically invite feedback from viewers/listeners via social media and may even share the feedback on the air.

The technology to mass-produce and distribute communication messages brings with it the power for one voice or a series of voices to reach and affect many people. This power makes mass communication different from the other levels of communication. While there is potential for unethical communication at all the other levels, the potential consequences of unethical mass communication are important to consider. Communication scholars who focus on mass communication and media often take a critical approach in order to examine how media shapes our culture and who is included and excluded in various mediated messages.

## "Getting Real"

**Fitchburg State Connection**

Fitchburg State offers a concentration[9] and minor[10] in Communication Studies. Though these are available to all students with an interest in communication studies, these tracks are particularly helpful for any students who may be considering graduate study in the future. All Communications Studies students are required to take at least two theory courses as electives. Communication theory classes offered include:

- COMM 4000 – Writings in Aesthetics
- COMM 4007 – Data & Society
- COMM 4008 – Rhetoric in Greece
- COMM 4010 – Information Design
- COMM 4200 – Human Communication
- COMM 4205 – Seminar in Communication Theory
- COMM 4206 – Media and Society
- COMM 4220 – Organizational Communication
- COMM 4230 – Communication Law and Ethics
- COMM 4240 – Media Criticism

9. https://www.fitchburgstate.edu/academics/programs/communication-studies-concentration-communications-media-bs

10. https://www.fitchburgstate.edu/academics/programs/communication-studies-minor

- COMM 4250 – Research Seminar
- COMM 4280 – Intercultural Communication
- COMM 4281 – Gender and Communication
- COMM 4300 – Critical Making
- COMM 4400 – Creative Coding
- THEA 3003 – Dramaturgy

Did you know that our department also offers a master's degree in Social Media[11]?

The Master of Science in Applied Communication, Social Media concentration program is geared towards individuals interested in the study of social media in applied contexts. This concentration prepares students for the careers that require: applied understanding of social media theories and practice; design and management of social media sites and applications; ability to design and execute a social media campaign; ability to apply quantitative and qualitative communication research methods and integrated social media marketing skills; effective data visualization and multimedia presentation skills, and the application of intercultural communication competency in the social media context[12].

Classes in the program include:

- COMM 7005 – Communication Ethics
- COMM 7008 – Visual Communication and Design
- COMM 8009 – Intercultural Communication Competence
- COMM 9022 – Quantitative Research Methods
- COMM 9023 – Qualitative Research Methods
- COMM 7006 – New and Emerging Media
- COMM 7007 – Social Mobilities
- COMM 7018 – Social Media Theory
- COMM 8021 – Integrated Social Media
- COMM 8114 – Social Media Marketing

11. https://www.fitchburgstate.edu/academics/programs/social-media-concentration-applied-communication-ms-online

12. https://catalog.fitchburgstate.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=47&poid=11537&returnto=3286

- COMM 9025 – Data and Analytics
- COMM 9970 – Capstone

**What Can You Do with a Degree in Communication Studies?**

You're hopefully already beginning to see that communication studies is a diverse and vibrant field of study. The multiple subfields and concentrations within the field allow for exciting opportunities for study in academic contexts but can create confusion and uncertainty when a person considers what they might do for their career after studying communication. It's important to remember that not every college or university will have courses or concentrations in all the areas discussed next. Look at the communication courses offered at your school to get an idea of where the communication department on your campus fits into the overall field of study. Some departments are more general, offering students a range of courses to provide a well-rounded understanding of communication. Many departments offer concentrations or specializations within the major such as public relations, rhetoric, interpersonal communication, electronic media production, or corporate communication. If you are at a community college and plan on transferring to another school, your choice of school may be determined by the course offerings in the department and expertise of the school's communication faculty. It would be unfortunate for a student interested in public relations to end up in a department that focuses more on rhetoric or broadcasting, so doing your research ahead of time is key.

Since communication studies is a broad field, many students strategically choose a concentration and/or a minor that will give them an advantage in the job market. Specialization can definitely be an advantage, but don't forget about the general skills you gain as a communication major. This book, for example, should help you build communication competence and skills in interpersonal communication, intercultural communication, group communication, and public speaking, among others. You can also use your school's career services office to help you learn how to "sell" yourself as a communication major and how to translate what you've learned in your classes into useful information to include on your resume or in a job interview.

The main career areas that communication majors go into are business, public relations /

advertising, media, nonprofit, government/law, and education[13]. Within each of these areas there are multiple career paths, potential employers, and useful strategies for success.

- **Business.** Sales, customer service, management, real estate, human resources, training and development.
- **Public relations / advertising.** Public relations, advertising/marketing, public opinion research, development, event coordination.
- **Media.** Editing, copywriting, publishing, producing, directing, media sales, broadcasting.
- **Nonprofit.** Administration, grant writing, fund-raising, public relations, volunteer coordination.
- **Government/law.** City or town management, community affairs, lobbying, conflict negotiation / mediation.
- **Education.** High school speech teacher, forensics/debate coach, administration and student support services, graduate school to further communication study.

1. Which of the areas listed above are you most interested in studying in school or pursuing as a career? Why?
2. What aspect(s) of communication studies does/do the department at your school specialize in? What concentrations/courses are offered?
3. How do you think you could use what you have learned and will learn in this class to "sell" yourself on the job market?

## Key Takeaways

- Getting integrated: Communication is a broad field that draws from many academic disciplines. This interdisciplinary perspective provides useful training and experience for

13. What Can I Do with This Major? "Communication Studies," accessed May 18, 2012, http://whatcanidowiththismajor.com/major/communication-studies.

students that can translate into many career fields.

- Communication is the process of generating meaning by sending and receiving symbolic cues that are influenced by multiple contexts.
- Ancient Greeks like Aristotle and Plato started a rich tradition of the study of rhetoric in the Western world more than two thousand years ago. Communication did not become a distinct field of study with academic departments until the 1900s, but it is now a thriving discipline with many subfields of study.
- There are five forms of communication: intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, public, and mass communication.
    - Intrapersonal communication is communication with oneself and occurs only inside our heads.
    - Interpersonal communication is communication between people whose lives mutually influence one another and typically occurs in dyads, which means in pairs.
    - Group communication occurs when three or more people communicate to achieve a shared goal.
    - Public communication is sender focused and typically occurs when one person conveys information to an audience.
    - Mass communication occurs when messages are sent to large audiences using print or electronic media.

## Exercises

1. Review the section on the history of communication. Have you learned any of this history or heard of any of these historical figures in previous classes? If so, how was this history relevant to what you were studying in that class?
2. Come up with your own definition of communication. How does it differ from the definition in the book? Why did you choose to define communication the way you did?
3. Over the course of a day, keep track of the forms of communication that you use. Make a pie chart of how much time you think you spend, on an average day, engaging in each form of

communication (intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, public, and mass).

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# 1.2 THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

**Learning Objectives**

- Identify and define the components of the transmission model of communication.
- Identify and define the components of the interaction model of communication.
- Identify and define the components of the transaction model of communication.
- Compare and contrast the three models of communication.
- Use the transaction model of communication to analyze a recent communication encounter.

Communication is a complex process, and it is difficult to determine where or with whom a communication encounter starts and ends. Models of communication simplify the process by providing a visual representation of the various aspects of a communication encounter. Some models explain communication in more detail than others, but even the most complex model still doesn't recreate what we experience in even a moment of a communication encounter. Models still serve a valuable purpose for students of communication because they allow us to see specific concepts and steps within the process of communication, define communication, and apply communication concepts. When you become aware of how communication functions, you can think more deliberately through your communication encounters, which can help you better prepare for future communication and learn from your previous communication. The three models of communication we will discuss are the transmission, interaction, and transaction models.

Although these models of communication differ, they contain some common elements. The first two models we will discuss, the transmission model and the interaction model, include the following parts: participants, messages, encoding, decoding, and channels. In communication models, the **participants** are the senders and/or receivers of messages in a communication encounter. The **message** is the verbal or nonverbal content being conveyed from sender to receiver. For example, when you say "Hello!" to your friend, you are sending a message of greeting that will be received by your friend.

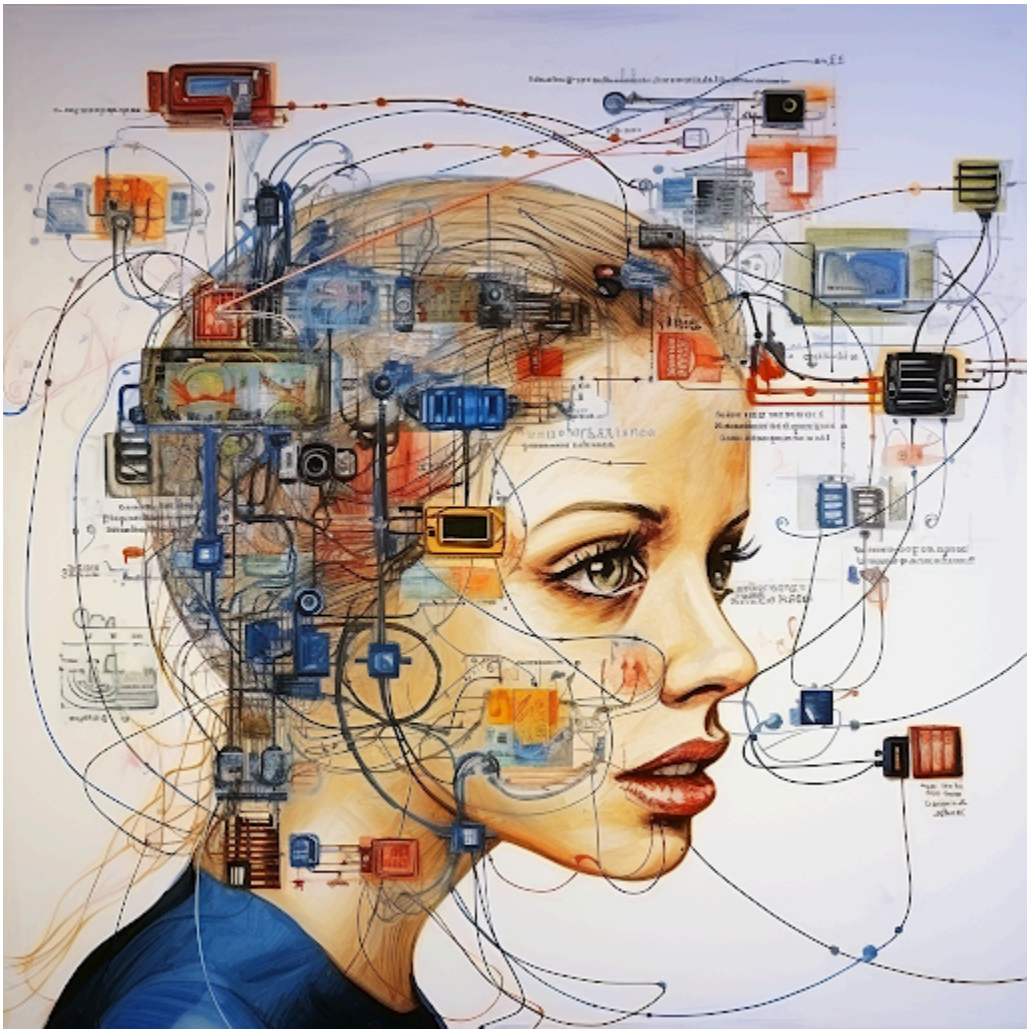

Figure 1: Although models of communication provide a useful blueprint to see how the communication process works, they are not complex enough to capture what communication is like as it is experienced. The photo shows a portrait of a woman. Her head is surrounded by abstract devices and wires.

The internal cognitive process that allows participants to send, receive, and understand messages is the encoding and decoding process. **Encoding** is the process of turning thoughts into communication. As we will learn later, the level of conscious thought that goes into encoding messages varies. **Decoding** is the process of turning communication into thoughts. For example, you may realize you're hungry and encode the following message to send to your roommate: "I'm hungry. Do you want to get pizza tonight?" As your roommate receives the message, he decodes your communication and turns it back into thoughts in order to make meaning out of it. Of course, we don't just communicate verbally—we have various options or channels for communication. Encoded messages are sent through a **channel** or a sensory route on which a message travels to the receiver for decoding. While communication can be sent and received using any sensory route (sight, smell, touch, taste, or sound), most communication occurs through visual (sight) and/or auditory (sound) channels.

If your roommate has headphones on and is engrossed in a video game, you may need to get his attention by waving your hands before you can ask him about dinner.

## Transmission Model of Communication

The **transmission model of communication** describes communication as a linear, one-way process in which a sender intentionally transmits a message to a receiver[1]. This model focuses on the sender and message within a communication encounter. Although the receiver is included in the model, this role is viewed as more of a target or end point rather than part of an ongoing process. We are left to presume that the receiver either successfully receives and understands the message or does not. The scholars who designed this model extended on a linear model proposed by Aristotle centuries before that included a speaker, message, and hearer. They were also influenced by the advent and spread of new communication technologies of the time such as telegraphy and radio, and you can probably see these technical influences within the model[2]. Think of how a radio message is sent from a person in the radio studio to you listening in your car. The sender is the radio announcer who encodes a verbal message that is transmitted by a radio tower through electromagnetic waves (the channel) and eventually reaches your (the receiver's) ears via an antenna and speakers in order to be decoded. The radio announcer doesn't really know if you receive his or her message or not, but if the equipment is working and the channel is free of static, then there is a good chance that the message was successfully received.

1. Richard Ellis and Ann McClintock, *You Take My Meaning: Theory into Practice in Human Communication* (London: Edward Arnold, 1990), 71.

2. Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1949), 16.

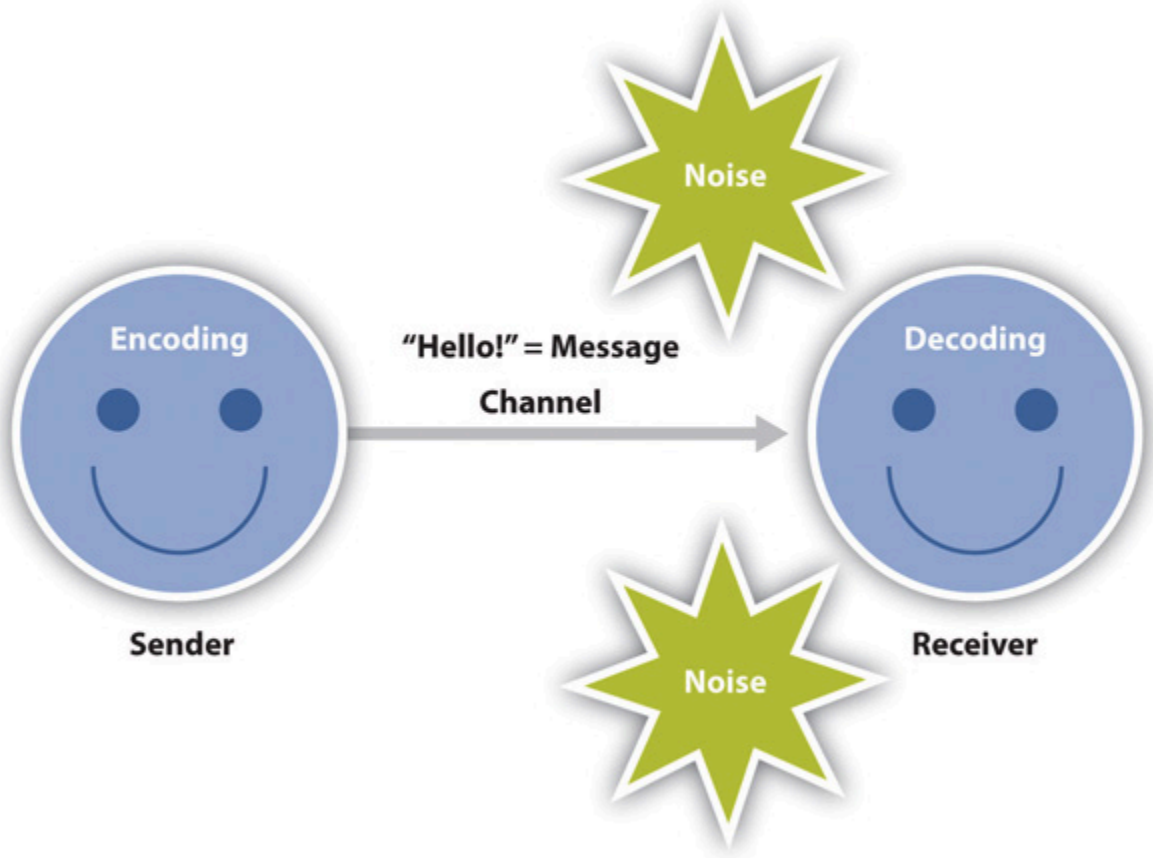


Figure 2: The Transmission Model of Communication. Image depicts a sender encoding a message, sending "Hello!" through a message channel which is surrounded by noise, then being received and decoded.

Since this model is sender and message-focused, responsibility is put on the sender to help ensure the message is successfully conveyed. This model emphasizes clarity and effectiveness, but it also acknowledges that there are barriers to effective communication. **Noise** is anything that interferes with a message being sent between participants in a communication encounter. Even if a speaker sends a clear message, noise may interfere with a message being accurately received and decoded. The transmission model of communication accounts for environmental and semantic noise. **Environmental noise** is any physical noise present in a communication encounter. Other people talking in a crowded diner could interfere with your ability to transmit a message and have it successfully decoded. While environmental noise interferes with the transmission of the message, **semantic noise** refers to noise that occurs in the encoding and decoding process when participants do not understand a symbol. To use a technical example, FM antennae can't decode AM radio signals and vice versa. Likewise, most French speakers can't decode Swedish and vice versa. Semantic noise can also interfere with communication between people speaking the same language because many words have multiple or unfamiliar meanings.

Although the transmission model may seem simple or even underdeveloped to us today, the creation

of this model allowed scholars to examine the communication process in new ways, which eventually led to more complex models and theories of communication that we will discuss in more detail later. This model is not quite rich enough to capture dynamic face-to-face interactions, but there are instances in which communication is one-way and linear, especially computer-mediated communication (CMC). As the following "Getting Plugged In" box explains, CMC is integrated into many aspects of our lives now and has opened up new ways of communicating and brought some new challenges. Think of text messaging for example. The transmission model of communication is well suited for describing the act of text messaging since the sender isn't sure that the meaning was effectively conveyed or that the message was received at all. Noise can also interfere with the transmission of a text. If you use an abbreviation the receiver doesn't know or the phone autocorrects to something completely different from what you meant, then semantic noise has interfered with the message transmission. I enjoy bargain hunting at thrift stores, so I just recently sent a text to a friend asking if she wanted to go thrifting over the weekend. After she replied with "What?!?" I reviewed my text and saw that my "smart" phone had autocorrected *thrifting* to *thrusting*! You have likely experienced similar problems with text messaging, and a quick Google search for examples of text messages made funny or embarrassing by the autocorrect feature proves that many others do, too.

## "Getting Plugged In"

### Computer-Mediated Communication

When the first computers were created around World War II and the first e-mails exchanged in the early 1960s, we took the first steps toward a future filled with computer-mediated communication (CMC)[3]. Those early steps turned into huge strides in the late 1980s and early 1990s when personal computers started becoming regular features in offices, classrooms, and homes. I remember getting our first home computer, a Tandy from Radio Shack, in the early 1990s and then getting our first Internet connection at home in about 1995. I set up my first e-mail account in 1996 and remember how novel and exciting it was to send and receive e-mails. I wasn't imagining a time when I would get dozens of e-mails a day, much less be able to check them on my cell phone! Many of you reading this book probably can't remember a time without

3. Crispin Thurlow, Laura Lengel, and Alice Tomic, *Computer Mediated Communication: Social Interaction and the Internet* (London: Sage, 2004), 14.

CMC. If that's the case, then you're what some scholars have called "digital natives." When you take a moment to think about how, over the past twenty years, CMC has changed the way we teach and learn, communicate at work, stay in touch with friends, initiate romantic relationships, search for jobs, manage our money, get our news, and participate in our democracy. It really is amazing to think that all that used to take place without computers. But the increasing use of CMC has also raised some questions and concerns, even among those of you who are digital natives. Almost half of the students in my latest communication research class wanted to do their final research projects on something related to social media. Many of them were interested in studying the effects of CMC on our personal lives and relationships. This desire to study and question CMC may stem from an anxiety that people have about the seeming loss or devaluing of face-to-face (FtF) communication. Aside from concerns about the digital cocoons that many of us find ourselves in, CMC has also raised concerns about privacy, cyberbullying, and lack of civility in online interactions. We will continue to explore many of these issues in the "Getting Plugged In" feature box included in each chapter, but the following questions will help you begin to see the influence that CMC has in your daily communication.

1. In a typical day, what types of CMC do you use?
2. What are some ways that CMC reduces stress in your life? What are some ways that CMC increases stress in your life? Overall, do you think CMC adds to or reduces your stress?
3. Do you think we, as a society, have less value for FtF communication than we used to? Why or why not?

## Interaction Model of Communication

The **interaction model of communication** describes communication as a process in which participants alternate positions as sender and receiver and generate meaning by sending messages and receiving feedback within physical and psychological contexts[4]. Rather than illustrating communication as a linear, one-way process, the interaction model incorporates feedback, which makes communication a more interactive, two-way process. **Feedback** includes messages sent in response to other messages. For example, your instructor may respond to a point you raise during class discussion, or you may point to the sofa when your roommate asks you where the remote control is. The inclusion of a feedback loop also leads to a more complex understanding

4. Wilbur Schramm, *The Beginnings of Communication Study in America* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997).

of the roles of participants in a communication encounter. Rather than having one sender, one message, and one receiver, this model has two sender-receivers who exchange messages. Each participant alternates roles as sender and receiver in order to keep a communication encounter going. Although this seems like a perceptible and deliberate process, we alternate between the roles of sender and receiver very quickly and often without conscious thought.

The interaction model is also less message-focused and more interaction-focused. While the transmission model focused on how a message was transmitted and whether or not it was received, the interaction model is more concerned with the communication process itself. In fact, this model acknowledges that there are so many messages being sent at one time that many of them may not even be received. Some messages are also unintentionally sent. Therefore, communication isn't judged effective or ineffective in this model based on whether or not a single message was successfully transmitted and received.

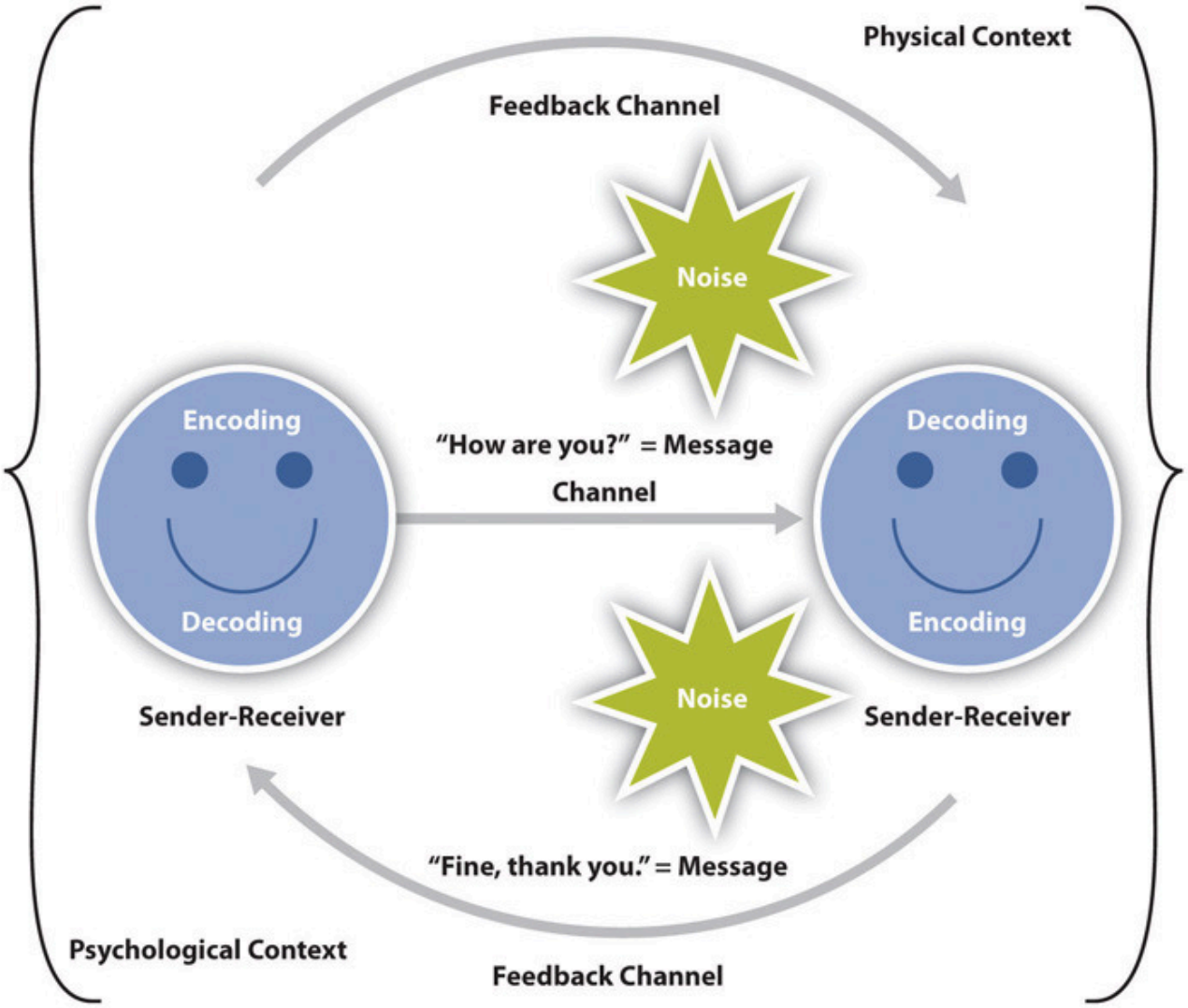


Figure 3: The Interaction Model of Communication. Image depicts the previous transmission model of communication but adds a feedback channel that shows arrows going back and forth between two sender-receivers rather than one sender and one receiver. An initial message sent between them is "How are you?" while the other responds, "Fine, thank you." There are also braces to denote the surrounding psychological and physical context.

The interaction model takes physical and psychological context into account. **Physical context** includes the environmental factors in a communication encounter. The size, layout, temperature, and lighting of a space influence our communication. Imagine the different physical contexts in which job interviews take place and how that may affect your communication. I have had job interviews on a sofa in a comfortable office, sitting around a large conference table, and even once in an auditorium where I was positioned on the stage facing about twenty potential colleagues seated in the audience. I've also been walked around campus to interview with various people in temperatures below zero degrees. Although I was a little chilly when I got to each separate interview, it wasn't too difficult to warm up and go on with the interview. During a job interview

in Puerto Rico, however, walking around outside wearing a suit in near 90-degree temperatures created a sweating situation that wasn't pleasant to try to communicate through. Whether it's the size of the room, the temperature, or other environmental factors, it's important to consider the role that physical context plays in our communication.

**Psychological context** includes the mental and emotional factors in a communication encounter. Stress, anxiety, and emotions are just some examples of psychological influences that can affect our communication. I recently found out some troubling news a few hours before a big public presentation. It was challenging to try to communicate because the psychological noise triggered by the stressful news kept intruding into my other thoughts. Seemingly positive psychological states, like experiencing the emotion of love, can also affect communication. During the initial stages of a romantic relationship, individuals may be so "love-struck" that they don't see incompatible personality traits or don't negatively evaluate behaviors they might otherwise find off-putting. Feedback and context help make the interaction model a more useful illustration of the communication process. Still, the transaction model views communication as a powerful tool that shapes our realities beyond individual communication encounters.

## Transaction Model of Communication

As the study of communication progressed, models expanded to account for more of the communication process. Many scholars view communication as more than a process that is used to carry on conversations and convey meaning. We don't send messages like computers, and we don't neatly alternate between the roles of sender and receiver as an interaction unfolds. We also can't consciously decide to stop communicating because communication is more than sending and receiving messages. The transaction model differs from the transmission and interaction models in significant ways, including the conceptualization of communication, the role of sender and receiver, and the role of context[5].

To review, each model incorporates a different understanding of what communication is and what communication does. The transmission model views communication as a thing, like an information packet, that is sent from one place to another. From this view, communication is defined as sending and receiving messages. The interaction model views communication as an interaction in which a message is sent and then followed by a reaction (feedback), which is then followed by another reaction, and so on. From this view, communication is defined as producing conversations and interactions within physical and psychological contexts. The transaction model views communication as integrated into our social realities in such a way that it helps us not only understand them but also create and change them.

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5. Dean C. Barnlund, "A Transactional Model of Communication," in *Foundations of Communication Theory*, eds. Kenneth K. Sereno and C. David Mortensen (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1970), 83–92.

The **transaction model of communication** describes communication as a process in which communicators generate social realities within social, relational, and cultural contexts. In this model, we don't just communicate to exchange messages; we communicate to create relationships, form intercultural alliances, shape our self-concepts, and engage with others in dialogue to create communities. In short, we don't communicate about our realities; communication helps to construct our realities.

The roles of sender and receiver in the transaction model of communication differ significantly from the other models. Instead of labeling participants as senders and receivers, the people in a communication encounter are referred to as *communicators*. Unlike the interaction model, which suggests that participants alternate positions as sender and receiver, the transaction model suggests that we are simultaneously senders and receivers. For example, on a first date, as you send verbal messages about your interests and background, your date reacts nonverbally. You don't wait until you are done sending your verbal message to start receiving and decoding the nonverbal messages of your date. Instead, you are simultaneously sending your verbal message and receiving your date's nonverbal messages. This is an important addition to the model because it allows us to understand how we are able to adapt our communication—for example, a verbal message—in the middle of sending it based on the communication we are simultaneously receiving from our communication partner.

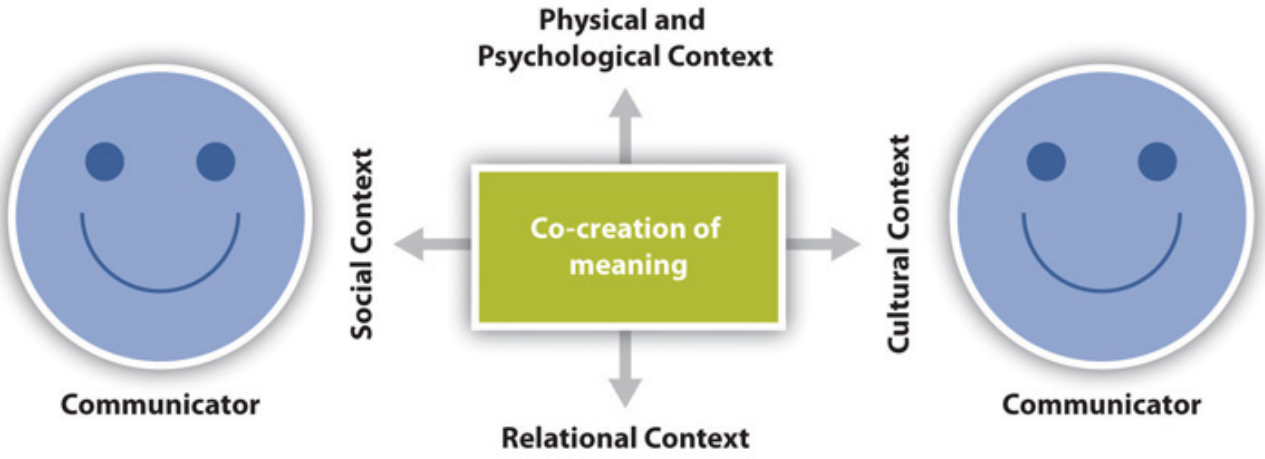


Figure 4: The Transaction Model of Communication. The Image shows two communicators co-creating meaning based on the surrounding physical and psychological context, social context, cultural context, and relational context.

The transaction model also includes a more complex understanding of context. The interaction model portrays context as physical and psychological influences that enhance or impede communication. While these contexts are important, they focus on message transmission and reception. Since the transaction model of communication views communication as a force that shapes our realities before and after specific interactions

occur, it must account for contextual influences outside of a single interaction. To do this, the transaction model considers how social, relational, and cultural contexts frame and influence our communication encounters.

**Social context** refers to the stated rules or unstated norms that guide communication. As we are socialized into our various communities, we learn rules and implicitly pick up on norms for communicating. Some common rules that influence social contexts include: don't lie to people, don't interrupt people, don't pass people in line, greet people when they greet you, thank people when they pay you a compliment, and so on. Parents and teachers often explicitly convey these rules to their children or students. Rules may be stated over and over, and there may be punishment for not following them.

Norms are social conventions that we pick up on through observation, practice, and trial and error. We may not even know we are breaking a social norm until we notice people looking at us strangely or someone corrects or teases us. For example, as a new employee you may over- or underdress for the company's holiday party because you don't know the norm for formality. Although there probably isn't a stated rule about how to dress at the holiday party, you will notice your error without someone having to point it out, and you will likely not deviate from the norm again in order to save yourself any potential embarrassment. Even though breaking social norms doesn't result in the formal punishment that might be a consequence of breaking a social rule, the social awkwardness we feel when we violate social norms is usually enough to teach us that these norms are powerful even though they aren't made explicit like rules. Norms even have the power to override social rules in some situations. To go back to the examples of common social rules mentioned before, we may break the rule about not lying if the lie is meant to save someone from feeling hurt. We often interrupt close friends when we're having an exciting conversation, but we wouldn't be as likely to interrupt a professor while they are lecturing. Since norms and rules vary among people and cultures, relational and cultural contexts are also included in the transaction model in order to help us understand the multiple contexts that influence our communication.

**Relational context** includes the previous interpersonal history and type of relationship we have with a person. We communicate differently with someone we just met versus someone we've known for a long time. Initial interactions with people tend to be more highly scripted and governed by established norms and rules, but when we have an established relational context, we may be able to bend or break social norms and rules more easily. For example, you would likely follow social norms of politeness and attentiveness and might spend the whole day cleaning the house for the first time you invite your new neighbors to visit. Once the neighbors are in your house, you may also make them the center of your attention during their visit. If you end up becoming friends with your neighbors and establishing a relational context, you might not think as much about having everything cleaned and prepared or even giving them your full attention during later visits. Since communication norms and rules also vary based on the type of relationship people have, relationship type is also included in relational context. For example, there are certain communication rules and norms that apply to a supervisor-supervisee relationship that don't apply to a brother-sister relationship and vice versa. Just as social norms and relational history influence how we communicate, so does culture.

**Cultural context** includes various aspects of identities such as race, gender, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, and ability. Whether we are aware of it or not, we all have multiple cultural identities that influence our communication. Some people, especially those with identities that have been historically marginalized, are regularly aware of how their cultural identities influence their communication and influence how others communicate with them. Conversely, people with identities that are dominant or in the majority may rarely, if ever, think about the role their cultural identities play in their communication.

When cultural context comes to the forefront of a communication encounter, it can be difficult to manage. Since intercultural communication creates uncertainty, it can deter people from communicating across cultures or lead people to view intercultural communication as negative. But if you avoid communicating across cultural identities, you will likely not get more comfortable or competent as a communicator. Difference isn't a bad thing. In fact, intercultural communication has the potential to enrich various aspects of our lives. In order to communicate well within various cultural contexts, it is important to keep an open mind and avoid making assumptions about others' cultural identities. While you may be able to identify some aspects of the cultural context within a communication encounter, there may also be cultural influences that you can't see. A competent communicator shouldn't assume to know all the cultural contexts a person brings to an encounter since not all cultural identities are visible. As with the other contexts, it requires skill to adapt to shifting contexts, and the best way to develop these skills is through practice and reflection.

### Key Takeaways

- Communication models are not complex enough to truly capture all that takes place in a communication encounter, but they can help us examine the various steps in the process in order better to understand our communication and the communication of others.
- The transmission model of communication describes communication as a one-way, linear process in which a sender encodes a message and transmits it through a channel to a receiver who decodes it. The transmission of the message may be disrupted by environmental or semantic noise. This model is usually too simple to capture FtF interactions but can be usefully applied to computer-mediated communication.
- The interaction model of communication describes communication as a two-way process in which participants alternate positions as sender and receiver and generate meaning by sending and receiving feedback within physical and psychological contexts. This model

captures the interactive aspects of communication but still doesn't account for how communication constructs our realities and is influenced by social and cultural contexts.
- The transaction model of communication describes communication as a process in which communicators generate social realities within social, relational, and cultural contexts. This model includes participants who are simultaneously senders and receivers and accounts for how communication constructs our realities, relationships, and communities.

**Exercises**

1. Getting integrated: How might knowing the various components of the communication process help you in your academic life, your professional life, and your civic life?
2. What communication situations does the transmission model best represent? The interaction model? The transaction model?
3. Use the transaction model of communication to analyze a recent communication encounter you had. Sketch out the communication encounter and make sure to label each part of the model (communicators, message, channel, feedback, and physical, psychological, social, relational, and cultural contexts).

## Media Attributions


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# 1.3 MEDIA STUDIES

**Learning Objectives**

- Distinguish between mass communication and mass media.
- Identify key points in American media and culture.

## Mass Communication, Mass Media, and Culture

The chapters to come will provide an in-depth look at many kinds of media, at how media trends are reshaping the United States' cultural landscape, and at how that culture shapes media in turn. These topics will be explored through an examination of mass media and mass communication both past and present—and speculation about what the future might look like.

First, it is important to distinguish between mass communication and mass media and to attempt a working definition of culture. **Mass communication** refers to information transmitted to large segments of the population. The transmission of mass communication may happen using one or many different kinds of **media** (singular medium), which is the means of transmission, whether print, digital, or electronic. **Mass media** specifically refers to a means of communication that is designed to reach a wide audience. Mass media platforms are commonly considered to include radio, newspapers, magazines, books, video games, and Internet media such as blogs, podcasts, and video sharing. Another way to consider the distinction is that a mass media message may be disseminated through several forms of mass media, such as an ad campaign with television, radio, and Internet components. **Culture** generally refers to the shared values, attitudes, beliefs, and practices that characterize a social group, organization, or institution. Just as it is difficult to pin down an exact definition of culture, cultures themselves can be hard to draw boundaries around, as they are fluid, diverse, and often overlapping.

Throughout U.S. history, evolving media technologies have changed the way we relate socially, economically, and politically. In 2008, for example, a joint venture between the 24-hour news network CNN and the video-sharing site YouTube allowed voters to pose questions directly to presidential candidates in two televised

debates. Voters could record their questions and upload them to YouTube, and a selection of these videos were then chosen by the debate moderators and played directly to the presidential candidates. This new format opened up the presidential debates to a much wider array of people, allowing for greater voter participation than has been possible in the past, where questions were posed solely by journalists or a few carefully chosen audience members.

In today's wired world of smartphones and streaming satellite feeds, our expectations of our leaders, celebrities, teachers, and even ourselves are changing in even more drastic ways. This book provides you with the context, tools, and theories to engage with the world of mass media through an examination of the history, theory, and effects of media practices and roles in America. This book also provides you with the framework to consider some of the crucial issues affecting media and culture in today's world.

## Key Takeaways

- Mass communication refers to a message transmitted to a large audience; the means of transmission is known as mass media. Many different kinds of mass media exist and have existed for centuries. Both the messages and the media affect culture, which is a diffused collection of behaviors, practices, beliefs, and values that are particular to a group, organization, or institution. Culture and media exert influence on each other in subtle, complex ways.
- The 2008 election is an example of how changes in media technology have had a major impact on society. But the influence goes both ways and sometimes cultural changes impact how the media evolves.

## Exercises

Read the following questions about media and culture:

1. The second half of the 20th century included a huge increase in forms of media available, including radio, cinema, television, and the Internet. However, some form of mass communication has always been a part of U.S. history. What were the dominant forms of media present in the United States during the Industrial Revolution? World Wars I and II? Other important historical eras? How did these forms of media differ from the ones we have today? How did they help shape the way people interacted with and understood the world they lived in? How does mass communication differ from mass media?
2. Contemporary Americans have more means of getting information and entertainment than ever before. What are the major media present in the United States today? How do these forms of media interact with one another? How do they overlap? How are they distinct?
3. What is the role of media in American culture today?
    - Some people argue that high-profile cases in the 1990s, such as the criminal trial of O. J. Simpson, Bill Clinton's impeachment proceedings, and the first Persian Gulf War, helped fuel the demand for 24-hour news access. What are some other ways that culture affects media?
    - Conversely, how does mass media affect culture? Do violent television shows and video games influence viewers to become more violent? Is the Internet making our culture more open and democratic or more shallow and distracted?
4. Though we may not have hovercars and teleportation, today's electronic gadgets would probably leave Americans of a century ago breathless. How can today's media landscape help us understand what might await us in years to come? What will the future of American media and culture look like?
5. Write down some of your initial responses or reactions based on your prior knowledge or intuition. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph. Keep the piece of paper somewhere secure and return to it on the last day of the course. Were your responses on target? How has your understanding of media and culture changed? How might you answer questions differently now?

# 1.4 WHAT DOES MEDIA DO FOR US?

**Learning Objectives**

- Identify four roles the media performs in our society.
- Recognize events that affected the adoption of mass media.
- Explain how different technological transitions have shaped media industries.

Media fulfills several basic roles in our society. One obvious role is entertainment. Media can act as a springboard for our imaginations, a source of fantasy, and an outlet for escapism. In the 19th century, Victorian readers disillusioned by the grimness of the Industrial Revolution found themselves drawn into fantastic worlds of fairies and other fictitious beings. In the first decade of the 21st century, American television viewers could peek in on a conflicted Texas high school football team in Friday Night Lights, the violence-plagued drug trade in Baltimore in The Wire, a 1960s-Manhattan ad agency in Mad Men, or the last surviving band of humans in a distant, miserable future in Battlestar Galactica. Through bringing us stories of all kinds, media has the power to take us away from ourselves.

Media can also provide information and education. Information can come in many forms, and it may sometimes be difficult to separate from entertainment. Today, newspapers and news-oriented television and radio programs make available stories from across the globe, allowing readers or viewers in London to access voices and videos from Baghdad, Tokyo, or Buenos Aires. Books and magazines provide a more in-depth look at a wide range of subjects. The free online encyclopedia Wikipedia has articles on topics from presidential nicknames to child prodigies to tongue twisters in various languages. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) has posted free lecture notes, exams, and audio and video recordings of classes on its OpenCourseWare website, allowing anyone with an Internet connection access to world-class professors.

Another useful aspect of media is its ability to act as a **public forum** for the discussion of important issues. In newspapers or other periodicals, letters to the editor allow readers to respond to journalists or to voice their opinions on the issues of the day. These letters were an important part of U.S. newspapers even when the nation was a British colony, and they have served as a means of public discourse ever since. The Internet

is a fundamentally democratic medium that allows everyone who can get online the ability to express their opinions through, for example, blogging or podcasting—though whether anyone will hear is another question.

Similarly, media can be used to monitor government, business, and other institutions. Upton Sinclair's 1906 novel The Jungle exposed the miserable conditions in the turn-of-the-century meatpacking industry. In the early 1970s, Washington Post reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein uncovered evidence of the Watergate break-in and subsequent cover-up, which eventually led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon. But purveyors of mass media may be beholden to particular agendas because of political slant, advertising funds, or ideological bias, thus constraining their ability to act as a watchdog. The following are some of these agendas:

1. Entertaining and providing an outlet for the imagination
2. Educating and informing
3. Serving as a public forum for the discussion of important issues
4. Acting as a watchdog for government, business, and other institutions

It's important to remember, though, that not all media are created equal. While some forms of mass communication are better suited to entertainment, others make more sense as a venue for spreading information. In terms of print media, books are durable and able to contain lots of information but are relatively slow and expensive to produce; in contrast, newspapers are comparatively cheaper and quicker to create, making them a better medium for the quick turnover of daily news. Television provides vastly more visual information than radio and is more dynamic than a static printed page; it can also be used to broadcast live events to a nationwide audience, as in the annual State of the Union address given by the U.S. president. However, it is also a one-way medium—that is, it allows for very little direct person-to-person communication. In contrast, the Internet encourages public discussion of issues and allows nearly everyone who wants a voice to have one. However, the Internet is also largely unmoderated. Users may have to wade through thousands of inane comments or misinformed amateur opinions to find quality information.

The 1960s media theorist Marshall McLuhan took these ideas one step further, famously coining the phrase "the medium is the message.[1]" By this, McLuhan meant that every medium delivers information in a different way and that content is fundamentally shaped by the medium of transmission. For example, although television news has the advantage of offering video and live coverage, making a story come alive more vividly, it is also a faster-paced medium. That means more stories get covered in less depth. A story told on television will probably be flashier, less in-depth, and with less context than the same story covered in a monthly magazine; therefore, people who get the majority of their news from television may have a particular view of the world shaped not by the content of what they watch but by its medium. Or, as computer scientist Alan Kay put

1. McLuhan, Marshall. Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

it, "Each medium has a special way of representing ideas that emphasize particular ways of thinking and de-emphasize others.[2]" Kay was writing in 1994 when the Internet was just transitioning from an academic research network to an open public system.

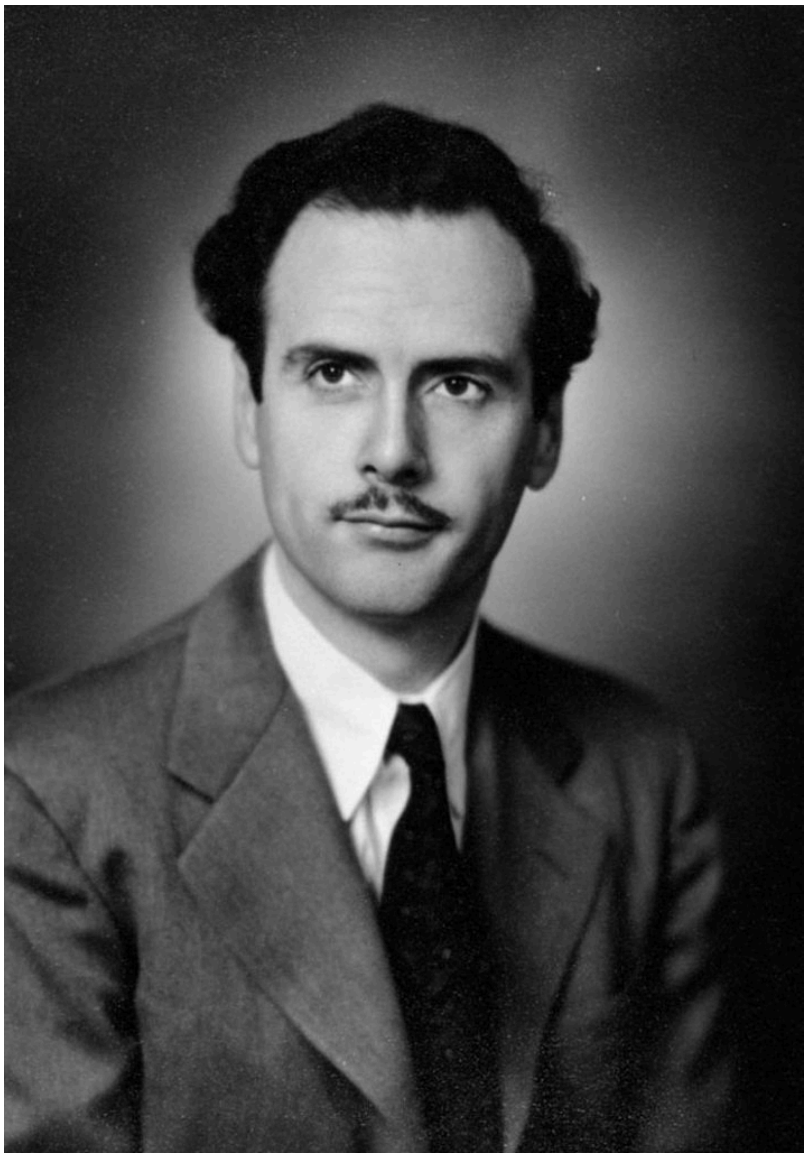

Figure 1: A photograph of Marshall McLuhan.

A decade and a half later, with the Internet firmly ensconced in our daily lives, McLuhan's intellectual descendants are the media analysts who claim that the Internet is making us better at associative thinking, or more democratic, or shallower. But McLuhan's claims don't leave much space for individual autonomy or resistance. In an essay about television's effects on contemporary fiction, writer David Foster Wallace scoffed

2. Kay, Alan. "The Infobahn Is Not the Answer," Wired, May 1994.

at the "reactionaries who regard TV as some malignancy visited on an innocent populace, sapping IQs and compromising SAT scores while we all sit there on ever fatter bottoms with little mesmerized spirals revolving in our eyes.... Treating television as evil is just as reductive and silly as treating it like a toaster with pictures.[3]" Nonetheless, media messages and technologies affect us in countless ways, some of which probably won't be sorted out until long in the future.

Marshall McLuhan's theory of the **tetrad** is a framework for understanding the effects of media and technology on society. It's a way to examine the impact of a medium by categorizing its effects into four distinct areas, forming a tetrad. These four aspects are:

1. **Enhancement**: What does the medium enhance or amplify? This looks at the positive attributes and what the technology extends or makes more efficient.
2. **Obsolescence**: What does the medium make obsolete or push aside? This considers what previous forms or technologies are replaced or diminished by the new medium.
3. **Retrieval**: What does the medium retrieve or bring back from the past? This explores what older forms or ideas are revived or recalled by the new technology.
4. **Reversal**: What does the medium reverse or flip into when pushed to its limits? This examines what happens when the technology is overextended, often leading to the opposite of the intended effect.

The tetrad is a tool for understanding not only the intended effects of a medium but also the unintended consequences. It provides a comprehensive view of how technology interacts with and changes the cultural landscape. McLuhan's tetrad has been influential in media studies and continues to be a valuable framework for analyzing the complex interplay between technology, media, and society.

### Key Takeaways

- Media fulfills several roles in society, including the following:
  - entertaining and providing an outlet for the imagination,
  - educating and informing,

3. Wallace, David Foster "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction," in A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again (New York: Little Brown, 1997).

    - serving as a public forum for the discussion of important issues, and
    - acting as a watchdog for government, business, and other institutions.

- Historical events, such as the exposure of the meatpacking industry in the early 1900s or the Watergate scandal, have shaped the role and perception of media, and technological advancements and the emergence of new mediums have influenced the adoption and evolution of mass media. Different forms of media, such as print, television, and the Internet, have unique characteristics that influence how information is conveyed. The medium itself shapes the message, as theorized by Marshall McLuhan, affecting the depth, context, and perception of the content.
- McLuhan's tetrad framework helps in understanding both the intended and unintended consequences of a medium, offering insights into the complex relationship between technology, media, and culture through four aspects:

    - Enhancement,
    - Obsolescence,
    - Retrieval,
    - and Reversal.

## Exercises

Choose two different types of mass communication—radio shows, television broadcasts, Internet sites, newspaper advertisements, and so on—from two different kinds of media. Make a list of what role(s) each one fills, keeping in mind that much of what we see, hear, or read in the mass media has more than one aspect. Then, answer the following questions. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. To which of the four roles media plays in society do your selections correspond? Why did the creators of these particular messages present them in these particular ways and these particular mediums?
2. What events have shaped the adoption of the two kinds of media you selected?

3. How have technological transitions shaped the industries involved in the two kinds of media you have selected?

## Media Attributions

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PART II

# CHAPTER 2: MEDIA, SOCIETY, CULTURE, AND YOU

Figure 1: Bronze bust of John Dewey sculpted by Jacob Epstein in 1927.

Society not only continues to exist by transmission, by communication, but it may fairly be said to exist in transmission, in communication." — John Dewey in Democracy and Education, 1916

## Media Attributions

- Bronze bust of John Dewey © Photo by Cliff via. Flickr is licensed under a CC BY-SA (Attribution ShareAlike) license

# 2.1 THE ROLE OF MASS MEDIA IN SOCIETY

**Learning Objectives**

- Trace the historical evolution of communication media, tracing its development from paper to modern technologies like the Internet, and analyze how these advancements have shaped global communication, influenced society, and created a dynamic relationship between mass media and social structures.
- Investigate the impact of mass communication on culture and society, including the legal setup of media systems, the role of mass media in transmitting culture, and the balance between mass media control and societal influence, as well as reflect on technological utopianism and the challenges of coexisting in a digitally connected world.
- Delve into the origin and development of mass media, including the role of the Gutenberg printing press and the penny press, evaluate why some mass media products resonate with audiences while others fail, and consider the role of affordability and accessibility in the dissemination of mass media.

More than one hundred years ago, John Dewey wrote in Democracy and Education that society is not only supported by various forms of communication but also enveloped in communication. Dewey reiterated what philosophers and scholars had noted for centuries: small groups, larger communities, and vast institutions — all the things that make up a society — function in relation to how communication flows within and between groups.

**Communication structure** refers to a combination of information and communication technologies (ICTs), guidelines for using those technologies, and professional workers dedicated to managing information and messages. In the mass communication field, communication structures are more than computers and transmission networks. The guidelines for using networks to create and distribute messages for mass consumption are a matter of corporate policy as well as law.

It has been noted that a society is made up of small groups, larger communities, and vast institutions. A more complete definition of the term comes from the field of sociology. A **society** is a very large group of people organized into institutions held together over time through formalized relationships. Nations, for

example, are made up of formal institutions organized by law. Governments of different sizes, economic institutions, educational institutions, and others all come together to form a society.

By comparison, **culture** — the knowledge, beliefs, and practices of groups large and small — is not necessarily formalized. Culture is necessary for enjoying and making sense of the human experience, but there are few formalized rules governing culture.

Mass communication influences both society and culture. Different societies have different media systems, and the way they are set up by law influences how the society works. Different forms of communication, including messages in the mass media, give shape and structure to society. Additionally, mass media outlets can spread cultural knowledge and artistic works around the globe. People exercise cultural preferences when it comes to consuming media, but mass media corporations often decide which stories to tell and which to promote, particularly when it comes to forms of mass media that are costly to produce, such as major motion pictures, major video game releases, and global news products.

More than any other, the field of mass communication transmits culture. At the same time, it helps institutional society try to understand itself and whether its structures are working.

## The Mass Media Dynamic

The mass media system is an institution itself. What sets it apart is its potential to influence the thinking of massive numbers of individuals. In fact, the ideas exchanged in organizational communication and interpersonal communication are often established, reinforced, or negated by messages in the mass media. This is what it means for societies "to exist in transmission, in communication." Different types of communication influence each other.

But the mass media are also shaped and influenced by social groups and institutions. This is the nature of the mass media dynamic.

Individuals and groups in society influence what mass media organizations produce through their creativity on the input side and their consumption habits on the output side. It is not accurate to say that society exists within the mass media or under mass media "control." Social structures are too powerful for mass media to completely govern how they operate. But neither is it accurate to say that the mass media are contained within societies. Many mass media products transcend social structures to influence multiple societies, and even in societies that heavily censor their mass media, the news of scandals and corruption can get out. The mass media and society are bound together and shape each other.

Almost everything you read, see, and hear is framed within a mass media context; however, mere familiarity is no guarantee of success. Products in the mass media that fail to resonate with audiences do not last long, even if they seem in tune with current tastes and trends.

# The Mass Communication Origin Story

In his book, John Dewey notes how, in the early 20th century, the mass media were beginning to connect large institutions in new ways. The production of mass media messages accelerated with the development of the telegraph and the popular newspaper. The spread of telegraph technology that began in the mid-1800s continued through the early 1900s to network the globe with a nearly instantaneous information transmission system. Much of the growth of newspapers occurred as a result of improvements in telegraph technology.

Thus, a primary function of the global mass communication system is to save time. People have a need to understand what is going on in the world, and they desire entertainment. Global electronic telecommunication networks collapse space by transmitting messages in much less time than the older, physical delivery systems.

The dynamic between society and mass media that is so prevalent today developed throughout the 20th century. Starting near the end of the 1800s, communication flows began to move at electronic speeds. More people knew about more things than ever before, but scholars are quick to point out that communication is not synonymous with understanding.

Dewey wanted to focus on educating people so that they could live and work well in societies heavily shaped by global telecommunication networks. For him, education was the meaning of life, and the global information and communication system needed to be molded into an educational tool. Many of us still hold out hope for Dewey's educational goals, but as ICTs have advanced over the past century or two, it has become clear that the mere existence of global mass communication networks does not ensure that societies will learn to coexist and thrive.

This can be difficult for people to acknowledge. Shortly after the widespread dissemination of the **telegraph**, the **radio**, broadcast **television,** and public **internet** access, some form of communication utopia was imagined or even expected. The telegraph collapsed space. Radio enabled instantaneous mass communication. Television brought live images from one side of the globe to the other for even larger mass audiences, and internet access gave individuals the power to be information senders, not just receivers. At each step, hope and imagination flourished, but social and cultural clashes persisted. Communication systems can be used as weapons. The evolution of mass communication tools is the story of increased capacity to do the same good and evil things people have always done in societies and between them.

Looking beyond technological utopianism — the idea that new technologies (particularly ICTs) will lead to greater social understanding and better conditions for the global population — we are left with a tedious but massively meaningful project. We must find ways to coexist with other societies even as we are constantly aware of our differences and of possible threats that may have existed before but now are much easier to see.

Perhaps if we are to make the best of our digital global communication network, it would help to track the evolution of different forms of mass communication. This text very briefly touched on the continuum from telegraph to widespread internet adoption, but the first mass medium was ink on paper.

# The First Mass Medium

The first global medium, besides the spoken word, was neither the Internet nor the telegraph. In fact, it was not a mass medium at all. It was paper. Via trade routes, messages in the form of letters moved around the world in a matter of weeks or months. It was global communication, but it was slow.

The development of a global telegraph network made it possible for messages to spread in minutes. When the telegraph was wed to mass-consumed newspapers, the world saw the rise of fast, global, mass communication that had the power to potentially influence large groups of people at once.

Books transmitted messages widely and inspired literacy, but they did not establish a channel for consistent, timely communication meant for mass audiences. After the Gutenberg printing press was developed around 1440, the Gutenberg Bible was slowly mass-produced and disseminated around the Western world. It opened up access to sacred texts that had been bound up for centuries by large institutions like the Roman Catholic Church, and its dissemination helped fuel the Protestant Reformation. Still, it was an outlier. Most other books, even those that were mass-produced from around the 1500s to the 1800s, were not disseminated as widely as the Gutenberg Bible. They were simply too expensive.

Nevertheless, mass literacy slowly paved the way for mass newspaper readership to emerge in the 20th century. After the telegraph was invented and developed for wide-scale use and after the cost of printing newspapers dropped, publishers could share news from around the globe with mass audiences. The newspaper, specifically the penny press, was the first mass medium.

THE PENNY PAPER.

No. 113. LAST CINCINNATI, MONDAY EVENING, MAY 16, 1881. EDITION One Cent

NEW YORK'S MULES.

They Both Kick Over the Traces.

Conkling and Platt Resign as United States Senators.

And Pray What Will the Poor Country Do Now?

The Biggest Sensation for Many a Day in the Dismal Old Capitol.

WASHINGTON, D. C., May 16.—A bombshell burst in the Senate soon after it was called to order this morning in the shape of the resignation of Senators Roscoe Conkling and Thomas C. Platt, of New York. The communications were in the usual form and addressed to Vice-President Arthur, and announced that the resignations had been forwarded to the Governor of the State of New York, and requested having announcement of the fact be formally made to the Senate.

This announcement was received by the Senators present with genuine surprise, but the Senate immediately proceeded to the transaction of routine business, and at 12:25 o'clock went into Executive session.

WASHINGTON, May 16.—The galleries were well filled, and the Senate was nearly full, when the resignations of Conkling and Platt were announced. Immediately after the reading of the journal, the Vice-President said: "I have the honor of laying the following communications before the Senate. The Clerk will read." The Clerk then read as follows:

WASHINGTON, D. C., May 16, 1881.

SIR.—Will you please announce to the Senate that my resignation as Senator of the United States from the State of New York has been forwarded to the Governor of that State.

I have the honor to be, with great respect, your obedient servant,

ROSCOE CONKLING.

At once there was a hum of surprise all about the Chamber. The Democrats looked anxiously at each other and smiled. The Republicans tried to be calm, but more than one showed unusual anxiety as to what would follow.

The Vice-President then handed another communication to the Clerk, who read as follows:

centering in the city have signed a petition asking for a reduction of hours of labor, and pay for overtime. At the present they work 12 hours. No decided change has yet taken place in the switchmen's strike.

Two young hoodlums, John Garrity and James Crowley, engaged in a fight last night, during which either chewed the left ear of the other.

WHY SHE CRIED.

More About Stephanie's Lover

A Young Man Beheaded, But Not on Account of Love for Her.

VIENNA, May 16.—The speculations about the cause of Princess Stephanie's sudden tearful outburst during the marriage ceremony Monday, was fanned afresh last evening, by a dispatch from Paris, announcing that a young American artist there had attempted suicide by opening the arteries of his arms. It was at once whispered around the palace that the young artist was none other than the Princess' unfortunate lover, the sight of whose face at the wedding threw her into hysterics. This, however, is not true. The young man's name is George Rowland, and from what has been ascertained about him, not hopeless love but pecuniary difficulties are at the bottom of his desperate deed. The American who escorted the Princess is said to be an rich as her Royal father himself.

Wall Street.

NEW YORK, May 16.—Stocks opened active and buoyant as compared with closing prices of Saturday. Advance ranged from ½ to 1 per cent., and was most marked in Wabash Common, Northwestern, St. Paul, Union Pacific, Pacific Mail, and the Northern Pacific stocks. At time of writing market is irregular. Lake Shore has reached ½ per cent. and some other stocks are following off.

The following are 11 a. m. prices: W. U. Tel., 130½; C. C. C. & I., 97½; C. & I., C., 87½; D. & H. Can., 140½; D. L. & W. Con., 139½; St. Pau. Con., 103½; Ill. Cen., 131½; Ohio Cen., 35½; Mich. Cen., 113½; North. Pac., 44½; do. preferred, 79½; Union Pac., 104½; Cen. Pac., 91. Kingston Coal, 27½; Allen and Terre Haute pref. 142½; Canada Southern, 79½; Chesapeake and Ohio, 17; Del. & Had., 134½; Del., Lack. & Western, 124½; Erie, 36½; do. preferred, 61; Han. & St. Jos. 7½; do. preferred, 11½; Iron Mountain, 74½; Kan. & Tex., 40½; Lake Shore, 121½; Louisville and Nashville, 104½; Northwest, 129½; do. preferred, 142½; Ontario and Western, 27½; Pac. Mail, 44½; Quicksilver, 18½; do. preferred, 67; Reading, 60; Rock Island, 142½; St. Paul and Omaha, 46½; do. preferred, 103½; St. Paul, preferred,

IMMENSE.

The Unions' Picnic Yesterday.

Grand Order, a Sociable Time, and a Big Parade.

THE DAY.

There could not have been a better day provided for the great picnic if the managers had the ordering of it themselves. The heavy rains of Saturday cooled the atmosphere and laid the dust without making any mud. The sun rose bright and clear in the morning, and while warm and pleasant, the air was yet cool enough to make dancing pleasant.

At an early hour excursions began to arrive from Louisville, Indianapolis, Dayton and Springfield. From the two latter points 20 car loads came down on the C., H. & D. and C., C., C. & I. Railroads.

THE PROCESSION.

The parade was a success in every particular. It was long enough to vex the patience of the thousands who crowded the streets watching it, and certainly was satisfactory to the members of the Trades' Unions. The Cigar-makers, the Typographical Union, the Iron-molders and the Journeymen Tailors were the most noticeable. The employees of Krohn, Fehr & Co., R. Lowenthal & Co., H. Thelig & Bro., and Haas Bros., all made a handsome display in their new and nobby hats and coats.

AT THE GROUNDS.

Long before the hour of noon, people began to flock toward Locust Park and the Lookout House, and after dinner a continuous stream of humanity poured into all the streets leading to those places, while every street-car line that reached the foot of the incline, had on extra cars, which were packed to accommodate those all day and night long.

Arriving at the grounds the immense multitude found all the usual devices for picnic amusements in full blast. Every body seemed in good humor and bent on having as much fun as could be crowded into a day of such rare attractiveness. Four large dancing platforms were crowded with dancers, while the merry go-round, the shooting galleries, bowling alleys, peanut stands, ice cream and refreshment stands all did a thriving business. As for beer, it flowed in streams down the thirsty throats of the thirty thousand or more people present. Considering the vast quantity drank, there was very little drunkenness apparent and no disorder to speak of. The police detail had little to do, as the various committees were untiring and vigilant in watching and promptly suppressing any thing approaching disorder.

PRESENT AND WERE EXPECTED, but neither came.

The ladies of strangers was nationally left at all the hill-tops. Price's Hill, the Bellevue and the Highland House being crowded all day long.

The Zoological Garden was well patronized yesterday, the largest number of visitors of the season being present. A better day to "take it in" could not have been selected.

CHESTER PARK.

Entries for the Running Races.

Liberal Purses, and Promise of Fine Sport.

The spring running meeting over the Chester Park Course will begin on the 25th inst., and continue five days. There are some fine runners among the entries. The following is the programme for the season of five days:

FIRST DAY—SATURDAY, MAY 21.

First Race.—Trial Purse $200 of which second to have $50. For all ages. Dash of one mile.

Second Race.—Ohio Derby Stake. For three-year olds. $50 entrance, h. f.; $100 added by the Association, of which second to have $30. Dash of one mile and a half.

Third Race.—Club Purse $300, of which second to have $50. For all ages. Mile heats.

SECOND DAY—MONDAY, MAY 23.

First Race.—Club Purse $300, of which second to have $50. For all ages. Dash of one mile and a quarter.

Second Race.—Club Purse $300, of which second to have $100. For all ages. Two-mile heats.

Third Race.—Cincinnati Ladies' Stake. For two-year-olds. $25 entrance, p. p.; $250 added by the Association, of which second to have $50. Dash of three-quarters of a mile.

THIRD DAY—TUESDAY, MAY 24.

First Race.—Club Purse $300, of which second to have $50. For all ages. Dash of one mile.

Second Race.—Sunset House Stake. For three-year olds. $50 entrance, h. f.; $200 added by the Sunset House, of which second to have $100. Mile heats.

Third Race.—Club Purse $350, of which second to have $50. For all ages. Dash of two miles.

FOURTH DAY—THURSDAY, JUNE 2.

First Race.—Club purse $300, of which second to have $50. For all ages. Mile heats, three best in five.

Second Race.—Cincinnati cup. For all ages. $50 entrance, p. p.; $500 added by the Association. Dash of two miles and a half.

Third Race.—Consolation purse for beaten horses, purse of $250, of which second is to have $50. Mile heats.

A NOBLE CHARITY.

THE PENNY PAPER.

New Shape, New Press, New Room.

The "All-the-News-for-a-Cent" Paper Ready for Business.

Four months and more ago THE PENNY PAPER was started in Cincinnati. Nearly everybody predicted its early demise. The paper became popular and was seen to be lively, newsy and, complete, but still people had little faith in its permanency. Cincinnati is as profusely strewn with the carcasses of newspaper ventures that the new-comer must fight his way through to a home into the heart of public confidence.

Well, THE PENNY PAPER still lives, and has long years of life and usefulness before it.

To-day it appears in new form and enlarged according to original calculation. To-day, also, the new press, the use of which unforeseen obstacles have long delayed, is running, throwing out papers at the rate of 15,000 per hour.

The entire establishment is now located at 4, 6, and 8 Home st. (between Elm and Plum and Fourth and Fifth), in commodious and convenient quarters, especially fitted up for it.

THE PENNY PAPER aims at being reliable, fair, and independent. It has all the current news of the day worth a reader's time, and this news is presented in an attractive and concise form. In the city news THE PENNY PAPER leads all other afternoon papers; and in the courts, with new capacity and conveniences, expects to be at the head of all papers in all ways interesting the masses of the people.

THE PENNY PAPER is published by an incorporated Company that also publishes daily newspapers in four other American cities. These papers are The Detroit Evening News, The Cleveland Penny Press, The Buffalo Evening Telegraph and The St. Louis Chronicle. The Detroit and St. Louis papers are two-cent, the others one-cent. The five papers of this alliance have an aggregate daily circulation of eighty thousand copies. But two newspaper establishments in the United States can take more papers every day than THE PENNY PAPER and its colleagues.

THE PENNY PAPER to-day begins paying the Union scale of wages to its employes, and is in hearty sympathy with the workingmen in their efforts to secure fair pay for good work. This paper will always in the future, as in the past, be found watchful of the rights of the work-

for sending the yard in front of the Post-office.

RIVER INTELLIGENCE.

STEAMERS LEAVING TO-DAY.

LEAVE AS ADVERTISED.

Miniature Almanac.

MONDAY, May 16.

Sun rises ... | Moon rises ...
Sun sets ... | Moon sets ...

PORT ITEMS.

Clear and pleasant. Business fair.

The river continued to fall, with 17 feet 3 inches of water in the channel at noon.

The Robt. Poehler arrived this morning with coal, and is gathering up empties for her return.

The Silas P. Cox arrived this morning from Pomeroy, and leaves, this afternoon, for St. Louis, although the statement to the contrary in a morning paper.

The Jos. D. Lee and the Miles McCoy are receiving the finishing touches in the repairs made upon them, and will be ready for business in a week or two.

The Andy Bevis arrived at 4 o'clock this morning with an excellent trip from Memphis, having refused freight at a number of places. She brings 1,500 bales of compressed cotton for the European trade, which will be sent East over the C., H. & D. and N. Y., P. and Ohio railroads.

The Wildwood left this morning at 9 o'clock on her daily trip for Maysville. This is the initial trip for the Wildwood daily and it is to be hoped they will pay sufficiently to be continued the year round. She returns this evening at 7 o'clock.

The daily packets depart as usual, including the fast Buckeye State for Pittsburg, the W. P. Thompson for Vanceburg.

The Chancellor and Cora Miller are both ready to receive for their trips tomorrow, the former for Kanawha and the latter for Memphis, followed by the Andy Bevis on Friday.

The following boats were at the wharf at noon: Golden City, Gen. Buell, W. P. Thompson, W[illegible], Pike, Gen. Lytle, Buckeye State, Cora Miller and C[illegible].

The Fannie Tay[illegible] row.

NEW ORLEANS, May 16. The New Navy Illusion arrived, yesterday, from Cincinnati.

ST. LOUIS, May 16.—The John L. Roberts leaves, to-morrow, for Pittsburg. The New Orleans Anchor Line steamer The W. H. Halliday down Wednesday, and

Figure 1: The front page of the Cincinnati Penny Paper from Monday, May 16, 1881. From: George Edward Stevens' article "From Penny Paper to Post and Times-Star: Mr. Scripps' First Link" in the Cincinnati Historical Society Bulletin No. 27, 1969.

What distinguished the **penny press** was affordability. These papers were published in tabloid format, which used small-sized pages and was cheaper to produce. Penny papers were written for and read by working-class audiences starting in about the 1830s. They covered all manner of current events. Soon, major institutions such as political parties and unions developed their own papers to cover the topics that suited their agendas and to promote the cultural values that they held dear.

Communication has evolved historically from paper to modern technologies like the Internet, shaping global communication and influencing society, with mass media playing a crucial role in transmitting culture and helping institutional society understand itself.

The relationship between mass media and society is dynamic, with mass media having the potential to influence thinking on a large scale but also being shaped by social groups and institutions, and neither completely governing nor being contained within societies.

The development of global telecommunication networks, from the telegraph to the internet, has collapsed

space and time, but the mere existence of these networks does not ensure societal coexistence and thriving, requiring a focus on education and understanding beyond technological utopianism.

The origin of mass media can be traced back to the Gutenberg printing press and the penny press, with affordability and accessibility playing key roles in the dissemination of mass media and the success of mass media products depending on resonance with audiences and alignment with current tastes and trends.

## Key Takeaways

- Communication has evolved historically from paper to modern technologies like the Internet, shaping global communication and influencing society, with mass media playing a crucial role in transmitting culture and helping institutional society understand itself.
- The relationship between mass media and society is dynamic, with mass media having the potential to influence thinking on a large scale but also being shaped by social groups and institutions, and neither completely governing nor being contained within societies.
- The development of global telecommunication networks, from the telegraph to the Internet, has collapsed space and time, but the mere existence of these networks does not ensure societal coexistence and thriving, requiring a focus on education and understanding beyond technological utopianism.
- The origin of mass media can be traced back to the Gutenberg printing press and the penny press, with affordability and accessibility playing key roles in the dissemination of mass media and the success of mass media products depending on resonance with audiences and alignment with current tastes and trends.

## Exercises

1. Trace the evolution of communication from paper to the Internet by creating a detailed timeline. Include key milestones such as the invention of the Gutenberg printing press, the telegraph, radio, television, and the rise of the Internet. Analyze how each advancement has

shaped global communication and influenced society. Present your findings in a visual format, such as a poster or digital presentation.

2. Select one successful and one failed mass media product, such as a popular movie and a box office flop. Write an analysis comparing the two, focusing on why one resonated with audiences while the other failed. Consider factors like content, marketing, audience preferences, and alignment with current tastes and trends. Conclude with insights on what makes mass media products succeed or fail.
3. Research the development of global telecommunication networks, such as the telegraph and the Internet, and how they have collapsed space and time. Prepare for a class debate on whether these advancements have led to greater social understanding and better global conditions, or if they have simply increased the capacity for both good and evil in societies. Consider the text's insights on technological utopianism and the challenges of coexisting in a digitally connected world.

## Media Attributions

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# 2.2 MASS MEDIA GROWTH AND CONSOLIDATION

**Learning Objectives**

- Explore the historical development of mass media, including the rise of brand advertising, professional journalism, digital networks, and various forms of convergence, to understand how they have shaped media consumption, production, and the fragmentation of mass audiences.
- Investigate the ethical dilemmas in journalism, such as autonomy versus social responsibility, and critically evaluate practices like objectivity and the influence of hyper-partisan media environments to understand the role of media organizations in societal repercussions.
- Analyze the effects of digital media on societal structures and cultural production, including democratization, filter bubbles, de-massification, gatekeeping, and convergence, to understand both positive and negative implications for society, cognition, and individual engagement with media.

As mass production of all sorts of manufactured goods grew during the 20th century, so did advertising budgets and the concept of brands. Brand advertising became fuel for the mass media, and as profitability rose, newspapers were bought up and organized into chains throughout the 20th century. Many newspapers grew their audience as they merged.

Partisan papers gave way to a brand of news that strived for objectivity. The profit motive mostly drove the change. To attract a mass audience, newspapers had to represent various points of view. This pushed some of the most opinionated citizens, particularly strong advocates for workers, to the fringes of mass discourse. Some advocates developed alternative media offerings. Others went mostly unheard or plied their craft directly in politics.

At the same, throughout much of the 20th century, the journalism workforce became more professionalized. Professional **norms**, that is the written and unwritten rules guiding behavior decided on by people in a given field, evolved. Many full-time, paid professional journalists stressed and continue to

stress the need to remain detached from the people they cover so that journalists can maintain the practice and appearance of objectivity. Journalists emphasized objectivity in order to remain autonomous and to be perceived as truthful. The norm of objective reporting still strongly influences news coverage in newspapers as well as on most mainstream radio and television news networks.

That being said, the practice of maintaining objectivity is being called into question in our current hyper-partisan political media environment. Other strategies for demonstrating truthfulness require journalists to be transparent about how they do their work, about who owns their media outlets, and about what investments and personal views they may have. Chapter 9 covers news norms and their evolution in greater detail.

At the heart of the ethical discussion for professional journalists is a sort of battle between the need to be autonomous to cover news accurately with minimal bias and the need to be socially responsible. **Social responsibility** in the study of journalism ethics is a specific concept referring to the need for media organizations to be responsible for the possible repercussions of the news they produce. The debate goes on even as more and more platforms for mass communication are developed.

Beyond advancements in ink-on-paper newspapers (including the development of color offset printing), technological developments have contributed to the diversification of mass media products. Photography evolved throughout the 20th century, as did motion picture film, radio, and television technology. Other mass media presented challenges and competition for newspapers. Still, newspapers were quite a profitable business. They grew to their greatest readership levels in the middle-to-late 20th century, and their value was at its high point around the turn of the 21st century. Then came the Internet.

## Digital Media: Collaboration and Conflict

With the rise of global computer networks, particularly high-speed broadband and mobile communication technologies, individuals gained the ability to publish their own work and to comment on mass media messages more easily than ever before. If mass communication in the 20th century was best characterized as a one-to-many system where publishers and broadcasters reached waiting audiences, the mass media made possible by digital information networks in the 21st century have taken on a many-to-many format.

For example, YouTube has millions of producers who themselves are also consumers. None of the social media giants such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Qzone, Weibo (in China), Twitter, Reddit, or Pinterest is primarily known for producing content. Instead, they provide platforms for users to submit their own content and to share what mass media news and entertainment companies produce. The result is that the process of deciding what people should be interested in is much more decentralized in the digital network mass media environment than it was in the days of an analog one-to-many mass media system.

The process of making meaning in society — that is, the process of telling many smaller stories that add up to a narrative shared by mass audiences — is now much more collaborative than it was in the 20th century because more people are consuming news in networked platforms than through the channels managed by

**gatekeepers**. A mass media gatekeeper is someone, professional or not, who decides what information to share with mass audiences and what information to leave out.

Fiction or non-fiction, every story leaves something out, and the same is true for shows made up of several stories, such as news broadcasts and heavily edited reality television. Gatekeepers select what mass audiences see and then edit or disregard the rest. The power of gatekeepers may be diminished in networks where people can decide for themselves what topics they care most about. However, there is still an important gatekeeping function in the mass media since much of what is ultimately shared on social media platforms originates in the offices and studios of major media corporations.

On social media platforms, media consumers have the ability to add their input and criticism, and this is an important function for users. Not only do we have a say as audience members in the content we would like to see, read, and hear, but we also have an important role to play in society as voting citizens holding their elected officials accountable.

If social media platforms were only filled with mass media content, individual user comments, and their own homegrown content, digitally networked communication would be complex enough, but there are other forces at work. Rogue individuals, hacker networks, and **botnets** — computers programmed to create false social media accounts, websites, and other digital properties — can contribute content alongside messages produced by professionals and legitimate online community members. False presences on social media channels can amplify hate and misinformation and can stoke animosity between groups in a hyper-partisan media age.

Around the world, societies have democratized mass communication, but in many ways, agreeing on a shared narrative or even a shared list of facts is more difficult than ever. Users create **filter bubbles** for themselves where they mostly hear the voices and information that they want to hear. This has the potential to create opposing worldviews where users with different viewpoints not only have differing opinions, but they also have in mind completely different sets of facts creating different images about what is happening in the world and how society should operate.

When users feel the need to defend their filtered worldviews, it is quite harmful to society.

## De-massification

The infiltration of bots on common platforms is one issue challenging people working in good faith to produce accurate and entertaining content and to make meaning in the mass media. De-massification is another. Professionals working on mass-market media products now must fight to hold onto mass audiences. **De-massification** signifies the breakdown of mass media audiences. As the amount of information being produced and the number of channels on which news and other content can be disseminated grows exponentially, ready-made audiences are in decline.

In the future, it is anticipated that audiences, or fan bases, must be built rather than tapped into. One path to

growing audiences in digital networks is to take an extreme point of view. Producers of news and entertainment information on the right and left of the political spectrum often rail against mainstream media as they promote points of view that are more or less biased. This kind of polarization, along with the tendency of social media platforms to allow and even encourage people to organize along political lines, likely contributes to de-massification as people organize into factions. This practice, while clearly effective, has incredibly damaging side effects. These methods of growing audiences encourage very violent and vitriolic interactions online and lead to a pipeline of extremism and radicalism that can grow into real-world headlines. This is concerning as those responsible for raising such audiences rarely- if ever- face consequences for what behaviors they grow and perpetuate[1].

The future of some mass communication channels as regular providers of shared meaning for very large audiences is in question. That said, claims that any specific medium is "dead" are overblown. For example, newspaper readership, advertising revenue, and employment numbers have been declining for about 25 years, but as of 2020, there are still more than 25 million newspaper subscribers[2]. Mass audiences are shrinking and shifting, but they can still be developed.

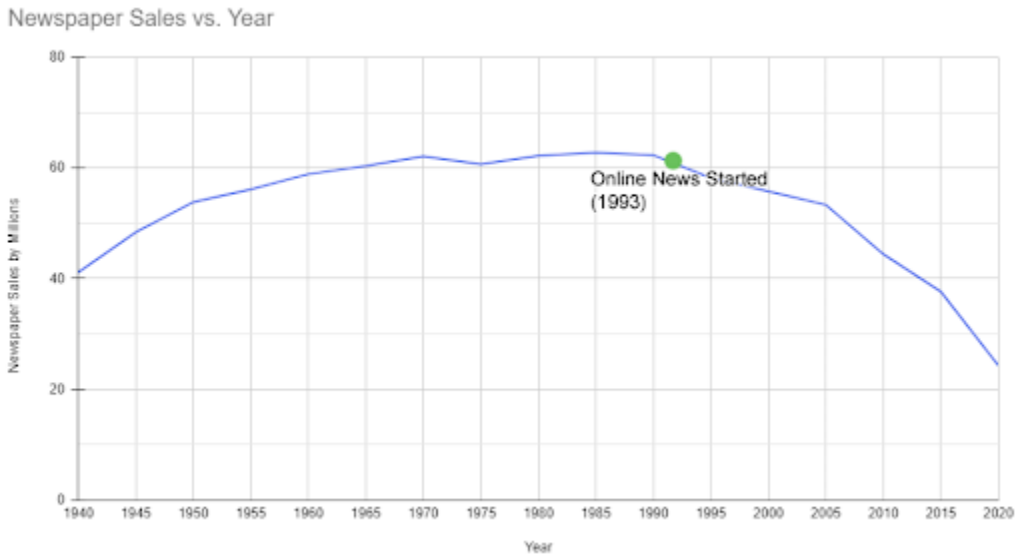


Figure 1: A diagram showing newspaper sales from 1940 to 2020. It shows newspaper sales beginning to decline in 1993 after the start of online news. Made in Google Sheets by researching relevant data.

1. Leitch, Shirley: "Rethinking social media and extremism" ANU Press 2022 https://library.oapen.org/viewer/web/viewer.html?file=/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/58012/book.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

2. McLennan, Douglas, and Jack Miles. "Opinion | A Once Unimaginable Scenario: No More Newspapers." *Washington Post*, March 21, 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/theworldpost/wp/2018/03/21/newspapers/.

# Convergence

As mass audiences are breaking up and voices from the fringe are garnering outsized influence, the various types of media (audio, video, text, animation and the industries they are tied to) have come together on global computer and mobile network platforms in a process called **convergence**.

It is as though all media content is being tossed into a huge stew, one that surrounds and composes societies and cultures, and within this stew of information, people are re-organizing themselves according to the cultural and social concerns they hold most dear.

According to one hypothesis, in a society dominated by digital communication networks, people gather around the information they recognize and want to believe because making sense of the vast amount of information now available is impossible.

This text covers several mass media channels, including social media, film, radio, television, music recording and podcasting, digital gaming, news, advertising, public relations, and propaganda because these are still viable industries even as the content they produce appears more and more often on converged media platforms.

What we see emerging in networked spaces is a single mass media channel with a spectrum of possible text, photo, audio, video, graphic, and game elements; however, the sites of professional production still mostly identify as one particular industry (such as radio and recorded music, film, television, cable television, advertising, PR, digital advertising or social media). Some of these are "legacy" media that have existed as analog industries prior to convergence, while others originated in digital media environments.

For the foreseeable future, we should expect legacy media producers to continue to hold formidable power as elements of larger media conglomerates, which acquired many media companies as a result of industry deregulation. We should also expect audiences to continue to fragment and digital media start-ups try to build audiences out of fragmented communities to be common even if they are difficult to sustain.

What this means for social structures and for cultural production is disruption, limited perhaps by legacy media traditions and corporate power.

It's important to keep in mind that the implementation of new technologies doesn't mean that the old ones simply vanish into dusty museums. Today's media consumers still watch television, listen to radio, read newspapers, and become immersed in movies. The difference is that it's now possible to do all those things through one device—be it a personal computer or a smartphone—and through the Internet. Such actions are enabled by media convergence, the process by which previously distinct technologies come to share tasks and resources. A cell phone that also takes pictures and videos is an example of the convergence of digital photography, digital video, and cellular telephone technologies. An extreme and currently nonexistent example of technological convergence would be the so-called black box, which would combine all the functions of previously distinct technology and would be the device through which we'd receive all our news, information, entertainment, and social interaction.

# Kinds of Convergence

But convergence isn't just limited to technology. Media theorist Henry Jenkins argues that convergence isn't an end result (as is the hypothetical black box) but, instead, a process that changes how media is both consumed and produced. Jenkins breaks convergence down into five categories:

1. Economic convergence occurs when a company controls several products or services within the same industry. For example, in the entertainment industry, a single company may have interests across many kinds of media. For example, Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation is involved in book publishing (HarperCollins), newspapers (New York Post, The Wall Street Journal), sports (Colorado Rockies), broadcast television (Fox), cable television (FX, National Geographic Channel), film (20th Century Fox), Internet (MySpace), and many other media.
2. Organic convergence is what happens when someone is watching a television show online while exchanging text messages with a friend and also listening to music in the background—the "natural" outcome of a diverse media world.
3. Cultural convergence has several aspects. Stories flowing across several kinds of media platforms is one component—for example, novels that become television series (True Blood); radio dramas that become comic strips (The Shadow); and even amusement park rides that become film franchises (Pirates of the Caribbean). The character Harry Potter exists in books, films, toys, and amusement park rides. Another aspect of cultural convergence is participatory culture—that is, the way media consumers are able to annotate, comment on, remix, and otherwise influence culture in unprecedented ways. The video-sharing website YouTube is a prime example of **participatory culture**. YouTube gives anyone with a video camera and an Internet connection the opportunity to communicate with people around the world and create and shape cultural trends.
4. Global convergence is the process of geographically distant cultures influencing one another despite the distance that physically separates them. Nigeria's cinema industry, nicknamed Nollywood, takes its cues from India's Bollywood, which is in turn inspired by Hollywood in the United States. Tom and Jerry cartoons are popular on Arab satellite television channels. Successful American horror movies like The Ring and The Grudge are remakes of Japanese hits. The advantage of global convergence is access to a wealth of cultural influence; its downside, some critics posit, is the threat of cultural imperialism, defined by Herbert Schiller as the way developing countries are "attracted, pressured, forced, and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating center of the system.[3]" Cultural imperialism can be a formal policy or can

3. White, Livingston A. "Reconsidering Cultural Imperialism Theory," TBS Journal 6 (2001), https://web.archive.org/web/20090219225535/http://www.tbsjournal.com/Archives/Spring01/white.html.

happen more subtly, as with the spread of outside influence through television, movies, and other cultural projects.

5. Technological convergence is the merging of technologies, such as the ability to watch TV shows online on sites like Hulu or to play video games on mobile phones like the Apple iPhone. When more and more different kinds of media are transformed into digital content, as Jenkins notes, "we expand the potential relationships between them and enable them to flow across platforms."

Figure 2: Nigeria's Nollywood produces more films annually than any other country besides India

## Effects of Convergence

Jenkins's concept of organic convergence is perhaps the most telling. To many people, especially those who grew up in a world dominated by so-called old media, there is nothing organic about today's media-dominated world. As a New York Times editorial recently opined, "Few objects on the planet are farther removed from

nature—less, say, like a rock or an insect—than a glass and stainless steel smartphone."[4] But modern American culture is plugged in as never before, and today's high school students have never known a world where the Internet didn't exist. Such a cultural sea change causes a significant generation gap between those who grew up with new media and those who didn't.

A 2010 study by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that Americans aged 8 to 18 spend more than 7.5 hours with electronic devices each day—and, thanks to multitasking, they're able to pack an average of 11 hours of media content into that 7.5 hours.[5] These statistics highlight some of the aspects of the new digital model of media consumption: participation and multitasking. Today's teenagers aren't passively sitting in front of screens, quietly absorbing information. Instead, they are sending text messages to friends, linking news articles on Facebook, commenting on YouTube videos, writing reviews of television episodes to post online, and generally engaging with the culture they consume. Convergence has also made multitasking much easier, as many devices allow users to surf the Internet, listen to music, watch videos, play games, and reply to e-mails on the same machine.

However, it's still difficult to predict how media convergence and immersion are affecting culture, society, and individual brains. In his 2005 book Everything Bad Is Good for You, Steven Johnson argues that today's television and video games are mentally stimulating in that they pose a cognitive challenge and invite active engagement and problem-solving. Poking fun at alarmists who see every new technology as making children stupider, Johnson jokingly cautions readers against the dangers of book reading: It "chronically understimulates the senses" and is "tragically isolating." Even worse, books "follow a fixed linear path. You can't control their narratives in any fashion—you simply sit back and have the story dictated to you... This risks instilling a general passivity in our children, making them feel as though they're powerless to change their circumstances. Reading is not an active, participatory process; it's a submissive one."[6]

A 2010 book by Nicholas Carr, The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains, is more pessimistic. Carr worries that the vast array of interlinked information available through the Internet is eroding attention spans and making contemporary minds distracted and less capable of deep, thoughtful engagement with complex ideas and arguments. "Once I was a scuba diver in a sea of words," Carr reflects ruefully. "Now I zip along the surface like a guy on a Jet Ski."[7] Carr cites neuroscience studies showing that when people try to do two things at once, they give less attention to each and perform the tasks less carefully. In other

4. New York Times, editorial, "The Half-Life of Phones," New York Times, June 18, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/ 2010/06/20/opinion/20sun4.html1.

5. Lewin, Tamar "If Your Kids Are Awake, They're Probably Online," New York Times, January 20, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/20/education/20wired.html.

6. Johnson, Steven Everything Bad Is Good for You (Riverhead, NY: Riverhead Books, 2005).

7. Carr, Nicholas The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains (New York: Norton, 2010).

words, multitasking makes us do a greater number of things poorly. Whatever the ultimate cognitive, social, or technological results, convergence is changing the way we relate to media today.

## Video Killed the Radio Star: Convergence Kills Off Obsolete Technology—or Does It?

When was the last time you used a rotary phone? How about a street-side pay phone? Or a library's card catalog? When you need brief, factual information, when was the last time you reached for a volume of Encyclopedia Britannica? Odds are it's been a while. All of these habits, formerly common parts of daily life, have been rendered essentially obsolete through the progression of convergence.

But convergence hasn't erased old technologies; instead, it may have just altered the way we use them. Take cassette tapes and Polaroid film, for example. Influential musician Thurston Moore of the band Sonic Youth recently claimed that he only listens to music on cassette. Polaroid Corporation, creators of the once-popular instant-film cameras, was driven out of business by digital photography in 2008, only to be revived 2 years later—with pop star Lady Gaga as the brand's creative director. Several Apple iPhone apps allow users to apply effects to photos to make them look more like a Polaroid photo.

Cassettes, Polaroid cameras, and other seemingly obsolete technologies have been able to thrive—albeit in niche markets—both despite and because of Internet culture. Instead of being slick and digitized, cassette tapes and Polaroid photos are physical objects that are made more accessible and more human, according to enthusiasts, because of their flaws. "I think there's a group of people—fans and artists alike—out there to whom music is more than just a file on your computer, more than just a folder of MP3s," says Brad Rose, founder of a Tulsa, Oklahoma-based cassette label (Hogan, 2010). The distinctive Polaroid look—caused by uneven color saturation, underdevelopment or overdevelopment, or just daily atmospheric effects on the developing photograph—is emphatically analog. In an age of high-resolution, portable printers, and camera phones, the Polaroid's appeal to some has something to do with ideas of nostalgia and authenticity. Convergence has transformed who uses these media and for what purposes, but it hasn't eliminated them.

## Melding Theories

The world of mass media has witnessed the convergence of media content on digital platforms, the ability of individuals to engage in one-to-many communication as though they were major broadcasters, and the emergence of structures that allow for many-to-many communication. These developments force us to rethink how separate interpersonal, organizational, and mass communication truly are.

From a theoretical standpoint, these are well-established approaches to thinking about communication, but in practice, certain messages might fit into multiple categories. For example, a YouTube video made for a few

friends might reach millions if it goes viral. Is it interpersonal communication, mass communication, or both? Viral videos and memes spread to vast numbers of people but might start out as in-jokes between internet friends or trolls. The message's original meaning is often lost in this process. In a networked society, it can be difficult to differentiate between interpersonal and mass communication. For our purposes, it will be helpful to consider the message creator's intent.

As a user, it is essential to realize the possibility that interpersonal messages may be shared widely. As professionals, it also helps to realize that you cannot force a message to go viral. However, most social media platforms now engage in various kinds of paid promotion where brands and influential users can pay to have their content spread more widely and more quickly.

Figure 3: Two women discuss a record album selection in a music shop in Amora, Portugal.

We must also understand that advertisers treat digital communication platforms much the same way whether they appear to users to be interpersonal or mass media environments. Users can be targeted down to the individual on either type of platform, and advertisers (with the help of platform creators), can access mass audiences, even when users are intending only to participate on a platform for purposes of interpersonal communication.

Scholars are still working to define how these platforms mix aspects of interpersonal and mass communication. Here is one takeaway: If you are not paying to use a platform like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube (Google), Instagram, or Snapchat, you are the product. It is your attention that is being sold to advertisers.

## Rise of AI Content

In recent times, the rise of AI software such as ChatGPT and other machine learning algorithms has brought light to an old conspiracy theory called "Dead Internet Theory."[8] This conspiracy is the belief the majority of the Internet is, in actuality, just machines and bots creating content for actual humans to purchase and consume. While seemingly outlandish, it has been calculated that up to 47% of internet traffic is from bots.[9] What was once considered a conspiracy theory may slowly become true.

This increase in automated content being shared online has made online communication considerably more difficult. For instance, when one searches for an image on Google, Google will try to make an AI-generated image of the searched term.[10] Functions such as this lead to interesting questions about why users may search for images and if it matters whether they are authentic. This increased AI usage could have very negative effects on how the average user interacts with the internet as a whole, as it creates an increasingly confusing and uncanny wasteland of near infinitely artificially generated content.

Some news sites now scrub online forums such as Reddit for headlines and report them.[11] Users who are aware of how such reporting works have been able to trick these sites into reporting on blatantly false information intentionally posted to such forums. If content like this increases in volume, the internet as a whole could become increasingly difficult to use and perhaps make it difficult to determine if one is even communicating with another human.

## The Big Picture

Society functions when the mass media work well, and we tend not to think about the technologies or the professionals who make it all possible. Interpersonal communication can function with or without a massive technological apparatus. It is more convenient, though, to be able to text each other. When interpersonal communication breaks down, we have problems in our relationships. When organizational communication

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8. Hughes, Neil: "Echoes of the dead internet theory: AI's silent takeover" Cybernews August 2023 https://cybernews.com/editorial/dead-internet-theory-ai-silent-takeover/
9. Imperva: "2023 Bad Bot Report" 2023 https://www.imperva.com/resources/reports/2023-Imperva-Bad-Bot-Report.pdf
10. Hutchinson, Andew: "Google Adds Generative AI Image Creation into Search" SocialMediaToday October 12 2023 https://www.socialmediatoday.com/news/google-generative-ai-image-creation-search/696511/
11. Luna, Elizabeth: "Reddit tricks an AI into writing an article about a fake World of Warcraft character" Mashable July 21, 2023 https://mashable.com/article/world-of-warcraft-wow-reddit-ai-glorbo

breaks down, it creates problems for groups and companies. But when mass communication breaks down, society breaks down.

## Key Takeaways

- Twenty-first-century media culture is increasingly marked by convergence, or the coming together of previously distinct technologies, as in a cell phone that also allows users to take video and check e-mail.
- Media theorist Henry Jenkins identifies the five kinds of convergence as the following:
    - Economic convergence is when a single company has interests across many kinds of media.
    - Organic convergence is multimedia multitasking, or the natural outcome of a diverse media world.
    - Cultural convergence is when stories flow across several kinds of media platforms and when readers or viewers can comment on, alter, or otherwise talk back to culture.
    - Global convergence is when geographically distant cultures are able to influence one another.
    - Technological convergence is when different kinds of technology merge. The most extreme example of technological convergence would be one machine that controlled every media function.
- The jury is still out on how these different types of convergence will affect people on an individual and societal level. Some theorists believe that convergence and new-media technologies make people smarter by requiring them to make decisions and interact with the media they're consuming; others fear the digital age is giving us access to more information but leaving us shallower.

## Exercises

Review the viewpoints of Henry Jenkins, Steven Johnson, and Nicholas Carr. Then, answer the following questions. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. Define convergence as it relates to mass media and provide some examples of convergence you've observed in your life.
2. Describe the five types of convergence identified by Henry Jenkins and provide an example of each type that you've noted in your own experience.
3. How do Steven Johnson and Nicholas Carr think convergence is affecting culture and society? Whose argument do you find more compelling and why?

## Media Attributions


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# 2.3 MASS MEDIA AND POPULAR CULTURE

**Learning Objectives**

- Determine the influence of tastemakers in traditional media.
- Identify the ways the digital age is undermining the traditional role of tastemakers.
- Determine how Internet culture now allows creators to bypass gatekeepers and determine the potential effects this will have.

## Cultural Production

There is another way of looking at the mass media that needs to be mentioned after looking in some depth at the structural changes going on in and around the field of mass communication. Mass media channels are also huge engines of cultural production. That is, they make the entertainment that helps us define who we are as large and small groups of people. To quote from Dead Poets Society: "We read and write poetry because we are members of the human race, and the human race is filled with passion. Medicine, law, business, and engineering are noble pursuits and necessary to sustain life. But poetry, beauty, romance, love, these are what we stay alive for." If you replace "reading and writing poetry" with "creating culture," you get a sense of the importance of cultural production. We can define culture as a collection of our knowledge, beliefs, and practices. In practice, culture is how we express ourselves and enjoy life's experiences.

In media, there are three main types of cultural works: those associated with "high" culture, popular culture, and folk culture. (Some scholars discuss "low" culture, but it is argued here that "low culture" is just another way of describing the low end of pop culture.)

**High culture** is arguably the best cultural material a society has to offer. Economic class often comes into play in defining what is "high culture" and what is not.

**Pop culture** is the vast array of cultural products that appeal to the masses.

**Folk culture** refers to cultural products borne out of everyday life identifiable because they usually have practical uses as well as artistic value. It is often associated with prehistoric cultures, but that is because the folk

culture, pop culture, and high culture of prehistoric peoples were often one and the same. Their best art may also have been an everyday object like a bowl, a basket, a doll, or a mask. Don't confuse prehistoric art with modern folk art.

Modern folk art has the specific quality of trying to capture what is both beautiful and useful in everyday life.

Folk music tends to rely on "traditional" sounds and instruments. Topically, it focuses on the value of everyday existence. Folk music is often built around narratives that carry morals much the same way fairy tales do. Fairy tales are probably the best example of folk literature.

So much of the interpretation and the value of cultural production is culturally relative. This means that an object or work's value is determined by the perceptions of people in different cultural groups.

In modern society, mass media often drive our perceptions. It is important to recognize that different cultures have different moral values and to acknowledge that some practices should be universally abhorred and stopped, even if they are partially or wholly accepted in other cultures.

The relationship between culture and mass media is complex; it is difficult to distinguish modern culture from how it appears in the various mass media. Culture in the developed world is spread through mass media channels. Just as society forms and is formed in part by messages in the mass media, so it goes with culture. Cultural products and their popularity can influence which media channels people prefer. Conversely, changes in media and ICTs can lead to changes in how we produce culture.

When we discuss digital culture in the next chapter, we will continue to break down different levels of culture and the relationship between cultural forms and mass communication in the networked communication age. To begin to understand the mass media, their role in society, and how they shape culture and are shaped by cultural preferences, it helps to think about how the mass media may influence you.

## Tastemakers

Historically, mass pop culture has been fostered by Sactive and tastemaking mass media that introduces and encourages the adoption of certain trends. Although they are similar in some ways to the widespread media gatekeepers discussed in Section 1.4.3, "Gatekeepers," tastemakers differ in that they are most influential when the mass media is relatively small and concentrated. When only a few publications or programs reach millions of people, their writers and editors are highly influential. The New York Times's restaurant reviews used to be able to make a restaurant successful or unsuccessful through granting (or withdrawing) its rating.

Or take the example of Ed Sullivan's variety show, which ran from 1948 to 1971, and is most famous for hosting the first U.S. appearance of the Beatles—a television event that was at the time the most-watched TV program ever. Sullivan hosted musical acts, comedians, actors, and dancers and had the reputation of being able to turn an act on the cusp of fame into full-fledged stars. Comedian Jackie Mason compared being on The Ed Sullivan Show to "an opera singer being at the Met. Or if a guy is an architect that makes the Empire

State Building....This was the biggest."[1] Sullivan was a classic example of an influential tastemaker of his time. A more modern example is Oprah Winfrey, whose book club endorsements often send literature, including old classics like Leo Tolstoy's Anna Karenina, skyrocketing to the top of The New York Times Best Sellers list.

Figure 1: For Elvis Presley's third appearance on The Ed Sullivan Show, he was shown only from the waist up; Sullivan considered his dancing too scandalous for family viewing.

Along with encouraging a mass audience to see (or skip) certain movies, television shows, video games, books, or fashion trends, people use tastemaking to create demand for new products. Companies often turn to advertising firms to help create public hunger for an object that may have not even existed 6 months before. In the 1880s, when George Eastman developed the Kodak camera for personal use, photography was most practiced by professionals. "Though the Kodak was relatively cheap and easy to use, most Americans didn't see the need for a camera; they had no sense that there was any value in visually documenting their lives," noted New Yorker writer James Surowiecki.[2] Kodak became a wildly successful company not because Eastman was good at selling cameras but because he understood that what he really had to sell was photography. Apple Inc. is

1. Leonard, John. "The Ed Sullivan Age," American Heritage, May/June 1997.

2. Surowiecki, James. "The Tastemakers," New Yorker, January 13, 2003.

a modern master of this technique. By leaking just enough information about a new product to cause curiosity, the technology company ensures that people will be waiting excitedly for an official release.

Tastemakers help keep culture vital by introducing the public to new ideas, music, programs, or products, but tastemakers are not immune to outside influence. In the traditional media model, large media companies set aside large advertising budgets to promote their most promising projects; tastemakers buzz about "the next big thing," and obscure or niche works can get lost in the shuffle.

## A Changing System for the Internet Age

In retrospect, the 20th century was a tastemaker's dream. Advertisers, critics, and other cultural influencers had access to huge audiences through a number of mass communication platforms. However, by the end of the century, the rise of cable television and the Internet had begun to make tastemaking a more complicated enterprise. While The Ed Sullivan Show regularly reached 50 million people in the 1960s, the most popular television series of 2009—American Idol—averaged around 25.5 million viewers per night, despite the fact that the 21st-century United States could claim more people and more television sets than ever before.[34] However, the proliferation of TV channels and other competing forms of entertainment meant that no one program or channel could dominate the attention of the American public as in Sullivan's day.

| Show/Episode | Number of Viewers | Percent of Households | Year |
|---|---|---|---|
| The Ed Sullivan Show / The Beatles' first appearance | 73 million | 45.1% | 1964 |
| The Ed Sullivan Show / Elvis Presley's first appearance | 60 million | 82.6% | 1956 |
| I Love Lucy / "Lucy Goes to the Hospital" | 44 million | 71.7% | 1953 |
| M*A*S*H / Series finale | 106 million | 60.2% | 1983 |
| Seinfeld / Series finale | 76 million | 41.3% | 1998 |
| American Idol / Season 5 finale | 36 million | 17% | 2006 |

Meanwhile, a low-tech home recording of a little boy acting loopy after a visit to the dentist ("David After Dentist") garnered more than 37 million YouTube viewings in 2009 alone. The Internet appears to be eroding some of the tastemaking power of traditional media outlets. No longer is the traditional mass media the only dominant force in creating and promoting trends. Instead, information spreads across the globe without the

3. Wikipedia, , s.v. "The Ed Sullivan Show," last modified June 26, 2012, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ The_Ed_Sullivan_Show.

4. Wikipedia, s.v. "American Idol," last modified June 26, 2012, http://en.wikipedia.org/ wiki/American_Idol.

active involvement of traditional mass media. Websites made by nonprofessionals can reach more people daily than a major newspaper. Music review sites such as Pitchfork keep their eyes out for the next big thing, whereas review aggregators like Rotten Tomatoes allow readers to read hundreds of movie reviews by amateurs and professionals alike. Blogs make it possible for anyone with Internet access to potentially reach an audience of millions. Some popular bloggers have transitioned from the traditional media world to the digital world, but others have become well-known without formal institutional support. The celebrity gossip chronicler Perez Hilton had no formal training in journalism when he started his blog, PerezHilton.com, in 2005; within a few years, he was reaching millions of readers a month.

E-mail and text messages allow people to transmit messages almost instantly across vast geographic expanses. Although personal communications continue to dominate, e-mail and text messages are increasingly used to directly transmit information about important news events. When Barack Obama wanted to announce his selection of Joe Biden as his vice-presidential running mate in the 2008 election, he bypassed the traditional televised press conference and instead sent the news to his supporters directly via text message—2.9 million text messages, to be exact.[5] Social networking sites, such as Facebook, and microblogging services, such as Twitter, are other sources of late-breaking information. When Michael Jackson died of cardiac arrest in 2009, "RIP Michael Jackson" was a top trending topic on Twitter before the first mainstream media first reported the news.

Thanks to these and other digital-age media, the Internet has become a pop culture force, both a source of amateur talent and a source of amateur promotion. However, traditional media outlets still maintain a large amount of control and influence over U.S. pop culture. One key indicator is the fact that many singers or writers who first make their mark on the Internet quickly transition to more traditional media—a mainstream record company signed YouTube star Justin Bieber and blogger Perez Hilton is regularly featured on MTV and VH1. New-media stars are quickly absorbed into the old-media landscape.

## Getting Around the Gatekeepers

Not only does the Internet give untrained individuals access to a huge audience for their art or opinions, but it also allows content creators to reach fans directly. Projects that may not have succeeded through traditional mass media may get a second chance through newer media. The profit-driven media establishment has been surprised by the success of some self-published books. For example, dozens of literary agents rejected first-time author Daniel Suarez's novel Daemon before he decided to self-publish in 2006. Through savvy self-

5. Covey, Nic. "Flying Fingers," Nielsen, https://web.archive.org/web/20090927100653/http://en-us.nielsen.com/main/insights/consumer_insight/issue_12/.

promotion through influential bloggers, Suarez garnered enough attention to land a contract with a major publishing house.

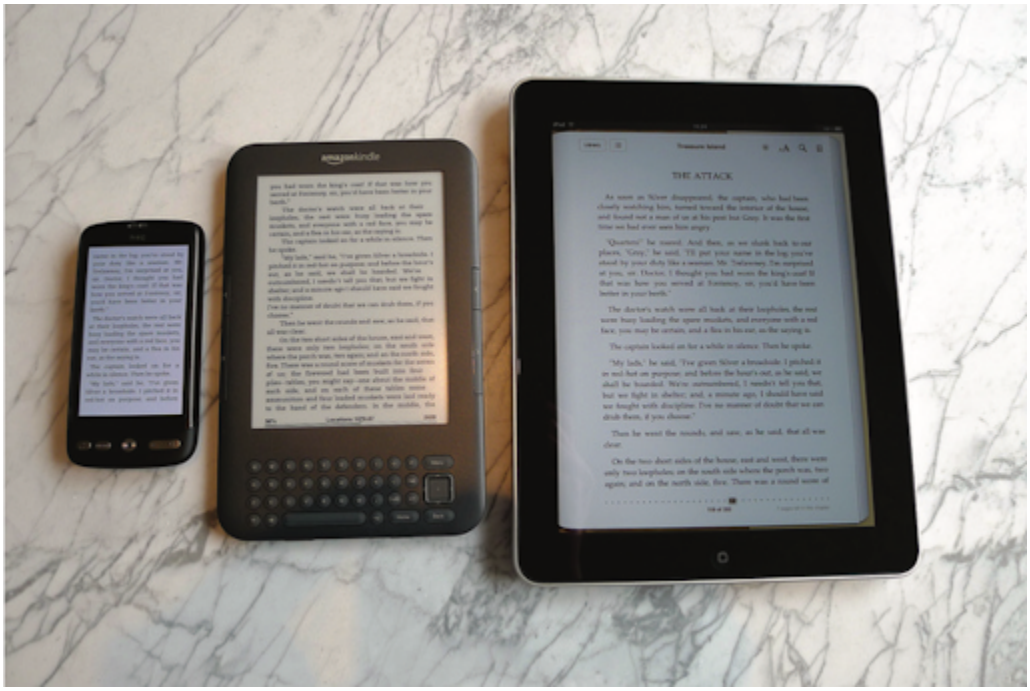

Figure 2: E-readers offer authors a way to get around the traditional publishing industry, but their thousands of options can make choosing hard on readers.

Suarez's story, though certainly exceptional, addresses some of the questions facing creators and consumers of pop culture in the Internet age. Without the influence of an agent, editor, or PR company, self-published content may be able to get closer to the creator's intention. However, much of the detailed marketing work must be performed by the work's creator instead of by a specialized public relations team. And with so many self-published, self-promoted works uploaded to the Internet every day, it's easy for things—even good things—to get lost in the shuffle.

Critic Laura Miller spells out some of the ways in which writers, in particular, can take control of their own publishing: "Writers can upload their works to services run by Amazon, Apple and... Barnes & Noble, transforming them into e-books that are instantly available in high-profile online stores. Or they can post them on services like Urbis.com, Quillp.com, or CompletelyNovel.com and coax reviews from other hopeful users."[6] Miller also points out that many of these companies can produce hard copies of books as well. While such a system may be a boon for writers who haven't had success with the traditional media establishment, Miller

6. Miller, Laura. "When Anyone Can Be a Published Author," Salon, June 22, 2010, http://www.salon.com/books/laura_miller/2010/06/22/slush.

notes that it may not be the best option for readers, who "rarely complain that there isn't enough of a selection on Amazon or in their local superstore; they're more likely to ask for help in narrowing down their choices."[7]

The question remains: Will the Internet era be marked by a huge and diffuse pop culture, where the power of traditional mass media declines and, along with it, the power of the universalizing blockbuster hit? Or will the Internet create a new set of tastemakers—influential bloggers—or even serve as a platform for the old tastemakers to take on new forms?

## Democratizing Tastemaking

In 1993, The New York Times restaurant critic Ruth Reichl wrote a review about her experiences at the upscale Manhattan restaurant Le Cirque. She detailed the poor service she received when the restaurant staff did not know her and the excellent service she received when they realized she was a professional food critic. Her article illustrated how the power to publish reviews could affect a person's experience at a restaurant. The Internet, which turned everyone with the time and interest into a potential reviewer, allowed those ordinary people to have their voices heard. In the mid-2000s, websites such as Yelp and TripAdvisor boasted hundreds of reviews of restaurants, hotels, and salons provided by users. Amazon allows users to review any product it sells, from textbooks to bathing suits. The era of the democratized review had come, and tastemaking was now everyone's job.

By crowdsourcing (harnessing the efforts of a number of individuals online to solve a problem) the review process, the idea was that these sites would arrive at a more accurate description of the service in choice. One powerful reviewer would no longer be able to wield disproportionate power; instead, the wisdom of the crowd would make or break restaurants, movies, and everything else. Anyone who felt treated badly or scammed now had recourse to tell the world about it. By 2008, Yelp had 4 million reviews.

However, mass tastemaking isn't as perfect as some people had promised. Certain reviewers can overly influence a product's overall rating by contributing multiple votes. One study found that a handful of Amazon users were casting hundreds of votes while most rarely wrote reviews at all. Online reviews also tend to skew to extremes—more reviews are written by the ecstatic and the furious, while the moderately pleased aren't riled up enough to post online about their experiences. And while traditional critics are supposed to adhere to ethical standards, there's no such standard for online reviews. Savvy authors or restaurant owners have been known to slyly insert positive reviews or attempt to skew ratings systems. To get an accurate picture, potential buyers may find themselves wading through 20 or 30 online reviews, most of them from nonprofessionals. And sometimes those people aren't professionals for a reason. Consider these user reviews on Amazon of William Shakespeare's Hamlet: "There is really no point and it's really long," "I really didn't enjoy reading this book, and I wish

7. *ibid*

that our English teacher wouldn't force my class to read this play," and "don't know what Willy Shakespeare was thinking when he wrote this one play tragedy, but I thought this sure was boring! Hamlet does too much talking and not enough stuff." While some may argue that these are valid criticisms of the play, these comments are certainly a far cry from the thoughtful critique of a professional literary critic.

These and other issues underscore the point of having reviews in the first place—that it's an advantage to have certain places, products, or ideas examined and critiqued by a trusted and knowledgeable source. In an article about Yelp, The New York Times noted that one of the site's elite reviewers had racked up more than 300 reviews in 3 years and then pointed out that "By contrast, a New York Times restaurant critic might take six years to amass 300 reviews. The critic visits a restaurant several times, strives for anonymity, and tries to sample every dish on the menu."[8] Whatever your vantage point, it's clear that old-style tastemaking is still around and still valuable—but the democratic review is here to stay.

### Key Takeaways

- Traditionally, pop culture hits were initiated or driven by the active support of media tastemakers. When mass media is concentrated, people with access to platforms for mass communication wield quite a bit of power in what becomes well-known, popular, or even infamous. Ed Sullivan's wildly popular variety TV show in the 1950s and 1960s served as a star-making vehicle and a tastemaker of that period.
- The digital age, with its proliferation of accessible media, has undermined the traditional role of the tastemaker. In contrast to traditional media, Internet-based mass media are not limited by time or space, and they allow bloggers, critics, or aspiring stars to potentially reach millions without the backing of the traditional media industry.
- However, this democratization has its downsides. An abundance of mass communication without some form of filtration can lead to information overload. Additionally, online reviews can be altered or biased.

8. McNeil, Donald G. "Eat and Tell," New York Times, November 4, 2008, Dining & Wine section.

**Exercises**

Find a popular newspaper or magazine that discusses popular culture. Look through it to determine what pop culture movements, programs, or people it seems to be covering. Then, answer the following questions. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. What is the overall tone of this periodical? What messages does it seem to be promoting, either implicitly or explicitly?
2. What are tastemakers? How might they be influencing the articles in this newspaper or magazine?

Next, find a website that deals with popular culture and answer the questions below.

1. Are there differences between the traditional media's and the new media's approach to popular culture?
2. How does the website you chose undermine tastemakers and gatekeepers?

## Media Attributions


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PART III

# CHAPTER 3: MEDIA LITERACY

Figure 1: bell hooks at a speaking engagement.

"Understanding knowledge as an essential element of love is vital because we are bombarded daily with messages that tell us love is about mystery, about that which cannot be known. We see movies in which people are represented as being in love who never talk with one another, who fall into bed without ever discussing their bodies, their sexual needs, their likes and dislikes. Indeed, the message is received from the mass media is that knowledge makes love less compelling; that it is ignorance that gives love its erotic and transgressive edge. These messages are brought to us by profiteering producers who have no clue about the art of loving, who substitute their mystified visions because they do not really know how to genuinely portray loving interaction." — bell hooks from her book *All About Love: New Visions*

In Gutenberg's age and the subsequent modern era, literacy—the ability to read and write—was a concern not only of educators but also of politicians, social reformers, and philosophers. A literate population, many reasoned, would be able to seek out information, stay informed about the news of the day, communicate effectively, and make informed decisions in many spheres of life. Because of this, literate people made better citizens, parents, and workers. Several centuries later, as global literacy rates continued to grow, there was a new sense that merely being able to read and write was not enough. In a media-saturated world, individuals needed to be able to sort through and analyze the information they were bombarded with every day. In the second half of the 20th century, the skill of being able to decode and process the messages and symbols transmitted via media was named media literacy. According to the nonprofit National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE), a person who is media literate can access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate

information. Put another way by John Culkin, a pioneering advocate for media literacy education, "The new mass media—film, radio, TV—are new languages, their grammar as yet unknown."[1] Media literacy seeks to give media consumers the ability to understand this new language. The following are questions asked by those who are media literate:

1. Who created the message?
2. What are the author's credentials?
3. Why was the message created?
4. Is the message trying to get me to act or think in a certain way?
5. Is someone making money by creating this message?
6. Who is the intended audience?
7. How do I know this information is accurate?

## Media Attributions

- bell hooks © bell hooks via. Flickr is licensed under a Public Domain license

1. Moody, Kate. "John Culkin, SJ: The Man Who Invented Media Literacy: 1928–1993," Center for Media Literacy, https://web.archive.org/web/20091009122232/http://www.medialit.org/reading_room/article408.html

# 3.1 APPROACHES TO LITERACY

**Learning Objectives**

- Define media literacy.
- Describe the role of individual responsibility and accountability when responding to pop culture.
- List the five key considerations about any media message.

Culkin called the pervasiveness of media "the unnoticed fact of our present," noting that media information was as omnipresent and easy to overlook as the air we breathe (and, he noted, "some would add that it is just as polluted").[1] Our exposure to media starts early—a study by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that 68 percent of children ages 2 and younger spend an average of 2 hours in front of a screen (either computer or television) each day, while children under 6 spend as much time in front of a screen as they do playing outside.[2] U.S. teenagers are spending an average of 7.5 hours with media daily, nearly as long as they spend in school. Media literacy isn't merely a skill for young people, however. Today's Americans get much of their information from various media sources—but not all that information is created equal. One crucial role of media literacy education is to enable us to skeptically examine the often-conflicting media messages we receive every day.

1. Moody, K. (n.d.). *John Culkin, SJ: The Man Who Invented Media Literacy: 1928-1993*. Center for Media Literacy. Retrieved January 23, 2024, from https://web.archive.org/web/20221128015328/http://www.centerformedialiteracy.org/reading-room/john-culkin-sj-man-who-invented-media-literacy-1928-1993.

2. Lewin, Tamar. "If Your Kids Are Awake, They're Probably Online." *The New York Times*, January 20, 2010, sec. Education. https://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/20/education/20wired.html.

# The Academic Approach to Studying the Mass Media

In the past, one goal of education was to provide students with the information deemed necessary to successfully engage with the world. Students memorized multiplication tables, state capitals, famous poems, and notable dates. Today, however, vast amounts of information are available at the click of a mouse. Even before the advent of the Internet, noted communications scholar David Berlo foresaw the consequences of expanding information technology: "Most of what we have called formal education has been intended to imprint on the human mind all of the information that we might need for a lifetime." Changes in technology necessitate changes in how we learn, Berlo noted, and these days "education needs to be geared toward the handling of data rather than the accumulation of data."[3]

Wikipedia, a hugely popular Internet encyclopedia, is at the forefront of the debate on the proper use of online sources. In 2007, Middlebury College banned the use of Wikipedia as a source in history papers and exams. One of the school's librarians noted that the online encyclopedia "symbolizes the best and worst of the Internet. It's the best because everyone gets his/her say and can state their views. It's the worst because people who use it uncritically take for truth what is only opinion."[4] Or, as comedian and satirist Stephen Colbert put it, "Any user can change any entry, and if enough other users agree with them, it becomes true."[5] A computer registered to the U.S. Democratic Party changed the Wikipedia page for Rush Limbaugh to proclaim that he was "racist" and a "bigot," and a person working for the electronic voting machine manufacturer Diebold was found to have erased paragraphs connecting the company to Republican campaign funds.[6] Media literacy teaches today's students how to sort through the Internet's cloud of data, locate reliable sources, and identify bias and unreliable sources.

If you have been reading the chapters of this text in order, by this point you will be aware of the powerful role the mass media play in society, but you may not yet question whether society benefits from this arrangement. In general, the mass media could do a better job of representing all sorts of groups and group cultures. The mass media could also represent abstract concepts like love, trust, and greed in more meaningful ways. This is not to say that the mass media have failed in this regard, but there is much room for improvement.

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3. Shaw, David. "A Plea for Media Literacy in our Nation's Schools," Los Angeles Times, November 30, 2003.

4. Byers, Meredith "Controversy Over Use of Wikipedia in Academic Papers Arrives at Smith," Smith College Sophian, News section, March 8, 2007.

5. Colbert, Stephen. "The Word: Wikiality," The Colbert Report, July 31, 2006.

6. Fildes, Jonathan. "Wikipedia 'Shows CIA Page Edits,'" BBC News, Science and Technology section, August 15, 2007.

As active audience members, as hybrid producer-users or "produsers" (to use a term coined by Axel Bruns),[7] you must not only be selective but also critical of what you consume. Whether you become media professionals or not, it will ultimately be your job as media consumers to remake the mass media in ways that better represent the depth of human experience.

Whether your interest is a religion, a fandom, or an abstract concept like love (one of the greatest of abstractions), you have the power to participate in the media production redefining how others understand it.

No, this is not a book about love. Yes, love and related concepts are commodified in the mass media; however, the disruption that has echoed in political spheres and often in the ways family and cultural group members speak to one another about politics also opens up space for critical thinking.

This chapter gives you some tools developed by mass communication scholars to develop your critical eye when viewing messages as products in the mass media. If massive numbers of "produsers" can reshape the media landscape, we have to re-think the role of mass media professionals.[8] Assisting people in the process of meaning-making — that is, making mass media with audiences instead of for them and aiding them in their own communication efforts — could open up a new purpose and new industries for those who are mentally prepared and daring enough to take the lead.

This chapter defines "media literacy" and touches on some key mass communication theories that are absolutely not meant to be left to molder in the digital cloud where this text"book" lives. Take these theories out, apply them, and see how they work. Find out how useful they can be and what their limitations are.

This text presents an image of entire societies and cultures swimming in a sea of media. Consider these concepts your first set of snorkel and swim-fins.

## Media Literacy Defined

**Media literacy** is a term describing media consumers' understanding of how mass media work. It includes knowing where different types of information can be found, how best to evaluate information, who owns the major mass media platforms, how messages are produced, and how they are framed to suit various interests.

In a global society that gets most of its information through digital networks, it is incredibly important to know how and by whom media messages are made so that, as consumers, we can discern how the mass media are being used to shape our opinions. We can reply to or comment on messages in the mass media, or we can demand a seat at the table when messages are being constructed. This is the nature of participatory media outlined in the previous chapter. Being media literate gives us the tools to participate well and with purpose.

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7. Bruns, Axel. "Produsage." In *Proceedings of the 6th ACM SIGCHI Conference on Creativity & Cognition*, 99–106. C&C '07. New York, NY, USA: Association for Computing Machinery, 2007. https://doi.org/10.1145/1254960.1254975.

8. Rosen, Jay. "PressThink: The People Formerly Known as the Audience," June 27, 2006. http://archive.pressthink.org/2006/06/27/ppl_frmr.html.

It is important to consider your role in contributing directly to mass media content. Your contributions to cultural trends and social change in the mass media can sometimes happen without your knowledge. If you post regularly to Facebook or other social media platforms, your data are being aggregated, and that information is used by advertisers, researchers, and news services to find out what you like and what you are like, as well as to create ads and political messages tailored just for you.

You are more than your preferences and the media you consume. You are encouraged to play an active role in shaping your digital identity beyond the one that has already been created for you.[9]

# Social Media Literacy

Social media literacy involves examining platforms like Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter and understanding the technical, cognitive, and emotional aspects of content analysis. On a technical level, it means grasping the platform's workings, content posting permissions, interaction mechanisms, and the algorithms shaping content visibility. Cognitively, it requires discerning reliable sources by evaluating user bios, follower counts, join dates, and offline affiliations. Additionally, social media literacy extends to recognizing and managing emotional responses to content and interactions.

Social media platforms, in contrast to mass media, are demanding and responsive to user participation, shaping users' conceptions of identity and reality. Through social media, users create their realities by interacting with the creator and the content. Based on that, a model called SoMeLit introduced three content dimensions of social media literacy.[10]

## The Self

The Self is the knowledge about the self and its relationships with its social media content choices, consumption, engagement, and social media network environment. Unlike traditional media literacy, social media literacy emphasizes knowing oneself and one's behaviors within the context of social media platforms. Since various motivations result in diverse outcomes, recognizing motivations is an essential first step in becoming social media literate. Beyond motivations and content choices, social networks—both online and offline—play a critical role in shaping the self on social media. Users, guided by their motivations, shape

9. The Local Germany. "German Watchdog Finds Facebook Data Harvesting 'abusive' for Users," December 19, 2017. https://www.thelocal.de/20171219/german-watchdog-facebook-data-abuse.

10. McNulty, N. (2023, October 11). "Why is internet and social media literacy so important? 5 steps to a conscious consumer." Niall McNulty. https://www.niallmcnulty.com/2021/03/internet-literacy-social-media-literacy/#htoc-what-is-internet-literacy

personalized content through a plethora of options and digital algorithms, creating customized media environments frequently referred to as "filter bubbles." Users engage with egocentric networks that affect how much information they absorb and how they produce it—these networks' features influence not just how material is consumed but also how it is made. Fundamentally, thorough awareness and comprehension of one's motivations, decisions, and social networks is necessary for social media literacy.

## The Medium

The medium is the understanding of the technological affordances and architectures of social media platforms, the absence of journalistic protocols and conventions of sourcing and fact-checking, and the governing economic and political interests. At the moment, the majority of media literacy research is concerned with content analysis; the unique characteristics of each medium are receiving less attention. Social media platforms are dynamic, influenced by user conventions and technological possibilities, in contrast to traditional media. According to media theory, different identities and realities are created across platforms by the medium's inherent influence on social and human processes. By enabling users to actively participate, social media's technological affordances challenge the mass media's hegemony in agenda-setting. But because there are no journalistic standards on these sites, there are drawbacks as well, such as hate speech and false information. Social media are less subject to formal rules than mass media, which gives them greater political and financial freedom. Users are therefore given more responsibility to assess the reliability of information. A literate person should be able to use social media with an understanding of the platforms' fixed and flexible features as well as how user interactions affect users' perceptions of reality. A social media literate person should be able to use social media with an understanding of the platforms' fixed and flexible features as well as how user interactions affect users' perceptions of reality.

## The Reality

The reality is the awareness of the multiplicity and malleability of realities on social media, and the multiple criteria people use to judge the realism of social media content. The nature of the medium shapes social and personal processes, resulting in a variety of identities and realities across platforms, claims media theory. Due to the lack of journalistic norms, social media presents issues including hate speech and disinformation, in addition to challenging the mass media's hegemony in agenda-setting. Social media are more flexible politically and economically than mass media as they are not subject to formal rules. Users now have a great deal of responsibility to assess the reliability of information. In conclusion, a media literate individual ought to be aware of how user interactions affect users' views of reality in addition to the stable and adjustable features of platforms.

## Skills Developed from Social Media Literacy

Being adept at analyzing social media posts and online news stories turns you into a discerning consumer. Ideally, these critical thinking skills should be integral to 21st-century education. Recognizing that media is crafted from specific perspectives is a crucial skill. Furthermore, being able to identify the impact of media on politics and society enables you to discern the values inherent in them and understand who gains from promoting these values.

# Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is media literacy put into action. Besides contributing to the creation of meaning by making your own mass media messages (perhaps in collaboration with professionals), you can ask who owns major mass media corporations. Scholars have found that more than half of the mass media channels available to mass audiences in America are owned by only five corporations or firms.[11] Additional research has shown that just by making people aware of the nature of media ownership, you can encourage them to be skeptical of mass media content.[12]

This text has already established that mass communication is what makes society in the physical world work. Information, often in the form of messages in the mass media, permeates institutional interactions and passes between all of us in our homes, and schools, and businesses. The information conveyed in the mass media gets interpreted in organizational, group and interpersonal communication contexts. These systems influence each other, but mass media messages tend to envelop and permeate other forms of communication. Thus, if you learn to be skeptical of the information you receive in the mass media, you learn how to critique the whole global social system.

## Critique this Book

Reading closely, you will have undoubtedly found value judgments in this text already. You may be inclined to assign political values to this text in our hyper-partisan cultural environment. You are welcome to do this. You

11. Drake, Jeff. A Summary of Ben Bagdikian's "The Media Monopoly." (July 19, 2017). https://web.archive.org/web/20170918144313/https://www.jeffdrake.org/2017/07/19/a-summary-of-ben-bagdikians-the-media-monopoly/

12. Ashley, Seth, Mark Poepsel, and Erin Willis. "Media Literacy and News Credibility: Does Knowledge of Media Ownership Increase Skepticism in News Consumers?" *Journal of Media Literacy Education* 2, no. 1 (September 10, 2013). https://doi.org/10.23860/jmle-2-1-3.

are encouraged to do this. You must think critically about the cultural values expressed not only in this text but also in your other textbooks and in the history and literature you read.

But you also must think critically about your preferred media outlets. Where do they get their information from? Who owns them? No single revelation about the mass media will tell you everything you need to know. You have to begin to see nuance and to think for yourself what aspects of the mass media matter most to you, what things you think should change, how you might change them, and what you can live with.

It is part of the responsibility of citizens now to critique messages that come to us via mass media, as well as messages from leaders who bypass mass media gatekeepers and fact checkers. It is also a sound career strategy for those who go into the mass communication field to learn to be able to critique messages, messengers and owners in the corporate mass media field of work and play. To know where the mass media industry is headed, you must be able to think critically about where it comes from.

Much of the rest of this book breaks down different mass media channels and looks briefly at the history of how each came to be, what and whom each channel serves, and how convergence in a digitally networked society might affect the future of each medium. This text also returns several times to "big picture" questions about the dynamic relationship between media and society as seen from the perspective of the various mass communication channels and platforms.

## The Dichotomy Between the Media and the "Real World"

To the extent they are shaped by mass media, our perceptions of reality are very much artificial — but not entirely so. How artificial is too artificial? Different individuals and different cultures differ in the amount of nonsense they can tolerate.

The real challenge to us as young media professionals and scholars is to try to determine what is artificial in the vast array of messages delivered to us at all times by the mass media. One of the best ways to do this is to get off of social media platforms and talk to people in person. We should also dig a bit into the information we consume and ask, "How do they know?" Whenever a message comes to us from a mass media outlet or from a friend's social media post, the media literate individual seeks to know what underlies each claim.

The question is not whether you believe it. The question is: On what grounds is a message in the mass media or in social media believable?

Now that people are constantly using technology and even wearing it,[13] it is becoming more difficult to separate messages mediated by professionals, who pledge ethically to adhere to disseminating factual

13. Doak, Alex. "The Apple Watch's Success Has Created a Luxury Smartwatch Boom." *Wired UK*. Accessed September 3, 2023. https://www.wired.co.uk/article/apple-watch-sales-smartwatches-montblanc-tag-heuer.

information (such as most journalists), from poorly-supported, opinion-only content or outright misinformation, which may be spread far and wide by friends and family.

We are living in a media age where we may not trust our own family members' social media posts. Things they think are important might not only be unimportant to us, they might be distasteful or even wrong. There are real-world consequences to sharing misinformation on social media platforms. Question the sources' sources. Talk to people in tangible spaces apart from social media platforms, and you can learn to see what is supported by fact in the physical world and its digital networks.

## The Bad Dynamic

Your media choices matter. In the network society, when mass media content is ubiquitous on mobile phones and is often projected into public spaces, it can be difficult to differentiate between your independent preferences and the opinions you are encouraged to carry by advertisers who constantly bombard you.

Without human interaction outside of the deluge of electronic information, it can be nearly impossible to figure out for yourself if what you like is a response to the quality of the media content or if you are responding to carefully targeted marketing campaigns.

Figure 1: Raahil Djhruva reached out gently across the generational divide and helped a community member learn how to use Skype so he could communicate with his daughter. Dhruva, a junior at Queens University of Charlotte from London, England, called the experience "an emotional moment." Media literacy is also about teaching people how to use information and communication technologies to reach out to one another.

The system of checks and balances in which you can compare your real life experiences to what you see and hear in the mass media may break down. A pessimistic view is that we may enter a constant state of depression

on a social level because we are cognitively incapable of comprehending all of the information presented to us and we lack ways of taking regular "reality checks."

Feelings of isolation and inadequacy coupled with cognitive overload create the potential for a host of social issues. Additionally, the images we see in ads and the perfected versions of themselves people present on social media usually do not reflect applied critical thinking.

The "bad dynamic" that comes into play is one where glossy identities are carefully constructed and protected while our real identities rapidly disintegrate. We may establish a society where many people have identity issues, and those issues are constantly worsening. It may seem at times as though we are headed for a massive collective mental breakdown.

What good is media literacy? Thinking critically about the mass media and content spread on social media helps us critique constructed images and accept our own shortcomings. If we look for ways to relate to one another besides our overlapping common culture interests, we may find deeper connections are possible. We can share imperfections and tackle doubts, but only if we acknowledge them in our media world first.

What follows is a set of mass communication theories arrived at through the analysis of facts and data by thousands of scholars over the course of nearly 100 years. As an academic field, mass communication is young, but there are several theories, or guiding abstractions, that can help us to see how our society is structured and what roles the mass media play in society at all levels.

### Key Takeaways

- Media literacy is essential in the modern age, enabling individuals to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate information. It helps in understanding the new languages of mass media and discerning how messages are made, thus empowering people to think critically about the information they consume and the influences shaping their opinions.
- The mass media's portrayal of concepts like love and identity can be misleading and artificial, driven by profit motives and often lacking genuine understanding. This portrayal emphasizes mystery and ignorance over knowledge, potentially leading to misconceptions and a disconnect between media representations and real human experiences.
- The pervasive influence of media in daily life, coupled with the bombardment of information and carefully targeted marketing campaigns, can lead to feelings of isolation, inadequacy, and cognitive overload. Media literacy offers a way to critique these constructed images, accept your imperfections, and foster deeper connections, but it also warns of potential societal issues if these challenges are not addressed.

**Exercises**

1. Understanding Media Literacy: How has your perception of media literacy changed after reading this text? Reflect on how you previously engaged with media and how you might approach media consumption and analysis differently in the future.
2. The Dichotomy Between Media and Reality: The text discusses the artificial nature of perceptions shaped by mass media. How do you see this dichotomy playing out in your own life or society at large? What strategies can you employ to discern what is artificial and what is grounded in fact?
3. Role of Technology in Communication: Reflect on the example of teaching a community member to use Skype. How do you see technology bridging or widening generational and cultural divides? Consider both the opportunities and challenges that technology presents in fostering genuine human connections.

## Media Attributions

- Technologies to reach out to one another. © Knight Foundation, Knight-Crane Convergence Lab is licensed under a CC BY-SA (Attribution ShareAlike) license

# 3.2 MEDIA THEORIES FOR MEDIA LITERACY

Learning Objectives

- Develop the ability to critically evaluate and interpret media messages by considering factors such as the author, format, audience, content, and purpose.
- Gain insights into various theories of mass communication, including Marxist critical theory, symbolic interactionism, agenda-setting theory, gatekeeping theory, and framing theory. Learn how these theories apply to the analysis of media systems, the influence of mass media on public opinion, and the role of media in shaping social and economic hierarchies.
- Understand the limited effects paradigm and the Limited Capacity Model, recognizing that the influence of mass media on behavior is complex and often limited. They will explore how cognitive abilities and existing patterns of thought affect the encoding, storage, and retrieval of media messages, leading to varied impacts on individual behavior and societal change.

## Individual Accountability and Popular Culture

Ultimately, media literacy involves teaching that images are constructed with various aims in mind and that it falls to the individual to evaluate and interpret these media messages. Mass communication may be created and disseminated by individuals, businesses, governments, or organizations, but it is always received by an individual. Education, life experience, and a host of other factors make each person interpret constructed media in different ways; there is no correct way to interpret a media message. But on the whole, better media literacy skills help us function better in our media-rich environment, enabling us to be better democratic citizens, smarter shoppers, and more skeptical media consumers. When analyzing media messages, consider the following:

1. **Author:** Consider who is presenting the information. Is it a news organization, a corporation, or an individual? What links do they have to the information they are providing? A news station might be owned by the company it is reporting on; likewise, an individual might have financial reasons for

supporting a certain message.

2. **Format:** Television and print media often use images to grab people's attention. Do the visuals only present one side of the story? Is the footage overly graphic or designed to provoke a specific reaction? Which celebrities or professionals are endorsing this message?
3. **Audience:** Imagine yourself in another's shoes. Would someone of the opposite gender feel the same way as you do about this message? How might someone of a different race or nationality feel about it? How might an older or younger person interpret this information differently? Was this message made to appeal to a specific audience?
4. **Content:** Even content providers that try to present information objectively can have an unconscious slant. Analyze who is presenting this message. Does he or she have any clear political affiliations? Is he or she being paid to speak or write this information? What unconscious influences might be at work?
5. **Purpose:** Nothing is communicated by mass media without a reason. What reaction is the message trying to provoke? Are you being told to feel or act a certain way? Examine the information closely and look for possible hidden agendas.

Using this framework, we can continue to draw on additional theories of communication to help us dig deeper.

## Critical Media Theory

There are many critical theorists among mass communication scholars. They work to develop better analytical theories that teach us how to analyze messages in media systems and the mass media and help us to discuss with clarity what is beneficial and what is harmful to society.

Academic work is about digging deep. Scholars will often analyze one medium at one period in time to explain how certain groups or ideologies are depicted.

Marxist critical theory questions the hierarchical organization of society — who controls the means of production and whether that control benefits society or only small groups of people. Every society has and needs leaders, and one of the most important functions of society is to manage a functioning economy. At question in Marxist critical thought is how the rules of each economy, including the global economy, are set up. Do they benefit most people? Do they allow for merit to be rewarded? Do they create a system of fair competition? Are they set up for collaboration and mutual benefit?

Most scholars who apply critical theoretical models would hesitate to call themselves Marxists. Marx was both a scholar and a revolutionary, a term which academics rarely self-apply. Most Marxist critical thinkers suggest changes that society could make to be more inclusive and fair for a greater number of people, but what is fair will always be debated. There is no single line of Marxist thought. There is a small number who demand complete change in the global economic system, and there are thousands of critical theorists calling for more

narrow or specific changes based on their observations in their areas of expertise — not just mass media analysis but all kinds of social analysis.

Historically, Marxist thought has been employed by dictators, often using mass media channels, to take power and often to wield it in horrendous ways.[1] Marxist thought also guides the reasoning of some mainstream economists who help manage social democracies, which historically garner more good will than dictatorships.[2] Scholars working with the critical theoretical point of view often note broad ways for society to improve as well as practical solutions that might help (although getting leaders to listen is another matter). Making cogent arguments and convincing people to hear them are very different things.

That said, ideas about questioning hierarchies and asking for whom social systems really work are still central to modern critical theory. This is what Marxist critique in media studies is all about: looking at symbols and underlying messages in all forms of media and discerning what purposes they serve, and asking whether they represent exploitation, corruption or any other social ill often found in closed hierarchies.

## Symbolic Interactionism

Another critical theoretical perspective is **symbolic interactionism**. The general idea comes from George Herbert Mead and suggests that people assign symbolic meaning to all sorts of phenomena around them. Our behavior is guided and influenced by our perceptions of reality and the symbols around us.

Mass media extend and limit our senses. When our senses are extended, we can become overwhelmed by the amount of information coming in, so we look for symbols, and we categorize ideas according to those symbols to make the messages easier to understand.

We sometimes apply the symbols ourselves, but in many (or even most) cases, the people editing messages in the mass media purposefully use symbols as a shorthand way of communicating. Not everyone understands every symbol or perceives them the same way. Symbols have a cultural context, but this is not much of a limiting factor in American society where there is a vast shared common culture and targeted marketing can tailor which images to deliver to which individuals.

You are encouraged to think critically about the symbols you see and ask whether they are meant to manipulate you. We will not stop using symbols in communication; however, if you ask, "Why am I being shown this symbol at this time," you can take a practical step in critically analyzing media.

An example would probably help.

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1. Gessen, Keith. "How Stalin Became Stalinist." *The New Yorker*, October 30, 2017. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/11/06/how-stalin-became-stalinist.

2. Jones, Ann. After I Lived in Norway, America Felt Backward. Here's Why: A crash course in social democracy. (January 18, 2016). https://web.archive.org/web/20190902075652/https://www.thenation.com/article/after-i-lived-in-norway-america-felt-backward-heres-why/

When asked to come up with an advertising campaign, college students often select a familiar category of beverage: energy drinks. RedBull uses the symbol of wings to show that an energy drink can pick you up and help you to move more quickly through your work. You can fly where you had stumbled. But that is not the only reason to associate wings with Red Bull. Wings are a symbol of angels, saviors, and other powerful beings. If an individual has reservations about consuming something that may be unhealthy, moral symbolism and images of power are designed to subconscious guilt or misgivings.

It is up to you to critique images in the mass media as you see fit, but you should develop the skill and practice applying it.

## Agenda-Setting Theory

**Agenda setting** is one of the most simple mass communication theories to understand, and it is one of the most widely cited. It argues that the mass media tell us what to think about. In other words, the mass media helps people to set their own agendas.

The idea is not that mass media companies come up with a specific agenda and then preach it to the masses; rather, mass media outlets learn what people are interested in and find similar topics based on what has been learned in the past. Then, the messages that appear in the mass media tell audiences what topics they should care about and how to prioritize them.

This is a dynamic process, and there is no evidence of a singular media agenda. All one needs to do is to flip through cable television news channels to see vastly different points of view presented to mass audiences at all times.

Instead, agenda setting highlights certain topics and stories and those topics become the public's agenda based not only on what appears in the mass media but what people accept, care about and share more widely.

Messages in the mass media may or may not succeed in directing us how or what to think, but with great success, they tell us what we should be thinking and talking about.

The examples are easy to find. Many mass media outlets talked more about Ebola during October of 2014 rather than the midterm elections. People came to discuss Ebola more often than the elections despite the fact that the election might have a more direct effect on them than Ebola ever would. The assumption may be that professionals in the mass media are pushing an agenda about a scary world, but in most instances, they are promoting news they know people care about based on previous responses to similar topics.

For an agenda to be set, messages have to appear in the mass media, and they have to be accepted by massive numbers of audience members. The acceptance of messages in the mass media is known as **salience**. Here is how agenda-setting theory works: Various mass media outlets have agendas for coverage that they develop. It may take years for a film company to develop a brand. News organizations change their coverage agenda several times a day. An agenda is just a list of issues a media outlet wants to discuss and a prioritization of those issues.

Research has shown thousands of times that those agendas are passed on to audiences. This is tested by

surveying people about what issues they think are important and comparing that list to the issues that had been in the news and entertainment media in the weeks before taking the survey. The topics and the relative levels of priority are often (but not always) passed along.

Agenda setting still works even as the processes of de-massification continue, but the influence of mass media outlets may be diminishing. The theory is based on the assumption that there are mass audiences all consuming similar messages, but mass audiences are diminishing. That said, the messages people share on social media between one another often originate in mass media channels.

## Gatekeeping Theory

Gatekeeping theory describes a practice where a person acts as a filter, deciding what information will be disseminated for public consumption via the mass media. A good example is an editor in a news organization looking at many stories from a newswire.

Newswires put out hundreds of stories per day. The same newspapers that publish wire stories from other areas may contribute stories to the newswire if something interesting to a broader audience should occur. Only a handful of wire stories make it into a TV news broadcast, onto a newspaper's website or into the paper itself.

In television news, producers act as primary gatekeepers. Only a dozen or so national and international news stories make it into the average big city daily newspaper, where the task falls to an editor. The person with the job of selecting and editing wire stories for a news organization has to decide which news stories are noteworthy to the local audience. The practice started in the 19th century with the marriage of the telegraph to the newspaper, and it continues as text, images, video and information graphics are shared through digital networks.

The way gatekeeping works has changed significantly over the past two centuries. Now, we often think of gatekeepers guarding a gate with no fences because on the internet anyone can post almost anything. Mass media news outlets are no longer people's only major source of news and information about the world. Social media platforms carry both messages produced by both mass media outlets and individuals free to share almost whatever they like online. Of course, sharing something online does not guarantee it will be popular. There are plenty of YouTube videos with very few views.

And where there are mass audiences, there is still plenty of gatekeeping going on. Humans do much of the work planning what goes into major newspapers and network news broadcasts as well as entertainment products for that matter. On social media platforms and in search engine content, however, the task is increasingly managed by algorithms — sets of procedures or rules for computers to follow.

In the future, we expect to see fewer human gatekeepers and more gatekeeping work done by recommendation engines and the like. You are unaware of the full extent of Netflix's available content because you only see what your preferences suggest you should see. The same is true for Google searches and

advertisements pulled from databases filled with vastly different ads designed to target different individuals at precisely the right time.

There is also a new theory to be aware of that concerns the flip-side of gatekeeping. "**Gatewatching**" describes people who consume all sorts of news and other information and who stay current with new information as it arrives.[3] It is as though they are watching professionally produced media messages come out of the gate and then almost immediately these media consumers post links to Reddit, Twitter, Facebook or other social linking sites and social media platforms.

Gatewatching is when someone takes a message already published, by professionals or amateurs (but more often by professionals working for mass media outlets), and shares it for others to see. It is not uncommon on Reddit to see stories from the national and international media ranked alongside funny cat videos and random thoughts people had in the shower. On the one hand, putting the power of gatewatching in the hands of users is a way for people to set agendas for one another. On the other hand, information-as-popularity-contest can promote biased views and can shut out not just what is politically unpopular but what people consider to be boring, which severely narrows the scope of discussion.

Try to consume mass media or social media for a day without seeing or hearing about pop music stars, Kardashians, major sports figures or odd news from far-flung places. It is a challenge, even if you tailor your social media experience to avoid trending topics.

## Framing Theory

Framing is a basic mass communication theory with widespread implications. It suggests that the way a news organization (or an entertainment producer, for that matter) frames a story is purposeful and meaningful and can influence how people think about the topic. A news frame refers to the way a story is presented including which sources and facts are selected as well as the tone the story or message takes.

An example is the period leading up to a war. If the United States has plans to go to war, it can be framed as a risky proposition, a patriotic endeavor or a morally righteous thing to do.

For any major news story, there are usually a few dominant frames that emerge. The author of this text was a television reporter at the time of the buildup to the Iraq war, and our station framed the issue as a matter of patriotism. There were patriots and there were protestors. Our station built a "Wall of Heroes" to display photos of marines, soldiers, airmen and sailors killed in action. While any given story about the buildup to the Iraq war might have been objective, the decision to build a display wall framed our coverage in a certain way. The display remained on view for approximately 18 months. The station then stopped keeping track in

3. Bruns, Axel. "Gatekeeping, Gatewatching, Real-Time Feedback: New Challenges for Journalism," n.d. http://snurb.info/files/2011/Gatekeeping,%20Gatewatching,%20Real-Time%20Feedback.pdf

that highly visible, demonstrably patriotic way, even though the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq continued for 15 more years on a reduced scale.

Whether you agree or disagree with the idea of remembering those who died in Iraq through local television news broadcast tributes, the point is that stories are framed by how they are covered. It matters what sources are selected for news stories and which sources are left out. It matters which terms are used and how prevalent they are. Framing analysis delves into news content to identify various themes and to show which ones receive preferential treatment.

Surveys of news and entertainment media consumers will reflect which frames were most salient; that is, not only which stories but also which frames stay in the minds of audience members.

## Limited Effects Paradigm

A paradigm is a collection of theories from the social sciences, which are themselves collections of facts supporting an abstract idea meant to explain the phenomena of human behavior. A theory is supported by empirical facts. It's not the same as when your buddy shotguns three beers and says "You know...I have a theory." Social scientific theories are meant to be big ideas that help predict behavior or the results of certain behaviors.

In the field of mass communication, the limited effects paradigm is so-called because there are different kinds of theory relating to different media that all show the same thing: It is a complicated task to tie one set of messages to massive shifts in human behavior. Even small shifts in behavior like deciding to purchase one smartphone over another are only partially influenced by messages in the mass media. There are simply too many other factors influencing behavior to say that a certain set of mass media messages caused behaviors across a mass audience.

Influence is another matter. The mass media work in tandem with other social stimuli to influence all sorts of behavior. If there were no influence, there would be no reason for mass media advertising or government propaganda. It is because they work that both are a constant presence in the global mass media environment. At question is how much influence certain messages can have and under what conditions is the influence stronger or weaker.

The limited effects paradigm started as a response to theories such as the hypodermic needle theory. After Germany lost World War I, mass communication was just starting to emerge as its own discipline. One of the first theories American scholars of mass communication had was that propaganda infects a population like a needle injecting a viable virus into the body.

Scholars thought that propaganda turned Germany into an imperialistic, nationalistic country (that is, Nazi Germany), but propaganda never works that easily. When the Nazi Party unified the country between World War I and World War II, a large portion of the population, welcomed the shift in social policy, despite the accompanying racism and violence. It did not take as much convincing for many Germans, as many in

the aftermath of WWII and the Holocaust would like to think. Using many kinds of authority, the Nazis committed atrocities. Mass communication enabled it, but the theory that propaganda could, more or less by itself, create that kind of situation has not held true. There were social weaknesses and social structures in place that paved the way for the Nazis, who could not have risen to power by media influence alone.

This does not mean that the mass media have no effects. It would not make sense to argue that communication permeates society and then to suggest that it has little to no effect on people. What the limited effects paradigm suggests instead is that information does not sway people as often as it is assimilated into existing patterns of thought. And those patterns of thought are shaped by all sorts of social forces, not just mass media campaigns. To reiterate, other social forces at play include religion, family, education, economic status, health, crime and incarceration.

Changing people's minds is difficult. Motivating behavior is difficult, and there are many variables guiding human behavior. Thus, the core concept is that the mass media have **limited effects** on society. Small effects are measured in mass communication studies all the time, and influencing thoughts is generally understood to be easier than influencing behavior.

## Limited Capacity Processing Model

The Limited Capacity Model of Motivated Mediated Message Processing (LC4MP), which we'll call the **Limited Capacity Model** for short, is a theory that states that our cognitive abilities are limited, so we are unable to process all of the information that we see, hear and read.

Since we cannot perceive and understand everything, parts of our brain act as filters that either disregard information, very rapidly process it according to our long-held assumptions, or force us to pay attention to it. We can force ourselves to pay attention to information as well, but it is difficult (which you might notice while reading textbooks).

The theory goes deeper than this and explains how we process information when we do attend to it. The three stages are encoding, storage and retrieval.

**Encoding** is when you voluntarily or involuntarily pay attention to a message and its underlying symbols. Once attention is paid, a message can be **stored**, or, recorded in our memories. Not all messages are easily **retrieved**, or recalled, when we wish to remember them.

Some are retrievable only in part, or they may be altered in the storage and retrieval process. There are voluntary and involuntary types of encoding, and what we store and how we store it has a lot to do with what is already in our minds. It is generally easier to store something when it connects to familiar thoughts.

All of this amounts to a quantitative approach to studying memory in the context of mass media messages. It does not presume effects. In fact, since a message has to be encoded, stored and retrieved before it can influence behavior, the limited capacity model is part of what explains the limited effects model.

Even if we had all the useful information in the world, our brains could not store and use it all. Thus, even

the best advertisements, political campaigns and in-depth news documentaries are up against the limits of our minds.

Keep this in mind as you think critically about the messages you see and share.

### Key Takeaways

- Media literacy involves the individual's ability to critically evaluate and interpret media messages, recognizing that images and content are constructed with specific intentions and biases.
- Various theories of mass communication, such as Marxist critical theory and agenda-setting theory, provide frameworks for understanding how media messages influence society, shape public opinion, and reflect underlying social structures.
- The influence of mass media on individual behavior and societal change is complex and often limited, constrained by cognitive abilities, existing patterns of thought, and the challenges of encoding, storing, and retrieving information.

### Exercises

1. Critical Analysis Exercise: Select a recent media advertisement or news article and analyze it using the framework provided in the text. Consider the author, format, audience, content, and purpose. What biases or hidden agendas can you identify? Write a brief analysis summarizing your findings.
2. Reflection on Limited Effects Paradigm: Reflect on a recent media campaign or political advertisement that you have encountered. Considering the limited effects paradigm and the Limited Capacity Model, write a short essay on why you think the campaign may or may not have been effective in influencing behavior. What factors might have contributed to its success or failure? How does this example illustrate the complexities of media influence on individual and societal behavior?

3. Symbolic Interactionism Activity: Choose a common symbol used in advertising or media (e.g., the symbol of wings in Red Bull's advertising). Analyze how this symbol is used to communicate specific messages or emotions. Create a visual presentation or write an essay that explores the cultural context of the symbol, how it might be perceived differently by various audiences, and what manipulative techniques might be at play. Reflect on your own reaction to the symbol and whether understanding its use changes your perception of the associated product or message.

# PART IV
# CHAPTER 4: CRITICAL THINKING

Reasoning is the cornerstone of critical thinking, forming the logical structure that connects evidence or premises to conclusions. In the context of communication and media studies, this logical connection is vital for both analyzing media messages and creating persuasive content.

For media students and professionals, checking the validity of arguments is essential. It enhances the quality of reasoning, making your analysis of media messages more insightful or your media content more convincing. For instance, if you're critiquing a political advertisement or designing a public awareness campaign, logically sound arguments provide a strong foundation for your analysis or creative direction. They enable you to discern underlying biases, recognize manipulative techniques, and create content that resonates with authenticity.

Understanding how to construct valid arguments—and recognizing when they are flawed—equips you to navigate a media landscape filled with both compelling narratives and misleading information. You may find it unsurprising how many people are swayed by unsound arguments in the media.

Ali Almossawi, in his entertaining book Bad Arguments, highlights the limits of logic, stating:

> "In closing, the rules of logic are not laws of the natural world, nor do they constitute all of human reasoning. As Marvin Minsky asserts, ordinary commonsense reasoning is difficult to explain in terms of logical principles, as are analogies. He adds, "Logic no more explains how we think than grammar explains how we speak." Logic does not generate new truths, but rather allows one to evaluate existing chains of thought for consistency and coherence. It is precisely for that reason that it proves an effective tool for the analysis and communication of ideas and arguments."[1]

1. Almossawi, Ali. *An Illustrated Book of Bad Arguments.* E-book, The Experiment, 2014. https://bookofbadarguments.com/. Accessed 6 November 2019.

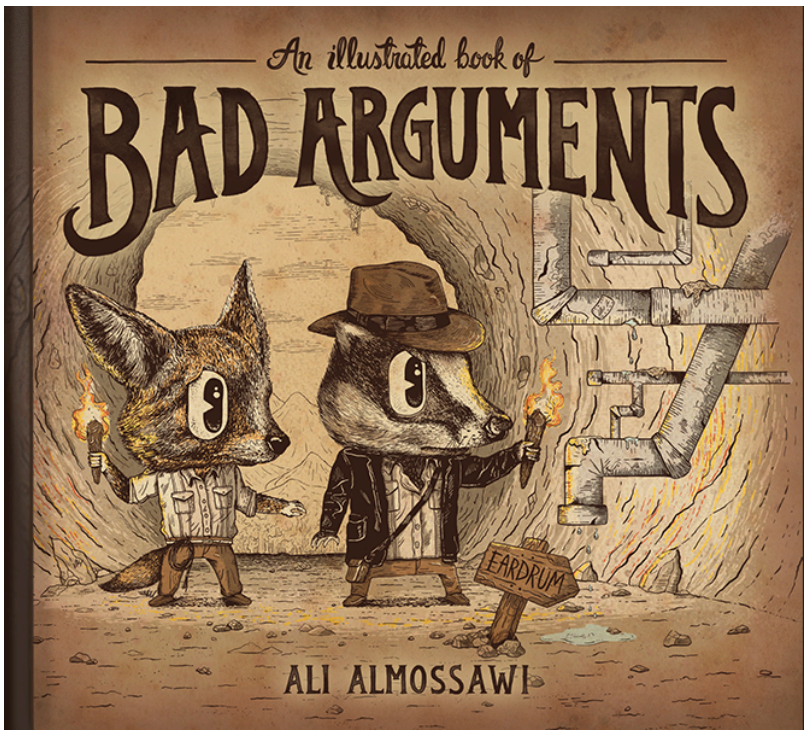


Figure 1: "An Illustrated Book of Bad Arguments"

As the iconic character Spock from Star Trek wisely noted, "Logic is the beginning of wisdom, not the end." In the realm of media, testing an argument for reasonableness or logic is a vital first step in deciding whether to accept or challenge a media message. It's not enough to be swayed by repetition or sensationalism; one must examine the validity and accuracy of the content.

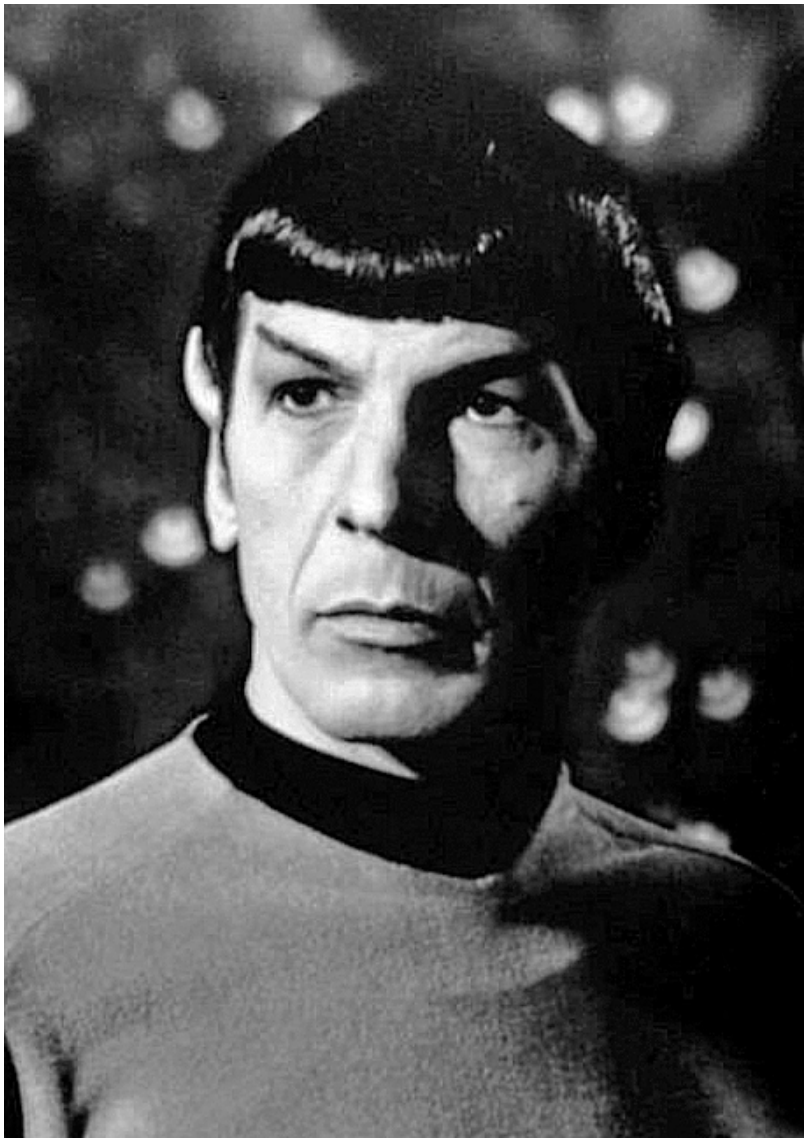

Figure 2: "Spock"

Critical thinkers in media must discern the difference between the reasoning that establishes an argument's validity and the evidence that substantiates its accuracy. This involves a dual analysis of both the type of reasoning used and the evidence presented, whether in analyzing a news report or creating a documentary.

When an argument combines quality evidence with a valid reasoning foundation, it is considered sound. As Professor James Sawyer observes, "Argumentation gives priority to logical appeals while recognizing the importance of ethical and emotional appeals; persuasion gives priority to ethical and emotional appeals while recognizing the importance of logical appeals."

In this chapter, we will delve into three key elements of reasoning: **inductive** reasoning, where we form generalizations; **deductive** reasoning, where we apply those generalizations; and **fallacies**, which are common errors in reasoning.

Thomas Huxley's words encapsulate the essence of our exploration: "Science is simply common sense

at its best, that is, rigidly accurate in observation and merciless to fallacy in logic." As we embark on this journey, we will uncover the intricate connections between reasoning, communication, and media, equipping you with the tools to think critically in an ever-evolving media landscape. Whether you are analyzing media messages or creating your own content, critical thinking will be your guide to navigating the complex world of communication and media.

## Media Attributions

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# 4.1 TYPES OF REASONING

**Learning Objectives**

- Identify and differentiate between the various methods of inductive reasoning, including example, cause, sign, comparison, and authority, and apply these methods to analyze real-world scenarios.
- Understand the principles and tests for different types of reasoning such as causal, sign, comparison, and reasoning from authority, and will be able to evaluate the validity and soundness of arguments using these principles.
- Recognize the distinction between inductive and deductive reasoning, and will be able to construct and analyze syllogisms using deductive reasoning, as well as appreciate the probabilistic nature of conclusions drawn from inductive reasoning.

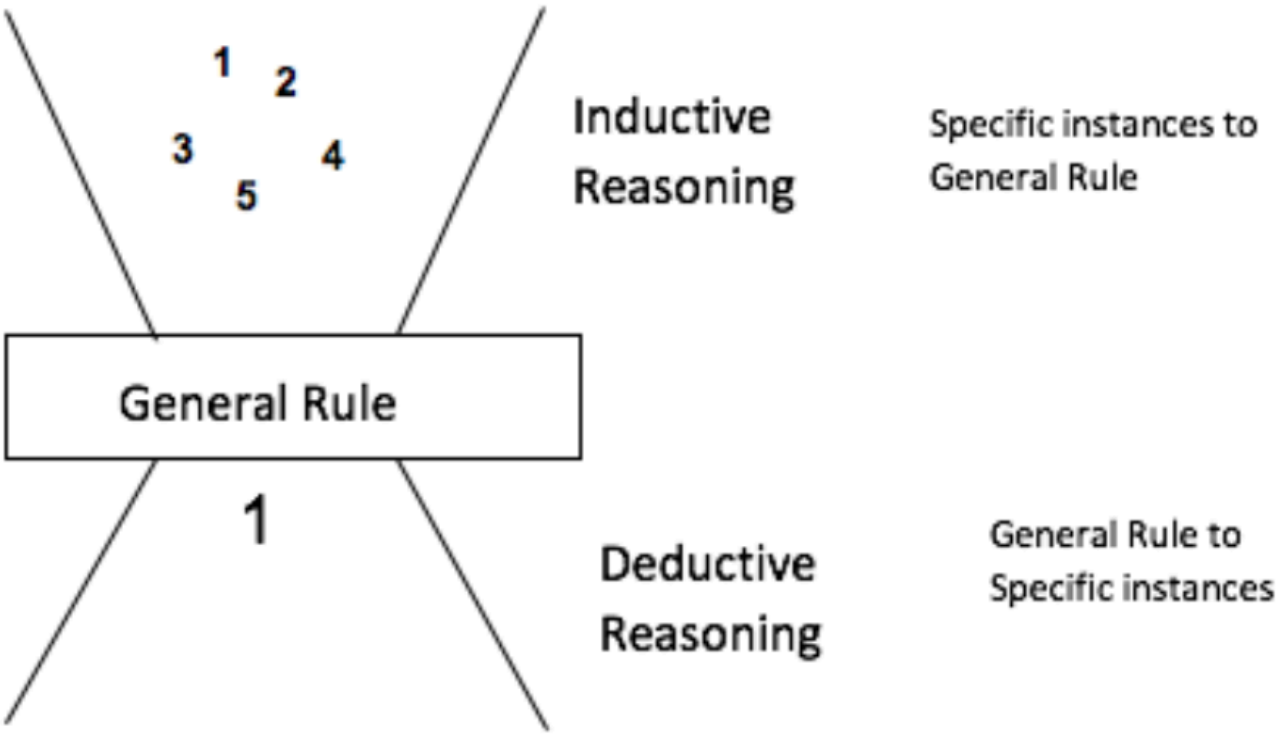


Figure 1: "Reasoning Diagram." On the left is a rectangle labeled general rule. Two lines extending from the top contain the numbers 1-5. This is labeled "Inductive Reasoning – Specific instances to General Rule." Two lines extending from the bottom contain only the number one. This is labeled "Deductive Reasoning – General rule to Specific instances"

## Inductive Reasoning

Inductive reasoning is the process of reasoning from specifics to a general conclusion related to those specifics. You have a series of facts and/or observations. From all of this data you make a conclusion or as the graphic above calls it, a "General Rule." Inductive reasoning allows humans to create generalizations about people, events, and things in their environment. There are five methods of inductive reasoning: example, cause, sign, comparison, and authority.

## Example Reasoning

**Example reasoning** involves using specific instances as a basis for making a valid conclusion. In this approach, specific instances 1, 2, and 3 lead to a generalized conclusion about the whole situation. For example: I have a Sony television, a Sony stereo, a Sony car radio, a Sony video system, and they all work well. It is clear that Sony produces superior electronic products. Or, I have taken four good professors at this college, Mr. Patel, Mrs. Ortiz, Dr. Kim, and Ms. Nkosi; therefore, I can conclude that the professors at this college are good.

## Tests for Reasoning by Example

1. **There must be a sufficient number of examples** to justify the generalized conclusion. How many examples are enough? The answer depends on the significance of the specific instances and the threshold of your target audience.
   Some audiences may find one enough, while others may need many more. For instance, the Nielsen Ratings that are used to measure the television viewing preferences of 300 million Americans are determined by roughly 3,000 homes scattered throughout the United States. Yet, the television industry, which uses them to set advertising rates, accepts the 3,000 examples as enough to validate the conclusions.
2. **The examples must be typical of the whole.** They must be representative of the topic about which the conclusion is reached, not fringe examples. For example, you come to college and take one English class whose instructor you find disappointing. You conclude that all 300 instructors at this particular college are poor teachers from this one class from this one Department. The sample might not be representative of the whole population of instructors.
3. **Important counter examples must be accounted for.** If the counter examples mitigate against the examples used, the generalization is threatened. What if a good friend of yours also took another English class and was pleased by the experience. He found that his instructor was an excellent teacher. His example becomes a counter one to the specific instance you used to draw your conclusion, which is now very much in doubt.
4. **The examples must be relevant to the time period of your argument.** If you are dealing with something recent, you need recent examples. If you are trying to prove something in the 1850's, examples from that period are appropriate. If you took the English class 30 years ago, it would be difficult to draw a valid conclusion about the nature of teachers at the college today without using recent examples. Likewise, recent examples may not be reflective of the way the college was 30 years ago.

# Causal Reasoning

Causal Reasoning is based on the idea that for every action there is a reaction. Stated very simply, a cause is anything that is directly responsible for producing something else, usually termed the effect. There are two forms of causal reasoning:

The goal of causal reasoning is to figure out how or why something happened. For instance, you did well on a test because you studied two days in advance. I could then predict that if you study two days in advance of the next test, you will do well. In causal reasoning, the critical thinker is trying to establish a predictive function between two directly related variables. If we can figure out how and why things occur, we can then try to predict what will happen in the future.

- Cause to effect, a known cause or causes is capable of producing some unknown effect or effects
- Effect to cause, some known effect(s) has/have been produced by some unknown cause or causes.

## Tests of Causal Reasoning

1. **The cause must be capable of producing the effect described, and vice versa.** Has causality really been established or is it just coincidence? Is the cause really capable of producing the effect and vice versa? There must be a direct connection between the cause and the effect that can be demonstrated using empirical evidence. For example, many people mistake superstition for causal reasoning. Is the source of good luck the rubbing of a rabbit's foot? Is the cause of bad luck really the fact that you walked under a ladder or broke the mirror? Did wearing that shirt really cause your team to win five games in a row? The critical thinker must make a clear distinction between a valid causal occurrence and sheer coincidence.
2. **Cumulative causal reasoning increases the soundness of the conclusion.** The more times the causal pattern has happened, the greater the strength given to the causal reasoning, leading to a more valid conclusion. If this is the first time this association has ever been asserted the advocate will have to use more evidence to support the soundness of the causal reasoning advanced.
3. **Counter causal factors must also be accounted for.** The advocate must be aware of the other inherent causal factors that could disrupt the relationship between the cause and effect presented. A claim was made by a father that his son committed suicide, because he was influenced to do so by the songs of a particular rock musician. If we assume that such a causal association exists, we also need to know if there are any other factors that could disrupt the connection: Was the son using drugs; had he tried to commit suicide before; were there family problems; did he listen to other artists and other types of music; did he have peer problems; did he have relationship problems; was he having problems in school, etc.? Each one of these, individually, might be enough to destroy the direct causal relationship that is attempting to be established.

In Massachusetts, Michelle Carter was tried in court for manslaughter. As a teenager, she texted her boyfriend, Roy, and encouraged him to commit suicide. And he did. Her defense attorney is arguing that Roy had mental problems, was already suicidal, and that the texts did not cause him to take his life. The prosecution is arguing that the text did cause Roy to kill himself. As stated by Daniel Medwed, a Northeastern University law

professor, "Causation is going to be a vital part of this case, can the prosecution prove that she caused him to kill himself in this way? Would he have done it anyway?"[1]

# Sign Reasoning

**Sign reasoning** involves inferring a connection between two related situations. The theory is that the presence or absence of one indicates the presence or absence of the other. In other words, the presence of an attribute is a signal that something else, the substance, exists. One doesn't cause the other to exist, but instead is a sign that it exists. Football on television is a sign that Fall has arrived. Football on television does not cause Fall to arrive; they just arrive at the same time. A flag is flying at half-staff is a sign that there has been a tragedy or a significant person has died. The flag flying at half-staff did not cause the death. It is a sign that the situation occurred.

## Sign Reasoning in Poker

Quite a few players' posture betrays the nature of their cards. An unconscious change in their sitting position, such as leaning forward, likely indicates a strong hand. With a weak hand they often show less body tension, for example, having hanging shoulders.

If someone has concealed his mouth with his hand, he often holds a weak hand – he wants to hide his emotions. In a sense, he does not want his expression to betray his hand. The same is true for a player who is reluctant to glance at you: he is worried that his eyes might indicate he is afraid.

Particularly for beginners, a quick glance at his cards is a reliable tell. The tell here is an unconscious one, brief look at the player's own cards. If, for example, the flop brings 3 hearts and the player looks at his cards, it is unlikely he has the flush.

This is because with an off-suit hand, a beginner usually takes no notice of the suits at first glance. Only with a suited hand will they remember the suit. Thus, you can often assume here that they have at most one heart.[2]

## Tests of Sign Reasoning

1. **Other substance/attribute relationships must be considered.** Is there another substance that might

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1. Associated Press. "Just do it, babe': Teen's texts to suicidal boyfriend revealed." *New York Post*, 9 Sept. 2015, https://nypost.com/2015/09/09/teen-c...st-do-it-babe/. Accessed 6 November 2019.

2. "Poker tells – hidden body language. To bluff or not to bluff?" *PokerStrategy.com*, https://www.pokerstrategy.com/strategy/live-poker/poker-tells-body-language/. Accessed 6 November 2019.

have the same attributes? Could the sending of roses to your wife be a sign of something other than love? Can the same signs indicate the presence of a valid second or third substance? You can see in this example how important sign reasoning is to the process of communication, as the same sign can be interpreted in multiple ways.

2. **Cumulative sign reasoning produces a more probable connection.** The more often this substance/attribute relationship occurs, the more likely it is to repeat itself. If this is the first time you have noticed the association, you will need a good deal of evidence to demonstrate that it really is a valid sign argument.

## Comparison Reasoning

**Comparison reasoning** is also known as reasoning by analogy. This type of reasoning involves drawing comparisons between two similar things, and concluding that, because of the similarities involved, what is correct about one is also correct of the other. There was once an ad for alligator meat that presented this comparison; "When you try alligator meat just remember what is considered exotic food today may often become normal fare in the future. This was the case with lobster. About 75 years ago, lobster was thought of as poor man's food; many New Englanders would not even think of eating it. Today, of course, lobster is a delicacy savored by many people." This type of reasoning wants us to conclude that alligator meat is to humans today, as lobster meat was to humans 75 years ago. And since lobster is now a delicacy so will alligator meat. There are two types of comparisons: **figurative and literal**.

- **Literal comparisons** attempt to establish a link between similar classifications; cars to cars, states to states, people to people. For instance, you can compare a Ford compact car with a Toyota compact car; the lottery in one state with the lottery in another state; how your parents treat you with how your best friend is treated by her parents. In these comparisons, similar classifications are being used for the purposes of making the analogy. Literal comparisons can provide logical proof for the point being made and thus can increase the validity of the argument.
- **Figurative comparisons** attempt to link similarities between two cases from different classifications. Jim Baker of the Bush 2000 campaign, argued after the 5-4 Supreme Court decision awarding the state of Florida to Bush, "Saying George W. Bush stole the Presidency from Al Gore is like saying someone tried to steer the Titanic after it had already hit the iceberg." Figurative comparisons carry no weight in terms of providing logical proof for an argument. They can, however, be very effective for the purpose of illustration and persuading an audience.

The line between a Literal and Figurative analogy is not clear. Instead of a comparison being totally figurative or totally literal, the comparison can be viewed in degrees using the following continuum.

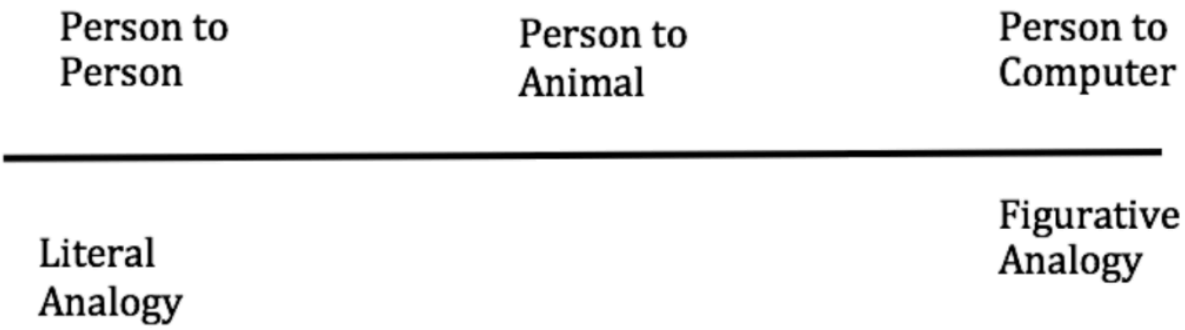


Figure 2: Analogy Diagram. On the top of a line are the phrases: Person to Person, Person to Animal and Person to Computer. Under the line, below Person to Person, is the phrase Literal Analogy. Under the line below Person Computer is the phrase Figurative Analogy.

There are few literal comparisons that can be made between a person and a computer. A person to an animal may have some overlapping actual similarities. While comparing one person to another person suggests a Literal Analogy. The more towards the figurative side the comparison is, the less the argument is logically valid. The more towards the literal side the comparison is, the more logically valid the argument is.

## Tests for comparison reasoning

1. **To be considered as proof, the analogy must be a literal one.** The further advocates move away from figurative comparisons and toward the literal comparison end of the continuum, the more validity they secure for their argument. Figurative comparisons carry no logical argumentative influence at all.
2. **The cases need to contain significant points of similarity.** The greater the number of important or major similar points between the cases, the easier it is to establish the comparison as a sound one. However, no matter how many points of similarity can be established between the two cases, major points of differences can destroy the analogy.
3. **Cumulative comparison reasoning will produce a more probable conclusion.** The greater the number of cases a person can use for the purpose of comparison, the more valid the comparison. If a student has been to more than one college or has had many instructors, he or she can evaluate the quality of the teachers by comparing them. The validity of his or her conclusion is increased as the number of teachers compared increases.

Children often try to convince a parent to let them do or try something the parent is opposed to by comparing themselves to another child. They point out they are the same age as the other child, they are in the same grade in school, the child lives in the same neighborhood as they do, thus they should be allowed to do what the other child is allowed to do. This seems to be a very effective argument by comparison until the parent says, you are

not that child or we are not their parents. To the parents, these points of difference destroy the comparison the child is trying to make.

## Poor Figurative Analogy May 23, 2016

(CNN) Veterans Affairs Secretary Bob McDonald downplayed Monday the time it takes for veterans to receive medical treatment by comparing the "experience" of waiting for health care to Disneyland guests waiting for a ride.

"When you go to Disney, do they measure the number of hours you wait in line? Or what's important?" McDonald told reporters at a Christian Science Monitor breakfast in Washington. "What's important is what's your satisfaction with the experience?"

American Legion National Commander Dale Barnett excoriated McDonald: "The American Legion agrees that the VA secretary's analogy between Disneyland and VA wait times was an unfortunate comparison because people don't die while waiting to go on Space Mountain."[3]

Figure 3: A photo of Robert McDonald

3. Griffin, Drew. "VA Secretary Disneyland-wait time comparison draws ire." *CNN*, 23 May 2016, https://www.cnn.com/2016/05/23/politics/veterans-affairs-secretary-disneyland-wait-times/index.html. Accessed 6 November 2019.

# Reasoning from Authority

**Reasoning from Authority** is used when a person argues that a particular claim is justified, because it is held or advocated by a credible source. That credible source can be a person or organization. Basically, the authority possesses some credentials that qualify the source as an authority. Thus, you accept the argument because someone you feel is an authority tells you so. You can use this type of argument in two ways. First, you can ask that an argument be accepted simply because someone you consider an authority advocates it. People grant authority status to other people they think have more knowledge than they do: students to teachers, patients to doctors, and clients to lawyers. Children often argue this way when they justify a position by saying "because my mommy or daddy said so."

Second, you can support your arguments with the credibility of another person. Here you are attempting to transfer the positive ethos from the credible source to the position you are advocating. Advertisers do this when they get popular athletes and entertainers to promote their products. The advertisers are hoping that your positive view of these people will transfer to their product, thus producing higher sales for the products. You may be persuaded to see a particular movie, attend a certain play, or eat at a restaurant because, it was advocated by a well-known critic.

## Tests for reasoning from authority

1. **The authority must be credible.** That is, the authority must possess the necessary qualifications for the target audience in order for the source to be used as justification for a point of view. If challenged, the advocate must be prepared to defend the expertise and ethos of his or her authority.
2. **Views of counter authorities must be taken into account.** The advocate must be aware of the other "experts" or highly credible sources who take an opposite position from the one being advocated. If he or she fails to do this, the argument breaks down into a battle over whose expert or authority should be accepted as being the most accurate.
3. **Cumulative views of authorities increase the validity of the reasoning.** Citing more than one expert or authority will increase the likelihood that your position will be viewed as the most valid one being argued.

**Important conclusion:** Since the process of reasoning by induction usually involves arriving at a conclusion based on a limited sampling, the conclusion to an inductive argument can never be totally certain. Why? Because no matter which type of inductive reasoning is used, nor how carefully critical thinkers adhere to the tests of each reasoning pattern, critical thinkers can never sample the totality of the population used to infer the generalization about that population.

Thus, **conclusions drawn from inductive reasoning are always only probable**. To use induction

effectively, an advocate must demonstrate that the specifics are compelling, and thus justify the conclusion, but never claim that the conclusion is guaranteed in all situations.

## Deductive Reasoning

**Deductive reasoning** is the process of reasoning from general statements, or rules, to a certain, specific, and logical conclusion. Deductive arguments begin with a general statement that has already been arrived at inductively. Unlike inductive reasoning, where the conclusion may be very valid, but is always only probable, the conclusion reached by deductive reasoning is logically certain.

A deductive argument offers two or more premises that lead to a conclusion directly related to those premises. As long as the two premises are sound, there can be no doubt that the final statement is correct. The final statement is a matter of logical certainty.

Deductive arguments are not spoken of as "true" or "false," but as "sound" or "unsound." A sound argument is one in which the premises guarantee the conclusion, and an unsound argument is one in which the premises do not guarantee the conclusion.

An advocate who uses deduction to frame an argument must be certain that the general statement is accepted as correct and then must demonstrate the relationship between this general statement and the specific claim, thus proving beyond a doubt the conclusion.

A deductive argument has three parts: a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion. This form is called a syllogism.

The major premise is a general statement. For example: All telemarketers are obnoxious. The subject section of the major premise (All telemarketers) is known as the antecedent; the predicate section of the major premise (are obnoxious) is known as the consequent.

The minor premise is a statement of a specific instance related to the major premise:

**The person on the phone is a telemarketer.**

The conclusion is the statement derived from the minor premises relationship to the major premise: **The person on the phone is obnoxious.**

An effective deductive argument is one in which your audience accepts the general statement and is then logically compelled by the development of the argument to accept your conclusion.

Thus, we use inductive reasoning to create generalizations or major premises, and we can use deductive reasoning to apply those generalizations to specific situations.

The final step in checking the strength of reasoning is to make sure there are no fallacies. Often, correcting for fallacies is the missing piece to creating and evaluating logical arguments.

## Case Study: The Role of Reasoning in the Viral

# Spread of Health Misinformation on Social Media

## Introduction

### Background

In an age where social media platforms serve as primary sources of information for a significant portion of the population, the rapid dissemination of health-related information—and misinformation—has become a topic of concern. This case study will examine a viral social media post claiming that eating garlic can prevent COVID-19.

### Objective

To analyze how various types of reasoning contribute to the dissemination and acceptance of health misinformation on social media platforms.

## Methodology

### Data Selection

For this case study, we have chosen a viral Facebook post that claims eating garlic can prevent COVID-19. The post has been shared over 20,000 times and has received a wide array of comments.

### Methods of Analysis

We will be applying the types of reasoning outlined in Chapter 4.1: inductive reasoning (including example, cause, sign, comparison, and authority) and deductive reasoning.

## Findings

### Inductive Reasoning

#### Example Reasoning

Many comments under the post cited anecdotal evidence, such as “My grandmother has been eating garlic

every day and she hasn't caught the virus!" This kind of reasoning may contribute to the misinformation being accepted as true.

### Cause Reasoning

The post itself claims that garlic boosts the immune system, therefore it can prevent COVID-19. This is a flawed causal relationship that is commonly mistaken for scientific evidence.

### Sign Reasoning

The post featured a picture of a garlic clove surrounded by a halo, which was interpreted by some as a sign that garlic has divine or extraordinary healing powers.

### Comparison Reasoning

Some comments drew comparisons between garlic and antiviral medications, suggesting that because both are "natural," they must be equally effective.

### Authority Reasoning

The post cited a "local health expert" without any credentials. For some users, this invoked a sense of authority, making the claim seem more legitimate.

## Deductive Reasoning

### Syllogism

One common line of deductive reasoning went as follows:

1. All natural foods boost immunity.
2. Garlic is a natural food.
3. Therefore, garlic must boost immunity against COVID-19.

# Evaluation

## Validity and Soundness

Upon evaluation, most of these arguments fail tests of validity and soundness. For instance, the causal reasoning lacks sufficient evidence, and the authority cited is not credible.

## Principles for Different Types of Reasoning

Students should be aware of the principles that govern different types of reasoning and should apply these principles critically when encountering information.

# Conclusion

This case study reveals that various types of reasoning play a significant role in the viral dissemination of health misinformation on social media. Media literacy programs could benefit from including modules that teach critical evaluation based on different types of reasoning.

**Key Takeaways**

- Inductive reasoning involves deriving general conclusions from specific examples, utilizing methods such as example, cause, sign, comparison, and authority, while recognizing that conclusions are probabilistic rather than certain.
- Deductive reasoning starts with a general statement and leads to a specific, logically certain conclusion, often structured in the form of a syllogism.
- Both inductive and deductive reasoning require careful consideration of validity, soundness, and relevance, with specific tests and principles guiding the evaluation of different types of reasoning.

**Exercises**

1. Compare and contrast inductive and deductive reasoning. Provide examples from your own experience where you have used both types of reasoning. How did the conclusions differ in certainty and application?
2. Analyze a given argument from a newspaper or magazine article, identifying whether it uses inductive or deductive reasoning. Apply the relevant tests for reasoning (such as credibility of authority, relevance of examples, etc.) to evaluate the strength of the argument.
3. Consider the importance of reasoning from authority. How do you determine the credibility of an authority in the media? Reflect on a situation where you accepted or rejected a claim based on the authority of the source, and discuss what factors influenced your decision.

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# 4.2 FALLACIES

**Learning Objectives**

- Students will be able to identify and differentiate between various types of logical fallacies, such as False Dilemma, Appeal to Emotion, Non-sequitur, Slippery Slope, Ad Hominem, Hasty Generalization, Circular Reasoning, and Appeal to Ignorance, and understand how they can appear in everyday argumentation.
- Students will develop the critical thinking skills necessary to recognize when fallacies are being used intentionally or unintentionally in arguments, and how to avoid adopting erroneous conclusions based on fallacious reasoning.
- Students will understand the significance of logical appeals in persuasion and communication, recognizing that high-quality evidence must be paired with sound reasoning to create effective and logical arguments, and apply this understanding to analyze and evaluate the logic in others' presentations.

A **fallacy** is an error in reasoning. A fallacy indicates there is a problem with the logic of deductive or inductive reasoning. This differs from a factual error, which is simply being wrong about the facts. To be more specific, a fallacy is an "argument" in which the premises given for the conclusion do not provide the needed degree of support.

A fallacy is a mistake in the way that the final conclusion of the argument, or any intermediate conclusions, are logically related to their supporting premises. When there is a fallacy in an argument, the argument is said to be unsound or invalid

The presence of a logical fallacy in an argument does not necessarily imply anything about the argument's premises or its conclusion. Both may actually be correct, but the argument is still invalid because the conclusion does not follow from the premises using the inference principles of the argument.

Recognizing fallacies is often difficult, and indeed fallacious arguments often persuade their intended audience. Detecting and avoiding fallacious reasoning will at least prevent adoption of some erroneous conclusions.

# Types of Fallacies

Fallacies are usually recognized in isolation, but woven into the context of an argument they may pass unnoticed, unless the critical thinker is on guard against them. Some advocates openly use fallacies in order to exploit an unknowing audience, but many times we use fallacies unintentionally. Many fallacies exist. Here is a few of the most common ones used in everyday argumentation.

**False Dilemma:** The False Dilemma fallacy occurs when an argument offers a false range of choices and requires that you pick one of them. Usually, the False Dilemma fallacy takes this form: Either A or B is true. If A is not true, then B is true. "Either you love me or hate me." The range is false because there may be other, unstated choices which would only serve to undermine the original argument. If you agree to pick one of those choices, you accept the premise that those choices are indeed the only ones possible. Seeing something as "black and white" is an example of a false dilemma.

**Appeal to Emotion:** This fallacy is committed when someone manipulates peoples' emotions in order to get them to accept a claim. More formally, this sort of "reasoning" involves the substitution of various means of producing strong emotions in place of evidence for a claim. Here the attempt is to transfer a positive emotion you have on one thing to the object or belief that is being argued.

This sort of "reasoning" is very common in politics and it serves as the basis for a large portion of modern advertising. Most political speeches are aimed at generating feelings in people, so that these feelings will get them to vote or act a certain way. How many times will you see pictures of American flags in a political commercial? The flag and other traditional images are aimed at getting the audience emotionally involved. In the case of advertising, the commercials are aimed at evoking emotions that will influence people to buy certain products. Beer commercials frequently include people at parties to get the potential consumers excited about the product. In many cases, such speeches and commercials are notoriously free of real evidence.

**Non-sequitur:** The phrase "non-sequitur" is Latin for "it does not follow." If an inference is made that does not logically follow from the premises of the preceding argument, then the inference is a non-sequitur. For example, "I am wearing my lucky hat today, nothing can go wrong." Though the term "non-sequitur" can be used broadly as an informal fallacy to describe any unwarranted conclusion, it is most often used when a statement openly contradicts itself and just makes no sense.

**Slippery Slope:** This fallacy reduces an argument to absurdity by extending it beyond its reasonable limits. This is an abuse of causal reasoning by trying to link events that normally have very little to do with each other. For example: legalizing marijuana will lead to the legalization of cocaine. If you legalize cocaine, you'll be able to buy crack and every other drug at your local 7-11. In this argument, it is asserted that the legalization of marijuana will eventually lead to purchasing crack at local 7-11's. Once one accepts the legalization of marijuana, then one is assumed to be on the slippery slope towards the legalization and availability of every other drug. In a Slippery Slope argument, you suggest that a series of events will occur leading to an undesirable conclusion instead of just one step as in Causal Reasoning.

**Ad Hominem:** Translated from Latin to English, "Ad Hominem" means "against the man" or "against

the person." An ad hominem fallacy consists of saying that someone's argument is wrong purely because of something about the person rather than about the argument itself. You will hear people on the radio and television dismiss comments by people they label as a conservative or a liberal, just because of how they label that person. Merely insulting another person or questioning the credibility of someone does not necessarily constitute an ad hominem fallacy. For this fallacy to exist it must be clear that the purpose of the characterization is to discredit the person offering the argument, in an attempt to invite others to then discount his or her arguments.

The Ad Hominem fallacy was employed by those who wanted to silence 16-year-old Climate Change activist Greta Thunberg. Those who disagreed with her argued that she should be ignored as she is just a child.

**Hasty Generalization:** This fallacy occurs when an arguer bases a conclusion on too few examples that are not necessarily typical of the conclusion being made. For instance, "My two boyfriends have never shown any concern for my feelings. Therefore, all men are insensitive, selfish, and emotionally uncaring." Or, "I read about this man who got worms from eating sushi. I always knew that sushi was not good to eat." Without more examples, these arguments can be considered fallacies.

**Circular Reasoning:** The fallacy of circular reasoning is the assertion or repeated assertion of a conclusion, without giving reasons in its support. In other words, supporting a premise with a premise, instead of a conclusion. It may imply that the conclusion is self-evident or rephrase the conclusion to sound like a reason. Circular reasoning creates an illusion of support by simply asserting its conclusion as though it were a reason, or by reasserting the same claim in different words. For example, "Kerosene is combustible; therefore, it burns." Or, "George Clooney is the best actor we have ever had, because he is the greatest actor of all time."

**Appeal to Ignorance:** In this fallacy, the arguer claims that something is valid only because it hasn't been proven false. This fallacy errs by trying to make this argument in a context in which the burden of proof falls on the arguer to show that his or her position is actually accurate, not just that it has not yet been shown false. The argument mistakes lack of evidence for evidence to the contrary. In effect, the argument says, "No one knows it is accurate. Therefore, it is false." For example, "There is no proof that hand gun legislation will reduce crime. Therefore, outlawing handguns would be a futile gesture." Or, "We have no evidence that God doesn't exist, therefore, God must exist." Ignorance about something says nothing about its existence or non-existence.

## Plato and a Platypus Walk into a Bar

In their book Plato and a Platypus Walk into a Bar, authors Thomas Cathcart and Daniel Klein, illustrate logical principles and fallacies using classic jokes. For example, to illustrate the fallacy of post hoc ergo propter hoc, they use the following:

> "In general, we're deceived by post hoc ergo propter hoc because we fail to notice that there's another cause at work.
>
> A New York boy is being led through the swamps of Louisiana by his cousin. 'Is it true that an alligator won't attack you if you carry a flashlight?' asks the city boy.

His cousin replies, 'Depends on how fast you carry the flashlight.'

The city boy saw the flashlight as a propter when it was only a prop."[1]

**Bandwagon:** The name "bandwagon fallacy" comes from the phrase "jump on the bandwagon" or "climb on the bandwagon" a bandwagon being a wagon big enough to hold a band of musicians. In past political campaigns, candidates would ride a bandwagon through town, and people would show support for the candidate by climbing aboard the wagon. The phrase has come to refer to joining a cause because of its popularity. For example, trying to convince you that you should do something because everyone else is doing it, is a bandwagon fallacy. "Everybody is buying a Tesla car, so should you."

**Post hoc ergo propter hoc:** The post hoc ergo propter hoc, "after this, therefore because of this," fallacy is based upon the mistaken notion that simply because one thing happens after another, the first event was a cause of the second event. Post hoc reasoning is the basis for many superstitions and erroneous beliefs.

For example, California earthquakes always happen after unusual weather patterns. Or, a film studio released a blockbuster hit after hiring a new marketing team, so the marketing team must be solely responsible for the film's success. Or, I wore my Packers shirt and my Packers team won. I now wear my Packers shirt for every game. These are all, post hoc ergo propter hoc fallacies

**Appeal to Pity:** With this fallacy, the arguer tries to get people to agree with his or her conclusion by evoking pity and sympathy either with the situation or with the situation of some third party. By appealing to people's ability to sympathize with others, a powerful emotive force can be created. Unfortunately, however serious another person's problems are, that does not automatically make their claims any more logical. My sympathy for that situation does not create a reasonable basis for believing his or her claims. For example, "I really need this job since my grandmother is sick" or "I should receive an 'A' in this class. After all, if I don't get an 'A' I won't get the scholarship that I need." These appeals evoke emotions, but are not necessarily logical.

**Straw-Man Fallacy:** The arguer attacks an argument that is different from, and usually weaker than, the opposition's best argument. To distort or misrepresent an argument one is trying to refute is called the straw man fallacy. In a straw man fallacy, the opponents argument is distorted, misquoted, exaggerated, misrepresented or simply made up. This makes the argument easier to defeat, and can also be used to make opponents look like ignorant extremists. The refutation may appear to be a good one to someone unfamiliar with the original argument.

Logical fallacies are errors of reasoning, errors which may be recognized and corrected by critical thinkers. Fallacies may be created unintentionally, or they may be created intentionally in order to deceive other people. The vast majority of the commonly identified fallacies involve arguments, although some involve explanations, or definitions, or other products of reasoning. Sometimes the term fallacy is used even more broadly to indicate any false belief or cause of a false belief. A fallacy is an argument that sometimes fools human reasoning, but is not logically valid.

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1. Cathcart, Thomas, and Daniel Klein. *Plato and a Platypus Walk into a Bar*. New York: Penguin Books, 2007.

In his book, PERSUASION: THEORY AND PRACTICE, Kenneth Anderson writes,

> "Logical appeals are powerful forces in persuasion. However, logic alone is rarely sufficient to yield persuasion. Desires and needs of receivers affect and determine what they will accept as logical demonstration. Thus, it is possible for one person to report that he or she is convinced by the logic used while another person remains horrified at the lack of logic presented."[2]

You can have high quality evidence, but lead to incorrect conclusions because your argument has poor reasoning. You always want to create the "soundest" or most logical argument possible. And you also want to examine the logic of others' presentations to determine what fallacies might be evident.

# Case Study Social Media and Conspiracy Theories – The Role of Fallacious Reasoning

## QAnon and the "Satan-Worshiping Elites"

Source: NPR[3]

Summary: QAnon, a conspiracy theory that gained traction during the Trump administration, posits that Satan-worshiping elites in a secret pedophile cabal are killing babies and drinking their blood. The theory also claims that Democrats stole the election from former President Donald Trump and that the people who broke into the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6 were actually undercover members of the left-wing Antifa.

## Fallacies Observed:

- **False Authority:** The theory often cites unnamed "insiders" or "experts" who supposedly have access to classified information.
- **Confirmation Bias:** People who already distrust the government or mainstream media are more likely to believe these theories.
- **Circular Reasoning:** The theory is often supported by other conspiracy theories, creating a loop that is hard to break.
- **Ad Hominem:** The theory targets specific groups or individuals as evil without providing concrete evidence.

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2. Anderson, Kenneth. *Persuasion: Theory and Practice*. Boston: American Press, 1983.

3. Smith, Tovia. "'Exit Counselors' Strain To Pull Americans Out Of A Web Of False Conspiracies." *NPR*, March 3, 2021, sec. National. https://www.npr.org/2021/03/03/971457702/exit-counselors-strain-to-pull-americans-out-of-a-web-of-false-conspiracies.

## Conclusion

The QAnon conspiracy theory is a stark example of how logical fallacies can contribute to the spread and acceptance of misinformation on social media platforms. Understanding these fallacies can help students recognize the mechanisms driving such theories and equip them to debunk misinformation effectively.

### Key Takeaways

- Fallacies are errors in reasoning that can make an argument unsound or invalid, and they can be used both intentionally to deceive or unintentionally due to a lack of understanding.
- Recognizing and understanding various types of fallacies, such as False Dilemma, Appeal to Emotion, and Slippery Slope, is essential for critical thinking and avoiding the adoption of erroneous conclusions.
- Logical appeals play a vital role in persuasion and communication, but they must be paired with sound reasoning and high-quality evidence to create effective arguments, making the recognition of fallacies crucial in evaluating the logic of presentations.

### Exercises

1. Analyze a political speech, advertisement, or debate you have recently encountered. Identify at least two examples of fallacies within the content, and explain how they affect the overall argument. How might the speaker or writer have constructed a more logically sound argument?
2. Consider the statement, “Logical appeals are powerful forces in persuasion. However, logic alone is rarely sufficient to yield persuasion.” Reflect on this in the context of media and communication. How do emotions, desires, and needs interact with logic in shaping public opinion or consumer behavior? Provide examples to support your thoughts.
3. Select a controversial topic relevant to media or communication. Write two short arguments:

one that employs logical reasoning and evidence, and another that relies on fallacies. Share both with a partner and discuss the differences in persuasiveness, ethical considerations, and potential impact on the audience. Reflect on how recognizing fallacies can make you a more critical consumer of information.

**Practice**

Identify the type of reasoning used in each of the following examples:

1. "A Pulitzer Prize-winning author recommends this writing software, so it must be good."
2. "A 'best-seller' label on a book cover is a sign that the book has sold many copies."
3. "Just as the telegraph was a breakthrough in the 19th century, email is a breakthrough in modern communication."
4. "According to a renowned journalist, unbiased reporting is essential for a healthy democracy."
5. "The rise in mobile technology leads to increased accessibility to information. Therefore, mobile technology causes information to be more accessible."
6. "I've read three books by this author, and they were all engaging. This author's books must be engaging."
7. "A red 'on-air' sign means that a live broadcast is happening."
8. "I've watched three documentaries on this streaming platform, and they were all informative. This platform's documentaries must be informative."
9. "Just as radio dramas entertained people before television, podcasts entertain people in the digital age."
10. "All reliable news sources verify their information. BBC is a reliable news source, so BBC verifies its information."
11. "Advertisements during the Super Bowl lead to increased product awareness. Therefore, advertising during the Super Bowl causes increased sales."
12. "All top-rated podcasts have engaging hosts. This is a top-rated podcast, so it has an engaging host."

13. "According to a leading media analyst, streaming services are transforming the way we consume entertainment."
14. "The introduction of HD technology led to clearer images on television. Therefore, HD technology causes improved visual quality."
15. "I've seen three movies in this genre, and they were all exciting. Movies in this genre must be exciting."
16. "I've watched five films by this director, and they were all thought-provoking. This director's films must be thought-provoking."
17. "A high number of retweets is a sign that a tweet is popular."
18. "Just as newspapers were a primary source of news in the past, social media is a primary source of news today."
19. "All viral videos reach millions of views. This video went viral, so it reached millions of views."
20. "A 'breaking news' banner on a news website is a sign that an important event has occurred."
21. "According to a media expert, binge-watching TV shows leads to a more immersive experience."
22. "Three of my friends read this book and loved it. Therefore, it must be a great book."
23. "A verified blue checkmark on an X (formerly Twitter) profile means that the user has a paid account."
24. "Just as traditional classrooms facilitate learning, virtual classrooms also facilitate learning in the digital age."
25. "The use of clickbait titles leads to more views on articles. Therefore, using clickbait titles causes increased readership."
26. "All successful YouTube channels have consistent content. This is a successful YouTube channel, so it has consistent content."
27. "I've listened to four albums by this musician, and they were all inspiring. This musician's albums must be inspiring."
28. "If a movie receives critical acclaim, it will be successful at the box office. This movie received critical acclaim, so it will be successful at the box office."
29. "The increase in social media usage leads to increased connectivity among people. Therefore, using social media causes people to be more connected."
30. "Just as newspapers informed people in the past, online news websites inform people today."
31. "All award-winning documentaries present facts accurately. This is an award-winning documentary, so it presents facts accurately."
32. "A verified account badge on Instagram is a sign that the account belongs to a celebrity or

public figure."

33. "According to a famous filmmaker, storytelling is the essence of cinema."
34. "Just as radio revolutionized information in the 20th century, the internet is revolutionizing information in the 21st century."

Identify the type of fallacy in each of the following examples:

1. A political ad proclaims, "Vote for this candidate if you care about the future of our children."
2. A movie critic says, "If you liked that film, then you must enjoy all mindless action movies with no plot."
3. A music critic writes, "This band uses vintage instruments, so their music must be profound."
4. A critic argues, "If we start censoring art, soon we'll have no freedom of expression at all."
5. A commercial insists, "All the top influencers are using our editing software, so you should too."
6. A debate opponent says, "Why would we listen to his media regulations proposal? He used to work for a big media corporation."
7. An advertisement claims, "Real patriots subscribe to our magazine."
8. A radio host argues, "Either you support free speech entirely without restrictions, or you're against freedom."
9. A journalist writes, "I'm correct because I've been reporting on this for years, and I know what I'm talking about."
10. A TV analyst claims, "Since the new anchor joined the evening news, ratings have gone up. He must be the sole reason for the increase."
11. A film reviewer says, "I watched two documentaries from this director, and they were boring. All his documentaries must be boring."
12. A TV host says, "My guest thinks that all advertising is evil and wants to ban it entirely."
13. A documentary narrator says, "Think of the poor animals while considering this environmental policy."
14. A commercial argues, "Everyone is switching to our internet service provider; you should too."
15. A political opponent argues, "Why would we trust his opinion on media laws? He's never even finished law school."
16. A journalist writes, "The new social media platform was launched, and now people are more divided than ever."
17. A news anchor says, "You're either with us, or you're against the truth."
18. A blogger claims, "This film is a masterpiece because it's an unparalleled work of art."

19. A radio host claims, “My guest wants to regulate the internet, which means he wants to take away all our freedoms.”
20. A music reviewer says, “This singer is popular on social media, so her album must be a hit.”
21. A columnist writes, “If we allow this controversial book in libraries, soon we’ll have no control over what children are exposed to.”
22. A critic claims, “This network aired one biased report; they must be a biased network.”
23. A charity commercial pleads, “Donate to our cause; think of the children who need your help.”
24. An online user comments, “Don’t listen to that reviewer; he’s just a failed filmmaker.”
25. An advertisement declares, “Join the millions who are already reading our daily newsletter.”
26. A columnist writes, “Either we ban all violent video games, or our society will become more violent.”
27. A politician pleads, “Vote for me, and think of my humble beginnings and struggles.”
28. A radio host asserts, “The government passed new media regulations, and now our culture is declining.”
29. A blogger claims, “This news source is trustworthy because it only reports the truth.”
30. A film critic argues, “This director is a philanthropist, so his movies must be good.”
31. A commentator states, “I saw three errors in their last report; this news agency is unreliable.”
32. A politician dismisses a journalist’s criticism of his policy by saying, “You can’t trust her opinion; she dropped out of college.”
33. A commentator argues, “If we allow this kind of content on TV, it will lead to the moral decay of society.”
34. A podcaster states, “My opponent thinks we should censor all violent content, which means he wants to suppress all forms of artistic expression.”
35. An advertisement for a news channel states, “If you care about your country, you’ll only watch our unbiased news.”

PART V

# CHAPTER 5: RHETORICAL APPEALS AND DEVICES

Studying rhetorical analysis is crucial in the fields of communication and media, as it goes hand-in-hand with the logical principles discussed in the previous chapter. While logic examines the structure and validity of arguments, rhetorical analysis explores the subtle ways information is shared, understood, and reacted to. It looks at how language, tone, and context are used to influence or inform people.

Those studying communication and media can gain insights into how messages are created and their societal effects by looking at these elements. This study not only sharpens critical thinking but also helps recognize hidden motives and biases in media. In today's information-rich world, being able to scrutinize media rhetoric is key to responsible information consumption and effective communication. It's worth noting that rhetorical analysis and logic aren't separate but work together. Logic lays down the rules of sound reasoning, while rhetorical analysis adds depth by considering emotions and context. Combined, they provide a full view of today's complex media and communication landscape.

**Fitchburg State Connection**

Every two years, Fitchburg State offers the study abroad course, Rhetoric in Greece. The official course description reads:

> This course explores rhetoric's origin and evolution in classical Greece through two primary lenses: the relationship between rhetoric and democracy and the contrasting understanding of truth in Sophistic rhetoric and Socratic philosophy. Students begin by investigating the transition from orality to literacy in Ancient Greece before moving on to explore how Plato's critique of rhetoric still impacts the field of communications media today. On a spring break trip, students explore historical locations in Greece associated with these debates in order to develop a deeper appreciation of their historical and cultural context. Finally, students will explore how the Greek intellectual tradition informs

contemporary rhetorical and democratic practices, with an emphasis on fake news and post-truth.[1]

1. https://catalog.fitchburgstate.edu/preview_course_nopop.php?catoid=46&coid=91867

# 5.1 RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

**Learning Objectives**

- Identify and analyze the three major parts of effective communication (ethos, pathos, and logos) and understand how they are utilized in various forms of communication to create persuasive arguments.
- Recognize and evaluate the rhetorical situation, including the speaker, occasion, audience, and purpose, and understand how these elements interact to shape the effectiveness of a communicator's message.
- Critically assess the credibility, emotional appeal, logical reasoning, and timing (Kairos) in different texts, enabling them to become more discerning consumers of information and more effective communicators themselves.

Simply defined, rhetoric is the art or method of communicating effectively to an audience, usually with the intention to persuade; thus, rhetorical analysis means analyzing how effectively a writer or speaker communicates her message or argument to the audience.

According to Aristotle, the three major parts of effective communication, also called the Rhetorical Triangle, are ethos, pathos, and logos, and they provide the foundation for a solid argument. As a reader and a listener, you must be able to recognize how writers and speakers depend upon these three rhetorical elements in their efforts to communicate. As a communicator yourself, you will benefit from the ability to see how others rely upon ethos, pathos, and logos so that you can apply what you learn from your observations to your own speaking and writing.

Rhetorical analysis can evaluate and analyze any type of communicator, whether they be a speaker, an artist, an advertiser, or a writer, but to simplify the language in this chapter, the term "writer" will represent the role of the communicator.

# The Rhetorical Situation

Understanding a rhetorical situation means understanding the context of that situation. A rhetorical situation comprises a handful of key elements, which should be identified before attempting to analyze and evaluate the use of rhetorical appeals.

These elements consist of the speaker in the situation (such as the writer), the occasion (the event that prompted the creation of the text and the topic being addressed), the audience being addressed, and the purpose for addressing the issue.

Answering the following questions will help you identify a rhetorical situation:

- Who is the speaker?
- What is the occasion the speaker is addressing?
    - What prompted the creation of the text?
    - What is the issue/topic of the text?
- Who is the audience?
    - Who is the intended audience?
    - What values does the audience hold that the author or speaker appeals to?
    - Who have been or might be secondary audiences?
    - If this is a work of fiction, what is the nature of the audience within the fiction?
- What is the writer's purpose for addressing this issue?
    - To provoke, to attack, or to defend?
    - To push toward or dissuade from certain actions?
    - To praise or to blame?
    - To teach, to delight, or to persuade?

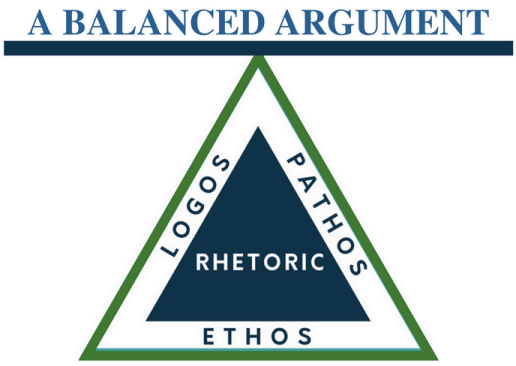


Figure 1: The phrase, "A Balanced Argument" sits atop a triangle. The sides of the triangle read, Logos, Pathos, and Ethos. The phrase rhetoric is in the middle of the triangle.

The foundations of rhetoric are interconnected in such a way that a writer needs to establish all of the rhetorical appeals to put forth an effective argument. If a writer lacks a pathetic appeal and only tries to establish a logical appeal, the audience will be unable to connect emotionally with the writer and, therefore, will care less about the overall argument. Brian Vickers, author of the essay In Defence of Rhetoric describes Rhetoric as a "coherent and functional system".[1] Immanuel Kant, an Enlightenment thinker (18th century), used a method of Rhetoric in order to get a "passionate, enthusiastic." reaction from his audience.[2]

If a writer lacks a logical appeal and tries to rely solely on subjective or emotionally driven examples, then the audience will not take the writer seriously because an argument based purely on opinion and emotion cannot hold up without facts and evidence to support it. If a writer lacks either the pathetic or logical appeal, not to mention the kairotic appeal, then the writer's ethical appeal will suffer. All of the appeals must be sufficiently established for a writer to communicate effectively with his audience.

1. Vickers, B. (1989). *In Defence of Rhetoric*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198117919.001.0001

2. Stoner, S. (2017). Kant on the Power and Limits of Pathos: Toward a "Critique of Poetic Rhetoric" (Vol. 50). Pennsylvania State University Press. https://doi.org/10.5325/philrhet.50.1.0073

# Appeal to Ethos

Literally translated, ethos means "character." In this case, it refers to the character of the writer or speaker, or more specifically, his credibility. The writer needs to establish credibility so that the audience will trust him and, thus, be more willing to engage with the argument. If a writer fails to establish a sufficient ethical appeal, then the audience will not take the writer's argument seriously.

For example, if someone writes an article that is published in an academic journal, in a reputable newspaper or magazine, or on a credible website, those places of publication already imply a certain level of credibility. If the article is about a scientific issue and the writer is a scientist or has certain academic or professional credentials that relate to the article's subject, that also will lend credibility to the writer. Finally, if the writer shows that they are knowledgeable about the subject by providing clear explanations of points and by presenting information in an honest and straightforward way, that also helps to establish a writer's credibility.

When evaluating a writer's ethical appeal, ask the following questions:

- Does the writer come across as reliable?
  - Viewpoint is logically consistent throughout the text
  - Does not use hyperbolic (exaggerated) language
  - Has an even, objective tone (not malicious but also not sycophantic)
  - Does not come across as subversive or manipulative
- Does the writer come across as authoritative and knowledgeable?
  - Explains concepts and ideas thoroughly
  - Addresses any counter-arguments and successfully rebuts them
  - Uses a sufficient number of relevant sources
  - Shows an understanding of sources used
- What kind of credentials or experience does the writer have?
  - Look at byline or biographical info
  - Identify any personal or professional experience mentioned in the text
  - Where has this writer's text been published?

# Appeal to Pathos

Literally translated, pathos means "suffering." In this case, it refers to emotion, or more specifically, the writer's appeal to the audience's emotions. When a writer establishes an effective pathetic appeal, they make the audience care about what they are saying. If the audience does not care about the message, then they will not engage with the argument being made.

For example, consider this: A writer is crafting a speech for a politician who is running for office, and in

it, the writer raises a point about Social Security benefits. In order to make this point more appealing to the audience so that they will feel more emotionally connected to what the politician says, the writer inserts a story about Mary, an 80-year-old widow who relies on her Social Security benefits to supplement her income. While visiting Mary the other day, sitting at her kitchen table and eating a piece of her delicious homemade apple pie, the writer recounts how the politician held Mary's delicate hand and promised that her benefits would be safe if he were elected. Ideally, the writer wants the audience to feel sympathy or compassion for Mary because then they will feel more open to considering the politician's views on Social Security (and maybe even other issues). With this type of approach, being persuasive caters to the emotions, and opposing views do not need to be addressed.[3]

When evaluating a writer's pathetic appeal, ask the following questions:

- Does the writer try to engage or connect with the audience by making the subject matter relatable in some way?
- Does the writer have an interesting writing style?
- Does the writer use humor at any point?
- Does the writer use narration, such as storytelling or anecdotes, to add interest or to help humanize a certain issue within the text?
- Does the writer use descriptive or attention-grabbing details?
- Are there hypothetical examples that help the audience to imagine themselves in certain scenarios?
- Does the writer use any other examples in the text that might emotionally appeal to the audience?
- Are there any visual appeals to pathos, such as photographs or illustrations?

An appropriate appeal to pathos is different from trying to unfairly play upon the audience's feelings and emotions through fallacious, misleading, or excessively emotional appeals. Such a manipulative use of pathos may alienate the audience or cause them to "tune out." An example would be the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) commercials featuring the song "In the Arms of an Angel" and footage of abused animals.

*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://rotel.pressbooks.pub/comm-media-studies/?p=147#oembed-1*

3. Wrobel, S. (2015). "Logos, Ethos, Pathos". Classical Rhetoric Revisited (Vol. 191). Warsaw: The Polish Sociological Assocation. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44113896.

This announcement created by ASPCA with Sarah Mclachlan explains the cruelty and abuse of animals in the United States of America and how they can be saved as explained at the end of the video. Even Sarah McLachlan, the singer and spokesperson featured in the commercials, admits that she changes the channel because they are too depressing.[4]

Even if an appeal to pathos is not manipulative, such an appeal should complement rather than replace reason and evidence-based argument. In addition to making use of pathos, the author must establish her credibility (ethos) and must supply reasons and evidence (logos) in support of her position. An author who essentially replaces logos and ethos with pathos alone does not present a strong argument.

## Appeal to Logos

Literally translated, logos means "word." In this case, it refers to information, or more specifically, the writer's appeal to logic and reason. A successful logical appeal provides clearly organized information as well as evidence to support the overall argument. If one fails to establish a logical appeal, then the argument will lack both sense and substance.

For example, refer to the previous example of the politician's speech writer to understand the importance of having a solid logical appeal. What if the writer had only included the story about 80-year-old Mary without providing any statistics, data, or concrete plans for how the politician proposed to protect Social Security benefits? Without any factual evidence for the proposed plan, the audience would not have been as likely to accept his proposal, and rightly so.

When evaluating a writer's logical appeal, ask the following questions:

- Does the writer organize his information clearly?
  - Ideas are connected by transition words and phrases
  - Ideas have a clear and purposeful order
- Does the writer provide evidence to back his claims?
  - Specific examples
  - Relevant source material
- Does the writer use sources and data to back his claims rather than base the argument purely on emotion or opinion?
  - Does the writer use concrete facts and figures, statistics, dates/times, specific names/titles, graphs/charts/tables?
  - Are the sources that the writer uses credible?

4. Brekke, Kira. "Sarah McLachlan: 'I Change The Channel' When My ASPCA Commercials Come On." Huffington Post. 5 May 2014.

- Where do the sources come from? (Who wrote/published them?)
- When were the sources published?
- Are the sources well-known, respected, and/or peer-reviewed (if applicable) publications?

Pay particular attention to numbers, statistics, findings, and quotes used to support an argument. Be critical of the source and do your own investigation of the facts. Remember: What initially looks like a fact may not actually be one. Maybe you've heard or read that half of all marriages in America will end in divorce. It is so often discussed that we assume it must be true. Careful research will show that the original marriage study was flawed, and divorce rates in America have steadily declined since 1985.[5] If there is no scientific evidence, why do we continue to believe it? Part of the reason might be that it supports the common worry of the dissolution of the American family.

## Appeal to Kairos

Literally translated, Kairos means the "supreme moment." In this case, it refers to appropriate timing, meaning when the writer presents certain parts of their argument as well as the overall timing of the subject matter itself. While not technically part of the Rhetorical Triangle, it is still an important principle for constructing an effective argument. If the writer fails to establish a strong Kairotic appeal, then the audience may become polarized, hostile, or may simply just lose interest.

If appropriate timing is not taken into consideration and a writer introduces a sensitive or important point too early or too late in a text, the impact of that point could be lost on the audience. For example, if the writer's audience is strongly opposed to their view, and they begin the argument with a forceful thesis of why they are right and the opposition is wrong, how do you think that audience might respond?

In this instance, the writer may have just lost the ability to make any further appeals to their audience in two ways: first, by polarizing them, and second, by possibly elevating what was at first merely strong opposition to what would now be hostile opposition. A polarized or hostile audience will not be inclined to listen to the writer's argument with an open mind or even to listen at all. On the other hand, the writer could have established a stronger appeal to Kairos by building up to that forceful thesis, maybe by providing some neutral points such as background information or by addressing some of the opposition's views, rather than leading with why they are right and the audience is wrong.

Additionally, if a writer covers a topic or puts forth an argument about a subject that is currently a non-issue or has no relevance for the audience, then the audience will fail to engage because whatever the writer's message

5. Peck, Dennis, L. "The Fifty Percent Divorce Rate: Deconstructing a Myth." The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare. Vol. 20, no.3, 1993, pp. 135-144.

happens to be, it won't matter to anyone. For example, if a writer were to put forth the argument that women in the United States should have the right to vote, no one would care; that is a non-issue because women in the United States already have that right.

When evaluating a writer's Kairotic appeal, ask the following questions:

- Where does the writer establish her thesis of the argument in the text? Is it near the beginning, the middle, or the end? Is this placement of the thesis effective? Why or why not?
- Where in the text does the writer provide her strongest points of evidence? Does that location provide the most impact for those points?
- Is the issue that the writer raises relevant at this time, or is it something no one really cares about anymore or needs to know about anymore?

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"The Art of Rhetoric: Persuasive Techniques" explores the use of rhetoric in advertising such as billboards, and apps and how it's presented for people to understand the advertiser's point of an argument.

## Connection to Media Literacy

The rhetorical appeals of logos (logic), pathos (emotion), ethos (credibility), and kairos (timing) are essential tools for analyzing and interpreting communication and media messages. Understanding these elements enhances media literacy by providing a framework for evaluating how messages are crafted to influence specific audiences.

Media literacy requires the ability to critically analyze various forms of media, including advertisements, news reports, social media posts, and more. By recognizing the use of logos, pathos, ethos, and kairos, individuals can assess how these appeals are employed to achieve specific communication goals. For example, a political advertisement may use logos to present factual data, pathos to evoke patriotic feelings, ethos to establish the candidate's credibility, and kairos to time the message effectively before an election. This multifaceted analysis enables individuals to discern underlying strategies, biases, and intentions, fostering a more informed and critical engagement with media.

In July of 2013, an NPR broadcast with host Reena Miller and guest Dr. Anne Curzan, professor of English at the University of Michigan, asked, "So when did rhetoric become so closely and negatively tied with politics?" Dr. Curzan states that "rhetoric can be very negative where people say, empty rhetoric, or harsh

rhetoric. But sometimes people use it to mean talk." Dr. Curzan is stating a fact about "mean talk" that is ubiquitous ten years after her statement. In 2023, most news networks use the word rhetoric every day. And in most cases this usually refers to " mean talk." So it seems that the word rhetoric can be used in two ways, a politician can use rhetoric that creates a polarization amongst the audience, and or constituents. The opposite usage is often found in academia, such as giving a counterpoint to an argument.[6]

In today's complex media landscape, understanding the rhetorical appeals of logos, pathos, ethos, and kairos empowers individuals to become more discerning media consumers. It helps them recognize how messages are tailored to persuade or influence through logical reasoning, emotional appeal, credibility, and timing. This awareness promotes responsible and thoughtful media consumption, allowing individuals to evaluate the validity and effectiveness of messages. Whether assessing the reliability of a news story, the persuasiveness of an advertisement, or the timing of a social media campaign, applying these rhetorical principles enhances the ability to navigate and respond to media content critically. This understanding contributes to a more media-literate society, capable of engaging with media messages in an informed and thoughtful manner.

## Case Study: Apple Advertising

Outstanding advertising campaigns will find ways to draw on multiple forms of rhetorical appeals. Apple is one company that has done this in many different ways over the years.[7] Take a look at the three videos below, linked on YouTube, and see if you can determine which one of them uses either logos, pathos, or ethos.

Example 1:[8]

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pg_Y41waaE

Apple is promoting its latest Mac as bigger and better. The emphasis is on the Mac's ability to multi-task at high-speed with great sound while maintaining outstanding color and giving you more battery power.

Example 2:[9]

6. Davis, A. (2013, July 28). Rhetoric: positive, negative, or both? Michigan Radio. Retrieved November 21, 2023, from https://www.michiganradio.org/arts-culture/2013-07-28/rhetoric-postive-negative-or-both

7. Martins, Jorge. "Using Rhetoric in Digital Marketing: The Power of Logos, Pathos and Ethos | Hafferi.Com | White Label PPC Agency | Montréal, Quebec, Canada | Hafferi.Com | White Label PPC Agency | Montréal, Quebec, Canada," June 2, 2021. https://hafferi.com/blog/using-rhetoric-in-digital-marketing-the-power-of-logos-pathos-and-ethos/.

8. Apple. (2023, October 30). The new MacBook Pro | Apple. YouTube.com. https://youtu.be/0pg_Y41waaE

9. Apple. (2012, February 1). 1984 Apple's Macintosh Commercial (HD). YouTube. Retrieved November 25, 2023, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VtvjbmoDx-I

*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://rotel.pressbooks.pub/comm-media-studies/?p=147#oembed-3*

In this famous Apple advertisement, Apple breaks the barrier of "Sameness". Apple clearly defines its product differently from the rest.

Example 3:[10]

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=edpJev-jyx4&list=PLHFlHpPjgk714Wqve10unWDzDIo4HVAI8

This Apple advertisement uses the tagline "How hard can it be?", showing the Mac computer being used in a wide range of applications from creativity to science, emphasizing ease of use.

After watching all three of these videos, how do you think Apple might use an appeal to Kairos in an advertisement?

**Key Takeaways**

- Rhetoric is the art of effective communication, utilizing ethos (credibility), pathos (emotional appeal), and logos (logical reasoning) to persuade an audience, and understanding these elements is vital for both analyzing and crafting persuasive messages.
- The rhetorical situation, encompassing the speaker, occasion, audience, and purpose, plays a crucial role in shaping communication, and recognizing these elements helps in evaluating the effectiveness of an argument.
- The interconnectedness of rhetorical appeals means that a balanced use of ethos, pathos, logos, and appropriate timing (Kairos) is essential for creating a compelling argument; a lack in any of these areas can diminish the overall impact on the audience.

10. Apple. (2023, October 30). You Think That's Hard Work? | Mac | Apple. YouTube.com. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=edpJev-jyx4&list=PLHFlHpPjgk714Wqve10unWDzDIo4HVAI8

**Exercises**

1. Analyze a recent political speech or advertisement using the principles of ethos, pathos, and logos. How does the speaker or writer establish credibility, appeal to emotions, and use logic to persuade the audience? Identify specific examples of each rhetorical element.
2. Create a hypothetical rhetorical situation, including the speaker, occasion, audience, and purpose. Then, write a short persuasive argument that effectively utilizes ethos, pathos, logos, and kairos. Share with a peer and discuss how well each element is integrated.
3. Consider a time when you were persuaded by an argument that later seemed flawed or biased. Analyze that argument using the concepts of ethos, pathos, logos, and kairos. What made the argument initially persuasive, and what did you later recognize as its weaknesses or fallacies?

## Media Attributions

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# 5.2 RHETORICAL DEVICES

**Learning Objectives**

- Understand the historical development and classification of rhetorical devices, including the distinction between schemes and tropes and how they have been organized and cataloged by the Greeks and Romans.
- Recognize and identify various examples of rhetorical devices such as metaphor, simile, antanaclasis, hyperbole, and irony, and will be able to differentiate between artful deviations in word meaning (tropes) and word arrangement (schemes).
- Appreciate the complexity and richness of rhetoric, recognizing that it encompasses more than just figures of speech, and will be able to analyze how rhetorical strategies can be used in expression, composition, or discovery of ideas and arguments.

Like wildflower seeds tossed on fertile ground, the figures of speech, sometimes called the "flowers of rhetoric" (Flores rhetoricae), have multiplied into a garden of enormous variety over time. As the right frame of this web resource illustrates, the number of figures of speech can seem quite imposing. And indeed, the number, names, and groupings of figures have been the most variable aspect of rhetoric over its history.

The figures first acquired their names from the Greeks and Romans who cataloged them. Although attempts have been made to anglicize or update the figures' names, this sometimes proves to confuse things, even though the Greek and Latin terms are odd to modern ears. Pronunciation guides and etymologies have been provided to clarify the Greek terms, in particular. And because there are so many synonyms or close synonyms among the figures, each entry contains equivalent and comparative terms from Greek, Latin, and English.

Over time, these figures have been organized in a variety of different ways in order to make sense of them and to learn their various qualities —much as a scientist might classify the flora of a forest, grouping like species into families. The simplest (and oldest) arrangement for the figures divides them into two broad categories, "schemes" and "tropes"—useful starting points.

As rich and interesting as the figures are, they do not constitute the whole of rhetoric, as some have mistakenly surmised. Such a view is a vast reduction of the discipline of rhetoric, which has just as much to

do with the discovery of things to say (Invention), their arrangement (Arrangement), committal to memory (Memory), and presentation (Delivery–using the rhetorical appeals) as it has to do with the figures of speech, which are typically categorized under the third of these canons of rhetoric, Style. Though this text distinguishes between different elements of rhetoric, in reality, they are all intertwined.

For example, the most identifiable tropes include metaphor and simile. These are simply comparisons: "Life is a journey"; "Watching TV is like taking a visual anesthetic." But "comparison" itself is a topic of invention, a commonplace to which one may turn to generate ideas about something: "Let us compare life to a journey. We set out at birth, travel through various regions, and arrive at the bleak destination of death…" The difference between a figure and a topic of invention, then, may sometimes simply be a matter of degree, or it may be a matter of whether one views the strategy as one of expression of an idea (an issue of style) or the composition or discovery of an idea or argument (an issue of invention). The point is, that we should recognize the close proximity of the figures and the topics of invention.

Before we dive into the diverse rhetorical devices, watch this video on Basic Rhetorical Devices for a quick overview:

*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://rotel.pressbooks.pub/comm-media-studies/?p=152#oembed-1*

This video by Kirks PLE English explains a few basic rhetorical devices to help master them.

## Tropes

There are many, many rhetorical devices. Some you may recognize from studying literary devices in English courses through the years and others may seem quite foreign (literally–as they are Greek!). You'll notice that different devices are featured in different places–the key is to be on the lookout for how a speaker uses language to emphasize (or de-emphasize) points.

The main two categories of rhetorical devices are schemes and tropes, which both have to do with using language in an unusual or "figured" way.

- A trope is an artful deviation from the ordinary or principal signification of a word.
- A scheme is an artful deviation from the ordinary arrangement of words.

"I work like a slave" [trope: simile]"I don't know if I'm working my job or my job, me" [schemes: antimetabole, ellipsis, personification]

Notice how each figure of speech uses language in an artful way to make a point. Tropes focus on how a particular word is used, whereas schemes play with the way words are arranged.

## Kinds of Tropes

Remember, a Trope is an artful deviation from the ordinary or principal signification of a word.

1. Reference to One Thing as Another
2. Wordplay and puns
3. Substitutions
4. Overstatement/Understatement
5. Semantic Inversions

### Reference to One Thing as Another

**Metaphor:** Reference to one thing as another, implying a comparison.

No man is an island —John Donne

For ever since that time you went away,

I've been a rabbit burrowed in the wood —Maurice Sceve

Life is a beach.

Who captains the ship of state?

**Simile:** Explicit comparison of one thing to another.

My love is like a red, red rose —Robert Burns

Her hair was like gravy, running brown off her head and clumping up on her shoulders.

The day we passed together for a while

Seemed a bright fire on a winter's night —Maurice Sceve

You are like a hurricane: there's calm in your eye, but I'm getting blown away —Neil Young

The air-lifted rhinoceros hit the ground like a garbage bag filled with split pea soup.

**Synecdoche** (si-nek'-do-kee)**:** A whole is represented by naming one of its parts.

The rustler bragged he'd absconded with five hundred head of longhorns.

Both "head" and "longhorns" are parts of cattle that represent them as wholes.

Listen, you've got to come take a look at my new set of wheels.

One refers to a vehicle in terms of some of its parts, "wheels."

"He shall think differently," the musketeer threatened, "when he feels the point of my steel."

A sword, the species, is represented by referring to its genus, "steel."

**Metonymy** (me-ton'-y-my)**:** Reference to something or someone by naming one of its attributes.

The pen is mightier than the sword

The pen is an attribute of thoughts that are written with a pen; the sword is an attribute of military action. – Edward Bulwer-Lytton

We await word from the crown.

I'm told he's gone so far as to give her a diamond ring.

The IRS is auditing me? Great. All I need is a couple of suits arriving at my door.

**Personification:** Reference to abstractions or inanimate objects as though they had human qualities or abilities.

O beware, my lord, of jealousy!
It is the green-ey'd monster which doth mock
The meat it feeds on.
—Iago in Shakespeare's Othello 3.3.165-67

The insatiable hunger for imagination preys upon human life
—Samuel Johnson

## Wordplay and Puns

**Antanaclasis** (an'-ta-na-cla'-sis): Repetition of a word in two different senses.

Your argument is sound...all sound. —Benjamin Franklin

The meaning of "sound" first appears to be "solid" or "reasonable"; in its repetition, it means something very different, "all air" or "empty."

In thy youth learn some craft that in thy age thou mayest get thy living without craft.

The meaning of "craft" first means "vocation"; in its repetition, it means "fraud" or "cunning."

While we live, let us live.

In the following example, antanaclasis occurs with an entire phrase whose meaning alters upon repetition:

"If you aren't fired with enthusiasm, you will be fired with enthusiasm." —Vince Lombardi

**Paronomasia:** Using words that sound alike but that differ in meaning (punning).

A jesting friar punned upon the name of the famous humanist Erasmus, "Errans mus" [erring mouse]. —Puttenham

A pun is its own reword.

**Syllepsis:** Using a word differently in relation to two or more words that it modifies or governs (sometimes called zeugma).

In the following example, "rend" governs both objects, but the first rending is figurative; the second literal:

Rend your heart, and not your garments. Joel 2:13

You held your breath and the door for me
—Alanis Morissette

"Fix the problem, not the blame." —Dave Weinbaum

The verb "fix" governs both "problem" and "blame." In its first instance, "fix" means "solve," but this verb shifts its meaning when applied to its second object, where the understood "fix" = "assign."

**Onomatopoeia** (on-o-mat-o-pee'-a): Using or inventing a word whose sound imitates that which it names.

The buzzing of innumerable bees

The "zz" and "mm" sounds in these words imitate the actual sounds of bees.

## Substitutions

**Anthimeria:** Substitution of one part of speech for another.

I've been Republicaned all I care to be this election year.

Noun used as verb.

Did you see the way those blockers defenced on that last play?

Noun used as verb.

Feel bad? Strike up some music and have a good sing.

Verb used as noun.

**Periphrasis:** Substitution of a descriptive word or phrase for a proper name or of a proper name for a quality associated with the name.

In the TV show "Dinosaurs" the infant dino called his father, "Not-the-Mama."

He's no Fabio to look at; but then, he's no Woody Allen, either.

Said of Aristotle: "The prince of Peripatetics" —Angel Day

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## Overstatement/Understatement

**Hyperbole** (hy-per'-bo-lee): Use of exaggerated terms for emphasis or effect. Hyperbole is often accomplished via comparisons, similes, and metaphors.

I've told you a million times not to exaggerate.

I'm starving.

**Auxesis:** Arranging words or clauses in a sequence of increasing force. Reference to something with a name disproportionately greater than its nature (a kind of hyperbole).

Said of a scratch: Look at this gaping wound!

After missing breakfast: I'm dying of hunger!

**Litotes:** (li-to'-tees): Understatement used deliberately, especially when expressing a thought by denying its opposite. Can be used for expressing modesty or downplaying one's accomplishments in order to gain the audience's favor.

> It isn't very serious. I have this tiny little tumor on the brain. —J.D. Salinger, The Catcher in the Rye
>
> Running a marathon in under two hours is no big deal.

**Meiosis:** Reference to something with a name disproportionately lesser than its nature (a kind of litotes).

> Said of an amputated leg.: "It's just a flesh wound" —Monty Python and the Holy Grail

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## Semantic Inversions

**Rhetorical Question:** Asking a question for a purpose other than obtaining the information requested. Rhetorical questions can be used as an ethical appeal to endear the speaker to the audience.

> "Why are you so stupid?" is likely to be a statement regarding one's opinion of the person addressed rather than a genuine request to know.
>
> When someone responds to a tragic event by saying, "Why me, God?!" it is more likely to be an accusation or an expression of feeling than a realistic request for information.
>
> "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" says the persona of Shakespeare's 18th sonnet.

**Irony:** Using language in such a way as to convey a meaning opposite of what the terms used denote (often by exaggeration). Irony is often used for the purpose of derision, mockery, or jest.

> When in Shakespeare's Much Ado About Nothing, the constable Dogberry says "redemption" instead of "damnation" (itself a malapropism), the fact that he means precisely the opposite of what he so passionately exclaims makes this a comical use of irony:
>
> O villain! thou wilt be condemned into everlasting redemption for this.

**Oxymoron:** Placing two ordinarily opposing terms adjacent to one another. A compressed paradox.

> ...Yet from those flames
>
> No light, but rather darkness visible
>
> Served only to discover sights of woe.
>
> —Milton, Paradise Lost 1.62-64
>
> The Sounds of Silence
>
> Festina lente (make haste slowly).

**Paradox:** An apparently contradictory statement that contains a measure of truth.

> It seems impossible to me that this administration could so quickly reverse itself on this issue.

# Schemes

A **scheme** is an artful deviation from the ordinary arrangement of words.

## Kinds of Schemes

1. Structures of Balance
2. Change in Word Order
3. Omission
4. Repetition

### Structures of Balance

**Parallelism:** Similarity of structure in a pair or series of related words, phrases, or clauses.

*Parallelism of words:*

She tried to make her pastry fluffy, sweet, and delicate.

*Parallelism of phrases:*

Singing a song or writing a poem is joyous.

*Parallelism of clauses:*

Perch are inexpensive; cod are cheap; trout are abundant; but salmon are best.

**Isocolon:** A series of similarly structured elements having the same length.

Veni, vidi, vici (I came, I saw, I conquered).

BOGO-Buy one, get one (free).

**Tricolon:** Three parallel elements of the same length occurring together.

Veni, vidi, vici. —Julius Caesar (The English is not a tricolon because the translations are not all the same length.

**Antithesis:** Juxtaposition of contrasting ideas (often in parallel structure).

"It has been my experience that folks who have no vices have very few virtues." —Abraham Lincoln

"It can't be wrong if it feels so right" —Debbie Boone

**Climax:** Generally, the arrangement of words, phrases, or clauses in an order of increasing importance, often in parallel structure. More specifically, climax is the repetition of the last word of one clause or sentence at the beginning of the next, through several clauses or sentences.

Miss America was not so much interested in serving herself as she was eager to serve her family, her community, and her nation.

The following passage from the Bible shows that version of climax that is synonymous with anadiplosis:

But we glory also in tribulations, knowing that tribulation works patience; and patience trial; and trial hope; and hope confound not, because the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost, who is given to us. —St. Paul

## Change in Word Order

**Anastrophe** (an-as'-tro-phee): Inversion of natural word order for the sake of emphasis.

The verb before the subject-noun (normal syntax follows the order subject-noun, verb):

Glistens the dew upon the morning grass. (Normally: The dew glistens upon the morning grass)

Adjective following the noun it modifies (normal syntax is adjective, noun):

She looked at the sky dark and menacing. (Normally: She looked at the dark and menacing sky)

The object preceding its verb (normal syntax is verb followed by its object):

Troubles, everybody's got. (Normally: Everybody's got troubles)

Preposition following the object of the preposition (normal syntax is preposition, object ["upon our lives"]):

It only stands / Our lives upon, to use Our strongest hands

—Shakespeare, Antony and Cleopatra 2.1.50-51

**Parenthesis:** Insertion of a verbal unit that interrupts the normal syntactical flow.

The garrulous Polonius from Hamlet can't help but interrupt himself as he speaks to King Claudius about Prince Hamlet's behavior toward his daughter, adding a parenthesis to his own parenthesis:

But what might you think,
When I had seen this hot love on the wing—
As I perceiv'd it (I must tell you that)
Before my daughter told me—what might you,
Or my dear Majesty your queen here, think...?

—Shakespeare, Hamlet 2.2.131-35

**Apposition** (AKA appositive): Addition of an adjacent, coordinate, explanatory element.

Albert Einstein, perhaps the greatest of scientists, seemed not to have mastered the physics of hair combing.

## Omission

**Ellipsis:** Omission of a word or words readily implied by context.

"The average person thinks he isn't." –Father Larry Lorenzoni

The term "average" is omitted but understood after "isn't."

John forgives Mary and Mary, John.

Note that the comma signals what has been elided, "forgives"

**Asyndeton:** Omission of conjunctions between a series of clauses, often resulting in a hurried rhythm or vehement effect.

> He was a bag of bones, a floppy doll, a broken stick, a maniac. – On the Road by Jack Kerouac
>
> Reduce, reuse, recycle.

**Brachylogia:** Omission of conjunctions between a series of words with the effect of a broken, hurried delivery.

> Phillip! Rise! Eat! Leave!
>
> Love, hate, jealousy, frenzy, fury drew him from pity —Angel Day

**Polysyndeton** (pol-y-syn'-do-ton): Opposite of asyndeton, a superabundance of conjunctions between clauses, often slowing the tempo or the rhythm.

> I said, "Who killed him?" and he said, "I don't know who killed him but he's dead all right," and it was dark and there was water standing in the street and no lights and windows broke and boats all up in the town and trees blown down and everything all blown and I got a skiff and went out and found my boat where I had her inside Mango Key and she was all right only she was full of water.
>
> —Ernest Hemingway, "After the Storm."

## Repetition

**Alliteration:** Repetition of initial or medial consonants in two or more adjacent words.

> Why not waste a wild weekend at Westmore Water Park?

**Assonance:** Repetition of similar vowel sounds, preceded and followed by different consonants, in the stressed syllables of adjacent words.

> The sergeant asked him to bomb the lawn with hotpots.

**Polyptoton:** Repetition of words derived from the same root.

> With eager feeding food doth choke the feeder.
>
> —John of Gaunt in Shakespeare's Richard II 2.1.37

**Anaphora:** Repetition of the same word or group of words at the beginning of successive clauses.

> This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle,
> This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
> This other Eden, demi-paradise,
> This fortress built by Nature for herself
> Against infection and the hand of war,
> This happy breed of men, this little world,
> This precious stone set in the silver sea,
> Which serves it in the office of a wall,
> Or as [a] moat defensive to a house,
> Against the envy of less happier lands;

This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,
This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings [. . .]
This land of such dear souls, this dear dear land,
Dear for her reputation through the world,
Is now leas'd out — I die pronouncing it —
Like to a tenement or pelting farm.
—John of Gaunt in Shakespeare's Richard II (2.1.40-51; 57-60)

**Epistrophe:** Repetition of the same word or group of words at the ends of successive clauses.

What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny compared to what lies within us." —Emerson
Hourly joys be still upon you!
Juno sings her blessings on you. [. . .]
Scarcity and want shall shun you,
Ceres' blessing so is on you.
— Shakespeare, The Tempest (4.1.108-109; 116-17)
We are born to sorrow, pass our time in sorrow, end our days in sorrow.

**Epanalepsis:** Repetition at the end of a clause of the word that occurred at the beginning of the clause. More strictly, repetition at the end of a line, phrase or clause of the word or words that occurred at the beginning of the same line, phrase, or clause.

"In times like these, it is helpful to remember that there have always been times like these. " —Paul Harvey
"Believe not all you can hear, tell not all you believe." —Native American proverb
"A lie begets a lie." —English proverb
"To each the boulders that have fallen to each."
—Robert Frost, "Mending Wall"

**Anadiplosis:** Repetition of the last word of one clause at the beginning of the following clause.

The love of wicked men converts to fear,
That fear to hate, and hate turns one or both
To worthy danger and deserved death.
—Shakespeare, Richard II 5.1.66-68
The following shows anadiplosis of a phrase:
...a man could stand and see the whole wide reach
Of blue Atlantic. But he stayed ashore.
He stayed ashore and plowed, and drilled his rows...
— Charles Bruce, "Biography"

**Climax:** Repetition of the scheme anadiplosis at least three times, with the elements arranged in an order of increasing importance.

Miss America was not so much interested in serving herself as she was eager to serve her family, her community, and her nation.

The following passage from the Bible shows that version of climax that is synonymous with anadiplosis:

But we glory also in tribulations, knowing that tribulation works patience; and patience trial; and trial hope; and hope confounds not, because the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost, who is given to us. —St. Paul

**Antimetabole:** Repetition of words, in successive clauses, in reverse grammatical order. (Sometimes mistaken as chiasmus)

When the going gets tough, the tough get going.

Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country. —John F. Kennedy

You can take the gorilla out of the jungle, but you can't take the jungle out of the gorilla.

Integrity without knowledge is weak and useless, and knowledge without integrity is dangerous and dreadful. —Samuel Johnson, Rasselas

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! —Isaiah 5:20

**Chiasmus:** Repetition of ideas or grammatical structures in reverse order in successive phrases or clauses (not to be mistaken with antimetabole).

But O, what damned minutes tells he o'er

Who dotes, yet doubts; suspects, yet strong loves.

—Shakespeare, Othello 3.3

The idea of affection occurs in "dotes" and "strongly loves"; the idea of doubting in "doubts" and "suspects." These two ideas occur in the quotation in an A B B A order, thus repeated and inverted.

It is boring to eat; to sleep is fulfilling

The pattern is present participle-infinitive; infinitive-present participle.

## Connection to Media Literacy

Media literacy requires the ability to critically evaluate the content, structure, and intent of media messages. By recognizing and analyzing the use of rhetorical tropes and schemes, individuals can uncover the underlying strategies employed by media creators to persuade, entertain, or inform. For example, an advertisement may use metaphor (a trope) to create a vivid image of a product, while employing repetition (a scheme) to reinforce a key selling point. Identifying these devices helps in understanding how the message is crafted to appeal to specific emotions, values, or cognitive processes, thereby fostering a deeper and more critical engagement with media content.

Understanding rhetorical tropes and schemes not only enhances the ability to analyze media but also

empowers individuals to become more effective communicators and critical consumers. Recognizing how these devices are used in various media forms, such as advertising, journalism, film, and social media, allows individuals to discern the underlying intentions and biases of media messages. Furthermore, those involved in media creation can employ these rhetorical tools to craft more compelling and ethically responsible content. Ultimately, the knowledge of rhetorical tropes and schemes contributes to a more media-literate society, capable of both creating and consuming media in an informed, thoughtful, and responsible manner.

## Case study: Commonplaces for climate action in the 2019 general election[1]

Although the dominant issue at the time of the 2019 General Election was Brexit, climate change received greater attention than it had ever before. Indeed, Chris Stark, chief executive of the Committee on Climate Change, argued that 'this election really is the climate election'.[2] The dispute over climate change in the United Kingdom has been intensified since 2010 developing into a partisan issue which, despite not reaching the level of intensity it has in the United States, became a key political battleground.[3] This conflict culminated during the 2019 General Election, when a 'climate debate' was hosted by Channel 4 and attended by five political leaders (with Boris Johnson replaced by an ice sculpture). For the purposes of this article, I have analyzed the manifestos published by five parties: Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrats, Scottish National, and Green Party. Despite focusing primarily on the sections devoted specifically to climate action, I have studied and integrated into the analysis every reference made on this issue in the manifestos. I have also considered the role of visual rhetoric in these text events, as images 'provide rich moments of rhetorical invention';[4] at the same time, they can stiffen our imagination,[5] as they naturalize the symbolic message communicated[6] and therefore can enhance a process of decontestation. The set of data chosen for this study is consistent

1. Case study adapted from: Hatzisavvidou, S. (2022). Studying political disputes: A rhetorical perspective and a case study. *Politics*, *42*(2), 185–199. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263395720940883

2. Shukman, David. "General Election 2019: How Big an Issue Is Climate Change for Voters?" *BBC News*, November 6, 2019, sec. Science & Environment. https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-50307304.

3. Carter N (2014) The politics of climate change in the UK. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change* 5(3): 423–433.

4. Olson KM, Goodnight GT (1994) Entanglements of consumption, cruelty, privacy, and fashion: The social controversy over fur. *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 80(3): 273

5. Pezzulo PC, Cox R (2018) *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere*, 5th edn. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE: 91

6. Barthes R (1977) Rhetoric of the image. In: Barthes R (ed.) *Image Music Text*. London: Fontana Press: 45.

with the requirements of a rhetorical analysis: it aims to persuade, it is context-specific, and remains open to contestation, as the values that underpin it cannot be verified or discredited using external objective criteria.

The analysis evidences that some parties (Conservative, Liberal Democrats, Scottish National Party (SNP)) used – in different intensities – 'economic growth' as the commonplace for the invention of arguments for climate action. Economic growth – measured as the rise of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) – has been the single most important policy goal across the world for most of the last century.[7] The argument that it is possible to continue growing the global economy while protecting the natural environment is so common that growth ideology dictates the terms of national and international climate discourse.[8] Although the roots of this argument can be located in the 1990s and the paradigm of ecological modernisation,[9] it gained prominence on the level of institutional and political support in the years following the global financial crisis of 2007–2009. According to this line of thinking, the impact of the ecological crisis could be minimized or even rectified by introducing a new grand narrative and a new vision for development: that of a 'green economy', in the context of which green growth would provide the alternative to the model of growth followed until then. In this context, climate change specifically was framed as an economic opportunity and specifically as the opportunity to create new markets and, therefore, new jobs in an altering economy. Since then, this argument has become the dominant political response to climate change as a number of international organizations, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the United Nations (UN), popularized this argument through their documents and practices.

The ideology of growthism is contested by those who view the very logic of free-market capitalism as being in opposition to physical reality and planetary boundaries (Rockström et al., 2009).[10] They, therefore, refute the idea that capitalism can be 'greened', arguing that the logic of accumulation and growth that is inherent in capitalism further exaggerates problems caused by resource exploitation.[11][12] Yet, even among those who endorse this particular position, there is disagreement over how societies should be organized in view of unprecedented climate changes. For example, proponents of a Green New Deal advocate decarbonization through radical transformation to replace the capitalist social order with democratized control over major

7. Jackson T (2017) *Prosperity without Growth: Foundations for the Economy of Tomorrow*, 2nd edn. London: Routledge.

8. Hamilton C (2003) *Growth Fetish*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

9. Nordhaus WD (1991) To slow or not to slow: The economics of the greenhouse effect. *The Economic Journal* 101(407): 920–937. https://doi.org/10.2307/2233864.

10. Rockström J, Steffen W, Noone K, Persson Å, Chapin FS, Lambin E, et al. (2009) Planetary boundaries: Exploring the safe operating space for humanity. *Ecology and Society* 14(2): 472–475.

11. Benton T (1989) Marxism and natural limits: An ecological critique and reconstruction. *New Left Review* 178(1): 51–86.

12. White DF, Gareau BJ, Rudy AP (2017) Ecosocialisms, past, present and future: From the metabolic rift to a reconstructive, dynamic and hybrid ecosocialism. *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 28(2): 22–40.

energy systems and resources.[13] Others emphasize that it is possible to remain agnostic about growth when planning economic activities while considering human prosperity, irrespective of whether GDP is growing or not.[14] They thus advocate a post-growth vision that revolves around social equity and ecological integrity. Yet, others foreground the importance of placing the well-being of humans and nature at the center of economic and social organization.[15] The analysis that follows shows that these ideas are not merely part of scholarly debates; they inform arguments for climate action in the United Kingdom.

The commonplace of 'economic growth' had a prominent place in the manifestos presented by the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats. One of the key six commitments of the Conservative Party was 'reaching net zero by 2050 with investment in clean energy solutions and green infrastructure to reduce carbon emissions and pollution', pledging to 'protect the planet' through 'free markets, innovation, and prosperity.'[16] The climate action plan proposed by the Conservatives is fuelled by technological innovation and investment 'in clean energy solutions and green infrastructure', exemplified by 'the innovations of British battery-makers and turbine designers'.[17] The plan would 'deliver economic growth'.[18] Working with the market, the Party promised 'to deliver two million new high-quality jobs in clean growth' that will deliver 'clean energy', and 'clean transport'.[19]

In a similar fashion, Liberal Democrats pledged to 'take urgent action to save our planet' outlining a vision for 'a green society' and 'a green economy'[20] within the context of 'a growing economy'.[21] Their plan argued for cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 'creating markets for climate-friendly products',[22] 'investing in climate-friendly infrastructure and technology and creating new green businesses and jobs',[23] thus turning

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13. Pettifor A (2019) *The Case for A Green New Deal*. London: Verso.

14. Raworth K (2017) *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist*. London: Random House.

15. Gudynas E (2011) Buen Vivir: Today's tomorrow. *Development* 54(4): 441–447.

16. Conservative Party (2019) General election manifesto. Available at: https://assets-global.website-files.com/5da42e2cae7ebd3f8bde353c/5dda924905da587992a064ba_Conservative%202019%20Manifesto.pdf

17. *ibid, p. 3*

18. *ibid, p. 7*

19. *ibid*, p. 55

20. Liberal Democrats (2019) General election manifesto, p. 38. Available at: https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/libdems/pages/57307/attachments/original/1574876236/Stop_Brexit_and_Build_a_Brighter_Future.pdf?1574876236

21. *ibid*, p. 18

22. *ibid*, p. 12

23. *ibid*, p. 15

'the birthplace of the industrial revolution into the home of the new Green Revolution'.[24] The use of images of wind turbines in the manifesto visually supported and complemented this plan, thus reproducing the dominant argument that technological progress and economic growth can be achieved in harmony with the natural environment. All humans have to do is harness the power of nature and put it in the service of economic growth and progress.

For the Conservative Party, environmental protection can deliver economic growth through investment in infrastructure, science, and research. For Liberal Democrats, climate change was explicitly viewed as 'a massive opportunity to create a different future',[25] greener and climate-friendly. In both cases, growth served as the main commonplace for the invention of arguments for taking action against climate change, with investment in technology and innovation celebrated as the means to achieve economic growth while cutting carbon emissions. For both parties, growth and environmental protection go hand-in-hand; one cannot be delivered without the other. Such intensification of investment, manufacturing, and construction contributes significantly to economic growth, job creation, and energy efficiency. Nonetheless, in practice, the argument that economic growth can be combined with action to avoid climate breakdown lacks empirical support.[26] It not only intensifies the marketisation of nature and climate change, but it also diverts attention from the issues of social justice inherent in environmental issues.[27] It is not surprising, then, that other parties deviated from this dominant view.

SNP makes for an interesting case because, although it acknowledged the centrality of economic growth in its vision for Scotland, it simultaneously argued that economic growth cannot be 'unrestricted' and must be 'sustainable'. The SNP pledged 'a moral responsibility to tackle climate change and 'transition to net zero while creating economic opportunity',[28] while changing the way the economy works to 'address economic injustice at source' and preventing the catastrophic 'impact of unrestricted economic growth'[29] on the environment. Although sustainability was at the heart of the SNP's climate plan, the manifesto did not make clear how any restrictions on growth would be applied or how they would be compatible with the goals of increased investment and job opportunities.

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24. *ibid*, p. 40

25. *ibid*, p. 39

26. Hickel, Jason, and Giorgos Kallis. "Is Green Growth Possible?" *New Political Economy* 25, no. 4 (June 6, 2020): 469–86. https://doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2019.1598964.

27. D'Alessandro S, Cieplinski A, Distefano T, Dittmer K (2020) Feasible alternatives to green growth. *Nature Sustainability* 3(4): 329–335.

28. SNP (2019) General election manifesto, p. 29. Available at: https://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/www.snp.org/uploads/2019/11/11_27-SNP-Manifesto-2019-for-download.pdf

29. *ibid*, p. 23

The case of Labour was also interesting in that its manifesto sought to insert an alternative position into the climate debate. In advocating a Green Industrial Revolution that would create 1 million jobs to transform 'industry, energy, transport, agriculture, and buildings, while restoring nature',[30] Labour adopted the terminology of the emerging solution of a Green New Deal. Its manifesto was more detailed compared to that of other parties, outlining plans for how investment would be used as part of a programme for decarbonising the energy sector, with infrastructure operating under public ownership and training offered to workers who would be employed in the sector as part of a green-just transition. Such an embrace of intensified green economic activity without appeal to growth is congruent with the insurgent vision of post-growth. The use of images of wind turbines and electric buses in the Labour manifesto visually supported the argument that post-growth does not have to mean the return to a pre-modern condition. Statements such as 'transforming our economy into one low in carbon, rich in good jobs, radically fairer',[31] 'tackling the destruction of our planet is a question of justice',[32] 'our commitments to ecosystem repair and environmental protections work hand in hand with sustainable jobs and industries, and social justice'[33] point to the fact that the commonplace of Labour's arguments for a 'green transition' is social equity.

The Greens were the only party that explicitly denounced economic growth, stating that it 'will no longer be the way we measure progress'.[34] The flagship of the Green manifesto was the Green New Deal, a comprehensive plan covering all aspects of economy and society that aims not merely at tackling climate breakdown but also at transforming the economy and society in a fair way. Investment is targeted towards communities and businesses that depend on polluting industries and the overarching goal is to 'kick-start the great transition to a net zero carbon economy and a better quality of life'.[35] The commonplace for climate action in the Green manifesto is the concept of well-being, interpreted as 'improvement in health, reduction of inequality and the restoration and protection of the natural environment on which we all depend'.[36] The purpose of taking climate action is human and ecological well-being. The lack of images of wind turbines and electric buses from the Green manifesto is not incidental; the visual arguments deployed by the Greens involved

30. Labour Party (2019) General election manifesto, p. 12. Available at: https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Real-Change-Labour-Manifesto-2019.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2SAoU5GnLeW4CjNXUceminVjOK826VrR8ah

31. *ibid*, p. 11

32. *ibid*, p. 12

33. *ibid*, p. 22

34. Green Party (2019) General election manifesto, p. 8. Available at: https://www.greenparty.org.uk/assets/files/Elections/Green%20Party%20Manifesto%202019.pdf

35. *ibid*, p. 88

36. *ibid*, p. 8

climate activists protesting against the climate emergency and Green politicians meeting with people. This is not to suggest that UK Greens do not appeal to technology; the implementation of their Green New Deal requires investment in technologies and energy systems that will replace polluting with renewable ones. What is important is that the goal of such transformations is not the pursuit of economic growth but 'the wellbeing of citizens, society and the natural world'.

## Key Takeaways

- Rhetorical devices, categorized into schemes and tropes, have evolved into a vast and varied garden since their initial cataloging by the Greeks and Romans, and they play a crucial role in enhancing language through artful deviations in word meaning and arrangement.
- The figures of speech, although rich and interesting, are only a part of the broader discipline of rhetoric, which also includes elements like Invention, Arrangement, Memory, and Delivery.
- The text provides a comprehensive overview of different rhetorical devices, including examples and explanations, highlighting the importance of recognizing and understanding these tools for effective communication and expression.

## Exercises

1. How do the categories of "schemes" and "tropes" differ in their approach to language manipulation, and why might a writer choose to use one over the other? Provide examples from the text to support your answer.
2. Select five rhetorical devices from the text (at least two from both "schemes" and "tropes") and create original sentences using each device. Explain how the device functions in your sentence and what effect it might have on a reader or listener.
3. Considering the historical development of rhetorical figures from the Greeks and Romans to modern times, how do you think the use of these figures has evolved in contemporary speech and writing? Reflect on the relevance of these figures in today's communication,

including digital media.

## Practice

**What kind of rhetorical appeal does each of the examples below use?**

1. A politician cites statistics about rising unemployment rates to argue for a new jobs program.
2. A car commercial shows a family enjoying a road trip, laughing and bonding in their new vehicle.
3. A doctor writes an op-ed about the importance of vaccinations, citing her 20 years of medical experience.
4. A charity advertisement shows images of suffering children and asks for donations to make a difference.
5. An environmental organization uses graphs and data to show the increase in global temperatures over the last century.
6. A celebrity endorses a new brand of athletic wear, mentioning their own success in sports.
7. A commercial for a fast-food chain emphasizes the joy of sharing a meal with friends.
8. A tech company advertises its new phone by listing its cutting-edge specifications and features.
9. A politician speaks passionately about the need for change, right before an important election.
10. A student uses personal anecdotes about struggling with mental health to advocate for more counseling services at school.
11. A financial expert writes a book on investment, citing his successful track record and client testimonials.
12. A public service announcement uses images of car crashes to warn against drunk driving.
13. A scientist presents a well-reasoned argument, backed by research, for reducing plastic waste.
14. A fitness trainer promotes a new workout program, emphasizing how it made her feel more energetic and happy.

15. A historical documentary uses primary sources, expert interviews, and archival footage to tell a story.
16. A pet food advertisement shows a dog wagging its tail and looking happy after eating the brand's product.
17. A lawyer writes a legal column, using case law and statutes to explain a particular legal issue.
18. A motivational speaker tells a personal story of overcoming adversity to inspire others to take action.
19. A technology blogger with years of industry experience reviews the latest gadgets.
20. An advertisement for a university highlights the success stories of its alumni to attract new students.
21. A news report uses graphs and expert opinions to explain the economic impact of a new policy.
22. A skincare product commercial shows before-and-after pictures of users to demonstrate effectiveness.
23. A renowned chef endorses a brand of cooking utensils, citing their quality and his own use of them.
24. A travel advertisement uses beautiful imagery and emotive music to entice viewers to visit a destination.
25. A health organization uses statistics and studies to argue for a new public health initiative.
26. A movie trailer uses suspenseful music and exciting visuals to create anticipation for the film's release.
27. An author with a Ph.D. in psychology writes a self-help book, using research to support her advice.
28. A commercial for a toy shows children laughing and playing with it, emphasizing fun.
29. A journalist with years of experience in the field writes an in-depth analysis of a political situation.
30. A non-profit organization uses heartwarming success stories to encourage volunteer involvement.
31. A tech review website uses detailed comparisons and technical specifications to rate different products.
32. A political campaign ad shows a candidate helping community members, emphasizing empathy and connection.
33. An advertisement for a weight loss program uses testimonials and before-and-after photos to persuade viewers.
34. A safety organization uses statistics about accidents to promote a new child car seat.

35. A social media post by a popular influencer promotes a brand of makeup, citing personal use and satisfaction.

**Identify the scheme or trope used in each quote below:**

1. "Life is a highway, full of twists and turns."
2. "The pen is mightier than the sword."
3. "She sells seashells by the seashore."
4. "I came, I saw, I conquered."
5. "The movie was a rollercoaster of emotions: thrilling, exciting, terrifying, and exhilarating."
6. "The rustler bragged he'd absconded with five hundred head of longhorns."
7. "Why are you so stupid?"
8. "The buzzing of innumerable bees."
9. "The early bird catches the worm."
10. "The more you learn, the more you earn."
11. "The report was clear, concise, and convincing."
12. "The politician promised peace, prosperity, and progress."
13. "The world is a stage, and we are merely players."
14. "The wind whispered through the trees."
15. "The movie wasn't bad."
16. "The news is all fake, fake, fake!"
17. "The advertisement used bright colors, catchy slogans, and appealing images."
18. "The athlete trained hard, fought bravely, and won deservedly."
19. "The comedian's joke was a home run."
20. "The journalist asked the tough questions, and the tough questions were answered."
21. "The novel was a feast for the mind, a banquet for the soul."
22. "The politician's speech was full of sound and fury."
23. "The singer's voice was like silk."
24. "The storm roared, raged, and rattled throughout the night."
25. "The teacher explained, elaborated, and exemplified the concept."
26. "The technology is new, novel, and innovative."
27. "The thunder clapped, the lightning flashed, and the rain poured."
28. "The writer's words were a beacon of hope."
29. "Time flies like an arrow."
30. "To err is human; to forgive, divine."
31. "We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools."

32. “We must, indeed, all hang together or, most assuredly, we shall all hang separately.”
33. “With malice toward none, with charity for all.”
34. “You can take the boy out of the country, but you can’t take the country out of the boy.”
35. “You have to see the forest for the trees.”

PART VI

# CHAPTER 6: RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF VISUAL TEXTS

Visual rhetoric is the study of how images and visual features convey information and impact audiences. It investigates how visual elements such as images, symbols, and design may persuade and transmit meaning as effectively as written or spoken words. Visual rhetoric is important in today's media, with applications ranging from advertising and journalism to entertainment and digital content.

By incorporating cultural symbols and design aspects, visual language has the ability to change perceptions, elicit emotions, and link audiences. Understanding the concepts of visual rhetoric entails examining how images function within certain cultural and social frameworks, exposing how meanings alter with context. This understanding is critical for creators who want to effectively engage their audience via visual storytelling.

Mastering visual rhetoric enables media professionals to create messages that resonate with viewers and achieve the desired results. Communicators who deliberately use visual components can improve their capacity to transmit complicated concepts, elicit emotional responses, and impact public opinion. In a society dominated by visual media, the capacity to comprehend and apply visual rhetoric is critical to effective communication.

# 6.1 OVERVIEW OF VISUAL RHETORIC

**Learning Objectives**

- Understand and apply the principles of visual rhetoric, recognizing how images, symbols, and other visual elements can be used strategically to communicate ideas, emotions, and messages across various media platforms.
- Develop the ability to analyze and interpret visual language within cultural contexts, gaining insights into how meanings change from context to context, and how visual elements can be as persuasive as written or spoken words.
- Acquire the skills to create more engaging and effective content in media-related fields such as advertising, filmmaking, and web design, by mastering the alignment of visual components with the intended message, audience culture, and context of media consumption.

As a link between images and meaning, visual rhetoric is crucial to media and communication studies. Visual rhetoric is the deliberate use of pictures, symbols, and other visual elements to communicate ideas and sway audiences. It acknowledges that images may be just as convincing as written or spoken words and are not just for decoration. Media practitioners may produce more interesting and successful content for advertising, journalism, or entertainment by mastering the fundamentals of visual rhetoric. A deeper understanding of how images function within cultural contexts and how they can be used to transmit intricate thoughts and emotions is fostered by the study of visual rhetoric, which permits the decoding of visual language.

Since visual rhetoric is a crucial part of effective communication in today's visually-driven society, those who make media should understand how to master it. In addition to being an aesthetic activity, being able to create and decipher visual messages is a crucial talent for communicating thoughts, emotions, and knowledge. Media makers may use imagery more effectively, frame their material more effectively, and engage audiences more effectively if they are aware of the subtleties of visual language. This competence transcends purely aesthetic considerations; it calls for a profound comprehension of how visual components can be strategically matched with the intended message, audience culture, and context of media consumption. A proficiency with visual rhetoric in any media-related field, including advertising, filmmaking, and web design, allows

content producers to create pieces that connect with viewers, improve comprehension, and eventually elicit the intended reaction or action.

So far you have examined how primarily written arguments work rhetorically. But visuals (symbols, paintings, photographs, advertisements, cartoons, etc.) also work rhetorically, and their meaning changes from context to context.

Imagine two straight lines intersecting each other at right angles. One line runs from north to south. The other is from east to west. Now think about the meanings that this sign evokes.

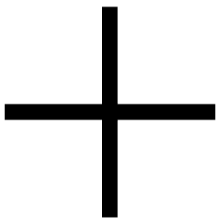

Figure 1: An image of a plus sign, or a cross, etc.

What came to mind as you pondered this sign? Crossroads? A first aid sign? The Swiss flag? Your little brother making a cross sign with his forefingers that signals "step away from the hallowed ground that is my bedroom"?

Now think of a circle around those lines so that the ends of the lines hit, or cross over, the circumference of the circle. What is the image's purpose now?

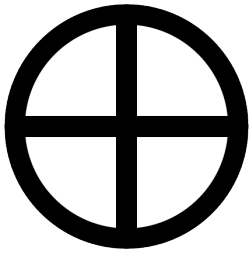

Figure 2: The same image as above, except with an added circle around it.

What did you come up with? The Celtic cross? A surveyor's target? A pizza cut into really generous sizes?

Did you know that this symbol is also the symbol for our planet Earth? And it's the symbol for the Norse god, Odin. Furthermore, a quick web search will also tell you that John Dalton, a British chemist who led the way in atomic theory and died in 1844, used this exact same symbol to indicate the element sulfur.

Recently, however, the symbol became the subject of a fiery political controversy. The marketing team of former Alaska governor (and former vice-presidential candidate), Sarah Palin, placed several of these symbols—the lines crossed over the circumference of the circle in this case—on a map of the United States. The symbols indicated where the Republican Party had to concentrate their campaign because these two seemingly innocuous lines encompassed by a circle evoked, in this context, the symbol for crosshairs—which itself invokes a myriad of meanings that range from "focus" to "target."

However, after the shooting of Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords in Arizona in January 2011, the symbol, and the image it was mapped onto, sparked a vehement nationwide debate about its connotative meaning. Clearly, the image's rhetorical effectiveness had transformed into something that some considered offensive. Palin's team withdrew the image from her website.

How we understand symbols rhetorically, and indeed all images, depends on how the symbols work with the words they accompany, and on how we understand and read the image's context, or the social "landscape" within which the image is situated. As you have learned from earlier chapters, much of this contextual knowledge in persuasive situations is tacit, or unspoken.

Like writing, how we use images has real implications in the world. So, when we examine visuals in rhetorical circumstances, we need to uncover this tacit knowledge. Even a seemingly innocuous symbol, like the one above, can denote a huge variety of meanings, and these meanings can become culturally loaded. The same is true for more complex images—something we will examine at length below.

In this chapter, we will explore how context—as well as purpose, audience, and design—render symbols and images rhetorically effective. The political anecdote above may seem shocking, but, nevertheless, it indicates how persuasively potent visuals are, especially when they enhance the meaning of a text's words or vice versa. Our goal for this chapter, then, is to come to terms with the basics of visual analysis, which can encompass

the analysis of words working with images or the analysis of images alone. When you compose your own arguments, you can put to use what you discover in this chapter when you select or consider creating visuals to accompany your own work.

Here is an overview of Visual Rhetoric from the OWL at Purdue:

*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://rotel.pressbooks.pub/comm-media-studies/?p=157#oembed-1*

## Key Takeaways

- Visual rhetoric is a vital aspect of communication, enabling the deliberate use of images and symbols to convey complex ideas and emotions, and it plays a significant role in various media-related fields.
- The understanding and mastery of visual rhetoric go beyond aesthetics, requiring a deep comprehension of how visual elements interact with cultural contexts and intended messages.
- The study and application of visual rhetoric can enhance content creation across advertising, journalism, and entertainment, allowing media makers to connect with viewers more effectively and elicit the desired reactions or actions.

## Exercises

1. How do visual elements like symbols, paintings, and photographs work rhetorically in different contexts? Provide examples from advertising or political campaigns to illustrate your understanding of visual rhetoric.

2. Analyze a popular media piece, identifying the visual rhetoric techniques used. Explain how these visual elements are strategically matched with the intended message, audience culture, and context of media consumption.
3. What are the implications of visual rhetoric in today's visually-driven society? How can a proficiency in visual rhetoric enhance the effectiveness of communication in fields like advertising, filmmaking, and web design? Provide real-world examples to support your argument.

## Media Attributions

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- Earth symbol © Wikipedia is licensed under a Public Domain license

# 6.2 HOW TO ANALYZE VISUAL TEXTS

**Learning Objectives**

- Dissect and analyze visual texts, recognizing the components and techniques used in visual rhetoric, including the use of color, arrangement, perspective, and modality, and apply this understanding to various genres such as videos and advertisements.
- Interpret the contextual landscape of visual texts, including the historical, political, and social factors that influence their meaning, and connect these insights to the overall purpose and effectiveness of the visual in communicating its intended message.
- Critically assess the relationship between text and image in visual rhetoric, understanding how font, arrangement, social distance, mood, and lighting contribute to the overall meaning, and how these elements can be manipulated to create specific effects or appeal to particular audiences.

Let's start by reviewing what we mean by analysis. Imagine that your old car has broken down and your Uncle Bob has announced that he will fix it for you. The next day, you go to Uncle Bob's garage and find the engine of your car in pieces all over the driveway; you are further greeted with a vision of your hapless uncle greasily jabbing at the radiator with a screwdriver. Uncle Bob (whom you may never speak to again) has broken the car engine down into its component parts to try and figure out how your poor old car works and what is wrong with it.

Happy days are ahead, however. Despite the shock and horror that the scene above inspires, there is a method to Uncle Bob's madness. Amid the wreckage, he finds out how your car works and what is wrong with it, so he can fix it and put it back together.

Likewise, analyzing entails breaking down a text or an image into component parts (like your engine). And while analyzing doesn't entail fixing per se, it does allow you to figure out how a text or image works to convey the message it is trying to communicate. What constitutes the component parts of an image? How might we analyze a visual? What should we be looking for? To a certain extent we can analyze visuals in the same way we analyze written language; we break down a written text into component parts to figure out just what the creator's agenda might be and what effect the text might have on its readers.

When we analyze visuals we do take into account the same sorts of things we do when we analyze written texts, with some added features.

Please watch "Visual Rhetoric: How to Analyze Images":

> *One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://rotel.pressbooks.pub/comm-media-studies/?p=163#oembed-1*

Genres that use visuals tell us a lot about what we can and can't do with them. Coming to terms with genre is rather like learning a new dance—certain moves, or conventions, are expected that dictate what kind of dance you have to learn. If you're asked to moonwalk, for instance, you know you have to glide backwards across the floor like Michael Jackson. It's sort of the same with visuals and texts; certain moves, or conventions, are expected that dictate what the genre allows and doesn't allow.

Below is a wonderful old bumper sticker from the 1960s. A bumper sticker, as we will discover, is a genre that involves specific conventions.

Figure 1: A bumper sticker, featuring a picture of John F. Kennedy with the words "Kennedy for President" in the background.

Bumper stickers today look quite a bit different, but the amount of space that a sticker's creator has to work with hasn't really changed. Bumper stickers demand that their creators come up with short phrases that are contextually understandable and accompanied by images that are easily readable—a photograph of an oil painting trying to squeeze itself on a bumper sticker would just be incomprehensible. In short, bumper stickers are an argument in a rush!

A bumper sticker calls for an analysis of images and words working together to create an argument. As for their rhetorical content, bumper stickers can demand that we vote a certain way, pay attention to a problem,

act as part of a solution, or even recognize the affiliations of the driver of the car the sticker is stuck to. But their very success, given that their content is minimal, depends wholly on our understanding of the words and the symbols that accompany them in context.

The procedure for doing a rhetorical analysis of a visual text is essentially the same as for a spoken/written text.

## Step 1: Read the Text

In the case of a visual text, there might be words or there might not. If there are no words, "read" the image and think about what the creator of the image is trying to portray. Rather than a summary of the text, you might write a description of the image, including what you believe the author's main intent is. In this case, your description might be fairly short:

> In the center of the bumper sticker is an image of JFK, Jr.'s smiling face. The background consists of three horizontal stripes of red, white, and blue. The red stripe is the widest and contains the word "Kennedy" in blue, all capital block letters. Below the red stripe is a slightly narrower white stripe containing the words "For President" all in blue, all capital block letters, but in slightly smaller font. The image of JFK covers up the "res" in President. At the very bottom of the image is a thin blue line. The bumper sticker is clearly a promotional item from JFK's presidential campaign.

## Step 2: Define the Rhetorical Situation

Again, this step is very similar to what you would do for a written/spoken text. Simply answer the same questions about the visual text. Remember the acronym SOAP:

### Speaker

In this case, the speaker isn't as clear as it might be in a spoken or written text. In general, a speech is made by a specific person, and a written text has an author. In some cases, determining the origin of a visual text could be difficult. In this case, we can presume that the bumper sticker was made by the Democratic Party as a campaign effort.

### Occasion/Context

Thinking about context is crucial when we are analyzing visuals, as it is with analyzing writing. We need to understand the political, social, economic, or historical situations from which the visual emerges. Moreover,

we have to remember that the meaning of images change as time passes. For instance, what do we have to understand about the context from which the Kennedy sticker emerged in order to grasp its meaning? Furthermore, how has its meaning changed in the past 50 years?

First, to read the bumper sticker at face value, we have to know that a man named Kennedy is running for president. But the president of what? Maybe that's obvious, but then again, how many know who the Australian prime minister was 50 years ago, or, for that matter, the leading official in China? Of course, we should know that the face on the bumper sticker belongs to John F. Kennedy, a US Democrat, who ran against the Republican nominee Richard Nixon, and who won the US presidential election in 1960. (We hope you know that anyway.)

Now think how someone seeing this bumper sticker and the image of Kennedy on it today would react differently than someone in 1960 would have. Since his election, JFK's status has transformed from American president into an icon of American history. We remember his historic debate with Nixon, the first televised presidential debate.

*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://rotel.pressbooks.pub/comm-media-studies/?p=163#oembed-2*

One wonders how much of a role this event played in his election, given that the TV, a visual medium, turned a political underdog into a celebrity. We also remember Kennedy for his part in the Cuban missile crisis, his integral role in the Civil Rights Movement, and, tragically, we remember his assassination in 1963. In other words, after the passage of 50 years, we might read the face on the bumper sticker quite differently than we might have in 1960.

While we examine this "text" from 50 years ago, it reminds us that the images we are surrounded by now change in meaning all the time. For instance, we are all familiar with the Apple logo. The image itself, on its own terms, is simply a silhouette of an apple with a bite taken out of it. But, the visual does not now evoke the nourishment of a Granny Smith or a Golden Delicious. Instead, the logo is globally recognized as an icon of computer technology.

## Audience and Medium

In their book *Picturing Texts*, Lester Faigley et al. claim that, when determining the audience for a visual,

we must "think about how an author might expect the audience to receive the work."[1] Medium, then, dominates an audience's reception of an image. For instance, Faigley states that readers will most likely accept a photograph in a newspaper as news—unless, of course, one thinks that pictures in the tabloids of alien babies impersonating Elvis constitute news. Alien babies aside, readers of the news would expect that the picture on the front page of the New York Times, for instance, is a "faithful representation of something that actually happened."[2] An audience for a political cartoon in the newspaper, on the other hand, would know that the pictures they see in cartoons are not faithful representations of the news but opinions about current events and their participants, caricatured by a cartoonist. The expectations of the audience in terms of medium, then, determine much about how the visual is received.

As for our bumper sticker then, we might argue that the image of JFK speeding down the highway on the bumper of a spiffy new Ford Falcon would be persuasive to those who put their faith in the efficacy of bumper stickers, as well as the image of the man on the bumper sticker. Moreover, given that the Falcon is speeding by, we might assume that the bumper sticker would mostly appeal to those folks who are already thinking of voting for JFK—otherwise, there's a chance that the Falcon's driver would be the recipient of some 1960s-style road rage.

Today, the audience for our bumper sticker has changed considerably. We might find it in a library collection. Or we might find it collecting bids on eBay. Once again, the audience for this example of images and words working together rhetorically depends largely on its contextual landscape.

## Purpose

Words and images can work together to present a point of view. But, in terms of visuals, that point of view often relies on what isn't explicit—what, as we noted above, is tacit.

The words on the sticker say quite simply, "Kennedy For President." We know now that this simple statement reveals that John F. Kennedy ran for president in 1960. But what was its rhetorical value back then? What did the bumper sticker want us to do with its message? After all, taken literally, it doesn't really tell us to do anything.

For now, let's cheat and jump the gun and guess that the bumper sticker's argument in 1960 was "Vote to Elect John F Kennedy for United States President."

Okay. So knowing what we know from history, we can accept that the sticker is urging us to vote for Kennedy. It's trying to persuade us to do something. And the reason we know what we know about it is because we know how to read its genre and we comprehend its social, political, and historical context. But

1. Faigley, Lester, Diana George, Anna Palchik, and Cynthia Selfe. Picturing Texts. London: Norton, 2004. Print. p. 104

2. Faigley, Lester, Diana George, Anna Palchik, and Cynthia Selfe. Picturing Texts. London: Norton, 2004. Print. p. 105

in order to be persuaded by its purpose, we need to know why voting for JFK is a good thing. We need to understand that its underlying message, "Vote for JFK," is that voting for JFK is a good thing for the future of the United States.

So, to be persuaded by the bumper sticker, we must agree with the reasons why voting for JFK is a good thing. But the bumper sticker doesn't give us any. Instead, it relies on what we are supposed to know about why we should vote for Kennedy. For instance, if we were present for the campaign, we would know that JFK campaigned on a platform of liberal reform as well as increased spending for the military and space travel technology. Moreover, we would be aware of the evidence for why we should vote that way. Consequently, if we voted for JFK, we accepted the above claim, reasons, and evidence driving the bumper sticker's purpose without being told any of it by the bumper sticker. The claim, reasons, and evidence are all tacit.

What about the image itself? How does that further the bumper sticker's purpose? We see that the image of JFK's smiling face is projected on top of the words "Kennedy for President." The image is not placed off to the side; it is right in the middle of the bumper sticker. So, for this bumper sticker to be visually persuasive, we need to agree that JFK, here represented by his smiling face, located right in the middle of the bumper sticker on a backdrop of red, white, and blue, signifies a person we can trust to run the country.

Nowadays, JFK's face on the bumper sticker—or in any other genre, for that matter —might underscore a different purpose. It might encompass nostalgia for an era gone by, or it might be used as a resemblance argument in order to compare President Kennedy with President Obama, for example.

Overall, then, when we see a visual used for rhetorical purposes, we must first determine the argument (claim, reasons, evidence) from which the visual is situated and then try to grasp why the visual is being used to further its purpose.

To these, we will add one more element – Style – making our acronym SOAPS.

## Style

When analyzing visual texts, the style in which the text is created is important. In rhetorical analysis, you should consider why this particular style was chosen–why use a bumper sticker or a billboard instead of writing an article in the newspaper?

Consider what format or medium the text being made: image? written essay? speech? song? protest sign? meme? sculpture?

- What is gained by having a text composed in a particular format/medium?
- What limitations does that format/medium have?
- What opportunities for expression does that format/medium have (that perhaps other formats do not have?)

# Step 3. Identify Rhetorical Strategies

Think through how the creator of the text uses ethos, pathos, logos, and kairos to portray the message. While you might see some rhetorical devices being employed, they might not play as large a role in visual texts. The elements of Design will play a much larger role in a visual analysis. Design actually involves several factors.

## Arrangement

Designers are trained to emphasize certain features of a visual text. And they are also trained to compose images that are balanced and harmonized. Faigley et al suggest that we look at a text that uses images (with or without words) and think about where our eyes are drawn first.[3] Moreover, in Western cultures, we are trained to read from left to right and top to bottom—a pattern that often has an impact on what text or image is accentuated in a visual arrangement.

Other arrangements that Faigley et al discuss are closed and open forms.[4] A closed-form image means that, like our bumper sticker, everything we need to know about the image is enclosed within its frame. An open form, on the other hand, suggests that the visual's narrative continues outside the frame of the visual. Many sports ads employ open-frame visuals that suggest the dynamic of physical movement.

Another method of arrangement that is well known to designers is the rule of thirds. Here's an example of that rule in action:

3. Faigley, Lester, Diana George, Anna Palchik and Cynthia Selfe. Picturing Texts. London: Norton, 2004. Print. p. 34

4. Faigley, Lester, Diana George, Anna Palchik and Cynthia Selfe. Picturing Texts. London: Norton, 2004. Print. p. 105

Figure 2: The horizontal slats are on rule of thirds horizontal lines. Vertical lines have been added to the photo. The flower is at an intersection.

Note how the image above has been cordoned off into 9 sections. The flower coincides with these lines. The rule of thirds dictates that this compositional method allows for an interesting and dynamic arrangement as opposed to one that is static. Now, unfortunately, our bumper sticker above doesn't really obey that rule. Nevertheless, our eyes are still drawn to the image of JFK's head. Many modern bumper stickers do, however, obey the rule of thirds. Next time you see a bumper sticker on a parked car, check if the artist has paid attention to this rule. Or, seek out some landscape photography. The rule of thirds is the golden rule in landscape art and photography and is more or less a comprehensive way to analyze arrangement in design circles because of its focus on where one's eye is drawn.

Rhetorically speaking, what is accentuated in a visual is the most important thing to remember about arrangement. As far as professional design is concerned, it is never haphazard. Even a great photo, which might seem to be the result of serendipity, can be cropped to highlight what a newspaper editor, for instance, wants to be highlighted.

## Texts and Image in Play

Is the visual supported by words? How do the words support the visual? What is gained by the words, and what would be lost if they weren't in accompaniment? What if we were to remove the words "Kennedy for President" from our bumper sticker? Would the sticker have the same rhetorical effect?

Moreover, when examining visual rhetoric, we should pinpoint how fonts emphasize language. How does font render things more or less important, for instance? Is the font playful, like Comic Sans MS, or formal, like Arial? Is the font blocked, large, or small? What difference does the font make to the overall meaning of the visual? Imagine that our JFK bumper sticker was composed with a swirly-curly font. It probably wouldn't send the desired message. Why not, do you think?

Alternately, think about the default font in Microsoft Word. What does it look like and why? What happens to the font if it is bolded or enlarged? Does it maintain a sense of continuity with the rest of the text? If you scroll through the different fonts available to you on your computer, which do you think are most appropriate for essay writing, website design, or the poster you may have to compose?

Lastly, even the use of white (or negative) space in relation to text deserves attention in terms of arrangement. The mismanagement of the relation of space to text and/or visual can result in visual overload! For instance, in an essay, double spacing is often advised because it is easier on the reader's eye. In other words, the blank spaces between the lines of text render reading more manageable than would dense bricks of text. Similarly, one might arrange text and image against the blank space to create a balanced arrangement of both.

While in some situations the arrangement of text and visual (or white space) might not seem rhetorical (in an essay, for example), one could make the argument that cluttering one's work is not especially rhetorically effective. After all, if you are trying to persuade your instructor to give you an 'A', making your essay effortlessly readable seems like a good place to start.

## Visual Figures

Faigley et al also ask us to consider the use of figures in a visual argument.[5] Figurative language is highly rhetorical, as are figurative images. For instance, visual metaphors abound in visual rhetoric, especially advertising.[6] A visual metaphor is at play when you encounter an image that signifies something other than its literal meaning. For instance, think of your favorite cereal: which cartoon character on the cereal box makes you salivate in anticipation of breakfast time? Next time, when you see a cartoon gnome, and your tummy starts to rumble in anticipation of chocolate-covered rice puffs, you'll know that the design folks down at ACME

5. Faigley, Lester, Diana George, Anna Palchik and Cynthia Selfe. Picturing Texts. London: Norton, 2004. Print. p. 32

6. Faigley, Lester, Diana George, Anna Palchik and Cynthia Selfe. Picturing Texts. London: Norton, 2004. Print. p. 32

cereals have done their job. Let's hope, however, that you don't want to chow down on the nearest short fat fellow in a red cap that comes your way.

Visual rhetoric also relies on synecdoche, a trope in which a part of something represents the whole. In England, for instance, a crown is used to represent the British monarchy. The image of JFK's face on the bumper sticker, then, might suggest his competency to head up the country.

# Color

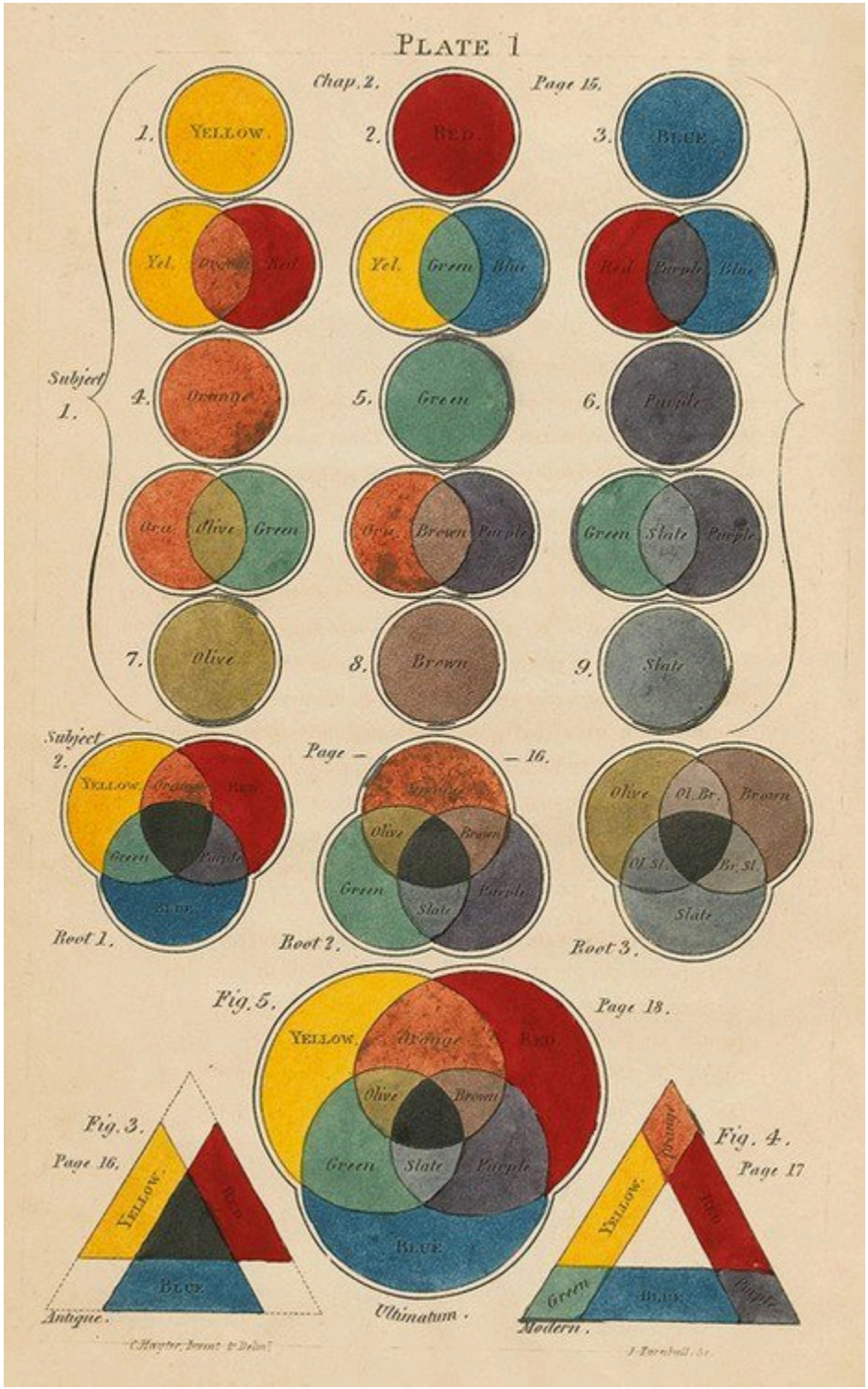


Figure 3: An image of what appears to be a poster with intersecting circles and triangles of various colors. The overlapping colors show how one color blends into another.

Colors are loaded with rhetorical meaning, both in terms of the values and emotions associated with them and their contextual background. Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen show how the use of color is as contextually bound as writing and images themselves. For instance, they write,

> "red is for danger, green for hope. In most parts of Europe, black is for mourning, though in northern parts of Portugal, and perhaps elsewhere in Europe as well, brides wear black gowns for their wedding day. In China, and other parts of East Asia, white is the color of mourning; in most of Europe, it is the color of purity, worn by the bride at her wedding. Contrasts like these shake our confidence in the security of meaning of color and color terms."[7]

So, what colors have seemingly unshakeable meaning in the US? How about red, white, and blue? Red and blue are two out of the three primary colors. They evoke a sense of sturdiness. After all, they are the base colors from which others are formed.

The combined colors of the American flag have come to signal patriotism and American values. But even American values, reflected in the appearance of the red, white, and blue, change in different contexts. To prompt further thought, Faigley shows us that the flag has been used to lend different meanings to a variety of magazine covers—from American Vogue (fashion) to Fortune magazine (money).[8] An image of the red, white, and blue on the cover lends a particularly American flavor to each magazine. And this can change the theme of each magazine. For instance, with what would you acquaint a picture of the American flag on the cover of Bon Appétit or Rolling Stone? Hot dogs and Bruce Springsteen perhaps?

What then does the red, white, and blue lend our bumper sticker? A distinctly patriotic flavor, for sure. Politically patriotic. And that can mean different things to different people. Thus, given that meanings change in a variety of contexts, we can see that the meaning of color can actually be more fluid than we might have originally thought.

Alternatively, if our JFK sticker colors were anything other than red, white, and blue, we might read it very differently; indeed, it might seem extremely odd to us.

## Modality

Kress and Van Leeuwen ask us to consider the modality in which an image is composed. Very simply, this means, how "real" does the image look? And what does this "realness" contribute to its persuasiveness? They write, "Visuals can represent people, places, and things as though they are real, as though they actually exist in

7. Kress, Gunther, and Theo Van Leeuwen: "Colour as a Semiotic Mode: Notes for a Grammar or Colour." Visual Communication 1.3 (2002): 343.

8. Faigley, Lester, Diana George, Anna Palchik and Cynthia Selfe. Picturing Texts. London: Norton, 2004. Print. p. 91

this way . . . or as though they do not."[9] Photographs are thus considered a more naturalistic representation of the world than clip art, for instance.

Figure 4: An image showing a photo of books vs. a clipart image of books.

We expect photographs to give us a representation of reality. Thus, when a photograph is manipulated to signify something fantastic, like a unicorn or a dinosaur, we marvel at its ability to construct something that looks "real." And when a visual shifts from one modality to another, it takes on additional meaning.

For instance, how might we read a cartoon version of JFK compared to the photograph that we see on our bumper sticker? Would the cartoon render the bumper sticker less formal? Less significant perhaps? Would a cartoon, given its associative meanings, somehow lessen the authenticity of the sticker's purpose? Or the authority of its subject?

## Perspective/Point of View

Imagine standing beneath a wind turbine. Intimidating? Impressive Overwhelming? Now envision that you are flying over it in an airplane. That very enormous thing seems rather insignificant now—a wind turbine in Toyland.

9. Kress, Gunther and Theo Van Leeuwen. Reading Images. London: Routledge, 1996. Print. p. 161

Figure 5: An image of many wind turbines in a field. There are some flowers in the foreground.

Now imagine the same proportions depicted in a photograph. One might get the same sense of power if the photo was taken from the bottom of the turbine, the lens pointed heavenward. Then again, an aerial photograph might offer us a different perspective. If the landscape presents us with an endless array of turbines stretching into the distance, we might get a sense that they are infinite—as infinite as wind energy.

Our Kennedy sticker offers neither of the above-described senses of perspective. Coming face to face with Kennedy, we neither feel overwhelmed nor superior. In fact, it's as if Kennedy's gaze is meeting ours at our own level. The artist is still using his powers of perspective; it's just that our gaze meets Kennedy's face to face. Consequently, Kennedy is portrayed as friendly and approachable.

## Social distance

Jewitt and Van Leeuwen include social distance in the components of design. Social distance accounts for the

"psychology of people's use of space."[10] In short, a visual artist can exploit social distance to create a certain psychological effect between a person in an image and the image's audience.

To illustrate, imagine a photograph of a handsome man and a pretty woman, head and shoulders only, smiling straight at you with warm eyes.

Figure 6: An image of a multi-racial couple smiling at the camera.

"Look at me," both seem to say, "buy this product; we invite you." Likewise, Kennedy smiles into the camera. "Vote for me," he encourages. "I'm a nice guy." Depicting head and shoulders only, we are given a sense of what Van Leeuwen and Carey Jewitt call "Close Personal Distance." The result is one of intimacy.

Alternatively, a visual of several people, or a crowd, would suggest far less intimacy.

10. Van Leeuwen, Theo and Carey Jewitt. The Handbook of Visual Analysis. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2003. Print. p. 29

Figure 7: Image of a large crowd, photographed from far away.

## Mood and Lighting

Have you ever put a flashlight under your chin and lit your face from underneath? Maybe we aren't all budding scary movie makers, but jump out of the closet on a dark night with all the lights turned off and the flashlight propped under your chin and you're sure to give at least the cat a fright. What you have experimented with is mood and lighting. In short, the lighting as described eerily captures facial features that aren't usually accentuated. It can be quite off-putting. Thus the position of the light has created a creepy face; it's created a visual mood. And, the mood combines with other elements of the visual to create an effect, which of course is rhetorical.

The next time you watch a movie, note how the filmmaker has played with lighting to create a mood. In the illustration below, we can see how Film Noir, for instance, capitalizes on techniques of mood and lighting to create an uncanny effect.

Figure 8: A black and white image. A silhouette of a woman in a dress appears in the foreground. A silhouette of a man standing in front of her appears smaller.

## Step 4. Connect the Text to the Purpose

Think about how the author's purpose connects to the visual text. Do they match up? Has the author's feelings or desire for creativity interfered with the message?

## Case Study: Tracking Memes in the Wild: Visual Rhetoric and Image Circulation in Environmental Communication[11]

### The Lorax

Since the publication of Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax* in 1971, the book's titular character has become an icon and has been remixed over time, across genres and been interpreted through numerous lenses. Many of Dr. Seuss's characters remain culturally relevant, but none more than the Lorax, who plays a prominent role in environmentalist subculture. The Lorax is an environmental icon for its ability to stand alone and be recognized as an environmental message. Since its initial publication, there have been more than 200 million copies sold,  and the illustration has circulated through numerous media, including protest signs, t-shirts, and

11. Case study adapted from: Jones, M., Beveridge, A., Garrison, J. R., Greene, A., & MacDonald, H. (2022). Tracking Memes in the Wild: Visual Rhetoric and Image Circulation in Environmental Communication. *Frontiers in Communication*, *7*. https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fcomm.2022.883278

a 2012 Universal Pictures animated movie.[12] The original illustration and meme renditions remain dominant in many subcultures today.

Written one year after the first Earth Day in 1970 and at the beginning of the environmental movement, *The Lorax* provided several takeaway messages for a budding environmentalism. Dr. Seuss painted the fictional world of Thneedville with words and images of fertile land with thriving ecosystems and smiling animals that starkly contrast the antagonists, the Once-ler's, desire for profit that eventually leaves the land dark and barren. Warnings of a post-apocalyptic world, messages on environmental degradation, a nod toward the dangers of capitalism, and an individual character with determination to save trees are interwoven throughout the book. Environmentalists identify with the Lorax's representation of being an environmental crusader. The Lorax is met with resistance and stubbornness from the Once-ler just as today's environmentalists are met with resistance from corporations and capitalism. *The Lorax*, representing today's activists fighting against corporations, is captured perfectly in the political image of the Lorax wearing a t-shirt of Exxon, Pepsico, and Doritos, common corporations that environmentalists identify as the antagonist.

Environmentalists have taken to the streets with force with the Lorax held high above their heads on protest signs. A sign in the shape of a single truffula tree **(Figure 9A[13])** points to the famous line from *The Lorax* and shows how a mere few words can make a potent statement. Similarly, a protester holds up a hand-drawn sign with an image of the Lorax with the word "UNLESS." The simplicity of this sign invites us to recall another famous line: "Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not" **(Figure 9B[14])**. Another protest sign says, "There is no Lorax 2 speak for the trees so... We Will" **(Figure 9C[15])**. These signs show how well-understood and widely known the Lorax is as he delivers a message with little context. Across all of the signs, whether hand-drawn or clipped from the animation, the Lorax's orange color stands strong. In one sign, the Lorax is compared to Donald Trump **(Figure9D[16])**. This sign refers to Donald Trump's orange coloration from his excessive use of self-tanner and suggests that we listen to the Lorax, another orange figure, instead of Trump. This political sign appeals to environmental politics while criticizing Trump for his use of cosmetics by indexing the two through *ethos*, ultimately claiming that a fictional character is more trustworthy than the president.

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12. Dailey, D. (2012). *Five Interpretations of the Lorax*. Available online at: https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-17224775.

13. Schuenemann, K. (n.d.). Lorax Trees. Available online at: https://www.pinterest.com/pin/100205160440752443/.

14. Daretoeatapeach (2017). The 35 Best Protest Signs From the San Francisco Science March. Available online at: https://web.archive.org/web/20170429214518/https://futureisfiction.com/35-best-protest-signs-san-francisco-science-march/.

15. Salinas, I. (2019). Pop Culture for Change. Available online at: https://sundial.csun.edu/154553/arts-entertainment/pop-culture-for-change/

16. Funny Video Memes, Funny Memes, Good Jokes (n.d.). Available online at: https://www.pinterest.fr/pin/858991328908257165/

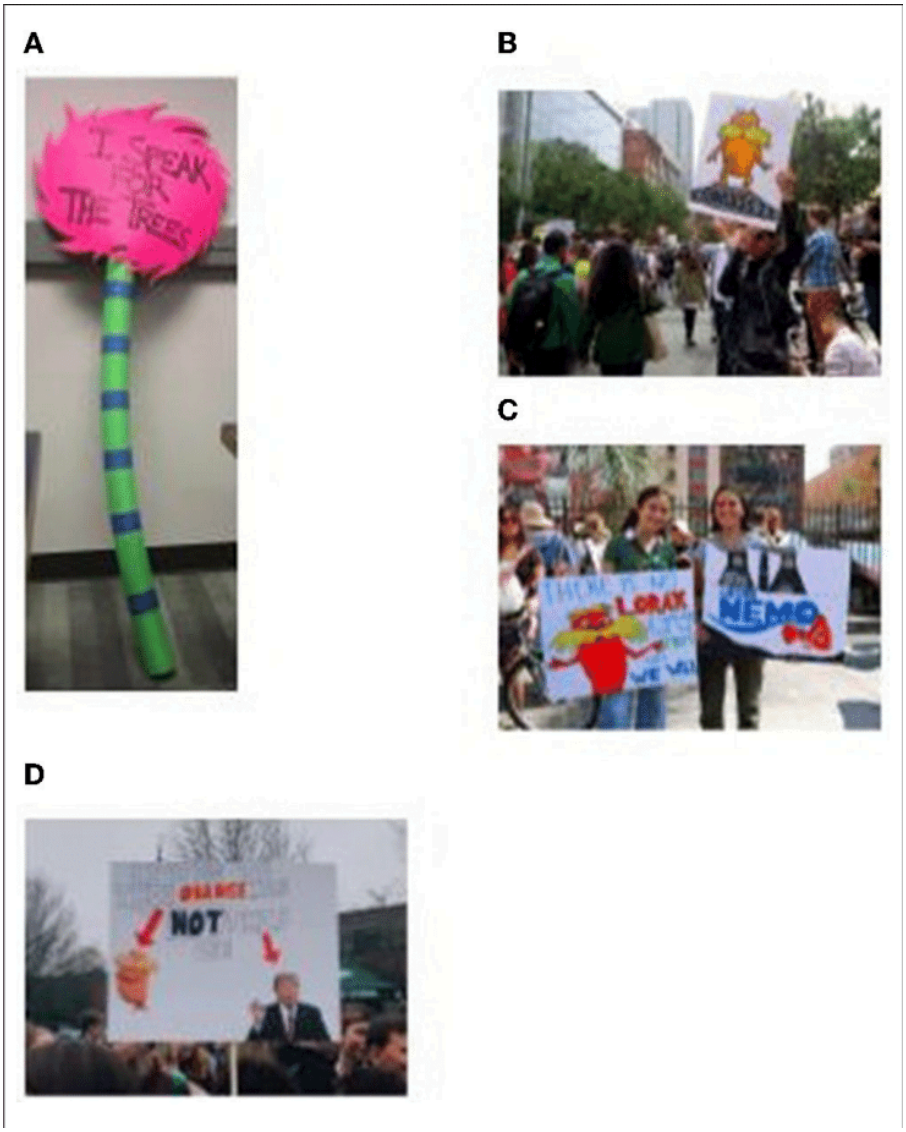


Figure 9: The Lorax protests and posters. (A) Truffula Tree Sign. (B) FUnless sign. (C) Lorax and Nemo Poster. (D) Trump Poster.

Images and quotes from *The Lorax* have been transformed into t-shirts) **(Figure 10A**[17]**)**, buttons **(Figure 10B**[18]**)**, and even tattoos. These paraphernalia and permanent body markings show that Lorax is here to be heard on many more occasions than just at a rally. Wearing the Lorax also shows the significance of the character and its message to the environmentalists as they are willing to let it be portrayed on their physical

17. I am the Lorax I speak for the trees T shirt (2021). https://newgraphictees.com/product/i-am-the-lorax-i-speak-for-the-trees-t-shirt/

18. Hake's Dr. Seuss designed rare "I SPEAK FOR THE TREES" Ecology-themed button featuring The Lorax. (2013). https://www.hakes.com/Auction/ItemDetail/79599/DR-SEUSS-DESIGNED-RARE-I-SPEAK-FOR-THE-TREES-ECOLOGY-THEMED-BUTTON-FEATURING-THE-LORAX

identity as clothing temporarily or as a tattoo forever. The performative nature of the Lorax does not seem to have bounds.

Figure 10. The Lorax paraphernalia. (A) T-shirt design with the Lorax. (B) I speak for the trees button.

## Results

The original illustration **(Figure 11A**[19]**)** was published in the book. The 2012 animation **(Figure 11B**[20]**)** and the Lorax television show **(Figures 11C**[21] **and 11D**[22]**)** characters have been modified with advanced illustration technology. Across all versions, there is room for interpretation of what the Lorax could be saying,

19. Kimmel, E. (2019). 10 Lessons in Quotes From the Lorax (Dr. Seuss's Classic). Available online at: https://greenglobaltravel.com/lessons-quotes-from-the-lorax/

20. Morye, K. (2020). "I am the Lorax. I Speak for the Trees!" – Amidst the Quarantine, There Is Hope for Climate Action. Available online at: https://medium.com/@kimayamorye/i-am-the-lorax-i-speak-for-the-trees-amidst-the-quarantine-there-is-hope-for-climate-action-c9f0d93bda8a

21. Misli. (n.d.). https://www.pinterest.com/pin/428053139554374889/

22. I am the Lorax and I Speak for the trees! (n.d.). https://imgur.com/gallery/9pvVx1w

and it is often remixed with words placed in the background behind him to connect his presence with a thought or speech bubble. The original illustration appears remixed more frequently in memes, signs, and other paraphernalia than the 2012 animation and the television character **(Figure 11F[23])**.

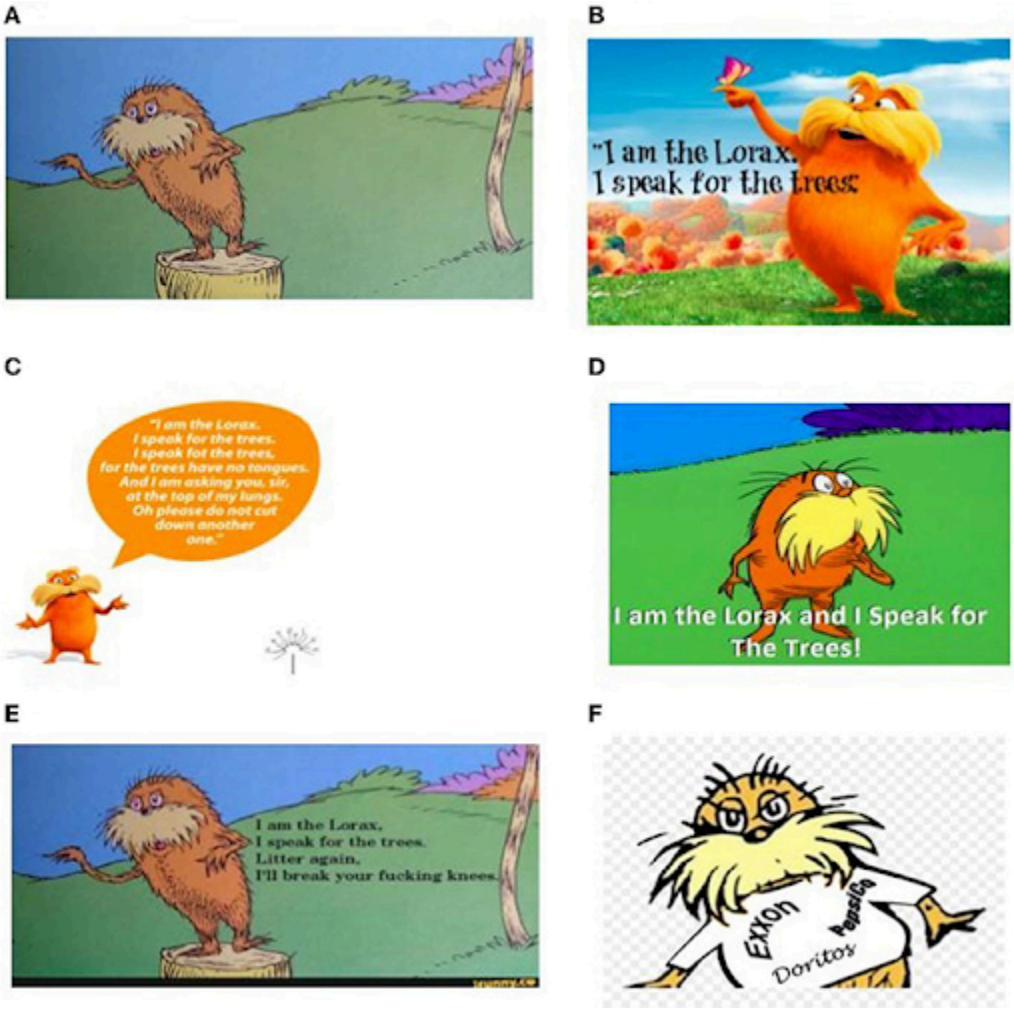


Figure 11. Lorax characters. (A) Original illustration. (B) 2012 animation. (C) Animation with quote. (D) TV Cartoon Lorax. (E) Original illustration with text. (F) Lorax wearing t-shirt.

Some popular memes took advantage of overlaying text on the screen to remix what the Lorax was saying with a more vulgar rendition. One of the most popular memes uses the same rhyme structure that Dr. Seuss is famous for and changes the second line from "for the trees have no tongues. And I am asking you, sir, at the top of my lungs. Oh please do not cut down another one." to "Litter again, I'll break your fucking knees"

23. The Lorax YouTube Clip Art – Lorax Dr Seuss Characters – Png Download (n.d.). https://www.pinclipart.com/pindetail/ibTTbih_the-lorax-youtube-clip-art-lorax-dr-seuss/

**(Figure 11E**[24]**)**. Political caricature renditions of the Lorax have been made that exaggerate the Lorax beyond his original environmental iconography. The remixes that make the Lorax political also enable the Lorax to be a very popular sign among protestors. From the quotes "I speak for the trees" and "Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not." to the truffula tree, to a simple Lorax character, to a comparison of the Lorax to Donald Trump **(Figure 9D)**, there are a plethora of memes of the Lorax being used to be a call to action. The Lorax has also been used for a variety of paraphernalia, including t-shirts **(Figure 10A)**, buttons **(Figure 10B)**, and tattoos. Most of this paraphernalia includes a near approximation of the original Lorax and his sayings rather than a remixed or meme version.

Beyond these popular parodies, other memes include a simple image of the Lorax that is identifiable by his orange color and yellow mustache **(Figure 12A**[25]**)**. These memes employ the same strategy of adding text next to the character to imply what the Lorax is saying. Another remixed meme of the Lorax shows the Lorax giving a middle finger **(Figure 12B**[26]**)**. Another popular meme was first developed by substituting text that says, "and they say, well, I do not know it was in Vietnamese" **(Figure 12C**[27]**)**. This meme has since been modified to still resemble the Lorax at the most basic level with the orange body and yellow mustache but adding military apparel and guns **(Figure 12D**[28]**)**. Among the most popular uses of the Lorax, the image associated with the phrase "I speak for the trees" brings up over 200,000 Google search results. The Google Trend search for "I speak for the trees," "Lorax," and "truffula" spiked in March of 2012, upon the release of the film, and gained traction steadily from 2015, peaking in the spring of each year around Earth Day.

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24. Picture memes 78vlLnMq6 – iFunny (n.d.). https://www.pinterest.co.kr/pin/627055948099310315/?amp_client_id=CLIENT_ID(_)&mweb_unauth_id=&from_amp_pin_page=true

25. I am the Lorax I speak for the trees – I am the Lorax, I., and speak for the trees (2020). https://knowyourmeme.com/photos/1038793-i-am-the-lorax-i-speak-for-the-trees

26. PNGEgg. "YouTube Once-Ler Aunt Grizelda Animation Character, Dr Seuss, Child, Carnivoran Png" Accessed April 1, 2024. https://www.pngegg.com/en/png-yiicp.

27. I am the Lorax, I speak for the trees, and they say, Well I don't know it was in Vietnamese (n.d.). https://www.pngegg.com/en/png-yiicp

28. The trees!: Really funny memes, history jokes, stupid funny memes. (n.d.). https://www.pinterest.com/pin/819936675887264406/

Figure 12: Other memes. (A) Simplified Meme. (B) Middle Finger Meme. (C) Vietnam book meme. (D) Vietnamese military meme.

# Discussion

The original illustration of the Lorax tends to be the most commonly used in circulation and across remixes, followed by the 2012 animation image. However, since 2012, there have been a growing number of renditions of the animated character over the original. A newer iteration of the Lorax, the most simplified yet, consists of a simple-shaped, orange body and minimal features. It is used most commonly in satirical memes **(Figure 12A)**. This is a common meme strategy-amplify how iconic a character is by stripping it to its most basic features.

## Tone Variations

This remix became a popular meme on Pinterest and Reddit with the added text "Litter again, I'll break your fucking knees" **(Figure 11E)**. This meme adds a vulgar, threatening rhyme to employ the same call to action. As environmentalists have felt unheard since the start of the movement, this meme captures their anger and the threatening tone they wish was effective in enacting political change. Contrary to the message-driven tone in the original book, this meme targets individual acts of littering instead of large corporations.

Another meme that is only suitable for adults remixed the Lorax to give the middle finger **(Figure 12B).** This "f-you" can be inferred as what the trees may be saying to the Once-ler for cutting them down and can be used today to relay the same message to corporations. A grouping of memes has cut down the Lorax character to a simple body that is only recognizable because it has been crafted with the same orange color and yellow mustache **(Figure 12A)**. These parodies of the Lorax take on a more satirical and vulgar tone as they poke fun at the original saying, "I speak for the trees," by adding, "The trees say shut the fuck up." Unlike the middle finger meme, this meme claims that the trees do not care about being spoken for and wish that the Lorax would quiet himself.

In a publication for *Nature*, Emma Marris described the Lorax character as a "parody of a misanthropic ecologist," meaning that his unsocial and reclusive nature was what led him to be unsuccessful.[29] Similarly, the Lorax matches the criticisms of being an alarmist and anti-progress. The Once-ler describes the Lorax as "shortish and oldish and sharpish and bossy."[30] Since environmentalists identify themselves with the Lorax, they can be easily mocked with these same criticisms. Many environmentalists are also criticized for being "woo-woo" or "hippies." The Lorax comes in and out of a tree and is illustrated and animated with lightning bolts around him as if he has some sort of spiritual authority.[31] This plays into commonplace critiques of environmentalism as being rooted in a false spirituality.

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29. Marris, E. (2011). In retrospect: the lorax. Nature 476, 148–149. doi: 10.1038/476148a

30. GradeSaver (2021). The Lorax Imagery. Available online at: https://www.gradesaver.com/the-lorax/study-guide/imagery

31. *ibid*

## A Dark Turn

Other memes point to unexpected places like war history. The memes that remix the Lorax to be saying, "Well I don't know it was in Vietnamese" and "the trees say something in Vietnamese" are references to the Vietnam War, when American soldiers often claimed they could hear the jungle speak Vietnamese as the soldiers were about to attack **(see Figures 12C,D)**.[32] Visually, this reference to the Vietnam War has been made in the original illustration with the addition of text and the crudely drawn figure of the Lorax with the addition of a helmet and machine gun. These memes merge the two ideas of what the Lorax hears from the trees and how Vietnamese soldiers would hide in the trees before an ambush during the war. The analysis of this meme has gone beyond a war history meme and into ecofascism. Ecofascism is a political ideology where the community advocates to decrease the world's population to avoid environmental disasters.[33] Whether or not this was the illustrator's original intention, this meme is successful within the community of ecofascists because it reflects the success of the Vietnamese soldiers by killing Americans and dwindling the population. This meme now brings the Lorax into a dark side of environmentalism subcultures.

Dr. Seuss is facing recent criticisms of racist and insensitive imagery that portrays people in hurtful ways as his work has been under a critical lens for the way he portrays Blacks, Asians, and other minoritized/marginalized communities. With these growing critiques of Dr. Seuss's work, books are being pulled from the shelves of schools and removed from murals.[34] This removal and cancellation of Dr. Seuss's work could lead to an unknown future of the Lorax as an environmental icon. Since the meme exists within the world of environmentalists who often overlap with those of social justice communities, it is unclear if the Lorax visual and memes will still succeed. From our analysis of the Lorax through iconographic tracking thus far, we understand how a children's book character can become so prevalent in popular culture today and this same method will enable us to investigate how the Lorax will circulate in the future.

**Key Takeaways**

32. u/paradoX1995. (2019). What Is Up With Vietnamese Speaking Trees? Available online at: https://www.reddit.com/r/OutOfTheLoop/comments/a9dwua/what_is_up_with_vietnamese_speaking_trees/

33. Krzeminski, J. (2019). Whose Utopia? American ECOFASCISM Since the 1880s. Available online at: https://edgeeffects.net/ecofascism/

34. Pratt, M. (2021). 6 Dr. Seuss Books Won't Be Published for Racist Images. Available online at: https://apnews.com/article/dr-seuss-books-racist-images-d8ed18335c03319d72f443594c174513

- It's important to break down visuals into component parts, similar to analyzing written language, to understand how images and texts convey messages, using techniques like arrangement, color, modality, and perspective.
- Recognizing the conventions and limitations of different genres, such as bumper stickers, and understanding the historical and social context of visuals, are essential for interpreting their meaning and rhetorical content.
- There is an intricate relationship between text and image in visual rhetoric, detailing how font, arrangement, social distance, mood, and lighting work together with visuals to create a cohesive and persuasive message and how these elements can be manipulated to achieve specific effects.

**Exercises**

1. How do the elements of design, such as color, arrangement, and perspective, influence the interpretation of a visual message? Provide examples from current media to support your analysis.
2. Select a film trailer and analyze it using the concepts of visual rhetoric discussed in the text. Focus on aspects like arrangement, text and image interplay, modality, and social distance. Write a detailed analysis of how these elements work together to be persuasive.
3. Consider the concept of "modality," as discussed in the text, where the "realness" of an image affects its persuasiveness. How might this concept apply to modern digital media, where images can be easily manipulated? Reflect on the ethical implications of using highly manipulated images in advertising or political campaigns.

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PART VII

# CHAPTER 7: THE PRINTING PRESS

## A Lost Generation of Readers?

In 2004, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) released a report that it said represented "a national crisis." What was under such dire peril that it threatened to "impoverish both cultural and civic life," as NEA Chairman Dana Gioia put it? Reading—or, more aptly put, not reading. According to the report, Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America, less than half the population engaged in any literary reading in 2002, a record low since the survey's beginnings in 1982 (National Endowment for the Arts, 2004).

The report, which asked respondents whether they had read any literary fiction (novels, short stories, plays, or poetry) over the past year showed especially stark numbers among the youngest adults. Those aged 18–24 saw a rate of decline 55 percent greater than the total adult population. (Books read for school or work weren't counted in the survey, which was examining Americans' leisure reading habits.) According to the NEA, the overall 10 percent drop in literary readers represented a loss of 20 million potential readers, most of them young. In 1982, young adults (people aged 18–34) were most likely to engage in literary reading; by 2002, they were the least likely group. Based on this, the report asks, "Are we losing a generation of readers?"[1]

Despite these facts, the publishing industry's releasing more books than ever before. In 2003, just 1 year after the NEA issued its gloomy warning about the state of reading, 175,000 new titles were published in the United States—a 19 percent jump from the year before.[2] Since the early part of the 21st century, the U.S. publishing industry has had an average annual monetary growth rate of 1.1 percent; however, net sales have dropped from $26 billion to $23 billion in the past year.[3] Meanwhile, as the NEA report notes, 24 percent of Americans' recreational spending went to electronics, while books accounted for only 5.6 percent in 2002. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the households that watched television more read less. The report warned that "at the current rate of loss, literary reading as a leisure activity will virtually disappear in half a century."[4]

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1. National Endowment for the Arts, Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America (New York: 2004).

2. Bowker. "U.S. Book Production Soars to 175,000 New Titles in 2003; Trade Up, University Presses Down," news release, May 27, 2004, https://web.archive.org/web/20110827003937/http://www.bowker.com:80/press/bowker/2004_0527_bowker.htm.

3. Association of American Publishers, "Industry Statistics 2009: AAP Reports Book Sales Estimated at $23.9 Billion in 2009," https://web.archive.org/web/20101221111622/http://publishers.org/main/IndustryStats/indStats_02.htm.

4. National Endowment for the Arts, Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America (New York: 2004).

As a response to the alarming statistics, in 2006 the NEA launched its Big Read program, essentially a city-wide book club in which community members are encouraged to read the same book at the same time. The NEA provided publicity, funding for kickoff parties, and readers' guides. The residents of Tampa, Florida, read The Joy Luck Club and were accorded a visit by author Amy Tan, and the residents of Washington, DC, chose Ernest J. Gaines's A Lesson Before Dying with hopes that it would spur conversations about race, justice, and violence. The Big Read's DC program director said that he hoped the book got young people talking, noting that the book raises all sorts of relevant questions, such as "Do we offer second chances for people after making mistakes, especially youth in DC? What about youth in the justice system? So many people who have been through the juvenile justice system will testify a book set them free," he claimed.[5]

When the NEA's 2008 numbers were released, many people were again surprised. The statistics showed that the decline in reading had reversed, the first such increase in 26 years. Once again, the change was most significant among young adults, who had a 21 percent increase from 2002 (Rich, 2009). The NEA credited the "millions of parents, teachers, librarians, and civic leaders [who] took action... [to ensure that] reading became a higher priority in families, schools, and communities."[6] Another factor may have been in play, however; the 2008 study was the first to include online reading. To understand what books mean in the present world of e-readers and digital libraries, it helps to examine how they functioned in the past and to consider how they might change in the future.

**Fitchburg State Connection**

The field of graphic design has emerged in the wake of the invention of the printing press. Fitchburg State offers a Communications Media concentration in graphic design:

Graphic design is a field full of exciting job opportunities. Graphic designers create logos, websites, animations, visual identities, books, magazines, exhibitions, fonts, movie titles, apps, and product packaging.

The Graphic Design concentration offers a hands-on approach to teaching design, giving students a diverse, well-rounded general education necessary to understand the ever-changing field. The concentration fosters critical and creative thinking and embraces a process-oriented approach to learning. Faculty work closely with students, guiding them

5. Brown, DeNeen. "Ernest J. Gaines's 'Lesson' Prompts Teens to Grapple With Stark Realities," Washington Post, May 10, 2010, Arts section.

6. Rich, Mokoto "Fiction Reading Increases for Adults," New York Times, January 11, 2009, Arts section.

toward academic excellence in the concentration and in the university at-large. The concentration not only focuses on preparing students to enter the field of design or for graduate school, but strives to help students continually develop their design skills over their lifetime.[7]

7. https://www.fitchburgstate.edu/academics/programs/graphic-design-concentration-communications-media-bs

# 7.1 HISTORY OF BOOKS

**Learning Objectives**

- Identify the material and cultural origins of the book in ancient and medieval times.
- Indicate the influence of mechanical movable type on modern society.
- Explain the evolution of contemporary copyright law and of the contemporary publishing industry.

## Ancient Books

Most historians trace the origins of the book back to the ancient Egyptians, whose papyrus scrolls looked very different from the books we're accustomed to today. From the time they first developed a written script, around 3000 BCE, Egyptians wrote on many different surfaces, including metal, leather, clay, stone, and bone. Most prominent, though, was the practice of using reed pens to write on papyrus scrolls. In many ways, papyrus was an ideal material for the Egyptians. It was made using the tall reeds that grew plentifully in the Nile Valley. Individual sheets of papyrus were glued or sewn together to make scrolls. A standard scroll was around 30 feet long and 7 to 10 inches wide, while the longest Egyptian scroll ever found stretched over 133 feet, making it almost as long as the Statue of Liberty when it was rolled all the way out.[1]

By the 6th century BCE, papyrus was the most common writing surface throughout the Mediterranean and was used by the Greeks and Romans. Because papyrus grew in Egypt, the Egyptians had a virtual monopoly over the papyrus trade. Many ancient civilizations housed their scrolls in large libraries, which acted as both repositories of knowledge and displays of political and economic power. The Royal Library of Alexandria boasted around half a million scrolls in its collection; some scholars claim that this was between 30 and 70

1. Harry Ransom Center, "The Gutenberg Bible at the Ransom Center," University of Texas at Austin, https://web.archive.org/web/20181206135355/http://www.hrc.utexas.edu:80/educator/modules/gutenberg/books/early/.

percent of all books in existence at the time.[2] But other powerful entities in the ancient world were growing tired of the Egyptians' monopoly over the papyrus trade.

Parchment was made from treated animal skins that were scraped thin to create a flexible, even surface. Parchment had several advantages over papyrus: It was more durable, both sides could be written on, and its trade wasn't monopolized by the Egyptians. Its spread coincided with another crucial development in the history of the book. Between the 2nd and 4th centuries, the Romans began sewing folded sheets of papyrus or parchment together, and binding them between wooden covers. This form, called the codex, has essentially the same structure as today's books. The codex was much more user-friendly than was the papyrus scroll: more portable, easier to store and handle, and less expensive to produce. It also allowed readers to quickly flip between sections. While reading a scroll was a two-handed activity, a codex could be propped open in front of a reader, allowing for note taking. Traditions changed slowly in the ancient world, however, and the scroll remained the dominant form for secular works for several centuries. The codex was the preferred form for early Christian texts, and the spread of Christianity eventually brought about the dominance of the codex; by the 6th century CE, it had almost entirely replaced the scroll.

2. Kelly, Kevin. "Scan This Book!" New York Times Magazine, May 14, 2006.

Figure 1: The earliest known printed books were created using woodblock printing.

The next major innovation in the history of books, the use of block printing on paper, began in Tang Dynasty China around 700 CE, though it wouldn't arrive in Europe for nearly 800 years. The first known examples of text printed on paper are tiny, 2.5-inch-wide scrolls of Buddhist prayers commissioned by Japan's Empress Shōtoku in 764 CE. The earliest example of a dated, printed book is a Buddhist text called the Diamond Sutra (868 CE). Woodblock printing was a meticulous process that involved carving an entire page of text onto a wooden block, then inking and pressing the block to print a page.

In medieval Europe, however, scribes were still laboriously copying texts by hand. Book culture in the Middle Ages was dominated by monasteries, which became centers of intellectual life. The largest monasteries had rooms called **scriptoria** where monks copied, decorated, and preserved both religious and secular volumes.

Many of the classical texts we have today owe their preservation to diligent medieval monks, who thought of scholarship, even the study of secular and pre–Christian writers, as a way to become closer to God.

The hand-copied books produced in the Middle Ages were much more ornate than the mass-produced books of today. These were **illuminated manuscripts** that included painted embellishments that were added on to the handwritten books. The word illuminate comes from the Latin illuminare, which means to light up, and some medieval books were literally made to shine through applications of gold or silver decorations. Other ornate additions included illustrations, decorative capital letters, and intricately drawn borders. The degree of embellishment depended on the book's intended use and the wealth of its owner. Medieval manuscripts were so highly valued that some scribes placed so-called book curses at the front of their manuscripts, warning that anyone who stole or defaced the copy would be cursed. Written in a copy of the Vulgate Bible, for example, is this warning: "Whoever steals this book let him die the death; let be him be frizzled in a pan; may the falling sickness rage within him; may he be broken on the wheel and be hanged."[3]

Though illuminated books were highly prized, they were also expensive and labor-intensive to create. By the end of the Middle Ages, the papal library in Avignon, France, held only a few thousand manuscripts compared to the nearly half-million texts found at the Library of Alexandria in ancient times.[4] Bookmaking in the Western world became somewhat less expensive when paper emerged as the primary writing surface. Making paper from rags and other fibers, a technique that originated in 2nd-century China, reached the Islamic world in the 8th century and led to a flowering of book culture there. By the 12th century, Marrakesh, in modern-day Morocco, was said to have had a street lined with a hundred booksellers. But it wasn't until the 14th century that paper manufacturing began in earnest in Europe.

## Gutenberg's Industry-Changing Invention

Papermaking coincided with another crucial step forward in the history of books: Johannes Gutenberg's invention of **mechanical movable type** in 1448. Though the simple act of crafting small, movable letters may seem mundane in the contemporary world of digital devices and microchips, it is difficult to overstate the importance of Gutenberg's invention and the effect it had on the world. The Biography Channel and A&E both named Gutenberg as the single most influential person of the second millennium, ahead of Shakespeare, Galileo, and Columbus, and Time magazine cited movable type as the single most important invention of the past 1,000 years. Through his invention, Gutenberg indisputably changed the world.

Much of Gutenberg's life is shrouded in mystery. It is known that he was a German goldsmith and book

3. Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries, "Book Curses," https://web.archive.org/web/20111117162340/https://www.library.vcu.edu/preservation/curse.html.

4. Fischer, Steven Roger A History of Reading (New York: Reaktion Books, 2004).

printer and that he spent the 1440s collecting investors for a mysterious project. That invention turned out to be the printing press, which combined existing technologies—such as the screw press, which was already used for papermaking—with his own innovation—individual metal letters and punctuation marks that could be independently rearranged—to revolutionize how books were made. Though Gutenberg probably printed other, earlier materials, it was the Bible he printed in 1455 that brought him renown. In his small print shop in his hometown of Mainz, Germany, Gutenberg used his movable type press to print 180 copies of the Bible, 135 on paper and 45 on vellum.[5] This book, commonly called the Gutenberg Bible, ushered in Europe's so-called **Gutenberg Revolution** and paved the way for the commercial mass printing of books. In 1978, the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center of the University of Texas at Austin purchased a complete copy of the Gutenberg Bible for $2.4 million.

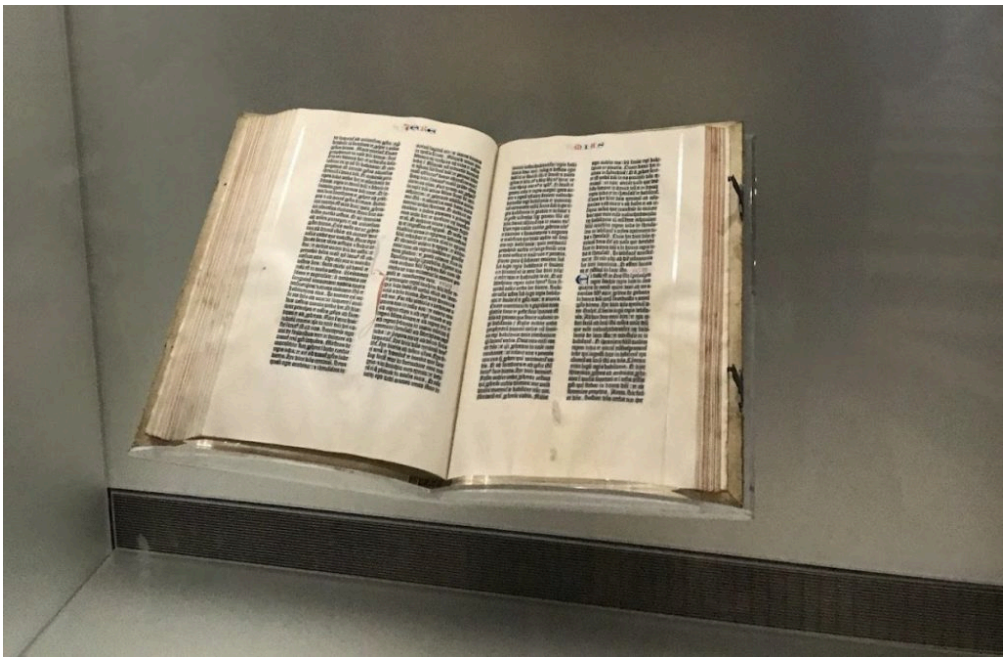

Figure 2: A photo of the Gutenberg Bible on display at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

Over the next few centuries, the printing press changed nearly everything about how books were made, distributed, and read. Printing books was a vastly swifter system than handwriting books was, and paper was much less expensive to produce than parchment. Before the printing press, books were generally commissioned and then copied. The printing press meant that multiple identical editions of the same book could be printed in a relatively short time, while it probably would've taken a scribe at least a year to handwrite the Bible. As

5. Harry Ransom Center, "The Gutenberg Bible at the Ransom Center," University of Texas at Austin, https://web.archive.org/web/20181206135355/http://www.hrc.utexas.edu:80/educator/modules/gutenberg/books/early/.

Gutenberg's invention led to more and more printing shops springing up all over Europe, the very idea of what a book looked like began to change. In medieval times, books were the valuable, rare product of hundreds (if not thousands) of hours of work, and no two were the same.

Figure 3: A photo of an original leaf from the 1611 King James Bible, taken at Museum of Printing in Haverhill, MA.

After Gutenberg, books could be standardized, plentiful, and relatively cheap to produce and disseminate. Early printed books were made to look like illuminated manuscripts, complete with hand-drawn decorations. However, printers soon realized the economic potential of producing multiple identical copies of one text, and book printing soon became a speculative business, with printers trying to guess how many copies a particular book could sell. By the end of the 15th century, 50 years after Gutenberg's invention of movable type, printing shops had sprung up throughout Europe, with an estimated 300 in Germany alone. Gutenberg's invention was a resounding success, and the printing and selling of books boomed. The Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center estimates that before the invention of the printing press, the total number of books in all of Europe was

around 30,000. By 1500 CE, the book was thriving as an industrial object, and the number of books in Europe had grown to as many as 10 to 12 million.[6]

Video demonstrating the process of creating a book in the 1940s.

## Effects of the Mass Production of Books

The post–Gutenberg world was revolutionized by the advent of the printed book. One thing that did not substantially change, however, was the form of the book itself. Despite minor tweaks and alterations, the ancient form of the codex remained relatively intact. What did rapidly evolve was the way books were produced and distributed and the way information circulated through the world.

6. Jones, Bruce. "Manuscripts, Books, and Maps: The Printing Press and a Changing World," September 5, 2000, https://web.archive.org/web/20121014064726/http://communication.ucsd.edu:80/bjones/books/booktext.html.

Figure 4: A photo of a Columbian Press at the Museum of Printing in Haverhill, MA. Invented by George Clymer in 1813, it's adorned with American symbols. Ironically, its American bald eagle design soared in popularity in Britain just years after the War of 1812.

Simply put, the mechanical reproduction of books meant that there were more books available at a lower cost, and the growth of international trade allowed these books to have a wider reach. The desire for knowledge among the growing middle class and the new availability of classical texts from ancient Greece and Rome helped fuel the Renaissance, a period of celebration of the individual and a turn toward humanism. For the first time, texts could be widely dispersed, allowing political, intellectual, religious, and cultural ideas to spread widely. Also, for the first time, many people could read the same books and be exposed to the same ideas at the same time, giving rise to mass media and mass culture. Science was revolutionized as well. For example, standardized, widely dispersed texts meant that scientists in Italy were exposed to the theories and discoveries of scientists in England. Because of improved communication, technological and intellectual ideas spread more

quickly, enabling scientists from disparate areas to more easily build on the breakthroughs and successes of others.

As the Renaissance progressed, the size of the middle class grew, as did literacy rates. Rather than a few hundred precious volumes housed in monastery or university libraries, books were available to people outside monastic or university settings, which meant that more books were available to women. In effect, the mass production of books helped knowledge become democratized. However, this spread of information didn't proceed without resistance. Thanks in part to the spread of dissenting ideas, the Roman Catholic Church, the dominant institution of medieval Europe, found its control slipping. In 1487, only a few decades after Gutenberg first printed his Bible, Pope Innocent VIII insisted that all books be prescreened by church authorities before they were allowed to be printed.[7] One book the church banned was the Bible printed in any language other than Latin—a language that few people outside of clerical or scholarly circles understood. In 1517, Martin Luther instigated the Protestant Reformation. He challenged the church's authority by insisting that people had the right to read the Bible in their own language. The church rightly feared the spread of vernacular Bibles; the more people who had access to the text, the less control the church was able to exert over how it was interpreted. Since the church's interpretation of the Bible dictated in no small part the way many people lived their lives, the church's sway over the hearts and minds of the faithful was severely undermined by accessible printed Bibles and the wave of Protestantism they encouraged. The Catholic Church's attempt to control the printing industry proved impossible to maintain, and over the next few centuries, the church would see its power decline significantly as it was no longer the sole keeper of religious knowledge as it had been throughout the Middle Ages.

The Bible wasn't the only text that was beginning to be published in languages other than Latin. The Renaissance saw a growing interest in texts published in the **vernacular**, the speech of the "common people." As books became more available to the middle class, people wanted to read books written in their native tongue. Early well-known works in the vernacular included Dante's Divine Comedy (first printed in Italian in 1472) and Chaucer's Canterbury Tales (published in Middle English in the 15th century). Genres with popular appeal, such as plays and poetry, became increasingly widespread. In the 16th and 17th centuries, inexpensive **chapbooks** (the name derives, appropriately enough, from cheap books) became popular. Chapbooks were small and cheaply printed, and they often included popular ballads, humorous stories, or religious tracts. The proliferation of chapbooks showed just how much the Gutenberg Revolution had transformed the written word. In just a few hundred years, many people had access to reading material, and books would no longer be considered sacred objects.

Because of the high value placed on human knowledge during the Renaissance, libraries flourished during this time period. As they had been in ancient Egypt, libraries were once again a way of displaying national power and wealth. The German State Library in Berlin was founded in 1661, and other European centers soon

7. Green, Jonathan and Nicholas J. Karolides, The Encyclopedia of Censorship (Facts on File, 2005), 111.

followed, such as the National Library of Spain in Madrid in 1711 and the British Library (the world's largest) in London in 1759. Libraries were also associated with universities, clubs, and museums; however, these were often only for subscribers. The United Kingdom's Public Libraries Act of 1850 fostered the development of free, public lending libraries. After the American Civil War, public libraries flourished in the newly reunified United States, helped by fundraising and lobbying by women's clubs. Philanthropist Andrew Carnegie helped bring the Renaissance ideals of artistic patronage and democratized knowledge into the 20th century when he helped found more than 1,700 public libraries between 1881 and 1919.[8]

## History of Document Control

While Gutenberg's invention of the printing press ushered in an age of democratized knowledge and incipient mass culture, it also transformed the act of authorship, making writing a potentially profitable enterprise. Before the mass production of books, authorship had few financial rewards (unless a generous patron got involved). As a consequence, pre-Renaissance texts were often collaborative, and many books didn't even list an author. The earliest concept of **copyright**, from the time of the scriptoria, was who had the right to copy a book by hand. The printed book, however, was a speculative commercial enterprise, in that large numbers of identical copies could be sold. The explosive growth of the European printing industry meant that authors could potentially profit from the books they made and then wrote if their legal rights were recognized. In contemporary terms, copyright allows a person the right to exclude others from copying, distributing, and selling a work. This is a right usually given to the creator, although that right can be sold or otherwise transferred. Works not covered by copyright or for which the copyright has expired are part of the **public domain**, which means that they are essentially public property and can be used freely by anyone without permission or royalty payments.

The origins of contemporary copyright law are usually traced back to the Statute of Queen Anne. This law, enacted in England in 1710, was the first to recognize the legal rights of authors, though in an incomplete manner. It granted a book's publisher 14 years of exclusive rights and legal protection, renewable for another 14-year term if the author was still living. Anyone who infringed on a copyrighted work paid a fine, half of which went to the author and half to the government. Early copyright was intended to limit monopoly and censorship, to provide a sense of stability to authors, and to promote learning by ensuring that documents would be widely accessible.

The United States established its first copyright law not long after the Declaration of Independence. The U.S. Constitution granted Congress the power "to promote the progress of science and useful arts, by securing for limited times to authors and inventors the exclusive right to their respective writings and discoveries" in

8. Krasner-Khait, Barbara. "Survivor: The History of the Library," History Magazine, October/November 2001.

Article I, Section 8, Clause 8. The first federal copyright law, the Copyright Law of 1790, was modeled on the Statute of Queen Anne and it similarly granted exclusive rights for 14 years, renewable for 14 more if the author was living at the end of the first term.

The "limited times" mentioned in the Constitution have steadily lengthened since the 18th century. The Copyright Act of 1909 allowed for an initial 28-year term of copyright, which was renewable for one additional 28-year term. The Copyright Act of 1976, which preempted the 1909 act, extended copyright protection to "a term consisting of the life of the author and 50 years after the author's death," was substantially longer than the original law's potential 56-year term. In 1998, copyright was extended even further, to 70 years after the author's death. The 1998 law, called the Copyright Term Extension Act, also added a 20-year extension to all currently copyrighted works. This automatic extension meant that no new works would enter the public domain until 2019 at the earliest. Critics of the Copyright Term Extension Act called it the "Mickey Mouse Protection Act" because the Walt Disney Company lobbied for the law.[9] Because of the 20-year copyright extension, Mickey Mouse and other Disney characters remained out of the public domain, which meant that they were still the exclusive property of Disney.

The 1976 law also codified the terms of **fair use** for the first time. Fair-use law specifies the ways in which a work (or parts of a work) under copyright could legally be used by someone other than the copyright holder for "purposes such as criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching (including multiple copies for classroom use), scholarship, or research, is not an infringement of copyright." That is, a book review quoting snippets of a book or a researcher citing someone else's work is not infringing on copyright. Given an Internet culture that thrives on remixes, linking, and other creative uses of source material, the boundaries of the legal definition of fair use have met with many challenges in recent years.

The conversation surrounding creative control often swings between two extremes.[10] On one side, there's a desire for absolute control, where every single use of a work is governed, and the motto is "all rights reserved" (sometimes even more). On the opposite side, there's a chaotic vision where creators have extensive freedom but are exposed to potential exploitation. The principles of balance, compromise, and moderation, which once guided a copyright system that equally appreciated innovation and protection, are now at risk.

**Creative Commons**, an organization dedicated to restoring these principles, leverages private rights to generate public benefits by liberating creative works for specific purposes. The overarching objective that connects all of Creative Commons' endeavors is the creation of a sensible, adaptable copyright layer in response to increasingly rigid standard rules.

In December 2002, Creative Commons launched its first project: a collection of copyright licenses available to the public at no cost. Drawing inspiration from the Free Software Foundation's GNU General Public

9. Krasniewicz, Louise. Walt Disney: A Biography (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2010), 43.

10. Creative commons history remixed from https://wiki.creativecommons.org/wiki/history

License (GNU GPL), Creative Commons has crafted a web tool that allows individuals to either dedicate their creative works to the public domain or maintain their copyright while licensing them for free under specific conditions. Unlike the GNU GPL, Creative Commons licenses are tailored for various creative works such as websites, academic writings, music, films, photographs, literature, educational materials, and more. The goal is not merely to augment the quantity of raw content online but also to simplify and reduce the cost of accessing that content. To facilitate this, metadata has been developed to link creative works with their public domain or license status in a machine-readable format. This innovation aims to lower barriers to creativity by enabling easy searches for works that are free to use under certain terms.

This textbook itself is licensed under Creative Commons, allowing it to be freely accessible. The use of a Creative Commons license exemplifies the principles discussed in this chapter, demonstrating how intellectual property can be both protected and shared for the benefit of all.

## History of the Book-Publishing Industry

With the exception of self-published works, the author isn't the person in charge of producing the book or sending it out into the world. These days, the tasks of editing, designing, printing, promoting, and distributing a book generally fall to the book's publisher. Although authors are usually the ones with their names prominently displayed on the spine, a published book is actually the product of many different kinds of labor by many different people.

Early book printers acted as publishers because they produced pages and sold them commercially. In England, the Stationer's Company, which was essentially a printer's guild, had a monopoly over the printing industry and was also allowed to censor texts. The Statute of Queen Anne, the 1710 copyright law, came about partially as a result of some of these early publishers overstepping their bounds.

In the 19th-century United States, publishers fulfilled many roles, and it was not uncommon for one company to print, wholesale, and even retail their own books. Although bookstores and printers existed in the United States, the Northeast emerged as the nation's publishing epicenter, with hotspots in Philadelphia, New York, and Boston. During the 1800s, the U.S. book industry swiftly expanded. In 1820, the books manufactured and sold in the United States totaled about $2.5 million; by 1850, even though the price of books had dropped substantially, sales figures had quintupled.[11] Technological advances in the 19th century, including machine-made paper and the Linotype typesetting machine, made book publishing simpler and more profitable. Many of today's large publishing companies were created in the 19th century; for example, Houghton Mifflin originated in 1832; Little, Brown & Company formed in 1837; and Macmillan was founded

11. Howe, Daniel Walker. What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

in Scotland in 1843 and opened its U.S. branch in 1869. By the turn of the century, New York was the center of publishing in the United States.

The rapid growth of the publishing industry and evolving intellectual property laws meant that authors could make money from their writing during this period. Perhaps it's no surprise, then, to learn that the first literary agents also emerged in the late 19th century. Literary agents act as intermediaries between the author and the publisher, negotiating contracts and parsing difficult legal language. The world's first literary agent, A. P. Watt, worked in London in 1881 and essentially defined the role of the contemporary literary agent—he got paid to negotiate on behalf of the author. A former advertising agent, Watt decided to charge based on commission, meaning that he would take in a set percentage of his clients' earnings. Watt set the fee as 10 percent, which is still considered standard today.

The biggest change to hit publishing in the first half of the 20th century was the increasing popularity of the paperback book. Books covered in less expensive, less durable paper existed since Renaissance chapbooks were invented, but they were usually crudely printed works that were meant only as passing entertainment. In 1935, the publishing industry was changed forever when Penguin Books Ltd., a paperback publisher, launched in England, ushered in the so-called paperback revolution. Instead of being crude and cheaply made, Penguin titles were simple but well designed. Though Penguin sold paperbacks for only 25¢, it concentrated on providing works of literary merit, thus fundamentally changing the idea of what quality books should look like. Some early Penguin titles included Ernest Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms and Dashiell Hammett's The Thin Man. In the decades that followed, more and more paperback publishing companies were launched by people hoping to capitalize on Penguin's success. The first U.S.-based paperback company was Pocket Books, founded in 1939. By 1960, paperbacks were outselling hardbacks in the United States.[12]

The second half of the 20th century was marked by the consolidation of the U.S. book-publishing industry and by a larger trend toward media consolidation. Between 1960 and 1989, about 578 mergers and acquisitions occurred in the U.S. book industry; between 1990 and 1995, 300 occurred; and between 1996 and 2000, nearly 380 occurred.[13] This was just a part of the larger international trend toward mass media consolidation, where large international media empires acquired smaller companies in many different industries. For example, the German media company Bertelsmann AG had acquired Bantam Books, Doubleday, and Random House; London-based Pearson owned Viking, Penguin, Putnam, and the Dutton Group; and AOL Time- Warner Little, Brown and Company and Warner Books. Because publicly traded companies have obligations to their shareholders, the publishing industry found itself pressured to turn increasingly high profits. By 2010, roughly 60 percent of all books sold in the United States were published by six large publishing houses, often referred

12. Ogle, Matthew. "The Paperback Revolution," CRC Studio, 2003, https://web.archive.org/web/20181103070358/http://www.crcstudio.org:80/paperbacks/revolution.php.

13. Greco, Albert N. The Book Publishing Industry (New York: Routledge, 2005)

to as the Big Six.[14] In the first years of the third millennium, book publishing was an increasingly centralized, profit-driven industry. The Big Six controls more than 60 percent of the book market.[15]

### Key Takeaways

- Papyrus scrolls were the earliest forms of books, superseded in the 6th century by the codex. The codex was more portable, sturdier, and easier to store, which made it a more popular format. During the Middle Ages, books were handwritten on parchment and then painstakingly decorated. At this time, monasteries were the centers of intellectual life, and most book copying happened in their scriptoria. Until the invention of mechanical movable type, books were expensive and not widely available.
- The Gutenberg Revolution changed how information circulated around the globe. The invention of mechanical movable type made books much cheaper and quicker to produce, which led to the swifter spread of ideas. Access to classical texts spurred the European Renaissance and led to higher literacy rates among women. With millions of books circulating in the world, popular literature soon emerged, sometimes in the form of inexpensive chapbooks.
- Copyright law was originally meant to protect authors from censorship and to allow them to profit from their work. The first copyright law was England's Statute of Queen Anne in 1710. In the 20th century, American copyright law steadily increased the terms of protection for works under copyright.
- The publishing industry arose to help authors produce and distribute copies of their work. Early printers acted as wholesale booksellers. In the 20th century, paperback books revived the publishing industry by making high literature available in an inexpensive, portable format. By the turn of the century, book publishing was dominated by six publishing companies, themselves part of large media conglomerations.

14. Hyatt, Michael. "Top Ten U.S. Book Publishers for 2009," January 15, 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20130116115535/http://michaelhyatt.com/top-ten-u-s-book-publishers-for-2009.html.
15. Hyatt, Michael. "Top Ten U.S. Book Publishers for 2009," January 15, 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20130116115535/http://michaelhyatt.com/top-ten-u-s-book-publishers-for-2009.html.

### Exercises

Questions about the exact extent of fair use of copyrighted materials have been especially relevant in recent years because of the popularity of using and manipulating copyrighted materials on the Internet. Go on a website with user-uploaded content (such as YouTube or Wikipedia) and find examples of works that use copyrighted content in a way that you think is justified under fair use. Then, find examples of works that you think do not use copyrighted content in a way permitted by fair use. Answer the following questions when you have completed your research:

- What is the difference between the two examples you found?
- What criteria did you use to make your decision?
- What objections might be made by someone who could classify the works differently from what you did?
- How does current fair-use law differ from ancient, medieval, and modern copyright laws?

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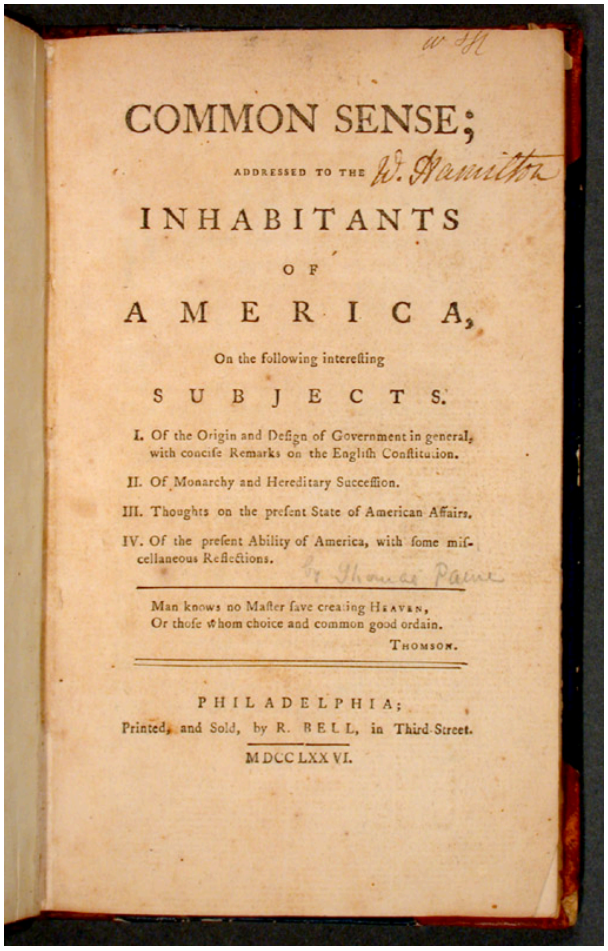
# 7.2 BOOKS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF U.S. POPULAR CULTURE

**Learning Objectives**

- Identify the change in women's roles after the American Revolution and how it impacted early U.S. literature.
- Name some distinctive aspects of the American style used by 19th-century writers.
- Identify popular works of 20th-century fiction.



COMMON SENSE;

ADDRESSED TO THE INHABITANTS OF AMERICA,

On the following interesting

SUBJECTS.

I. Of the Origin and Design of Government in general, with concise Remarks on the English Constitution.

II. Of Monarchy and Hereditary Succession.

III. Thoughts on the present State of American Affairs.

IV. Of the present Ability of America, with some miscellaneous Reflections.

Man knows no Master save creating HEAVEN,
Or those whom choice and common good ordain.
THOMSON.

PHILADELPHIA;
Printed, and Sold, by R. BELL, in Third-Street.
MDCCLXXVI.

Figure 1: Common Sense, a pamphlet published anonymously in 1776, argued for the American colonies' independence from Britain.

At the turn of the 18th century, the American colonies could only claim about 250 published books.[1] In 2010 alone, more than 288,000 new titles were published. As the United States has grown and developed, books have grown and developed along with it. Sometimes books have amplified differences within the nation, sometimes their authors have worked to proclaim a distinctive American style; sometimes the authors have tried to expose hypocrisies in government and society, and sometimes the authors have celebrated America's multifaceted population. Throughout the history of the United States, books have influenced American popular culture and have been influenced by it as well.

In the years leading up to the American Revolution, newspapers and pamphlets were the publication method of choice because they could be quickly printed and were ideal for circulating short political and news items at a moment of rapid change. Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, first published anonymously in

1. Baym, Nina. Introduction to The Norton Anthology of American Literature (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007) A:1–14.

1776, could be considered America's first best seller. As literacy rates soared in post-independence America and the nation became more stable, the market for longer books increased. William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy*: or, *The Triumph of Nature*, published in 1789, is considered the first American novel. Brown's **epistolary novel**, which is a novel made up of letters of correspondence, warned about the dangers of seduction. Brown's novel shares some features with a novel published 2 years later, *Charlotte Temple* by Susannah Rowson, another cautionary tale about a woman falling prey to seduction.

Though women were often the subjects of popular novels, they were increasingly the audience as well. Eighteenth-century Americans were influenced by Enlightenment values, which maintained that a strong nation needed an educated, moral population. Although the public realm of education, employment, and politics was dominated by men, women had control over the domestic sphere and the education of the next generation. The 18th-century idea that American women should educate their children for the good of the emerging nation, sometimes called republican motherhood, helped to legitimize, expand, and improve women's education. Women's literacy rates rose sharply during this period, and more and more books were tailored to women's interests, as women tended to have more leisure time for reading. Authors such as Frances Burney and Mary Wollstonecraft wrote about issues facing women of the period and openly criticized the fixed role of females in society.

However, in these early years of the American novel, some people found the form potentially dangerous and subversive because it was too entertaining and it appealed to people's, especially women's, imaginations. A character in The Boarding School by Hannah Webster Foster, a popular writer of the time period, espouses this particular viewpoint:

> Novels are the favorite and the most dangerous kind of reading, now adopted by the generality of young ladies.... Their romantic pictures of love, beauty, and magnificence fill the imagination with ideas which lead to impure desires, a vanity of exterior charms, and a fondness for show and dissipation, by no means consistent with that simplicity, modesty, and chastity, which should be the constant inmates of the female breast.[2]

Part of the perceived threat of novels was their widespread popularity with many different kinds of people. An early biography of Susannah Rowson characterized the wide readership of her novel:

> It has stolen its way alike into the study of the divine and into the workshop of the mechanic, into the parlor of the accomplished lady and the bed-chamber of her waiting-maid, into the log-hut on the extreme border of modern civilization and into the forecastle of the whale ship on the lonely ocean. It has been read by the grey-bearded professor after his 'divine Plato'; by the beardless clerk after balancing his accounts at night, by the traveler waiting for the next conveyance at the village inn; by the school girl stealthfully in her seat at school.[3]

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2. Foster, Hannah Webster. The Boarding School; or, Lessons of a Preceptress to Her Pupils (1829; repr., Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2010).

3. Darnton, Robert. The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996).

These popular 18th-century novels were preoccupied with providing moral guidance and cautionary tales to the citizens of the newly formed United States. Questions of freedom and responsibility were paramount as the emerging nation attempted to establish a uniquely American literature.

## Books in the 1800s—How Uncle Tom's Cabin Helped Start a War

Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* became the most popular book in the 1800s until Uncle Tom's Cabin was published.[4] Written by abolitionist and preacher Harriet Beecher Stowe in 1852—9 years before the beginning of the Civil War—*Uncle Tom's Cabin* was a smash hit by any definition. An impassioned critique of slavery that tugged on readers' emotions, the novel sold 300,000 copies in its first year and became the century's second-best-selling book after the Bible.[5] Stowe's novel has been credited with heightening tensions between the North and the South. The novel was not only popular domestically. The first London edition sold 200,000 copies in a year, and the book was the first American novel to be translated into Chinese.[6] The absence of international copyright law meant that Stowe was not compensated for most of these translations. Many unauthorized stage versions of the play were produced as well, causing historians to theorize that more people saw theatrical adaptations of the play than read the book. As with today's stage and film adaptations of books, some of these versions of Stowe's story were faithful to the novel, while others changed the story's ending or even twisted the story to make it pro-slavery. In the early 1900s, nine silent film versions of the novel were released, making Uncle Tom's Cabin the most-filmed story of the silent film era. With her book, Stowe helped establish the political novel as an important touchstone of American literature.

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4. Winship, Micheal. "Two Early American Bestsellers," Common-place 9, no. 3 (2009), https://web.archive.org/web/20091005005128/http://www.common-place.org/vol-09/no-03/winship/.

5. PBS, Africans in America Resource Bank, "Slave Narratives and Uncle Tom's Cabin, 1845–1862," PBS, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p2958.html.

6. *ibid.*

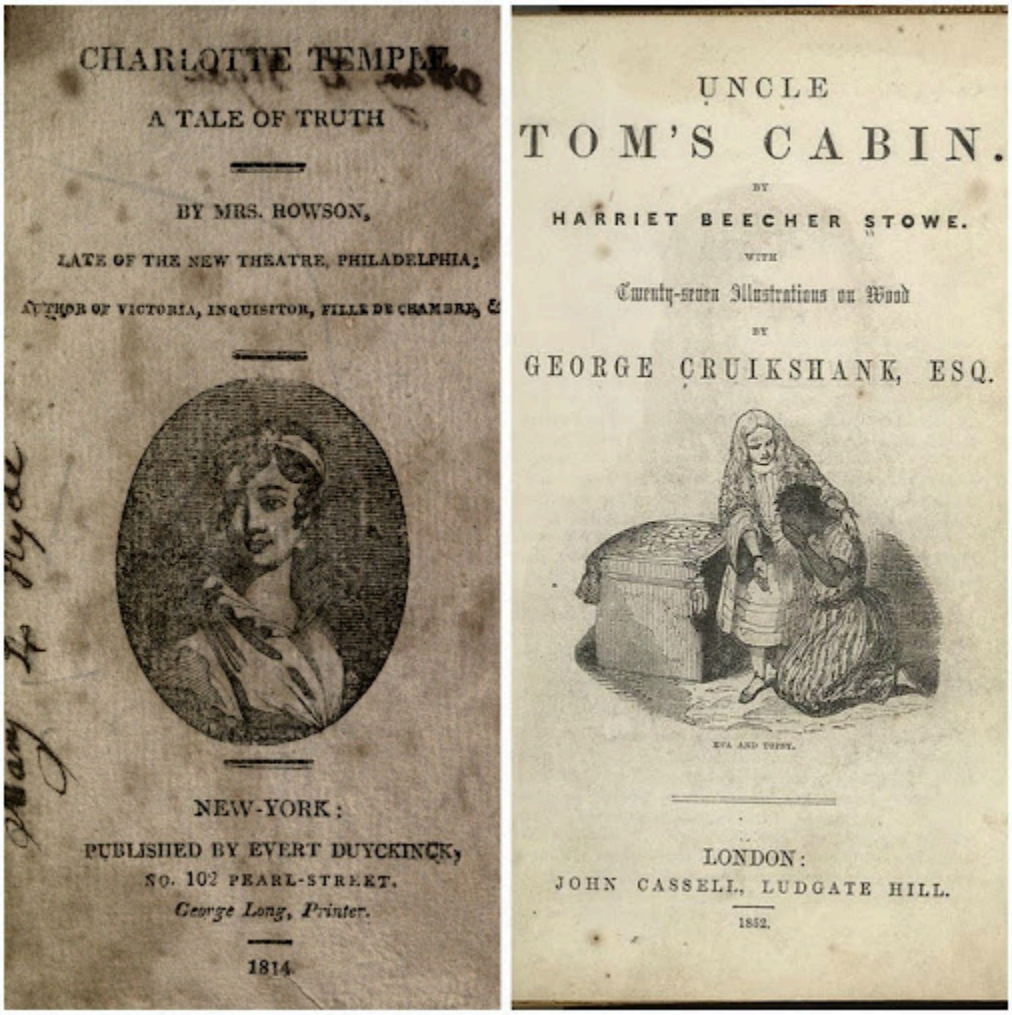


Figure 2: Strict copyright law, many different versions of Stowe's novel cropped up.

Other 19th-century writers in the United States concentrated on developing a uniquely American style, a mode of self-expression distinct from European models. James Fenimore Cooper, author of *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), wrote adventure stories that celebrated the American frontier, championing a theme that would intrigue U.S. writers for centuries to come. Poet Walt Whitman wrote *Leaves of Grass* (1855), a collection of poems that shocked readers with its frank sexuality and fresh use of language. In contrast to most other English-language poets at the time, Whitman wrote in free verse, mimicking the rhythms of actual speech in his poems. He was purposefully informal; he valued everyday speech; he spoke openly about sexual themes; and he was an important figure in establishing an American idiom that was open, informal, and focused on the experiences of common people. Washington Irving, author of the now-iconic short stories "Rip Van Winkle" (1819) and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (1820), helped establish satire and wit as important aspects of the emerging American style.

Mark Twain famously used humor in his many works of journalism, travel writing, and fiction. Twain's characters' voices are funny, irreverent, and full of off-the-wall idioms and odd regional coinages. This passage,

from the first chapter of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), shows Twain's use of distinctively American speech patterns:

> The Widow Douglas she took me for her son, and allowed she would sivilize me; but it was rough living in the house all the time, considering how dismal regular and decent the widow was in all her ways; and so when I couldn't stand it no longer I lit out[7]

Twain was also one of the first writers to use a then-newfangled invention—the typewriter.

Figure 3: A photo of a New Franklin typewriter, on display at the Museum of Printing in Haverhill, MA. This typewriter was produced between 1892 and 1904.

Edgar Allan Poe is best known for writing macabre stories and poems like "The Raven" (1845), "The Cask of Amontillado" (1846), and "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843). A master of the Gothic genre, Poe is also credited with writing the first detective story, 1841's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." (Some people also credit Poe with the invention of the horror story and the science fiction story.) In this and other stories, Poe established many of the classic features of detective stories, including Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes tales: a brilliant, crime-solving detective who works outside the standard police system; the detective's assistant or friend, who serves as narrator; and an emphasis on analysis and solving a crime through reason. Poe had such

7. Twain, Marc. The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1885; repr., New York: Harper & Brothers, 1912).

a strong effect on the mystery genre that the Mystery Writers of America annually give out the Edgar Awards, named in honor of Poe.

At the end of the 1800s, American literature could be broadly categorized as reflecting an interest in the natural landscape, preoccupation with questions of identity (both of the individual and the nation), an interest in humor or satire, a pride in common speech, and an interest in politics. An emerging interest in what we now call **genre fiction** was increasing and would become a fully-fledged movement as the 20th century progressed.

## Twentieth Century and Beyond

The production of books in the 1900s was cheaper than ever because of improved technology. The 20th century saw a multiplicity of genres that began to better reflect the diversity of experiences and interests in the United States. Furthermore, the paperback revolution eroded the distinction between high and low art. By the end of the century, however, books were facing competition for attention with films, television, video games, and the Internet.

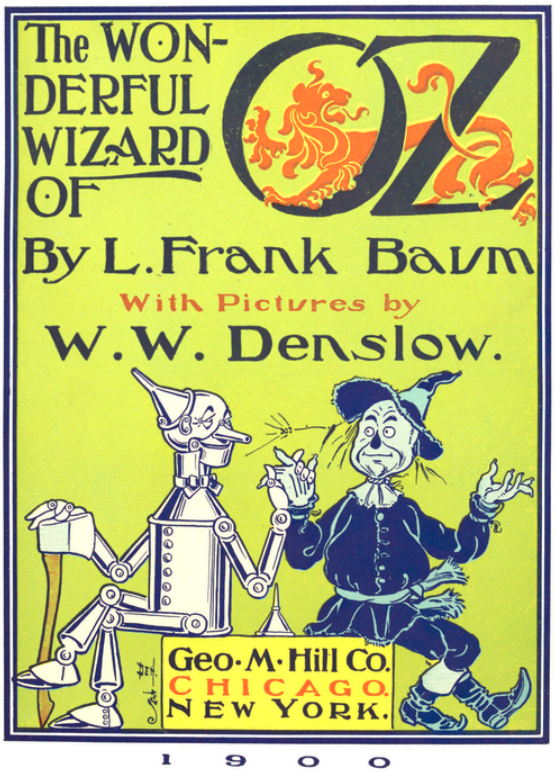


Figure 4: L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* was the basis for the famous 1939 movie The Wizard of Oz.

In 1900, L. Frank Baum published *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, a novel set in the fantastical world of Oz.

It became the best-selling children's book for the next 2 years and went on to spawn 13 sequels. Baum's book is considered part of the so-called golden age of children's literature, which is considered to have begun with Lewis Carroll's *Adventures of Alice in Wonderland* (1865) and ended with A. A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* books (1924–1928). Along with children's literature, other kinds of genre fiction saw their birth or growth in the 20th century. Owen Wister's *The Virginian* (1902) and *Zane Grey's Riders of the Purple Sage* (1912) established the Western as a uniquely American genre that would influence the popular Wild West films of the 1920s and beyond. Other genres including science fiction, horror, mystery, and romance sprung up out of the late-19th and early-20th dime novels, named for their cheap cost and known for their sensational, quickly written stories. The dime novel gave way to the even cheaper pulp magazines and books, inexpensive publications named for the cheap pulp paper they were printed on. **Pulp stories** were generally sensational and featured sordid tales of murder, prostitution, and gangster violence; others told fantastical stories of aliens or monsters. The pulps were gleefully low culture and were quite popular with readers. Conan the Barbarian, Tarzan, Zorro, and The Shadow all made their first appearances as characters in early pulps. The paperback revolution of the 1930s, 40s, and 50s gave genre stories a wider reach in a more durable format.

While many 19th-century U.S. writers worked to create a distinctive American style, some 20th-century writers aimed to debunk American myths. After World War II, the United States emerged as a dominant world power. Some writers became preoccupied with critiquing American society and government. Dissatisfied with the widespread 1950s ideals of conformity and homogeneity, **Beat Generation** authors wrote in a freewheeling, informal style and proudly described their drug use and sexual exploits. Touchstone works of the Beat Generation include Allen Ginsberg's *Howl and Other Poems* (1956), Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957), and William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* (1959). These books celebrated road trips, drug trips, spiritual yearning, distrust of the mass media, and gleeful obscenity, and they helped pave the way for the hippie movement of the 1960s.

After the end of the Cold War in 1991, American literature saw an upswing in books that expressed the diversity of voices and experiences of late-20th-century America. Jhumpa Lahiri and Amy Tan wrote about the immigrant experience; Sherman Alexie and Louise Erdrich penned acclaimed novels about Native American life; and Toni Morrison explored the political and historical dimensions of slavery and race in the United States. Sometimes called **multicultural literature**, these and other books were celebrated as a way to promote cross-cultural understanding by examining the different value systems, histories, traditions, and speech patterns of people in America.

The 21st-century market has so far been dominated by several massively popular **novel franchises**—such as Left Behind, Harry Potter, The Twilight Saga, and The Da Vinci Code—that have collectively sold hundreds of millions of copies. These haven't only been popular as books; they've also spawned equally lucrative films and merchandise tie-ins. Consumers who are so inclined can purchase Twilight Saga wall decals, Harry Potter earrings, or Da Vinci Code board games. In some ways, such novel franchises harken back to Uncle Tom's Cabin in the 19th century, which was a multiplatform success popular on the page, stage, and screen.

Figure 5: Pulp publications captured readers with their lurid, colorful covers. This is a cover titled "Spicy Mystery Stories – Her DemonLover by Morgan Lafay"

## Defining Obscenity: "Howl" Goes on Trial

Allen Ginsberg's poem "Howl" met with strong reactions, both positive and negative, when it was released by City Lights Books in 1956. Ginsberg's poem was instantly notorious for its descriptions of sexual acts, both heterosexual and homosexual, drug use, mental hospitals, and antiestablishment conspiracies. Many readers were shocked by Ginsberg's words; however, that was precisely his intent. He once described "Howl" as "an

emotional time bomb that would continue exploding in U.S. consciousness in case our military-industrial-nationalist complex solidified (Ginsberg, 1995)."

In 1957, U.S. customs officials seized a shipment of copies of the book on the grounds of obscenity, but soon after dropped their charges. However, the poem's legal struggles weren't over; that same year, the California police sent plainclothes officers to City Lights Bookstore to buy a copy and then promptly arrested the salesclerk and the store owner on charges of obscenity.

The "Howl" trial came in the same year as several other landmark Supreme Court cases that liberalized the legal definition of obscenity in the United States. Before 1957, a more strict definition held that any material with a possible immoral influence was obscene. This stance led to a ban on works by authors such as James Joyce and D. H. Lawrence. Under the new law, a work would be judged by "community standards" and could only be judged obscene if its "dominant theme taken as a whole appeals to the prurient interest." In other words, books could no longer be deemed obscene on the basis of a single four-letter word. It also meant that the poem's obscenity would have to be judged against the relatively liberal standards of San Francisco, where the police sting operation had taken place.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) leapt to City Lights' defense, and the presiding judge overturned the obscenity charge, citing the poem's "redeeming social importance." In hindsight, the judge seems undoubtedly correct about the poem's social importance. "Howl" and the obscenity rulings of 1957 marked a crucial bridge between the post–World War II years of enthusiastic patriotism and social conformity and the 1960s ethos of free love and anti-government sentiment. By the time of Ginsberg's death in 1997, *Howl and Other Poems* had sold more than 800,000 copies.[8]

### Key Takeaways

- After the Revolutionary War, the United States was preoccupied with questions of self-determination. Many popular books reflected similar concerns about freedom through stories that explored the dangers of seduction for women. During this time, the ideals of republican motherhood also boosted literacy rates for women although reading novels was still seen by some as a potentially subversive activity.
- During the 19th century, Uncle Tom's Cabin was a national sensation that heightened

8. Raskin, Johan. American Scream: Allen Ginsberg's "Howl" and the Making of the Beat Generation (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

divisions between the North and South, and that may have hastened the outbreak of the Civil War. The book was also popular as a stage play and, later, as a silent film. Other American writers of this period tried to establish a distinctive American voice, whether through political engagement, satire, interest in the natural world, or the use of regional dialects and idioms.

- In the 20th century, genre fiction came to prominence through popular, sensational pulp novels. Genres such as children's literature, science fiction, mystery, and romance were given a boost beginning in the 1930s by the spread of the paperback book. The second half of the 20th century was marked by writers who challenged conformist ideas of the United States. The Beat Generation risked jail time for obscenity, while multicultural literature celebrated a multiplicity of voices and viewpoints.
- The 21st century has so far been dominated by a number of novel franchises with massive sales and multiple marketing tie-ins.

**Exercises**

Consider a novel or book from any era in U.S. history that has made an impression on you. Research this book on the Internet to discover how it played a part in shaping U.S. popular culture, how culture shaped the book in question or both. Then, answer the following questions:

- What was the social or cultural climate at the time of its publication?
- What was the initial critical reception? Did opinions of the book change over time?
- At what point was the book most popular?
- Does the book belong to a larger movement? Was it a reaction against a political moment or literary movement that came before?

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# 7.3 MAJOR BOOK FORMATS

**Learning Objectives**

- Determine the role of hardcover books in the publishing industry.
- Identify the differences in the two major formats of paperback books.
- Recognize the changes that e-books bring to the publishing industry.

From ancient Egyptian papyrus scrolls to scrollable 21st-century e-books, a book can come in many different formats. However, in some ways, it seems like the more things change, the more they stay the same. In the same way that early printed books were painstakingly illuminated to look more like medieval books, today's e-books use e-paper technology to mimic the look of a printed page. Even the hardcover books we're familiar with today are direct descendants of the ancient codex.

## Hardcover

While the first codices enclosed bound papers between wooden covers (the word codex means block of wood in Latin), contemporary hardcover book covers are usually made of cardboard sheathed in cloth, paper, or leather. The printed pages of the book are either sewn or glued to the cover. Until the early 1800s, most books were sold unbound. A buyer would purchase a sheath of printed papers that would be bound either by the bookseller or by a commissioned bindery. British publisher William Pickering is considered the first publisher to issue books in uniform cloth bindings in 1820. About a decade later, dust jackets, the detachable outer covers that sheathe most hardback books today, arrived on the scene. Dust jackets were initially meant only as a protective covering for the binding, but soon, they became a place where designers could create a colorful and distinctive cover for a book.

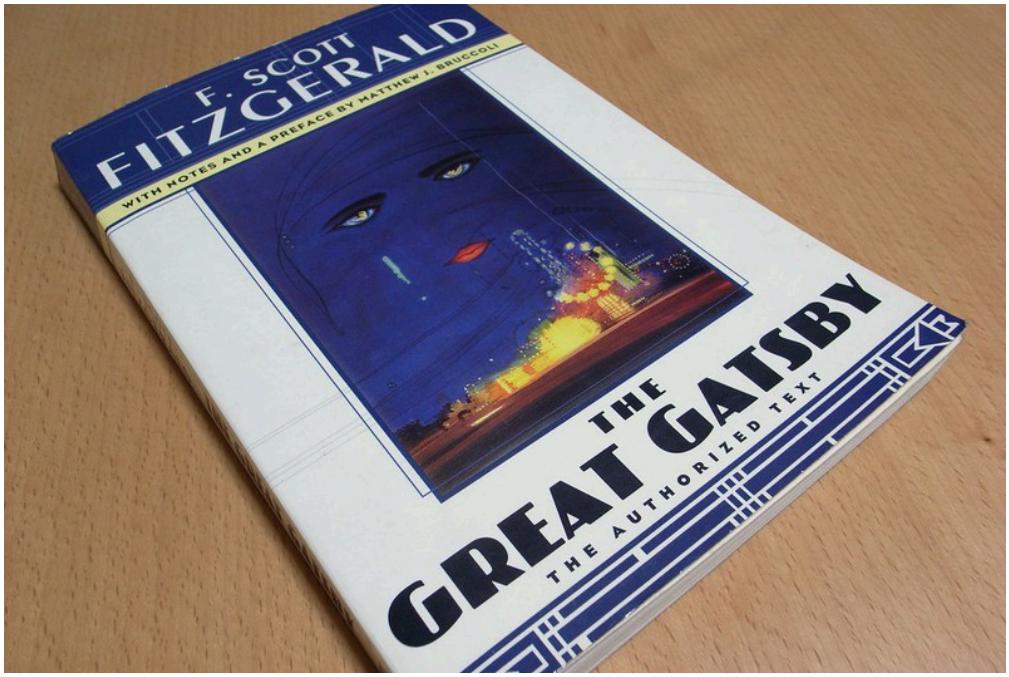


Figure 1: Original dust jackets are especially important for book collectors—a first edition of F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby without the dust jacket sells for around $3000; with the dust jacket intact, it can go for more than $30,000.

The durability of hardcover books makes them attractive to both authors and book purchasers. However, the competitive economics of today's publishing industry means that some books are never issued in hardcover. Because hardcover books are more expensive to produce and almost always cost more than their paperback equivalents, publishers tend to reserve the format for books that they expect will sell well.

Based on projected sales, publishers must decide how big of a print run to order for a new hardcover book. A book's **print run** refers to all the copies made in one setup of the printing apparatus. A failed book may only have one, while a successful book may have 50 or more printings. Figuring out how many copies of a book to print is an inexact science, as publishers must essentially guess how well a book will sell. There is no standard size for a print run. The U.K. edition of the first Harry Potter book had an initial print run of only 500 copies; the U.S. print run of the seventh and final book in the series was a record-breaking 12 million. When an initial print run is sold out, the book is either reprinted (these copies are considered a second printing) or is considered out of print. The contemporary publishing industry will often issue a first-run hardcover printing, followed by subsequent paperback editions.

## Paperback

Inexpensive paper-bound books have been around for centuries in formats like the chapbook, the British penny dreadful, and the American dime novel. However, the hardcover book, whether as an ancient codex

or its contemporary equivalent, was the dominant format in the book world for thousands of years. The introduction of a new format in the 1930s, the paperback, was considered revolutionary. The so-called paperback revolution began during the Great Depression, when paperbacks were marketed as inexpensive alternatives to hardcover editions. Penguin Books, Ltd., the first majorly successful paperback publishing company, kept prices low by ordering large print runs and selling books in nontraditional retailers, such as Woolworth's drugstores.

Penguin also broke the traditional paperback mold by avoiding pulp fiction entertainment novels and instead printing books that were both cheap and intellectually stimulating. Donald Porter Geddes, the editor of Pocket Books, the first paperback publishing house in the United States, spelled out this new approach to bookselling in 1944: "The best books apparently have the greatest appeal to the greatest number of people...the larger American public need no longer suffer from the delusion that it is intellectually inferior, or, from a literary point of view, lacking in any aspect in good taste, judgment, and appetite."[1] By 1960, when paperback books first outsold hardcovers, these early paperback innovators were proved right.

While paperback publishing first issued only reprints of books that had already been issued in hardcover, **paperback originals**, books that had their initial print run as a paperback edition, emerged in the 1950s. Paperback originals were another step in helping to remove the stigma from the paperback book. In 1999, Jhumpa Lahiri's The Interpreter of Maladies was the first paperback original to win the Pulitzer Prize for fiction.

Today's books published in paperback are traditionally divided into two broad categories: mass-market paperbacks and trade paperbacks. **Mass-market paperbacks** are small, inexpensive editions that are sometimes issued after a hardcover edition, although many genre novels are printed only in mass-market paperback editions. **Trade paperbacks** are larger and generally of better quality. They're often printed on higher-quality paper (sometimes acid-free paper). If the trade paperback follows a hardcover release, the paperback will be the same size as the hardcover and will have the same pagination and page layout as the hardcover edition.

Traditionally, hardcover books have been seen as more prestigious than paperbacks, though that stereotype may be beginning to change. In recent years, some publishers of literary fiction were seeing 50 to 75 percent of the hardcover books they shipped to bookstores returned to them unsold. As a response, certain publishers opted to release books with uncertain sales potential as trade paperbacks, bypassing the hardcover format entirely. "Getting somebody to spend $22 on a book by an author who they've never heard of is hard, but getting them to spend $13.95 on a paperback is much easier," Random House's Jane von Mehren told The New York Times in 2006.[2] Some publishers are concerned that book reviewers don't take trade paperback

1. Ogle, "The Paperback Revolution."

2. Wyatt, Edward. "Literary Novels Going Straight to Paperback," New York Times, March 22, 2006, Books section.

editions as seriously, but that too may be slowly changing. Another publishing strategy is to release hardcover and trade paperback editions simultaneously rather than delaying the paperback edition for several months (or even years, in the case of exceptionally popular books). Such a technique is intended to drive up sales, taking advantage of initial publicity to capture readers who may be unwilling to pay the full hardcover price for a book.

Whatever the concerns that publishers may have about issuing paperbacks, the format is still dominant in the U.S. publishing industry. According to the American Association of Publishers (AAP), 35 percent of the books sold in 2009 were trade paperbacks; 35 percent hardcovers; 21 percent mass market paperbacks; 2 percent audio books; 2 percent e-books; and 5 percent "other (Eco-Libris)."[3]

## E-Books

The hardcover book's expensive, durable binding seemed to say that it was an object intended for posterity. If paperback books disrupted the traditional concept of books by making them cheaper and more portable, then the e-book is poised to cause an even greater change in how readers interact with a text. E-books, also known as electronic or digital books, are the digital media equivalent of printed books. That is, they are books read on the screen of an electronic device, whether a cell phone, personal computer, or dedicated e-book reader.

E-books differ from their print equivalents in many significant ways. For one, there's no physical production cost, which means that e-books are generally less expensive than traditional books. There's also no cost to store or transport e-books. Because an e-book's publisher doesn't need to order a set print run, a text issued as an e-book doesn't ever have to go out of print. E-books also appeal to readers who want instant gratification. Instead of having to travel to a brick-and-mortar bookstore or wait for a delivery, a reader can download an e-book in a matter of minutes.

Early e-books were mostly technical manuals or digitized versions of works in the public domain. As the Internet took off and as electronic devices became increasingly mobile, book publishers began to issue digital editions of their works. In the first decade of the 21st century, various companies began issuing software and hardware platforms for electronic books, each competing for dominance in this emerging market.

Although e-books make up only a small percentage of total book sales, that number is growing. Dan Brown's *The Lost Symbol*, the follow up to his massively popular novel *The Da Vinci Code*, sold more copies as a Kindle e-book than as a hardcover in the first few days after its September 2009 release. However, e-book successes have led to a threat that faces many kinds of digital content: online piracy. Only a few days after its initial release, Brown's novel had been illegally downloaded more than 100,000 times. Some authors and publishers

3. Eco-Libris, "Some Facts About the Book Publishing Industry," Eco-Libris, http://www.ecolibris.net/bookpublish.asp.

are concerned that Internet users expect free content and will find a way around spending money on e-books. American novelist Sherman Alexie recently voiced some of these anxieties, "With the open-source culture on the Internet, the idea of ownership—of artistic ownership—goes away."[4] Other prominent authors have reacted to the e-book in various ways. In 2000, Stephen King published his novella *Riding the Bullet* as a digital file that could only be read on a computer; in contrast, J. K. Rowling has stated that the *Harry Potter* novels won't ever be released as e-books.[5] However, piracy has struck Rowling's novels as well. Every *Harry Potter* novel is available in pirated form, either as a scanned copy or one that was manually typed out by fans.

Another concern with e-books is the possibility of **digital decay**. All an e-book is, after all, is a collection of data saved to a disk. It turns out that digital formats tend to decay much faster than their physical counterparts.[6] The swift turnover of digital devices is another concern; the possibility exists that a book bought on a Kindle device in 2010 will not be compatible with an equivalent device in 2035 or even 2015.

E-book sales still make up a small part of the overall book market, 3 to 5 percent by most estimates, but their sales increased by 177 percent in 2009. The New Yorker cites a projection that e-books will someday account for between 25 to 50 percent of all book sales.[7] And with newer models of e-book readers, such as the iPad, boasting full-color screens and the ability to embed web links and video in a book's text, e-books may fundamentally reshape how people read in the future.

### Key Takeaways

- Hardcover books are a direct descendant of the ancient codex. Because they are more durable and more expensive, they are considered more prestigious than paperback books. Traditionally, publishers order an initial print run in hardcover, followed by a paperback release.
- Paperback books are popular because they are more portable and less expensive than their

4. Frisch, Matt. "Digital Piracy Hits the E-book Industry," CNN, January 1, 2010, http://www.cnn.com/2010/TECH/01/01/ebook.piracy/index.html.

5. McHugh, John B. "J. K. Rowling Refuses E-books for Potter," USA Today, June 14, 2005, https://web.archive.org/web/20120714002729/http://www.usatoday.com:80/life/books/news/2005-06-14-rowling-refuses-ebooks_x.htm.

6. Bollacker, Kurt D. "Avoiding a Digital Dark Age," American Scientist 98, no. 3 (2010): 106.

7. Auletta, Ken. "Publish or Perish," Annals of Communication, New Yorker, April 26, 2010.

hardcover equivalents are. Books issued in paperback can be either mass-market paperbacks or trade paperbacks, which are pricier and of higher quality. To stay competitive and to attract customers, publishers are releasing some novels simultaneously in hardcover and paperback; other books skip hardcover and are released as paperback originals.

- Although they make up only 3 to 5 percent of current sales, e-books have the potential to transform the book market. Gaining currency with customers only in recent years, the e-book has the advantage of being cheaper and more portable than even most paperbacks. Some concerns with e-books include the prevalence of piracy and the potential for digital decay.

**Exercises**

Create a list of the three book formats mentioned in this section, and then answer the following questions:

- What are the features, advantages, and drawbacks of each format?
- How do they differ? How are they the same?
- What type of person might each format appeal to?
- Which format do you prefer the most, and why?

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# 7.4 CURRENT PUBLISHING TRENDS

**Learning Objectives**

- Indicate the effect of blockbuster syndrome on the publishing industry.
- Recognize how book superstores have changed the business of bookselling.
- Identify the causes and results of price wars in the book industry.

The last few decades have seen a sharp rise in electronic entertainment. In 2009, the average American spent 56 percent of his or her free time watching TV, and less than 7 percent of his or her free time reading.[1] Video game sales rose 19 percent in 2008 alone and have continued to climb.[2] In a world full of diverting entertainment, each clamoring for people's time, the publishing industry is endeavoring to do everything it can to capture readers' attention.

## Blockbuster Syndrome

Imagine this scenario: A young author has spent the last few years slaving over his novel, rewriting and revising until the whole thing is polished, exciting, and fresh. He sends out his manuscript and is lucky enough to find a literary agent eager to support his work. The agent sells the book to a publisher, netting the author a decent advance; the book goes on to get great reviews, win some awards, and sell 20,000 copies. To most people, this situation sounds like a dream come true. But in an increasingly commercialized publishing industry, with

1. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, American Time Use Survey, Table 11, "Time spent in leisure and sports activities for the civilian population by selected characteristics, 2009 annual averages," June 22, 2010, http://www.bls.gov/news.release/atus.t11.htm.

2. MSNBC, Associated Press, "Video Game Sales Top $21 Billion in 2008," Games on msnbc.com, January 15, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20120620063809/https://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/28682836/ns/technology_and_science-games/t/video-game-sales-top-billion/.

a focus on finding the next blockbuster, this burgeoning author could be at risk of not getting his contract renewed.

In an industry increasingly dominated by large media corporations with obligations to stockholders, publishers feel pressured to turn a profit. As a result, they tend to bank on sure-fire best sellers, books that are expected to sell millions (or tens of millions) of copies, regardless of literary merit. The industry's growing focus on a few best-selling authors, called **blockbuster syndrome**, often means less support and less money for the vast majority of writers who don't sell millions of copies.

An **advance** is a sum of money paid to the author in expectation of future royalties. **Royalties** are a percentage of the book's sale price. So if a publisher gives an author a $10,000 advance, the author has immediate access to that money, but the first $10,000 worth of royalties goes to the publisher. After that, the author accumulates royalties for every book sold. In this way, an advance is a cross between a loan and a gamble. If the book doesn't sell well, the author doesn't have to pay back the advance; however, he or she won't earn any additional money from royalties. However, as many as three-quarters of books don't earn back their advances, meaning that their authors aren't making any money from sales at all.

Publishers and writers are notoriously hush-hush about the actual sums of advances. A recent New York Times article estimated an average advance to be around $30,000, though actual figures vary widely. Keeping in mind that a book may take years to write, it's clear that many authors are barely earning a living from their books. For those who may be curious, this is far less for any academic book a professor might publish. The best-selling academic books might make only a few thousand dollars over several years.[3]

Here are some advances on major books in the past, for reference:

- Bret Easton Ellis, American Psycho: $300,000.[4]
- Donna Tartt, A Secret History: $450,000.[5]
- Sarah Palin, Going Rogue: $1.25 million.[6]
- Bill Clinton, My Life: $15 million.[7]

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3. Somin, Ilya. Writing an Academic Book, Part I: How to Decide Whether You Should Write a Book in the First Place. (May 10, 2021.) https://www.theihs.org/blog/writing-an-academic-book-part-i-how-to-decide-whether-you-should-write-a-book-in-the-first-place/.

4. Benatar, Giselle. "American Psychodrama," Entertainment Weekly, November 30, 1990, https://web.archive.org/web/20180730105421/http://ew.com/article/1990/11/30/american-psycho-drama/.

5. Allen, Brooke. "Panpipes and Preppies," review of The Secret History, by Donna Tartt, New Criterion, October 1992, Books, https://web.archive.org/web/20150901001728/http://www.newcriterion.com:80/articles.cfm/Panpipes%E2%80%94preppies-4619.

6. Rosen, Yereth. "Palin's Financial Disclosure: $1.25 mln advance for 'Going Rouge'," Reuters, October 27, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20100504114012/http://blogs.reuters.com/frontrow/2009/10/27/palins-financial-disclosure-125-mln-advance-for-going-rogue/.

These days, though, most of the media attention is focused on the few books each year that earn their authors huge advances and go on to sell massive numbers of copies—the blockbusters. But the focus on blockbusters can have a damaging effect on emerging writers. Because publishing is a gamble, advances to new or unproven writers are generally low. Additionally, because a publishing house wants to recoup its initial investment, a book that earned an author a big advance will probably get a big publicity budget. Unfortunately, the flip side is also true; a small advance equals a small publicity budget, which can trap many authors in a vicious circle. In most cases, a book without much promotion won't have the chance to become a hit. If the book isn't a hit, the publisher can justify an even lower advance for the next book and a lower budget for promotion. The result is that many books by emerging authors get lost in the shuffle. "It used to be that the first book earned a modest advance, then you would build an audience over time and break even on the third or fourth book," Morgan Entrekin, the publisher of Grove/Atlantic, told The New York Times. "Now the first book is expected to land a huge advance and huge sales.... Now we see a novelist selling 9,000 hardcovers and 15,000 paperbacks, and they see themselves as a failure."[8]

Potential blockbusters come at a high price for the publisher as well. They threaten to eat up publicity budgets and dominate publishers' attention. An extremely large advance will only pay off if a massive number of copies sell, which makes the publishing houses less likely to take a gamble on unconventional books. This can also lead to a glut of similar books being pushed by publishers. After Dan Brown's huge success with The Da Vinci Code in 2003, publishers rushed to capitalize on its success by releasing similar art history–conspiracy–mystery thrillers, few of which interested readers.

To a certain extent, focusing on blockbusters has worked for the publishing industry. Today's best sellers sell more copies than best sellers did 10 years ago and make up a larger share of the market. However, overall book sales have remained relatively flat over the past 8 years.[9] In other words, it's not that more books are being sold; it's just that more of the sales are taken up by a few heavily promoted blockbusters. However, the blockbuster syndrome threatens to damage the industry in other ways. In a best-seller-driven system, literature becomes a commodity, with little value placed on a book's artistic merit. Instead, the primary concern is whether or not it will sell.

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7. McIntire, Mike. "Clintons Made $109 Million in Last 8 Years," New York Times, April 5, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/05/us/politics/05clintons.html?_r=2.

8. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, American Time Use Survey, Table 11, "Time spent in leisure and sports activities for the civilian population by selected characteristics, 2009 annual averages," June 22, 2010, http://www.bls.gov/news.release/atus.t11.htm.

9. Association of American Publishers, "AAP Publishers Report Strong Growth in Year-to-Year, Year-End Book Sales," press release, February 16, 2011.

## Authors Say "No" to Blockbuster Syndrome

Discontented with the industry's focus on blockbusters at the expense of other books, some authors are taking control of publishing their materials. John Edgar Wideman, a celebrated author who has been a finalist for the National Book Award and is the only writer to have twice won the International PEN/Faulkner Award, had published more than 20 books through the traditional publishing system. But by the time he was looking for a home for his new collection of short stories, Briefs: Stories for the Palm of the Mind, he was ready for something new. "The blockbuster syndrome is a feature of our social landscape that has gotten out of hand," Wideman said. "Unless you become a blockbuster, your book disappears quickly. It becomes not only publish or perish, but sell or perish."[10] Wideman eventually decided to team up with self-publishing service Lulu, which meant that he gave up a traditional contract and advance payment in favor of greater control and a higher percentage of royalties. Other authors are turning away from the Big Six publishers and seeking out independent publishing houses, which often offer a different model. McSweeney's offers low advances and splits all profits with the author evenly. Vanguard offers no advances, but gives authors high royalties and guarantees a high marketing budget. These nontraditional systems allow authors more flexibility at a time when the publishing industry is facing rapid change. As Wideman puts it, "I like the idea of being in charge. I have more control over what happens to my book. And I have more control over whom I reach."[11]

## Rise (and Fall?) of Book Superstores

In the late 20th century, a new group of colossal bookstores reshaped the retail sale of books in the United States. Two of the most well-known and prevalent book retailers, Barnes & Noble and Borders (the largest and second-largest book retailers in the United States, respectively) expanded extensively by building book superstores in the late 1980s and early 1990s. These large retail outlets were different from traditional, smaller bookstores in several ways. They often sold many products other than books, including calendars, paper goods, and gifts. Many also housed in-store cafes, allowing patrons to browse books and sip lattes under the same roof. They were also physically bigger, and such megastores drew customers because of their wide selection and their ability to offer books at deeply discounted prices.

Many independent bookstores couldn't compete with the large chains' discounts, wide selection, and upscale atmosphere. According to Publishers Weekly, independent booksellers' share of the book market fell from 58 percent in 1972 to 15.2 percent in 1999. The American Booksellers Association (ABA), a trade

10. Reid, Calvin. "John Edgar Wideman to Self-Publish New Book Via Lulu.com," Publishers Weekly, March 5, 2010.

11. *ibid*

association of bookstores, notes that its membership peaked at 5,200 in 1991; by 2005, that number had declined by 65 percent to 1,791. The decline of the independent bookstore coincided with the consolidation of the publishing industry, and some supporters of independent bookstores see a link between the two. Richard Howorth—owner of Square Books—an independent bookstore in Oxford, Mississippi, told Mother Jones magazine that "when the independent bookselling market was thriving in the '70s and '80s, more books were being published, more people were reading books, the sales of books were higher, and publishers' profit margins were much greater. With the rise of the corporate retailing powers and the consolidation in publishing, all of those things have declined."[12] Book superstores emphasized high turnover and high-volume sales, placing a higher emphasis on best sellers and returning some mass market paperbacks to publishers after only 6 weeks on the shelves.

In more recent years, the book superstores have been under threat themselves. In 2009, large retailers like Target, Wal-Mart, and Costco sold more books than both independent and chain bookstores combined: nearly 45 percent of the market.[13] These stores didn't specialize in books and tended to offer only a few heavily promoted blockbuster titles. Large discount stores were able to negotiate favorable deals with publishers, allowing them to discount books even further than the book superstores in some cases. In more recent years, book superstores have also faced a threat from the increasing number of books purchased online. By 2010, Amazon, the largest online bookseller, accounted for around 15 to 20 percent of book sales in the United States.

The shift away from independent bookstores and toward bigger retailers, such as book superstores or nonspecialized retailers like Wal-Mart, has benefited the industry in some ways, most notably by making books cheaper and more widely available. Mega best sellers, such as the Harry Potter and Twilight series, were able to set sales records at least in part because the books were available for purchase in malls, convenience stores, supermarkets, and other nontraditional venues. However, overall book sales have not risen. And though consumers may be paying less for the books they're buying through these retailers, something may be lost as well. Jonathan Burnham, a publisher from HarperCollins, discussed the value of independent bookstores with The New Yorker, noting how they are similar to community centers: "There's a serendipitous element involved in browsing.... We walk in and know the people who work there and like to hear their reading recommendations."

## Price Wars

Part of the reason book superstores were able to crowd out smaller, independent retailers was their ability to

12. Gurwitt, Rob. "Light in Oxford," Mother Jones, May/June 2000.

13. Auletta, Ken. "Publish or Perish," Annals of Communication, New Yorker, April 26, 2010.

offer significant discounts on a book's cover price. Because the big chains sell more books, they can negotiate better deals with publishers and then pass the discounts to their customers. Not surprisingly, deep discounts appeal to customers, which is one reason the book superstores gained such a large share of the market in the 1990s. The superstores are able to sell books at such a sharp discount, sometimes even half of the listed price, because their higher sales numbers gives them bargaining power with the publishers. Independent bookstores buying the books at a normal wholesale rate (usually half the list price) are at a disadvantage; they can't offer deep discounts and, as a result, they must charge higher prices than the superstores. This deep discount policy is one reason best-seller sales have risen over the past decade (book superstores usually slash the prices of best sellers and new releases only). However, large discounts encourage high-volume selling, and emphasizing high-volume selling encourages safe publishing choices. That is, the bookstores are able to make up for the big discounts only by selling tons of copies, and the books most likely to sell this well are blockbuster works by known-quantity authors. The threat of deep discounting to independent bookstores and its effect on the publishing industry has led some European countries to regulate prices. For example, bookstores in France are prohibited from discounting more than 5 percent, and in Germany, price slashing can only happen 9 months after a book's release.

The brick-and-mortar bookstores aren't the only book discounters in the mix. Walmart and other discount retailers sell more copies of the few books they offer at their stores, so they can negotiate even more favorable terms with publishers. Amazon, which dominates online book sales, routinely discounts books by 20 percent or more.

Recently, other online retailers have been battling with Amazon for online bookselling profits. In October 2009, as retailers were preparing for the holiday season, Amazon and Wal-Mart were preparing to compete for sales. When Wal-Mart announced that it would lower preorder prices for 10 highly anticipated hardcover books to only $10, Amazon responded by matching that price the next day. Wal-Mart then lowered its price to $9, and Amazon followed. Unwilling to give up the fight, Wal-Mart lowered its prices by a penny, listing the 10 books at $8.99. Then another online retailer, Target, joined the fray, matching Wal-Mart's price. Walmart dropped its list prices again by a penny, listing the books at $8.98.[14]

While there's something almost comical about major retailers duking it out over pennies, it's also a situation that looked quite sobering to book retailers, from the independents to the large chains. The startling thing about the price wars among Amazon, Target, and Wal-Mart was that no one involved expected to make any money from these deeply discounted books. At $9 or less, these books were almost certainly selling at below retail value, perhaps by quite a lot.

If a book's list price is $35, its wholesale price is usually around half of that, in this case, $17. If that book is priced at $9, that means an $8 loss to the retailer per copy. Although, at first, this seems like blatantly bad

14. Gregory, Sean. "Walmart, Target, Amazon: Book Price War Heats Up," Time, October 27, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20130826140054/http://www.time.com/time/business/article/0,8599,1932426,00.html.

business, it works because all of these retailers are in the business of selling much more than just books. Large online retailers use the deep discounts to lure customers to their websites in hopes that these customers will purchase other items. These book sales are valuable as a way to drive traffic to the retailer's website. However, booksellers whose main business is still selling books, such as local independent bookstores, don't have this luxury.

E-books have also entered into the retail struggle. Because there are no printing costs, e-books are relatively cheap to make, and consumers expect to see the savings on their end. However, book publishers still sell the books to distributors at wholesale prices—about half of the retail value of the hardcover version. To tempt buyers, companies such as Amazon charge only $9.99 for the average e-title, once again taking a loss.[15] Many hope to make up for it with device sales—consumers are more likely to spend hundreds of dollars on an inexpensive reader to access cheaper books. While major retailers may eventually profit from this method of sales, many wonder how long it will last. Author David Baldacci argues that a book industry based solely on profit isn't sustainable. In the end, he argues, "there won't be anyone selling [books] anymore because you just can't make any money."[16]

The inclination to focus only on net profits is indicative of a larger trend in the book industry. Retailers are getting larger, consumer prices are getting lower, and popular books are receiving the majority of attention. While this has positive short-term results for consumers and large retailers, the effects are devastating for most authors and smaller bookstores. Although, in the end, the introduction of e-books may be no more harmful to the industry than the explosion of paperbacks was in the early 1900s, the larger emphasis on quantity over quality threatens the literary value and sustainability of books.

### Key Takeaways

- Blockbuster syndrome refers to the publishing industry's focus on books with best-seller potential at the expense of works that may not sell as well. Fueled by high advances that depend on high publicity budgets for high sales, less-popular authors often get lost in the shuffle. Such a system evaluates books on the basis of their commercial potential instead of

15. Stone, Brad and Motoko Rich, "Sony to Cut E-Book Prices and Offer New Readers," New York Times, August 4, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/05/technology/personaltech/05sony.html.

16. Rich, Mokoto. "Steal This Book (for $9.99)," New York Times, May 16, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/17/weekinreview/17rich.html.

their literary merit. Fed up with what they see as the industry's exclusive focus on blockbusters, some authors are turning away from the Big Six publishers and are opting for different publishing models.

- Book superstores rose to prominence in the 1990s because their low prices, large selection, and upscale atmosphere made them popular with book buyers. As a result, large numbers of independent bookstores closed. In recent years, the book superstores have been losing market share to large retailers such as Wal-Mart and Costco. These stores don't focus on selling books, and so they only have the shelf space for a few best sellers, thus helping to fuel the blockbuster syndrome. Additionally, brick-and-mortar stores are coming under threat from Amazon and other online retailers.
- Stores that sell a large volume of books are able to negotiate favorable terms with book publishers and they are then able to pass along deep discounts to their customers. Smaller independent bookstores are not able to do this, and so are less economically competitive. Recent price wars have erupted among online retailers like Amazon, Wal-Mart, and Target, who competed to sell books and e-books at prices so low they amounted to a net loss per sale. Retailers used these sales to drive business to their websites and to encourage customers to buy other products.

## Exercises

1. Examine a recent list of best sellers (some lists to consider include those by The New York Times, USA Today, Book Sense, or The Washington Post). Complete a web search for the top-10 authors to see if they have published books previously and if their previous books were also on best-seller lists. Some questions to consider: Are the books part of a series or novel franchise? Do the books have film tie-ins? What conclusions can you draw from your research?
2. Write down two books, one a current or recent best seller and the other a book that was published at least 5 years ago. Look up the books' prices on Amazon and note both the list price and Amazon's sale price. Then find the price of the same book at a local chain bookstore and an independent bookseller. What factors might account for any differences in pricing?

How might these prices have changed in recent years?

# 7.5 THE INFLUENCE OF NEW TECHNOLOGY

**Learning Objectives**

- Determine the benefits and drawbacks of digital libraries.
- Define print-on-demand and self-publishing.

The book industry has changed enormously since its creation. From the invention of the papyrus scroll to the introduction of the e-book, new technologies continuously affect how people view and experience literature. With the advent of digital media, old-media industries, such as the book industry, must find ways to adapt. Some fear that this new technology will destroy the industry, while others maintain that it works to the industry's advantage. However, one thing is clear—digital technology promises to reshape the publishing industry as we know it.

E-Books

The first e-book readers were related to the personal digital assistant (PDA) devices, pocket-sized electronics that could store and display large amounts of text, which became popular in the 1990s. However, early e-book readers lingered on the market, popular in certain techy niches but unable to gain traction with the wider population. Early e-readers had minimal battery life and text that was difficult to read. Through the 2000s, technological advances allowed for smaller and sleeker models. The Apple iPhone and the iPad helped make readers more comfortable with reading on a small screen. The second half of the decade saw the release of many e-readers. The technology got a boost when Oprah Winfrey praised the Kindle on her show in October 2008. By that holiday season, e-book reader sales were booming, and it wasn't just the technologically savvy individuals who were interested anymore. Despite being criticized by some as providing an inferior reading experience to dedicated e-readers, the Apple iPad has been a powerful driving force behind e-book sales—more than 1.5 million books were downloaded on the Apple iPad during its first month of release in 2010.[1]

1. Maneker, Marion. "Parsing the iPad's Book Sale Numbers," The Big Money, May 4, 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20100508183857/http://www.thebigmoney.com:80/blogs/goodnight-gutenberg/2010/05/04/ibooks-vs-app-books-ipad.

E-books make up less than 5 percent of the current book market, but that number is growing. At the beginning of 2010, Amazon had about 400,000 titles available for the Kindle device. Some devices offer wireless accessibility, meaning that an e-reader doesn't have to be connected to a computer to access titles. An open Wi-Fi connection is all it needs. With access to a dazzling array of books available with just a few clicks, it's no wonder the contemporary consumer seems enamored with the e-book. An e-book reader has the space to store thousands of titles in an object smaller and lighter than the average hardcover novel. Also, though the devices themselves can be expensive, e-books are usually cheaper than their hardcopy equivalents; sometimes they're even free. Thanks to efforts like the Gutenberg Project and Google Books (see the following section), more than a million public domain titles are available as free e-books.

Anything that gets people excited about books and reading should be good for the publishing industry, right? Unfortunately for U.S. publishers, it's not that simple. Some publishers worry that e-book sales may actually end up hurting their bottom lines. During the Kindle's first year, Amazon essentially set the standard price for bestselling or new release e-books at $9.99. Since Amazon was acting as a wholesaler and buying these books for half the publisher's list price—generally around $25 for a new hardcover—the company was selling these titles at a loss. However, for Amazon, a short-term loss might have had long-term payoffs. At the start of 2010, the company controlled a 90 percent share of the e-book market. Faced with e-books that cost less than $10, traditional publishers worried that consumers would avoid purchasing a new hardcover priced at $25 (or even a $13 trade paperback).

Figure 1: Photo features an e-reader in a case, resting on the arm of a chair. Most e-readers are the size and shape of one hardcover book.

In January 2010, the conflict between Amazon and the publishing establishment came to a head. Macmillan, one of the six major publishing companies in the United States, suggested a new business model to Amazon, one that resembled the deal that the Big Six publishers had worked out with Apple for e-book sales on the Apple iPad. Essentially, Amazon had been able to buy books from publishers at wholesale rates—half the hardcover list price—and then set whatever retail price it wanted. This allowed Amazon to choose to sell books at a loss in the hope of convincing more people to buy Kindles. Macmillan proposed a system in which Amazon would act more as a commission-earning agent than a wholesaler. In Macmillan's proposed model, the publisher would set the retail price and take 70 percent of each sale, leaving 30 percent for the retailer. Macmillan couldn't force Amazon to agree to this deal, but the publisher could strike a hard bargain: If Amazon refused Macmillan's offer, it could still sell Macmillan titles under the wholesale model, but the publisher would delay e-book editions for 7 months after hardcover releases.

What followed was a standoff. Amazon didn't just reject Macmillan's proposal; it removed the "buy" button from all Macmillan books listed on its website (including print books), essentially refusing to sell Macmillan titles. However, after a few days, Amazon capitulated and agreed to Macmillan's terms, but not before issuing a strongly worded press release claiming that they agreed to sell Macmillan's titles "at prices we believe are needlessly high for e-books," because "Macmillan has a monopoly over their own titles."[2] Still, Macmillan and the other publishers seem to have won this battle: Amazon agreed that e-books for most new fiction and nonfiction books for adults will be priced at $12.99 to $14.99, though best sellers will still be $9.99.[3]

But the $10 book may be the least of the publishing industry's worries. At the start of 2010, more than half of the bestselling titles on Kindle were free. Some of these were public domain novels such as *Pride and Prejudice*, but many others were books by living authors being promoted by publishers by giving away the book. The industry hasn't yet come to a consensus about the utility of free e-books. Some publishers consider it a practice that devalues books in the eyes of customers. "At a time when we are resisting the $9.99 price of e-books," David Young of the Hachette Book Group told The New York Times, "it is illogical to give books away for free ."[4] Other publishers consider free e-books a promotional tool to build word-of-mouth and to introduce readers to new authors.

Other e-books emerge from outside the traditional publishing system. Four of the five bestselling novels in Japan in 2007 were cell phone novels, books that were both written and intended to be read on cell phones. Cell-phone novels are traditionally written by amateurs who post them on free websites. Readers can download copies at no cost, which means no one is making much of a profit from this new genre. Although

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2. Rich, Mokoto. and Brad Stone, "Publisher Wins Fight With Amazon Over E-books," New York Times, January 31, 2010, Technology section.

3. *ibid*

4. Rich, Mokoto. "With Kindle, the Best Sellers Don't Need to Sell," New York Times, January 23, 2010, Books section.

the phenomenon has not caught on in the United States yet, the cell phone novel is feared by some publishers as a further sign of the devaluation of books in a world where browsers expect content to be free.

With e-book sales expected to triple by 2015, it's hard to say what such a quickly growing industry will look like in the future.[5] Some people have theorized that e-readers will lead to an increasing popularity of the short story, which can be bought and read in short increments. Others have claimed that they'll destroy the book industry as we know it. Whatever the future of books looks like, everything—from the way books are produced to the way we read them—continues to change rapidly because of new technologies.

## Digitizing Libraries

The idea of a digitized library has been around since the early years of the Internet. A **digital library** stores its materials in a digital format, accessible by computers. Some digital libraries can be accessed locally; others can be accessed remotely through a computer network. Michael Hart founded Project Gutenberg, the oldest digital library, in 1971, 3 years before the Internet went live. Hart's initial goal was to make 10,000 of the most-consulted books publicly available and free by the end of the century. The forward-thinking Hart named his project after the inventor of the movable type printing press, perhaps realizing that book digitization had the potential to revolutionize the way humans produce and read books as much as Gutenberg's invention had centuries earlier. At first, the process was slow for Hart and his fellow book-digitizing volunteers because they were forced to copy text manually until 1989. In the early 1990s, scanners and text-recognition software allowed them to somewhat automate the process.

Fast-forward to 2010. Project Gutenberg's free online library boasts more than 30,000 public domain works available for free download. Stanford University uses a robotic page-turning scanner machine to digitize 1,000 book pages an hour. Stanford's partner in digital library production is Google Books, which has scanned over 10 million books since it began Google Books in 2004. A Chinese company claims to have digitized more than half of all books that have been published in Chinese since 1949. In 2006, *The New York Times* estimated that humans have published at least 32 million books throughout history; the huge push for book digitization makes it seem entirely possible that nearly all known books could be digitized within 50 years.[6]

Some liken the prospect of these widely accessible, easily searchable, free libraries to the proliferation of free libraries in the 19th century, which led to a surge in literacy rates. One of Project Gutenberg's stated goals is

5. McQuivy, James L. "eBook Buying Is About to Spiral Upward," Forrester Research: Making Leaders Successful Every Day, 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20101115051436/https://www.forrester.com/rb/Research/ebook_buying_is_about_to_spiral_upward/q/id/57664/t/2.

6. Kelly, Kevin. "Scan This Book!" New York Times Magazine, May 14, 2006.

"to break down the bars of ignorance and illiteracy" through its library of digitized books.[7] Digital libraries make a huge selection of texts available to people with Internet access, giving them the amazing potential to democratize knowledge. As Bill McCoy, the general manager of Adobe's e-publishing business, told The New York Times in 2006, "Some of us have thousands of books at home, can walk to wonderful big-box bookstores and well-stocked libraries and can get Amazon.com to deliver the next day. The most dramatic effect of digital libraries will be not on us, the well-booked, but on the billions of people worldwide who are underserved by ordinary paper books."[8] Digitized libraries can make fragile materials available to browsers without damaging originals; academic libraries are also able to share important texts without shipping books across the country.

Google Books, the largest online library, is not run by an academic institution though it does claim several as partners. The bulk of free digital books available from Google Books or elsewhere come from the public domain, which constitutes approximately 15 percent of all books. Google Books has made over a million of these titles fully and freely searchable and downloadable. Other works in the Google Books digital library include in-print texts whose publishers have worked out a deal with Google. Some of these titles have their full text available online; others allow only a limited number of page previews. As part of its partnership with publishers, a Google Books search result will often provide links to the publisher's website and to booksellers.

Google Books ran into trouble, however, when it began to digitize millions of books with unclear legal status, such as out-of-print works that weren't yet in the public domain. Many of these are considered **orphan works**, meaning that no one is exactly sure who owns their copyright. In 2004, the site announced plans to scan these texts and to make them searchable, but it would only show sentence-long snippets to searchers. Copyright holders could ask Google to remove these snippets at any time. Google claimed that this digitization plan would benefit authors, whose books would no longer linger in out-of-print limbo; it would also help researchers and readers, who would be able to locate (and perhaps purchase) previously unavailable works.

Publishers and authors did not agree with Google. Many objected to Google's plan to scan first and look into copyright ownership later; others saw Google's profiting from works still under copyright as a clear violation of intellectual property law. In 2005, the Authors Guild of America and the American Association of Publishers (AAP) sued Google for "massive copyright infringement." Google argued that it was essentially creating a massive online card catalog; the Authors Guild and AAP alleged that Google was attempting to monopolize information and profit from it. In 2008, Google agreed to a $125 million settlement with the publishers and the Authors Guild. Some of that money would go directly to copyright holders; some would pay for legal fees; and some would go to found the Book Rights Registry, an independent nonprofit association that would ensure content users (like Google) are paying copyright owners. Copyright owners would get money from

7. Hart, Michael S. and Gregory B. Newby, "Project Gutenberg Principle of Minimal Regulation," Project Gutenberg, 2004.

8. *ibid*

Google and from potential book sales; Google would get money from advertisers, book sales, and institutional subscriptions by libraries.

Still, not everyone agreed with the decision. The Open Book Alliance was formed by a diverse partnership of organizations, including Amazon, Internet Archive, and the National Writers Union, who fear that Google's proprietary control of so much copyrighted material was an antitrust violation. As the group states on its website:

We will assert that any mass book digitization and publishing effort be open and competitive. The process of achieving this promise must be undertaken in the open, grounded in sound public policy and mindful of the need to promote long-term benefits for consumers rather than isolated commercial interests. The Open Book Alliance will counter Google, the Association of American Publishers, and the Authors' [sic] Guild's scheme to monopolize the access, distribution, and pricing of the largest digital database of books in the world.

Another concern, which was mentioned earlier, in the digital library world is digital decay. One librarian at Harvard University told *The New York Times* that "we don't really have any methodology [to preserve digital material] as of yet.... We just store the disks in our climate-controlled stacks, and we're hoping for some kind of universal Harvard guidelines."[9]

## Print-on-Demand and Self-Publishing

Part of what made Gutenberg's printing press so revolutionary was that it allowed books to be mass-produced. In medieval times, readers often commissioned a scribe to copy a text by hand, a process that could take months or even years. But despite their many conveniences, printed books carry their own risks for authors and publishers. Producing books in bulk means that publishers are taking a gamble, attempting to publish enough books to satisfy demand but not so many that unwanted copies linger in warehouses. When a book doesn't sell as much as expected, the publisher may end up taking a loss if the costs of publishing the book exceed the revenue from its sale. Interestingly, modern technology has made it feasible for some authors and publishers to turn to an updated version of the medieval model of producing books on demand for specific customers, allowing them to avoid the risk of carrying a large inventory of books that may or may not sell. **Print-on-demand**, a system in which a book is printed only after an order is received, as well as the increasing trend of self-publishing, may reshape the industry in the 21st century.

**Self-publishing**—a system that involves an author, not a third-party company, being in charge of producing and publishing a work—is not a new concept. Many authors self-published works in their lifetimes, including Virginia Woolf and Oscar Wilde. More recently, popular books like *The Joy of Cooking* and the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series had their origins in self-publishing. Many authors also self-publish when they're

9. Cohen, Patricia. "Fending Off Digital Decay, Bit by Bit," New York Times, March 15, 2010, Arts section.

unable to get support from the traditional publishing world. Daniel Suarez's techno-thriller *Daemon* was rejected by 48 agents before he opted for self-publishing. After creating an interest in blogs, Suarez eventually got a two-book deal with Dutton, an imprint of Random House.[10] Additionally, self-publishing can be an attractive option for authors who want control over their own content. Instead of leaving decisions up to the publisher, authors can control their own editing, designing, and marketing.

One major challenge for authors who choose to strike out on their own is the stigma that's sometimes attached to self-published books. Until recent years, most self-published authors went through the so-called **vanity presses**, which charge writers a premium for published copies of their books. As the name implies, these types of self-publishing ventures were often seen as preying on writers' need to see their own work in print. To justify the cost of printing, a minimum order of a thousand copies was standard, and unless authors were able to find an audience, they had little hope of selling them all. Because there was no quality control and vanity presses would usually publish anyone with money, some readers were skeptical of self-published books. Major retailers and distributors generally refused to carry them, meaning that authors had to rely on their own marketing efforts to sell the books. Before the advent of the Internet, this usually meant either selling copies in person or relying on mail-order catalogs, neither of which is a very reliable way to sell enough copies to recoup costs.

However, beginning in the early 2000s, self-publishing has changed dramatically. Advances made in publishing technology have made it easier for self-published books to more closely resemble traditionally published ones. Free professional typesetting software has allowed writers to format their text for the page; Adobe Photoshop and similar programs have made image editing and graphic design feasible for amateurs and professionals. The Internet has revolutionized marketing and distribution, allowing authors of books about niche subjects to reach a worldwide audience. As a result, many new Internet-based self-publishing companies have sprung up, offering a variety of services. Some companies, such as Lulu Enterprises and CreateSpace, feature a low-cost service without many bells and whistles; others offer a package of services that may include professional editing, cover design, and marketing. The process has become streamlined as well. For example, to publish a book with Lulu, an author just has to upload a PDF of a properly formatted text file; decide what size, paper, and binding options to use; and make a cover using a premade template. Self-published books are generally quicker to produce and allow an author a higher share of the royalties, though it usually costs more on a per-book basis. As a result, self-published books often have a higher list price.

Whereas vanity publishers were stigmatized for charging authors sometimes thousands of dollars to publish their books, creating a book using the services of Lulu or CreateSpace doesn't cost the author anything. That's because users who upload their content aren't creating an actual, physical copy of a book; instead, they're essentially making a potential volume. With print-on-demand technology, books aren't printed until an order is placed, which significantly lowers the financial risk for self-publishers. Print-on-demand is especially useful

10. McHugh, Josh. "How the Self-Published Debut Daemon Earned Serious Geek Cred," Wired, April 21, 2008.

for books with a limited or niche audience. Print-on-demand isn't only being used by self-publishers; both small presses and academic publishers are using the technology for older books without much of an audience. With print-on-demand, books that may only sell a few dozen copies a year can stay in print without the publisher having to worry about printing a full run of copies and being stuck with unsold inventory.

Although some self-published authors manage to find a huge audience, most don't. Bob Young, the founder of Lulu, told the London Times that his goal is to publish 1 million books that each sell 100 copies rather than 100 books that sell 1 million copies each.[11] Lulu and other enterprising self-publishers disrupt the traditional notion of the publishing house, which acted as a sort of gatekeeper for the book industry—ushering a few talented, lucky writers in and keeping others out. In the world of self-publishing, there are no barriers—anyone with a book in a PDF file can whip up a nice-looking paperback in under 1 hour. This has democratized the industry, allowing writers who had been rejected by traditional publishers to find their own audience. But it has also meant that a lot of writing with little literary merit has been published as well. Additionally, if a bestseller in the Lulu world is a book that sells 500 copies, as Bob Young told the London Times, then few authors are going to be able to make a living through self-publishing. Indeed, most of the self-publishing success stories involve writers whose self-published efforts sold well enough to get them a book deal with one of the traditional publishing houses, a sign that for better or for worse, the traditional publishing model still has the social cachet and sales to dominate the industry.

### Key Takeaways

- E-books have been increasing in popularity with customers since the 1990s. However, the publishing industry is worried that setting the price for e-books at $9.99, as Amazon initially did for most titles, would turn consumers away from buying more expensive physical books. Amazon lost money on every $9.99 e-book but hoped that the low prices would act as an incentive to buy its e-book reader, the Kindle device. In 2010, Macmillan and other publishers forced Amazon to change its pricing model to give publishers more control over e-book prices.
- Digital libraries began with Project Gutenberg in 1971. Digitized books allow anyone with an Internet connection access to millions of volumes, and some advocates hope that digital

11. Whitworth, Damian. "Publish and Be Downloaded," Times (London), March 8, 2006, Life and Style section.

libraries will lead to a rise in global literacy rates. Millions of books in the public domain are available for free download. Google Books, the largest digital library, has run into trouble with its plan to digitize as many books as possible, even books under current copyright. The Open Book Alliance accuses Google of monopolizing copyrighted content to make a profit.

- Self-publishing used to carry a social stigma as well as a high cost. Thanks to print-on-demand services, self-publishing is an increasingly popular option for amateur and professional writers. It appeals to authors who may have a niche audience or who want more control over their work. Print-on-demand makes it possible for books to never go out of print.

## Exercises

- E-books have been increasing in popularity with customers since the 1990s. However, the publishing industry is worried that setting the price for e-books at $9.99, as Amazon initially did for most titles, would turn consumers away from buying more expensive physical books. Amazon lost money on every $9.99 e-book but hoped that the low prices would act as an incentive to buy its e-book reader, the Kindle device. In 2010, Macmillan and other publishers forced Amazon to change its pricing model to give publishers more control over e-book prices.
- Digital libraries began with Project Gutenberg in 1971. Digitized books allow anyone with an Internet connection access to millions of volumes, and some advocates hope that digital libraries will lead to a rise in global literacy rates. Millions of books in the public domain are available for free download. Google Books, the largest digital library, has run into trouble with its plan to digitize as many books as possible, even books under current copyright. The Open Book Alliance accuses Google of monopolizing copyrighted content to make a profit.
- Self-publishing used to carry a social stigma as well as a high cost. Thanks to print-on-demand services, self-publishing is an increasingly popular option for amateur and professional writers. It appeals to authors who may have a niche audience or who want more control over their work. Print-on-demand makes it possible for books to never go out of print.

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PART VIII

# CHAPTER 8: ELECTRIFYING COMMUNICATION: THE TELEGRAPH AND TELEPHONE

The development of the telegraph was a turning point in communication history that ushered in the modern era of telecommunications. It transformed the information sharing process by enabling nearly instantaneous communication over great distances. Messages were delivered by horse or ship prior to the telegraph, which could take days or weeks. The telegraph had a significant impact on business, media, and interpersonal communication since it allowed information to be conveyed quickly across continents.

By enabling direct communication across great distances, the telephone further revolutionized communication. The telephone allowed for more casual and intimate communication between people since it was more widely available to the general population than the telegraph, which needed skilled operators to send and receive coded messages. Various social, political, and economic considerations influenced the creation and broad use of these technologies, including their impact on communities like the deaf community and their strategic use during conflicts like the Civil War.

Thomas Edison, Alexander Graham Bell, and Samuel Morse were among the prominent individuals who made substantial contributions to the field of telecommunications technology development, frequently in the face of rivalry and controversy. Their inventions impacted everything from daily social interactions to international commercial operations, laying the foundation for contemporary communication networks. The telephone and telegraph demonstrated the continuous evolution of human connection and communication, laying the groundwork for the digital communication technologies that characterize our modern world.

# 8.1 HISTORICAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS

**Learning Objectives**

- Understand the historical development of telecommunication technologies, from the early experiments with electrical telegraphs to the invention and adoption of the telephone.
- Analyze the social, political, and economic factors that influenced the adoption of telecommunication technologies, including their impact on the Civil War and the deaf community.
- Evaluate the contributions and controversies surrounding key figures in the development of telecommunication, such as Samuel Morse, Alexander Graham Bell, and Thomas Edison, and their lasting impact on modern communication systems.

## Early Development

Before the telegraph became a household name, several individuals dabbled in the field of electrical communication. Harrison Gray Dyar was one of the earliest experimenters, successfully conducting tests in 1826-27. However, he eventually abandoned his pursuits. Similarly, David Alter of Pennsylvania developed a rudimentary electrical telegraph system in 1836 but failed to commercialize it. These early endeavors laid the groundwork for what would become a revolution in communication.

Samuel Morse, a name synonymous with the telegraph, entered the scene in the late 1830s. He employed Alfred Vail in September 1837 to refine his telegraph system. Vail's engineering skills were instrumental in transforming Morse's prototype into a more practical device. That same month, Morse filed for a patent, officially marking his entry into the telegraphy arena.

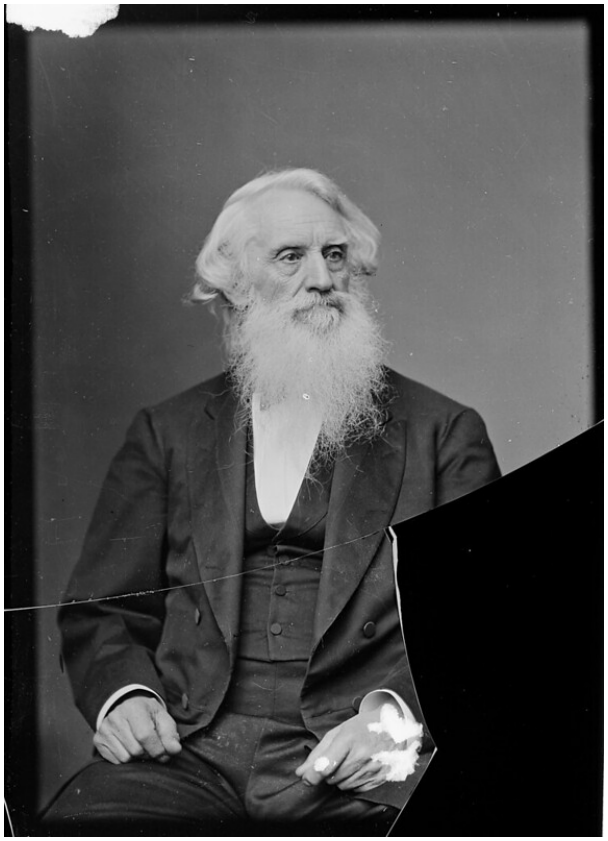


Figure 1: A photo of Samuel Morse.

Morse's first public demonstration was at Speedwell Ironworks in New Jersey on January 6, 1838. The event garnered significant attention and even involved a presentation to President Martin Van Buren. Despite this, Morse faced legislative hurdles. A proposal by Congressman Francis Ormand Jonathan Smith to allocate $30,000 for Morse's telegraph was rejected by Congress in April 1838. Undeterred, Morse continued his work and finally secured a patent on June 20, 1840.

The U.S. Congress finally saw the potential of Morse's invention and allocated funds on March 3, 1843, for a telegraph line between Washington, D.C., and Baltimore. Initially, Morse planned to lay the wire underground, but the project faced numerous setbacks. Learning from the work of William Fothergill Cooke and Charles Wheatstone's success in England with pole-based lines, Morse decided to switch tactics.

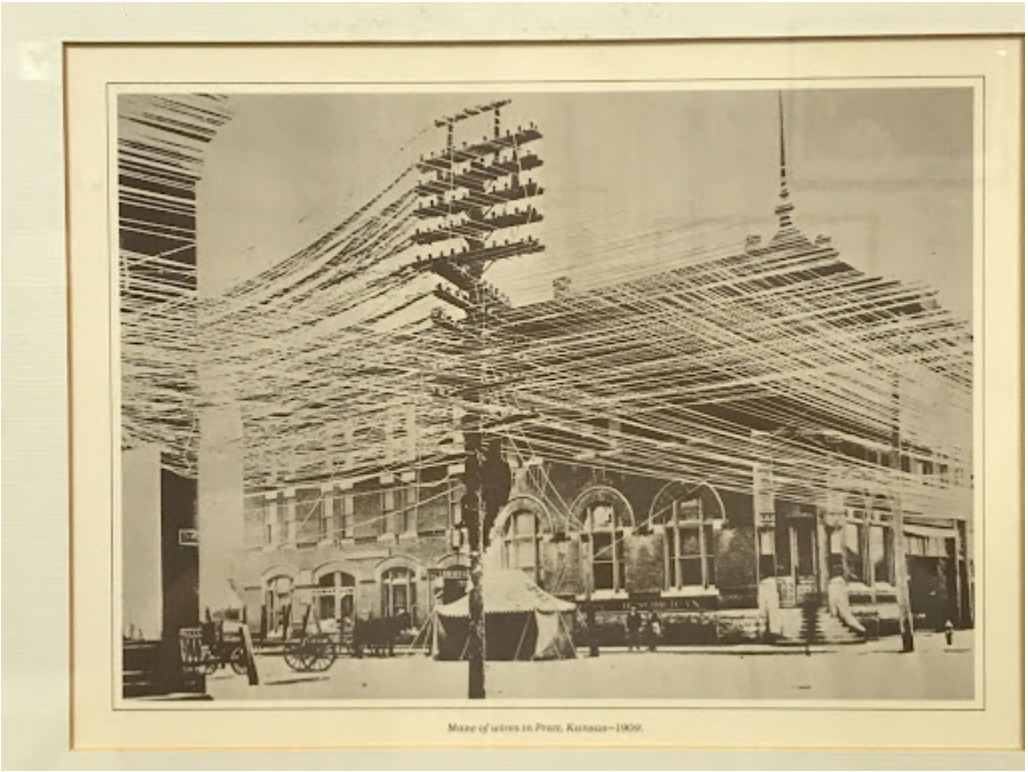


Figure 2: Caption reads: "A mess of wires in Pratt, Kansas-1909." Photo demonst eventual visual clutter that would be caused by the decision to use a pole-based wire system.

Work on the pole-based line began in earnest on April 1, 1844. The construction used chestnut poles of seven meters in height, spaced 60 meters apart. The first test message was sent on May 1, 1844, conveying news of Henry Clay's nomination for U.S. President. Morse's famous message, "What hath God wrought!" was transmitted on May 24, 1844, marking a monumental moment in the history of communication.

The first public telegraph office opened in Washington, D.C., on April 1, 1845, under the control of the Postmaster-General. This marked the beginning of commercial telegraphy, as the public now had to pay for messages. By the end of 1846, telegraph lines had expanded significantly, connecting major cities like Washington, Boston, Pittsburgh, New York, Albany, and Buffalo. The expansion was so rapid that by the end of the decade, lines had even reached Toronto and Montreal in Canada.

By 1850, the United States had about 12,000 miles of telegraph lines operated by 20 different companies. Western Union was organized in 1851, and it would later become one of the most significant players in the telegraph industry. The 1850s also saw the telegraph reach the West Coast, including cities like San Francisco, San Jose, Stockton, Sacramento, and Marysville.

The dream of a transcontinental telegraph line became a reality in 1861. Work began on July 4, and the line was completed on October 24 at Salt Lake City, Utah. This achievement rendered the Pony Express obsolete and connected the two coasts of the United States for the first time.

Figure 3: Frank E. Webner, pony express rider, sitting on top of a horse, ca. 1861. The first ride of the Pony Express began on April 3, 1860. The service would end in October 1861 with the advent of the transcontinental telegraph.

Although the Pony Express was no longer needed, the way the telegraph functioned still required humans to help transmit the messages to their destination. The message transmitted via telegraph would be deciphered into letters that were printed on a telegraph, and the telegram was then delivered to its local addressee. This work was often done by children.

Figure 4: Photo of seven boys standing in front of a building labeled "Commercial Cables. Quick Service." Postal Telegraph Messengers. (Indiana has no age limit for messengers.) Indianapolis, Ind, August 1908.

The first transatlantic telegraph cable was laid on August 16, 1858, but failed after just three weeks. It wasn't until July 18, 1866, that a reliable new cable was successfully laid. By the 1870s, telegraph lines had reached as far as India and Australia, making it a truly global communication network.

By this point in time, Morse was making relatively little from the patent rights he held for the telegraph. In the U.S., the demand for telegraphy service led to the founding of a wide variety of telegraph companies, and many of these companies produced their own variations of devices that could be used to transmit messages. These variations allowed the filing of new patents that didn't require the licensing of Morse's original patent. While European countries recognized Morse as the inventor of the telegraph, he never actually filed for patents in any countries outside of the U.S., even though he traveled in Europe significantly to promote his work. Therefore, he received no royalties outside the U.S.[1]

1. Standage, Tom. *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century's on-Line Pioneers*. New York London Oxford New Delhi Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2014.

The demand for telegraph services helped drive significant innovation. In 1858, Wheatstone secured a patent for an automatic sender, which could transmit messages at 400 words per minute – ten times faster than existing human operators! The automatic transmission used pre-punched tape to transmit the message. Although a human hand was still needed to create these pre-punched tapes, this unskilled labor could be paid for at one-fourth of the salary demanded by human telegraph operators. Sending more words per minute also helped increase the volume of information that could be transmitted across a line, with a trickle-down effect on how people paid for sending telegrams – rather than paying by the word, they could now pay by the length of tape used.[2]

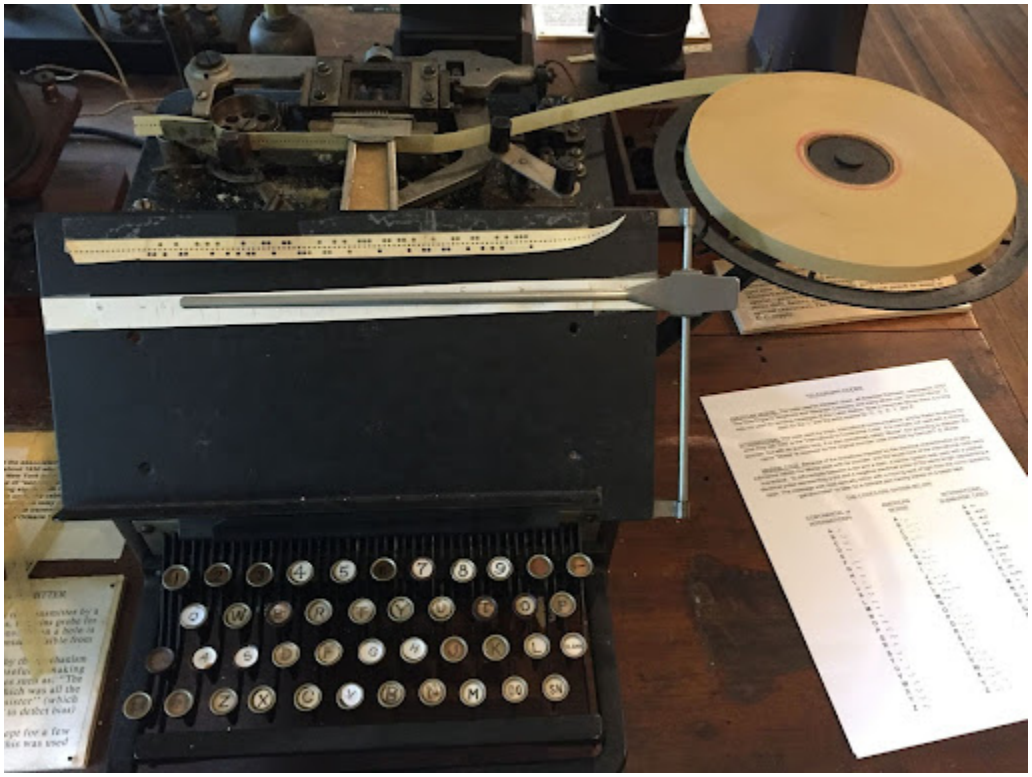


Figure 5: A photo of a Kleinschmidt Perforator, taken at the French Cable Station Museum in Orleans, MA. This machine worked much like a typewriter and allowed the use of a keyboard to type telegraphic messages ahead of time. The machine would puncture the tape using punch blocks with dots and dashes on it.

2. Standage, Tom. *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century's on-Line Pioneers*. New York London Oxford New Delhi Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2014.

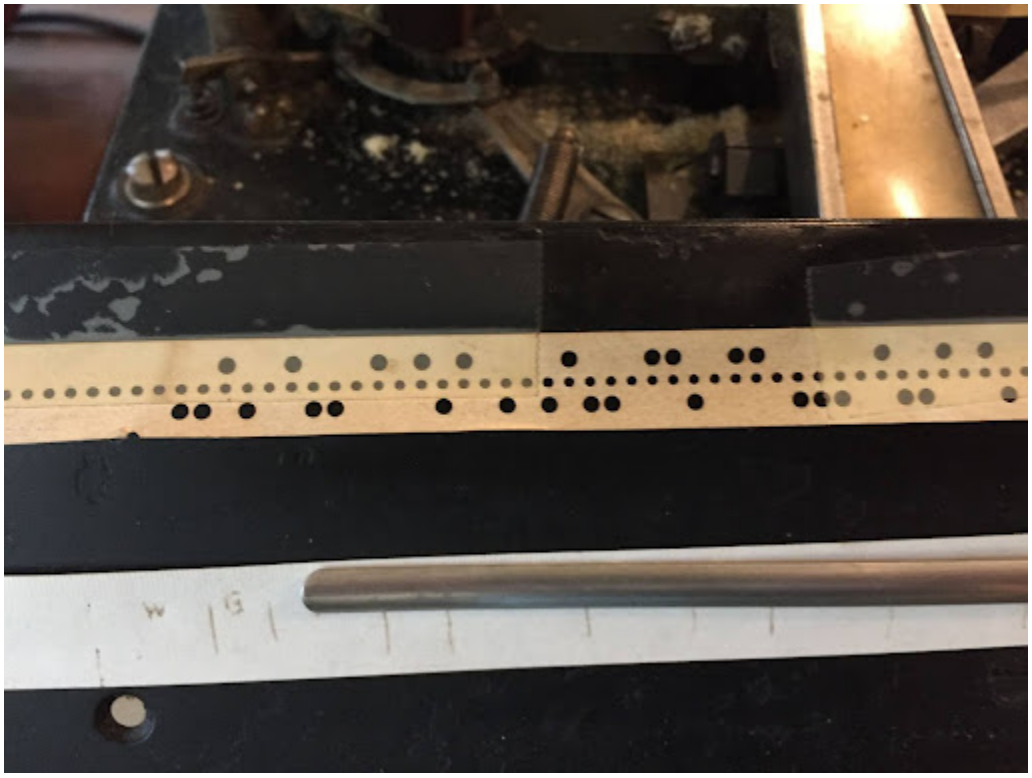


Figure 6: A closeup photo of the tape in a Kleinschmidt Perforator, taken at the French Cable Station Museum in Orleans, MA.

Figure 7: A photo of a printing telegraph on display at Thomas Edison National Historic Park in West Orange, NJ; developed at Edison's Newark, NJ lab.

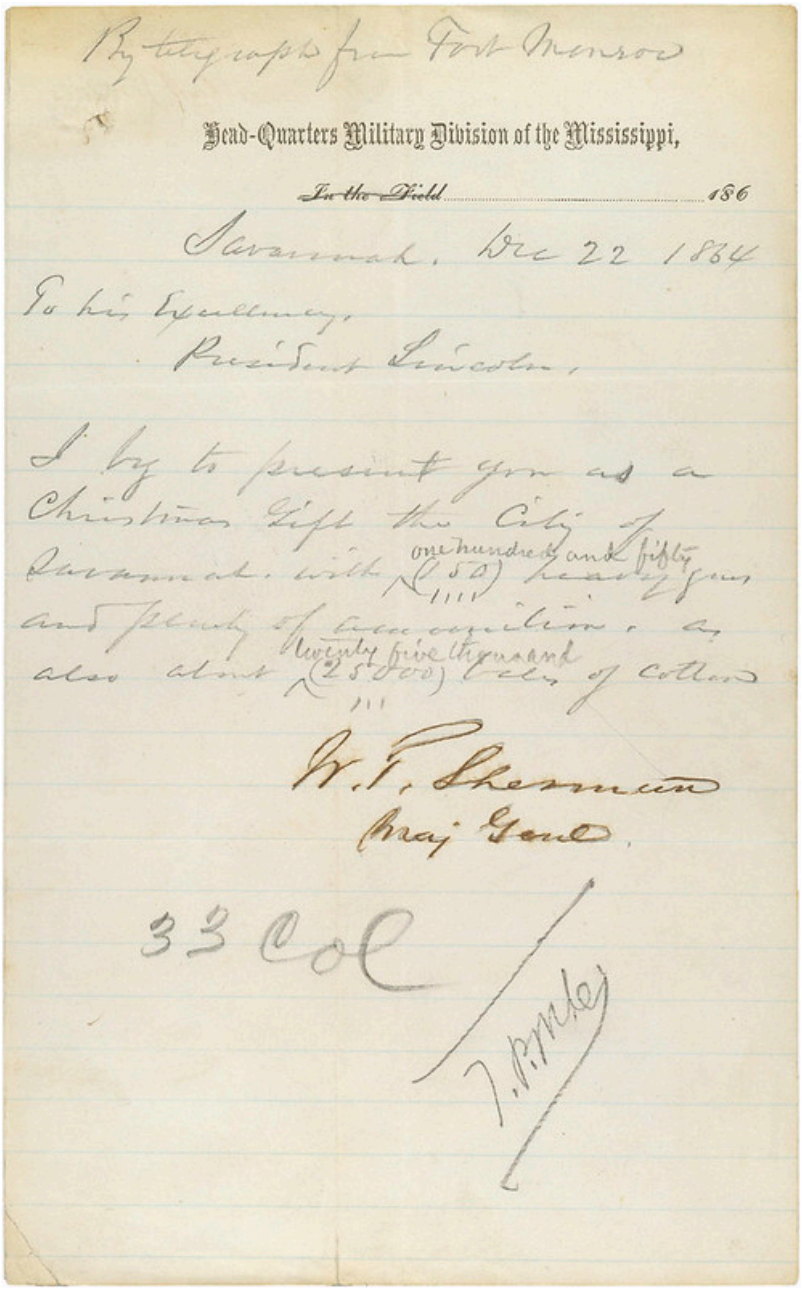
## The Civil War and Beyond

Tom Wheeler offers an in-depth analysis of how the telegraph impacted the Civil War in his book, *Mr. Lincoln's T-Mails: The Untold Story of How Abraham Lincoln Used the telegraph to win the Civil War.*[3] The telegraph emerged as a transformative technology during the Civil War, offering a significant advantage to the Union army, which was electronically interconnected far more than their Rebel opponents. This

3. Wheeler, Tom. *Mr. Lincoln's T-Mails: The Untold Story of How Abraham Lincoln Used the Telegraph to Win the Civil War*. New York: HarperCollins e-books, 2009.

innovative technology allowed for rapid communication across vast distances, transforming the way leadership was exercised and military operations were conducted.

Abraham Lincoln, the Union's President, was an early adopter of the telegraph. He recognized and embraced its potential as a tool to impose his leadership, manage military strategy, and keep abreast of developments on the battlefield in real-time. Lincoln's use of the telegraph was groundbreaking; it not only expedited the delivery of messages but enabled a virtual conversation occurring in near real-time between parties separated by large distances. This marked a significant shift in the nature of national executive leadership and provided Lincoln with a tool that played a crucial role in the Union's victory in the Civil War.



By telegraph from Fort Monroe

Head-Quarters Military Division of the Mississippi,

In the Field ..... 186

Savannah, Dec 22 1864

To his Excellency,

President Lincoln,

I beg to present you as a Christmas Gift the City of Savannah, with one hundred and fifty (150) heavy guns and plenty of ammunition, & also about twenty five thousand (25,000) bales of cotton

W. T. Sherman

Maj Genl

33 Col

T. Pyndey

Figure 8: Telegram from General William T. Sherman to President Abraham Lincoln announcing the surrender of Savannah, Georgia, as a Christmas present to the President., 12/22/1864.

In the mid-19th-century world, where electricity was barely understood, the concept of sending messages via electric pulses was revolutionary, and the acceptance of this technology varied greatly. Wheeler writes:

> It was easier for a member of Congress in the 1960s to comprehend placing a man on the moon than it was for his or her counterpart in the 1840s to grasp the concept of sending messages by electric sparks.[4]

Northern states, which were more inclined toward embracing innovation, utilized the telegraph to their advantage. It became an integral part of their military and strategic operations, greatly enhancing their efficiency and efficacy.

The telegraph also played a significant role in conjunction with the railway system. Railroads provided free rights of way along their tracks to telegraph companies that, in turn, carried railroad traffic as priority and for free. This symbiotic relationship led to improvements in both railroad and telegraph system efficiencies, further contributing to the strategic advantage of the Union. In contrast, Southern states, fearing the impact of these innovations on their traditional way of life, resisted the implementation of the telegraph and the railway system. This resistance limited their electronic infrastructure and the expansion of their communication networks during the war, placing them at a disadvantage.

In addition to its military application, the telegraph also influenced information control and censorship during the war. The administration reached an understanding with wire services, which were favored as the outlet of choice, but with the expectation that they would report stories as the government wanted. To safeguard important transmissions, both sides developed cipher codes, adding another layer of complexity to wartime communication.

In the face of challenges and setbacks, Lincoln's use of the telegraph proved instrumental in maintaining control and direction. He demonstrated a profound understanding of this new technology and used it effectively to guide the Union's strategy. The telegraph, coupled with Lincoln's leadership, played a significant role in the Union's victory in the Civil War. Lincoln's adoption and effective use of the telegraph represented a stunning breakthrough, particularly in a world where electricity was an abstract concept and no national figure had ever used electronic messages in the exercise of their leadership:

> It was how Lincoln used the traffic coming from the other direction—the inbound reports, including those not addressed to him—that broke new ground. By reviewing the contents of the telegraph clerk's drawer "down to the raisins," the president turned the telegraph into a window on activities spread over a vast geographic area and an insight into the thinking at his generals' headquarters.[5]

His ability to harness this new technology for leadership and strategic advantage was nothing short of inspired. Lincoln's strategic application of the telegraph set a precedent for the use of technology in leadership, a legacy that continues to resonate in today's digital age.

The use of the telegraph and related technology extended into future wars as well. For example, World War

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4. *ibid,* p. 20

5. *ibid,* p. 181

I featured telegraph battalions. Fort Devens (then Camp Devens), in Devens, MA was home to the 401st telegraph battalion.

Figure 9: An image of a photograph showing a car labeled “Telephone” parked in front of a building labeled Telephone & Telegraph Company. The photo is on display at the Fort Devens Museum, in Devens, MA.

Figure 10: A photo of equipment that was used to train telegraph and telephone operators at Camp Devens. The photo is on display at the Fort Devens Museum, in Devens, MA. A telegraph key, tape reels, headphones, and other equipment are visible.

Even as the telegraph waned in popularity with regular citizens, the skills associated with its technology remained important for the military. Fort Devens served as a central training location for these skills through the 1970s.

> Fort Devens hosted the United States Army Security Agency Training Center and School from 1951 until 1976. ASA training included virtually every facet of electronic and signals intelligence. LInguists, Morse intercept operators, teletype and voice intercept operators, cryptographers, and direction finding equipment operators were trained here. From Fort Devens, ASA personnel were sent to detachments across the globe. Many of their missions remain classified to this day. On January 1, 1977, the ASA was replaced by the U.S. Army INtelligence and Security Command. For countless ASA veterans, For Devens was where they learned to be "Vigilant Always."[6]

6. Object label for The Army Security Agency at the Fort Devens Museum in Devens, MA.. Seen on: September 5, 2023.

Figure 11: A photo of equipment that was used to train members of the Army Security Agency at the Fort Devens Museum, in Devens, MA.

## From Text to Voice

The technology that was at the core of the telegraph slowly developed into what would become the telephone as inventors continued to experiment with new ways to send an even greater volume of messages across wires. The 1870s saw significant technological advancements in telegraphy. Duplex systems, introduced in 1871, allowed two messages to be sent over a single wire at the same time but in opposite directions. Thomas Edison took this a step further with his invention of the quadruplex telegraph in 1874, which allowed four separate signals to be transmitted and received on a single wire simultaneously.

Figure 12: A photo of a telegraph key, taken at Thomas Edison National Historic Park in West Orange, NJ. The caption reads: "TELEGRAPH SENDING KEY & RECEIVER: In the 1860s Americans communicated across long distances by telegraph wire. As a young man, Edison worked as an operator for the Western Union Telegraph Company. He changed jobs often and worked at offices in Cincinnati, Louisville, Boston and New York City. Edison make good use of his time by experimenting with the equipment he was using. His earliest patents were awarded for improvements in the field of telegraphy."

Work on transmitting voice over these wires began as early as 1849, with Italian immigrant Antonio Meucci, who created a device to transmit audio between his workshop and the bedroom of his disabled wife, Esther, on the third floor of their cottage. He began installing the device in 1854 and achieved success by 1856.[7] A German inventor, Philipp Reis, also invented a version of the telephone in 1861. This device captured audio, converted it to electrical pulses that were transmitted over a wire, and then converted them back into audio at the other end.[8] However, neither of these inventors ever received a patent for their work.[9]

7. https://web.archive.org/web/20100706204628/http://www.aei.it/ita/museo/mam_coll.htm

8. "Bell 'Did Not Invent Telephone.'" December 1, 2003. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/3253174.stm.

9. New Hampshire Telephone Museum, NHTM (Version 2.2), [Mobile App]. App Store. https://apps.apple.com/us/app/nhtm/id1076102853.

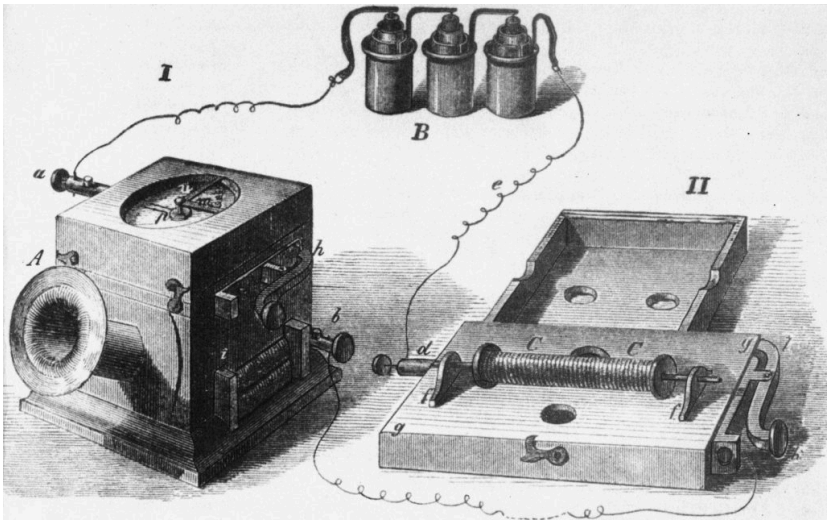


Figure 13: A drawing of the Reis Phone.

Alexander Graham Bell and Elisha Gray both made filings with the patent office on the same day, Monday, February 14, 1876. Gray had filed a patent caveat, or provisional patent application meant to block other inventors from submitting a similar patent for a period of one year. However, Bell filed his patent on the same day, even though it was not yet fully working. Bell's patent was apparently reviewed first, awarding him the patent, however, if Gray's caveat had been reviewed first, Bell's patent would have been blocked.[10] Both men were working toward the invention of a harmonic telegraph that was intended to expand the capacity of telegraph lines. Unlike Meucci and Reis, the ability to transmit voice was an unexpected consequence of this work. The plan for this device was to use a series of reeds that would oscillate at the same frequency, generating electrical signals that would be transmitted across the telegraph line. Identical reeds at the other end could receive the signal transmitted by its twin and produce a series of dots and dashes. This system would allow for the transmission of multiple messages at the same time, with a unique message communicated by each reed with a unique frequency.[11]

Controversy lingers over who should receive the credit for being first to invent the telephone. In 2001, the U.S. Congress passed a resolution that credits Antonio Meucci as the inventor, but Canada's House of Commons responded by passing a motion recognizing Alexander Graham Bell.[12]

Bell's first breakthrough came on June 2, 1875. One of the reeds became lodged and Bell's assistant, Thomas Watson, pulled it with greater force than usual to dislodge it. This resulted in Bell hearing a unique twang of

10. *ibid.*

11. Standage, Tom. *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century's on-Line Pioneers*. New York London Oxford New Delhi Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2014.

12. Hayes, Derek. *Canada: An Illustrated History*. Vancouver / Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 2004.

the reed at his end of the wire, a sound far more intricate than the rudimentary musical tones his device was designed to transmit. This incident sparked an insight in Bell, leading him to the realization that his device could be modified to transport any sounds, including human voices, over a wire.[13] But it was his significant work up to this point that allowed him to understand the importance of this accident:

> Pasteur once wrote "Chance favors the prepared mind," and this incident, when Nature left the door to her secrets ajar for one instant, confirms his insight. Bell's vague, dreamy notion of how sound might be mirrored by an undulating electrical current, his hyper-normal sense of hearing, and the months of utter concentration which him habitually and unconsciously press the reed-magnet to his ear, all combined to let him see the significance of an "accident" as though illuminated by a bolt of lighting. He knew what had happened even though it would take him many hours to articulate in words for others.[14]

Based on this work, Bell filed his patent in February of 1876. Another breakthrough occurred by accident on March 10th, 1876. This time, the breakthrough was inspired by Bell's controversial involvement with the deaf community.

## Bell's Controversial Work with the Deaf Community

Bell's father had created the "Visible Speech" technique for instructing the deaf, and his grandfather was a distinguished speech teacher. Bell applied his father's approach in several educational settings, including the Boston School for Deaf Mutes and the American Asylum for the Deaf. His own life experiences, such as having a mother with hearing loss and a wife who was both his former student and deaf, had a profound impact on his work.[15]

Bell's expertise made him a natural choice for advising the Census Bureau. As early as 1889, he began making recommendations for more accurate and sensitive enumeration of people with hearing and speech disabilities. Appointed as "Expert Special Agent of the Census Office" in 1900, Bell was responsible for designing the supplemental questionnaire for the census, which for the first time included carefully phrased questions to assess varying degrees of disabilities. The resulting report, though not completed until 1906, offered the most comprehensive data on the deaf, blind, and those with speech impairments up to that time. Bell's nuanced understanding of disability and his sensitive approach to questioning had a long-lasting impact, laying the foundation for modern census methodology that recognizes various disabilities, including cognitive

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13. Standage, Tom. *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century's on-Line Pioneers*. New York London Oxford New Delhi Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2014

14. Boettinger, H. M. The Telephone Book: Bell, Watson, Vail and American Life, 1876-1976. Croton-on-Hudson, N.Y: Riverwood Publishers, 1977.

15. Berke, Jamie. "Alexander Graham Bell and His Controversial Views on Deafness." Verywell Health, July 13, 2023. https://www.verywellhealth.com/alexander-graham-bell-deafness-1046539.

and ambulatory difficulties. Despite the stress the census work inflicted on him, as noted by his wife, Mabel, Bell's contributions to this field were pioneering and left an enduring legacy.[16] In addition to this work on the census, he also created an *audiometer* that was used to test hearing and identify those who could be in an early stage of hearing loss. He even supervised the education of Helen Keller, a deaf and blind student, with whom he remained friends for the duration of his life.[17]

However, Bell also held controversial opinions on deaf intermarriage, influenced by his beliefs in eugenics. Although his work was focused on teaching the deaf to communicate in a way that would allow them to be incorporated back into society, he was nonetheless concerned about the possibility of a "deaf sub-species of humanity."[18] He submitted a paper to the National Academy of Sciences in 1883, detailing his worries and suggesting restrictive actions. These included discouraging marriages between individuals born deaf and gradually eliminating the use of sign language in favor of spoken language in deaf education. While Bell's focus on oral communication has been praised for enabling better interaction between the deaf and those who can hear, the foundational beliefs of his work have been criticized for marginalizing the deaf community. His views led to the sidelining of sign language and contributed to the notion that deaf individuals are inherently "flawed," eroding their self-respect and ability for self-expression.[19]

It was his work on devices used to help the deaf learn to speak that led to his breakthrough with the telephone:

> That a pioneer teacher of the deaf – where lack of speeches the human tragedy he grapples with – became the inventor of a device which is based totally on human speech is remarkable enough. But the fact is that deafness played an overwhelming part in the events of his life.[20]

Bell himself said that, "It is only right that it should be known that the telephone is one of the products of the work of the Horace Mann School for the Deaf in Boston and resulted from my attempts to benefit the children of the school.."[21]

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16. Martin, Chris. "Alexander Graham Bell and the 1900 Census." United States Census Bureau, n.d. https://www.census.gov/history/pdf/agbellarticle-32017.pdf

17. Boettinger, H. M. The Telephone Book: Bell, Watson, Vail and American Life, 1876-1976. Croton-on-Hudson, N.Y: Riverwood Publishers, 1977.

18. *ibid*

19. Berke, Jamie. "Alexander Graham Bell and His Controversial Views on Deafness." Verywell Health, July 13, 2023. https://www.verywellhealth.com/alexander-graham-bell-deafness-1046539.

20. Boettinger, H. M. The Telephone Book: Bell, Watson, Vail and American Life, 1876-1976. Croton-on-Hudson, N.Y: Riverwood Publishers, 1977.

21. *ibid,* p. 153

## The Breakthrough

Bell was searching for a way to graphically record sound waves. He wrote, "If I could make a current of electricity vary in intensity precisely as the air varies in intensity during the production of sound, I should be able to transmit speech telegraphically."[22] In order to do this, Bell and Watson developed a system in which a diaphragm was suspended in a diluted sulfuric acid which would rise and fall in the acid. A battery current then vibrated a receiver at the other end, producing sound. Although sulfuric acid is no longer used, modern phones still rely on the concept of variable resistance![23]

The breakthrough on March 10th in his Boston attic occurred when Bell spilled sulfuric acid on himself as he was about to test the device with Watson, and he called out, "Mr. Watson, come here, I want you!" Watson heard him through the device for the first time, and rushed back to help, noting he had heard every world clearly.[2425]This first message every transmitted via Bell's telephone is noteworthy for several reasons:

> ...the strict, Victorian formality of Bell's "Mr. Watson" after months of fraternal associations; Bell's instinctive use of the primitive telephone to summon aid in what must have been a somewhat disconcerting accident; and the first practical use of this now-everyday instrument as an emergency call for help. No high-sounding phrases before distinguished audiences as the "What hath God wrought?" of Morse's telegraph. Bell avoided historically self conscious rhetoric used by heads of states. Instead, a simple plea from a human being in trouble attended the telephone's entrance as a social force. No more appropriate and symbolic event could be imagined or invented.[26]

You can hear Watson describing this breakthrough in the soundtrack for a 1914 film about the invention of the telephone:

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After several more months of enhancements, the telephone, originally perceived as an upgraded "talking

22. New Hampshire Telephone Museum, NHTM (Version 2.2), [Mobile App]. App Store. https://apps.apple.com/us/app/nhtm/id1076102853.

23. Boettinger, H. M. The Telephone Book: Bell, Watson, Vail and American Life, 1876-1976. Croton-on-Hudson, N.Y: Riverwood Publishers, 1977.

24. *ibid.*

25. New Hampshire Telephone Museum, NHTM (Version 2.2), [Mobile App]. App Store. https://apps.apple.com/us/app/nhtm/id1076102853.

26. Boettinger, H. M. The Telephone Book: Bell, Watson, Vail and American Life, 1876-1976. Croton-on-Hudson, N.Y: Riverwood Publishers, 1977.

telegraph", was introduced to the public. Another, more recent breakthrough has allowed us to listen to Bell's voice for the first time, through the recovery of a wax recording:

*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://rotel.pressbooks.pub/comm-media-studies/?p=210#oembed-1*

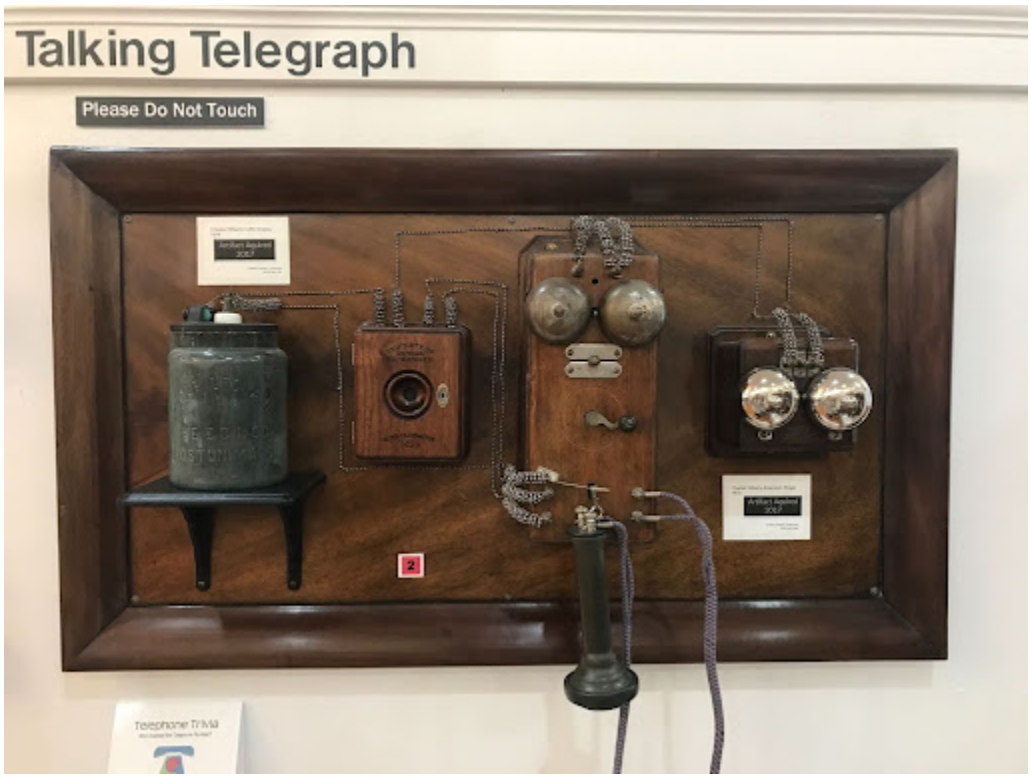


Figure 14: A photo of the early talking telegraphs on display at the New Hampshire Telephone Museum.

Bell's impact is dual-faceted: he transformed global communication through the telephone and had a lasting, albeit disputed, influence on deaf education. These two areas were closely connected, as his work in one often shaped his innovations and thoughts in the other. While his technological contributions are universally praised, his effect on the deaf community continues to be a topic of ongoing discussion and controversy.

For a brief period of time, the telegraph and telephone co-existed, and improvements continued to be made to telegraphic devices. One example includes Edison's 1877 recording telegraph, which would lead to further work related to recording sound, covered in a future chapter.

Figure 15: Photograph of Edison's recording telegraph, taken at Thomas Edison National Historic Park in West Orange, NJ. The caption reads, "This machine predates the phonograph. Edison called it 'the father of the phonograph.' It recorded incoming telegraph messages by indenting code signals on a paper disc, and then retransmitted them, which inspired Edison to do something similar with sound."

**Key Takeaways**

- The telegraph revolutionized communication, laying the groundwork for modern technologies, and played a pivotal role in the Union's victory during the Civil War.
- Despite its transformative impact, the telegraph faced numerous challenges, including legislative hurdles and technical setbacks, before becoming a commercial and global success.
- The development of the telegraph and telephone was deeply intertwined with social issues, including the treatment and perception of the deaf community, showcasing the complex relationship between technology and society.

**Exercises**

1. Several inventors like Harrison Gray Dyar and David Alter were mentioned as early experimenters who failed to commercialize their inventions. What factors do you think contributed to their lack of success compared to Samuel Morse and Alexander Graham Bell?
2. Alexander Graham Bell had controversial views on deaf education and eugenics. How do you think these views influenced his work, and what ethical considerations arise from this?
3. Create a timeline that highlights the key milestones in the development of telecommunication technologies from the early 19th century to the late 19th century. Include inventors, inventions, and significant events like patents and public demonstrations.

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# 8.2 IMPACTS OF THE TELEGRAPH

**Learning Objectives**

- Articulate the complex interplay of technological, human, and geopolitical factors that shape the materiality and functionality of undersea cables, including their historical roots in telegraph technology.
- Understand the concept of "technogenesis," and how it applies to the co-evolutionary relationship between humans and communication technologies, from telegraph code books to modern digital networks.
- Gain insights into the notion of "chronocentricity," enabling them to critically evaluate the perceived uniqueness of contemporary communication technologies by comparing them with historical technologies like the telegraph.

## Media Materiality

In today's digital age, the undersea network of cables serves as the backbone of our global communications, a complex system shaped by technological, human, and geopolitical factors. Nicole Starosielski explores this system in her book, *The Undersea Network (Sign, Storage, Transmission),* summarized here.[1] Contrary to popular belief, it's not satellites but these submarine systems that carry the bulk of the Internet across oceans. However, the existence of today's cables harken back to the era of the telegraph, often still following the same routes due to the complexity of securing the initial rights to lay these cables. These cables, often only 15-20 millimeters thick despite appearing miles wide on maps, are far more than mere technological conduits. They connect to cable stations that serve as critical nodes in both domestic and international networks, and these stations are geopolitical hotspots where governments wield significant control over rates, taxes, and services.

1. Starosielski, Nicole. *The Undersea Network*. Sign, Storage, Transmission. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015.

Figure 1: Photo of a cross section of a telegraph cable, taken at the French Cable Station Museum in Orleans, MA.

Figure 2: Photo of another cross section of a telegraph cable, taken at the French Cable Station Museum in Orleans, MA.

A historical example that encapsulates many of these elements is the cable station in Orleans, Massachusetts. Known as "Le Direct," this station was the American termination point for a telegraph cable that stretched almost 3,200 miles from Brest, France. Installed in 1898, it was part of a lineage of French cables, the first of which was laid in 1869 and landed in Duxbury, Massachusetts. Duxbury proved to be an unsuitable location due to frequent damage from fishing and shipping operations. A subsequent cable was laid in 1879 to North Eastham, an isolated area that was difficult to reach in bad weather. The current Orleans building was constructed in 1891, and it remained operational until 1959, with a brief closure from 1940 to 1952 during WWII for security reasons. In 1972, the station was purchased from France by a committee of 10 prominent Orleans citizens. They raised money and guaranteed a loan with their personal assets to eliminate the debt, opening the station to the public in July of that year. This example illustrates the complex interplay of technological, human, and geopolitical factors that shape the materiality of undersea cables.[2] Similarly, Oʻahu's cable landings have turned Hawaiʻi into a crucial node in global telecommunications, but they have also led to the displacement of local residents and the creation of makeshift tent cities along the coast.

2. https://www.frenchcablestationmuseum.org/museum-history.htm

Figure 3: A photo of the French Cable Station Museum in Orleans, MA.

Figure 4: A photo of a plaque at the French Cable Station Museum in Orleans, MA. The plaque reads: "IEEE MILESTONE. The French Transatlantic Telegraph Cable, 1898. The submarine telegraph cable known as Le Direct provided communication between Europe and North America without intermediate relaying. In a remarkable feat of oceanic engineering, the cable was laid in the deepest waters of the Atlantic Ocean between Brest, France and Orleans, Massachusetts. When completed in 1898 by La Compagnie Francaise des Cables Telegraphiques, it spanned 3174 nautical miles (5878 km), making it the longest and heaviest cable in service. September 2018"

The human element in these stations has evolved over time. In the early days, operators were integral to the system, literally becoming part of the circuit. Technological advancements have since reduced the human role, but the operation of these stations continues to be shaped by human social practices. Security measures have also evolved, moving from physical fortifications to a focus on actionable knowledge like keystrokes and login codes. In the United States, for instance, cable stations often look like "special fortified bunkers," but they might be staffed part-time or not at all.

The process of establishing these stations is fraught with challenges, including a cumbersome and expensive permitting process. Landing the Honotua cable in Hawaii required over twenty permits, while Tahiti needed only two. Despite these hurdles, hundreds of thousands of pounds are spent annually on repairs due to trawler damage, a fishing method that drags nets along the seafloor. To mitigate this, committees have suggested making fishing gear safer for cables and implementing government inspections.

As we become increasingly dependent on digital networks, understanding the materiality of undersea cables isn't just an academic exercise but a necessity for the security and functionality of our interconnected world.

The balance of power has shifted in recent years, with updated laws increasing penalties for damaging cables and even transferring money to the fishing industry to allow for cable laying. In some countries, military cables are kept hidden and unmarked, and disruptions are simply allowed to occur.

In network theory, the term "edge" aptly describes the link between two nodes, such as Hawai'i and Tahiti. These edges are shaped by deliberate manipulations of politics, culture, and the environment. The U.S. Defense Department, for instance, has secured dedicated backup circuits to Canada and Australia in exchange for connections at Hawai'i, serving various geopolitical interests, including those of high-frequency traders and nations wishing to bypass U.S. surveillance.

The undersea network is a living, evolving entity that impacts not just how we communicate, but also how we live, govern, and engage with the world. By examining the material and immaterial aspects of these networks, we can better appreciate the "physicality of the virtual," shedding light on the often-invisible forces that shape our global connectivity.

Starosielski also developed a companion website to her *Undersea Network* book that explores the cables from a physical and theoretical perspective. While it feels somewhat disorienting at first glance, it's well worth exploring: http://surfacing.in/.

## Cultural Effects

Communication scholar James Carey renewed interest and cultural analysis of the telegraph with the publication of a chapter on the telegraph in his 1988 book *Communication in Culture: Essays in Media and Society*.[3] In that essay, he argued that the telegraph, often considered the pioneer among industries rooted in science and engineering, had a transformative impact on various aspects of human life that extended far beyond the technological realm. Its influence permeated the fabric of language, economics, ideology, and even human consciousness. One of its most groundbreaking contributions was the decoupling of communication from transportation. Before the advent of the telegraph, the concept of "communication" was inextricably linked to physical transportation. Messages had to be carried by foot, horseback (as in the Pony Express, above), or trail from one location to another. The telegraph shattered this paradigm, allowing for the rapid dissemination of information independent of physical entities. This not only accelerated the speed of communication but also served as a control mechanism for the physical world that had been left behind.

This revolutionary technology also had a profound impact on the nature of business and economic relationships. In the era before the telegraph, business was largely a personal affair. Transactions were conducted between individuals who had personal relationships and often knew each other well. The telegraph

3. Carey, James. "Technology and Ideology: The Case of the Telegraph." In *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*, 201–30. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988.

changed this by enabling impersonal, long-distance transactions, thereby setting the stage for the rise of monopoly capitalism. It transformed the way business was conducted, making it possible for large corporations to dominate markets and for business relationships to become less personal and more transactional.

It was also, Carey argued, steeped in a complex web of ideological and religious rhetoric. It was often described in terms of what has been called the "technological sublime," a concept that imbued the telegraph with a sense of divine inspiration. In the discourse of the day, the technology was seen as a miraculous tool for spreading Christianity, capable of transcending the limitations of time and space to bring the Christian message to far-flung corners of the world. This religious and ideological framing was part of a broader middle-class ideology that equated communication and exchange with progress and enlightenment. This "electric sublime" promised to annihilate the barriers of time and space, bringing humanity closer together and overcoming the obstacles of isolation and disconnection.

The telegraph also had a lasting impact on the institutionalization of technological development. It led to the formation of professional engineering societies, specialized research laboratories, and university departments that were dedicated to the advancement of technology. This professionalization of technological development created a new paradigm for innovation, one that was rooted in scientific inquiry and academic research.

Moreover, the telegraph had a profound impact on language and the field of journalism. The need for rapid and efficient communication led to a form of language that was stripped of local idioms and colloquial expressions. This shift moved language closer to what could be termed "scientific language," a form of expression that was precise, clear, and universally understandable. This transformation also influenced literary styles, most notably in the "cablese" style of writing popularized by Ernest Hemingway, which was characterized by its terse, straightforward prose.

The telegraph's influence also extended to geopolitics, transforming colonialism into imperialism. Backed by sea power, the telegraph enabled the central authority of an empire to dictate terms to its peripheries, rather than merely responding to events at the margins. This shift in power dynamics had a profound impact on global politics, enabling empires to exert greater control over their colonies.

The British Empire's rule over India is a prime illustration of how the telegraph turned colonialism into imperialism.[4],[5],[6] Prior to the invention of the telegraph, correspondence between the British colonial government in India and the government in London was laborious and lengthy, frequently lasting weeks or

4. Headrick, Daniel R. *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981.

5. Standage, Tom. *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century's on-Line Pioneers*. New York London Oxford New Delhi Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2014.

6. Bayly, Christopher Alan. *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780 – 1870*. 1. paperback ed. Cambridge Studies in Indian History and Society 1. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006.

even months. The British government struggled to react quickly to the events in India as a result of this delay, which essentially decentralized power and gave local colonial officers some degree of autonomy.

The invention of the telegraph, however, fundamentally altered this dynamic. The British administration could now impose considerably tighter control over its Indian colony since messages could be sent and received very instantly. For instance, the telegraph was essential during the 1857 Indian Rebellion, also known as the First War of Independence or the Sepoy Mutiny. Thanks in major part to the telegraph connections that had been set up throughout the nation, the British were able to quickly assemble troops and plan a response to the rebellion. The British were likely able to put down the uprising more successfully than they could have without this quick communication.

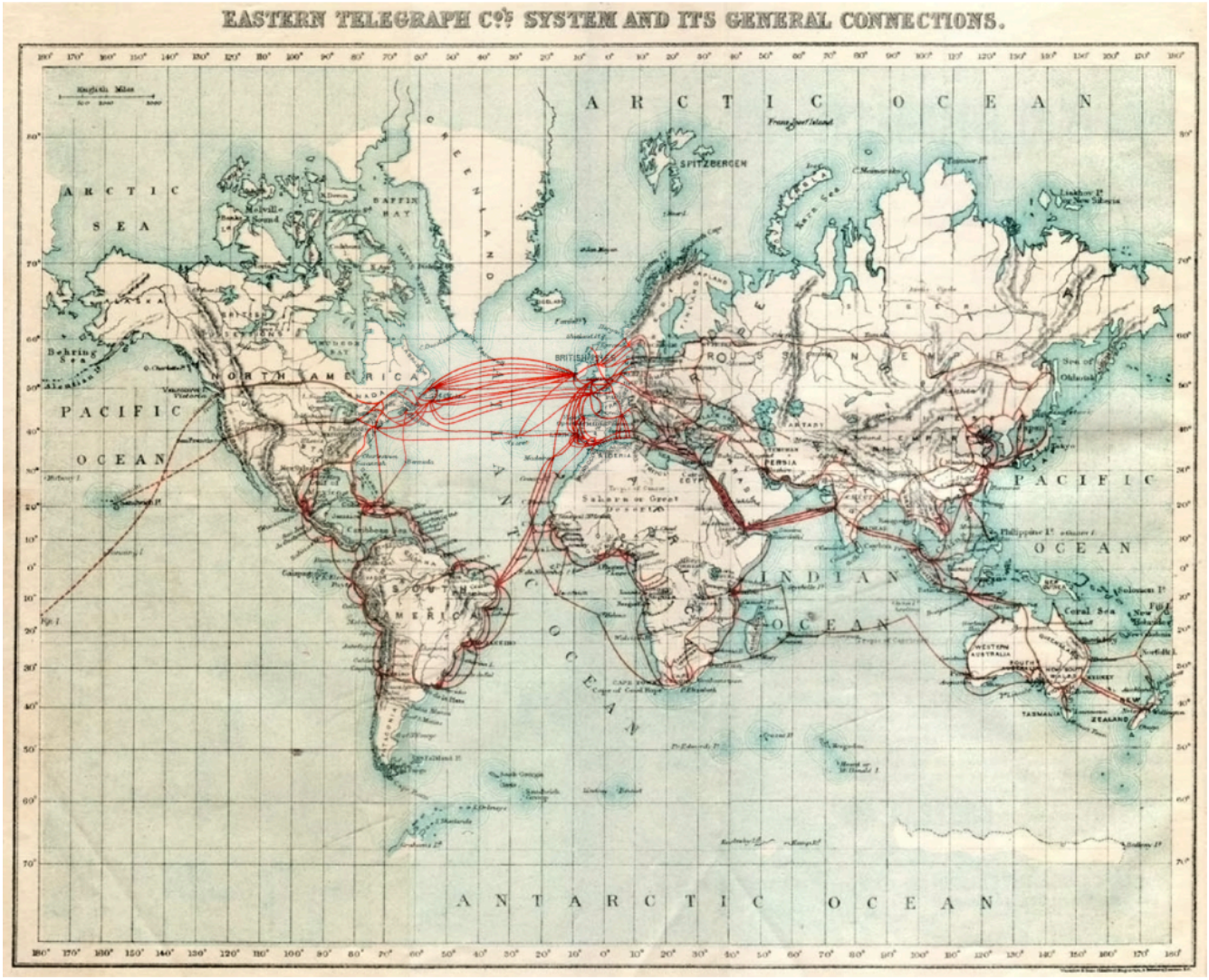


Figure 5: Map with telegraph cables in 1901, also showing routes between Britain and India.

Furthermore, the telegraph enabled the British to better integrate India into its global economic system. Information about prices of commodities like tea, spices, and cotton could be quickly relayed between London and various Indian cities, allowing for more effective market manipulation and resource extraction. This

economic control was another form of imperialism, as it allowed the British to dictate terms not just politically but also economically.

In essence, the telegraph shifted the balance of power, enabling the British Empire to transition from a form of colonialism, where local conditions had a significant influence, to a form of imperialism, where control was centralized and exerted from the metropole. This change had a profound impact on the colony and contributed to shaping modern global politics.

In the realm of economics, the telegraph unified disparate markets by allowing for real-time updates on commodity prices. Before the telegraph, markets were localized, operating independently of each other, with prices determined by local conditions of supply and demand. The telegraph changed this by evening out markets across geographical distances, allowing commodity trading to shift from a focus on spatial differences to temporal fluctuations.

Perhaps one of the most overlooked but significant impacts of the telegraph was its role in the standardization of time. Before the telegraph, local times were determined by the sun reaching its zenith at noon, leading to a plethora of local time zones that caused enormous confusion, especially with the expansion of the railroad system. The telegraph facilitated the creation of standard time zones, which, despite initial resistance on religious and ecological grounds, became essential for coordinating activities and ensuring social control.

Canadian Sanford Fleming was responsible for the implementation of time zones. He served as a chief engineer on the Intercolonial Railway and advocated for the laying of a telegraph cable across the Pacific Ocean to Australia, which he called the "final communication link in the Empire."[7] Fleming came up with the idea for time zones after missing a train. He then developed the system of the twenty-four hour clock and twenty-four time zones across the globe:

> It remained to select a starting point for this system. At the International Prime Meridian Conference in Washington, D.C., in 1884, which Fleming was instrumental in convening, agreement was finally reached aht Greenwich, site of the Royal Observatory in England, would become the 0° and 360° meridian, with a time zone boundary 7° 30' either side of it, and adjoining zones 15° apart would encircle the globe. It was an elegantly simple system, useful for trains but essential for modern air transportation and instantaneous communication. Canada adopted standard time on 1 January 1885, as did most of the United States, although it did not become law there until 1918. By the end of the nineteenth century most countries subscribed to the system, though the last holdout, Liberia, did not join until 1972.[8]

7. Hayes, Derek. *Canada: An Illustrated History*. Vancouver / Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 2004, p. 157

8. *ibid*

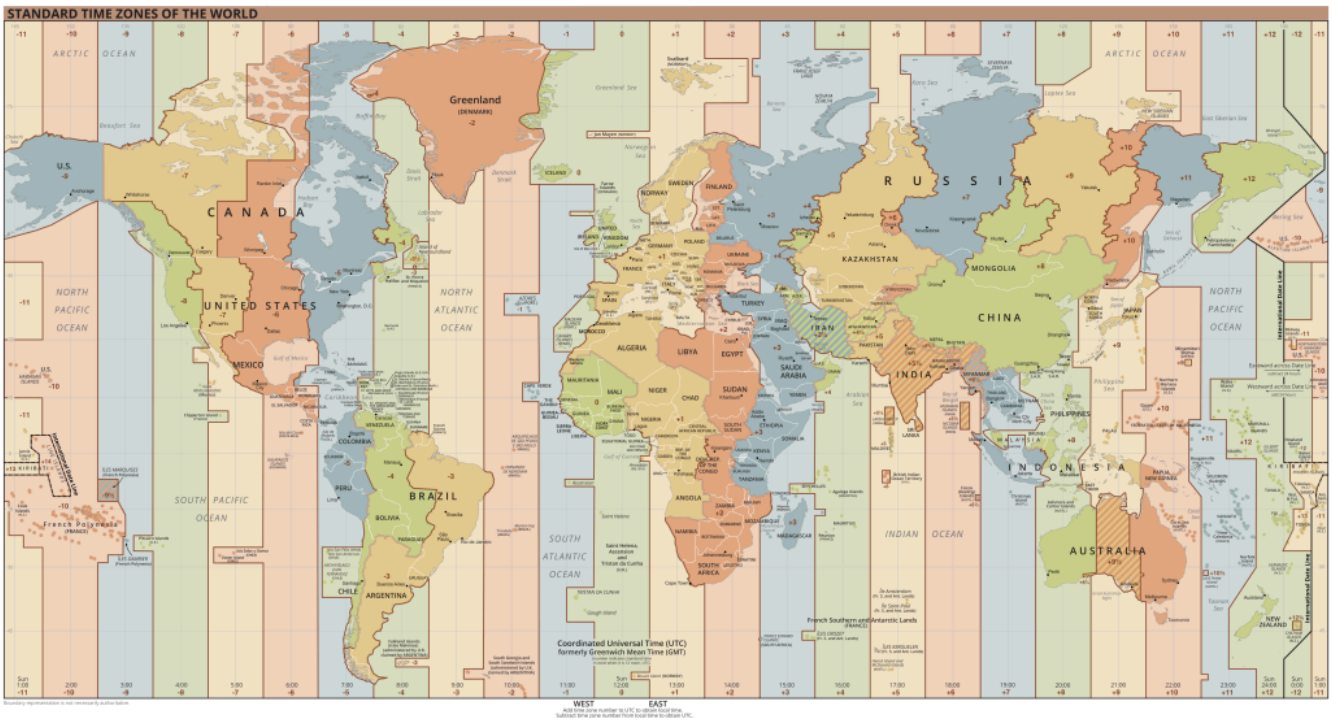


Figure 6: A map showing the time zones of the world.

The telegraph was not merely a technological innovation; it was a cultural and ideological force that reshaped our understanding of language, capitalism, and even time and space. Its far-reaching impacts have affected not just how we communicate but also how we perceive and interact with the world. It revolutionized various facets of human life, from the way we conduct business and express ourselves to how we understand our place in the world and the cosmos.

## Technogenesis

The term "technogenesis" was coined by Bernad Steigler. In her book, *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis*, by N. Katherine Hayles, a literary critic and expert in both science and literature, uses the concept to characterize the co-evolutionary relationship between people and technology.[9] Technogenesis, according to Hayles, is the notion that humankind and technology develop side by side in a mutually forming connection. The conventional view that technology is only a tool made and managed by humans is challenged by this idea. Instead, it contends that human evolution, intellect, and culture are all influenced by technology.

9. Hayles, N. Katherine. *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis*. Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012.

Hayles examines how human cognition, social institutions, and even our biological selves have been shaped by technologies like writing, print, and digital media in addition to how they have been shaped by humans. She explores how each technological development alters what it is to be human, having an impact on our mental faculties, social connections, and cultural norms.

Technogenesis emphasizes that neither can be fully understood in isolation from the other and offers a framework to comprehend the complex interplay between people and technology. It provides a balanced viewpoint on technology that goes beyond deterministic or utopian viewpoints, considering both the advantages and disadvantages of new technical developments.

She applies this concept to the development and use of telegraph code books in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Telegraph code books were designed to simplify and economize telegraphic communication by substituting long phrases with shorter codes, thereby saving time and reducing costs. These books played a significant role in shaping not just the technology of telegraphy but also the humans who used them.

From a technogenic perspective, telegraph code books were not merely tools for efficient communication; they also influenced the way people thought about information, language, and even social relationships. The need for brevity and speed in telegraphy led to new forms of language and syntax, which in turn influenced journalistic styles, business practices, and even everyday communication. The code books standardized certain phrases and ways of conveying information, thus shaping the cognitive and communicative habits of those who used them.

Moreover, the use of code books had social and cultural implications. They were instrumental in the globalization of business and diplomacy, as they enabled faster and more efficient cross-border communication. This had a transformative effect on how business was conducted and how international relations were managed, thereby influencing societal structures.

In this way, the telegraph and its associated code books can be seen as part of a technogenic loop, where technology and human evolution influence each other in a continuous, dynamic relationship. The development of telegraph code books didn't just stem from human ingenuity; it also shaped human practices, thought processes, and social structures, exemplifying the co-evolutionary relationship between humans and technology that is central to the concept of technogenesis.

Know. MISCELLANEOUS. Bea.

| No. | SENTENCES. | No. of Cipher Word. | No. | Cipher. | No. of Sentence. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 726 | It will take | | 726 | Basilisk | |
| 727 | It will take until | | 727 | Bask | |
| 728 | It would be better to | | 728 | Basket | |
| 729 | | | 729 | Buss | |
| 730 | | | 730 | Basset | |
| 731 | | | 731 | Bassinet | |
| 732 | | | 732 | Bassoon | |
| 733 | | | 733 | Bastard | |
| 734 | J | | 734 | Bastile | |
| 735 | Judgment | | 735 | Bastinado | |
| 736 | Use your own judgment | | 736 | Basting | |
| 737 | | | 737 | Batavian | |
| 738 | | | 738 | Bateful | |
| 739 | | | 739 | Bateless | |
| 740 | K | | 740 | Bath | |
| 741 | Keep | | 741 | Bathing | |
| 742 | Keep a lookout for | | 742 | Baton | |
| 743 | Keep it quiet | | 743 | Batter | |
| 744 | Keep it out of the papers | | 744 | Battery | |
| 745 | Keep it up | | 745 | Battish | |
| 746 | Keep out of it | | 746 | Battle | |
| 747 | Keep the papers | | 747 | Battleax | |
| 748 | Keep us informed of | | 748 | Bauble | |
| 749 | Know | | 749 | Bavarian | |
| 750 | Do you know ? | | 750 | Bawd | |
| 751 | Do you know, or can you ascertain ? | | 751 | Bawler | |
| 752 | Let us know | | 752 | Bawling | |
| 753 | Let us know the best you can do | | 753 | Bayard | |
| 754 | Let us know what is up in | | 754 | Bazar | |
| 755 | Want to know | | 755 | Beach | |
| 756 | We do not know | | 756 | Bead | |
| 757 | We do not know, and cannot ascertain | | 757 | Beadle | |
| 758 | We do not know anything about it | | 758 | Beak | |
| 759 | | | 759 | Beard | |
| 760 | | | 760 | Beardless | |
| 761 | | | 761 | Beast | |
| 762 | | | 762 | Beastly | |

Figure 7: A page from the telegraphy code book, Bloomer's Commercial Cryptograph, by John Godfrey Bloomer. It features cipher words related to miscellaneous instructions.

For Hales, this is important to the larger history of how we understand the concept of "information." She writes:

> In the new regime the telegraph established, a zone of indeterminacy developed in which bodies seemed to take on some of the attributes of dematerialized information, and information seemed to take on the physicality of bodies. Nelson E. Ross, in "How to Write a Telegram Properly" (1927) recounts an anecdote in which a "countryman" wanted to send boots to his son: "He brought the boots to the telegraph office and asked that they be sent by wire. He had heard of money and flowers being sent by telegraph, so why not boots? [The operator] told the father to tie the boots together and toss them over the telegraph wire... [The countryman] remained until nightfall, watching to see the boots start on their long journey... [but] during the night, some one stole the boots. When the old man returned in the morning, he said: 'Well, I guess the boy has the boots by now'" (12). The old man's mistake was merely in thinking he could supply the boots, for in the same booklet, Ross writes about the "telegraphic shopping service," which "permits the purchase by telegraph of any standardized article from a locomotive to a paper or pins. The person wishing to make the purchase has merely to call at the telegraph office, specify the article he wishes to have bought, and pay the cost, plus a small charge for the service. Directions will be telegraphed to the point at which the purchase is to be made, and an employee will buy the article desired" (13). The purchase is then either delivered in the same manner as a telegram or, if the recipient lives elsewhere, forwarded by parcel post. Thus bodies and information interpenetrate, with information becoming a body upon completion of the transaction."[10]

This blurring of the boundaries between material bodies and immaterial information plays a significant role in the development of a cultural understanding of the mind as dematerialized information, driving fantasies of being able to upload the human mind to a computer. This conceptualization of information played a major role in the development of cybernetic approaches to technology, which largely dominated the ideology behind technological development in the 20th century. Norman Wiener defines cybernetics as "control and communication in the animal and the machine."[11]

## Chronocentricity: The Internet Echoes the Telegraph

Tom Standage argues in his book, *The Victorian Internet*: *The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century's On-line Pioneers*, that the telegraph was actually a much more disruptive invention in its

10. *ibid*, p. 148

11. Wiener, Norbert. *Cybernetics or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*. 2. ed., 14. print. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2007.

time than the internet was.[12] He argues that **chronocentricity**, the belief that one's own era is unprecedented and unique, often colors our perception of technological advancements. This notion is particularly evident when we consider the Internet, frequently hailed as a revolutionary leap in communication. When examined more closely, however, it becomes clear that many of the characteristics and effects of the Internet are not wholly novel but rather advancements of the telegraph. Although the Internet is frequently seen as the pinnacle of contemporary communication, it has a surprising amount of similarities to its precursor from the 19th century, both in terms of technological operation and sociological influence.

The once-groundbreaking telegraph has mostly been forgotten by society, yet its legacy lives on in modern communication tools like the telephone, fax machine, and most significantly, the Internet. The essential function of both the telegraph and the Internet is to make long-distance communication easier. As we've seen, both rely on a system of cables for their infrastructure and both facilitate communication across enormous distances.

This similarity extends to the very language of transmission. Computers exchange information through bytes, sequences of eight binary digits. This method of communication closely mirrors the eight-panel shutter telegraphs of yesteryears. While telegraph operators relied on codebooks and Morse code to translate these combinations into words, today's computers use ASCII codes to represent characters. The fundamental principle of encoding and decoding information for transmission has remained consistent across both technologies.

A fascinating study of human behavior may be found in how society has responded to the telegraph and the Internet. The telegraph was initially received with a mix of amazement and cynicism. A lot of Victorians thought that the development of this new technology would end misunderstandings between nations and usher in a time of global peace. The founder of MIT's Media Lab, Nicholas Negroponte, had a similar idea when he said that the Internet would blur international boundaries and foster a more peaceful global society. Both of these technologies were viewed as revolutionary forces that will change the way we think about nationalism and global citizenship.

However, these lofty ideals were not realized without challenges. Both the telegraph and the Internet became platforms for fraudulent activities almost as quickly as they were adopted for legitimate communication. During the telegraph era, scam artists manipulated stock prices and horse racing results, exploiting the technology for personal gain. Today, the Internet is a hotbed for scams, from phishing emails to fraudulent websites. Security concerns have been a constant companion to both technologies. In the 19th century, secret codes were used to secure telegraphic messages, much like the encryption software that protects our online data today.

These technologies' cultural modifications have also been quite comparable. Terms like "netizens" and

12. Standage, Tom. *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century's on-Line Pioneers*. New York London Oxford New Delhi Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2014.

"surfers" have entered the vernacular, just as the telegraph did with its own unique set of jargon. Both networks have also experienced some tribalism among users, with devoted users frequently clashing with newcomers. Even the online wedding phenomenon has its roots in the telegraph age.

Moreover, both technologies have been blamed for increasing the pace and stress of life, particularly in the business world. The telegraph led to more centralized business operations, as rapid communication allowed for tighter control from headquarters. The Internet, while enabling remote work, has also led to the centralization of data and the constant demand for immediate responses, contributing to what many describe as "information overload."

The hype, skepticism, and general bewilderment that often accompany discussions about the Internet find their historical counterparts in the public reaction to the telegraph. These similarities suggest that while the technologies themselves evolve, the human elements—our ways of interacting with these platforms and the societal impacts they engender—remain remarkably consistent. Therefore, it may be worthwhile to keep in mind that many of the difficulties and opportunities we identify with the Internet were also discussed in relation to the telegraph the next time we are tempted to conceive of our period as being unusually revolutionary. The telegraph was, in many respects, as startling and transformative for its era as the Internet is for ours, serving as a reminder that every generation must deal with its own revolutionary developments, even if they are not as novel as we may like to believe. Standage concludes:

> Time traveling Victorians arriving in the late twentieth century would, no doubt, be unimpressed by the Internet. They would surely find space flight and routine intercontinental air travel far more impressive technological achievements than our much-trumpeted global communications network. Heavier-than-air flying machines were, after all, thought by the Victorians to be impossible. But as for the Internet – well, they had one of their own.[13]

Standage's comparison of the telegraph and the Internet should remind us to think carefully about how all of our views of contemporary communication could be shaped by our chronocentricity. Most of our new technology really isn't that new, afterall. An important skill in the world of media studies is being able to see how previous technologies have influenced not only contemporary technologies, but also ourselves as human beings.

**Key Takeaways**

13. *ibid*. p. 213

- Undersea cables, often overlooked in favor of satellites, serve as the backbone of global communications and are shaped by a complex mix of technological, human, and geopolitical factors.
- The concept of "technogenesis" challenges the conventional view of technology as merely a tool, highlighting the co-evolutionary relationship between humans and technology in shaping cognition, social institutions, and even biology.
- The idea of "chronocentricity" warns against the belief that our era's technological advancements are unprecedented, encouraging a more nuanced understanding of how new technologies are often evolutions of previous ones, like the Internet's roots in telegraph technology.

**Exercises**

1. How do undersea cables exemplify the interconnectedness of technology, geopolitics, and human factors? Discuss the role of cable stations as geopolitical hotspots and their impact on global communications.
2. Research the history and development of a specific undersea cable system, including viewing it on Surfacing website . Present your findings, focusing on how technological, human, and geopolitical factors have influenced its establishment and operation. Include screenshots from the mapping tool.
3. In what ways does the concept of "technogenesis" challenge or support your own views on the relationship between humans and technology? Provide examples to illustrate your perspective.

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# 8.3 FROM DOTS AND DASHES TO DIAL TONES

**Learning Objectives**

- Explain the historical development of the telephone, including its rapid adoption and the decline of the telegraph industry.
- Understand the legal and ethical challenges faced by early telephone companies, including patent disputes and discriminatory labor practices.
- Analyze the social and cultural impact of the telephone, including its role in changing communication habits, disrupting social norms, and influencing design and technology.

The telephone was an immediate sensation. From a modest 230 telephones in use by the end of June 1877, the number rapidly escalated to 750 the subsequent month, and to 1,300 a month later. By 1880, there were 30,000 telephones in use globally. This transition towards electric technology signaled the gradual decline of the telegraph industry and its associated traditions and subculture. By 1886, a decade after its invention, there were 250,000 telephones in use. This figure dramatically rose to nearly 2 million by 1900, with a telephone in one out of every ten homes in the U.S. The emergence of the telephone thus marked a significant progression from the telegraph, fundamentally revolutionizing the way people communicated.

## The Bell Telephone Company to AT&T

After successfully building his first telephone, Alexander Graham Bell first attempted to sell his patents to the Western Union Telegraph Company, which had emerged as the dominant force in the age of the telegraph.

However, Western Union refused to purchase the patents for $100,000 because they believed the telephone was too impractical.[1]

Without a buyer, Bell instead founded his own company, the Bell Telephone Company in 1877, whose first office was located in New Haven, CT. Because he wanted to spend his time continuing his work teaching the deaf community, Bell hired Theodore Vail in 1878 to run the company and begin building its network. Vail had previously worked for the U.S. postal service, overseeing its nationwide delivery. Vail oversaw major projects during his tenure at the company, which helped create the foundation for its future monopoly in the telephone industry. These improvements include the founding of a Western Electric Company division of the company which built and sold telephone related equipment, and the creation of a connection between Boston, MA and Providence, RI, which was the first ever long-distance telephone system.[2]

The development of the telephone system in the U.S. was different from that of most other countries. For example, in England, the telegraph was a nationalized service that was monopolized by the Crown in the form of Queen Victoria. This monopoly extended to the telephone, which was known as the *voice telegraph* in England. This lack of centralized control in the U.S. led to fierce competition and a series of lawsuits that played a major role in the creation of the nation's network.[3]

One major lawsuit involved Western Union, which had rather quickly realized it made a mistake in passing on Bell's patents. They hired Thomas Edison to help establish their own service by making incremental improvements for the telephone, much as he had done for the telegraph.[4] In 1878, the Bell Telephone Company, which was then a tiny, newly formed company, sued Western Union for infringing Bell's patents. In all, there were over 600 legal actions related to the early inventions of the telephone industry, with five cases going all the way to the Supreme Court. Bell ultimately won every case, but this experience caused him to develop a life-long distaste for the need to commercially develop his inventions.[5] Ultimately, Western Union agreed to leave the telephone market in exchange for 20% of Bell rentals for the remainder of the 17 years of Bell's patents.[6]

Vail's leadership was visionary, and he worked insistently to help extend the telephone network nationwide. This process including forming the New England Telephone Company and the National Bell Telephone Company to license the technology to local service companies throughout the country, often named "Bell

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1. New Hampshire Telephone Museum, NHTM (Version 2.2), [Mobile App]. App Store. https://apps.apple.com/us/app/nhtm/id1076102853.

2. *ibid*

3. Boettinger, H. M. The Telephone Book: Bell, Watson, Vail and American Life, 1876-1976. Croton-on-Hudson, N.Y: Riverwood Publishers, 1977.

4. New Hampshire Telephone Museum, NHTM (Version 2.2), [Mobile App]. App Store. https://apps.apple.com/us/app/nhtm/id1076102853.

5. Boettinger, H. M. The Telephone Book: Bell, Watson, Vail and American Life, 1876-1976. Croton-on-Hudson, N.Y: Riverwood Publishers, 1977.

6. New Hampshire Telephone Museum, NHTM (Version 2.2), [Mobile App]. App Store. https://apps.apple.com/us/app/nhtm/id1076102853.

Telephone Company of..." the local town. By 1885, it was clear that a new company needed to be established in order to oversee all of the overlapping systems involved in the development of the telephone system.[7] Vail founded the American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T) in New York, with the following charter:

> ...the lines of this association... will connect one or more points in each and every city, town or place, in the State of New York with one or more points in each and every other city, town or place in said State, and in the rest of the United States, Canada and Mexico, and also by cable and other appropriate means with the rest of the known world as may hereafter become necessary or desirable in conducting the business of the association.[8]

Because of differences in taxes and other corporate capital laws, New York provided a much more suitable home to the now very large telephone company. In 1899, AT&T merged with the Bell American Telephone Company of Boston, with AT&T becoming the parent company to take advantage of the less restrictive New York laws. The company had grown so large, they were able to acquire Western Union.[9]

To avoid antitrust action, AT&T entered into the Kingsbury Commitment in 1913, agreeing to divest its Western Union stock and allow competitors to interconnect with its network. However, AT&T's Bell System became a nationwide monopoly by 1940, controlling not just long-distance and local service, but also the telephones themselves. This vertical monopoly led to antitrust lawsuits, resulting in a 1956 consent decree that limited AT&T's market share and opened its patents royalty-free, fostering innovation in the electronics and computer sectors.

Internationally, AT&T had a significant presence, including operations in Canada and the Caribbean, and a 54% stake in Japan's NEC. However, the 1984 Bell System divestiture, prompted by another antitrust lawsuit, broke up the monopoly into Regional Bell Operating Companies (RBOCs), commonly known as "Baby Bells."

Post-1984, the telecommunications landscape underwent numerous mergers and acquisitions, transforming the original Baby Bells into major corporations like AT&T Inc., Verizon, and Lumen Technologies. The Bell name and logo have largely disappeared from the U.S. market but continue to be used in Canada by Bell Canada.

Today, AT&T and its offshoots are part of a much more competitive and diversified telecommunications industry, but the company's legacy as a pioneering and at times monopolistic force continues to be felt.

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7. Boettinger, H. M. The Telephone Book: Bell, Watson, Vail and American Life, 1876-1976. Croton-on-Hudson, N.Y: Riverwood Publishers, 1977.

8. *ibid*. p. 102

9. *ibid.*

# Telephone Design

Telephone technology continued to develop quickly. One very early model, circa 1878, was the Doolittle telephone. This design quickly gave way to what became known as coffin phones, so called because the wooden box that contains the inner working is shaped somewhat like a coffin. They were designed to be mounted on the wall and were among some of the very first phones to be installed in homes and businesses. Most coffin phones had a magneto system, which the user would crank to generate a signal that rang the operator or the other party's phone. They had a separate earpiece and mouthpiece, akin to the candlestick models that came later. Because early phone lines didn't deliver electrical power, these telephones often contained wet-cell batteries to provide the necessary electrical charge for operation. The coffin phone's old-fashioned aesthetic has made it a popular element in various subcultures that romanticize past technologies, such as Steampunk.

Figure 1: A photo of the Doolittle Telephone.

Figure 2: A photo of coffin phone designs, taken at the New Hampshire Telephone Museum.

## The Impact of Disease

By the end of the 1880s, telephone housings were made of walnut and cherry wood, the bells of brass or nickel, and the mouthpieces of brass or vulcanite. However, in the 1918 flu and the rise of tuberculosis created concern about the role telephones might play in the spread of these diseases. To help combat these concerns, the mouthpieces incorporated glass and porcelain, which could be unscrewed and boiled in order to clean them.[10] Some even marketed personal mouthpieces for phones that one could carry with them and attach to any phone they use.[11]

The fear of labor shortages related to measles also played an instrumental role in the development and adoption of telephone numbers. The use of such numbers was initially very unpopular because customers saw them as a dehumanizing loss of personal identity. But ultimately, numbers were much easier to use than names for operators who hadn't memorized which ports on a switchboard were associated with which customer:

10. New Hampshire Telephone Museum, NHTM (Version 2.2), [Mobile App]. App Store. https://apps.apple.com/us/app/nhtm/id1076102853.

11. Gifford, Clive, ed. *Media & Communication*. Eyewitness Books 104. London: Dorling Kindersley, 2000.

> In 1880 at Lowell, Massachusetts, a respected physician, Dr. Parker, during an epidemic of the measles, recommended the use of *numbers* because he feared paralysis of the town's telephone system if the four operators succumbed. He felt that substitute operators could be trained more easily if an emergency disabled experienced personnel. When introduced, the practicality of the arrangement was quickly perceived and became general. In 1895, official instructions to operators specified, "Number, please?" as the proper response to a customer.[12]

The COVID-19 pandemic also introduced significant changes to the telecommunications industry. In 2020, many employees transitioned to working from home and using a variety of video conferencing software such as Google Meet and Zoom. The use of such technology has led to a conflict over work-from-home policies as many corporations asked for employees to return to the office in subsequent years.

## Continued Design Innovation

The "Candlestick Phone," also known as the "Upright Desk Stand" or simply the "Stick Phone," is an iconic telephone design that defined an era in telecommunications. Its unique shape, resembling a candlestick, made it instantly recognizable and represented a significant leap forward in both design and function. The candlestick phone gained prominence in the late 1890s and remained popular through the 1920s. It replaced earlier designs, such as the wooden coffin phones, becoming the standard design in many households and businesses. It also moved phones off of walls and onto desks, allowing for longer conversations while seated.

One of the most distinguishing features of the candlestick phone was its separation of the transmitter (mouthpiece) and the receiver (earpiece). The transmitter was mounted on a long, vertical shaft, while the receiver was a separate piece attached by a cord and lifted to the ear during use. Initially, candlestick phones were commonly used with a separate bell box and were operator-assisted. However, with the introduction of the rotary dial, the design was adapted to include this feature, enabling direct dialing. The development of handsets that combined both the transmitter and receiver into a single unit led to the decline of the candlestick phone. The iconic design has left a lasting impression. It often appears in period pieces and films to signify the era. Even modern reproductions are available for those who want a retro flair to their décor.

12. Boettinger, H. M. The Telephone Book: Bell, Watson, Vail and American Life, 1876-1976. Croton-on-Hudson, N.Y: Riverwood Publishers, 1977, p. 106

Figure 3: Photo of candlestick telephone design, taken at New Hampshire Telephone Museum.

Moving into the 1950's telephone design exploded into a wide variety of designs, colors, and styles. Notably, some designs began to move back to the wall, and began to feature longer cords that allowed for movement. The headset and dial became combined into a single piece, anticipating future cordless phones. Marketing for the phones became more targeted, with for example, the launch of Bell's Princess Telephone with the slogan, "It's little! It's lovely! It lights!" It wasn't until the 1980's however, that the Bell System allowed customers to use phones purchased from another company.[13]

*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://rotel.pressbooks.pub/comm-media-studies/?p=242#oembed-1*

13. New Hampshire Telephone Museum, NHTM (Version 2.2), [Mobile App]. App Store. https://apps.apple.com/us/app/nhtm/id1076102853.

Figure 4: A photo of a variety of telephone designs over time, taken at the New Hampshire Telephone Museum.

Learn more about the history of the cell phone from this NPR story:.

Figure 5: Photo of the first mobile phones that went on sale in the U.S. in 1983, taken at New Hampshire Telephone Museum.

Figure 6: A photo of a Blackberry Curve, manufactured in 2007, taken at New Hampshire Telephone Museum.

## Phone Switches

On January 28, 1878, the Boardman Building in New Haven became a landmark in telecommunications history as it hosted the world's inaugural commercial telephone exchange, conceived by Civil War veteran George Coy along with Herrick Frost and Walter Lewis. The initiative was particularly groundbreaking because, until then, telephones were individually owned or leased in pairs, typically connecting a home to a business. This setup required people to also hire telegraph contractors to lay the connecting wires. Coy revolutionized this by developing a primitive switchboard made of spare parts like carriage bolts and teapot handles. This allowed a central office to link multiple users, enabling subscribers to only need one telephone to connect with an unlimited number of other users. For a monthly fee of $1.50, the 21 initial subscribers could make calls via the central office, which employed operators to facilitate the connections. Notably, direct dialing didn't become standard until the 1920s. Just a few weeks later, on February 21, 1878, another milestone was

achieved when Coy's company released the world's first telephone directory. It was a single-page flier listing 50 individuals and businesses in New Haven, including Coy, Frost, and Lewis as residential subscribers.[14]

## Discriminatory Labor Practices

The New Hampshire Telephone Museum explores the problematic discriminatory labor practices of early exchanges. In the early days of telephone companies, teenage boys were initially employed as operators, largely because they were already accustomed to working in telegraph offices and accepted lower wages. However, the job of a telephone operator demanded a level of patience and decorum that these young boys lacked. Their rowdy behavior, which included pranks and even cursing at callers, made them unsuitable for the role. Recognizing this, the Boston Telephone Dispatch Company began hiring female operators in 1878. Women were perceived to have more pleasant voices and better manners, making them more appealing to the predominantly male customer base. Additionally, because gender inequality was rampant at the time, female operators could be paid less and managed more strictly than their male counterparts. Employment options for women wanting to work outside the home were limited to roles like servant, factory worker, sales clerk, nurse, or teacher. To become a telephone operator, women typically had to be unmarried, between the ages of 17 and 26, and have arms long enough to reach the top of the tall switchboards. Discriminatory practices also barred African American and Jewish women from these roles. Operators earned a meager seven dollars per week and worked long, inflexible hours, often including nights and holidays.[15]

The role of the telephone operator evolved into a critical component of the communication infrastructure. While managing the switchboard, operators were expected to provide additional services, such as disseminating election results, train arrivals, and weather updates. However, the working conditions varied significantly between rural and urban settings. In rural areas, operators could attach long cords to their headsets, allowing them to complete household chores while waiting for calls, thereby enjoying a certain degree of independence. Conversely, city operators faced a high-paced environment, handling up to 600 calls an hour. Efficiency was paramount, leading telephone companies to enlist scientific management teams that established stringent rules governing everything from posture to the time taken to answer calls. Supervisors closely monitored operators, even eavesdropping on conversations. Strict rules were enforced to the point where operators had to ask

14. Smith. "First Commercial Telephone Exchange – Today in History: January 28 – Connecticut History | a CTHumanities Project." Connecticut History | a CTHumanities Project – Stories about the people, traditions, innovations, and events that make up Connecticut's rich history., January 28, 2020. https://connecticuthistory.org/the-first-commercial-telephone-exchange-today-in-history/.

15. Object label for Telephone Exchange Photos at the New Hampshire Telephone Museum, Warner, NH. Seen on: August 8, 2023.

for permission for even basic needs like going to the bathroom, and infractions could result in humiliating punishments, such as being sent to a "punishment room" for tardiness.[16]

Figure 7: Photograph showing women operators for the N.E. Tel. & Tel. Co. in Worcester, MA, circa December 1896. Exhibited at New Hampshire Telephone Museum.

## Pop Culture Influence

Because the phone switches were manual, users would need to call into a central station and ask for assistance. The phrase, "Hello, Central" was popularized as a way to greet the operator who answered your call.

16. *ibid*

Figure 8: Photo of a Hello, Central! phone display at the MIT Museum in Cambridge, MA.

The phrase was popularized in the 1901 song, "Hello, Central, Give Me Heaven," which tells the story of a young child asking a telephone operator to connect her to her deceased mother, in Heaven.

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Figure 9: Sheet music cover for "Hello Central, Give Me Heaven"

## Automatic Switching

Although it would be many years before the phone industry transitioned from manual to automatic switching, the roots for this technological innovation began in 1888 with an undertaker:

> Mr. Strowger was the only undertaker in Kansas City. He heard another one was going to be moving into town, but didn't worry about losing any business because he was very well-established and everyone knew him. One day, however, Mr. Strowger was sipping his coffee and reading his morning newspaper – in particular the obituaries – and noticed the new undertaker was listed as performing many of the funeral services. Mr. Strowger did a little investigative work and learned that the new undertaker was actually married to the local telephone operator. Since she was handling all of the calls in town, she was directing everyone who was looking for an undertaker to her husband, rather than Mr. Strowger. Convinced that it should be subscribers, rather than

> the operator, who chose who was called, he first conceived his invention in 1888, and patented the automatic telephone exchange in 1891.[17]

Despite this invention, manual switchboards continued in operation well into the 20th century. To meet the increased telephone demands of the U.S. military during World War I, Bell System purchased the patent for the automatic switch from Strowger for 2.5 million dollars. The technology was slowly rolled out exchanges across the country, but it was met with some hesitation by consumers. AT&T produced educational videos that helped teach people how to dial for themselves! By the 1950s, the volume of traffic had increased so much that it became unrealistic for this switching to continue manually. By the 1960s, almost all exchanges in the U.S. had been converted to automatic switching. Initially analog in nature, these were later converted to digital.[18]

*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://rotel.pressbooks.pub/comm-media-studies/?p=242#oembed-3*

17. New Hampshire Telephone Museum, NHTM (Version 2.2), [Mobile App]. App Store. https://apps.apple.com/us/app/nhtm/id1076102853.

18. *ibid*

Figure 10: Photo (taken at New Hampshire Telephone Museum) of the Bryant Pond Telephone, from Woodstock Maine. This was the last Magneto hand crank system using a manual exchange rather than automatic. It ended service on October 11, 1983.

## Fear of Dehumanization

As we've seen, all new technological inventions tend to provoke both fear and excitement. One common fear is that of **dehumanization**, the fear that the technology will somehow erode what it means to be "truly" human. Of course, as we read earlier theories of technogenesis suggest that humans have always evolved with the technology that they use and create. Nonetheless, these fears remain constant. The Anti-Digit Dialing League, a group that arose to protest dialing phone numbers, offers a classic example of this fear.

The Anti-Digit Dialing League existed for only two years in the 1960s and attempted to fight against the "creeping numeralism of phone dialing, explaining in an article in *Time* magazine[19]:

> These people are systematically trying to destroy the use of memory. They tell you to 'write it down,' not

19. Leddy, Michael. "The Anti-Digit Dialing League." *Orange Crate Art* (blog), April 12, 2012. https://mleddy.blogspot.com/2012/04/anti-digit-dialing-league.html

> memorize it. Try writing a telephone number down in a dark booth while groping for a pencil, searching in an obsolete phone book and gasping for breath. And all this in the name of efficiency! Engineers have a terrible intellectual weakness. 'If it fits the machine,' they say, 'then it ought to fit people.' This is something that bothers me very much: absentmindedness about people.[20]

Perhaps even more extreme, the group used sabotage methods to try demonstrate the ridiculousness of using a numeric system:

> Interpreting the area code and seven digits as one huge number, they place calls by saying, "Operator, give me S.I. Hayakawa at four billion, one hundred fifty-five million, eight hundred forty-two thousand, three hundred and one." Growls Chapter Leader Frederick Litto, "If they want digits, we'll give them digits."[21]

In addition to citing psychological studies that claimed strings of numbers were difficult to memorize, the group used a question-and-answer format to explain their cause[22]:

> Q. But isn't all this fuss simply a tempest in a teapot? Aren't the people opposing Digit Dialing really just opposing progress? Isn't the present furor nothing more than an emotional reaction to any kind of change?
>
> A. Most decidedly not! Most people, and certainly the members of ADDL, welcome constructive change. However, the telephone is an extremely important part of everyday life, and major changes in its use will have widespread effects.[23]

These arguments about memory and widespread change have been made over and over again throughout history, dating back to Socrates complaining that the invention of alphabetic hand-writing would ruin one's memory.

## Long Distance Area Codes

Area codes were developed as part of the North American Numbering Plan (NANP) to organize and facilitate the rapidly expanding telephone network. Introduced in 1947, this system was designed to simplify direct-dial long-distance calling and automate the connection process, which was previously managed manually by operators. Each area code was assigned to a specific geographic region and served as the first part of a standard 10-digit phone number in the United States, Canada, and other participating countries. The area code helped

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20. TIME.com. "The TIME Vault: July 13, 1962." Accessed September 2, 2023. http://time.com/vault/issue/1962-07-13/.

21. *ibid*

22. Leddy, Michael. "Phones Are For People." *Orange Crate Art* (blog), April 23, 2012. https://mleddy.blogspot.com/2012/04/phones-are-for-people.html.

23. Anti Digit Dialing League. *Phones Are For People*, 1962. (as quoted in Leddy).

to route the call to the appropriate local exchange within that region. Initially, the codes were distributed based on population density; areas with higher populations received codes that were quicker to dial on rotary phones. As technology evolved and the demand for phone lines grew, new area codes were added, and existing ones were split or overlaid to accommodate more numbers. This system has continued to adapt, but the basic concept of area codes as geographic identifiers in the numbering plan remains in place. You can view area codes by state here: NANPA Area Codes Map

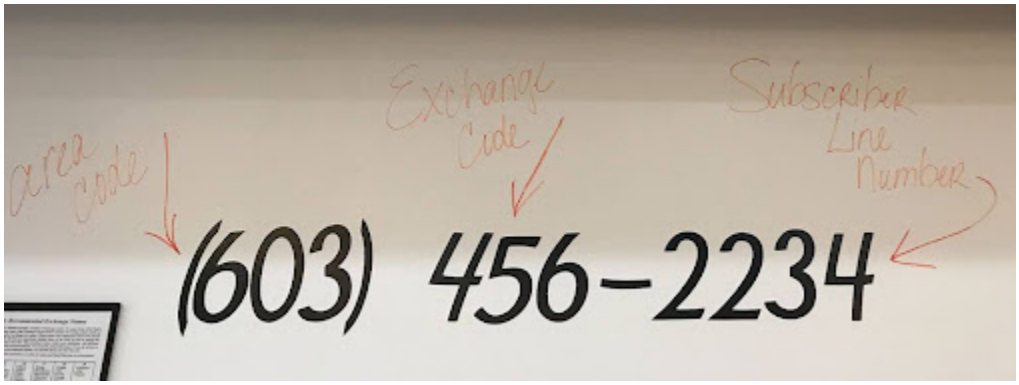


Figure 11: A photo showing a phone number. The first three numbers are the area code, the next three are the exchange code, and the last four are the subscriber line number. The number used for example is (603) 456-2234.

## Social Upheaval

Carolyn Marvin explored the social upheaval that stemmed from the telephone extensively in her 1988 book, *When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking About Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth* Century.[24] *She argues that,* in its early years, the telephone was entangled in two contrasting and deeply emotional narratives. On one hand, some viewed this newfound technology as a chaotic, disorganizing force capable of eroding established social mores and structures. On the other, it was seen as a revolutionary tool that could bring people together, creating an interconnected web of community unlike anything seen before.

When the telephone first arrived, electrical engineers and experts sounded the alarms, cautioning society about the untold impact it might have. These individuals were not just concerned about the mechanics of this new invention; they were fearful of its potential to fundamentally alter familiar forms of social knowledge, interaction, and even authority. It was as though the telephone threatened to democratize information and power in a way that would make traditional forms of social control less effective.

This concern was not limited to unknown citizens but extended to public figures who found themselves

24. Marvin, Carolyn. *When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking about Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century*. 1. issued as an Oxford Univ. Press paperback, 9. print. New York, NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 1990.

accessible in previously unthinkable ways. Take, for instance, Chauncey Depew, the governor of New York at the time. Depew was bombarded by what the media termed "telephone maniacs"—people who would call him every time a news story or comment about him was published. This sort of instant accessibility blurred the boundaries between the public and private spheres, causing anxiety among those accustomed to a more clearly defined social hierarchy.

Equally worrisome for many was the telephone's perceived capacity to invade the privacy of the domestic sphere. Families, long considered a sanctuary from the public eye, were now vulnerable to external scrutiny. The telephone emerged as a double-edged sword: while offering the convenience of easy communication, it also raised uncomfortable ethical questions about the sanctity of family life and intimacy. In 1877, the New York Times went as far as to brand the telephone's nature as "atrocious," largely due to its potential to reveal family secrets and turn the private public.

One societal segment that felt the heat of this technological revolution was the bourgeois family. The telephone seemed to collapse traditional barriers that safeguarded the family unit, leading to unintended social mingling and making it challenging to maintain essential markers of social distance like class and race. With the erosion of these barriers, society started to panic about how to enforce the age-old distinctions that had been relatively straightforward to maintain before this technological upheaval.

It wasn't just social classes that were disrupted; gender roles were also questioned. The early telephone era gave birth to the "telephone girl"—the female operator tasked with connecting calls. This new role gave women a novel form of agency and public presence, but it was fraught with societal apprehensions. The community feared that these young women would be exposed to the advances of men from different social strata, undermining the traditional social norms of courtship and marriage.

Interestingly, the telephone was also seen as a tool for control, especially in the domestic environment of the upper classes. In such households, the device became a conduit through which orders could be more efficiently given to servants. It offered a semblance of an ideal domestic scenario, where control of the household remained firmly entrenched with the masters and parents.

However, the telephone also posed challenges to the very notion of privacy within the home. While it offered a constant connection to the outside world, it came at the cost of sudden, and often intrusive, interruptions. This dilemma highlighted society's ambivalence towards new technology. Other innovations, like the phonograph, didn't incur the same level of social concern because they were less invasive and more controllable, indicating a complex emotional relationship with different forms of new technology.

In a broader political and social context, the telephone revealed an undercurrent of tension between democratic ideals and actual power dynamics. Initially touted as a force for democratization, the technology also exposed underlying societal efforts to maintain existing hierarchies. Thus, the telephone became a subject of paradoxical public discourse—it was extolled for its potential to democratize communication while being subtly branded as a tool that would never truly serve the broader population.

In summary, the early history of the telephone is a fascinating study of social and ethical challenges that extended far beyond the technical realm. The telephone didn't just alter how we communicated; it touched

the very core of societal values, norms, and structures. It elicited both fear and excitement as people grappled with its potential to unravel established norms and offer new methods of control and connectivity. As we look back, it's clear that many of the questions and dilemmas that surrounded the telephone's early years continue to resonate in our current age of digital interconnectivity.

## The End of an Era

Western Union discontinued its telegram services on January 27, 2006, marking the end of the telegraph era in North America. Some services continued in other parts of the world until 2013, but the telegraph had largely been replaced by newer forms of communication.

### Key Takeaways

- The telephone revolutionized communication, rapidly gaining popularity and leading to the decline of the telegraph industry, while also facing numerous legal challenges including patent disputes.
- The development and adoption of the telephone had significant social and cultural impacts, including changes in labor practices, gender roles, and societal norms around privacy and communication.
- The telephone's history is marked by both technological innovation and social upheaval, raising ethical and societal questions that continue to be relevant in the age of digital interconnectivity.

### Exercises

1. How did the telephone disrupt existing social norms and labor practices, especially in terms of gender roles and privacy? Discuss the positive and negative impacts of this disruption.

2. Research a major lawsuit or patent dispute in the early history of the telephone. Summarize the key points of the case and its outcome, and explain how it shaped the development of the telecommunications industry.
3. The telephone underwent various design changes over the years, from the Doolittle telephone to the candlestick phone and beyond. How do these design changes reflect broader societal and technological shifts?

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PART IX

# CHAPTER 9: NEWSPAPERS AND DIGITAL NEWS

On April 26, 2010, *Wired* magazine proclaimed that a "clash of the titans" between two major newspapers, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times*, was about to take place in the midst of an unprecedented downward spiral for the print medium.[1] Rupert Murdoch, owner of *The Wall Street Journal*, had announced that his paper was launching a new section, one covering local stories north of Wall Street, something that had been part of *The New York Times'* focus since it first began over a century before. *New York Times* Chairman Arthur Sultzberger Jr. and CEO Janet Robinson pertly responded to the move, welcoming the new section and acknowledging the difficulties a startup can face when competing with the well-established *New York Times.*[2]

Despite *The New York Times'* droll response, Murdoch's decision to cover local news indeed presented a threat to the newspaper, particularly as the two publications continue their respective moves from the print to the online market. In fact, some believe that *The Wall Street Journal's* decision to launch the new section has very little to do with local coverage and everything to do with the Internet. Newspapers are in a perilous position: Traditional readership is declining even as papers are struggling to create a profitable online business model. Both *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times* are striving to remain relevant as competition is increasing and the print medium is becoming unprofitable.

In light of the challenges facing the newspaper industry, *The Wall Street Journal's* new section may have a potentially catastrophic effect on *The New York Times*. *Wired* magazine described the decision, calling it "two-pronged" to "starve the enemy and capture territory."[3] By offering advertising space at a discount in the new Metro section, *The Journal* would make money while partially cutting *The Times* off from some of its primary support. *Wired* magazine also noted that the additional material would be available to subscribers through the Internet, on smartphones, and on the iPad.[4]

Attracting advertising revenue from The New York Times may give The Wall Street Journal the financial edge it needs to lead in the online news industry. As newspapers move away from print publications to online

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1. Burskirk, Eliot Van "Print War Between NYT and WSJ Is Really About Digital," Wired, April 26, 2010, http://www.wired.com/epicenter/2010/04/print-war-between-nyt-and-wsj-is-really-about-digital.

2. *ibid*

3. *ibid*

4. *ibid*

publications, a strong online presence may secure more readers and, in turn, more advertisers—and thus more revenue—in a challenging economic climate.

This emerging front in the ongoing battle between two of the country's largest newspapers reveals a problem the newspaper industry has been facing for some time. New York has long been a battleground for other newspapers, but before Murdoch's decision, these two papers coexisted peacefully for over 100 years, serving divergent readers by focusing on different stories. However, since the invention of the radio, newspapers have worried about their future. Even though readership has been declining since the 1950s, the explosion of the Internet and the resulting accessibility of online news has led to an unprecedented drop in subscriptions since the beginning of the 21st century. Also hit hard by the struggling economy's reluctant advertisers, most newspapers have had to cut costs. Some have reinvented their style to appeal to new audiences. Some, however, have simply closed. As this struggle for profit continues, it's no surprise that The Wall Street Journal is trying to outperform The New York Times. But how did newspapers get to this point? This chapter provides historical context of the newspaper medium and offers an in-depth examination of journalistic styles and trends to illuminate the mounting challenges for today's industry.

# 9.1 HISTORY OF NEWSPAPERS

**Learning Objectives**

- Describe the historical roots of the modern newspaper industry.
- Explain the effect of the penny press on modern journalism.
- Define sensationalism and yellow journalism as they relate to the newspaper industry.

Over the course of its long and complex history, the newspaper has undergone many transformations. Examining newspapers' historical roots can help shed some light on how and why the newspaper has evolved into the multifaceted medium that it is today. Scholars commonly credit the ancient Romans with publishing the first newspaper, *Acta Diurna*, or *daily doings*, in 59 BCE. Although no copies of this paper have survived, it is widely believed to have published chronicles of events, assemblies, births, deaths, and daily gossip.

In 1566, another ancestor of the modern newspaper appeared in Venice, Italy. These *avisi*, or gazettes, were handwritten and focused on politics and military conflicts. However, the absence of printing-press technology greatly limited the circulation for both the *Acta Diurna* and the Venetian papers.

# The Birth of the Printing Press

Figure 1: A photo of a printing press in operation at the Museum of Printing in Haverhill, MA.

Johannes Gutenberg's printing press drastically changed the face of publishing. In 1440, Gutenberg invented a movable-type press that permitted the high-quality reproduction of printed materials at a rate of nearly 4,000 pages per day, or 1,000 times more than could be done by a scribe by hand. This innovation drove down the price of printed materials and, for the first time, made them accessible to a mass market. Overnight, the new printing press transformed the scope and reach of the newspaper, paving the way for modern-day journalism.

# European Roots

The first weekly newspapers to employ Gutenberg's press emerged in 1609. Although the papers—*Relations:*

*Aller Furnemmen*, printed by Johann Carolus, and *Aviso Relations over Zeitung*, printed by Lucas Schulte—did not name the cities in which they were printed to avoid government persecution, their approximate location can be identified because of their use of the German language. Despite these concerns over persecution, the papers were a success, and newspapers quickly spread throughout Central Europe. Over the next 5 years, weeklies popped up in Basel, Frankfurt, Vienna, Hamburg, Berlin, and Amsterdam. In 1621, England printed its first paper under the title *Corante, or weekely newes from Italy, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Bohemia, France and the Low Countreys*. By 1641, a newspaper was printed in almost every country in Europe as publication spread to France, Italy, and Spain.

Figure 2: Newspapers are the descendants of the Dutch corantos and the German pamphlets of the 1600s.

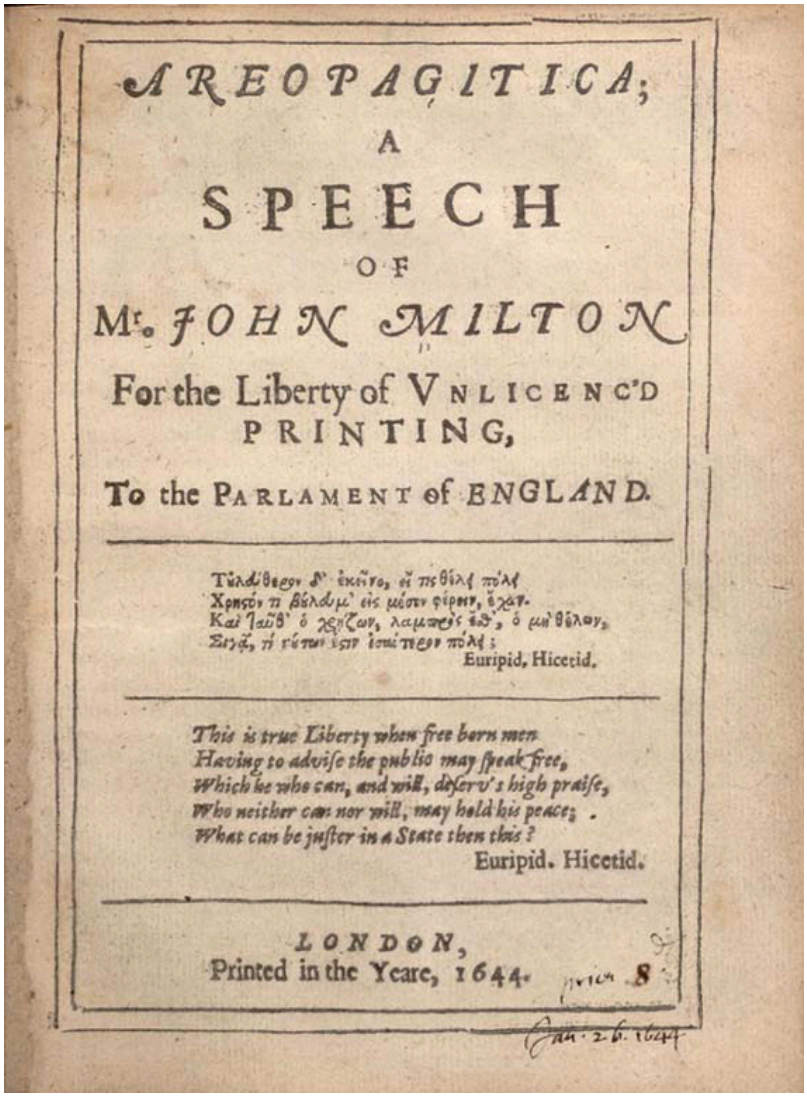
These early newspapers followed one of two major formats. The first was the Dutch-style corantos, a densely packed two- to four-page paper, while the second was the German-style pamphlet, a more expansive 8- to

24-page paper. Many publishers began printing in the Dutch format, but as their popularity grew, they changed to the larger German style.

## Government Control and Freedom of the Press

Because many of these early publications were regulated by the government, they did not report on local news or events. However, when civil war broke out in England in 1641, as Oliver Cromwell and Parliament threatened and eventually overthrew King Charles I, citizens turned to local papers for coverage of these major events. In November 1641, a weekly paper titled *The Heads of Severall Proceedings in This Present Parliament* began focusing on domestic news.[1] The paper fueled a discussion about the freedom of the press that was later articulated in 1644 by John Milton in his famous treatise *Areopagitica*.

1. Goff, Moira. "Early History of the English Newspaper," 17th-18th Century Burney Collection Newspapers, Gale, 2007, https://www.gale.com/binaries/content/assets/gale-us-en/primary-sources/intl-gps/intl-gps-essays/full-ghn-contextual-essays/ghn_essay_1718bnc_goff2_website.pdf.



AREOPAGITICA;

A

SPEECH

OF

Mr. JOHN MILTON

For the Liberty of VNLICENC'D PRINTING,

To the PARLAMENT of ENGLAND.

Τὼλδίθεον δ' ἐκεῖνο, εἴ τις θέλοι πόλει
Χρηστόν τι βέλτιον' εἰς μέσον φέρειν, ἔχειν.
Καὶ ταῦθ' ὁ χρήζων, λαμπρὸς ἐν, ὁ μὴ θέλων,
Σιγᾷ, τί τούτων ἐστὶν ἰσοτίμως πόλει;

Euripid, Hicetid.

*This is true Liberty when free born men*
*Having to advise the public may speak free,*
*Which he who can, and will, deserv's high praise,*
*Who neither can nor will, may hold his peace;*
*What can be juster in a State then this?*

Euripid. Hicetid.

LONDON,
Printed in the Yeare, 1644.

Figure 3: John Milton's 1644 Areopagitica, which criticized the British Parliament's role in regulating texts and helped pave the way for the freedom of the press.

Although the *Areopagitica* focused primarily on Parliament's ban on certain books, it also addressed newspapers. Milton criticized the tight regulations on their content by stating, "Who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's image; but he who destroys a good book, kills reason itself, kills the image of God, as it were in the eye."[2] Despite Milton's emphasis on texts rather than on newspapers, the treatise had a major effect on printing regulations. In England, newspapers were freed from government control, and people began to understand the power of free press.

Papers took advantage of this newfound freedom and began publishing more frequently. With biweekly

2. Milton, John. Areopagitica, 1644, https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/jebb-areopagitica-1644-jebb-ed.

publications, papers had additional space to run advertisements and market reports. This changed the role of journalists from simple observers to active players in commerce as business owners and investors grew to rely on the papers to market their products and to help them predict business developments. Once publishers noticed the growing popularity and profit potential of newspapers, they founded daily publications. In 1650, a German publisher began printing the world's oldest surviving daily paper, *Einkommende Zeitung*, and an English publisher followed suit in 1702 with London's *Daily Courant*. Such daily publications, which employed the relatively new format of headlines and the embellishment of illustrations, turned papers into vital fixtures in the everyday lives of citizens.

## Colonial American Newspapers

Newspapers did not come to the American colonies until September 25, 1690, when Benjamin Harris printed *Public Occurrences, Both FORREIGN and DOMESTICK*. Before fleeing to America for publishing an article about a purported Catholic plot against England, Harris had been a newspaper editor in England. The first article printed in his new colonial paper stated, "The Christianized Indians in some parts of Plimouth, have newly appointed a day of thanksgiving to God for his Mercy."[3] The other articles in *Public Occurrences*, however, were in line with Harris's previously more controversial style, and the publication folded after just one issue.

Fourteen years passed before the next American newspaper, *The Boston News-Letter*, launched. Fifteen years after that, *The Boston Gazette* began publication, followed immediately by the *American Weekly Mercury* in Philadelphia. Trying to avoid following in Harris's footsteps, these early papers carefully eschewed political discussion to avoid offending colonial authorities. After a lengthy absence, politics reentered American papers in 1721, when James Franklin published a criticism of smallpox inoculations in the *New England Courant*. The following year, the paper accused the colonial government of failing to protect its citizens from pirates, which landed Franklin in jail.

After Franklin offended authorities once again for mocking religion, a court dictated that he was forbidden "to print or publish *The New England Courant*, or any other Pamphlet or Paper of the like Nature, except it be first Supervised by the Secretary of this Province."[4] Immediately following this order, Franklin turned over the paper to his younger brother, Benjamin. Benjamin Franklin, who went on to become a famous statesman and who played a major role in the American Revolution, also had a substantial impact on the printing industry as publisher of *The Pennsylvania Gazette* and the conceiver of subscription libraries.

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3. Harris, Benjamin. Public Occurrences, Both FORREIGN and DOMESTICK, September 25, 1690.

4. Massachusetts Historical Society, "Silence DoGood: Benjamin Franklin in the New England Courant," http://www.masshist.org/online/silence_dogood/essay.php?entry_id=204.

The Antiquarian Society, located in Worcester, MA, holds the largest collection of American colonial newspapers and is open to the public for access to these documents. The Antiquarian Society was founded by Isaiah Thomas, who was a local printer at the time of the American Revolution. Thomas also printed a copy of the Declaration of Independence and performed its very first public reading, also in Worcester. His printing press is still on display at the Antiquarian Society.

Figure 4: A photo of newspaper archives, taken at the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, MA. A prominent label on a box reads [MA] Boston, Boston Daily American Statesman.

Figure 5: A photo of Isaiah Thomas' printing press in use at the American Antiquarian Society.

*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://rotel.pressbooks.pub/comm-media-studies/?p=260#oembed-1*

## The Trial of John Peter Zenger

Boston was not the only city in which a newspaper discussed politics. In 1733, John Peter Zenger founded *The New York Weekly Journal*. Zenger's paper soon began criticizing the newly appointed colonial governor, William Cosby, who had replaced members of the New York Supreme Court when he could not control them. In late 1734, Cosby had Zenger arrested, claiming that his paper contained "divers scandalous, virulent, false and seditious reflections."[5] Eight months later, prominent Philadelphia lawyer Andrew Hamilton defended

5. Archiving Early America, "Peter Zenger and Freedom of the Press," http://www.earlyamerica.com/earlyamerica/bookmarks/zenger/.

Zenger in an important trial. Hamilton compelled the jury to consider the truth and whether or not what was printed was a fact. Ignoring the wishes of the judge, who disapproved of Zenger and his actions, the jury returned a not guilty verdict to the courtroom after only a short deliberation. Zenger's trial resulted in two significant movements in the march toward freedom of the press. First, the trial demonstrated to the papers that they could potentially print honest criticism of the government without fear of retribution. Second, the British became afraid that an American jury would never convict an American journalist.

With Zenger's verdict providing more freedom to the press and as some began to call for emancipation from England, newspapers became a conduit for political discussion. More conflicts between the British and the colonists forced papers to pick a side to support. While a majority of American papers challenged governmental authorities, a small number of Loyalist papers, such as James Rivington's *New York Gazetteer*, gave voice to the pro-British side. Throughout the war, newspapers continued to publish information representing opposing viewpoints, and the partisan press was born. After the revolution, two opposing political parties—the Federalists and the Republicans—emerged, giving rise to partisan newspapers for each side.

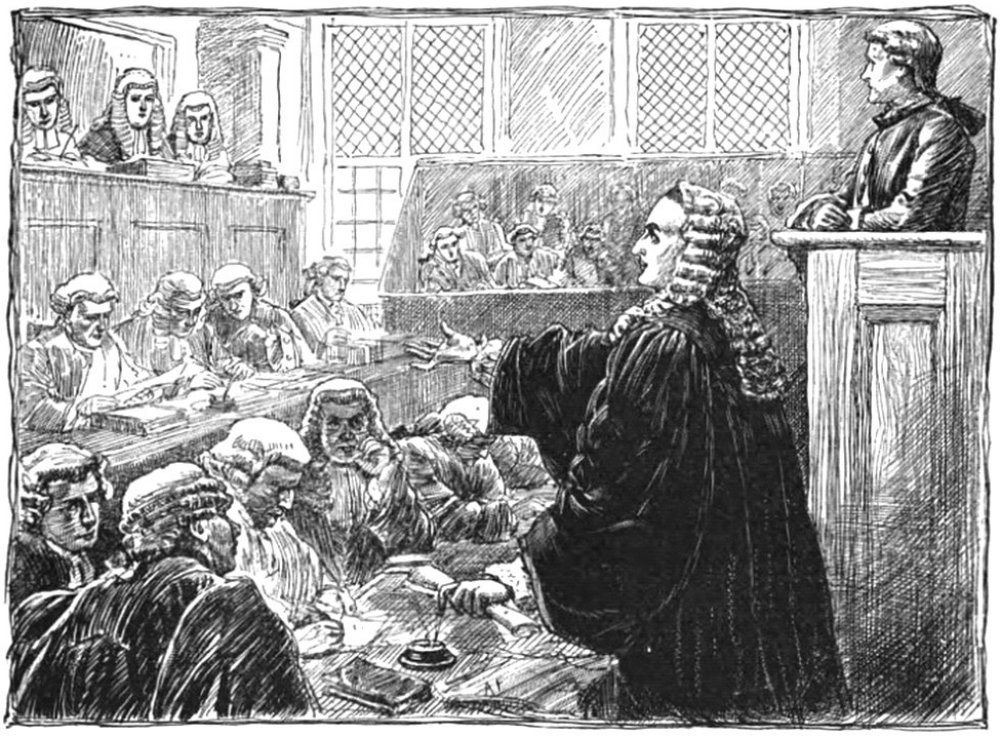

Figure 6: The New York Weekly Journal founder John Peter Zenger brought controversial political discussion to the New York press.

## Freedom of the Press in the Early United States

In 1791, the nascent United States of America adopted the First Amendment as part of the Bill of Rights. This act states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free

exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceable to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."[6] In this one sentence, U.S. law formally guaranteed freedom of press.

However, as a reaction to harsh partisan writing, in 1798, Congress passed the Sedition Act, which declared that "writing, printing, uttering, or publishing any false, scandalous and malicious writing or writings against the government of the United States" was punishable by fine and imprisonment.[7] When Thomas Jefferson was elected president in 1800, he allowed the Sedition Act to lapse, claiming that he was lending himself to "a great experiment...to demonstrate the falsehood of the pretext that freedom of the press is incompatible with orderly government."[8] This free-press experiment has continued into modern times.

## Newspapers as a Form of Mass Media

As late as the early 1800s, newspapers were still quite expensive to print. Although daily papers had become more common and gave merchants up-to-date, vital trading information, most were priced at about 6 cents a copy—well above what artisans and other working-class citizens could afford. As such, newspaper readership was limited to the elite.

## The Penny Press

All that changed in September 1833 when Benjamin Day created *The Sun*. Printed on small, letter-sized pages, The Sun sold for just a penny. With the Industrial Revolution in full swing, Day employed the new steam-driven, two-cylinder press to print *The Sun*. While the old printing press was capable of printing approximately 125 papers per hour, this technologically improved version printed approximately 18,000 copies per hour. As he reached out to new readers, Day knew that he wanted to alter the way news was presented. He printed the paper's motto at the top of every front page of *The Sun*: "The object of this paper is to lay before the public, at a price within the means of every one, all the news of the day, and at the same time offer an advantageous medium for advertisements."[9]

*The Sun* sought out stories that would appeal to the new mainstream consumer. As such, the paper

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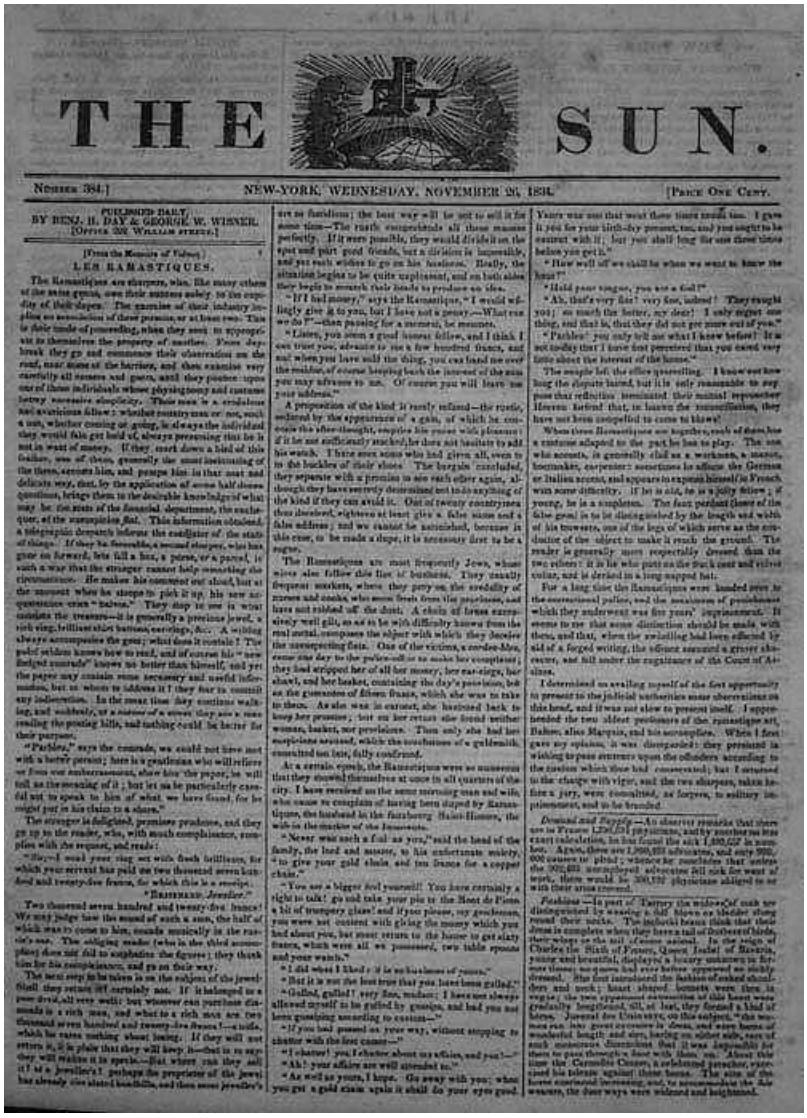
6. Cornell University Law School, "Bill of Rights," http://topics.law.cornell.edu/constitution/billofrights.

7. Constitution Society, "Sedition Act, (July 14, 1798)," http://www.constitution.org/rf/sedition_1798.htm.

8. University of Virginia, "Thomas Jefferson on Politics & Government," http://etext.virginia.edu/jefferson/quotations/jeff1600.htm.

9. Starr, Paul. The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Modern Communications (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 131.

primarily published human-interest stories and police reports. Additionally, Day left ample room for advertisements. Day's adoption of this new format and industrialized method of printing was a huge success. *The Sun* became the first paper to be printed by what became known as the **penny press**. Prior to the emergence of the penny press, the most popular paper, New York City's *Courier and Enquirer*, had sold 4,500 copies per day. By 1835, *The Sun* sold 15,000 copies per day.



THE SUN.

NEW-YORK, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 1835.

PUBLISHED DAILY, BY BENJ. H. DAY & GEORGE W. WISNER. [OFFICE 222 WILLIAM STREET.]

LES RAMASTIQUES.

Figure 7: Benjamin Day's Sun, the first penny paper. The emergence of the penny press helped turn newspapers into a truly mass medium.

Another early successful penny paper was James Gordon Bennett's *New York Morning Herald*, which was first published in 1835. Bennett made his mark on the publishing industry by offering nonpartisan political reporting. He also introduced more aggressive methods for gathering news, hiring both interviewers and foreign correspondents. His paper was the first to send a reporter to a crime scene to witness an investigation.

In the 1860s, Bennett hired 63 war reporters to cover the U.S. Civil War. Although the *Herald* initially emphasized sensational news, it later became one of the country's most respected papers for its accurate reporting.

## Growth of Wire Services

Another major historical technological breakthrough for newspapers came when Samuel Morse invented the telegraph. Newspapers turned to emerging telegraph companies to receive up-to-date news briefs from cities across the globe. The significant expense of this service led to the formation of the Associated Press (AP) in 1846 as a cooperative arrangement of five major New York papers: the *New York Sun*, the *Journal of Commerce*, the *Courier and Enquirer*, the *New York Herald*, and the *Express*. The success of the Associated Press led to the development of wire services between major cities. According to the AP, this meant that editors were able to "actively collect news as it [broke], rather than gather already published news."[10] This collaboration between papers allowed for more reliable reporting, and the increased breadth of subject matter lent subscribing newspapers mass appeal for not only upper- but also middle- and working-class readers.

The advent of teletype machines in the early 20th century constituted a pivotal moment in the history of journalism. Reaching their zenith of utility between the 1930s and 1970s, these devices dramatically expedited the dissemination of news by enabling the real-time transmission of text-based information over telegraph and telephone lines. Prior to this innovation, journalists were reliant on comparatively cumbersome methods such as human messengers, postal services, and manually-operated telegraphs. Teletype technology permitted established news agencies, including the Associated Press, to directly relay stories to the newsrooms of various newspapers. The implementation of teletype systems thus significantly narrowed the temporal gap between the occurrence of an event and its subsequent reportage, laying the groundwork for the contemporary, rapid news cycle.

10. Associated Press, "AP History," http://www.ap.org/pages/about/history/history_first.html.

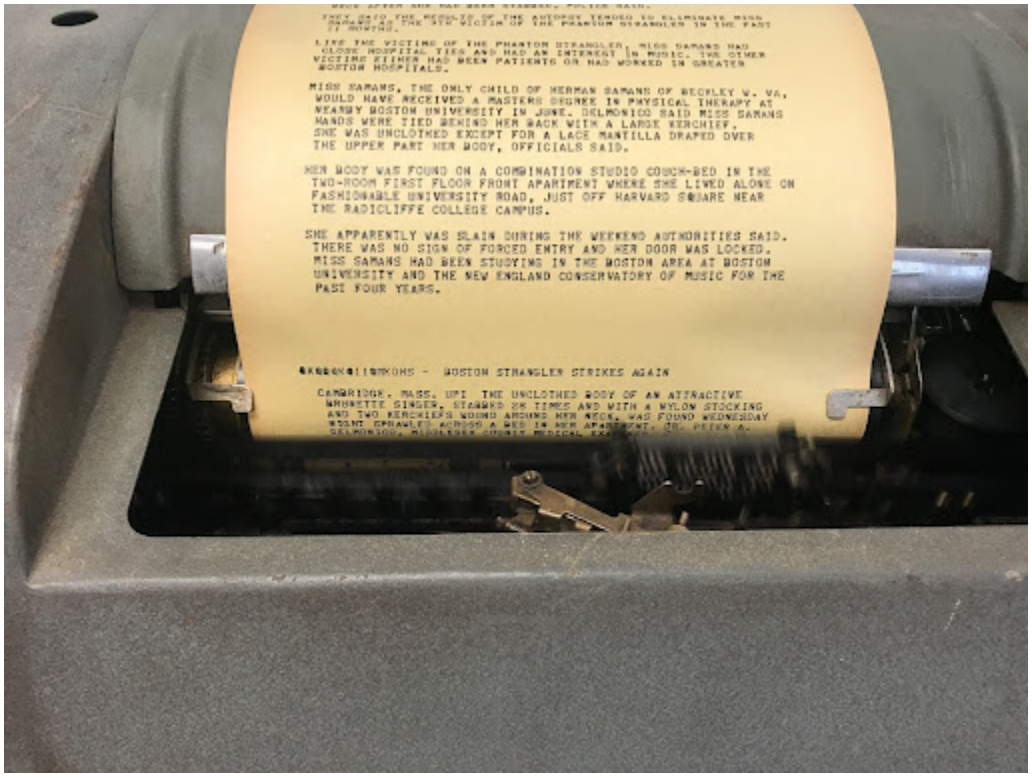



Figure 8: Photo of a teletype machine printing a news story about the Boston Strangler. This machine and the story was used in the filming of the 2023 Hulu Series, Boston Strangler. Photo taken at Museum of Broadcast Technology, Woonsocket, RI.

You can see the print in action here:

*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://rotel.pressbooks.pub/comm-media-studies/?p=260#oembed-2*

## Yellow Journalism

In the late 1800s, *New York World* publisher Joseph Pulitzer developed a new journalistic style that relied on an intensified use of **sensationalism**—stories focused on crime, violence, emotion, and sex. Although he made major strides in the newspaper industry by creating an expanded section focusing on women and by pioneering the use of advertisements as news, Pulitzer relied largely on violence and sex in his headlines to sell more copies. Ironically, journalism's most prestigious award is named for him. His *New York World* became

famous for such headlines as "Baptized in Blood" and "Little Lotta's Lovers."[11] This sensationalist style served as the forerunner for today's **tabloids**. Editors relied on shocking headlines to sell their papers, and although investigative journalism was predominant, editors often took liberties with how the story was told. Newspapers often printed an editor's interpretation of the story without maintaining objectivity.

At the same time Pulitzer was establishing the *New York World*, William Randolph Hearst—an admirer and principal competitor of Pulitzer—took over the *New York Journal*. Hearst's life partially inspired the 1941 classic film *Citizen Kane*. The battle between these two major New York newspapers escalated as Pulitzer and Hearst attempted to outsell one another. The papers slashed their prices back down to a penny, stole editors and reporters from each other, and filled their papers with outrageous, sensationalist headlines. One conflict that inspired particularly sensationalized headlines was the Spanish-American War. Both Hearst and Pulitzer filled their papers with huge front-page headlines and gave bloody—if sometimes inaccurate—accounts of the war. As historian Richard K. Hines writes, "The American Press, especially 'yellow presses' such as William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal* [and] Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* ... sensationalized the brutality of the reconcentrado and the threat to American business interests. Journalists frequently embellished Spanish atrocities and invented others."[12]

## Comics and Stunt Journalism

As the publishers vied for readership, an entertaining new element was introduced to newspapers: the comic strip. In 1896, Hearst's *New York Journal* published R. F. Outcault's The *Yellow Kid* in an attempt to "attract immigrant readers who otherwise might not have bought an English-language paper."[13] Readers rushed to buy papers featuring the successful yellow-nightshirt-wearing character. The cartoon "provoked a wave of 'gentle hysteria' and was soon appearing on buttons, cracker tins, cigarette packs, and ladies' fans—and even as a character in a Broadway play."[14] Another effect of the cartoon's popularity was the creation of the term ***yellow journalism*** to describe the types of papers in which it appeared.

Pulitzer responded to the success of the *Yellow Kid* by introducing stunt journalism. The publisher hired journalist Elizabeth Cochrane, who wrote under the name Nellie Bly, to report on aspects of life that had

11. Fang, Irving E. A History of Mass Communication: Six Information Revolutions (Boston: Focal PressUSA, 1997), p. 103.

12. Hines, Richard K. "'First to Respond to Their Country's Call': The First Montana Infantry and the Spanish-American War and Philippine Insurrection, 1898–1899," Montana: The Magazine of Western History 52, no. 3 (Autumn 2002): 46.

13. Yaszek, Lisa. "'Them Damn Pictures': Americanization and the Comic Strip in the Progressive Era," Journal of American Studies 28, no. 1 (1994): 24.

14. *ibid*

previously been ignored by the publishing industry. Her first article focused on the New York City Lunatic Asylum on Blackwell Island. Bly feigned insanity and had herself committed to the infamous asylum. She recounted her experience in her first article, "Ten Days in a Madhouse." "It was a brilliant move. Her madhouse performance inaugurated the performative tactic that would become her trademark reporting style (Lutes, 2002)." Such articles brought Bly much notoriety and fame, and she became known as the first stunt journalist. Although stunts such as these were considered lowbrow entertainment and female stunt reporters were often criticized by more traditional journalists, Pulitzer's decision to hire Bly was a huge step for women in the newspaper business. Bly and her fellow stunt reporters "were the first newspaperwomen to move, as a group, from the women's pages to the front page, from society news into political and criminal news."[15]

Despite the sometimes questionable tactics of both Hearst and Pulitzer, each man made significant contributions to the growing journalism industry. By 1922, Hearst, a ruthless publisher, had created the country's largest media-holding company. At that time, he owned 20 daily papers, 11 Sunday papers, 2 wire services, 6 magazines, and a newsreel company. Likewise, toward the end of his life, Pulitzer turned his focus to establishing a school of journalism. In 1912, a year after his death and 10 years after Pulitzer had begun his educational campaign, classes opened at the Columbia University School of Journalism. At the time of its opening, the school had approximately 100 students from 21 countries. Additionally, in 1917, the first Pulitzer Prize was awarded for excellence in journalism.

### Key Takeaways

- Although newspapers have existed in some form since ancient Roman times, the modern newspaper primarily stems from German papers printed in the early 1600s with Gutenberg's printing press. Early European papers were based on two distinct models: the small, dense Dutch corantos and the larger, more expansive German weeklies. As papers began growing in popularity, many publishers started following the German style.
- The Sun, first published by Benjamin Day in 1833, was the first penny paper. Day minimized paper size, used a new two-cylinder steam-engine printing press, and slashed the price of the paper to a penny so more citizens could afford a newspaper. By targeting his paper to a

15. Lutes, Jean Marie "Into the Madhouse with Nellie Bly: Girl Stunt Reporting in Late Nineteenth-Century America," American Quarterly 54, no. 2 (2002): 217.

larger, more mainstream audience, Day transformed the newspaper industry and its readers.
- Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst were major competitors in the U.S. newspaper industry in the late 1800s. To compete with one another, the two employed sensationalism—the use of crime, sex, and scandal—to attract readers. This type of journalism became known as yellow journalism. Yellow journalism is known for misleading stories, inaccurate information, and exaggerated detail.

**Exercises**

Please respond to the following writing prompts. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. Examine one copy of a major daily newspaper and one copy of a popular tabloid. Carefully examine each publication's writing style. In what ways do the journals employ similar techniques, and in what ways do they differ?
2. Do you see any links back to the early newspaper trends that were discussed in this section? Describe them.
3. How do the publications use their styles to reach out to their respective audiences?

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# 9.2 DIFFERENT STYLES AND MODELS OF JOURNALISM

**Learning Objectives**

- Explain how objective journalism differs from story-driven journalism.
- Describe the effect of objectivity on modern journalism.
- Describe the unique nature of literary journalism.

Location, readership, political climate, and competition all contribute to rapid transformations in journalistic models and writing styles. Over time, however, certain styles—such as sensationalism—have faded or become linked with less serious publications such as tabloids, while others have developed to become prevalent in modern-day reporting. This section explores the nuanced differences among the most commonly used models of journalism.

## Objective versus Story-Driven Journalism

In the late 1800s, a majority of publishers believed that they would sell more papers by reaching out to specific groups. As such, most major newspapers employed a partisan approach to writing, churning out political stories and using news to sway popular opinion. This all changed in 1896 when a then-failing paper, The New York Times, took a radical new approach to reporting: employing objectivity, or impartiality, to satisfy a wide range of readers.

**Fitchburg State Connection**

Political Journalism Minor[1]

Local political coverage is dwindling at a time when the importance of understanding and communicating local politics remains paramount. Local journalism acts as the backbone of democratic societies, ensuring the public remains informed and engaged. The Political Journalism minor at Fitchburg State is designed to rekindle local political journalism and fill the informational gap in North Central Massachusetts. Rooted in the university's commitment to community engagement, this program collaborates with our student newspaper, The Point, to bring local politics to the forefront.

The Political Journalism minor trains the next generation of journalists to become skilled in their craft and also possess a deep understanding of state and local government. Ideal for students with interests spanning journalism, political science, and media influence on civic engagement, the program offers a holistic approach. Through this minor, students will be equipped to report on vital political events such as elections, campaigns, and local town hall meetings using various multimedia tools. More than just classroom instruction, students will gain practical experience by working as political reporters for the campus newspaper, building a robust portfolio in the process.

Key courses include News Reporting and Writing, Journalism, and College Newspaper Production. This is coupled with essential political science subjects like State and Urban Government and The First Amendment.

## The Rise of Objective Journalism

At the end of the 19th century, *The New York Times* found itself competing with the papers of Pulitzer and Hearst. The paper's publishers discovered that it was nearly impossible to stay afloat without using the sensationalist headlines popularized by its competitors. Although *The New York Times* publishers raised prices to pay the bills, the higher charge led to declining readership, and soon the paper went bankrupt. Adolph Ochs, owner of the once-failing *Chattanooga Times*, took a gamble and bought *The New York Times* in 1896. On August 18 of that year, Ochs made a bold move and announced that the paper would no longer follow the

1. https://www.fitchburgstate.edu/academics/programs/political-journalism-minor

sensationalist style that made Pulitzer and Hearst famous, but instead would be "clean, dignified, trustworthy and impartial."[2]

This drastic change proved to be a success. *The New York Times* became the first of many papers to demonstrate that the press could be "economically as well as ethically successful."[3] With the help of managing editor Carr Van Anda, the new motto "All the News That's Fit to Print," and lowered prices, *The New York Times* quickly turned into one of the most profitable impartial papers of all time. Since the newspaper's successful turnaround, publications around the world have followed *The New York Times'* objective journalistic style, demanding that reporters maintain a neutral voice in their writing.

## The Inverted Pyramid Style

One commonly employed technique in modern journalism is the **inverted pyramid style**. This style requires objectivity and involves structuring a story so that the most important details are listed first for ease of reading. In the inverted pyramid format, the most fundamental facts of a story—typically the who, what, when, where, and why—appear at the top in the lead paragraph, with nonessential information in subsequent paragraphs. The style arose as a product of the telegraph. The inverted pyramid proved useful when telegraph connections failed in the middle of transmission; the editor still had the most important information at the beginning. Similarly, editors could quickly delete content from the bottom up to meet time and space requirements.[4]

The reason for such writing is threefold. First, the style is helpful for writers, as this type of reporting is somewhat easier to complete in the short deadlines imposed on journalists, particularly in today's fast-paced news business. Second, the style benefits editors who can, if necessary, quickly cut the story from the bottom without losing vital information. Finally, the style keeps in mind traditional readers, most of whom skim articles or only read a few paragraphs, but they can still learn most of the important information from this quick read.

# Interpretive Journalism

During the 1920s, objective journalism fell under critique as the world became more complex. Even though

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2. New York Times, "Adolph S. Ochs Dead at 77; Publisher of Times Since 1896," New York Times, April 9, 1935, https://web.archive.org/web/20101009062528/http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/bday/0312.html.

3. *ibid*

4. Scanlan, Chip. "Writing from the Top Down: Pros and Cons of the Inverted Pyramid," Poynter, June 20, 2003, https://web.archive.org/web/20141105034051/http://www.poynter.org:80/how-tos/newsgathering-storytelling/chip-on-your-shoulder/12754/writing-from-the-top-down-pros-and-cons-of-the-inverted-pyramid/.

*The New York Times* continued to thrive, readers craved more than dry, objective stories. In 1923, *Time* magazine launched as the first major publication to step away from simple objectivity to try to provide readers with a more analytical interpretation of the news. As *Time* grew, people at some other publications took notice, and slowly editors began rethinking how they might reach out to readers in an increasingly interrelated world.

During the 1930s, two major events increased the desire for a new style of journalism: the Great Depression and the Nazi threat to global stability. Readers were no longer content with the who, what, where, when, and why of objective journalism. Instead, they craved analysis and a deeper explanation of the chaos surrounding them. Many papers responded with a new type of reporting that became known as **interpretive journalism**.

Interpretive journalism, following *Time's* example, has grown in popularity since its inception in the 1920s and 1930s, and journalists use it to explain issues and to provide readers with a broader context for the stories that they encounter. According to Brant Houston, the executive director of Investigative Reporters and Editors Inc., an interpretive journalist "goes beyond the basic facts of an event or topic to provide context, analysis, and possible consequences."[5] When this new style was first used, readers responded with great interest to the new editorial perspectives that newspapers were offering on events. But interpretive journalism posed a new problem for editors: the need to separate straight objective news from opinions and analysis. In response, many papers in the 1930s and 1940s "introduced weekend interpretations of the past week's events...and interpretive columnists with **bylines**."[6] As explained by Stephen J. A. Ward in his article, "Journalism Ethics," the goal of these weekend features was to "supplement objective reporting with an informed interpretation of world events."[7]

## Competition From Broadcasting

The 1930s also saw the rise of broadcasting as radios became common in most U.S. households and as sound–picture recordings for newsreels became increasingly common. This broadcasting revolution introduced new dimensions to journalism. Scholar Michael Schudson has noted that broadcast news "reflect[ed]...a new journalistic reality. The journalist, no longer merely the relayer of documents and messages,

5. Houston, Brant. "Interpretive Journalism," The International Encyclopedia of Communication, 2008, https://web.archive.org/web/20171010014352/http://www.blackwellreference.com/public/tocnode?id=g9781405131995_chunk_g978140513199514_ss82-1.

6. Ward, Stephen J. A. "Journalism Ethics," in The Handbook of Journalism Studies, ed. Karin Wahl-Jorgensen and Thomas Hanitzsch (New York: Routledge, 2008): 298.

7. *ibid*

ha[d] become the interpreter of the news."[8] However, just as radio furthered the interpretive journalistic style, it also created a new problem for print journalism, particularly newspapers.

Suddenly, free news from the radio offered competition to the paid news of newspapers. Scholar Robert W. McChesney has observed that, in the 1930s, "many elements of the newspaper industry opposed commercial broadcasting, often out of fear of losing ad revenues and circulation to the broadcasters."[9] This fear led to a media war as papers claimed that radio was stealing their print stories. Radio outlets, however, believed they had equal rights to news stories. According to Robert W. McChesney, "commercial broadcasters located their industry next to the newspaper industry as an icon of American freedom and culture."[10] The debate had a major effect on interpretive journalism as radio and newspapers had to make decisions about whether to use an objective or interpretive format to remain competitive with each other.

The emergence of television during the 1950s created even more competition for newspapers. In response, paper publishers increased opinion-based articles, and many added what became known as **op-ed** pages. An op-ed page—short for *opposite the editorial page*—features opinion-based columns typically produced by a writer or writers unaffiliated with the paper's editorial board. As op-ed pages grew, so did interpretive journalism. Distinct from news stories, editors and columnists presented opinions on a regular basis. By the 1960s, the interpretive style of reporting had begun to replace the older descriptive style.[11]

## Literary Journalism

Stemming from the development of interpretive journalism, **literary journalism** began to emerge during the 1960s. This style, made popular by journalists Tom Wolfe (formerly a strictly nonfiction writer) and Truman Capote, is often referred to as *new journalism* and combines factual reporting with sometimes fictional narration. Literary journalism follows neither the formulaic style of reporting of objective journalism nor the opinion-based analytical style of interpretive journalism. Instead, this art form—as it is often termed—brings voice and character to historical events, focusing on the construction of the scene rather than on the retelling of the facts.

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8. Schudson, Michael. "The Politics of Narrative Form: The Emergence of News Conventions in Print and Television," in "Print Culture and Video Culture," Daedalus 111, no. 4 (1982): 104.

9. McChesney, Robert W. "Media and Democracy: The Emergence of Commercial Broadcasting in the United States, 1927–1935," in "Communication in History: The Key to Understanding" OAH Magazine of History 6, no. 4 (1992): 37.

10. *ibid*

11. Patterson, Thomas. "Why Is News So Negative These Days?" History News Network, 2002, http://hnn.us/articles/1134.html.

## Important Literary Journalists

Tom Wolfe was the first reporter to write in the literary journalistic style. In 1963, while his newspaper, New York's *Herald Tribune*, was on strike, Esquire magazine hired Wolfe to write an article on customized cars. Wolfe gathered the facts but struggled to turn his collected information into a written piece. His managing editor, Byron Dobell, suggested that he type up his notes so that *Esquire* could hire another writer to complete the article. Wolfe typed up a 49-page document that described his research and what he wanted to include in the story and sent it to Dobell. Dobell was so impressed by this piece that he simply deleted the "Dear Byron" at the top of the letter and published the rest of Wolfe's letter in its entirety under the headline "There Goes (Varoom! Varoom!) That Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby." The article was a great success, and Wolfe, in time, became known as the father of new journalism. When he later returned to work at the Herald Tribune, Wolfe brought with him this new style, "fusing the stylistic features of fiction and the reportorial obligations of journalism."[12]

Truman Capote responded to Wolfe's new style by writing *In Cold Blood*, which Capote termed a "nonfiction novel," in 1966.[13] The tale of an actual murder that had taken place on a Kansas farm some years earlier, the novel was based on numerous interviews and painstaking research. Capote claimed that he wrote the book because he wanted to exchange his "self-creative world...for the everyday objective world we all inhabit."[14] The book was praised for its straightforward, journalistic style. *New York Times* writer George Plimpton claimed that the book "is remarkable for its objectivity—nowhere, despite his involvement, does the author intrude."[15] After *In Cold Blood* was finished, Capote criticized Wolfe's style in an interview, commenting that Wolfe "[has] nothing to do with creative journalism" by claiming that Wolfe did not have the appropriate fiction-writing expertise.[16] Despite the tension between these two writers, today they are remembered for giving rise to a similar style in varying genres.

## The Effects of Literary Journalism

Although literary journalism certainly affected newspaper reporting styles, it had a much greater impact on

12. Kallan, Richard K. "Tom Wolfe," in A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism: Representative Writers in an Emerging Genre, ed. Thomas B. Connery (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 1992).

13. Plimpton, George. "The Story Behind a Nonfiction Novel," New York Times, January 16, 1966, http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/12/28/home/capote-interview.html.

14. *ibid*

15. *ibid*

16. *ibid*

the magazine industry. Because they were bound by fewer restrictions on length and deadlines, magazines were more likely to publish this new writing style than were newspapers. Indeed, during the 1960s and 1970s, authors simulating the styles of both Wolfe and Capote flooded magazines such as *Esquire* and *The New Yorker* with articles.

Literary journalism also significantly influenced objective journalism. Many literary journalists believed that objectivity limited their ability to critique a story or a writer. Some claimed that objectivity in writing is impossible as all journalists are somehow swayed by their own personal histories. Still others, including Wolfe, argued that objective journalism conveyed a "limited conception of the 'facts,'" which "often effected an inaccurate, incomplete story that precluded readers from exercising informed judgment."[17]

## Advocacy Journalism and Precision Journalism

The reactions of literary journalists to objective journalism encouraged the growth of two more types of journalism: **advocacy journalism** and **precision journalism**. Advocacy journalists promote a particular cause and intentionally adopt a biased, nonobjective viewpoint to do so effectively. However, serious advocate journalists adhere to strict guidelines, as "an advocate journalist is not the same as being an activist" according to journalist Sue Careless.[18] In an article discussing advocacy journalism, Careless contrasted the role of an advocate journalist with the role of an activist. She encourages future advocate journalists by saying the following:

> A journalist writing for the advocacy press should practice the same skills as any journalist. You don't fabricate or falsify. If you do you will destroy the credibility of both yourself as a working journalist and the cause you care so much about. News should never be propaganda. You don't fudge or suppress vital facts or present half-truths.[19]

Despite the challenges and potential pitfalls inherent to advocacy journalism, this type of journalism has increased in popularity over the past several years. In 2007, *USA Today* reporter Peter Johnson stated, "Increasingly, journalists and talk-show hosts want to 'own' a niche issue or problem, find ways to solve it,

17. Kallan, Richard K. "Tom Wolfe," in A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism: Representative Writers in an Emerging Genre, ed. Thomas B. Connery (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 1992).

18. Careless, Sue. "Advocacy Journalism," Interim, May 2000, https://web.archive.org/web/20150721173422/http://www.theinterim.com:80/2000/may/10advocacy.html.

19. *ibid*

and be associated with making this world a better place."[20] In this manner, journalists across the world are employing the advocacy style to highlight issues they care about.

Precision journalism emerged in the 1970s. In this form, journalists turn to polls and studies to strengthen the accuracy of their articles. Philip Meyer, commonly acknowledged as the father of precision journalism, says that his intent is to "encourage my colleagues in journalism to apply the principles of the scientific method to their tasks of gathering and presenting the news."[21] This type of journalism adds a new layer to objectivity in reporting, as articles no longer need to rely solely on anecdotal evidence; journalists can employ hard facts and figures to support their assertions. An example of precision journalism would be an article on voting patterns in a presidential election that cites data from exit polls. Precision journalism has become more popular as computers have become more prevalent. Many journalists currently use this type of writing.

## Oprah Winfrey: Advocacy Journalist

Television talk-show host and owner of production company Harpo Inc., Oprah Winfrey is one of the most successful, recognizable entrepreneurs of the late-20th and early-21st centuries. Winfrey has long been a news reporter, beginning in the late 1970s as a co-anchor of an evening television program. She began hosting her own show in 1984, and in 2010, the *Oprah Winfrey Show* was one of the most popular TV programs on the air. Winfrey had long used her show as a platform for issues and concerns, making her one of the most famous advocacy journalists. While many praise Winfrey for using her celebrity to draw attention to causes she cares about, others criticize her techniques, claiming that she uses the advocacy style for self-promotion. As one critic writes, "I'm not sure how Oprah's endless self-promotion of how she spent millions on a school in South Africa suddenly makes her 'own' the 'education niche.' She does own the trumpet-my-own-horn niche. But that's not 'journalism.'"[22]

Yet despite this somewhat harsh critique, many view Winfrey as the leading example of positive advocacy journalism. Sara Grumbles claims in her blog "Breaking and Fitting the Mold": "Oprah Winfrey obviously practices advocacy journalism.... Winfrey does not fit the mold of a 'typical' journalist by today's standards.

20. Johnson, Peter. "More Reporters Embrace an Advocacy Role," USA Today, March 5, 2007, https://web.archive.org/web/20120830012222/http://www.usatoday.com:80/life/television/news/2007-03-05-social-journalism_N.htm.

21. Meyer, Phillip. Precision Journalism: A Reporter's Introduction to Social Science Methods, 4th ed. (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), vii.

22. Schlussel, Debbie. "USA Today Heralds 'Oprah Journalism,'" Debbie Schlussel (blog), March 6, 2007, http://www.debbieschlussel.com/497/usa-today-heralds-oprah-journalism/.

She has an agenda and she voices her opinions. She ha[d] her own op-ed page in the form of a million-dollar television studio. Objectivity is not her strong point. Still, in my opinion, she is a journalist."[23]

Regardless of the arguments about the value and reasoning underlying her technique, Winfrey unquestionably practices a form of advocacy journalism. In fact, thanks to her vast popularity, she may be the most compelling example of an advocacy journalist working today.

## Consensus versus Conflict Newspapers

Another important distinction within the field of journalism must be made between **consensus journalism** and **conflict journalism**. Consensus journalism typically takes place in smaller communities, where local newspapers generally serve as a forum for many different voices. Newspapers that use consensus-style journalism provide community calendars and meeting notices and run articles on local schools, events, government, property crimes, and zoning. These newspapers can help build civic awareness and a sense of shared experience and responsibility among readers in a community. Often, business or political leaders in the community own consensus papers.

Conversely, conflict journalism, like that which is presented in national and international news articles in *The New York Times*, typically occurs in national or metropolitan dailies. Conflict journalists define news in terms of societal discord, covering events and issues that contravene perceived social norms. In this style of journalism, reporters act as watchdogs who monitor the government and its activities. Conflict journalists often present both sides of a story and pit ideas against one another to generate conflict and, therefore, attract a larger readership. Both conflict and consensus papers are widespread. However, because they serve different purposes and reach out to differing audiences, they largely do not compete with each other.

## Niche Newspapers

**Niche newspapers** represent one more model of newspapers. These publications, which reach out to a specific target group, are rising in popularity in the era of the Internet. As Robert Courtemanche, a certified journalism educator, writes, "In the past, newspapers tried to be everything to every reader to gain circulation.

23. Grumbles, Sara. "Breaking and Fitting the Mold," Media Chatter (blog), October 3, 2007, http://www.commajor.com/?p=1244. No archive of URL, but it is referenced here: https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Communication/Journalism_and_Mass_Communication/Book%3A_Mass_Communication_Media_and_Culture/04%3A_Newspapers/4.03%3A_Different_Styles_and_Models_of_Journalism.

That outdated concept does not work on the Internet where readers expect expert, niche content."[24] Ethnic and minority papers are some of the most common forms of niche newspapers. In the United States—particularly in large cities such as New York—niche papers for numerous ethnic communities flourish. Some common types of U.S. niche papers are papers that cater to a specific ethnic or cultural group or to a group that speaks a particular language. Papers that cover issues affecting lesbians, gay men, and bisexual individuals—like the *Advocate*—and religion-oriented publications—like *The Christian Science Monitor*—are also niche papers.

## The Underground Press

Some niche papers are part of the **underground press**. Popularized in the 1960s and 1970s as individuals sought to publish articles documenting their perception of social tensions and inequalities, the underground press typically caters to alternative and countercultural groups. Most of these papers are published on small budgets. Perhaps the most famous underground paper is New York's Pulitzer Prize–winning *Village Voice*. This newspaper was founded in 1955 and declares its role in the publishing industry by saying:

> The Village Voice introduced free-form, high-spirited and passionate journalism into the public discourse. As the nation's first and largest alternative newsweekly, the Voice maintains the same tradition of no-holds-barred reporting and criticism it first embraced when it began publishing fifty years ago.[25]

Despite their at-times shoestring budgets, underground papers serve an important role in the media. By offering an alternative perspective to stories and by reaching out to niche groups through their writing, underground-press newspapers fill a unique need within the larger media marketplace. As journalism has evolved over the years, newspapers have adapted to serve the changing demands of readers.

**Key Takeaways**

24. Courtemanche, Robert. "Newspapers Must Find Their Niche to Survive," Suite101.com, December 20, 2008, https://web.archive.org/web/20100119160606/http://newspaperindustry.suite101.com/article.cfm/newspapers_must_find_their_niche_to_survive.

25. Village Voice, "About Us," https://web.archive.org/web/20100213060553/http://www.villagevoice.com/about/index/.

- Objective journalism began as a response to sensationalism and has continued in some form to this day. However, some media observers have argued that it is nearly impossible to remain entirely objective while reporting a story. One argument against objectivity is that journalists are human and are, therefore, biased to some degree. Many newspapers that promote objectivity put in place systems to help their journalists remain as objective as possible.
- Literary journalism combines the research and reporting of typical newspaper journalism with the writing style of fiction. While most newspaper journalists focus on facts, literary journalists tend to focus on the scene by evoking voices and characters inhabiting historical events. Famous early literary journalists include Tom Wolfe and Truman Capote.
- Other journalistic styles allow reporters and publications to narrow their editorial voice. Advocacy journalists encourage readers to support a particular cause. Consensus journalism encourages social and economic harmony, while conflict journalists present information in a way that focuses on views outside of the social norm.
- Niche newspapers—such as members of the underground press and those serving specific ethnic groups, racial groups, or speakers of a specific language—serve as important media outlets for distinct voices. The rise of the Internet and online journalism has brought niche newspapers more into the mainstream.

## Exercises

Please respond to the following writing prompts. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. Find an objective newspaper article that includes several factual details. Rewrite the story in a literary journalistic style. How does the story differ from one genre to the other?
2. Was it difficult to transform an objective story into a piece of literary journalism? Explain.
3. Do you prefer reading an objective journalism piece or a literary journalism piece? Explain.

# 9.3 HOW NEWSPAPERS CONTROL THE PUBLIC'S ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND IMPACT AMERICAN POP CULTURE

**Learning Objectives**

- Describe two ways that newspapers control stories.
- Define watchdog journalism.
- Describe how television has impacted journalistic styles.

Since 1896, *The New York Times* has printed the phrase "All the News That's Fit to Print" as its masthead motto. The phrase itself seems innocent enough, and it has been published for such a long time now that many probably skim over it without giving it a second thought. Yet, the phrase represents an interesting phenomenon in the newspaper industry: control. Papers have long been criticized for the way stories are presented, yet newspapers continue to print—and readers continue to buy them.

## "All the News That's Fit to Print"

In 1997, *The New York Times* publicly claimed that it was "an independent newspaper, entirely fearless, free of ulterior influence and unselfishly devoted to the public welfare."[1] Despite this public proclamation of objectivity, the paper's publishers have been criticized for choosing which articles to print based on personal financial gain. In reaction to that statement, scholar Edward S. Herman wrote that the issue is that *The New*

1. Herman, Edward S. "All the News Fit to Print: Structure and Background of the New York Times," Z Magazine, April 1998, https://web.archive.org/web/20100103045250/http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Herman%20/AllNewsFit_Herman.html.

*York Times* "defin[es] public welfare in a manner acceptable to their elite audience and advertisers."[2] *The New York Times* has continually been accused of determining what stories are told. For example, during the 1993 debate over the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), *The New York Times* clearly supported the agreement. In doing so, the newspaper exercised editorial control over its publication and the information that went out to readers.

However, *The New York Times* is not the only newspaper to face accusations of controlling which stories are told. In his review of *Read All About It: The Corporate Takeover of America's Newspapers*, Steve Hoenisch, editor of Criticism.com, offers these harsh words about what drives the stories printed in today's newspapers:

> I've always thought of daily newspapers as the guardians of our—meaning the public's—right to know. The guardians of truth, justice, and public welfare and all that. But who am I fooling? America's daily newspapers don't belong to us. Nor, for that matter, do they even seek to serve us any longer. They have more important concerns now: appeasing advertisers and enriching stockholders.[3]

More and more, as readership declines, newspapers must answer to advertisers and shareholders as they choose which stories to report on.

However, editorial control does not end there. Journalists determine not only what stories are told but also how those stories are presented. This issue is perhaps even more delicate than that of selection. Most newspaper readers still expect news to be reported objectively and demand that journalists present their stories in this manner. However, careful public scrutiny can burden journalists, while accusations of controlling information affect their affiliated newspapers. However, this scrutiny takes on importance as the public turns to journalists and newspapers to learn about the world.

Journalists are also expected to hold themselves to high standards of truth and originality. Fabrication and plagiarism are prohibited. If a journalist is caught using these tactics, then his or her career is likely to end for betraying the public's trust and for damaging the publication's reputation. For example, *The New York Times* reporter Jayson Blair lost his job in 2003 when his plagiarism and fabrication were discovered, and *The New Republic* journalist Stephen Glass was fired in 1998 for inventing stories, quotes, and sources.

Despite the critiques of the newspaper industry and its control over information, the majority of newspapers and journalists take their roles seriously. Editors work with journalists to verify sources and to double-check facts so that readers are provided accurate information. In this way, the control that journalists and newspapers exert serves to benefit their readers, who can then be assured that the articles printed are correct.

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2. *ibid*

3. Hoenisch, Steven. "Corporate Journalism," review of Read All About It: The Corporate Takeover of America's Newspapers, by James D. Squires, http://www.criticism.com/md/crit1.html#section-Read-All-About-It.

## The New York Times Revisits Old Stories

Despite the criticism of *The New York Times*, the famous newspaper has been known to revisit its old stories to provide a new, more balanced view. One such example occurred in 2004 when, in response to criticism of their handling of the Iraq War, *The New York Times* offered a statement of apology. The apology read:

> We have found a number of instances of coverage that was not as rigorous as it should have been. In some cases, information that was controversial then and seems questionable now was insufficiently qualified or allowed to stand unchallenged. Looking back, we wish we had been more aggressive in re-examining the claims as new evidence emerged—or failed to emerge.[4]

Although the apology was risky—it essentially admitted guilt in controlling a controversial story—*The New York Times* demonstrated a commitment to ethical journalism.

# Watchdog Journalism

One way that journalists control stories for the benefit of the public is by engaging in **watchdog journalism**. This form of journalism provides the public with information about government officials or business owners while holding those officials to high standards of operation. Watchdog journalism is defined as

(1) independent scrutiny by the press of the activities of government, business, and other public institutions, with an aim toward (2) documenting, questioning, and investigating those activities, and toward (3) providing the public and officials with timely information on issues of public concern.[5]

One of the most famous examples of watchdog journalism is the role that Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein of *The Washington Post* played in uncovering information about the Watergate break-in and scandal that ultimately resulted in President Richard Nixon's resignation. Newspapers and journalists often laud watchdog journalism, one of the most important functions of newspapers, yet it is difficult to practice because it requires rigorous investigation, which in turn demands more time. Many journalists often try to keep up with news as it breaks, so journalists are not afforded the time to research the information—nor to hone the skills—required to write a watchdog story. "Surviving in the newsroom—doing watchdog stories—takes a

4. New York Times, Editorial, "The Times and Iraq," New York Times, May 26, 2004, http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/26/international/middleeast/26FTE_NOTE.html.

5. Bennett, W. Lance and William Serrin, "The Watchdog Role," in The Institutions of American Democracy: The Press, ed. Geneva Overholser and Kathleen Hall Jamieson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 169.

great deal of personal and political skill. Reporters must have a sense of guerilla warfare tactics to do well in the newsroom."[6]

To be successful, watchdog journalists must investigate stories, ask tough questions, and face the possibility of unpopularity to alert the public to corruption or mismanagement while elevating the public's expectations of the government. At the same time, readers can support newspapers that employ this style of journalism to encourage the press to engage in the challenging watchdog form of journalism. As scholars have observed, "Not surprisingly, watchdog journalism functions best when reporters understand it and news organizations and their audiences support it."[7]

## Impact of Television and the Internet on Print

Newspapers have control over which stories are told and how those stories are presented. Just as the newspaper industry has changed dramatically over the years, journalistic writing styles have been transformed. Many times, such changes mirrored a trend shift in readership; since the 1950s, however, newspapers have had to compete with television journalism and, more recently, the Internet. Both television and the Internet have profoundly affected newspaper audiences and journalistic styles.

### Case Study: *USA Today*

*USA Today*, founded in 1982 and known for its easy-to-read stories, is but one example of a paper that has altered its style to remain competitive with television and the Internet. In the past, newspapers placed their primary focus on the written word. Although some newspapers still maintain the use of written narration, many papers have shifted their techniques to attract a more television-savvy audience. In the case of *USA Today*, the emphasis lies on the second track—the visual story—dominated by large images accompanied by short written stories. This emphasis mimics the television presentation format, allowing the paper to cater to readers with short attention spans.

A perhaps unexpected shift in journalistic writing styles that derives from television is the more frequent use of present tense, rather than past tense, in articles. This shift likely comes from television journalism's tendency to allow a story to develop as it is being told. This subtle but noticeable shift from past to present tense in narration sometimes brings a more dramatic element to news articles, which may attract readers who otherwise turn to television news programs for information.

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6. *ibid*

7. *ibid*

Like many papers, *USA Today* has redesigned its image and style to keep up with the sharp immediacy of the Internet and with the entertainment value of television. In fact, the paper's management was so serious about their desire to compete with television that from 1988 to 1990 they mounted a syndicated television series titled *USA Today: The Television Show* (later retitled *USA Today on TV*).[8] Despite its short run, the show demonstrated the paper's focus on reaching out to a visual audience, a core value that it has maintained to this day. Today, *USA Today* has established itself as a credible and reliable news source, despite its unorthodox approach to journalism.

## Key Takeaways

- Newspapers control which stories are told by selecting which articles make it to print. They also control how stories are told by determining the way in which information is presented to their readers.
- Watchdog journalism is an investigative approach to reporting that aims to inform citizens of occurrences in government and businesses.
- Television has not only contributed to the decline of readership for newspapers but has also impacted visual and journalistic styles. Newspapers, such as USA Today, have been profoundly affected by the television industry. USA Today caters to television watchers by incorporating large images and short stories while primarily employing the present tense to make it seem as though the story is unfolding before the reader.

## Exercises

8. Internet Movie Database, "U.S.A Today: The Television Series," Internet Movie Database, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0094572/.

Please respond to the following writing prompts. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. Compare the journalistic styles of USA Today and The Wall Street Journal. Examine differences in the visual nature of the newspapers as well as in the journalistic style.
2. How has television affected these particular newspapers?
3. What noticeable differences do you observe? Can you find any similarities?
4. How did each newspaper cover events differently? How did each newspaper's coverage change the focus and information told? Did you find any watchdog stories, and if so, what were they?

# 9.4 CURRENT POPULAR TRENDS IN THE NEWSPAPER INDUSTRY

**Learning Objectives**

1. Identify newspapers with high circulation.
2. Describe the decline of the newspaper industry.

Popular media, such as television and the Internet, have forever changed the newspaper industry. To fully understand the impact that current technology is having on the newspaper industry, it is necessary first to examine the current state of the industry.

## Major Publications in the U.S. Newspaper Industry

Although numerous papers exist in the United States, a few major publications dominate circulation and, thus, exert great influence on the newspaper industry. Each of these newspapers has its own unique journalistic and editorial style, relying on different topics and techniques to appeal to its readership.

### *USA Today*

*USA Today* currently tops the popularity chart with a daily circulation of 2,281,831.[1] This national paper's easy-to-read content and visually focused layout contribute to its high readership numbers. Although the paper does not formally publish on weekends, it does have a partner paper titled *USA Weekend*. *USA Today* consists

1. Newspaper, "Top 10 US Newspapers by Circulation," Newspapers.com, https://web.archive.org/web/20100715175131/http://www.newspapers.com:80/top10.html.

of four sections: news, money, sports, and life; for the ease of its readers, the newspaper color-codes each section. Owned by the Gannett Company, the paper caters to its audience by opting for ease of comprehension over complexity.

## The Wall Street Journal

Established in the late 1800s, *The Wall Street Journal* closely trails *USA Today*, with a circulation of 2,070,498.[2] In fact, *USA Today* and *The Wall Street Journal* have competed for the top circulation spot for many years. An international paper that focuses on business and financial news, *The Wall Street Journal* primarily uses written narration with few images. Recent changes to its layout, such as adding advertising on the front page and minimizing the size of the paper slightly to save on printing costs, have not dramatically shifted this long-standing focus. The paper runs between 50 and 96 pages per issue and gives its readers up-to-date information on the economy, business, and national and international financial news.

### The New York Times

*The New York Times* is another major publication, with a circulation of 1,121,623.[3] Founded in 1851, the New York City–based paper is owned by the New York Times Company, which also publishes several smaller regional papers. The flagship paper contains three sections: news, opinion, and features. Although its articles tend to be narrative-driven, the paper does include images for many of its articles, creating a balance between the wordier layout of *The Wall Street Journal* and the highly visual *USA Today*. *The New York Times* publishes international stories along with more local stories in sections such as Arts, Theater, and Metro. The paper has also successfully established itself on the Internet, becoming one of the most popular online papers today.

### Los Angeles Times

*The Los Angeles Times*—currently the only West Coast paper to crack the top 10 circulation list—has also contributed much to the newspaper industry. First published in 1881, the California-based paper has a distribution of 907,977.[4] Perhaps the most unique feature of the paper is its Column One, which focuses on sometimes-bizarre stories meant to engage readers. Known for its investigative journalistic approach, the *Los*

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2. *ibid*

3. *ibid*

4. *ibid*

*Angeles Times* demands that its journalists "provide a rich, nuanced account" of the issues they cover.[5] By 2010, the paper had won 39 Pulitzer Prizes, including five gold medals for public service.[6]

## The Washington Post

First published in 1877, *The Washington Post* is Washington, DC's oldest and largest paper, with a daily circulation of 709,997.[7] According to its editors, the paper aims to be "fair and free and wholesome in its outlook on public affairs and public men."[8] In this vein, *The Washington Post* has developed a strong investigative journalism style, perhaps most exemplified by its prominent investigation of the Watergate Scandal.

The paper also holds the principle of printing articles fit "for the young as well as the old.[9]" In 2003, *The Washington Post* launched a new section called the Sunday Source which targets the 18- to 34-year-old age group in an attempt to increase readership among younger audiences. This weekend supplement section focused on entertainment and lifestyle issues, like style, food, and fashion. Although it ceased publication in 2008, some of its regular features migrated to the regular paper. Like the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post* holds numerous Pulitzer Prizes for journalism.

## Chicago Tribune

One other major publication with a significant impact on the newspaper industry is the *Chicago Tribune*, wielding a circulation of 643,086.[10] First established in 1847, the paper is often remembered for famously miscalling the 1948 presidential election with the headline of "Dewey Defeats Truman."

Despite this error, the *Chicago Tribune* has become known for its watchdog journalism, including a specific

5. Los Angeles Times, "L.A. Times Ethics Guidelines," Readers' Representative Journal (blog), http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/readers/2007/07/los-angeles-tim.html.
6. Los Angeles Times, "Times' Pulitzer Prizes," http://www.latimes.com/about/mediagroup/latimes/la-mediagroup-pulitzers,0,1929905.htmlstory.
7. Newspaper, "Top 10 US Newspapers by Circulation," Newspapers.com, http://www.newspapers.com/top10.html.
8. Washington Post, "General Information: Post Principles," https://nie.washpost.com/gen_info/principles/index.shtml. (Program retired).
9. *ibid*
10. Newspaper, "Top 10 US Newspapers by Circulation," Newspapers.com, https://web.archive.org/web/20100715175131/http://www.newspapers.com:80/top10.html.

watchdog section for issues facing Chicago, like pollution, politics, and more. It proudly proclaims its commitment "to standing up for your interests and serving as your watchdog in the corridors of power."[11]

# Declining Readership and Decreasing Revenues

Despite major newspapers' large circulations, newspapers as a whole are experiencing a dramatic decline in both subscribers and overall readership. For example, on February 27, 2009, Denver's *Rocky Mountain News* published its final issue after nearly 150 years in print. The front-page article "Goodbye, Colorado" reflected on the paper's long-standing history with the Denver community, observing that "It is with great sadness that we say goodbye to you today. Our time chronicling the life of Denver and Colorado, the nation and the world, is over."[12]

## Readership Decline

The story of *Rocky Mountain News* is neither unique nor entirely unexpected. For nearly a half-century, predictions of the disappearance of print newspapers have been an ongoing refrain. The fear of losing print media began in the 1940s with the arrival of the radio and television. Indeed, the number of daily papers has steadily decreased since the 1940s; in 1990, the number of U.S. dailies was just 1,611. By 2008, that number had further shrunk to 1,408.[13] But the numbers are not as clear-cut as they appear. As one report observed, "The root problems go back to the late 1940s, when the percentage of Americans reading newspapers began to drop. But for years the U.S. population was growing so much that circulation kept rising and then, after the 1970s, remained stable."[14] During the 1970s when circulation stopped rising, more women were entering the workforce. By the 1990s when "circulation began to decline in absolute numbers," the number of women in the workforce was higher than had ever been previously experienced.[15] With women at work,

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11. Chicago Tribune, "On Guard for Chicago," https://web.archive.org/web/20140731130535/http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/chi-on-guard-for-chicago,0,3834517.htmlpage.

12. Rocky Mountain News, "Goodbye, Colorado," February 7, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20090228022757/http://www.rockymountainnews.com/news/2009/feb/27/goodbye-colorado/.

13. Newspaper Association of American, "Total Paid Circulation," https://web.archive.org/web/20090225142902/http://www.naa.org/TrendsandNumbers/Total-Paid-Circulation.aspx.

14. State of the Media, project for Excellence in Journalism, "Newspapers: Audience" in The State of the News Media 2004, https://web.archive.org/web/20080619005420/http://www.stateofthemedia.org/2004/narrative_newspapers_audience.asp?cat=3&media=2.

15. *ibid*

there were fewer people at home with leisure time for reading daily papers for their news. This, combined with television journalism's rising popularity and the emergence of the Internet, meant a significant decrease in newspaper circulation. With newer, more immediate ways to get news, the disconnect between newspapers and consumers deepened.

Compounding the problem is newspapers' continuing struggle to attract younger readers. Many of these young readers simply did not grow up in households that subscribed to daily papers and so they do not turn to newspapers for information. However, the problem seems to be more complex "than fewer people developing the newspaper habit. People who used to read every day now read less often. Some people who used to read a newspaper have stopped altogether."[16]

Yet the most significant challenge to newspapers is certainly the Internet. As print readership declines, online readership has grown; fast, free access to breaking information contributes to the growing appeal of online news. Despite the increase in online news readers, that growth has not offset the drop in print readership. In 2008, the Pew Research Center conducted a news media consumption survey in which only

> 39 percent of participants claimed to having read a newspaper (either print or online) the day before, showing a drop from 43 percent in 2006. Meanwhile, the readership of print newspapers fell from 34 percent to 25 percent in that time period.[17]

The study also observed that younger generations are primarily responsible for this shift to online reading. "The changes in reader habits seem to be similar amongst both Generation X and Y demographics, where marked increases in consulting online news sources were observed."[18] Baby boomers and older generations do, for the most part, still rely on printed newspapers for information. Perhaps this distinction between generations is not surprising. Younger readers grew up with the Internet and have developed different expectations about the speed, nature, and cost of information than older generations. However, this trend suggests that online readership, along with the general decline of news readers, may make printed newspapers all but obsolete in the near future.

## Joint Operating Agreements

As readership began to decline in the 1970s and newspapers began experiencing greater competition within

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16. *ibid*

17. Dilling, Emily. "Study: Newspaper Readership Down, Despite Online Increase," Shaping the Future of the Newspaper (blog), March 3, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20100324131137/http://www.sfnblog.com/circulation_and_readership/2009/03/study_newspaper_readership_down_despite.php.

18. *ibid*

individual cities, Congress issued the Newspaper Preservation Act authorizing the structure of **joint operating agreements** (JOAs). The implementation of JOAs means that two newspapers could "share the cost of business, advertising, and circulation operations," which helped newspapers stay afloat in the face of an ever-shrinking readership.[19] The Newspaper Preservation Act also ensured that two competing papers could keep their distinct news divisions but merge their business divisions.

At its peak, 28 newspaper JOAs existed across the United States, but as the industry declines at an increasingly rapid rate, JOAs are beginning to fail. With today's shrinking pool of readers, two newspapers simply cannot effectively function in one community. In 2009, only nine JOAs continued operations, largely because JOAs "don't eliminate the basic problem of one newspaper gaining the upper hand in circulation and, hence, advertising revenue."[20] With advertising playing a key role in newspapers' financial survival, revenue loss is a critical blow. Additionally, "in recent years, of course, the Internet has thrown an even more dramatic wrench into the equation. Classified advertising has migrated to Internet sites like craigslist.org while traditional retail advertisers...can advertise via their own web sites."[21] As more advertisers move away from the newspaper industry, more JOAs will likely crumble. The destruction of JOAs will, in turn, result in the loss of more newspapers.

## Newspaper Chains

As newspapers diminish in number and as newspaper owners find themselves in financial trouble, a dramatic increase in the consolidation of newspaper ownership has taken place. Today, many large companies own several papers across the country, buying independently owned papers to help them stay afloat. The change has been occurring for some time; in fact, "since 1975, more than two-thirds of independently owned newspapers...have disappeared."[22] However, since 2000, newspaper consolidation has increased markedly as more papers are turning over control to larger companies.

In 2002, the 22 largest newspaper chains owned 39 percent of all the newspapers in the country (562

19. Milstead, David. "Newspaper Joint Operating Agreements Are Fading," Rocky Mountain News, January 22, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20090605143644/http://www.rockymountainnews.com:80/news/2009/jan/22/newspaper-joas-fading/.

20. *ibid*

21. *ibid*

22. Free Press, "Media Consolidation," https://web.archive.org/web/20160726122320/https://www.freepress.net/policy/ownership/consolidation.

papers). Yet those papers represent 70 percent of daily circulation and 73 percent of Sunday. And their influence appears to be growing. These circulation percentages are a full percentage point higher than 2001.[23]

Among the 22 companies that own the largest percentage of the papers, four chains stand out: Gannett, the Tribune Company, the New York Times Company, and the McClatchy Company. Not only do these companies each own several papers across the country, but they also enjoy a higher-than-normal profit margin relative to smaller chains.

## Recent Ownership Trends

In addition to consolidation, the decline of print newspapers has brought about several changes in ownership as companies attempt to increase their revenue. In 2007, media mogul Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation purchased *The Wall Street Journal* with an unsolicited $5 billion bid, promising to "pour money into the *Journal* and its website and use his satellite television networks in Europe and Asia to spread Journal content the world over."[24] Murdoch has used the buyout to move the paper into the technological world, asking readers and newspapers to embrace change. In 2009, he published an article in *The Wall Street Journal* assuring his readers that "the future of journalism is more promising than ever—limited only by editors and producers unwilling to fight for their readers and viewers, or government using its heavy hand either to overregulate or subsidize us."[25] Murdoch believes that the hope of journalism lies in embracing the changing world and how its inhabitants receive news. Time will tell if he is correct.

Despite changes in power, the consolidation trend is leveling off. Even large chains must cut costs to avoid shuttering papers entirely. In January 2009, the newspaper industry experienced 2,252 layoffs; in total, the U.S. newspaper industry lost 15,114 jobs that year.[26] With the dual challenges of layoffs and decreasing readership, some in the journalism industry are beginning to explore other options for ownership, such as nonprofit ownership. As one article in the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* puts it, "It may be time for a more radical

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23. Communic@tions Management Inc. "Sixty Years of Daily Newspaper Circulation Trends." Media-CMI, May 6, 2011. http://www.media-cmi.com/downloads/Sixty_Years_Daily_Newspaper_Circulation_Trends_050611.pdf.

24. Ahrens, Frank. "Murdoch Seizes Wall St. Journal in $5 Billion Coup," Washington Post, August 1, 2007, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/07/31/AR2007073100896.html.

25. Murdoch, Rupert. "Journalism and Freedom," Wall Street Journal, December 8, 2009, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704107104574570191223415268.html.

26. *ibid*

reinvention of the daily newspaper. The answer for some newspapers may be to adopt a nonprofit ownership structure that will enable them to seek philanthropic contributions and benefit from tax exemptions."[27]

It is clear that the newspaper industry is on the brink of major change. Over the next several years, the industry will likely continue to experience a complete upheaval brought on by dwindling readership and major shifts in how individuals consume news. As newspapers scramble to find their footing in an ever-changing business, readers adapt and seek out trustworthy information in new ways.

### Key Takeaways

- Some key players in the U.S. newspaper market include USA Today, The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, The Washington Post, and the Chicago Tribune.
- Although readership has been declining since the invention of the radio, the Internet has had the most profound effect on the newspaper industry as readers turn to free online sources of information.
- Financial challenges have led to the rise of ever-growing newspaper chains and the creation of JOAs. Nevertheless, newspapers continue to fold and lay off staff.

### Exercises

Please respond to the following writing prompts. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. Pick a major national event that interests you. Then, select two papers of the six discussed in this section and explore the differences in how those newspapers reported on the story.

27. Stehle, Vince. "It's Time for Newspapers to Become Nonprofit Organizations," Chronicle of Philanthropy, March 12, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20120626091844/http://gfem.org:80/node/492.

How does the newspaper's audience affect the way in which a story is presented?

2. Spend some time exploring websites of several major newspapers. How have these papers been responding to growing online readership?

# 9.5 ONLINE JOURNALISM REDEFINES NEWS

**Learning Objectives**

- Describe two ways in which online reporting may outperform traditional print reporting.
- Explain the greatest challenges newspapers face as they transition to online journalism.

The proliferation of online communication has had a profound effect on the newspaper industry. As individuals turn to the Internet to receive news for free, traditional newspapers struggle to remain competitive and hold onto their traditional readers. However, the Internet's appeal goes beyond free content. This section delves further into the Internet and its influence on the print industry.

## Competition From Blogs

Weblogs, or blogs, have offered a new take on the traditional world of journalism. Blogs feature news and commentary entries from one or more authors. However, journalists differ on whether the act of writing a blog, commonly known as blogging, is, in fact, a form of journalism.

Indeed, many old-school reporters do not believe blogging ranks as formal journalism. Unlike journalists, bloggers are not required to support their work with credible sources. This means that stories published on blogs are often neither verified nor verifiable. As Jay Rosen, New York University journalism professor, writes, "Bloggers are speakers and writers of their own invention, at large in the public square. They're participating in the great game of influence called public opinion."[1] Despite the blurry lines of what constitutes "true" journalism—and despite the fact that bloggers are not held to the same standards as journalists—many people

1. Rosen, Jay. "Brain Food for BloggerCon," PressThink (blog), April 16, 2004, https://web.archive.org/web/20100610104444/http://journalism.nyu.edu/pubzone/weblogs/pressthink/2004/04/16/con_prelude.html.

still seek out blogs to learn about news. Thus, blogs have affected the news journalism industry. According to longtime print journalist and blogger Gina Chen, "Blogging has changed journalism, but it is not journalism."[2]

## Advantages Over Print Media

Beyond the lack of accountability in blogging, blogs are free from the constraints of journalism in other ways that make them increasingly competitive with traditional print publications. Significantly, Internet publication allows writers to break news as soon as it occurs. Unlike a paper that publishes only once a day, the Internet is constantly accessible, and information is ready at the click of a mouse.

In 1998, the Internet flexed its rising journalistic muscle by breaking a story before any major print publication: the Bill Clinton/Monica Lewinsky scandal. *The Drudge Report*, an online news website that primarily consists of links to stories, first made the story public, claiming to have learned of the scandal only after *Newsweek* magazine failed to publish it. On January 18, 1998, the story broke online with the title "*Newsweek* Kills Story on White House Intern. Blockbuster Report: 23-year-old, Former White House Intern, Sex Relationship with President." The report gave some details on the scandal, concluding the article with the phrase "The White House was busy checking the *Drudge Report* for details."[3] This act revealed the power of the Internet because of its superiority in timeliness, threatening the relevancy of slower newspapers and news magazines.

Print media also continuously struggle with space constraints, another limit that the Internet is spared. As newspapers contemplate making the transition from print to online editions, several editors see the positive effect of this particular issue. N. Ram, editor in chief of *The Hindu*, claims, "One clear benefit online editions can provide is the scope this gives for accommodating more and longer articles.... There need be no space constraints, as in the print edition."[4] With the endless writing space of the Internet, online writers have the freedom to explore topics more fully, to provide more detail, and to print interviews or other texts in their entirety—opportunities that many print journalists have longed for since newspapers first began publishing.

Online writing also provides a forum for amateurs to enter the professional realm of writing. With cost-cutting forcing newspapers to lay off writers, more and more would-be journalists are turning to the Internet to find ways to enter the field. Interestingly, the blogosphere has launched the careers of journalists who otherwise

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2. Chen, Gina. "Is Blogging Journalism?" Save the Media, March 28, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20100314063739/http://savethemedia.com/2009/03/28/is-blogging-journalism/.

3. Australian Politics, "Original Drudge Reports of Monica Lewinsky Scandal (January 17, 1998)," AustralianPolitics.com, https://web.archive.org/web/20120304192629/http://www.australianpolitics.com/usa/clinton/impeachment/drudge.shtml.

4. Viswanathan, S. "Internet Media: Sky's the Limit," Hindu, March 28, 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20170713175057/http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/Readers-Editor/Internet-media-skys-the-limit/article16625607.ece.

may never have pursued a career in journalism. For example, blogger Molly Wizenberg founded the blog *Orangette* because she didn't know what to do with herself: "The only thing I knew was that, whatever I did, it had to involve food and writing."[5] After *Orangette* became a successful food blog, Wizenberg transitioned into writing for a traditional media outlet: food magazine *Bon Appetit*.

## Online Newspapers

With declining readership and increasing competition from blogs, most newspapers have embraced the culture shift and have moved to online journalism. For many papers, this has meant creating an online version of their printed paper that readers will have access to from any location, at all times of the day. By 2010, over 10,000 newspapers had gone online. But some smaller papers—particularly those in two-paper communities—have not only started websites, but have also ceased publication of their printed papers entirely.

One such example is Seattle's *Post-Intelligencer*. In 2009, the newspaper stopped printing, "leaving the rival *Seattle Times* as the only big daily in town."[6] As Steve Swartz, president of Hearst Newspapers and owner of the Post-Intelligencer, commented about the move to online-only printing, "Being the second newspaper in Seattle didn't work. We are very enthusiastic, however, about this experiment to create a digital-only business in Seattle with a robust community website at its core."[7] For the *Post-Intelligencer*, the move meant a dramatic decrease in its number of staff journalists. The printed version of the paper employed 135 journalists, but the online version, Seattlepi.com, employs only two dozen. For Seattlepi.com, this shift has been doubly unusual because the online-only newspaper is not really like a traditional newspaper at all. As Swartz articulated, "Very few people come to our website and try to re-create the experience of reading a newspaper—in other words, spending a half-hour to 45 minutes and really reading most of the articles. We don't find people do that on the Web."[8] The online newspaper is, in reality, still trying to figure out what it is. Indeed, this is an uncomfortable position familiar to many online-only papers: trapped between the printed news world and the online world of blogs and unofficial websites.

During this transitional time for newspapers, many professional journalists are taking the opportunity to enter the blogosphere, the realm of bloggers on the Internet. Journalist bloggers, also known as **beatbloggers**,

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5. Wyke, Nick. "Meet the Food Bloggers: Orangette," Times (London), May 26, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20100529032401/http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/food_and_drink/real_food/article6364590.ece.

6. Folkenflik, David. "Newspapers Wade Into an Online-Only Future," NPR, March 20, 2009, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=102162128.

7. *ibid*

8. *ibid*

have begun to utilize blogs as "tool[s] to engage their readers, interact with them, use them as sources, crowdsource their ideas and invite them to contribute to the reporting process," says beatblogger Alana Taylor.[9] As beatblogging grows, online newspapers are harnessing the popularity of this new phenomenon and taking advantage of the resources provided by the vast Internet audience through **crowdsourcing** (outsourcing problem solving to a large group of people, usually volunteers). Blogs are becoming an increasingly prominent feature on news websites, and nearly every major newspaper website displays a link to the paper's official blogs on its homepage. This subtle addition to the web pages reflects the print industry's desire to remain relevant in an increasingly online world.

Even as print newspapers are making the transformation to the digital world with greater or less success, Internet news sites that were never print papers have begun to make waves. Sites such as *The Huffington Post*, *The Daily Beast*, and the *Drudge Report* are growing in popularity. For example, *The Huffington Post* displays the phrase "The Internet Newspaper: News, Blogs, Video, Community" as its masthead, reiterating its role and focus in today's media-savvy world.[10] In 2008, former *Vanity Fair* editor Tina Brown cofounded and began serving as editor in chief of *The Daily Beast*. On *The Daily Beast's* website, Brown has noted its success: "I revel in the immediacy, the responsiveness, the real-time-ness. I used to be the impatient type. Now I'm the serene type. Because how can you be impatient when everything happens right now, instantly?"[11]

Some newspapers are also making even more dramatic transformations to keep up with the changing online world. In 2006, large newspaper conglomerate GateHouse Media began publishing under a Creative Commons license, giving noncommercial users access to content according to the license's specifications. The company made the change to draw in additional online viewers and, eventually, revenue for the newspapers. Writer at the Center for Citizen Media, Lisa Williams, explains in her article published by PressThink.org:

> GateHouse's decision to CC license its content may be a response to the cut-and-paste world of weblogs, which frequently quote and point to newspaper stories. Making it easier—and legal—for bloggers to quote stories at length means that bloggers are pointing their audience at that newspaper. Getting a boost in traffic from weblogs may have an impact on online advertising revenue, and links from weblogs also have an impact on how high a site's pages appear in search results from search engines such as Google. Higher traffic, and higher search engine rankings build a site's ability to make money on online ads.[12]

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9. Taylor, Alana. "What It Takes to Be a Beatblogger," BeatBlogging.org (blog), March 5, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20090413050847/http://beatblogging.org/2009/03/05/what-it-takes-to-be-a-beatblogger.

10. Huffington Post, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/.

11. Brown, Tina. "The Daily Beast Turns One," Daily Beast, October 5, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20091009062618/http://www.thedailybeast.com/blogs-and-stories/2009-10-05/the-daily-beast-turns-one/full/.

12. Williams, Lisa. "Newspaper Chain Goes Creative Commons: GateHouse Media Rolls CC Over 96 Newspaper Sites," PressThink (blog), December 15, 2006, https://web.archive.org/web/20090226045120/https://journalism.nyu.edu/pubzone/weblogs/pressthink/2006/12/15/newspaper_chain.html.

GateHouse Media's decision to alter its newspapers' licensing agreement to boost advertising online reflects the biggest challenge facing the modern online newspaper industry: profit. Despite shrinking print-newspaper readership and rising online readership, print revenue remains much greater than digital revenue because the online industry is still determining how to make online newspapers profitable. As one article notes:

> The positive news is that good newspapers like The New York Times, The Guardian, The Financial Times, and The Wall Street Journal now provide better, richer, and more diverse content in their Internet editions.... The bad news is that the print media are yet to find a viable, let alone profitable, revenue model for their Internet journalism.[13]

The issue is not only that information on the Internet is free but also that advertising is far less expensive online. As National Public Radio (NPR) reports, "The online-only plan for newspapers remains an unproven financial model; there are great savings by scrapping printing and delivery costs, but even greater lost revenues, since advertisers pay far more money for print ads than online ads."[14]

Despite these challenges, newspapers both in print and online continue to seek new ways to provide the public with accurate, timely information. Newspapers have long been adapting to cultural paradigm shifts, and in the face of losing print newspapers altogether, the newspaper industry continues to reinvent itself to keep up with the digital world.

### Key Takeaways

- Print newspapers face increasing challenges from online media, particularly amateur blogs and professional online news operations.
- Internet reporting outperforms traditional print journalism both with its ability to break news as it happens and through its lack of space limitations. Still, nonprofessional Internet news is not subject to checks for credibility, so some readers and journalists remain skeptical.
- As newspapers move to online journalism, they must determine how to make that model

13. Viswanathan, S. "Internet Media: Sky's the Limit," Hindu, March 28, 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20170713175057/http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/Readers-Editor/Internet-media-skys-the-limit/article16625607.ece.

14. Folkenflik, David. "Newspapers Wade Into an Online-Only Future," NPR, March 20, 2009, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=102162128.

profitable. Most online newspapers do not require subscriptions, and advertising is significantly less expensive online than it is in print.

## Exercises

Please respond to the following writing prompts. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. Choose a topic on which to conduct research. Locate a blog, a print newspaper, and an online-only newspaper that have information about the topic.
2. What differences do you notice in style and in formatting?
3. Does one appeal to you over the others? Explain.
4. What advantages does each source have over the others? What disadvantages?
5. Consider the changes the print newspaper would need to make to become an online-only paper. What challenges would the print newspaper face in transitioning to an online medium?

# 9.6. MEDIA SYSTEM IN GERMANY

**Learning Objectives**

- Understand the dual structure of the German media system, distinguishing between the roles and funding mechanisms of private and public broadcasters.
- Analyze the historical influences on the development of Germany's media landscape, focusing on the impact of the Nazi regime and the subsequent establishment of media independence and democratic engagement.
- Evaluate the challenges faced by public media in Germany, including the criticism of contribution fees, and appreciate their significance in maintaining a balanced, informed, and democratic public sphere.

## What is the media system in Germany?

In Germany, the media system is divided into two. On the one hand, there are private media, such as CBNC, BBC, Fox News, etc. in the US. On the other hand, there are so-called public broadcasters. It is important to note that these are nevertheless independent of the state and should not be seen as an instrument of government.

The press is free, protected by the constitution, and has a control function vis-à-vis the state, and society – but also itself.

The importance of journalists and editorial offices is so great that many refer to them as the "fourth estate" in a democratic society alongside the government, parliament, and the judiciary.[1]

The high status of the media is based on normative concepts that give the media the task of forming opinions

1. Steinlein, E. (2023, April 25). Das ABC des deutschen Mediensystems. Deutschland.de. https://www.deutschland.de/de/topic/kultur/pressefreiheit-und-medien-in-deutschland-im-ueberblick.

and creating a democratic public sphere. It is therefore about the public mandate that the media have to offer every citizen of the country the opportunity to form their own opinion on public and political events, i.e. to always report on them neutrally. This can only be done by independent media that are neither dependent on the state nor on companies, but rather in line with the idea of "by the people for the people".

There are historical reasons for this, which will be explained in more detail later in the chapter.[2]

## Private vs. public press

There are numerous media offerings in Germany as well as in the US: Newspapers, radio, television, apps, social media, streaming services, podcasts, etc. The difference, as described above, is that these are offered by two types of media organizations: private and public.

These differ not only in the way they are financed but are also subject to different regulations.

Below is a brief outline of the main differences between the two:

**1. Private media**

These finance their programs exclusively through advertising. TV stations are allowed to broadcast twelve minutes of advertising per hour, while radio stations are not subject to any restrictions. Almost all of them have their own apps, podcasts and social media accounts in addition to their traditional radio and TV offerings, where they broadcast their content in order to reach the largest possible target group. Here, too, the main source of funding is advertising.

However, there are also other sources of funding such as subscriptions. This is mainly offered by newspapers. There are usually different subscription models for the newspaper and also for the online offerings, as many articles are behind a paywall. In this case, consumers also pay the newspapers directly, although this share is not sufficient, which is why advertising remains the main source of income for private media. Even if there are certain legal regulations, a private broadcaster or newspaper is therefore mainly dependent on companies that buy advertising placements in these media. There is often a strict demarcation between editorial and advertising content, but this boundary is blurred time and again.

For example, it may be that a newspaper also writes a small editorial section within the advertising space, but this is precisely tailored to the topic of the customer's advertisement, so that when leafing through it, it is not obvious at first glance what exactly is editorial and what is advertising. Of course, this is a gray area, but some media find ways to get around it. It is all in the interests of customer acquisition, as advertising customers are the source of funding.

It is therefore clear that there is always a certain dependency on companies.

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2. Thomaß, B., Radoslavov, S. (2016, December 12): Unabhängigkeit und Staatsferne – nur ein Mythos? Medienpolitik (bpb.de) https://www.bpb.de/themen/medien-journalismus/medienpolitik/172237/unabhaengigkeit-und-staatsferne-nur-ein-mythos/.

**2. Public Media**

They are essentially financed by a contribution that all households in Germany have to pay. There is also a small amount of advertising revenue, but this is subject to strict restrictions. TV stations are only allowed to broadcast advertising for 20 minutes a day. After 8 p.m. and on Sundays and public holidays, they are not allowed to broadcast any advertising at all. In return, the broadcasters provide a basic service – in addition to news programs and documentaries, this also includes sports broadcasts, quiz shows, films and series.

As with private media, there is also a wide range of offerings here, as the stations not only offer television, but also radio, apps, podcasts and numerous social media accounts. On Instagram, YouTube and Tiktok in particular, there are many information offerings that are tailored exclusively to the young generation in order to bring them closer to serious journalism, well-researched topics and daily news.[3]

The requirement to remain independent of the state rules out financing via tax revenue. Therefore, public broadcasting is financed by a contribution payment per household in Germany – regardless of the number of devices (note: even if you do not own a device that receives public broadcasting in any form (including cell phones), every household is obliged to make this payment). This contribution currently amounts to €18.36 per month for each household, which is equivalent to around $19.64.

There are various payment models (quarterly, half-yearly, and year-round), and students who receive "BaföG" (financial support from the government for their studies, which around 500,000 people currently claim) can be exempt from this.[4]

In summary, it can be said that the aim of the German media system is to establish a basic public information supply that is both non-state and non-market, which was created with public service broadcasting.[5]

## History of the media in Germany – Development of today's media system

In Germany, this is primarily due to the country's problematic history. Between 1933 and 1945, the media

3. Steinlein, E. (2023, April 25). Das ABC des deutschen Mediensystems. Deutschland.de. https://www.deutschland.de/de/topic/kultur/pressefreiheit-und-medien-in-deutschland-im-ueberblick.

4. Bieber, C. (2018). Öffentlich-rechtlicher Rundfunk. In: Voigt, R. (eds), Handbuch Staat (795-804). Springer VS. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-20744-1_72 , S. 801f.

5. *ibid*, S. 796f.

were instrumentalized by the Nazis and used as a means of propaganda. For this reason, great importance was attached to ensuring that this could never happen again in the Federal Republic.[6]

After a model with exclusively public media was initially introduced in 1945 by the Western Allies where the British concept of fee-financed broadcasting was a role model. It was to be independent of the state but not privately organized. Through free and independent reporting, the media was for the development of a democratic public in Germany. Over time and after the Federal Republic of Germany was founded in 1949, this system developed into a dual media system with private and public broadcasters.[7] [8] [9]

This coexistence of the two media and thus the foundation stone for today's dual broadcasting system in Germany was laid down in 1987 by the Interstate Broadcasting Treaty. This was also intended to guarantee the independence of the media from the state, a goal that had already been set after 1945. However, at the beginning of the Federal Republic of Germany, public broadcasting was still frequently criticized and instrumentalized by politicians – albeit not in such a radical form of propaganda as under the Nazis. Nevertheless, in 1987, the importance of independent and public broadcasting was finally to be ensured, which was the case with the State Treaty.[10]

Independence from the state leads to the concept of media governance, which is applied in many democracies. This reduces the role of the state as a regulatory function and hands it over to the media, which, in line with the capitalist market order (even if Germany has a social market economy, which is not the same as a capitalist market economy), has a position of control and supervision through the distribution mechanism itself.[11]

German history up to 1945 has once again shown why independent and neutral media are so important for a democracy, which is why this was enshrined in the constitution. The fact that there are so many different news media in Germany is also due to the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of opinion and freedom of

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6. Steinlein, E. (2023, April 25). Das ABC des deutschen Mediensystems. Deutschland.de. https://www.deutschland.de/de/topic/kultur/pressefreiheit-und-medien-in-deutschland-im-ueberblick.

7. Bieber, C. (2018). Öffentlich-rechtlicher Rundfunk. In: Voigt, R. (eds), Handbuch Staat (795-804). Springer VS. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-20744-1_72 , S. 795.

8. Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (2020, June 8): Öffentlich-rechtlicher Rundfunk: von der Gründung der ARD bis heute. kurz&knapp (bpb.de). https://www.bpb.de/kurz-knapp/hintergrund-aktuell/311191/oeffentlich-rechtlicher-rundfunk-von-der-gruendung-der-ard-bis-heute/.

9. Stock, M. (2007). Jens Lucht: Der öffentlich-rechtliche Rundfunk: ein Auslaufmodell? Grundlagen – Analysen – Perspektiven. Publizistik, 52, 578-580. Springer VS. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11616-007-0283-8 , S. 578f.

10. Baetz, B. (2012, April 3). Öffentlich-rechtlich vs. Privat. Deutschlandfunk.de. https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/oeffentlich-rechtlich-vs-privat-100.html.

11. Beck, K. (2018). Das Mediensystem Deutschlands: Strukturen, Märkte, Regulierung. Springer Fachmedien. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-11779-5 , S. 38.

the press in the Federal Republic. Article 5 of the "Grundgesetz" (Basic law), the German constitution and the fundamental law, states: "Everyone has the right to freely express and disseminate his opinion in speech, writing and pictures and to inform himself unhindered from generally accessible sources. (...) There shall be no censorship." [12] [13]

## Controlling mechanisms

Despite the dual system, there needs to be a body that checks whether the reporting of German media – whether private or public – is truly independent and not influenced by the state or the market. This is what the German Press Code and the Press and Broadcasting Council are for.[14]

**1. Press code**

The Press Code are rules that journalists have set themselves for their work. Among other things, they undertake

- not to accept any benefits that jeopardize their independence
- to balance privacy and the protection of a person's honor against the public's right to information when reporting
- not to be guided by sensationalism and not to discriminate against or offend anyone
- to carefully check the source and content of a news item before publishing it
- if they cannot prove something or are only reporting rumors, to clearly indicate this in the article
- not to mix reporting with advertising. Advertising content must always be clearly identified and separated from journalistic content
- if they have misrepresented a person or a fact, to publish a counterstatement in the same position
- that they can be held legally responsible for their publications if they make false factual claims through gross negligence or even malicious intent[15]

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12. Steinlein, E. (2023, April 25). Das ABC des deutschen Mediensystems. Deutschland.de. https://www.deutschland.de/de/topic/kultur/pressefreiheit-und-medien-in-deutschland-im-ueberblick.

13. Landeszentrale für politische Bildung NRW (n.d.). Geschichte der Medienwelt. Landeszentrale für politische Bildung NRW. https://www.politische-bildung.nrw.de/fileadmin/imperia/md/content/Digitale_Medien/Digitale_Demokratiekompetenz/News_Room_4.0/Infografik_Mediengeschichte_zum_Download.pdf.

14. Steinlein, E. (2023, April 25). Das ABC des deutschen Mediensystems. Deutschland.de. https://www.deutschland.de/de/topic/kultur/pressefreiheit-und-medien-in-deutschland-im-ueberblick.

15. Steinlein, E. (2023, April 25). Das ABC des deutschen Mediensystems. Deutschland.de. https://www.deutschland.de/de/topic/kultur/pressefreiheit-und-medien-in-deutschland-im-ueberblick.

**2. Press and Broadcasting Council**

The Press Council and the Broadcasting Council monitor compliance with these principles.The Broadcasting Council monitors the public service media and checks whether they are fulfilling their statutory broadcasting mandate – i.e. whether their programming contributes to information, education, advice, culture and entertainment and to ensuring diversity of opinion in Germany. The Broadcasting Council should represent a cross-section of the population: Social organizations such as trade unions, churches and political parties provide members.The Press Council, in turn, is responsible for all media in Germany – including private media. All citizens can lodge a complaint here if they believe a publication has violated the press code. The committee then examines the complaint. In the event of violations, it sends the editorial staff concerned a notice or a letter of disapproval or issues a public reprimand, which the reprimanded editorial staff should publish.

## Criticism and why public media are still important.

Of course, there is also a lot of criticism of this model. The model is particularly under discussion in times of crisis. This comes from both politicians and the general public. Frequent accusations refer to the public broadcasters as a "lying press" or a "state press," and various sides accuse the media of alleged party-political influence. Another point is the device-independent contribution and the amount of the contribution. People who don't have a TV or radio argue that they are paying for something they don't even use.[16]

In order to consider these accusations, we need to look at the general attitude of the population towards the media. The last decade has been characterized by global crises: the Covid pandemic, wars, and economic crises have dominated the last few years. Many studies have shown that trust in the media generally declines in such situations. This can also be observed in Germany and relates to both private and public media. This opens up a whole new topic, which will not be discussed further here, but it is important to be aware of this aspect in this context.

So as to refute the criticism, however, one must first and foremost remember the media's mandate in the constitution. The goal is not the production of media products as an end in itself, but the actual social goal is the public opinion-forming of citizens for participation in the democratic community.[17]

16. Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (2020, June 8): Öffentlich-rechtlicher Rundfunk: von der Gründung der ARD bis heute. kurz&knapp (bpb.de). https://www.bpb.de/kurz-knapp/hintergrund-aktuell/311191/oeffentlich-rechtlicher-rundfunk-von-der-gruendung-der-ard-bis-heute/.

17. Gonser, N. (eds) (2018). Der öffentliche (Mehr-)Wert von Medien. Public Value aus Publikumssicht. Forschung und Praxis an der FH Wien der WKW: Vol. 2/2018. Springer VS. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-20498-3 , S. 37.

The purpose is therefore to contribute to the formation of public opinion, which in turn is crucial for a free and functioning democracy.

There is no doubt that private media also provide information and entertainment at a high level. They undoubtedly contribute to the diversity of opinion. However, they are primarily beholden to their shareholders, not to society. If there are fewer customers, the private media will have to deliver what the market demands – and not what would be conducive to democracy and opinion-forming.[18]

What must also be taken into account is that individual interests are often the focus of criticism. Here are a few examples:

- Parties want to be elected – where critical reporting on their election program is counterproductive, for example, which is why people then like to use this media product and portray it as a "lying press" or that it would be used by another party for their own purposes.
- Private individuals think of their own money (understandably) and only see the high amount they have to pay each month and may as well use private channels instead of public ones, yet still pay the fee.
- Private media may see the public broadcasters as competition and want to generate the highest possible viewing figures for themselves and win over consumers.[19]

Nowhere is an argument made from an overall social perspective. There are certainly some points that need to be improved. For example, the type and amount of contributions should be urgently reconsidered. The control function regarding neutrality and independence could also be tightened, for example, through stricter rules and penalties (whereby it would always have to be ensured that the relevant control body assesses from a completely neutral perspective), and certainly, other points of criticism also need to be addressed.

The general existence of public service media is enshrined in the constitution for good reason, namely to safeguard and strengthen democracy and a political and informed public that has the opportunity to obtain information from the diverse range of media on offer at all times. An informed society that can form its

18. Rößner, T. (2017, April 27). Argumente für den öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunk. Heinrich Böll Stiftung. Die grüne politische Stiftung. https://www.boell.de/de/2017/04/27/argumente-fuer-den-oeffentlich-rechtlichen-rundfunk.

19. Gapski, H., Gerlach, F., Hallenberger, G., Neuberger, C., Weber, T. (2023, July 11). Welchen öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunk wollen wir? Frankfurter Allgemeine (FAZ.NET). https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/medien/welchen-oeffentlich-rechtlichen-rundfunk-wollen-wir-19023932.html.

own opinion on all relevant topics prevents populism and propaganda, which clashes with the ideas of a free democracy.[20] [21]

### Key Takeaways

- The German media system is bifurcated into private media, funded through advertising and subscriptions, and public broadcasters, financed by a household fee, both playing distinct roles in information dissemination and public discourse.
- Shaped by historical events, especially the Nazi era, Germany's media landscape evolved into a dual system of private and public broadcasting, ensuring media independence and democratic public engagement.
- German media, seen as a crucial democratic pillar, are regulated by entities like the Press Code and Broadcasting Council to uphold journalistic standards, neutrality, and a clear separation between editorial and advertising content.
- Despite criticisms, particularly about the contribution fee, public media in Germany remain fundamental in promoting informed public opinion and safeguarding democratic processes through diverse and unbiased information.

### Exercises

1. Compare and contrast the dual structure of Germany's media system with the media

20. Rößner, T. (2017, April 27). Argumente für den öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunk. Heinrich Böll Stiftung. Die grüne politische Stiftung. https://www.boell.de/de/2017/04/27/argumente-fuer-den-oeffentlich-rechtlichen-rundfunk.

21. Stock, M. (2007). Jens Lucht: Der öffentlich-rechtliche Rundfunk: ein Auslaufmodell? Grundlagen – Analysen – Perspektiven. Publizistik, 52, 578-580. Springer VS. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11616-007-0283-8 , S. 578.

landscape in the United States. How do the roles, funding mechanisms, and types of content differ between private and public broadcasters in both countries?

2. Reflect on the historical influences on media in Germany, particularly during the Nazi era, and compare this with key historical moments that have shaped the media landscape in the United States. How have these historical contexts influenced the current state of media regulation and freedom of the press in each country?
3. Debate the funding models for public broadcasting in Germany and the United States. How do the German household contribution fee and the American public broadcasting funding mechanisms impact the independence and accessibility of public media in each country? Discuss the advantages and challenges of each system.

PART X

# CHAPTER 10: FILM AND BRICOLAGE

> "Walt Whitman once said, 'I see great things in baseball. It's our game, the American game. It will repair our losses and be a blessing to us.' You could look it up." — Annie Savoy, played by Susan Sarandon, from the film Bull Durham

The *LA Times* did look up the reference quoted at the end of the film *Bull Durham* and found that Whitman's sentiments were represented more or less accurately.[1] What appears in the film is a distillation of a longer paraphrase—made by Horace L. Traubel, a noted Whitman biographer—of a statement Whitman probably did make. The line in *Bull Durham* captures the essence of the quote, even if it is a paraphrase of a paraphrase. This is often what great films do. They take what is available in reality and distill it down so viewers can understand it the first time. When you make a copy of a copy, things get blurry, and more difficult to decipher. Films often do the exact opposite with elements of culture. They reduce present reality and essential past experiences into distilled **intertextual** products—mediated messages that combine various types of text into one.

**Fitchburg State Connection**

The Communications Media Department offers a concentration in Film and Video Production:

> The Film and Video Production concentration allows students to work in both film and digital media, as well as study both narrative fiction and documentary filmmaking. Beginning in their first year, students are given hands-on instruction in a deeply immersive environment that stresses both the technical and aesthetic aspects of media creation.

If you're not in the Film/Video concentration, but are interested in the area, consider taking COMM 2050: Intro to Video Editing:

1. Cronin, Brian. "Did 'Bull Durham' Misquote Walt Whitman on Baseball?" Los Angeles Times, March 28, 2012. https://www.latimes.com/sports/la-xpm-2012-mar-28-la-sp-sn-bull-durham-baseball-20120328-story.html.

> Introduction to Video Editing is an introductory-level workshop course that explores the use of editing and motion graphics software common to the creation of broadcast and streaming media. Davinci Resolve and Adobe Premiere, Photoshop, and After Effects will be employed in the development of professional and creative video productions and basic motion graphics work. This course is open to any student looking to add editing and graphics work to their production skillset.

Check out this podcast which features a 2023 interview with Mike Grasela, a 2013 FSU Film/ Video alumni:

*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://rotel.pressbooks.pub/comm-media-studies/?p=73#audio-73-1*

# 10.1 THE FILM PROFESSION

**Learning Objectives**

- Understand the multi-layered aspects of filmmaking, including the technical, artistic, and social dimensions that contribute to the creation of a film.
- Gain insights into the challenges and opportunities within the film industry, including the role of networking, the importance of diverse representation, and the ethical considerations that filmmakers must navigate.
- Critically analyze the concept of "bricolage" in filmmaking, understanding how various elements are combined to create a cohesive and impactful story, and how this process reflects broader cultural and social dynamics.

A movie combines moving pictures (video, film or animation), sound, graphics, special effects and, of course, written text, which is most often spoken as dialogue. It can be delivered as a disembodied voice speaking over video in what is called a **voice-over**, or text can appear in graphic form as actual text on screen. Each element from video to sound to graphics and special effects is considered a text. The various texts are sewn together in a multi-layered story.

Movies are popular because of the stories they tell and the way they tell them. The most popular films have a compelling narrative, fantastic special effects, great cinematography, supportive, realistic sound effects and often a great score. Compiling and combining texts for mass audiences in major motion pictures is incredibly difficult to do well, but with digital technology, many millions of people can create intertextual stories on their own.

Whether you are a YouTube producer or enjoy making Instagram stories every day, you can be an intertextual storyteller with tools readily available on the mass market. The "readily available" part calls to mind the concept of **bricolage**, which in intertextual storytelling means taking the images, sounds and words readily available to you, along with the recording and editing tools that are also available, and making stories intended for others to appreciate. All mediated messages, whether they are an individual's latest Instagram production or a major motion picture studio's latest multimillion-dollar gamble, are exercises in bricolage.

Filmmakers are some of the most passionate, creative people in the mass media industry. They balance knowledge and skill in managing many types of media production. At their best, they are enthusiastic about storytelling and about professionally mastering many aspects of the art form. At their worst, filmmakers (including producers, directors and others in the industry) are controlling manipulators who apply their efforts recklessly and for personal gain. There is a reason some of the worst outrages leading to the Me Too movement happened in the film industry. It is an industry where powerful people, usually men, have for too long used their power to do awful things without repercussions, which will be discussed below.[1]

## Filmmaking Practice

The American film industry employs more than 2 million people, according to the Motion Picture Association of America.[2] Filmmakers and studios are protected by the First Amendment to discuss almost any topic they choose. The marketplace is often a more limiting factor than other forms of social or cultural influence. Many great stories are not made into films because it is too costly to produce a major motion picture to risk box-office losses. It is the right of the film studio to pursue profits, but many filmmakers consider their work a vocation or calling. The driving artistic and economic forces often compete wherever movies are made.

Filmmakers today gain experience by making commercials, music videos, television shows, independent movies and even web series posted directly online. Young filmmakers rarely work with actual film. It is far more expensive to shoot film than video. The most common format at the time this book is being revised is SD (secure digital) media. The file type and codec depends on the camera. Many filmmakers shoot video on DSLR cameras and enjoy the ability to switch lenses for different conditions or effects. This type of media can store large files, and in the future SD storage may increase as high as 128 terabytes per card.[3] As video quality increases, so does the need for greater storage capacity. Video formats such as 4K and 8K are known as ultra high definition. They enable filmmakers to capture and show incredibly detailed images.

Successful filmmakers not only have to know the tools of the trade, they must also be good at networking. Films may cost up to a billion dollars to make and to promote. Filmmakers must demonstrate they can work well with others before a studio will take such a large chance on their talent. Because so much social and cultural influence and financial risk rests on a few flagship films each year, the controls are generally only

1. Dargis, Manohla. "Harvey Weinstein Is Gone. But Hollywood Still Has a Problem." *The New York Times*, October 11, 2017, sec. Movies. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/11/movies/harvey-weinstein-hollywood.html.
2. Motion Picture Association. "Driving Economic Growth." Accessed September 3, 2023. https://www.motionpictures.org/what-we-do/driving-economic-growth/.
3. Grunin, Lori. "New SD Card UC, Express Specifications Tout 128TB Max at up to Almost 1GB per Second." CNET, June 27, 2018. https://www.cnet.com/tech/mobile/new-sd-card-uc-express-specs-tout-128tb-max-up-to-almost-1gb-per-sec/.

given to proven filmmakers. To truly represent the voices of women, minorities, immigrants and other cultural groups in our society, there need to be pathways in the industry to producing, directing and promoting major films. For example, even before news broke about the many women who have been sexually assaulted in the industry, Hollywood had drawn mass attention for problems with industry sexism.[4] Perhaps for the industry to be a better place for women personally, it needs to be a better place professionally. For this reason, there must be a variety of industry entry points if Hollywood is truly going to offer diverse points of view told from diverse groups of people.[5] An **entry point** is a position in an industry that an individual can use to gain the experience needed to move up the career ladder. All of the technical skill in the world is of little use if there are no pathways to powerful positions.

## Storytelling

Filmmaking tools and practical career preparations give options and opportunities to professionals, but they do not make films better by themselves. In other words, a technically skilled filmmaker might still fail because the industry is about storytelling. You might like a film with great special effects more than you like one without any, but the development of a new special effects technology does not make every film that employs it a good one. You can probably think of a bad movie with relatively good special effects (Spoiler alert: Lots of Michael Bay).[6] Likewise, there are great classic films with almost no special effects. The tools are only as good as the people wielding them.

Films can play an important social and cultural role. They can communicate political agendas and can push issues to the forefront of media attention. Filmmakers, on the other hand, may also go out of their way not to make political statements. Whether a film communicates directly or more subtly, the most successful films combine great technical skill with a combination of trusted and innovative storytelling techniques.

A key goal of movie marketing is to make people anticipate a film so much that they feel they have to see it on the opening weekend for fear of missing out. For people who do not often go to movies, one key indicator they use to judge a film's success is its rank at the box office. It takes the support of both regular movie fans and those who only see a few films a year for a movie to be a true blockbuster. The best and most successful films combine great technical prowess with innovative but approachable storytelling. The best filmmakers have to

4. Gonzales, Erica. "25 Celebrity Women on Gender Inequality in Hollywood." Harper's BAZAAR, March 8, 2017. https://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/a12666/sexism-in-hollywood/.

5. Cox, Gordon. "Hollywood Diversity and Inclusion See Little Rise in 10 Years (Study)." *Variety* (blog), July 31, 2017. https://variety.com/2017/film/news/hollywood-diversity-little-rise-study-1202510809/.

6. BKAllmight. "Top 10 Bad Movies with Good Special Effects." TheTopTens. Accessed September 3, 2023. https://www.thetoptens.com/movies/bad-movies-with-good-special-effects/.

be able to get professional work out of hundreds or even thousands of people working on a single project. They must be able to manage actors, special effects crew members, film crews and marketing professionals, to name a few. Filmmakers must also have a sense of the interplay between texts. The best storytelling is multifaceted and emotional but sufficiently connected to reality to be relatable.

## Bricolage

Every motion picture that succeeds at being **intertextual** — that is, every film that combines a variety of types of text into a tapestry for audiences with a good story behind it — is a matter of bricolage. The term "bricolage" is related to the French word for "tinkering" and calls to mind the word "collage." Most readers of this text will have made several collages in school with the idea being to create art or to depict a concept using available materials rather than drawing or painting something from scratch using a single medium. Bricolage refers to a do-it-yourself tinkering process where you make something new out of other things.

You might argue that new films are made with new technology, not existing film clips or video files. You might also point out that special effects, 3D projection, and IMAX technology are not cheap, and the materials to make modern blockbusters are not going to be found simply lying around. You would be correct if movies were only storage media they are shot on, the computers they are edited in, and the 3D glasses you wear in the theater. But in reality, every film is made with limited resources using the existing tools and the talent available at the time. Every film is, to some extent, a pastiche, a reference to the films that came before. Bricolage is about taking the tools, materials, and talents available to you, tinkering with them, and making something different that has its own meaning. It is like a college student making dinner from leftovers. Turkey and Swiss cheese with pancakes for bread? Why not? Throw some chili on it. Wash it down with a light beer. Bricolage.

Some bricolage is better than others. Major motion picture filmmakers do a kind of bricolage. They simply have more expensive tools. Often, it is said films are written three times. First, the script is written. Then the film is shot and brought to life by the director, actors, film crews and effects crews. Finally, a film is rewritten in editing. This notion that films are written as scripts, revised in the shooting process and written a third time in the editing booth comes from this video summarizing how the original Star Wars was saved in editing. Filmmaking is a collaborative, **iterative** process, which means it may take many people many tries to create a successful story.

*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://rotel.pressbooks.pub/comm-media-studies/?p=288#oembed-1*

## The Limits of Passion

Some students will be impressed by Quentin Tarantino's assertion, "I didn't go to film school. I went to films." It is tempting to think that all you need to know about filmmaking can be learned by watching films. That is certainly the start of developing a passion that can drive a career, but there is a case to be made for a formal education.

College is where you learn how to think strategically. You learn how to work with other professionals-in-training. Working through college for four years or more, you gain stability and personal connections. You may not all end up as filmmakers or mass media professionals, but the critical thinking and problem-solving skills you learn from a liberal arts background prepare you to evaluate sources of information. You learn how to ask where people selling you a story got their information. If you learn how to learn, how to analyze media critically, and how to make your own work as professional as possible, you will be prepared for shifts in the industry that might otherwise sap your passion.

Passion is like a pit bull. It can be a friend, companion and protector — something to rely on when times are tough. Passion that is mistreated, ignored, or that knows only about the darker, more violent side of life, can get out of its owner's control. There is no specific, perfect formula for cultivating your passion. Choose one and apply it in every college course you possibly can. If your education works for you, your passion can be tamed and it will always with you.

Before he was known as a screenwriter and before he had directed anything, Quentin Tarantino was doing more than just watching movies. He worked with people who made films. His work at a production company enabled him to get his script for *True Romance* to film director Tony Scott. Without his production company experience, no one would have cared that he knew everything there was to know about kung fu movies and westerns. He would have been a very knowledgeable video store clerk in a world where video stores were about to die.

## So Wrong for so Long

When Uma Thurman talked about Harvey Weinstein's attempts to sexually assault her, she told a story dozens of other women shared about Weinstein's abusive, criminal behavior.[7] The prevalence of sexual assault in Hollywood was a driving force behind the global Me Too movement of women as well as men sharing stories of sexual assault and abuse. Abusive behavior, mostly on the part of men in the workplace, has been tolerated

7. Dowd, Maureen. "Opinion | This Is Why Uma Thurman Is Angry." *The New York Times*, February 3, 2018, sec. Opinion. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/03/opinion/sunday/this-is-why-uma-thurman-is-angry.html.

in Hollywood and in other corporate and institutional cultures for far too long. Sometimes it was even joked about. Most often, it was allowed to be part of the business of entertainment.

In a better future for film and other forms of media making, sexual assault would not be tolerated, and people of all genders and backgrounds would support each other against those who abuse their power to reinforce their dominance and for sexual gratification. Laws did not do enough to protect women from predators, but speaking out has started to make a difference in a culture that has tolerated harassment, abuse, and rape.[8] For the film industry to truly be one of free expression and thoughtful cultural and social meaning-making, it cannot be a place where more than half of society is objectified and dehumanized regularly.

Uma Thurman also noted in her opinion article about Harvey Weinstein that she was objectified to the point that Quentin Tarantino pushed her to risk her life when shooting a car chase scene. Her story was about sexual objectification and assault but also about the way men, in particular, devalue women in many aspects of life. If Hollywood can change, its stories change too and the social and cultural impacts of that movement would be felt like waves emanating from this time for future generations.

### Key Takeaways

- Filmmaking is a complex, multi-layered process that involves not just technical skills but also storytelling, networking, and ethical considerations. The industry is influenced by both artistic and economic forces, often in tension with each other.
- The concept of "bricolage" is central to understanding how films are made, as it involves combining various types of text, special effects, and sound into a cohesive story. This do-it-yourself approach reflects the broader cultural and social dynamics at play.
- Ethical and social issues, such as gender inequality and sexual assault, have long plagued the film industry. Addressing these issues is crucial for the industry to be a platform for free expression and meaningful cultural impact.

8. MacKinnon, Catharine A. "Opinion | #MeToo Has Done What the Law Could Not." *The New York Times*, February 5, 2018, sec. Opinion. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/04/opinion/metoo-law-legal-system.html.

## Exercises

1. How do the artistic and economic forces in filmmaking interact and sometimes conflict? Provide examples from recent films to support your answer.
2. Create a mini "bricolage" film project using readily available materials like stock footage, sound clips, and text. Discuss how the concept of bricolage influenced your creative process.
3. Considering the ethical issues discussed, such as gender inequality and the Me Too movement, how can the film industry evolve to be more inclusive and ethical? What steps can be taken at various levels, from individual filmmakers to studios?

# 10.2 THE HISTORY OF MOVIES

**Learning Objectives**

1. Identify key points in the development of the motion picture industry.
2. Identify key developments of the motion picture industry and technology.
3. Identify influential films in movie history.

The movie industry, as we know it today, originated in the early 19th century through a series of technological developments: the creation of photography, the discovery of the illusion of motion by combining individual still images, and the study of human and animal locomotion. The history presented here begins at the culmination of these technological developments, where the idea of the motion picture as an entertainment industry first emerged. Since then, the industry has seen extraordinary transformations, some driven by the artistic visions of individual participants, some by commercial necessity, and still others by accident. The history of the cinema is complex, and for every important innovator and movement listed here, others have been left out. Nonetheless, after reading this section, you will understand the broad arc of the development of a medium that has captured the imaginations of audiences worldwide for over a century.

**Fitchburg State Connection**

The Photography Concentration[1] at Fitchburg State aims to prepare students for entering careers as photographic artists, commercial and documentary photographers, digital techs, photography assistants, art directors, photo editors, and professional image re-touchers. The

1. https://www.fitchburgstate.edu/academics/programs/photography-concentration-communications-media-bs

concentration does this by offering an exceptional entry into the discipline of photography and the profound power of still image-making. Starting with a thorough foundation in the photochemical roots of the art form, students transition to contemporary digital practices, working with state of art equipment and software. Through the active practice of previsualization and producing images, printing, reviewing, critiquing, and repeating, our students develop strong and varied technical skills along with critical and aesthetic sensibilities. The mix of the two yields Photo majors with a mature approach to the discipline that one expects from an artist while also producing the technical and commercial expertise that one expects from a photography professional!

**How to join us:**

All students in the Communications Media major are welcome to take coursework, join the concentration, or even complete a dual concentration with Photography and another discipline. Taking Comm 3600 Intro to Photography (no pre-requisite required) is the first step, and students are encouraged to enroll in it as early in their time here as possible to allow for the option of enrolling in the concentration or dual concentration in a more relaxed timeframe. Our Photography Minor[2] is also available for any student in the University not matriculated into the Communications Media Major, and it offers a very similar curriculum balanced between active image making and critical and aesthetic development.

Students are encouraged to enroll in either of the Photo Concentration's entry-level courses:

1. Comm 3600: Intro to Photography
2. Comm 2030: Photo as a Visual Language

## The Beginnings: Motion Picture Technology of the Late 19th Century

While the experience of watching movies on smartphones may seem like a drastic departure from the communal nature of film viewing as we think of it today, in some ways the small-format, single-viewer display is a return to film's early roots. In 1891, the inventor Thomas Edison, together with William Dickson, a

2. https://www.fitchburgstate.edu/academics/programs/photography-minor

young laboratory assistant, came out with what they called the **kinetoscope**, a device that would become the predecessor to the motion picture projector. The kinetoscope was a cabinet with a window through which individual viewers could experience the illusion of a moving image.[3],[4] A perforated **celluloid film strip** with a sequence of images on it was rapidly spooled between a light bulb and a lens, creating the illusion of motion.[5] The images viewers could see in the kinetoscope captured events and performances that had been staged at Edison's film studio in East Orange, New Jersey, especially for the Edison **kinetograph** (the camera that produced kinetoscope film sequences): circus performances, dancing women, cockfights, boxing matches, and even a tooth extraction by a dentist.[6]

3. Gale Virtual Reference Library, Europe 1789–1914: Encyclopedia of the Age of Industry and Empire, vol. 1, s.v. "Cinema," by Alan Williams, Gale Virtual Reference Library.

4. British Movie Classics, "The Kinetoscope," British Movie Classics, https://web.archive.org/web/20100123103033/http://www.britishmovieclassics.com/thekinetoscope.php.

5. Britannica Online. s.v. "History of the Motion Picture." http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/394161/history-of-the-motion picture

6. Robinson, David. From Peep Show to Palace: The Birth of American Film (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 43–44.

Figure 1: A photograph of the Edison Kinetoscope, taken at Thomas Edison National Historic Park in West Orange. The sign reads: “Edison Kinetoscope, Circa early 1900s. Viewed from front and back. Notice the operation crank on the far right side.

Figure 2: A photograph of a film perforator and film in metal canisters, taken at Thomas Edison National Historic Park in West Orange.

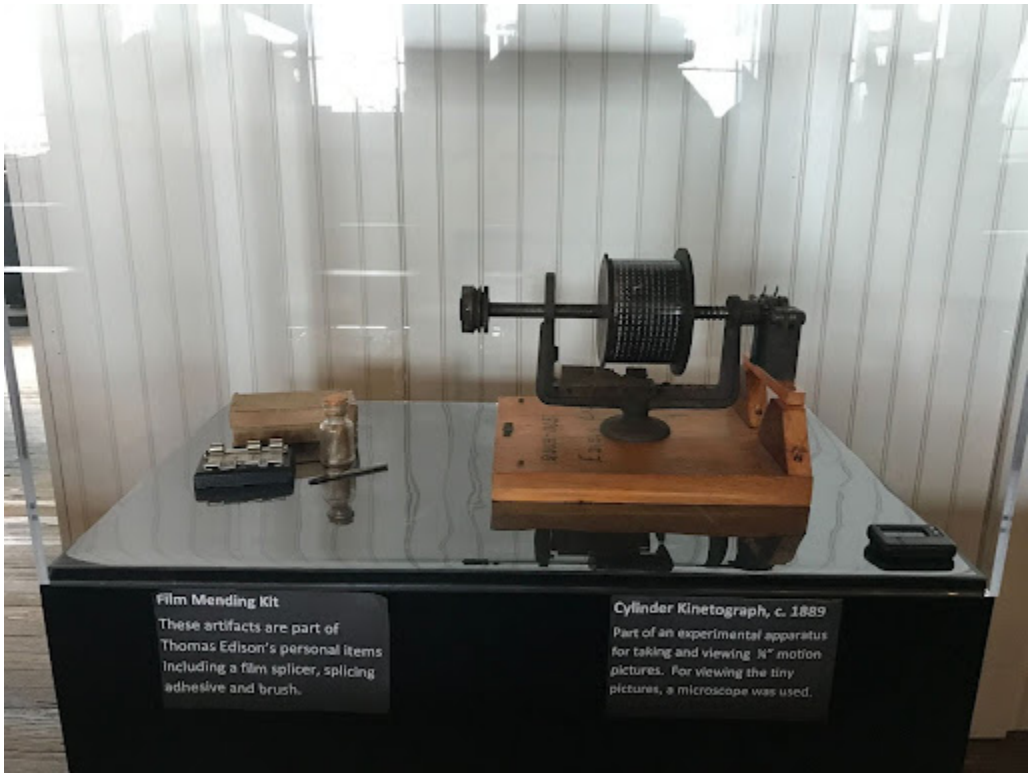


Figure 3: A photograph of a film mending kit and cylinder kinetograph, taken at Thomas Edison National Historic Park in West Orange. The first label reads: "Film Mending Kit. These artifacts are part of Thomas Edison's personal items including a film splicer, splicing adhesive and brush." The second reads: "Cylinder Kinetograph, c. 1889. Part of an experimental apparatus for taking and viewing ¼" motion pictures. For viewing the tiny pictures, a microscope was used."

As the kinetoscope gained popularity, the Edison Company began installing machines in hotel lobbies, amusement parks, and penny arcades, and soon kinetoscope parlors—where customers could pay around 25 cents for admission to a bank of machines—had opened around the country. However, when friends and collaborators suggested that Edison find a way to project his kinetoscope images for audience viewing, he apparently refused, claiming that such an invention would be a less profitable venture.[7]

Because Edison hadn't secured an international patent for his invention, variations of the kinetoscope were soon being copied and distributed throughout Europe. This new form of entertainment was an instant success, and a number of mechanics and inventors, seeing an opportunity, began toying with methods of projecting the moving images onto a larger screen. However, it was the invention of two brothers, Auguste and Louis Lumière—photographic goods manufacturers in Lyon, France—that saw the most commercial success. In 1895, the brothers patented the **cinématographe** (from which we get the term cinema), a lightweight film

7. Britannica Online, s.v. "Kinetoscope," http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/318211/Kinetoscope/318211main/Article.

projector that also functioned as a camera and printer. Unlike the Edison kinetograph, the cinématographe was lightweight enough for easy outdoor filming, and over the years the brothers used the camera to take well over 1,000 short films, most of which depicted scenes from everyday life. In December 1895, in the basement lounge of the Grand Café, Rue des Capucines in Paris, the Lumières held the world's first ever commercial film screening, a sequence of about 10 short scenes, including the brother's first film, Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory, a segment lasting less than a minute and depicting workers leaving the family's photographic instrument factory at the end of the day, as shown below.[8]

Figure 4: Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory: One of the first films viewed by an audience.

Believing that audiences would get bored watching scenes that they could just as easily observe on a casual walk around the city, Louis Lumière claimed that the cinema was "an invention without a future,"[9] but a demand for motion pictures grew at such a rapid rate that soon representatives of the Lumière company were traveling throughout Europe and the world, showing half-hour screenings of the company's films. While cinema initially competed with other popular forms of entertainment—circuses, vaudeville acts, theater troupes, magic shows, and many others—eventually it would supplant these various entertainments as the

8. Encyclopedia of the Age of Industry and Empire, s.v. "Cinema."

9. Menand, Louis "Gross Points," New Yorker, February 7, 2005, http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2005/02/07/050207crat_atlarge.

main commercial attraction.[10] Within a year of the Lumières' first commercial screening, competing film companies were offering moving-picture acts in music halls and vaudeville theaters across Great Britain. In the United States, the Edison Company, having purchased the rights to an improved projector that they called the **Vitascope**, held their first film screening in April 1896 at Koster and Bial's Music Hall in Herald Square, New York City.

### Fitchburg State Connection

Fitchburg State's Communications Media Department offers majors in both Theater and Technical Theater. These programs often work in conjunction with the Film and Video concentration, as theater students serve as actors and technical consultants for student films productions.

> Our theater professors are members of professional unions and they act and direct in Boston and New York City. Productions range from the Greeks to the contemporary repertoire. By the time our students graduate, after completing a required 12-credit professional internship, they will have acquired a wide range of skills and a repertoire of material that will support their goals of either pursuing further studies at the graduate level or directly entering the profession.[11]
>
> Students in technical theater are trained to become resourceful, imaginative, and technically competent people who integrate engineering and artistic techniques with theatrical settings. Students take courses in computer-aided design, stage lighting, scene design, stage management, and production planning.[12]

10. *ibid*

11. Theater Concentration, Communications Media, BS | Fitchburg State University

12. https://www.fitchburgstate.edu/academics/programs/technical-theater-concentration-communications-media-bs

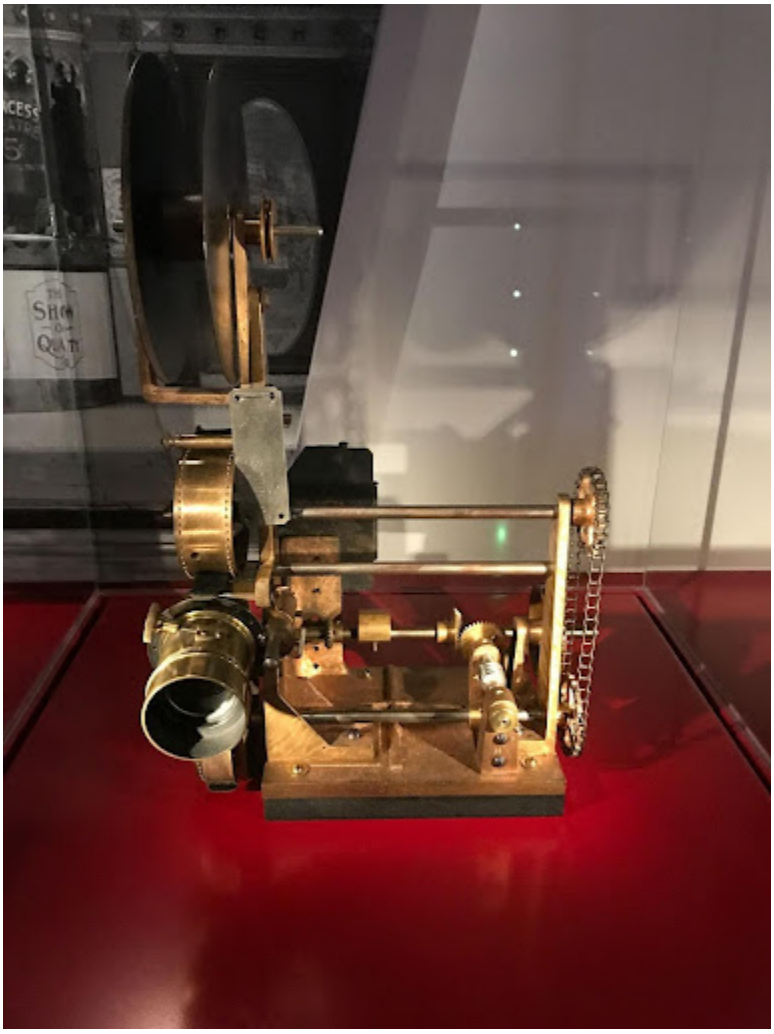

Figure 5: A photograph of Edison's vitascope, 1896, taken at the National Museum of American History.

Film's profound impact on its earliest viewers is difficult to imagine today, inundated as many are by video images. However, the sheer volume of reports about the early audience's disbelief, delight, and even fear at what they were seeing suggests that viewing a film was an overwhelming experience for many. Spectators gasped at the realistic details in films such as Robert Paul's *Rough Sea at Dover*, and at times people panicked and tried to flee the theater during films in which trains or moving carriages sped toward the audience.[13] Even the public's perception of film as a medium was considerably different from the contemporary understanding; the moving image was an improvement upon the photograph—a medium with which viewers were already familiar—and this is perhaps why the earliest films documented events in brief segments but didn't tell stories. During this "novelty period" of cinema, audiences were more interested in the phenomenon of the film projector itself, so

13. Robinson, David. From Peep Show to Palace: The Birth of American Film (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 43–44.

vaudeville halls advertised the kind of projector they were using (for example "The Vitascope—Edison's Latest Marvel"),[14] rather than the names of the films.[15]

Figure 6: Edison's Greatest Marvel: The Vitascope.

By the close of the 19th century, as public excitement over the moving picture's novelty gradually wore off, filmmakers were also beginning to experiment with film's possibilities as a medium in itself (not simply, as it had been regarded up until then, as a tool for documentation, analogous to the camera or the phonograph). Technical innovations allowed filmmakers like Parisian cinema owner Georges Méliès to experiment with special effects that produced seemingly magical transformations on screen: flowers turned into women, people

14. Balcanasu, Andrei Ionut, Sergey V. Smagin, and Stephanie K. Thrift, "Edison and the Lumiere Brothers," Cartoons and Cinema of the 20th Century, https://web.archive.org/web/20070529164153/http://library.thinkquest.org/C0118600/index.phtml?menu=en%3B1%3Bci1001.html.

15. Britannica Online, s.v. "Kinetoscope," http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/318211/Kinetoscope/318211main/Article.

disappeared with puffs of smoke, a man appeared where a woman had just been standing, and other similar tricks.[16]

Not only did Méliès, a former magician, invent the "trick film," which producers in England and the United States began to imitate, but he was also the one to transform cinema into the narrative medium it is today. Whereas before, filmmakers had only ever created single-shot films that lasted a minute or less, Méliès began joining these short films together to create stories. His 30-scene *Trip to the Moon* (1902), a film based on a Jules Verne novel, may have been the most widely seen production in cinema's first decade.[17] However, Méliès never developed his technique beyond treating the narrative film as a staged theatrical performance; his camera, representing the vantage point of an audience facing a stage, never moved during the filming of a scene. In 1912, Méliès released his last commercially successful production, *The Conquest of the Pole*, and from then on, he lost audiences to filmmakers who were experimenting with more sophisticated techniques.[18]

16. Robinson, David. From Peep Show to Palace: The Birth of American Film (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 43–44.

17. *ibid*

18. Encyclopedia of Communication and Information (New York: MacMillan Reference USA, 2002), s.v. "Méliès, Georges," by Ted C. Jones, Gale Virtual Reference Library.

Figure 7: Georges Méliès's Trip to the Moon was one of the first films to incorporate fantasy elements and to use "trick" filming techniques, both of which heavily influenced future filmmakers.

## The Nickelodeon Craze (1904–1908)

One of these innovative filmmakers was Edwin S. Porter, a projectionist and engineer for the Edison Company. Porter's 12-minute film, *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), broke with the stagelike compositions of Méliès-style films through its use of editing, camera pans, rear projections, and diagonally composed shots that produced a continuity of action. Not only did *The Great Train Robbery* establish the realistic narrative as a standard in cinema, it was also the first major box-office hit. Its success paved the way for the growth of the film industry, as investors, recognizing the motion picture's great money-making potential, began opening the first permanent film theaters around the country.

Known as **nickelodeons** because of their 5-cent admission charge, these early motion picture theaters, often housed in converted storefronts, were especially popular among the working class of the time, who couldn't

afford live theater. Between 1904 and 1908, around 9,000 nickelodeons appeared in the United States. It was the nickelodeon's popularity that established film as a mass entertainment medium.[19]

# The "Biz": The Motion Picture Industry Emerges

As the demand for motion pictures grew, production companies were created to meet it. At the peak of nickelodeon popularity in 1910, there were 20 or so major motion picture companies in the United States.[20] However, heated disputes often broke out among these companies over patent rights and industry control, leading even the most powerful among them to fear fragmentation that would loosen their hold on the market.[21] Because of these concerns, the 10 leading companies—including Edison, Biograph, Vitagraph, and others—formed the Motion Picture Patents Company (MPPC) in 1908. The MPPC was a trade group that pooled the most significant motion picture patents and established an exclusive contract between these companies and the Eastman Kodak Company as a supplier of film stock. Also known as the *Trust*, the MPPC's goal was to standardize the industry and shut out competition through monopolistic control. Under the Trust's licensing system, only certain licensed companies could participate in the exchange, distribution, and production of film at different levels of the industry—a shut-out tactic that eventually backfired, leading the excluded, independent distributors to organize in opposition to the Trust.[22]

## The Rise of the Feature

In these early years, theaters were still running single-reel films, which came at a standard length of 1,000 feet, allowing for about 16 minutes of playing time. However, companies began to import multiple-reel films from European producers around 1907, and the format gained popular acceptance in the United States in 1912 with Louis Mercanton's highly successful *Queen Elizabeth*, a three-and-a-half reel "feature" starring the French actress Sarah Bernhardt. As exhibitors began to show more features—as the multiple-reel film came to be called—they discovered a number of advantages over the single-reel short. For one thing, audiences saw these longer films as special events and were willing to pay more for admission, and because of the popularity of the

19. Dictionary of American History, 3rd ed., s.v. "Nickelodeon," by Ryan F. Holznagel, Gale Virtual Reference Library.

20. Britannica Online, s.v. "nickelodeon."

21. Fielding, Raymond A Technological History of Motion Pictures and Television (Berkeley: California Univ. Press, 1967) 21.

22. Britannica Online, s.v. "nickelodeon."

**feature narratives**, features generally experienced longer runs in theaters than their single-reel predecessors.[23] Additionally, the feature film gained popularity among the middle classes, who saw its length as analogous to the more "respectable" entertainment of live theater.[24] Following the example of the French *film d'art*, U.S. feature producers often took their material from sources that would appeal to a wealthier and better educated audience, such as histories, literature, and stage productions.[25]

As it turns out, the feature film was one factor that brought about the eventual downfall of the MPPC. The inflexible structuring of the Trust's exhibition and distribution system made the organization resistant to change. When movie studio and Trust member Vitagraph began to release features like *A Tale of Two Cities* (1911) and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1910), the Trust forced it to exhibit the films serially in single-reel showings to keep with industry standards. The MPPC also underestimated the appeal of the star system, a trend that began when producers chose famous stage actors like Mary Pickford and James O'Neill to play the leading roles in their productions and to grace their advertising posters.[26] Because of the MPPC's inflexibility, independent companies were the only ones able to capitalize on two important trends that were to become film's future: single-reel features and star power. Today, few people would recognize names like Vitagraph or Biograph, but the independents that outlasted them—Universal, Goldwyn (which would later merge with Metro and Mayer), Fox (later 20th Century Fox), and Paramount (the later version of the Lasky Corporation)—have become household names.

## Hollywood

As moviegoing increased in popularity among the middle class, and as the feature films began keeping audiences in their seats for longer periods of time, exhibitors found a need to create more comfortable and richly decorated theater spaces to attract their audiences. These "dream palaces," so called because of their often lavish embellishments of marble, brass, guilding, and cut glass, not only came to replace the nickelodeon theater, but also created the demand that would lead to the Hollywood studio system. Some producers realized that the growing demand for new work could only be met if the films were produced on a regular, year-round system. However, this was impractical with the current system that often relied on outdoor filming and was predominately based in Chicago and New York—two cities whose weather conditions prevented outdoor

23. Cook, David A, Robert Sklar, and Filip Jankowski. "History of Film." Britannica, March 5, 2024. https://www.britannica.com/art/history-of-the-motion-picture.

24. *ibid*

25. Robinson, David. From Peep Show to Palace: The Birth of American Film (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 43–44.

26. *ibid*

filming for a significant portion of the year. Different companies attempted filming in warmer locations such as Florida, Texas, and Cuba, but the place where producers eventually found the most success was a small, industrial suburb of Los Angeles called Hollywood.

Hollywood proved to be an ideal location for a number of reasons. Not only was the climate temperate and sunny year-round, but land was plentiful and cheap, and the location allowed close access to a number of diverse topographies: mountains, lakes, desert, coasts, and forests. By 1915, more than 60 percent of U.S. film production was centered in Hollywood.[27]

## The Art of Silent Film

While the development of narrative film was largely driven by commercial factors, it is also important to acknowledge the role of individual artists who turned it into a medium of personal expression. The motion picture of the silent era was generally simplistic in nature; acted in overly animated movements to engage the eye; and accompanied by live music, played by musicians in the theater, and written titles to create a mood and to narrate a story. Within the confines of this medium, one filmmaker in particular emerged to transform the **silent film** into an art and to unlock its potential as a medium of serious expression and persuasion. D. W. Griffith, who entered the film industry as an actor in 1907, quickly moved to a directing role in which he worked closely with his camera crew to experiment with shots, angles, and editing techniques that could heighten the emotional intensity of his scenes. He found that by practicing **parallel editing**, in which a film alternates between two or more scenes of action, he could create an illusion of simultaneity. He could then heighten the tension of the film's drama by alternating between cuts more and more rapidly until the scenes of action converged. Griffith used this technique to great effect in his controversial film *The Birth of a Nation*, which will be discussed in greater detail later on in this chapter. Other techniques that Griffith employed to new effect included **panning shots**, through which he was able to establish a sense of scene and to engage his audience more fully in the experience of the film, and **tracking shots**, or shots that traveled with the movement of a scene, which allowed the audience—through the eye of the camera—to participate in the film's action.[28]

27. Cook, David A, Robert Sklar, and Filip Jankowski. "History of Film." Britannica, March 5, 2024. https://www.britannica.com/art/history-of-the-motion-picture.

28. *ibid*

# MPAA: Combating Censorship

As film became an increasingly lucrative U.S. industry, prominent industry figures like D. W. Griffith, slapstick comedian/director Charlie Chaplin, and actors Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks grew extremely wealthy and influential. Public attitudes toward stars and toward some stars' extravagant lifestyles were divided, much as they are today: On the one hand, these celebrities were idolized and imitated in popular culture, yet at the same time, they were criticized for representing a threat, on and off screen, to traditional morals and social order. And much as it does today, the news media liked to sensationalize the lives of celebrities to sell stories. Comedian Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle, who worked alongside future icons Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton, was at the center of one of the biggest scandals of the silent era. When Arbuckle hosted a marathon party over Labor Day weekend in 1921, one of his guests, model Virginia Rapp, was rushed to the hospital, where she later died. Reports of a drunken orgy, rape, and murder surfaced. Following World War I, the United States was in the middle of significant social reforms, such as Prohibition. Many feared that movies and their stars could threaten the moral order of the country. Because of the nature of the crime and the celebrity involved, these fears became inexplicably tied to the Artbuckle case.[29] Even though autopsy reports ruled that Rapp had died from causes for which Arbuckle could not be blamed, the comedian was tried (and acquitted) for manslaughter, and his career was ruined.

The Arbuckle affair and a series of other scandals only increased public fears about Hollywood's impact. In response to this perceived threat, state and local governments increasingly tried to censor the content of films that depicted crime, violence, and sexually explicit material. Deciding that they needed to protect themselves from government censorship and to foster a more favorable public image, the major Hollywood studios organized in 1922 to form an association they called the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (later renamed the **Motion Picture Association of America**, or MPAA). Among other things, the MPAA instituted a code of self-censorship for the motion picture industry. Today, the MPAA operates by a voluntary rating system, which means producers can voluntarily submit a film for review, which is designed to alert viewers to the age-appropriateness of a film while still protecting the filmmakers' artistic freedom (Motion Picture Association of America).[30]

29. Cook, David A, Robert Sklar, and Filip Jankowski. "History of Film." Britannica, March 5, 2024. https://www.britannica.com/art/history-of-the-motion-picture.

30. Motion Picture Association of America, "History of the MPAA," https://web.archive.org/web/20100503054649/http://www.mpaa.org/about/history.

# Silent Film's Demise

In 1925, Warner Bros. was just a small Hollywood studio looking for opportunities to expand. When representatives from Western Electric offered to sell the studio the rights to a new technology they called Vitaphone, a sound-on-disc system that had failed to capture the interest of any of the industry giants, Warner Bros. executives took a chance, predicting that the novelty of talking films might be a way to make a quick, short-term profit. Little did they anticipate that their gamble would not only establish them as a major Hollywood presence but also change the industry forever.

The pairing of sound with motion pictures was nothing new in itself. Edison, after all, had commissioned the kinetoscope to create a visual accompaniment to the phonograph, and many early theaters had orchestra pits to provide musical accompaniment to their films. Even the smaller picture houses with lower budgets almost always had an organ or piano. When Warner Bros. purchased Vitaphone technology, it planned to use it to provide pre-recorded orchestral accompaniment for its films, thereby increasing their marketability to the smaller theaters that didn't have their own orchestra pits.[31] In 1926, Warner debuted the system with the release of Don Juan, a costume drama accompanied by a recording of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra; the public responded enthusiastically.[32] By 1927, after a $3 million campaign, Warner Bros. had wired more than 150 theaters in the United States, and it released its second sound film, *The Jazz Singer*, in which the actor Al Jolson improvised a few lines of synchronized dialogue and sang six songs. The film was a major breakthrough. Audiences, hearing an actor speak on screen for the first time, were enchanted.[33] While radio, a new and popular entertainment, had been drawing audiences away from the picture houses for some time, with the birth of the "**talkie**," or talking film, audiences once again returned to the cinema in large numbers, lured by the promise of seeing and hearing their idols perform.[34] By 1929, three-fourths of Hollywood films had some form of sound accompaniment, and by 1930, the silent film was a thing of the past (Gochenour).[35]

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31. Gochenour, Phil. "Birth of the 'Talkies': The Development of Synchronized Sound for Motion Pictures," in Science and Its Times, vol. 6, 1900–1950, ed. Neil Schlager and Josh Lauer (Detroit: Gale, 2000), 577.

32. Cook, David A, Robert Sklar, and Filip Jankowski. "History of Film." Britannica, March 5, 2024. https://www.britannica.com/art/history-of-the-motion-picture.

33. Gochenour, Phil. "Birth of the 'Talkies': The Development of Synchronized Sound for Motion Pictures," in Science and Its Times, vol. 6, 1900–1950, ed. Neil Schlager and Josh Lauer (Detroit: Gale, 2000).

34. Higham, Charles. The Art of the American Film: 1900–1971. (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1973), 85.

35. Gochenour, Phil. "Birth of the 'Talkies': The Development of Synchronized Sound for Motion Pictures," in Science and Its Times, vol. 6, 1900–1950, ed. Neil Schlager and Josh Lauer (Detroit: Gale, 2000).

## "I Don't Think We're in Kansas Anymore": Film Goes Technicolor

Although the techniques of tinting and hand painting had been available methods for adding color to films for some time (Georges Méliès, for instance, employed a crew to hand-paint many of his films), neither method ever caught on. The hand-painting technique became impractical with the advent of mass-produced film, and the tinting process, which filmmakers discovered would create an interference with the transmission of sound in films, was abandoned with the rise of the talkie. However, in 1922, Herbert Kalmus's Technicolor company introduced a dye-transfer technique that allowed it to produce a full-length film, *The Toll of the Sea*, in two primary colors.[36] However, because only two colors were used, the appearance of *The Toll of the Sea* (1922), *The Ten Commandments* (1923), and other early Technicolor films was not very lifelike. By 1932, Technicolor had designed a three-color system with more realistic results, and for the next 25 years, all color films were produced with this improved system. Disney's *Three Little Pigs* (1933) and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (1936) and films with live actors, like MGM's *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) and *Gone With the Wind* (1939), experienced early success using Technicolor's three-color method.

Despite the success of certain color films in the 1930s, Hollywood, like the rest of the United States, was feeling the impact of the Great Depression, and the expenses of special cameras, crews, and Technicolor lab processing made color films impractical for studios trying to cut costs. Therefore, it wasn't until the end of the 1940s that Technicolor would largely displace the black-and-white film.[37]

## Rise and Fall of the Hollywood Studio

The spike in theater attendance that followed the introduction of talking films changed the economic structure of the motion picture industry, bringing about some of the largest mergers in industry history. By 1930, eight studios produced 95 percent of all American films, and they continued to experience growth even during the Depression. The five most influential of these studios—Warner Bros., Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, RKO, 20th Century Fox, and Paramount—were **vertically integrated**; that is, they controlled every part of the system as it related to their films, from the production to release, distribution, and even viewing. Because they owned theater chains worldwide, these studios controlled which movies exhibitors ran, and because they "owned"

36. Gale Virtual Reference Library, "Motion Pictures in Color," in American Decades, ed. Judith S. Baughman and others, vol. 3, Gale Virtual Reference Library.

37. *ibid*

a stock of directors, actors, writers, and technical assistants by contract, each studio produced films of a particular character.

The late 1930s and early 1940s are sometimes known as the "**Golden Age**" of cinema, a time of unparalleled success for the movie industry; by 1939, film was the 11th-largest industry in the United States, and during World War II, when the U.S. economy was once again flourishing, two-thirds of Americans were attending the theater at least once a week.[38] Some of the most acclaimed movies in history were released during this period, including *Citizen Kane* and *The Grapes of Wrath*. However, postwar inflation, a temporary loss of key foreign markets, the advent of the television, and other factors combined to bring that rapid growth to an end. In 1948, the case of the *United States v. Paramount Pictures*—mandating competition and forcing the studios to relinquish control over theater chains—dealt the final devastating blow from which the studio system would never recover. Control of the major studios reverted to Wall Street, where the studios were eventually absorbed by multinational corporations, and the powerful studio heads lost the influence they had held for nearly 30 years.[39]

## Post–World War II: Television Presents a Threat

While economic factors and antitrust legislation played key roles in the decline of the studio system, perhaps the most important factor in that decline was the advent of the television. Given the opportunity to watch "movies" from the comfort of their own homes, the millions of Americans who owned a television by the early 1950s were attending the cinema far less regularly than they had only several years earlier (Motion Pictures).[40] In an attempt to win back diminishing audiences, studios did their best to exploit the greatest advantages film held over television. For one thing, television broadcasting in the 1950s was all in black and white, whereas the film industry had the advantage of color. While producing a color film was still an expensive undertaking in the late 1940s, a couple of changes occurred in the industry in the early 1950s to make color not only more affordable, but more realistic in its appearance. In 1950, as the result of antitrust legislation, Technicolor lost its monopoly on the color film industry, allowing other providers to offer more competitive pricing on filming and processing services. At the same time, Kodak came out with a multilayer film stock that made it possible to use more affordable cameras and to produce a higher quality image. Kodak's Eastmancolor option was an integral component in converting the industry to color. In the late 1940s, only 12 percent of features were in

38. Britannica Online, s.v. "History of the Motion Picture".

39. Baers, Michael. "Studio System," in St. James Encyclopedia of Popular Culture, ed. Sara Pendergast and Tom Pendergast (Detroit: St. James Press, 2000), vol. 4, 565.

40. Cook, David A, Robert Sklar, and Filip Jankowski. "History of Film." Britannica, March 5, 2024. https://www.britannica.com/art/history-of-the-motion-picture.

color; however, by 1954 (after the release of Kodak Eastmancolor) more than 50 percent of movies were in color.[41]

Another clear advantage on which filmmakers tried to capitalize was the sheer size of the cinema experience. With the release of the epic biblical film The Robe in 1953, 20th Century Fox introduced the method that would soon be adopted by nearly every studio in Hollywood: a technology that allowed filmmakers to squeeze a wide-angle image onto conventional 35-mm film stock, thereby increasing the **aspect ratio** (the ratio of a screen's width to its height) of their images. This wide-screen format increased the immersive quality of the theater experience. Nonetheless, even with these advancements, movie attendance never again reached the record numbers it experienced in 1946, at the peak of the Golden Age of Hollywood.[42]

## Mass Entertainment, Mass Paranoia: HUAC and the Hollywood Blacklist

The Cold War with the Soviet Union began in 1947, and with it came the widespread fear of communism, not only from the outside, but equally from within. To undermine this perceived threat, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) commenced investigations to locate communist sympathizers in America who were suspected of conducting espionage for the Soviet Union. In the highly conservative and paranoid atmosphere of the time, Hollywood, the source of a mass-cultural medium, came under fire in response to fears that subversive, communist messages were being embedded in films. In November 1947, more than 100 people in the movie business were called to testify before the HUAC about their and their colleagues' involvement with communist affairs. Of those investigated, 10 in particular refused to cooperate with the committee's questions. These 10, later known as the Hollywood Ten, were fired from their jobs and sentenced to serve up to a year in prison. The studios, already slipping in influence and profit, were eager to cooperate in order to save themselves, and a number of producers signed an agreement stating that no communists would work in Hollywood.

The hearings, which recommenced in 1951 with the rise of Senator Joseph McCarthy's influence, turned into a kind of witch hunt as witnesses were asked to testify against their associates, and a blacklist of suspected

41. *ibid*

42. *ibid*

communists evolved. Over 324 individuals lost their jobs in the film industry as a result of blacklisting (the denial of work in a certain field or industry) and HUAC investigations.[43],[44],[45]

## Down With the Establishment: Youth Culture of the 1960s and 1970s

Movies of the late 1960s began attracting a younger demographic, as a growing number of young people were drawn in by films like Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* (1969), Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), and Dennis Hopper's *Easy Rider* (1969)—all revolutionary in their genres—that displayed a sentiment of unrest toward conventional social orders and included some of the earliest instances of realistic and brutal violence in film. These four films, in particular, grossed so much money at the box offices that producers began churning out low-budget copycats to draw in a new, profitable market.[46] While this led to a rise in youth-culture films, few of them saw great success. However, the new liberal attitudes toward depictions of sex and violence in these films represented a sea of change in the movie industry that manifested in many movies of the 1970s, including Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* (1972), William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* (1973), and Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975), all three of which saw great financial success (Britannica Online; Belton, 1994).[47],[48]

## Blockbusters, Knockoffs, and Sequels

In the 1970s, with the rise of work by Coppola, Spielberg, George Lucas, Martin Scorsese, and others, a new breed of director emerged. These directors were young and film school educated, and they contributed a

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43. Georgakas, Dan. "Hollywood Blacklist," in Encyclopedia of the American Left, ed. Mari Jo Buhle, Paul Buhle, and Dan Georgakas, 2004, http://writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/50s/blacklist.html.

44. Mills, Michael. "Blacklist: A Different Look at the 1947 HUAC Hearings," Modern Times, 2007, https://web.archive.org/web/20070503115546/http://www.moderntimes.com/blacklist/.

45. Dresler, Kathleen, Kari Lewis, Tiffany Schoser and Cathy Nordine, "The Hollywood Ten," Dalton Trumbo, 2005, https://web.archive.org/web/20071021022949/http://www.mcpld.org/trumbo/WebPages/hollywoodten.htm.

46. Cook, David A, Robert Sklar, and Filip Jankowski. "History of Film." Britannica, March 5, 2024. https://www.britannica.com/art/history-of-the-motion-picture.

47. *ibid*

48. Belton, John. American Cinema/American Culture. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 284–290.

sense of professionalism, sophistication, and technical mastery to their work, leading to a wave of blockbuster productions, including Close *Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), *Star Wars* (1977), *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), and *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982). The computer-generated special effects that were available at this time also contributed to the success of a number of large-budget productions. In response to these and several earlier blockbusters, movie production and marketing techniques also began to shift, with studios investing more money in fewer films in the hopes of producing more big successes. For the first time, the hefty sums producers and distributors invested didn't go to production costs alone; distributors were discovering the benefits of TV and radio advertising and finding that doubling their advertising costs could increase profits as much as three or four times over. With the opening of Jaws, one of the five top-grossing films of the decade (and the highest-grossing film of all time until the release of *Star Wars* in 1977), Hollywood embraced the wide-release method of movie distribution, abandoning the release methods of earlier decades, in which a film would debut in only a handful of select theaters in major cities before it became gradually available to mass audiences. Jaws was released in 600 theaters simultaneously, and the big-budget films that followed came out in anywhere from 800 to 2,000 theaters nationwide on their opening weekends.[49],[50]

The major Hollywood studios of the late 1970s and early 1980s, now run by international corporations, tended to favor the conservative gamble of the tried and true, and as a result, the period saw an unprecedented number of high-budget sequels—as in the *Star Wars*, *Indiana Jones*, and *Godfather* films—as well as imitations and adaptations of earlier successful material, such as the plethora of "slasher" films that followed the success of the 1979 thriller *Halloween*. Additionally, corporations sought revenue sources beyond the movie theater, looking to the video and cable releases of their films. Introduced in 1975, the VCR became nearly ubiquitous in American homes by 1998, with 88.9 million households owning the appliance.[51] Cable television's growth was slower, but ownership of VCRs gave people a new reason to subscribe, and cable subsequently expanded as well.[52] Also, the newly introduced concept of film-based merchandise (toys, games, books, etc.) allowed companies to increase profits even more.

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49. *ibid*

50. Hanson, Steve and Sandra Garcia-Myers, "Blockbusters," in St. James Encyclopedia of Popular Culture, ed. Sara Pendergast and Tom Pendergast (Detroit: St. James Press, 2000), vol. 1, 282.

51. Rosen, Karen and Alan Meier, "Power Measurements and National Energy Consumption of Televisions and Video Cassette Recorders in the USA," Energy, 25, no. 3 (2000), 220.

52. Rogers, Everett. "Video is Here to Stay," Center for Media Literacy, https://web.archive.org/web/20231204041837/https://www.medialit.org/reading-room/video-here-stay.

# The 1990s and Beyond

The 1990s saw the rise of two divergent strands of cinema: the technically spectacular blockbuster with special, computer-generated effects and the independent, low-budget film. The capabilities of special effects were enhanced when studios began manipulating film digitally. Early examples of this technology can be seen in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991) and *Jurassic Park* (1993). Films with an epic scope—*Independence Day* (1996), *Titanic* (1997), and *The Matrix* (1999)—also employed a range of computer-animation techniques and special effects to wow audiences and to draw more viewers to the big screen. *Toy Story* (1995), the first fully computer-animated film, and those that came after it, such as *Antz* (1998), *A Bug's Life* (1998), and *Toy Story 2* (1999), displayed the improved capabilities of computer-generated animation.[53] At the same time, independent directors and producers, such as the Coen brothers and Spike Jonze, experienced an increased popularity, often for lower-budget films that audiences were more likely to watch on video at home.[54] A prime example of this is the 1996 Academy Awards program, when independent films dominated the Best Picture category. Only one movie from a big film studio was nominated—Jerry Maguire—while the rest were independent films. The growth of both independent movies and special-effects-laden blockbusters continues to the present day. You will read more about current issues and trends and the future of the movie industry later on in this chapter.

### Key Takeaways

- The concept of the motion picture was first introduced to a mass audience through Thomas Edison's kinetoscope in 1891. However, it wasn't until the Lumière brothers released the cinématographe in 1895 that motion pictures were projected for audience viewing. In the United States, film established itself as a popular form of entertainment with the nickelodeon theater in the 1910s.
- The release of The Jazz Singer in 1927 marked the birth of the talking film, and by 1930 silent film was a thing of the past. Technicolor emerged for film around the same time and found early success with movies like The Wizard of Oz and Gone With the Wind. However, people

53. Sedman, David. "Film Industry, Technology of," in Encyclopedia of Communication and Information, ed. Jorge Reina Schement (New York: MacMillan Reference, 2000), vol. 1, 340.

54. Britannica Online, s.v. "History of the Motion Picture".

would continue to make films in black and white until the late 1950s.

- By 1915 most of the major film studios had moved to Hollywood. During the Golden Age of Hollywood, these major studios controlled every aspect of the movie industry, and the films they produced drew crowds to theaters in numbers that have still not been surpassed. After World War II, the studio system declined as a result of antitrust legislation that took power away from studios and of the invention of the television.
- During the 1960s and 1970s, there was a rise in films—including Bonnie and Clyde, The Wild Bunch, 2001: A Space Odyssey, and Easy Rider—that celebrated the emerging youth culture and a rejection of the conservatism of the previous decades. This also led to looser attitudes toward depictions of sexuality and violence in film. The 1970s and 1980s saw the rise of the blockbuster, with films like Jaws, Star Wars, Raiders of the Lost Ark, and The Godfather.
- The adoption of the VCR by most households in the 1980s reduced audiences at movie theaters but opened a new mass market of home movie viewers. Improvements in computer animation led to more special effects in film during the 1990s with movies like The Matrix, Jurassic Park, and the first fully computer-animated film, Toy Story.

## Exercises

Identify four films that you would consider to be representative of major developments in the industry and in film as a medium that were outlined in this section. Imagine you are using these films to explain movie history to a friend. Provide a detailed explanation of why each of these films represents significant changes in attitudes, technology, or trends and situate each in the overall context of film's development. Consider the following questions:

1. How did this movie influence the film industry?
2. What has been the lasting impact of this movie on the film industry?
3. How was the film industry and technology different before this film?

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# 10.3 MOVIES AND CULTURE

**Learning Objectives**

- Recognize how movies reflect cultural attitudes, trends, and events.
- Indicate how movies influence culture.

## Movies Mirror Culture

The relationship between movies and culture involves a complicated dynamic; while American movies certainly influence the mass culture that consumes them, they are also an integral part of that culture, a product of it, and therefore a reflection of prevailing concerns, attitudes, and beliefs. In considering the relationship between film and culture, it is important to keep in mind that, while certain ideologies may be prevalent in a given era, not only is American culture as diverse as the populations that form it, but it is also constantly changing from one period to the next. Mainstream films produced in the late 1940s and into the 1950s, for example, reflected the conservatism that dominated the sociopolitical arenas of the time. However, by the 1960s, a youth culture began to emerge in opposition to the dominant institutions, and these anti-establishment views soon found their way onto the screen—a far cry from the attitudes most commonly represented only a few years earlier.

In one sense, movies could be characterized as America's storytellers. Not only do Hollywood films reflect certain commonly held attitudes and beliefs about what it means to be American, but they also portray contemporary trends, issues, and events, serving as records of the eras in which they were produced. Consider, for example, films about the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks: *Fahrenheit 9/11*, *World Trade Center*, *United 93*, and others. These films grew out of a seminal event of the time, one that preoccupied the consciousness of Americans for years after it occurred.

# Birth of a Nation

In 1915, director D. W. Griffith established his reputation with the highly successful film *The Birth of a Nation*, based on Thomas Dixon's novel *The Clansman*, a pro-segregation narrative about the American South during and after the Civil War. At the time, *The Birth of a Nation* was the longest feature film ever made, at almost 3 hours, and contained huge battle scenes that amazed and delighted audiences. Griffith's storytelling ability helped solidify the narrative style that would continue to dominate feature films. He also experimented with editing techniques, such as close-ups, jump cuts, and parallel editing, which make the film an artistic achievement.

Griffith's film found success largely because it captured the social and cultural tensions of the era. As American studies specialist Lary May has argued, "[Griffith's] films dramatized every major concern of the day."[1] In the early 20th century, fears about recent waves of immigrants had led to certain racist attitudes in mass culture, with "scientific" theories of the time purporting to link race with inborn traits like intelligence and other capabilities. Additionally, the dominant political climate, largely a reaction against populist labor movements, was one of conservative elitism, eager to attribute social inequalities to natural human differences.[2] According to a report by the New York *Evening Post* after the film's release, even some Northern audiences "clapped when the masked riders took vengeance on Negroes."[3] However, the outrage many groups expressed about the film is a good reminder that American culture is not monolithic and that there are always strong contingents in opposition to dominant ideologies.

While critics praised the film for its narrative complexity and epic scope, many others were outraged and even started riots at several screenings because of its highly controversial, openly racist attitudes, which glorified the Ku Klux Klan and blamed Southern Blacks for the destruction of the war.[4] Many Americans joined the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in denouncing the film, and the National Board of Review eventually cut a number of the film's racist sections.[5] However, it's important to keep in mind the attitudes of the early 1900s. At the time, the nation was divided, and Jim Crow laws and segregation were enforced. Nonetheless, The Birth of a Nation was the highest-grossing movie of its era. In

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1. May, Lary. "Apocalyptic Cinema: D. W. Griffith and the Aesthetics of Reform," in Movies and Mass Culture, ed. John Belton (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 26.

2. Darity, William A."Birth of a Nation," Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, 2nd ed., ed. William A. Darity, Jr., Gale Virtual Reference Library, 1:305–306.

3. Higham, *Art of the American Film*, 13.

4. *ibid*

5. May, Lary. "Apocalyptic Cinema: D. W. Griffith and the Aesthetics of Reform," in Movies and Mass Culture, ed. John Belton (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

1992, the film was classified by the Library of Congress among the "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant films" in U.S. history.

Figure 1: Photo of Ku Klux Klan members in full regalia riding horses. The Birth of a Nation expressed racial tensions of the early 20th century.

## "The American Way"

Until the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, American films after World War I generally reflected the neutral, isolationist stance that prevailed in politics and culture. However, after the United States was drawn into the war in Europe, the government enlisted Hollywood to help with the war effort, opening the federal Bureau

of Motion Picture Affairs in Los Angeles. Bureau officials served in an advisory capacity on the production of war-related films, an effort with which the studios cooperated. As a result, films tended toward the patriotic and were produced to inspire feelings of pride and confidence in being American and to clearly establish that America and its allies were forces of good. For instance, critically acclaimed *Casablanca* paints a picture of the ill effects of fascism, illustrates the values that heroes like Victor Laszlo hold, and depicts America as a place for refugees to find democracy and freedom.[6]

These early World War II films were sometimes overtly propagandist, intended to influence American attitudes rather than present a genuine reflection of American sentiments toward the war. Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* films, for example, the first of which was produced in 1942, were developed for the U.S. Army and were later shown to general audiences; they delivered a war message through narrative.[7] As the war continued, however, filmmakers opted to forego patriotic themes for a more serious reflection of American sentiments, as exemplified by films like Alfred Hitchcock's *Lifeboat*.

## Youth versus Age: From Counterculture to Mass Culture

In Mike Nichols's 1967 film *The Graduate*, Dustin Hoffman, as the film's protagonist, enters into a romantic affair with the wife of his father's business partner. However, Mrs. Robinson and the other adults in the film fail to understand the young, alienated hero, who eventually rebels against them. *The Graduate*, which brought in more than $44 million at the box office, reflected the attitudes of many members of a young generation growing increasingly dissatisfied with what they perceived to be the repressive social codes established by their more conservative elders.[8]

This baby boomer generation came of age during the Korean and Vietnam wars. Not only did the youth culture express a cynicism toward the patriotic, pro-war stance of their World War II–era elders, but they displayed a fierce resistance toward institutional authority in general, an anti-establishmentism epitomized in the 1967 hit film *Bonnie and Clyde*. In the film, a young, outlaw couple sets out on a cross-country bank-robbing spree until they're killed in a violent police ambush at the film's close.[9]

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6. Digital History, Review of Casablanca, directed by Michael Curtiz, Digital History, https://web.archive.org/web/20140511010841/http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu:80/historyonline/bureau_casablanca.cfm.

7. Koppes, Clayton R. and Gregory D. Black, Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies (Los Angeles: The Free Press, 1987), 122.

8. Dirks, Tim. review of The Graduate, directed by Mike Nichols, Filmsite, http://www.filmsite.org/grad.html.

9. Belton, John. Introduction to Movies and Mass Culture, ed. John Belton, 12.

Figure 2: A still from Bonnie and Clyde in which Clyde is holding Bonnie as she stands on the front wheel of a car. The film reflected the attitudes of a rising youth culture.

*Bonnie and Clyde's* violence provides one example of the ways films at the time were testing the limits of permissible on-screen material. The youth culture's liberal attitudes toward formally taboo subjects like sexuality and drugs began to emerge in film during the late 1960s. Like *Bonnie and Clyde*, Sam Peckinpah's 1969 Western *The Wild Bunch*, displays an early example of aestheticized violence in film. The wildly popular *Easy Rider* (1969)—containing drugs, sex, and violence—may owe a good deal of its initial success to liberalized audiences. In the same year, *Midnight Cowboy*, one of the first Hollywood films to receive an X rating (in this case for its sexual content), won three Academy Awards, including Best Picture (Belton).[10] As

10. *ibid*

the release and subsequently successful reception of these films attest, what at the decade's outset had been countercultural had, by the decade's close, become mainstream.

## The Hollywood Production Code

When the MPAA (originally MPPDA) first banded together in 1922 to combat government censorship and to promote artistic freedom, the association attempted a system of self-regulation. However, by 1930—in part because of the transition to talking pictures—renewed criticism and calls for censorship from conservative groups made it clear to the MPPDA that the loose system of self-regulation was not enough protection. As a result, the MPPDA instituted the Production Code, or Hays Code (after MPPDA director William H. Hays), which remained in place until 1967. The code, which, according to motion picture producers, concerned itself with ensuring that movies were "directly responsible for spiritual or moral progress, for higher types of social life, and for much correct thinking," was strictly enforced starting in 1934, putting an end to most public complaints.[11] However, many people in Hollywood resented its restrictiveness. After a series of Supreme Court cases in the 1950s regarding the code's restrictions to freedom of speech, the Production Code grew weaker until it was finally replaced in 1967 with the MPAA rating system.[12]

## MPAA Ratings

As films like *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966) tested the limits on violence and language, it became clear that the Production Code was in need of replacement. In 1968, the MPAA adopted a rating system to identify films in terms of potentially objectionable content. By providing officially designated categories for films that would not have passed Production Code standards of the past, the MPAA opened a way for films to deal openly with mature content. The rating system originally included four categories: G (suitable for general audiences), M (equivalent to the PG rating of today), R (restricted to adults over age 16), and X (equivalent to today's NC-17).

The MPAA rating system, with some modifications, is still in place today. Before release in theaters, films are submitted to the MPAA board for a screening, during which advisers decide on the most appropriate rating based on the film's content. However, studios are not required to have the MPAA screen releases ahead of time—some studios release films without the MPAA rating at all. Commercially, less restrictive ratings are generally more beneficial, particularly in the case of adult-themed films that have the potential to earn the

11. History Matters, "Complete Nudity is Never Permitted: The Motion Picture Code of 1930," http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5099/.

12. American Decades Primary Sources, "The Production Code of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributers of America, Inc.—1930–1934," American Decades Primary Sources, ed. Cynthia Rose (Detroit: Gale, 2004), vol. 4, 12–15.

most restrictive rating, the NC-17. Some movie theaters will not screen a movie that is rated NC-17. When filmmakers get a more restrictive rating than they were hoping for, they may resubmit the film for review after editing out objectionable scenes.[13]

## The New War Film: Cynicism and Anxiety

Unlike the patriotic war films of the World War II era, many of the films about U.S. involvement in Vietnam reflected strong antiwar sentiment, criticizing American political policy and portraying war's damaging effects on those who survived it. Films like *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), *M*A*S*H* (1970), *The Deer Hunter* (1978), and *Apocalypse Now* (1979) portray the military establishment in a negative light and dissolve clear-cut distinctions, such as the "us versus them" mentality, of earlier war films. These, and the dozens of Vietnam War films that were produced in the 1970s and 1980s—Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (1986) and *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989) and Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), for example—reflect the sense of defeat and lack of closure Americans felt after the Vietnam War and the emotional and psychological scars it left on the nation's psyche (Dirks, 2010; Anderegg, 1991).[14],[15] A spate of military and politically themed films emerged during the 1980s as America recovered from defeat in Vietnam, while at the same time facing anxieties about the ongoing Cold War with the Soviet Union.

Fears about the possibility of nuclear war were very real during the 1980s, and some film critics argue that these anxieties were reflected not only in overtly political films of the time but also in the popularity of horror films, like *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th*, which feature a mysterious and unkillable monster, and in the popularity of the fantastic in films like *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial, Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and *Star Wars*, which offer imaginative escapes (Wood, 1986).[16]

# Movies Shape Culture

Just as movies reflect the anxieties, beliefs, and values of the cultures that produce them, they also help to shape and solidify a culture's beliefs. Sometimes the influence is trivial, as in the case of fashion trends or figures of speech. After the release of *Flashdance* in 1983, for instance, torn T-shirts and leg warmers became hallmarks

13. Dick, Kirby. interview by Terry Gross, Fresh Air, NPR, September 13, 2006, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6068009.

14. Dirks, Tim. "1980s Film History," Filmsite, 2010, http://www.filmsite.org.

15. Anderegg, Michael. introduction to Inventing Vietnam: The War in Film and Television, ed. Michael Anderegg (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 6–8.

16. Wood, Robin. Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 168.

of the fashion of the 1980s.[17] However, sometimes the impact can be profound, leading to social or political reform, or the shaping of ideologies.

## Film and the Rise of Mass Culture

During the 1890s and up until about 1920, American culture experienced a period of rapid industrialization. As people moved from farms to centers of industrial production, urban areas began to hold larger and larger concentrations of the population. At the same time, film and other methods of mass communication (advertising and radio) developed, whose messages concerning tastes, desires, customs, speech, and behavior spread from these population centers to outlying areas across the country. The effect of early mass-communication media was to wear away regional differences and create a more homogenized, standardized culture.

Film played a key role in this development, as viewers began to imitate the speech, dress, and behavior of their common heroes on the silver screen.[18] In 1911, the Vitagraph company began publishing *The Motion Picture Magazine*, America's first fan magazine. Originally conceived as a marketing tool to keep audiences interested in Vitagraph's pictures and major actors, *The Motion Picture Magazine* helped create the concept of the film star in the American imagination. Fans became obsessed with the off-screen lives of their favorite celebrities, like Pearl White, Florence Lawrence, and Mary Pickford.[19]

## American Myths and Traditions

American identity in mass society is built around certain commonly held beliefs, or myths about shared experiences, and these American myths are often disseminated through or reinforced by film. One example of a popular American myth, one that dates back to the writings of Thomas Jefferson and other founders, is an emphasis on individualism—a celebration of the common man or woman as a hero or reformer. With the rise of mass culture, the myth of the individual became increasingly appealing because it provided people with a sense of autonomy and individuality in the face of an increasingly homogenized culture. The hero myth finds embodiment in the Western, a film genre that was popular from the silent era through the 1960s, in which the lone cowboy, a semi-nomadic wanderer, makes his way in a lawless and often dangerous frontier. An example

17. Pemberton-Sikes, Diana. "15 Movies That Inspired Fashion Trends," The Clothing Chronicles, March 3, 2006, https://web.archive.org/web/20060709033126/http://www.theclothingchronicles.com/archives/217-03032006.htm.

18. Mintz, Steven. "The Formation of Modern American Mass Culture," Digital History, 2007, https://web.archive.org/web/20120618140908/http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/database/article_display.cfm?HHID=455.

19. Doyle, Jack. "A Star is Born: 1910s," Pop History Dig, 2008, film stars & mass culture | The Pop History Dig.

is 1952's *High Noon*. From 1926 until 1967, Westerns accounted for nearly a quarter of all films produced. In other films, like Frank Capra's 1946 movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, the individual triumphs by standing up to injustice, reinforcing the belief that one person can make a difference in the world.[20] And in more recent films, hero figures such as Indiana Jones, Luke Skywalker (*Star Wars*), and Neo (*The Matrix*) have continued to emphasize individualism.

## Social Issues in Film

As D. W. Griffith recognized nearly a century ago, film has enormous power as a medium to influence public opinion. Ever since Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* sparked strong public reactions in 1915, filmmakers have been producing movies that address social issues, sometimes subtly and sometimes very directly. More recently, films like *Hotel Rwanda* (2004), about the 1994 Rwandan genocide, or *The Kite Runner* (2007), a story that takes place in the midst of a war-torn Afghanistan, have captured audience imaginations by telling stories that raise social awareness about world events. And a number of documentary films directed at social issues have had a strong influence on cultural attitudes and have brought about significant change.

In the 2000s, documentaries, particularly those of an activist nature, were met with greater interest than ever before. Films like *Super Size Me* (2004), which documents the effects of excessive fast-food consumption and criticizes the fast-food industry for promoting unhealthy eating habits for profit, and *Food, Inc.* (2009), which examines corporate farming practices and points to the negative impact these practices can have on human health and the environment, have brought about important changes in American food culture.[21] Just 6 weeks after the release of *Super Size Me*, McDonald's took the supersize option off its menu and, since 2004, has introduced a number of healthy food options in its restaurants.[22] Other fast-food chains have made similar changes.

Other documentaries intended to influence cultural attitudes and inspire change include those made by director Michael Moore. Moore's films present a liberal stance on social and political issues such as health care, globalization, and gun control. His 2002 film *Bowling for Columbine*, for example, addressed the Columbine High School shootings of 1999, presenting a critical examination of American gun culture. While some critics have accused Moore of producing propagandistic material under the label of documentary because of his films' strong biases, his films have been popular with audiences, with four of his documentaries ranking among the highest-grossing documentaries of all time. *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004), which criticized the second Bush

20. Belton, *American Cinema/American Culture*, 286.

21. Severson, Kim. "Eat, Drink, Think, Change," New York Times, June 3, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/07/movies/07seve.html.

22. Sood, Suemedha. "Weighing the Impact of 'Super Size Me,'" Wiretap, June 29, 2004. https://web.archive.org/web/20071009175733/http://www.wiretapmag.org/stories/19059/.

administration and its involvement in the Iraq War, earned $119 million at the box office, making it the most successful documentary of all time.[23]

## Key Takeaways

- As products of mass culture, movies reflect cultural attitudes, trends, and concerns:
    - D. W. Griffith's film The Birth of a Nation, presenting a racist perspective on the U.S. Civil War and its aftermath, reflected racist concerns of the era in which it was produced.
    - During World War II, films reflected the patriotic, pro-war sentiments of the time.
    - In the 1960s and 1970s with the rise of an antiestablishment youth culture, movies adopted more liberal stances toward sexuality and violence and displayed a cynicism toward established social structures.
- After the failure of the Vietnam War, films reflected a more ambivalent attitude toward war.
- The MPAA rating system, established in 1968, gave filmmakers greater freedom in the content they were able to portray on screen.
- Movies shape cultural attitudes and customs, as audiences adopt the attitudes and styles of the characters they watch on screen. Filmmakers may use their movies to influence cultural attitudes toward certain social issues, as in Fahrenheit 9/11 and Super Size Me.

## Exercises

1. Consider three films you have watched in the last year. In what ways have these films

23. Dirks, Tim. "Film History of the 2000s," Filmsite; Washington Post, "The 10 Highest-Grossing Documentaries," July 31, 2006, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/graphic/2006/07/31/GR2006073100027.html.

reflected current concerns, trends, or attitudes? Of these movies, which do you think have the most potential to shape cultural attitudes or bring about social change? How do you think these movies might bring about this change?

2. Locate a film that has been remade and watch the original and re-made versions. Besides the obvious changes in fashion and technology, what other differences do you notice that reflect the cultural attitudes, trends, and events in which each film was produced?

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# 10.4 THE INFLUENCE OF NEW TECHNOLOGY

**Learning Objectives**

- Identify the impact of home-entertainment technology on the motion picture industry.
- Recognize the role the DVD market plays in the economics of moviemaking.
- Describe the impact of digital cinematography on the film industry.

New technologies have a profound impact, not only on the way films are made, but also on the economic structure of the film industry. When VCR technology made on-demand home movie viewing possible for the first time, filmmakers had to adapt to a changing market. The recent switch to digital technology also represents a turning point for film. In this section, you will learn how these and other technologies have changed the face of cinema.

## Effects of Home Entertainment Technology

The first technology for home video recording, Sony's Betamax cassettes, hit the market in 1975. The device, a combined television set and videocassette recorder (VCR), came with the high price tag of $2,495, making it a luxury still too expensive for the average American home. Two years later, RCA released the vertical helical scan (VHS) system of recording, which would eventually outsell Betamax, though neither device was yet a popular consumer product. Within several years however, the concept of home movie recording and viewing was beginning to catch on. In 1979, Columbia Pictures released 20 films for home viewing, and a year later Disney entered the market with the first authorized video rental plan for retail stores. By 1983, VCRs were still

relatively uncommon, found in just 10 percent of American homes, but within 2 years the device had found a place in nearly one-third of U.S. households.[1]

At the same time, video rental stores began to spring up across the country. In 1985, three major video rental chains—Blockbuster, Hastings, and Movie Gallery—opened their doors. The video rental market took off between 1983 and 1986, reaching $3.37 billion in 1986. Video sales that year came to $1 billion, for total revenue of more than $4 billion, marking the first time in history that video would eclipse box-office revenues ($3.78 billion that year).[2]

Video sales and rentals opened a new mass market in the entertainment industry—the home movie viewer—and offered Hollywood an extended source of income from its films. On the other hand, the VCR also introduced the problem of piracy.

## VCRs Legal, Just Barely

In an age when Hollywood was already struggling financially because of increased production costs, Sony's release of home video recording technology became a major source of anxiety for Hollywood studios. If people could watch movies in their own homes, would they stop going to the movies altogether? In the 1976 case, Sony Corp. of America v. Universal City Studios, Universal Studios and the Walt Disney Company sued Sony in the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California. The suit argued that because Sony was manufacturing a technology that could potentially be used to break copyright law, the company was therefore liable for any copyright infringement committed by VCR purchasers. The District Court struggled with the case, eventually ruling against Sony. However, Sony appealed to the Supreme Court, where the case was again highly debated. Part of the struggle was the recognition that the case had wider implications: Does a device with recording capabilities conflict with copyright law? Is an individual guilty of copyright infringement if they record a single movie in their own home for their own private use?

Eventually, the Supreme Court ruled that Sony and other VCR manufacturers could not be held liable for copyright infringement. This case represented an important milestone for two reasons. It opened up a new market in the entertainment sector, enabling video rental and home movie sales. Additionally, the case set a standard for determining whether a device with copying or recording capability violated copyright law. The court ruled that because nonprofit, noncommercial home recording did not constitute copyright violation, VCR technology did have legitimate legal uses, and Sony and other companies could not be held liable for any

1. Entertainment Merchant Association, "A History of Home Video and Video Game Retailing," https://web.archive.org/web/20070811131332/https://www.entmerch.org/industry_history.html.

2. *ibid*

misuse of their devices. Recently, this case has posed interpretive challenges in legal battles and in debates over file sharing through the Internet (Spruill & Adler, 2009).[3]

## The Optical Disc System

In 1980, around the time when consumers were just beginning to purchase VCRs for home use, Pioneer Electronics introduced another technology, the LaserDisc, an optical storage disc that produced higher quality images than VHS tapes. Nonetheless, because of its large size (12 inches in diameter) and lack of recording capabilities, this early disc system never became popular in the U.S. market. However, the LaserDisc's successor, the digital versatile disc (DVD), was a different story. Like LaserDisc, the DVD is an optical storage disc—that is, a device whose encoded information follows a spiral pattern on the disc's surface and can be read when illuminated by a laser diode. However, unlike the analog-formatted LaserDisc, the DVD's information storage is entirely digital, allowing for a smaller, lighter, more compressed medium.

The first DVDs were released in stores in 1997, impressing consumers and distributors with their numerous advantages over the VHS tape: sharper-resolution images, compactness, higher durability, interactive special features, and better copy protection. In only a few years, sales of DVD players and discs surpassed those of VCRs and videos, making the DVD the most rapidly adopted consumer electronics product of all time.[4]

In 1999, the movie rental market was revolutionized by Netflix. Netflix began in 1997 as a video rental store in California. In 1999, the company began offering a subscription service online. Subscribers would select movies that they wanted to see on Netflix's website, and the movies would arrive in their mailbox a few days later, along with a prepaid return envelope. This allowed users to select from thousands of movies and television shows in the privacy of their own home.

More recently, DVD technology has been surpassed by the Blu-ray Disc format, intended for storing and producing high-definition video. Released in 2006, the Blu-ray Disc technology has the same physical dimensions as DVDs, but because they are encoded to be read by lasers with a shorter wavelength, the discs have more than five times the storage capacity of the DVD (Blu-ray). By 2009, there were 10.9 million Blu-ray Disc players in U.S. homes (Molbaek, 2009).[5]

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3. Spruill, Willie and Derek Adler, "Sony Corp. of America v. Universal City Studios," Downloading & Piracy project for Laura N. Gasaway's Cyberspace Law Seminar, University of North Carolina School of Law, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20110307105849/http://www.unc.edu:80/courses/2009spring/law/357c/001/Piracy/cases.htm.

4. Entertainment Merchant Association, "A History of Home Video and Video Game Retailing," https://web.archive.org/web/20070811131332/https://www.entmerch.org/industry_history.html.

5. Molbaek, Henning. "10.7 Million Blu-Ray Players in U.S. Homes," DVDTown.com, Jan 9, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20090208221016/http://www.dvdtown.com/news/107-million-blu-ray-players-in-us-homes/6288.

## DVD Revenues and Decline

DVD rentals and sales make up a major source of revenue for the movie industry, accounting for nearly half of the returns on feature films. In fact, for some time the industry has been exploiting the profitability of releasing some films directly to DVD without ever premiering them in theaters or of releasing films on DVD simultaneously with their theater releases. According to one estimate, for every movie that appears in theaters, there are three that go straight to DVD.[6] While *direct-to-DVD* has become synonymous with poor production values and ill-conceived sequels, there are a number of reasons why a studio might bypass the multiplexes. Prequels and sequels of box-office hits, shot on a lower production budget, are often released this way and can generate considerable income from the niche market of hard-core fans. The fourth *American Pie* film, *Bring It On: In It to Win It*, and *Ace Ventura Pet Detective, Jr.* are all examples of successful direct-to-DVD films. However, in other cases, the costs of theatrical promotion and release may simply be too high for a studio to back. This is especially true among independently produced films that lack the big-studio marketing budgets. *Slumdog Millionaire* (2009) was almost one of these cases. However, the film did make it to theaters, going on to win eight Academy Awards in 2009, including Best Picture.[7] Finally, a film may go straight to DVD when its content is too controversial to be released in theaters. For example, almost all porn films are direct-to-DVD releases.

Between 2005 and 2008, the number of direct-to-DVD releases grew 36 percent as studios began to see the profitability of the strategy.[8] After a movie's success at the box office, a prequel, sequel, or related movie might earn the same profit pound-for-pound at the rental store if filmmakers slashed the production budget, often replacing the original celebrity actors with less expensive talent. In 2008, direct-to-DVD brought in around $1 billion in sales.[9]

Despite the profitability of the DVD market, the economic downturn that began in 2007, along with the concurrent release of Blu-ray Disc technology and online digital downloads, have brought about a decline in DVD sales among U.S. consumers.[10] With the rise in digital downloads, Netflix broadened its appeal in 2007

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6. Court, Robert W. "Straight to DVD," New York Times, May 6, 2006, Opinion section, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/06/opinion/06cort.html.

7. Charity, Tom. "Review: Why Some Films Go Straight to DVD," CNN, February 27, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20220609194935/http://www.cnn.com/2009/SHOWBIZ/Movies/02/27/review.humboldt/.

8. Barnes, Brooks. "Direct-to-DVD Releases Shed Their Loser Label," New York Times, January 28, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/28/business/media/28dvd.html.

9. *ibid*

10. Garrett, Dianne. "DVD Sales Down 3.6% in '07," January 7, 2008, https://web.archive.org/web/20220808065314/https://variety.com/2008/digital/features/dvd-sales-down-3-6-in-07-1117978576/.

by offering subscribers live-streaming movies and TV shows. This allowed viewers to watch programs on their computers, handheld devices, the Nintendo Wii game system, the Sony PlayStation 3 game system, and the Microsoft Xbox 360 game system without ever having the disc itself.

Additionally, by late 2007, film studios also became anxious over another trend: the Redbox rental system. Redbox, an American company that places DVD rental vending machines in pharmacies, grocery stores, and fast-food chains around the country, had placed a kiosk in approximately 22,000 locations by 2009.[11] For the movie industry, the trouble isn't the widespread availability of Redbox rentals, it's the price. As of March 2001, customers can rent DVDs from a Redbox kiosk for only $1 per day, which has already led to a severe decline in rental revenue for the film industry.[12] According to the traditional pricing model, prices for rentals are based on a release window; newly released films cost more to rent for a specified period of time after their release. When customers can rent both older and newly released movies at the same low price, rentals don't produce the same returns.[13]

Hollywood has also suffered major losses from online piracy. Since 2007, studios have been teaming up to turn this potential threat into a source of income. Now, instead of illegally downloading their favorite movies from file-sharing sites, fans can go to legal, commercial-supported sites like Hulu.com, where they can access a selected variety of popular movies and TV shows for the same price as accessing NBC, ABC, and CBS—free. In April 2010, Hulu announced it had already launched a fee-based service, Hulu Plus, in addition to its free service, for users who want access to even more programs, such as *Glee*.[14] Hulu doesn't allow viewers to download the films to their home computers, but it does provide a home-viewing experience through online streaming of content.[15]

## The Industry Goes Digital

In an industry where technological innovations can transform production or distribution methods over the

11. Barnes, Brookes. "Movie Studios see a Threat in Growth of Redbox," New York Times, September 6, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/07/business/media/07redbox.html.

12. Diorio, Carl. "$1 DVD Rentals Costing Biz $1 Bil: Study," Hollywood Reporter, December 7, 2009, http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/1-dvd-rentals-costing-biz-92098.

13. Verrier, Richard. "Piracy Cost Studios $6 Billion in '05, Study Says." *Los Angeles Times*, May 3, 2006, sec. Entertainment & Arts. https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2006-may-03-fi-piracy3-story.html.

14. Reuters, "Hulu Launches Paid Subscription TV Service," Fox News, June 30, 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20150315134707/http://www.foxnews.com:80/scitech/2010/06/30/hulu-starts-paid-subscription-tv-service/.

15. Hulu, "Media Info," 2010, http://www.hulu.com/about.

course of a few years, it's incredible to think that most movies are still captured on celluloid film, the same material that Thomas Edison used to capture his kinetoscope images well over a century ago. In 2002, George Lucas's *Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones* became the first major Hollywood movie filmed on high-definition digital video. However, the move to digitally filmed movies has been gradual; much of the movie industry—including directors, producers, studios, and major movie theater chains—have been slow to embrace this major change in filming technology. At the time that Lucas filmed *Attack of the Clones*, only 18 theaters in the country were equipped with digital projectors.[16]

However, digital cinematography has become an increasingly attractive and increasingly popular option for a number of reasons. For one thing, during production, it eliminates the need to reload film. A scene filmed in the traditional method, requiring multiple takes, can now be filmed in one continuous take because no raw material is being used in the process.[17] The digital format streamlines the editing process as well. Rather than scanning the images into a computer before adding digital special effects and color adjustments, companies with digitally filmed material can send it electronically to the editing suite. Additionally, digital film files aren't susceptible to scratching or wear over time, and they are capable of producing crystal-clear, high-resolution images.[18]

For distributors and production companies, digitally recorded images eliminate the costs of purchasing, developing, and printing film. Studios spend around $800 million each year making prints of the films they distribute to theaters and additional money on top of that to ship the heavy reels.[19] For a film like *Attack of the Clones*, widely released in 3,000 theaters, printing and shipping costs for 35-mm film would be around $20 million.[20] On the other hand, with digital format, which requires no printing and can be sent to theaters on a single hard drive, or, as the system develops, over cable or satellite, these costs are virtually eliminated.[21],[22]

In part, the change has been gradual because, for theaters, the costs of making the digital switch (at around

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16. Kirsner, Scott. "Studios Shift to Digital Movies, but Not Without Resistance," New York Times, July 4, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/22/technology/22iht-movies23.html?scp=15&sq=digital%20movie&st=cse.

17. *ibid*

18. Taub, Eric A. "More Digital Projectors, Coming to a Theater Near You," Gadgetwise (blog), New York Times, June 18, 2009, http://gadgetwise.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/06/18/its-a-4k-world-after-all/.

19. Burr, Ty. "Will the 'Star Wars' Digital Gamble Pay Off?" Entertainment Weekly, April 19, 2002, https://web.archive.org/web/20060420073158/http://archives.cnn.com/2002/SHOWBIZ/Movies/04/19/ew.hot.star.wars/.

20. *ibid*

21. *ibid*

22. Carvajal, Doreen. "Nurturing Digital Cinema," New York Times, May 23, 2005, http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/22/technology/22iht-movies23.html.

$125,000 for a high-quality digital projector)[23] is high, and the transformation offers them fewer short-term incentives than it does for distributors, who could save a significant amount of money with digital technology. Furthermore, theaters have already heavily invested in their current projection equipment for 35-mm film.[24] In the long run, the high-definition picture capabilities of digital movies might boost profits as more moviegoers turn out at the theaters, but there are no guarantees. In the meantime, the major studios are negotiating with leading theater chains to underwrite some of the conversion expenses.[25]

Another financial pitfall of digital film is, surprisingly, the cost of storage once the film is out of major circulation. For major studios, a significant portion of revenues—around one-third—comes from the rerelease of old films. Studios invest an annual budget of just over $1,000 per film to keep their 35-millimeter masters in archival storage.[26] Keeping the film stock at controlled temperature and moisture levels prevents degradation, so masters are often stored in mines, where these conditions can be met most optimally.[27]

Digital data however, for all of its sophistication, is actually less likely to last than traditional film is; DVDs can degrade rapidly, with only a 50 percent chance of lasting up to 15 years,[28] while hard drives must be operated occasionally to prevent them from locking up. As a result, the storage cost for digital originals comes closer to $12,500 per film per year.[29] Moreover, as one generation of digital technology gives way to another, files have to be migrated to newer formats to prevent originals from becoming unreadable.

## The Resurgence of 3-D

After World War II, as movie attendance began to decline, the motion picture industry experimented with new technologies to entice audiences back into increasingly empty theaters. One such gimmick, the 3-D picture, offered the novel experience of increased audience "participation" as monsters, flying objects, and

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23. Reuters, "Movie Theaters Going Digital," CNN, December 24, 2003, http://www.cnn.com/2003/TECH/ptech/12/24/digital.movietheater.reut/index.html.

24. Carvajal, Doreen. "Nurturing Digital Cinema," New York Times, May 23, 2005, http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/22/technology/22iht-movies23.html.

25. McCarthy, Erin. "The Tech Behind 3D's Big Revival," Popular Mechanics, April 1, 2009, http://www.popularmechanics.com/technology/digital/3d/4310810.

26. Cieply, Michael. "The Afterlife is Expensive for Digital Movies," New York Times, December 23, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/23/business/media/23steal.html.

27. *ibid*

28. *ibid*

29. *ibid*

obstacles appeared to invade the theater space, threatening to collide with spectators. The effect was achieved by manipulating filming equipment to work like a pair of human eyes, mimicking the depth of field produced through binocular vision. By joining two cameras together and spacing them slightly apart with their lenses angled fractionally toward one another, filmmakers could achieve an effect similar to that created by the overlapping fields of vision of the right and left eye. In theaters, the resulting images were played simultaneously on two separate projectors. The 3-D glasses spectators wore were polarized to filter the images so that the left eye received only "left eye" projections and the right eye received only "right eye" projections.[30]

3-D was an instant sensation. *House of Wax*, the first big-budget 3-D movie, released in 1953, brought in over $1 million during its first 3 weeks in theaters, making it one of the most successful films of the year. Best of all for investors, 3-D could be created with fairly inexpensive equipment. For this reason, a boom of 3-D development soon occurred nationwide. Forty-six 3-D movies were filmed in a span of 2 years. However, 3-D proved to be a brief success, with its popularity already beginning to wane by the end of 1953.[31]

3-D soon migrated from the realm of common popular entertainment to novelty attraction, appearing in IMAX cinemas, as an occasional marketing draw for kids' movies, and in theme-park classics like *Captain Eo* and *Honey, I Shrunk the Audience*. *Captain Eo*, a Disneyland attraction from 1986 to 1993, featured pop sensation Michael Jackson in his heyday. Following Jackson's death, the film was re-released for a limited time in 2010.[32]

Despite the marginal role 3-D has played since the mid-century fad died out, new technologies have brought about a resurgence in the trend, and the contemporary 3-D experience seems less like a gimmick and more like a serious development in the industry. DreamWorks animation CEO Jeffrey Katzenberg, for one, likened the new 3-D to the introduction of color.[33] One of the downfalls that led to the decline of 3-D in the 1950s was the "3-D headache" phenomenon audiences began to experience as a result of technical problems with filming.[34] To create the 3-D effect, filmmakers need to calculate the point where the overlapping images converge, an alignment that had to be performed by hand in those early years. And for the resulting image to come

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30. Buchanan, Matt. "Giz Explains 3D Technologies," Gizmodo (blog), November 12, 2008, http://gizmodo.com/5084121/giz-explains-3d-technologies.

31. Hayes, John. "'You See Them WITH Glasses!' A Short History of 3D Movies," Wide Screen Movies Magazine, 2009, http://widescreenmovies.org/wsm11/3D.htm.

32. Rivera, Heather Hust. "Captain EO Returns to Disneyland Resort." Disney Parks Blog, December 18, 2009. http://disneyparks.disney.go.com/blog/2009/12/captain-eo-returns-to-disneyland-resort/.

33. McCarthy, Erin. "The Tech Behind 3D's Big Revival," Popular Mechanics, April 1, 2009, http://www.popularmechanics.com/technology/digital/3d/4310810.

34. Hayes, John. "'You See Them WITH Glasses!' A Short History of 3D Movies," Wide Screen Movies Magazine, 2009, http://widescreenmovies.org/wsm11/3D.htm.

through clearly, the parallel cameras must run in perfect sync with one another—another impossibility with 35-millimeter film, which causes some distortion by the very fact of its motion through the filming camera.

Today the 3-D headache is a thing of the past, as computerized calibration makes perfect camera alignment a reality and as the digital recording format eliminates the celluloid-produced distortion. Finally, a single digital projector equipped with a photo-optical device can now perform the work of the two synchronized projectors of the past. For the theater chains, 3-D provides the first real incentive to make the conversion to digital. Not only do audiences turn out in greater numbers for an experience they can't reproduce at home, even on their HD television sets, but theaters are also able to charge more for tickets to see 3-D films. In 2008, for example, *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, which grossed $102 million, earned 60 percent of that money through 3-D ticket sales, even though it played in 3-D on only 30 percent of its screens.[35] Two of the top-grossing movies of all time, *Avatar* (2009) and *Alice in Wonderland* (2010), were both released in 3-D.

## Key Takeaways

- The introduction of the VCR in the late 1970s made home movie viewing easy. The VCR was replaced by DVD technology in the late 1990s, which is currently being replaced by Blu-ray Disc technology.
- DVD sales and rentals account for about a third of film revenues. Some films are released straight to DVD without ever appearing in theaters.
- Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones (2002) was the first big-budget film to be recorded digitally. Since then, many more films have been made with digital cinematography. However a full-scale industry change has been gradual, mainly because of the costs of conversion.
- Three-dimensional movies were a fad in the 1950s. In recent years, because of improved technologies, 3-D movies have seen a resurgence.

## Exercises

35. McCarthy, Erin. "The Tech Behind 3D's Big Revival," Popular Mechanics, April 1, 2009, http://www.popularmechanics.com/technology/digital/3d/4310810.

1. Imagine you work for a major Hollywood studio, and you are negotiating a contract with a large theater chain to switch to a digital projection system. Consider the following:
    1. What are the pros and cons of this switch?
    2. How have digital projection systems affected the motion picture industry?
    3. How has digital film affected the DVD market?
2. Imagine you are a film studies teacher, and you choose to show excerpts from The Birth of a Nation in your class to illustrate its significance in film history. One student is highly offended by the film and stops to voice her concerns to you after class. Taking into consideration the things you have learned about the history of cinema and the relationship between film and culture, how would you explain your choice to this student?
3. Assume you want to create a documentary to raise awareness about a social issue that concerns you. What issue would you address, and what would you choose to document? Whom would you interview, where would you go, and so on
4. How would you respond to a visitor from another country who accuses the United States of cultural imperialism through the export of American movies?
5. Imagine you want to produce a remake of a movie from the 1980s. Choose a movie that you think would be a blockbuster. Create a marketing plan that includes merchandise tie-ins and sources of revenue beyond the box office.
6. After its decline in the 1950s, 3-D experienced a brief comeback in the 1980s. Based on what you know about the movie industry of the time and the culture of the 1980s, why might this have occurred?
7. For the realm film buffs, check out the film *Histoire(s) Du Cinéma by Jean-Luc Godard*, available here: https://archive.org/details/01.-toutes-les-histoires-1988/01.+Toutes+les+histoires+(1988).mkv Take notes on recurring themes and cinematic techniques. Spend 20-30 minutes researching critical perspectives on "Histoire(s) Du Cinéma." Look for reviews, scholarly articles, or interviews that offer insight into Godard's intentions and the public's reception of the work. Write a 2-3 page analysis exploring the themes, techniques, and historical context presented in the film to deepen your understanding of film theory, cinematic history, and how cinema engages with broader historical and philosophical themes.

PART XI

# CHAPTER 11: TELEVISION THROUGH TIME

> "I find television very educating. Every time somebody turns on the set, I go into the other room and read a book." — Groucho Marx

When you talk to a parent, grandparent, or great-grandparent about life at home before television, they will probably tell you that they listened to the radio and read books, magazines, and newspapers. They may also mention spending time together telling old stories and listening to music on a record player.

It is no wonder that when television was first becoming America's medium of choice in the 1940s and '50s, plenty of thoughtful people questioned the influence it could have on society. Television's least-common-denominator sensibility concerned many, and some thought the entire entertainment industry was trying to turn the country Communist. Concerns about propaganda abounded. The previous chapter briefly covered the powerful cultural impact films can have. Of concern during the Cold War was that television would take that same power into people's homes on a platform that was constantly updated and sometimes broadcast live. Just as with film, the battle for control over the influence of television has existed as long as it has been a mass medium. It is difficult to underestimate television's cultural impact.

Besides those who saw television as a threat spreading Communism throughout the West, there were others who were not so radically against television but who preferred to talk about the importance of reading instead. They saw television not as a tool of the intellectual, global left but as anti-intellectual. You will still encounter people who voice with pride — and often an air of superiority — that they do not own a television. They imply that everyone else may be rotting their brains, but not their family. Condescension about the television and its content dates back to the dawn of the medium. Groucho Marx, depicted above, was an early film and TV star, and even he joked about the lack of quality programming. Of course, television isn't all bad. At every stage of the medium's development, there have been thoughtful, intelligent shows, and there has been dreck — that is, waste or trash that serves to fill time but not to inform meaningfully.

This chapter discusses the nature of television content as the medium evolved throughout the second half of the 20th century. It then briefly discusses the role of the television industry in society by examining the ways we watch TV and its possible impacts on our health. Finally, this chapter covers the medium's influence on popular culture and explores how the 2000s and 2010s may have brought about the golden age of television

while simultaneously opening up pathways for audience collaboration and shared cultural influence in what is perhaps the most culturally influential medium in human history.[1]

**Fitchburg State Connection**

Fitchburg State offers a course titled History of TV (COMM 2420):

The course provides a comprehensive analysis of television broadcasting from its inception to the present. The social and technological aspects of the medium are presented and examined in a lecture and seminar format. Particular emphasis is placed on television's sociological influence and impact on the communication process.[2]

1. If this topic is of particular interest to you, you may consider checking out: https://eyesofageneration.com/, which contains a massive archive of materials related to broadcast history.

2. https://catalog.fitchburgstate.edu/preview_course_nopop.php?catoid=46&coid=90572&print

# 11.1 THE EVOLUTION OF TELEVISION

**Learning Objectives**

- Identify two technological developments that paved the way for the evolution of television.
- Explain why electronic television prevailed over mechanical television.
- Identify three important developments in the history of television since 1960.

Since replacing radio as the most popular mass medium in the 1950s, television has played such an integral role in modern life that, for some, it is difficult to imagine being without it. Both reflecting and shaping cultural values, television has at times been criticized for its alleged negative influences on children and young people and at other times lauded for its ability to create a common experience for all its viewers. Major world events such as the John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King assassinations and the Vietnam War in the 1960s, the Challenger shuttle explosion in 1986, the 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, and the impact and aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 have all played out on television, uniting millions of people in shared tragedy and hope. Today, as internet technology and satellite broadcasting change the way people watch television, the medium continues to evolve, solidifying its position as one of the most important inventions of the 20th century.

## The Origins of Television

Inventors conceived the idea of television long before the technology to create it appeared. Early pioneers speculated that if audio waves could be separated from the electromagnetic spectrum to create radio, so too could TV waves be separated to transmit visual images. As early as 1876, Boston civil servant George Carey

envisioned complete television systems, putting forward drawings for a "selenium camera" that would enable people to "see by electricity" a year later.[1]

During the late 1800s, several technological developments set the stage for television. The invention of the **cathode ray tube** (CRT) by German physicist Karl Ferdinand Braun in 1897 played a vital role as the forerunner of the TV picture tube. Initially created as a scanning device known as the cathode ray oscilloscope, the CRT effectively combined the principles of the camera and electricity. It had a fluorescent screen that emitted visible light (in the form of images) when struck by a beam of electrons. The other key invention during the 1880s was the mechanical scanner system. Created by German inventor Paul Nipkow, the **scanning disk** was a large, flat metal disk with a series of small perforations arranged in a spiral pattern. As the disk rotated, light passed through the holes, separating pictures into pinpoints of light that could be transmitted as a series of electronic lines. The number of scanned lines equaled the number of perforations, and each rotation of the disk produced a television frame. Nipkow's mechanical disk served as the foundation for experiments on the transmission of visual images for several decades.

In 1907, Russian scientist Boris Rosing used both the CRT and the mechanical scanner system in an experimental television system. With the CRT in the receiver, he used focused electron beams to display images, transmitting crude geometrical patterns onto the television screen. The mechanical disk system was used as a camera, creating a primitive television system.

## Mechanical Television versus Electronic Television

From the early experiments with visual transmissions, two types of television systems came into existence: mechanical television and electronic television. **Mechanical television** developed out of Nipkow's disk system and was pioneered by British inventor John Logie Baird. In 1926, Baird gave the world's first public demonstration of a television system at Selfridge's department store in London. He used mechanical rotating disks to scan moving images into electrical impulses, which were transmitted by cable to a screen. Here they showed up as a low-resolution pattern of light and dark. Baird's first television program showed the heads of two ventriloquist dummies, which he operated in front of the camera apparatus out of the audience's sight. In 1928, Baird extended his system by transmitting a signal between London and New York. The following year, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) adopted his mechanical system, and by 1932, Baird had developed the first commercially viable television system and sold 10,000 sets. Despite its initial success, mechanical television had several technical limitations. Engineers could get no more than about 240 lines of resolution, meaning images would always be slightly fuzzy (most modern televisions produce images of more than 600

1. Federal Communications Commission, "Visionary Period, 1880's Through 1920's," Federal Communications Commission, November 21, 2005, https://web.archive.org/web/20100819193355/http://www.fcc.gov/omd/history/tv/1880-1929.html.

lines of resolution). The use of a spinning disk also limited the number of new pictures that could be seen per second, resulting in excessive flickering. The mechanical aspect of television proved to be a disadvantage that required fixing in order for the technology to move forward.

At the same time Baird (and, separately, American inventor Charles Jenkins) was developing the mechanical model, other inventors were working on an **electronic television** system based on the CRT. While working on his father's farm, Idaho teenager Philo Farnsworth realized that an electronic beam could scan a picture in horizontal lines, reproducing the image almost instantaneously. In 1927, Farnsworth transmitted the first all-electronic TV picture by rotating a single straight line scratched onto a square piece of painted glass by 90 degrees.

Farnsworth barely profited from his invention; during World War II, the government suspended sales of TV sets, and by the time the war ended, Farnsworth's original patents were close to expiring. However, following the war, many of his key patents were modified by RCA and were widely applied in broadcasting to improve television picture quality.

Having coexisted for several years, electronic television sets eventually began to replace mechanical systems. With better picture quality, no noise, a more compact size, and fewer visual limitations, the electronic system was far superior to its predecessor and rapidly improving. By 1939, the last mechanical television broadcasts in the United States had been replaced with electronic broadcasts.

## Early Broadcasting

Television broadcasting began as early as 1928, when the Federal Radio Commission authorized inventor Charles Jenkins to broadcast from W3XK, an experimental station in the Maryland suburbs of Washington, DC. Silhouette images from motion picture films were broadcast to the general public on a regular basis at a resolution of just 48 lines. Similar experimental stations ran broadcasts throughout the early 1930s. In 1939, RCA subsidiary NBC (National Broadcasting Company) became the first network to introduce regular television broadcasts, transmitting its inaugural telecast of the opening ceremonies at the New York World's Fair. The station's initial broadcasts were transmitted to just 400 television sets in the New York area, with an audience of 5,000 to 8,000 people.[2]

Television was initially available only to the privileged few, with sets ranging from $200 to $600—a hefty sum in the 1930s, when the average annual salary was $1,368.[3] RCA offered four types of television receivers, which were sold in high-end department stores such as Macy's and Bloomingdale's, and received channels 1

2. Lohr, Lenox. Television Broadcasting (New York: McGraw Hill, 1940).

3. KC Library, Lone Star College: Kinwood, "American Cultural History 1930–1939," https://web.archive.org/web/20140808151213/http://kclibrary.lonestar.edu/decade30.html.

through 5. Early receivers were a fraction of the size of modern TV sets, featuring 5-, 9-, or 12-inch screens. Television sales prior to World War II were disappointing—an uncertain economic climate, the threat of war, the high cost of a television receiver, and the limited number of programs on offer deterred numerous prospective buyers. Many unsold television sets were put into storage and sold after the war.

Figure 1: A photograph of a reel-to-reel machine used to broadcast early television programs. The reels are in the middle of the machine, with the controls at the bottom. The image from the tape can be seen in the top middle of the photo, featuring a news desk with three people. Image taken at Museum of Broadcast Technology, Woonsocket, RI.

NBC was not the only commercial network to emerge in the 1930s. RCA radio rival CBS (Columbia Broadcasting System) also began broadcasting regular programs. So that viewers would not need a separate television set for each individual network, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) outlined a single technical standard. In 1941, the panel recommended a 525-line system and an image rate of 30 frames per second. It also recommended that all U.S. television sets operate using **analog signals** (broadcast signals made

of varying radio waves). Analog signals were replaced by **digital signals** (signals transmitted as binary code) in 2009.

With the outbreak of World War II, many companies, including RCA and General Electric, turned their attention to military production. Instead of commercial television sets, they began to churn out military electronic equipment. In addition, the war halted nearly all television broadcasting; many TV stations reduced their schedules to around 4 hours per week or went off the air altogether. However, after the war, much of the technology that was developed and deployed for the war was then incorporated back into the television industry, driving further innovation. For example, in 1969, RCA released the TCR 100, which allowed film cartridges to be pre-loaded and then automatically cycled using a system powered by compressed air.

Figure 2: A photo of the , circa 1969, taken at the Museum of Broadcast Technology in Woonsocket, RI.

View the RCA TCR 100 in operation:

*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://rotel.pressbooks.pub/comm-media-studies/?p=317#oembed-1*

# Color Technology

Although it did not become available until the 1950s or popular until the 1960s, the technology for producing color television was proposed as early as 1904 and was demonstrated by John Logie Baird in 1928. As with his black-and-white television system, Baird adopted the mechanical method, using a Nipkow scanning disk with three spirals, one for each primary color (red, green, and blue). In 1940, CBS researchers, led by Hungarian television engineer Peter Goldmark, used Baird's 1928 designs to develop a concept of mechanical color television that could reproduce the color seen by a camera lens. WKY-TV in Oklahoma was the first television studio to purchase and use a color camera.[4]

Figure 3: Photo of the color camera used by WKY-TV, taken at the Museum of Broadcast Technology, Woonsocket, RI.

Following World War II, the National Television System Committee (NTSC) worked to develop an all-electronic color system that was compatible with black-and-white TV sets, gaining FCC approval in 1953. A year later, NBC made the first national color broadcast when it telecasted the Tournament of Roses Parade. Despite the television industry's support for the new technology, it would be another 10 years before color

4. Of A Generation...Television's Living History. "WKY-TV: First in Local Live Color." Accessed September 3, 2023. https://eyesofageneration.com/tv-history/wky-tv-first-in-local-live-color/.

television gained widespread popularity in the United States, and black-and-white TV sets outnumbered color TV sets until 1972.[5]

Figure 4: A photo of Philco televisions from the 1940s, taken at the Museum of Broadcast Technology in Woonsocket, RI.

The 1950s proved to be the golden age of television, during which the medium experienced massive growth in popularity. Mass-production advances made during World War II substantially lowered the cost of purchasing a set, making television accessible to the masses. In 1945, there were fewer than 10,000 TV sets in the United States. By 1950, this figure had soared to around 6 million, and by 1960 more than 60 million television sets had been sold.[6] Many of the early television program formats were based on network radio shows and did not take advantage of the potential offered by the new medium. For example, newscasters simply read the news as they would have during a radio broadcast, and the network relied on newsreel companies to provide footage of news events. However, during the early 1950s, television programming began to branch out from radio broadcasting, borrowing from theater to create acclaimed dramatic anthologies such as *Playhouse 90* (1956) and *The U.S. Steel Hour* (1953), and producing quality news film to accompany coverage of daily events.

5. Klooster, John. Icons of Invention: The Makers of the Modern World from Gutenberg to Gates (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2009), 442.

6. World Book Encyclopedia (2003), s.v. "Television."

Figure 5: A photo of a Hotpoint portable television, made in 1957, taken at the National Museum of American History.

Two new types of programs—the magazine format and the TV spectacular—played an important role in helping the networks gain control over the content of their broadcasts. Early television programs were developed and produced by a single sponsor, which gave the sponsor a large amount of control over the content of the show. By increasing program length from the standard 15-minute radio show to 30 minutes or longer, the networks substantially increased advertising costs for program sponsors, making it prohibitive for a single sponsor. Magazine programs such as the *Today* Show and *The Tonight Show*, which premiered in the early 1950s, featured multiple segments and ran for several hours. They were also screened on a daily, rather than weekly, basis, drastically increasing advertising costs. As a result, the networks began to sell spot advertisements that ran for 30 or 60 seconds. Similarly, the television spectacular (now known as the television special) featured lengthy music-variety shows that were sponsored by multiple advertisers.

In the mid-1950s, the networks brought back the radio quiz-show genre. Inexpensive and easy to produce, the trend caught on, and by the end of the 1957–1958 season, 22 quiz shows were being aired on network

television, including CBS's $64,000 Question. Shorter than some of the new types of programs, quiz shows enabled single corporate sponsors to have their names displayed on the set throughout the show. The popularity of the quiz-show genre plunged at the end of the decade, however, when it was discovered that most of the shows were rigged. Producers provided some contestants with the answers to the questions in order to pick and choose the most likable or controversial candidates. When a slew of contestants accused the show Dotto of being fixed in 1958, the networks rapidly dropped 20 quiz shows. A New York grand jury probe and a 1959 congressional investigation effectively ended prime-time quiz shows for 40 years, until ABC revived the genre with its launch of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* in 1999.[7]

## The Rise of Cable Television

Formerly known as Community Antenna Television, or CATV, **cable television** was originally developed in the 1940s in remote or mountainous areas, including Arkansas, Oregon, and Pennsylvania, to enhance poor reception of regular television signals. Cable antennas were erected on mountains or other high points, and homes connected to the towers would receive broadcast signals.

In the late 1950s, cable operators began to experiment with microwave to bring signals from distant cities. Taking advantage of their ability to receive long-distance broadcast signals, operators branched out from providing a local community service and began focusing on offering consumers more extensive programming choices. Rural parts of Pennsylvania, which had only three channels (one for each network), soon had more than double the original number of channels as operators began to import programs from independent stations in New York and Philadelphia. The wider variety of channels and clearer reception the service offered soon attracted viewers from urban areas. By 1962, nearly 800 cable systems were operational, serving 850,000 subscribers.

Cable's exponential growth was viewed as competition by local TV stations, and broadcasters campaigned for the FCC to step in. The FCC responded by placing restrictions on the ability of cable systems to import signals from distant stations, which froze the development of cable television in major markets until the early 1970s. When gradual deregulation began to loosen the restrictions, cable operator Service Electric launched the service that would change the face of the cable television industry—**pay TV**. The 1972 Home Box Office (HBO) venture, in which customers paid a subscription fee to access premium cable television shows and video-on-demand products, was the nation's first successful pay cable service. HBO's use of a satellite to distribute its programming made the network available throughout the United States. This gave it an advantage over the microwave-distributed services, and other cable providers quickly followed suit. Further

7. Boddy, William. "The Seven Dwarfs and the Money Grubbers," in Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism, ed. Patricia Mellencamp (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), 98–116.

deregulation provided by the 1984 Cable Act enabled the industry to expand even further, and by the end of the 1980s, nearly 53 million households subscribed to cable television. In the 1990s, cable operators upgraded their systems by building higher-capacity hybrid networks of fiber-optic and coaxial cable. These broadband networks provide a multichannel television service, along with telephone, high-speed Internet, and advanced digital video services, using a single wire.

Figure 6: A photo of the Jarrold "Starcom II" cable box, circa 1982, taken at the National Museum of American History. It allowed access to a much greater number of channels than was previously possible and led to new networks that targeted niche audiences.

## The Emergence of Digital Television

Following the FCC standards set out during the early 1940s, television sets received programs via analog signals made of radio waves. The analog signal reached TV sets through three different methods: over the airwaves, through a cable wire, or by satellite transmission. Although the system remained in place for more

than 60 years, it had several disadvantages. Analog systems were prone to static and distortion, resulting in a far poorer picture quality than films shown in movie theaters. As television sets grew increasingly larger, the limited resolution made scan lines painfully obvious, reducing the clarity of the image. Companies around the world, most notably in Japan, began to develop technology that provided newer, better-quality television formats, and the broadcasting industry began to lobby the FCC to create a committee to study the desirability and impact of switching to **digital television**. A more efficient and flexible form of broadcast technology, digital television uses signals that translate TV images and sounds into binary code, working in much the same way as a computer. This means they require much less frequency space and also provide a far higher quality picture. In 1987, the Advisory Committee on Advanced Television Services began meeting to test various TV systems, both analog and digital. The committee ultimately agreed to switch from analog to digital format in 2009, allowing a transition period in which broadcasters could send their signal on both an analog and a digital channel. Once the switch took place, many older analog TV sets were unusable without a cable or satellite service or a digital converter. To retain consumers' access to free over-the-air television, the federal government offered $40 gift cards to people who needed to buy a digital converter, expecting to recoup its costs by auctioning off the old analog broadcast spectrum to wireless companies.[8] These companies were eager to gain access to the analog spectrum for mobile broadband projects because this frequency band allows signals to travel greater distances and penetrate buildings more easily.

## The Era of High-Definition Television

Around the same time the U.S. government was reviewing the options for analog and digital television systems, companies in Japan were developing technology that worked in conjunction with digital signals to create crystal-clear pictures in a wide-screen format. **High-definition television**, or HDTV, attempts to create a heightened sense of realism by providing the viewer with an almost three-dimensional experience. It has a much higher resolution than standard television systems, using around five times as many pixels per frame. First available in 1998, HDTV products were initially extremely expensive, priced between $5,000 and $10,000 per set. However, as with most new technology, prices dropped considerably over the next few years, making HDTV affordable for mainstream shoppers.

As of 2010, nearly half of American viewers are watching television in high definition, the fastest adoption of TV technology since the introduction of the VCR in the 1980s.[9] The new technology is attracting viewers

8. Steinberg, Jacques. "Converters Signal a New Era for TVs," New York Times, June 7, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/07/technology/07digital.html.

9. Stelter, Brian. "Crystal-Clear, Maybe Mesmerizing," New York Times, May 23, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/24/business/media/24def.html.

to watch television for longer periods of time. According to the Nielsen Company, a company that measures TV viewership, households with HDTV watch 3 percent more **prime-time television**—programming screened between 7 and 11 p.m., when the largest audience is available—than their standard-definition counterparts.[10] The same report claims that the cinematic experience of HDTV is bringing families back together in the living room in front of the large wide-screen TV and out of the kitchen and bedroom, where individuals tend to watch television alone on smaller screens. However, these viewing patterns may change again soon as the Internet plays an increasingly larger role in how people view TV programs. The impact of new technologies on television is discussed in much greater detail later in this chapter.

## Key Takeaways

- Two key technological developments in the late 1800s played a vital role in the evolution of television: the cathode ray tube and the scanning disk. The cathode ray tube, invented by German physicist Karl Ferdinand Braun in 1897, was the forerunner of the TV picture tube. It had a fluorescent screen that emitted visible light (in the form of images) when struck by a beam of electrons. The scanning disk, invented by German inventor Paul Nipkow, was a large, flat metal disk that could be used as a rotating camera. It served as the foundation for experiments on the transmission of visual images for several decades.
- Out of the cathode ray tube and the scanning disk, two types of primitive television systems evolved: mechanical systems and electronic systems. Mechanical television systems had several technical disadvantages: Low resolution caused fuzzy images, and the use of a spinning disk limited the number of new pictures that could be seen per second, resulting in excessive flickering. By 1939, all mechanical television broadcasts in the United States had been replaced by electronic broadcasts.
- Early televisions were expensive, and the technology was slow to catch on because development was delayed during World War II. Color technology was delayed even further because early color systems were incompatible with black-and-white television sets. Following the war, television rapidly replaced radio as the new mass medium. During the "golden age" of television in the 1950s, television moved away from radio formats and developed new types of shows, including the magazine-style variety show and the television

10. *ibid*

spectacular.

- Since 1960, several key technological developments have taken place in the television industry. Color television gained popularity in the late 1960s and began to replace black-and-white television in the 1970s. Cable television, initially developed in the 1940s to cater to viewers in rural areas, switched its focus from local to national television, offering an extensive number of channels. In 2009, the traditional analog system, which had been in place for 60 years, was replaced with digital television, giving viewers a higher-quality picture and freeing up frequency space. As of 2010, nearly half of American viewers have high-definition television, which offers a crystal-clear picture in wide-screen to provide a cinematic experience at home.

**Exercises**

Please respond to the following writing prompts. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. Prior to World War II, television was in the early stages of development. In the years following the war, the technical development and growth in popularity of the medium were exponential. Identify two ways television evolved after World War II. How did these changes make postwar television superior to its predecessor?
2. Compare the television you use now with the television from your childhood. How have TV sets changed in your lifetime?
3. What do you consider the most important technological development in television since the 1960s? Why?

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# 11.2 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TELEVISION AND CULTURE

**Learning Objectives**

- Identify ways in which American culture is reflected on television.
- Identify ways in which television affects the development of American culture.

Since its inception as an integral part of American life in the 1950s, television has both reflected and nurtured cultural mores and values. From the escapist dramas of the 1960s, which consciously avoided controversial issues and glossed over life's harsher realities in favor of an idealized portrayal, to the copious reality TV shows in recent years, on which participants discuss even the most personal and taboo issues, television has held up a mirror to society. But the relationship between social attitudes and television is reciprocal; broadcasters have often demonstrated their power to influence viewers, either consciously through slanted political commentary, or subtly, by portraying controversial relationships (such as single parenthood, same-sex marriages, or interracial couplings) as socially acceptable. The symbiotic nature of television and culture is exemplified in every broadcast, from family sitcoms to serious news reports.

## Cultural Influences on Television

In the 1950s, most television entertainment programs ignored current events and political issues. Instead, the three major networks (ABC, NBC, and CBS) developed prime-time shows that would appeal to a general family audience. Chief among these types of shows was the **domestic comedy**—a generic family comedy that was identified by its character-based humor and usually set within the home. Seminal examples included popular 1950s shows such as *Leave It to Beaver*, *The Donna Reed Show*, and *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*. Presenting a standardized version of the White middle-class suburban family, domestic comedies portrayed the conservative values of an idealized American life. Studiously avoiding prevalent social issues such as racial discrimination and civil rights, the shows focused on mostly White middle-class families with

traditional nuclear roles (mother in the home, father in the office) and implied that most domestic problems could be solved within a 30-minute time slot, always ending with a strong moral lesson.

Although these shows depicted an idealized version of American family life, many families in the 1950s were traditional nuclear families. Following the widespread poverty, political uncertainty, and physical separation of the war years, many Americans wanted to settle down, have children, and enjoy the peace and security that family life appeared to offer. During the booming postwar era, a period of optimism and prosperity, the traditional nuclear family flourished. However, the families and lifestyles presented in domestic comedies did not encompass the overall American experience by any stretch of the imagination. As historian Stephanie Coontz points out, "the June Cleaver or Donna Stone homemaker role was not available to the more than 40 percent of black women with small children who worked outside the home."[1] Although nearly 60 percent of the U.S. population was labeled middle class by the mid-1950s, 25 percent of all families and more than 50 percent of two-parent Black families were poor. Migrant workers suffered horrific deprivations, and racial tensions were rife. None of this was reflected in the world of domestic comedies, where even the Hispanic gardener in Father Knows Best was named Frank Smith.[2]

Not all programs in the 1950s were afraid to tackle controversial social or political issues. In March 1954, journalist Edward R. Murrow broadcast an unflattering portrait of U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy on his show *See It Now*. McCarthy, a member of the Senate Investigation Committee, had launched inquiries regarding potential Communist infiltration in U.S. institutions. Murrow thought that McCarthy's aggressive tactics were a potential threat to civil liberties. His portrait cast the senator from Wisconsin in an unflattering light by pointing out contradictions in his speeches. This led to such an uproar that McCarthy was formally reprimanded by the U.S. Senate.[3]

Entertainment programs also tackled controversial issues. The long-running television western *Gunsmoke*, which aired on CBS from 1955 to 1975, flourished in a Cold War society, where U.S. Marshal Matt Dillon (James Arness) stood up to lawlessness in defense of civilization. The characters and community in *Gunsmoke* faced relevant social issues, including the treatment of minority groups, the meaning of family, the legitimacy of violence, and the strength of religious belief. During the 1960s, the show adapted to the desires of its viewing audience, becoming increasingly aware of and sympathetic to ethnic minorities, in tune with the national mood during the civil rights era. This adaptability helped the show to become the longest-running western in TV history.

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1. Coontz, Stephanie. "'Leave It to Beaver' and 'Ozzie and Harriet': American Families in the 1950s," in The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trip (New York: BasicBooks, 1992), 28.

2. *ibid*

3. Friedman, Michael J. "'See It Now': Murrow vs. McCarthy," in Edward R. Murrow: Journalism at Its Best, publication of U.S. Department of State, June 1, 2008, https://web.archive.org/web/20121020223023/http://www.america.gov/st/democracyhr-english/2008/June/20080601110244eaifas8.602542e-02.html.

## Violence and Escapism in the 1960s

During the 1960s, television news broadcasts brought the realities of real-world events into people's living rooms in vivid detail. *The CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite*, which debuted in 1962, quickly became the country's most popular newscast, and by the end of the decade, journalist Walter Cronkite was known as the most trusted man in America. Following John F. Kennedy's election to the presidency at the beginning of the decade, the 1960s took an ominous turn. Shocked viewers tuned into Cronkite's broadcast on November 22, 1963, to learn about the assassination of their president. During the next few days, viewers followed every aspect of the tragedy on television, from the tremor in Cronkite's voice as he removed his glasses and announced the news of Kennedy's death to the frantic scenes from Dallas police headquarters where the assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald, was gunned down by nightclub owner Jack Ruby, to the thousands of mourners lining up next to the president's flag-draped coffin.

Figure 1: Photo of John and Jacqueline Kennedy watching TV. Television began to play a major role in U.S. politics during the presidency of John. F. Kennedy.

Around the same time as Kennedy's assassination, horrific images from Vietnam were streaming into people's living rooms during the nation's first "televised war." With five camera crews on duty in the Saigon bureau, news crews captured vivid details of the war in progress. Although graphic images were rarely shown on network TV, several instances of violence reached the screen, including a CBS report in 1965 that showed Marines lighting the thatched roofs of the village of Cam Ne with Zippo lighters and an NBC news report in 1968 that aired a shot of South Vietnamese General Nguyen Ngoc Loan executing a captive on a Saigon street. Further images, of children being burned and scarred by napalm and prisoners being tortured, fueled the anti-war sentiments of many Americans. Unlike previous wars where media coverage was tightly controlled

and aimed at boosting morale, the Vietnam War emerged as America's first "television war," largely due to the proliferation of TV sets in American homes. During the 1950s and 1960s, television ownership soared from 9% to 93% of American households, transforming televisions into household essentials. At the same time, advancements in portable video and audio recording technologies enabled journalists to venture beyond static locations, capturing the war's realities with an unprecedented immediacy. These mobile cameras, lighter and easier to handle than ever before, allowed reporters to go deep into the jungles and villages of Vietnam, delivering stark, real-time images and stories straight into American living rooms. Journalists were allowed unprecedented access to the front lines, capturing raw and often harrowing footage that was beamed directly into living rooms. This shift was fueled in part by the journalistic competitive drive for the most compelling stories, but it also reflected a more permissive approach to media oversight compared to the highly censored reporting seen during World War II.[4]

Figure 2: Photo of an early portable tape recorder, the RCA TPR-10. This would be carried into the fields by reporters to capture footage.

View it in action here:

4. Kratz, Jessie. "Vietnam: The First Television War." *Pieces of History* (blog), January 25, 2018. https://prologue.blogs.archives.gov/2018/01/25/vietnam-the-first-television-war/.

*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://rotel.pressbooks.pub/comm-media-studies/?p=325#oembed-1*

In addition to the devastation caused by the president's death and the Vietnam War, Americans were also feeling the pressure of the Cold War—the clash between the United States and the Soviet Union in the years following World War II. This pressure was especially great during periods of tension throughout the 1950s and 1960s, such as during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, a confrontation that caused many people to fear nuclear war.

As a result of the intense stress faced by many Americans during the 1960s, broadcasters and viewers turned to escapist programs such a*s I Dream of Jeannie*, a fantasy show about a 2,000-year-old genie who marries an astronaut, and *Bewitched*, a supernatural-themed show about a witch who tries to live as a suburban housewife. Both shows typified the **situation comedy**, or sitcom, a comedy genre featuring a recurring cast of characters who resolve zany situations based on their everyday lives. Other popular sitcoms in the 1960s included *The Beverly Hillbillies*, a show about a poor backwoods family who move to Beverly Hills, California, after finding oil on their land, and *Gilligan's Island,* the ultimate escapist comedy about seven characters shipwrecked on an uncharted island. None of the 1960s sitcoms mentioned any of the political unease that was taking place in the outside world, providing audiences with a welcome diversion from real life. Other than an occasional documentary, TV programming in the 1960s consisted of a sharp dichotomy between prime-time escapist comedy and hard news.

Figure 3: A photo of an RCA Victor television playing Gilligan's Island, taken at the Museum of Broadcast Technology in Woonsocket, RI.

## Diversity and Politics in the 1970s

During the 1970s, broadcasters began to diversify families on their shows to reflect changing social attitudes toward formerly controversial issues such as single parenthood and divorce. Feminist groups including the National Organization for Women (NOW), the National Women's Political Caucus, and the Coalition of Labor Union Women pushed for equality on issues such as pay and encouraged women to enter the workforce.

In 1972, the U.S. Supreme Court sanctioned women's right to abortion, giving them control over their reproductive rights. Divorce rates skyrocketed during the 1970s, as states adopted no-fault divorce laws, and the change in family dynamics was reflected on television. Between 1972 and 1978, CBS aired the socially controversial sitcom *Maude*. Featuring a middle-aged feminist living with her fourth husband and divorced daughter, the show exploded the dominant values of the White middle-class domestic sitcom and its traditional gender roles. Throughout its 7-year run, *Maude* tackled social and political issues such as abortion, menopause, birth control, alcoholism, and depression. During its first four seasons, the show was in the top 10 in Nielsen ratings, illustrating the changing tastes of the viewing audience, who had come of age during the era of civil rights and Vietnam protests and developed a taste for socially conscious television. Other 1970s sitcoms took the same approach, including *Maude's* CBS predecessor, All in the Family, which covered issues ranging from racism and homophobia to rape and miscarriage, and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, which reflected changing attitudes toward women's rights by featuring television's first never-married independent career woman as the central character. Even wholesome family favorite *The Brady Bunch*, which ran from 1969 to 1974, featured a non-nuclear family, reflecting the rising rates of blended families in American society.

Figure 4: An image from the show Maude. The popularity of controversial shows like Maude reflected the changing cultural and social values of the 1970s.

In addition to changing family dynamics on sitcoms and other prime-time shows, variety and comedy sketch shows developed a political awareness in the 1970s that reflected audiences' growing appetite for social and political commentary. The **sketch comedy** show *Saturday Night Live* (SNL) premiered on NBC in 1975 and has remained on air ever since. Featuring a different celebrity guest host every week and relatively unknown comedy regulars, the show parodies contemporary popular culture and politics, lambasting presidential candidates and pop stars alike. Earlier NBC sketch comedy show *Laugh-In*, which ran from 1968 to 1973, also featured politically charged material though it lacked the satirical bite of later series such as *SNL*. By the end of the decade, television broadcasting reflected a far more politically conscious and socially aware viewing audience.

## The Influence of Cable Television in the 1980s

Until the mid-1980s, the top three networks (ABC, NBC, and CBS) dominated television broadcasting in the United States. However, as cable services gained popularity following the deregulation of the industry in 1984, viewers found themselves with a multitude of options. Services such as Cable News Network (CNN), Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (ESPN), and Music Television (MTV) profoundly altered the television landscape in the world of news, sports, and music. New markets opened up for these innovative program types, as well as for older genres such as the sitcom. During the 1980s, a revival of family sitcoms took place with two enormous hits: *The Cosby Show* and *Family Ties*. Both featured a new take on modern family life, with the mothers working outside of the home and the fathers pitching in with housework and parental duties. Despite their success on network television, sitcoms faced stiff competition from cable's variety of choices. Between 1983 and 1994, weekly broadcast audience shares (a measure of the number of televisions in use that are tuned to a particular show) for network television dropped from 69 to 52, while cable networks' shares rose from 9 to 26.[5]

With a growing number of households subscribing to cable TV, concern began to grow about the levels of violence to which children were becoming exposed. In addition to regularly broadcast network programs, cable offered viewers the chance to watch films and adult-themed shows during all hours, many of which had far more violent content than normal network programming. One study found that by the time an average child leaves elementary school, he or she has witnessed 8,000 murders and more than 100,000 other acts of violence on television.[6] Although no conclusive links have been drawn between witnessing violence on television and

5. Newcomb, Horace. ed., Encyclopedia of Television (New York: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2004), 389

6. Blakey, Rea. "Study Links TV Viewing Among Kids to Later Violence," CNN Health, March 28, 2002, https://web.archive.org/web/20100703045411/http://archives.cnn.com/2002/HEALTH/parenting/03/28/kids.tv.violence/index.html.

carrying out violence in real life, the loosening boundaries regarding sexual and violent content on television is a persistent cause for concern for many parents.

## Specialization in the 1990s and 2000s

Although TV viewership is growing, the vast number of cable channels and other newer content delivery platforms means that audiences are thinly stretched. In recent years, broadcasters have been narrowing the focus of their programming to meet the needs and interests of an increasingly fragmented audience. Entire cable channels devoted to cooking, music, news, African American interests (see below), weather, and courtroom drama enable viewers to choose exactly what type of show they want to watch, and many news channels are further specialized according to viewers' political opinions. This trend toward specialization reflects a more general shift within society as companies cater increasingly to smaller, more targeted consumer bases. Business magazine editor Chris Anderson explains, "We're leaving the watercooler era, when most of us listened, watched, and read from the same relatively small pool of mostly hit content. And we're entering the microculture era, when we are all into different things."[7] Just as cable broadcasters are catering to niche markets, Internet-based companies such as Amazon.com and Netflix are taking advantage of this concept by selling large numbers of books, DVDs, and music albums with narrow appeal.

### Black Entertainment Television (BET)

Launched in 1980, Black Entertainment Television (BET) was the first television network in the United States dedicated to the interests of African American viewers. The basic-cable franchise was created in Washington, DC, by media entrepreneur Robert Johnson, who initially invested $15,000 in the venture. Within a decade, he had turned the company into a multimillion-dollar enterprise, and in 1991 it became the first Black-controlled company on the New York Stock Exchange. The company was sold to Viacom in 2003 for $3 billion.

Pre-dating MTV by a year, BET initially focused on Black-oriented music videos but soon diversified into original urban-oriented programs and public affairs shows. Although BET compensated somewhat for the underrepresentation of Blacks on television (African Americans made up 8 percent of the prime-time characters on television in 1980 but made up 12 percent of the population), viewers complained about the portrayal of stereotypical images and inappropriate violent or sexual behavior in many of the rap videos shown by the network. In a 2004 interview with BET vice president of communications Michael Lewellen, former BET talk show host Bev Smith said, "We had videos on BET in those days that were graphic but didn't

7. Gunther, Marc. "The Extinction of Mass Culture, CNN Money, July 12, 2006, http://money.cnn.com/2006/07/11/news/economy/pluggedin_gunther.fortune/index.htm.

proliferate as they seem to be doing now. That's all you do seem to see are scantily dressed women who a lot of African American women are upset about in those videos (Fox News, 2004)."[8] Despite the criticisms, BET remained the No. 1 cable network among Blacks 18 to 34 in 2010 and retained an average audience of 524,000 total viewers during the first quarter of the year.[9]

## Television's Influence on Culture

The shallow nature of some of the most popular television content in the 20th century raises a broader question about mass-media content in a capitalist society. Can we expect a media system based on profit-making to focus on serious issues? Perhaps we should not expect the majority of television content to be informative or to treat social issues with nuance. After all, hard-working people attended movies in part because they craved instant gratification and movies were affordable. In the early days of television, the television set was expensive, but the content was free and delivered over the airwaves from broadcast towers to antennas. To make money in this media environment, producers considered popularity first. Advertisers supported the medium and cared above all else how many "eyeballs" they could reach.

Scholars will often suggest that a "balanced" television diet is best. In other words, we should not expect for-profit television producers to forego revenues to deliver mostly informational content. Rather, it is on us as consumers to seek out quality programming and limit our "guilty pleasures" when viewing TV. Ratings suggest most people are just fine watching shallow television, and many will binge-watch TV for days. As consumers, we will probably have more success holding ourselves to better consumption standards than we will have trying to hold producers to more positive social standards. In a crowded marketplace of broadcast, cable, satellite, and streaming television, quality content stands out.

Despite entering a microculture era with a variety of niche markets, television remains the most important unifying cultural presence in the United States. During times of national crises, television news broadcasts have galvanized the country by providing real-time coverage of major events. When terrorists crashed planes into the World Trade Center towers in 2001, 24-hour TV news crews provided stunned viewers around the world with continuous updates about the attack and its aftermath. Meanwhile, network blockbusters such as *Lost a*nd **24** have united viewers in shared anticipation, launching numerous blogs, fan sites, and speculative workplace discussions about characters' fate

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8. Fox News, The O'Reilly Factor, "Is Black Entertainment Television Taking a Disturbing Turn?" Fox News, May 26, 2004, https://web.archive.org/web/20150710082232/http://www.foxnews.com/story/2004/05/26/is-black-entertainment-television-taking-disturbing-turn.html.

9. Networks, B. E. T. "BET Networks Unveils New African American Consumer Market Research and New Programming at 2010 Upfront Presentation." PR Newswire, April 14, 2010. https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/bet-networks-unveils-new-african-american-consumer-market-research-and-new-programming-at-2010-upfront-presentation-90864449.html.

Televised coverage of the news has had several cultural effects since the 1950s. Providing viewers with footage of the most intense human experiences, televised news has been able to reach people in a way that radio and newspapers cannot. The images themselves have played an important role in influencing viewer opinion. During the coverage of the civil rights movement, for example, footage of a 1963 attack on civil rights protesters in Birmingham, Alabama, showed police blasting African American demonstrators—many of them children—with fire hoses. Coupled with images of angry White segregationist mobs squaring off against Black students, the news footage did much to sway public opinion in favor of liberal legislation such as the 1964 Voting Rights Act. Conversely, when volatile pictures of the race riots in Detroit and other cities in the late 1960s hit the airwaves, horrified viewers saw the need for a return to law and order. The footage helped create an anti-civil-rights backlash that encouraged many viewers to vote for conservative Republican Richard Nixon during the 1968 presidential election.

During the past few decades, mass-media news coverage has gone beyond swaying public opinion through mere imagery. Trusted centrist voices such as that of Walter Cronkite, who was known for his impartial reporting of some of the biggest news stories in the 1960s, have been replaced by highly politicized news coverage on cable channels such as conservative Fox News and liberal MSNBC. As broadcasters narrow their focus to cater to more specialized audiences, viewers choose to watch the networks that suit their political bias. Middle-of-the-road network CNN, which aims for nonpartisanship, frequently loses out in the ratings wars against Fox and MSNBC, both of which have fierce groups of supporters. As one reporter put it, "A small partisan base is enough for big ratings; the mildly interested middle might rather watch *Grey's Anatomy*."[10] Critics argue that partisan news networks cause viewers to have less understanding of opposing political opinions, making them more polarized.

## Social Controversy

The issue of whether television producers have a responsibility to promote particular social values continues to generate heated discussion. When the unmarried title character in the CBS series *Murphy Brown*—a comedy show about a divorced anchorwoman—got pregnant and chose to have the baby without any involvement from the father, then–Vice President Dan Quayle referenced the show as an example of degenerating family values. Linking the 1992 Los Angeles riots to a breakdown of family structure and social order, Quayle lambasted producers' poor judgment, saying, "It doesn't help matters when prime-time TV has Murphy Brown, a character who supposedly epitomizes today's intelligent, highly paid professional woman, mocking

10. Poniewozik, James. "CNN: Can a Mainstream News Outlet Survive?" Time, May 3, 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20130817080105/http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1983901,00.html.

the importance of fathers by bearing a child alone, and calling it just another 'lifestyle choice.'"[11] Quayle's outburst sparked lively debate between supporters and opponents of his viewpoint, with some praising his outspoken social commentary and others dismissing him as out of touch with America and its growing number of single mothers.

A similar controversy arose with the portrayal of openly gay characters on prime-time television shows. When the lead character on the ABC sitcom *Ellen* came out in 1997 (2 weeks after Ellen DeGeneres, the actress who played the role, announced that she was gay), she became the first leading gay character on both broadcast and cable networks. The show proved to be a test case for the nation's tolerance of openly gay characters on prime-time TV and became the subject of much debate. Embraced by liberal supporters and lambasted by conservative objectors (evangelical Baptist minister Jerry Falwell infamously dubbed her "Ellen DeGenerate"), both the actress and the show furthered the quest to make homosexuality acceptable to mainstream audiences. Although *Ellen* was canceled the following year (amid disagreements with producers about whether it should contain a parental advisory warning), DeGeneres successfully returned to television in 2003 with her own talk show. Subsequent shows with prominent gay characters were quick to follow in *Ellen's* footsteps. According to the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), 18 lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender characters accounted for 3 percent of scripted series regulars in the 2009–2010 broadcast television schedule, up from 1.3 percent in 2006.[12] Ellen herself went on to host a successful talk show.

## Creating Stars via Reality Television

Emerging out of the 1948 TV series *Candid Camera*, in which people were secretly filmed responding to elaborate practical jokes, **reality television** aimed to capture real, unscripted life on camera. The genre developed in several different directions, from home-video clip shows (*America's Funniest Home Videos*, *America's Funniest People*) to true-crime reenactment shows (*America's Most Wanted*, *Unsolved Mysteries*) to thematic shows based on professions of interest (*Project Runway*, *Police Women of Broward County*, *Top Chef*). Near the turn of the millennium, the genre began to lean toward more voyeuristic shows, such as MTV's *The Real World*, an unscripted "documentary" that followed the lives of seven strangers selected to live together in a large house or apartment in a major city. The show drew criticisms for glamorizing bad behavior and encouraging excessive drinking and casual sex, although its ratings soared with each successive controversy (a trend that critics claim encouraged producers to actively stage rating-grabbing scenarios). During the late 1990s

11. Time, "Dan Quayle vs. Murphy Brown," June 1, 1992, https://web.archive.org/web/20130825193119/http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,975627,00.html.

12. Mitchell, Wendy. "GLAAD Report: Gay Characters on Network TV Still on the Rise," Entertainment Weekly, September 30, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20091007124457/http://hollywoodinsider.ew.com/2009/09/30/glaad-report-gay-characters-on-rise/.

and 2000s, a wave of copycat reality TV shows emerged, including the voyeuristic series *Big Brother*, which filmed a group of strangers living together in an isolated house full of cameras in an attempt to win large amounts of cash, and *Survivor*, a game show in which participants competed against each other by performing endurance challenges on an uninhabited island.

Figure 5: Photo of the camcorder used to record the first winning entry on America's Funniest Home Videos, 1986. Taken at the National Museum of American History. Equipment like this helped accelerate the era of reality television.

*Survivor's* success as the most popular show on television in the summer of 2000 ensured the continued growth of the reality television genre, and producers turned their attention to reality dating shows such as *The Bachelor*, *Temptation Island*, and *Dating in the Dark*. Cheap to produce, with a seemingly never-ending supply of willing contestants and eager advertising sponsors, reality TV shows continue to bring in big ratings. As of 2010, singing talent competition *American Idol* is television's biggest revenue generator, pulling in $8.1 million in advertising sales every 30 minutes it is on the air (Bond, 2010).[13] The Writer's Guild of American went on strike in 2007-2008, to negotiate over how writers should be paid for "new media" content distributed online. Many have argued that this strike also helped cement the popularity and legacy of the reality TV genre, as networks scrambled to fill their timeslots: "As a result, some industry watchdogs connect the writers' strike with the boom of reality television, considering more than 100 unscripted shows —— from competition

13. Bond, Paul. "'Idol' Listed as TV's Biggest Revenue Generator," Hollywood Reporter, May 5, 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20100512165221/http://www.hollywoodreporter.com:80/hr/content_display/news/e3i8f1f42046a622bda2d602430b16d3ed9?.

shows to dating shows to life improvement series —— either debuted or returned during that 2007-2008 season."[14]

Reality TV has created the cultural phenomenon of the instant celebrity. Famous for simply being on the air, reality show contestants are extending their 15 minutes in the spotlight. Kate Gosselin, star of *Jon & Kate Plus 8*, a cable TV show about a couple who have eight children, has since appeared in numerous magazine articles, and in 2010 she starred on celebrity reality dance show *Dancing with the Stars*. *Survivor* contestant Elisabeth Hasselbeck became a co-host on TV talk show *The View*, and several *American Idol* contestants (including Kelly Clarkson and Carrie Underwood) have become household names. The genre has drawn criticism for creating a generation that expects to achieve instant wealth without having to try very hard and also for preying on vulnerable people whom critics call "disposable." When *Britain's Got Talent* star Susan Boyle suffered a public meltdown in 2009 after the stress of transitioning from obscurity to stardom in an extremely short time period, the media began to point out the dangers of reality television. In 2009, TheWrap.com investigated the current lives of former stars of reality shows such as *The Contender*, *Paradise Hotel*, *Wife Swap*, and *Extreme Makeover*, and found that at least 11 participants had committed suicide as an apparent result of their appearances on screen (Adams, 2009; Feldlinger).[15],[16]

### Key Takeaways

- Television has been reflecting changing cultural values since it first gained popularity after World War II. During the 1950s, most programs ignored current events and political issues in favor of family-friendly domestic comedies, which featured White suburban middle-class families. Extreme stress during the 1960s, caused by political events such as the Vietnam War and the Cuban Missile Crisis, led people to turn to escapist television offered by fantasy sitcoms. These provided a sharp dichotomy with the hard-news shows of the era. Social

14. Blickley, Leigh. "10 Years Later, Here's How The Writers Strike Indelibly Changed TV." HuffPost, February 12, 2018. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/10-years-ago-screenwriters-went-on-strike-and-changed-television-forever_n_5a7b3544e4b08dfc92ff2b32.

15. Adams, Guy. "Lessons From America on the Dangers of Reality Television," Independent (London), June 6, 2009, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/lessons-from-america-on-the-dangers-of-reality-television-1698165.html.

16. Frank Feldlinger, "TheWrap Investigates: 11 Players Have Committed Suicide," TheWrap, https://web.archive.org/web/20110216235554/http://www.thewrap.com:80/television/article/thewrap-investigates-11-players-have-committed-suicide-3409.

consciousness during the 1970s prompted television producers to reflect changing social attitudes regarding single parenthood, women's roles, and divorce, and sitcom families began to reflect the increasing number of non-nuclear families in society. The increasing popularity of cable TV in the 1980s led to an explosion of news and entertainment channels, some of which raised concerns about the levels of violence on television. During the 1990s and 2000s, TV networks became more specialized, catering to niche markets in order to meet the needs of an increasingly fragmented audience.

- Television reflects cultural values, and it also influences culture. One example of this is the polarization of cable TV news, which is no longer centrist but caters to individual political tastes. Critics argue that this influences cable news viewers' opinions and makes them less open to opposing political viewpoints. Entertainment programs also play an influential role in society. By portraying controversial relationships, such as single parents or gay couples, as acceptable, TV shows have the power to shape viewers' attitudes. In recent years, broadcasters have created the concept of the instant celebrity through the genre of reality television. Contestants on reality TV shows now permeate every aspect of culture and the media, from the music charts to popular magazines and newspapers.

## Exercises

Please respond to the following short-answer writing prompts. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. Choose a popular sitcom from the past 50 years you are familiar with. Using the ideas in this section as a starting point, identify three ways in which your chosen sitcom reflects or has reflected American culture.
2. Spend a few days reviewing news coverage on Fox News and MSNBC. How is coverage of similar news stories different? Do you think partisan news networks can affect public opinion? Why or why not?

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# 11.3 ISSUES AND TRENDS IN THE TELEVISION INDUSTRY

**Learning Objectives**

- Explain the influence of sponsors on program content.
- Describe the major trends among the broadcasting and cable networks.

When television was in its infancy, producers modeled the new medium on radio. Popular radio shows such as police drama *Dragnet* and western cowboy series *Gunsmoke* were adapted for television, and new TV shows were sponsored by single advertisers, just as radio shows had been. Television was dominated by three major networks—NBC, ABC, and CBS—and these networks accounted for more than 95 percent of all prime-time viewing until the late 1970s. Today, the television industry is far more complex. Programs are sponsored by multiple advertisers; programming is controlled by major media conglomerates; and the three major networks no longer dominate the airwaves but instead share their viewers with numerous cable channels. Several factors account for these trends within the industry, including technological developments, government regulations, and the creation of new networks.

## The Influence of Corporate Sponsorship

Early television programs were often developed, produced, and supported by a single sponsor, which sometimes reaped the benefits of having its name inserted into the program's title—*Colgate Comedy Hour*, *Camel Newsreel*, *Goodyear TV Playhouse*. However, as production costs soared during the 1950s (a single one-hour TV show cost a sponsor about $35,000 in 1952 compared with $90,000 at the end of the decade), sponsors became increasingly unable to bear the financial burden of promoting a show single-handedly. This suited the broadcast networks, which disliked the influence sponsors exerted over program content. Television executives, in particular NBC's Sylvester L. "Pat" Weaver, advocated the magazine concept, in which advertisers purchased one- or two-minute blocks rather than the entire program, just as magazines contained multiple

advertisements from different sponsors. The presence of multiple sponsors meant that no one advertiser controlled the entire program.

Figure 1: An image of the *Colgate Comedy Hour* title screen. Many sponsors believed that if viewers identified their favorite shows, such as the Colgate Comedy Hour, with a sponsor, they would be more likely to purchase the product being advertised.

Although advertising agencies relinquished control of production to the networks, they retained some influence over the content of the programs they sponsored. As one executive commented, "If my client sells peanut butter and the script calls for a guy to be poisoned eating a peanut butter sandwich, you can bet we're going to switch that poison to a martini."[1] Sponsors continue to influence program content indirectly by financially supporting shows they support and pulling funding from those they do not. For example, in 1995, pharmaceutical giant Procter & Gamble, the largest television advertiser, announced it would no longer sponsor salacious daytime talk shows. The company provided producers with details about its guidelines, pulling out of shows it deemed offensive and supporting shows that dealt with controversial subject matter responsibly. Communications heavyweight AT&T took a similar path, reviewing shows after they were taped

1. Newcomb, Encyclopedia of Television, 2170.

but before they aired in order to make decisions about corporate sponsorship on an individual basis.[2] In 2009, advertisers used their financial might to take a stand against Fox News host Glenn Beck, who offended viewers and sponsors alike with his incendiary comments that President Obama was a "racist" and had a "deep-seated hatred for white people." Sponsors of the Glenn Beck TV talk show began to remove advertising spots from the program in protest of Beck's comments. A spokeswoman for Progressive car insurance said, "We place advertising on a variety of programming with the goal of reaching a broad range of insurance consumers who might be interested in our products. We also seek to avoid advertising on programming that our customers or potential customers may find extremely offensive."[3] Other shows whose advertisers have pulled ads include NBC's long-running sketch comedy show *Saturday Night Live*, BET's *Hot Ghetto Mess*, and ABC's *Ellen* sitcom.

## Public Television and Corporate Sponsorship

Corporate sponsorship does not just affect network television. Even public television has become subject to the influence of advertising. Established in 1969, **Public Broadcasting Service** (PBS) developed out of a report by the Carnegie Commission on Educational Television, which examined the role of educational, noncommercial television on society. The report recommended that the government finance public television in order to provide diversity of programming during the network era—a service created "not to sell products" but to "enhance citizenship and public service."[4] Public television was also intended to provide universal access to television for viewers in rural areas or viewers who could not afford to pay for private television services. PBS focused on educational program content, targeting viewers who were less appealing to the commercial networks and advertisers, such as the over-50 age demographic and children under 12.

The original Carnegie Commission report recommended that Congress create a federal trust fund based on a manufacturer's excise tax on the sale of TV sets to finance public television. Following intense lobbying by the National Association of Broadcasters, the proposal was removed from the legislation that established the service. As a result, public television subsists on viewer contributions and federal funding and the latter has been drastically reduced in recent years. Although a 2007 proposal by President George W. Bush to eliminate more than half of the federal allocation to public broadcasting ($420 million out of $820 million) was overturned, PBS has become increasingly dependent on corporate sponsorship to stay afloat. By 2006,

2. Advertising Age, "Speak Up About Talk Shows," November 27, 1995, https://web.archive.org/web/20170713173757/http://adage.com/article/news/speak-talk-shows/84233/.

3. Spain, William. "Advertisers Deserting Fox News' Glenn Beck," MarketWatch, August 14, 2009, http://www.marketwatch.com/story/advertisers-deserting-fox-news-glenn-beck-2009-08-14.

4. McCauley, Michael P. Public Broadcasting and the Public Interest (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2003), 239.

corporate sponsors funded more than 25 percent of all public television. Sponsorship has saved many programs that would otherwise have been lost, but critics have bemoaned the creeping commercialism of public television. When PBS began selling banner advertisements on its website in 2006, Gary Ruskin, executive director of the consumer group Commercial Alert, commented, "It's just one more intrusion of the commercial ethos into an organization that was supposed to be firmly noncommercial. The line between them and the commercial networks is getting fuzzier and fuzzier."[5] Despite such criticisms, the drop in federal funding has forced public television executives to seek more creative ways of obtaining financial backing—for example, through online banner ads. In 2009, PBS shortened the length of time companies were required to sponsor some programs in an effort to encourage advertisers.[6] As of 2010, the future of PBS remained uncertain. With better-funded cable channels offering niche-interest shows that were traditionally public television's domain (BBC nature series *Planet Earth* was shown on the Discovery Channel, while historical dramas *John Adams* and *The Tudors* are shown on premium cable channels HBO and Showtime), PBS is left to rely on shows that have been around for decades, such as Nova and Nature, to attract audiences.[7] Only time will tell how PBS fares in the face of competition.

## The Rise and Fall of the Network

The period between 1950 and 1970 is historically recognized as the **network era**. Aside from a small portion of airtime controlled by public television, the three major networks (known as the Big Three) dominated the television industry, collectively accounting for more than 95 percent of prime-time viewing. In 1986, Rupert Murdoch, the head of multinational company News Corp, launched the Fox network, challenging the dominance of the Big Three. In its infancy, Fox was at best a minor irritation to the other networks. With fewer than 100 **affiliated stations** (the other networks all had more than 200 affiliates each), reaching just 80 percent of the nation's households (compared with the Big Three's 97 percent coverage rate), and broadcasting just one show (*The Late Show Starring Joan Rivers*), Fox was barely a consideration in the ratings war. During the early 1990s, these dynamics began to change. Targeting young viewers and Black audiences with shows such as *Beverly Hills 90210*, *Melrose Place*, *In Living Color*, and *The Simpsons*, Fox began to establish itself as an edgy, youth-oriented network. Luring affiliates away from other networks to increase its viewership, Fox

5. Gold, Matea. "Marketing Tie-ins Finding Their Way to PBS Sponsors," Baltimore Sun, October 23, 2006, https://web.archive.org/web/20200429015030/https://www.baltimoresun.com/bs-xpm-2006-10-23-0610230151-story.html.

6. Stelter, Brian. "PBS to Shorten Time Commitments for Sponsorships," New York Times, May 7, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/08/business/media/08adco.html.

7. McGrath, Charles. "Is PBS Still Necessary?" New York Times, February 17, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/17/arts/television/17mcgr.html.

also extended its programming schedule beyond the initial 2-night-a-week broadcasts. By the time the fledgling network acquired the rights to National Football League (NFL) games with its $1.58 billion NFL deal in 1994, entitling it to 4 years of NFL games, Fox was a worthy rival to the other three broadcast networks. Its success turned the Big Three into the Big Four. In the 1994–1995 television season, 43 percent of U.S. households were watching the Big Four at any given moment during prime time.[8]

Fox's success prompted the launch of several smaller networks in the mid-1990s. UPN (owned by Paramount, recently acquired by Viacom) and WB (owned by media giant Time Warner) both debuted in January 1995. Using strategies similar to Fox, the networks initially began broadcasting programs 2 nights a week, expanding to a 6-day schedule by 2000. Targeting young and minority audiences with shows such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*[9], *Moesha*, *Dawson's Creek*, and *The Wayans Bros*., the new networks hoped to draw stations away from their old network affiliations. However, rather than repeating the success of Fox, UPN and WB struggled to make an impact. Unable to attract many affiliate stations, the two fledgling networks reached fewer households than their larger rivals because they were unobtainable in some smaller cities. High start-up costs, relatively low audience ratings, and increasing production expenses spelled the end of the "**netlets**," a term coined by Variety magazine for minor-league networks that lacked a full week's worth of programming. After losing $1 billion each, parent companies CBS (having split from Viacom) and Time Warner agreed to merge UPN and WB, resulting in the creation of the CW network in 2006. Targeting the desirable 18–34 age group, the network retained the most popular shows from before the merger—*America's Next Top Model* and *Veronica Mars* from UPN and *Beauty and the Geek* and *Smallville* from WB—as well as launching new shows such as *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries*. Despite its cofounders' claims that the CW would be the "fifth great broadcast network," the collaboration got off to a shaky start. Frequently outperformed by Spanish-language television network Univision in 2008 and with declining ratings among its target audience, critics began to question the future of the CW network.[10] However, the relative success of shows such as *Gossip Girl* and *90210* in 2009 gave the network a foothold on its intended demographic, quashing rumors that co-owners CBS Corporation and Warner Bros. might disband the network. Warner Bros. Television Group President Bruce Rosenblum said, "I think the built-in assumption and the expectation is that the CW is here to stay."[11]

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8. Poniewozik, James. "Here's to the Death of Broadcast," Time, March 26, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20130826211619/http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1887840,00.html.

9. See, for instance, this publication by Fitchburg State faculty member, J.J. Sylvia IV, on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and postmodernism: http://www.jjsylvia.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Postmodernism-and-Buffy.pdf

10. Grego, Melissa. "How The CW Stays Undead," Broadcasting and Cable, February 1, 2010, http://www.broadcastingcable.com/article/446733-How_The_CW_Stays_Undead.php.

11. Collins, Scott. "With Ratings Comeback, has CW Finally Turned the Corner?" Los Angeles Times, April 7, 2009, https://www.latimes.com/archives/blogs/show-tracker/story/2009-04-07/with-ratings-comeback-has-cw-finally-turned-the-corner.

# Cable Challenges the Networks

A far greater challenge to network television than the emergence of smaller competitors was the increasing dominance of cable television. Between 1994 and 2009, the percentage of U.S. households watching the Big Four networks during prime time plummeted from 43 percent to 27 percent.[12] Two key factors influenced the rapid growth of cable television networks: industry **deregulation** and the use of satellites to distribute local TV stations around the country.

During the 1970s, the growth of cable television was restricted by FCC regulations, which protected broadcasters by establishing franchising standards and enforcing anti-siphoning rules that prevented cable from taking sports and movie programming away from the networks. However, during the late 1970s, a court ruled that the FCC had exceeded its authority, and the anti-siphoning rules were repealed. This decision paved the way for the development of cable movie channels, contributing to the exponential growth of cable in the 1980s and 1990s. Further deregulation of cable in the 1984 Cable Communications Policy Act removed restrictions on cable rates, enabling operators to charge what they wanted for cable services as long as there was effective competition to the service (a standard that over 90 percent of all cable markets could meet). Other deregulatory policies during the 1980s included the eradication of public-service requirements and the elimination of regulated amounts of advertising in children's programming, expanding the scope of cable channel stations. Deregulation was intended to encourage competition within the industry but instead enabled local cable companies to establish monopolies all over the country. In 1989, U.S. Senator Al Gore of Tennessee commented, "Precipitous rate hikes of 100 percent or more in one year have not been unusual since cable was given total freedom to charge whatever the market will bear.... Since cable was deregulated, we have also witnessed an extraordinary concentration of control and integration by cable operators and program services, manifesting itself in blatantly anticompetitive behavior toward those who would compete with existing cable operators for the right to distribute services."[13] The FCC reintroduced regulations for basic cable rates in 1992, by which time more than 56 million households (over 60 percent of the households with televisions) subscribed to a cable service.

The growth of cable TV was also assisted by a national satellite distribution system. Pioneered by Time Inc., which founded cable network company HBO, the corporation used satellite transmission in 1975 to beam the "Thrilla from Manila"—the historic heavyweight boxing match between Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier—into people's homes. Shortly afterward, entrepreneur Ted Turner, owner of independent Atlanta-

12. Poniewozik, James. "Here's to the Death of Broadcast," Time, March 26, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20130826211619/http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1887840,00.html.

13. Zaretsky, Adam M. "The Cable TV Industry and Regulation," Regional Economist, July 1995, http://research.stlouisfed.org/publications/regional/95/07/CableTV.pdf.

based station WTBS, uplinked his station's signal onto the same satellite as HBO, enabling cable operators to downlink the station on one of their channels. Initially provided free to subscribers to encourage interest, the station offered TV reruns, wrestling, and live sports from Atlanta. Having created the first "superstation," Turner expanded his realm by founding the 24-hour news network CNN in 1980. At the end of the year, 28 national programming services were available, and the cable revolution had begun. Over the next decade, the industry underwent a period of rapid growth and popularity, and by 1994 viewers could choose from 94 basic and 20 premium cable services.

## Narrowcasting

Because the proliferation of cable channels provided viewers with so many choices, broadcasters began to move away from mass-oriented programming in favor of more targeted shows. Whereas the broadcast networks sought to obtain the widest audience possible by avoiding programs that might only appeal to a small minority of viewers, cable channels sought out niche audiences within specific demographic groups—a process known as **narrowcasting**. In much the same way that specialist magazines target readers interested in a particular sport or hobby, cable channels emphasize one topic, or group of related topics, that appeal to specific viewers (often those who have been neglected by broadcast television). People interested in current affairs can tune into CNN, MSNBC, Fox News, or any number of other news channels, while those interested in sports can switch on ESPN or TSN (The Sports Network). Other channels focus on music, shopping, comedy, science fiction, or programs aimed at specific cultural or gender groups. Narrowcasting has proved beneficial for advertisers and marketers, who no longer need to time their communications based on the groups of people who are most likely to watch television at certain times of the day. Instead, they concentrate their approach on subscription channels that appeal directly to their target consumers.

## Impact on Networks

The popularity of cable television has forced the Big Four networks to rethink their approach to programming over the past three decades. Because of the narrowcasting mode of distribution and exhibition, cable TV has offered more explicit sexual and violent content than broadcast television does. To compete for cable channels' viewing audience, broadcast networks have loosened restrictions on graphic material and now frequently feature partial nudity, violence, and coarse language. This has increased viewership of mildly controversial shows such as *CSI*, *NCIS*, *Grey's Anatomy*, and *Private Practice* while opening the networks to attacks from conservative advocacy groups that object to extreme content.

The broadcast networks are increasingly adapting narrowcasting as a programming strategy. Newer networks, such as the CW, deliberately target the 18–34 age group (women in particular). Since its inception, the CW has replaced urban comedies such as *Everybody Hates Chris* with female-oriented series such as *Gossip*

*Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries*. Older networks group similar programs that appeal to specific groups in adjacent time slots to retain viewers for as long as possible. For example, ABC sitcoms *Modern Family* and *Cougar Town* run back to back, while Fox follows reality police series *Cops* with crime-fighting show *America's Most Wanted*.

Despite responding to challenges from cable, the broadcast networks' share of the total audience has declined each year. Between 2000 and 2009, the networks saw their numbers drop by around 8 million viewers.[14]

## Key Takeaways

- During the 1950s, the cost of producing a single television show increased as shows became longer and production costs soared. Sponsorship on network television shifted from single sponsorship, in which a program was entirely supported and produced by one advertiser, to multiple sponsorship, in which advertisers bought 1- or 2-minute spots on the show. Although no one advertiser controlled the content of the show, sponsors had some say in the program's subject matter. Sponsors have retained some control over program content by withdrawing funding from shows that are deemed to have offensive or inappropriate content.
- Public television was created to enhance citizenship and also to provide a television service for people in rural areas or those who could not afford to pay for a private television service. Despite its origins as a noncommercial entity, public television has increasingly had to turn to commercial sponsorship to stay afloat. Government funding for public television has declined over the years, and competition from niche cable channels has rendered its future uncertain.
- Between 1950 and 1970, the Big Three networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC) accounted for around 95 percent of prime-time viewing. The addition of Fox in 1986 created the Big Four; however, attempts to create an additional major network have been unsuccessful. CBS-owned UPN and Time Warner-owned WB merged in 2006 to create the CW. Targeted at women aged 18–34, the CW consistently ranks a low fifth in the ratings.
- The primary challenge to network television has been the rapid growth of cable, which grew

14. Bianco, Robert. "The Decade in Television: Cable, the Internet Become Players," USA Today, December 29, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20110209084006/http://www.usatoday.com/life/television/news/2009-12-28-decadeTV28_CV_N.htm.

exponentially in the 1980s and 1990s as a result of industry deregulation and the use of satellites to distribute local channels to a national audience (pioneered by HBO in the 1970s). Cable broadcasters use a process known as narrowcasting to target niche audiences for their shows. Channels usually focus on a single topic, such as news, weather, shopping, or comedy. Competition from cable has forced network television to loosen its restrictions regarding sex and violence on shows, and the networks have turned increasingly to narrowcasting in an effort to retain audiences. Despite its efforts, competition from cable and other sources has caused prime-time viewing audiences of the Big Four networks to drop from 43 percent in 1994 to 27 percent in 2009.

**Exercises**

Please respond to the following short-answer writing prompts. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. Choose one of the Big Four networks and print out its weekly programming schedule. Watch the network's prime-time programs over the course of a week, noting the target demographic for each show. Observe the advertising sponsors that support each show and compare how the products and services fit with the intended audience.
2. Does the network make use of narrowcasting to air shows with the same demographic in adjacent time slots?
3. How do the types of products and services advertised during each show change depending on the content and target audience?
4. Does the network cater to one target audience in particular?

## Media Attributions

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# 11.4 INFLUENCE OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES

**Learning Objectives**

- Describe the difference between satellite television and cable television.
- Identify two of the major satellite companies in today's market.
- Identify ways in which the Internet has affected content delivery and viewing patterns.

The experience of watching television is rapidly changing with the progression of technology. No longer restricted to a limited number of channels on network television or even to a TV schedule, viewers are now able to watch exactly what they want to watch when they want to watch it. Non-television delivery systems such as the Internet, which enables viewers to download traditional TV shows onto a computer, laptop, iPod, or smartphone, are changing the way people watch television. Meanwhile, cable and satellite providers are enabling viewers to purchase TV shows to watch at their convenience through the use of video-on-demand services, changing the concept of prime-time viewing. Digital video recording (DVR) systems such as TiVo, which enable users to record particular shows onto the system's computer memory, are having a similar effect.

Although TV audiences are becoming increasingly fragmented, they are also growing because of the convenience and availability of new technology. In 2009, Nielsen's Three Screen Report, which encompassed television, cell phone, and computer usage, reported that the average viewer watched more than 151 hours of television per month, up 3.6 percent from the previous year.[1] Viewers might not all be sitting together in the family room watching prime-time shows on network TV between 7 and 11 p.m., but they are watching.

1. Semuels, Alana. "Television Viewing at All-Time High," Los Angeles Times, February 24, 2009, http://articles.latimes.com/2009/feb/24/business/fi-tvwatching24.

# The War Between Satellite and Cable Television

The origins of **satellite television** can be traced to the space race of the 1950s when the United States and the Soviet Union were competing to put the first satellite into space. Soviet scientists accomplished the goal first with the launch of Sputnik in 1957, galvanizing Americans (who were fearful of falling behind in space technology during the Cold War era) into intensifying their efforts and resulting in the creation of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in 1958. AT&T launched *Telstar*, the first active communications satellite, on July 10, 1962, and the first transatlantic television signal—a black-and-white image of a U.S. flag waving in front of the Andover Earth Station in western Maine—transmitted that same day. However, the television industry did not utilize satellites for broadcasting purposes until the late 1970s when PBS introduced the Public Television Satellite Service. Satellite communication technology caught on and was used by broadcasters as a distribution method between 1978 and 1984 by pioneering cable channels such as HBO, TBS (Turner Broadcasting System), and CBN (Christian Broadcasting Network, later the Family Channel).

The trouble with early satellite television systems was that once people purchased a satellite system, they had free access to every basic and premium cable service that was broadcasting via satellite signals. The FCC had an "open skies" policy, under which users had as much right to receive signals as broadcasters had the right to transmit them. Initially, the satellite receiver systems were prohibitively expensive for most families, costing more than $10,000. However, as the price of a satellite dish dropped toward the $3,000 mark in the mid-1980s, consumers began to view satellite TV as a cheaper, higher-quality alternative to cable. Following the initial purchase of a dish system, the actual programming—consisting of more than 100 cable channels—was free. Cable broadcasters lobbied the government for legal assistance and, under the 1984 Cable Act, were allowed to encrypt their satellite feeds so that only people who purchased a decoder from a satellite provider could receive the channel.

Following the passing of the Cable Act, the satellite industry took a dramatic hit. Sales of the popular **direct-to-home** (DTH) systems (precursors to the smaller, more powerful direct broadcast satellite systems introduced in the 1990s) that had offered free cable programming slumped from 735,000 units in 1985 to 225,000 units a year later, and around 60 percent of satellite retailers went out of business. The satellite industry's sudden drop in popularity was exacerbated by large-scale anti dish advertising campaigns by cable operators, depicting satellite dishes as unsightly. Although sales picked up in the late 1980s with the introduction of integrated receiving and decoding units and the arrival of program packages, which saved consumers the time and effort of signing up for individual programming services, the growth of the satellite industry was stunted by piracy—the theft of satellite signals. Of the 1.9 million units manufactured between

1986 and 1990, fewer than 500,000 were receiving signals legally.[2] The problem was ultimately solved by the actions of the Satellite Broadcasting and Communications Association (SBCA), an association created in 1986 by the merger of two trade organizations—the Society of Private and Commercial Earth Stations (SPACE) and the Direct Broadcast Satellite Association (DBSA). SPACE was composed of manufacturers, distributors, and retailers of direct-to-home systems and DBSA represented companies interested in direct broadcast satellite systems. The SBCA set up an anti-piracy task force, aggressively pursuing illegal hackers with the FBI's help.

Once the piracy problem was under control, the satellite industry could move forward. In 1994, four major cable companies launched a first-generation **direct broadcast satellite** (DBS) system called PrimeStar. The system, a small-dish satellite-delivered program service specifically intended for home reception, was the first successful attempt to enter the market in the United States. Within a year, PrimeStar was beaming 67 channels into 70,000 homes for a monthly fee of $25 to $35 (in addition to a hardware installation fee of $100 to $200). By 1996, competing companies DirecTV and the EchoStar Dish Network had entered the industry, and Dish Network's cheaper prices were forcing its competitors to drop their fees. DirecTV acquired PrimeStar's assets in 1999 for around $1.82 billion, absorbing its rival's 2.3 million subscribers.[3]

## The Current Satellite Market: DirecTV versus Dish Network

As of 2010, the two biggest players in the satellite TV industry are DirecTV and Dish Network. Assisted by the passing of the Satellite Television Home Viewers Act in 1999, which enabled satellite providers to carry local TV stations (putting them on equal footing with cable television), both companies have grown rapidly over the past decade. In the first quarter of 2010, DirecTV boasted 18.6 million subscribers, placing it ahead of its rival, Dish Network, which reported a total of 14.3 million subscribers.[4] Dish courts customers who have been hit by the economic downturn, aggressively cutting its prices and emphasizing its low rates. Conversely, DirecTV targets affluent consumers, emphasizing quality and choice in its advertising campaigns and investing in advanced services and products such as multi-room viewing (enabling a subscriber to watch a show in one

2. Thibedeau, Harry W. "DTH Satellite TV: Timelines to the Future," Satellite Broadcasting & Communications Association, 2000, https://web.archive.org/web/20090214213010/http://satelliteretailers.com/dish_installation.html.

3. Junnarker, Sandeep. "DirecTV to Buy Rival PrimeStar's Assets," CNET, January 22, 1999, https://web.archive.org/web/20150428161944/http://news.cnet.com/DirecTV-to-buy-rival-Primestars-assets/2100-1033_3-220509.html.

4. Paul, Franklin. "Dish Network Subscriber Gain, Profit Beat Street," Reuters, May 10, 2010, http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE6492MW20100510.

room, pause it, and continue watching the same show in another room) to differentiate itself from rival satellite and cable companies.

Since the 1999 legislation put satellite television in direct competition with cable, the major satellite companies have increasingly pitted themselves against cable broadcasters, offering consumers numerous incentives to switch providers. One of these incentives is the addition of premium networks for satellite subscribers in the same vein as premium cable channel HBO. In 2005, DirecTV expanded its 101 Network channel to include original shows, becoming the first satellite station to air the first episodes of a broadcast television series with NBC daytime soap opera *Passions* in 2007. The station aired first-run episodes of football drama series *Friday Night Lights* in 2008 and set its sights on the male over-35 demographic by obtaining syndication rights to popular HBO series *Oz* and *Deadwood* a year later. Commenting on the satellite company's programming plans, executive vice president for entertainment for DirecTV Eric Shanks said, "We'd like to become a pre-cable window for these premium channels."[5] In other words, the company hopes to purchase HBO shows such as *Sex and the City* before HBO sells the series to basic cable channels like TBS.

In another overt bid to lure cable customers over to satellite television, both DirecTV and Dish Network offer a number of comprehensive movies and sports packages, benefiting from their additional channel capacity (satellite TV providers typically offer around 350 channels, compared with 180 channels on cable) and their ability to receive international channels often unavailable on cable. In the mid-2000s, the satellite companies also began encroaching on cable TV's domination of bundled packages by offering all-in-one phone, Internet, and television services. Despite being ideally suited to offering such packages with their single telecommunications pipe into the house, cable companies such as Comcast, Cox, and Time Warner had developed a reputation for offering poor service at extortionate prices. In the first three quarters of 2004, the eight largest cable providers (with the exception of bankrupt Adelphia) lost 552,000 basic cable subscribers. Between 2000 and 2004, cable's share of the TV market fell from 66 percent to 62 percent, while the number of U.S. households with satellite TV increased from 12 percent to 19 percent.[6] Despite reports that cash-strapped consumers are switching off pay-TV services to save money during strained economic times, satellite industry revenues have risen steadily over the past decade.

5. Carter, Bill. "DirecTV Raises Its Sights for a Channel," New York Times, January 23, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/24/business/media/24direct.html.

6. Belson, Ken. "Cable's Rivals Lure Customers With Packages," New York Times, November 22, 2004, https://web.archive.org/web/20220120123007/https://www.nytimes.com/2004/11/22/technology/cables-rivals-lure-customers-with-packages.html.

# The Impact of DVRs and the Internet: Changing Content Delivery

Over the past two decades, the viewing public has become increasingly fragmented as a result of growing competition between cable and satellite channels and traditional network television stations. Now, TV audiences are being presented with even more options. Digital video recorders (DVRs) like TiVo allow viewers to select and record shows they can watch at a later time. For example, viewers can set their DVRs to record all new (or old) episodes of the show *Deadliest Catch* and then watch the recorded episodes whenever they have free time.

DVRs can be used by advertisers to track which shows are being viewed. DVRs are even capable of targeting viewers with specific ads when they decide to watch their recorded program. In 2008, consumer groups battled with cable companies and lawmakers to protect the privacy of viewers who did not wish to be tracked this way, causing Nielsen to make tracking optional.

Non-television delivery systems such as the Internet allow viewers to download their favorite shows at any time on several different media. The Internet has typically been bad news for traditional forms of media; newspapers, magazines, the music industry, video rental companies, and bookstores have all suffered from the introduction of the Internet. However, unlike other media, television has so far survived the Internet's effects. Television remains the dominant source of entertainment for most Americans, who are using new media in conjunction with traditional TV viewing, watching vast quantities of television in addition to streaming numerous YouTube videos and catching up on missed episodes via the networks' web pages. In the third quarter of 2008, the average American watched 142 hours of television per month, an increase of 5 hours per month from the same quarter the previous year. Internet use averaged 27 hours per month, an increase of an hour and a half between 2007 and 2008.[7]

# New Viewing Outlets: YouTube and Hulu

Of the many recent Internet phenomena, few have made as big an impact as video-sharing website **YouTube**. Created by three PayPal engineers in 2005, the site enables users to upload personal videos, television clips, music videos, and snippets of movies that can be watched by other users worldwide. Although it initially drew unfavorable comparisons with the original music-sharing site Napster (see Chapter 12 "Music"), which was buried under an avalanche of copyright infringement lawsuits, YouTube managed to survive the controversy

7. Stross, Randall. "Why Television Still Shines in a World of Screens," New York Times, February 7, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/08/business/media/08digi.html.

by forming agreements with media corporations, such as NBC Universal Television, to legally broadcast video clips from shows such as *The Office*. In 2006, the company, which showed more than 100 million video clips per day, was purchased by Google for $1.65 billion.[8] Correctly predicting that the site was the "next step in the evolution of the Internet," Google CEO Eric Schmidt has watched YouTube's popularity explode since the takeover. As of 2010, YouTube shows more than 2 billion clips per day and allows people to upload 24 hours of video every single minute.[9] To secure its place as the go-to entertainment website, YouTube is expanding its boundaries by developing a movie rental service and showing live music concerts and sporting events in real-time. In January 2010, Google signed a deal with the Indian Premier League, making 60 league cricket matches available on YouTube's IPL channel and attracting 50 million viewers worldwide.[10]

While YouTube remains focused on user-generated material, viewers looking for commercial videos of movies and TV shows are increasingly turning to **Hulu**. Established in 2007 following a deal between NBC Universal, News Corporation, and a number of leading Internet companies (including Yahoo!, AOL, MSN, and MySpace), the site gives users access to an entire library of video clips without charge and syndicates its material to partner distribution sites. The videos include full episodes of current hit shows such as *House*, *Saturday Night Live*, and *The Simpsons*, as well as older hits from the studios' television libraries. Supported through advertising, the venture, which is only available to viewers in the United States, became the premier video broadcast site on the web within 2 years. In July 2009, the site received more than 38 million viewers and delivered more videos than any site except YouTube.[11] Throughout the entire year, Hulu generated an estimated $120 million in revenue and increased its advertiser base to 250 sponsors.[12] Its advertising model appeals to viewers, who need only watch two minutes of promotion in 22 minutes of programming, compared with 8 minutes on television. Limiting sponsorship to one advertiser per show has helped make recall rates twice as high as those for the same advertisements on television, benefiting the sponsors as well as the viewers.

Some critics and television executives claim that the Hulu model has been too successful for its own good, threatening the financial underpinnings of cable TV by reducing DVD sales and avoiding **carriage fees**—in 2009, Fox pulled most of the episodes of *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* from Hulu's site. Per the networks' request, Hulu also shut off access to its programming from Boxee, a fledgling service that enabled viewers to

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8. MSNBC, Associated Press, "Google Buys YouTube for $1.65 Billion," MSNBC, October 10, 2006, https://web.archive.org/web/20110512024309/http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/15196982/ns/business-us_business/.

9. YouTube, "YouTube Fact Sheet," https://web.archive.org/web/20101209162143/http://www.youtube.com/t/fact_sheet.

10. Timmons, Heather. "Google Sees a New Role for YouTube: An Outlet for Live Sports," New York Times, May 2, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/03/business/media/03cricket.html.

11. Salter, Chuck. "Can Hulu Save Traditional TV?" Fast Company, November 1, 2009, http://www.fastcompany.com/magazine/140/the-unlikely-mogul.html.

12. *ibid*

stream online video to their TV sets. "We have to find ways to advance the business rather than cannibalize it," stated the distribution chief at TNT, a network that refused to stream episodes of shows such as *The Closer* on Hulu's site.[13] However, many television executives realize that if they do not cannibalize their own material, others will. When a viral video of Saturday Night Live short "Lazy Sunday" hit the web in 2005, generating millions of hits on YouTube, NBC did not earn a dime. Broadcast networks—the Big Four and the CW—have also begun streaming shows for free in an effort to stop viewers from watching episodes on other websites.

## Video-on-Demand

Originally introduced in the early 1990s, the concept of **video on demand** (VOD)—a pay-per-view system that allows viewers to order or download a film via television or the Internet and watch it at their convenience—was not immediately successful because of the prohibitive cost of ordering a movie compared to buying or renting it from a store. Another early complaint about the service was that studios withheld movies until long after they were available on DVD, by which time most people who wanted to view the film had already seen it. Both of these disadvantages have since been remedied, with movies now released at the same time on VOD as they are on DVD at competitive rental prices. Currently, most cable and satellite TV providers offer some form of on-demand service, either VOD, which provides movies 24 hours a day and enables viewers all the functionality of a DVD player (such as the ability to pause, rewind, or fast forward films), or **near video on demand** (NVOD), which broadcasts multiple copies of a film or program over short time intervals but does not allow viewers to control the video.

As an alternative to cable or satellite VOD, viewers can also readily obtain movies and television shows over the Internet, via free services such as YouTube and Hulu or through paid subscriptions to sites that stream movies to a computer. Online DVD rental service Netflix started giving subscribers instant access to its catalog of older TV programs and films in 2007, while Internet giant Amazon.com set up a rival service resembling the pay-per-view model in 2008. Viewers can also stream free episodes of their favorite shows via cable and broadcast networks' websites. With the increasing popularity of smartphones—cell phones that contain built-in applications and Internet access—viewers are using VOD as a way of watching television while they are out of the house. Having discovered that consumers are willing to watch entire TV episodes or even films on their smartphones, industry executives are looking for ways to capitalize on smartphone technology. In 2010, News Corporation's Fox Mobile Group was planning to launch Bitbop, a service that will stream TV episodes to smartphones for $9.99 a month. Discussing the project, Bitbop architect Joe Bilman said that "the

13. Rose, Frank. "Hulu, a Victim of Its Own Success?" Wired, May 12, 2009, http://www.wired.com/epicenter/2009/05/hulu-victim-success/.

marriage of on-demand content and mobility has the power to light a fire in the smartphone space."[14] The shift from traditional television viewing to online viewing is making a small but noticeable dent in the $84 billion cable and satellite industry. Between the beginning of 2008 and the end of 2009, an estimated 800,000 U.S. households cut the cable cord in favor of web viewing (Schonfeld, 2010).[15]

## Interactive and Participatory Television

Moving a step beyond VOD, cable and satellite TV providers are combining aspects of traditional television viewing with online content to create an entirely new way of watching shows—**interactive television** (iTV). Using an additional set-top box and their remote control, viewers can utilize several different features that go beyond simply watching a television show. For example, interactive television enables users to take part in quiz shows, vote for a favorite contestant on a game show, view highlights or look up statistics during sports matches, create a music playlist or photo slideshow, and view local information such as weather and traffic through a ticker under a current TV program. Software such as Microsoft's UltimateTV, released in 2001, even brought interactivity to individual television shows. For example, a viewer watching CBS crime series *CSI* can click on the interactive icon in the corner of the screen and obtain instant information about forensic analysis techniques, along with an episode guide, character biographies, and a map of the show's Las Vegas setting.

Interactive television is beginning to take on the social format of the web, linking viewers with online communities who use communication tools such as Twitter and Skype IM to discuss what they just saw on television in real-time. When popular musical comedy show *Glee* hit the screens in 2009, marketing experts at Fox pushed for a strong online presence, airing the pilot episode well in advance of the actual season debut and generating buzz on social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook. Once the show gained widespread popularity, Fox launched an interactive hypertrailer on its website, allowing viewers to click on and "like" the show's cast members on Facebook. The *Glee* cast also participates in weekly "tweet-peats," which feature live Twitter feeds that scroll across the bottom of the screen during reruns of the show, providing behind-the-scenes details and answering fan questions. The CW network uses a similar technique with its "TV to Talk About" campaign, a tagline that changes from ad to ad to include iterations such as "TV to text about," "blog about," or "tweet about." Its website offers forums where viewers can discuss episodes and interact with video extras,

14. Stelter, Brian. "Audiences, and Hollywood, Flock to Smartphones," New York Times, May 2, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/03/business/media/03mobile.html.

15. Schonfeld, Erick. "Estimate: 800,000 U.S. Households Abandoned Their TVs for the Web," TechCrunch, April 13, 2010, http://techcrunch.com/2010/04/13/800000-households-abandoned-tvs-web/.

photos, and background clips about various shows. Online television forum Television Without Pity provides viewers with an alternative place for discussion that is not affiliated with any one network.

Despite the shift toward interactive television, one barrier that manufacturers seem to be unwilling to cross is the addition of the Internet to people's TV sets. Although Internet-enabled televisions began trickling into the market in 2008 and 2009, many industry executives remained skeptical of their potential. In February 2009, Sony spokesman Greg Belloni said, "Sony's stance is that consumers don't want an Internet-like experience with their TVs, and we're really not focused on bringing anything other than Internet video or widgets to our sets right now."[16]

We now use all manner of devices to connect to television content. Over-the-air television is gaining popular support as people cut the cable cord. Streaming services are beginning to dominate the landscape. Smartphones and tablets offer ways of consuming streaming television as well as amateur video programs. They also drive the opportunity for a s**econd screen experience**, which refers to watching something on television and interacting with the show or with fans of the show on social media and other Web platforms. The convergence of media platforms opens up new ways of engaging with video content and the people who produce it.

This has led to a shift toward **participatory** or collaborative television — the phenomenon in which content producers work with the audience to produce, alter, or enhance content, including to decide the outcomes of televised competitions — is not yet known. It is expected, however, that the practice will continue to grow. Audiences often enjoy having a say in the direction or the outcome of a program. Digital platforms measure audience engagement as something they can market to advertisers, which encourages the practice. This also puts some responsibility on the part of consumers to positively influence the content they help shape.

As television and broadband internet services merge, it is worth noting that the prediction of the union of television and computers is as old as the personal computer. Internet-ready televisions might have become more popular than add-on streaming devices such as Amazon Fire, Apple TV, Roku, or Google Chromecast, but television manufacturers hesitated to add full internet functionality for fear of viruses. Also, consumer demand for connected TVs was not strong enough for manufacturers to offer built-in technology. For the consumer, it matters little whether the television connects directly to the internet or whether a relatively inexpensive add-on is needed. In whatever manner you connect to converged digital video content — that is, the media products formerly known as television — you have access to perhaps the most influential cultural tool in history.

16. Richtel, Matt. "What Convergence? TV's Hesitant March to the Net," New York Times, February 15, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/16/technology/internet/16chip.html.

## Shifting Habits: Appointment Viewing Versus Binge-watching

**Appointment viewing** refers to the phenomenon of people watching television shows at the same time each week or each day. When most people watched television broadcast over the air or on cable, they generally had two options. They could watch the show live as it aired, or, once the VCR was invented, they could record programs to watch later. A major concern during the mid-20th century, when appointment viewing was most popular, was that people might not watch serial narratives on television because they would have to wait a week between episodes. If they missed an episode or two, they could feel lost and stop watching the show.

Thus, appointment viewing and **episodic** TV went hand in hand for a majority of shows during the 20th century. Episodic television shows usually featured a different story with each episode. Soap operas, however, were **serialized**. They told an ongoing story with several threads, and each episode picked up where the last one left off, but they aired almost every weekday, and the stories were not known for being complicated.

The logic against making serial television dominated the 1980s and 1990s, but in the 2000s dramatic shows such as *The Sopranos*, *The Wire*, *Breaking Bad*, *MadMen*, *Deadwood*, *Dexter*, *Boardwalk Empire*, *Six Feet Under*, *Lost*, *24*, *Homeland*, *Game of Thrones*, *Westworld*, *Stranger Things*, and *The Handmaid's Tale* became increasingly popular. DVRs and streaming services contributed to the popularity of these dramas and to the habit of **binge-watching** — consuming several hours of video content in a single viewing or in a very limited time frame.

The upside is that many shows now present intricate plots with long-building character arcs. Many former filmmakers, screenwriters and actors now prefer to do television rather than film because television allows for more intricate storytelling. Not everything in popular television needs to have the potential to reach a global audience interested in action, superheroes and sexy, simplistic love stories. While it is true that many independent films pursue visual storytelling as an art form, such releases are limited. In many ways, television (including shows broadcast on streaming services) now leads the way in attempting to make cultural and social impacts. Of course, instant gratification television still exists. So-called "reality television" is still popular, as are game shows and myriad live sporting events, but it can still be argued that the highest form of the visual storytelling art may now be seen on the small screen.

## The Impact of TV on Health

Television's impact on society is debated by scholars. Long-term studies have associated higher rates of

television viewing with lower rates of high school completion.[17] Watching television has been shown to make attention spans shorter.[18] Media studies scholars do not agree on whether television "cultivates" a sense that the world is a violent, scary place, even when crime rates are low.[19] Findings for that hypothesis seem to depend on how each study is carried out and how data analyses are structured. Alternatively, educational television can have a positive impact as an intervention for children in poverty.[20] Too much television has the potential to affect us negatively. Doctors often recommend limiting screen time, particularly for children. The way we consume television has changed a great deal since the medium was introduced.

Streamable television content may be as socially relevant as ever, but it encourages binge-watching, which can contribute to health problems. The content itself might not harm your health, but binge-watching and general overconsumption lead to unhealthy sedentary lifestyles. Researchers have found links between increased television viewing and obesity, smoking rates, and generally low fitness levels. Netflix, Amazon and Hulu are engaged in a fierce competition to create the most binge-worthy content, which means that binge-watching is not going away any time soon. Again, mitigation of the social impact of television will fall on the consumer's shoulders.

Socially, television is an incredibly powerful medium. Most media studies scholars agree that it has the potential to enable shared social understanding. Televised images of atrocities helped encourage the Civil Rights Movement and the end of the Vietnam War. Educational and informational programming is required of broadcasters, and many consumers find valuable shows amidst the information glut; however, the future of television might be darker than the present age of quality and variety.

As television content moves online and streaming services become more popular, there is a massive corporate push to give internet service providers (ISPs) the kind of control over content that cable television providers have had in the past. The end of net neutrality could make streaming services more expensive, and though it is not likely to happen rapidly, internet access could be divided into tiers of websites and web services with ISPs charging more for the most popular sites.[21] If the most binge-worthy, least intellectually valuable content

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17. Hancox, Robert J., Barry J. Milne, and Richie Poulton. "Association of Television Viewing During Childhood With Poor Educational Achievement." *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* 159, no. 7 (July 1, 2005): 614–18. https://doi.org/10.1001/archpedi.159.7.614.

18. Christakis, Dimitri A., Frederick J. Zimmerman, David L. DiGiuseppe, and Carolyn A. McCarty. "Early Television Exposure and Subsequent Attentional Problems in Children." *Pediatrics* 113, no. 4 (April 1, 2004): 708–13. https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.113.4.708.

19. Hirsch, Paul M. "The 'Scary World' of the Nonviewer and Other Anomalies: A Reanalysis of Gerbner et al.'s Findings on Cultivation Analysis Part I." *Communication Research* 7, no. 4 (October 1, 1980): 403–56. https://doi.org/10.1177/009365028000700401.

20. Baydar, Nazli, Çiğdem Kağitçibaşi, Aylin C. Küntay, and Fatoş Gökşen. "Effects of an Educational Television Program on Preschoolers: Variability in Benefits." *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* 29, no. 5 (September 2008): 349–60. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2008.06.005.

21. PBS NewsHour. "'Net Neutrality' Is Ending. Here's How Your Internet Use Could Change," June 11, 2018. https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/net-neutrality-is-ending-heres-how-your-internet-use-could-change.

becomes the affordable option for most people, the social impact of the new internet-television regime could be negative for generations to come.

### Key Takeaways

- The first satellite television signal was broadcast in 1962; however, the television industry did not begin utilizing satellites for broadcasting purposes until the late 1970s. Early problems with satellite TV included the high cost of a satellite dish and the theft of satellite signals following the passing of the Cable Act in 1984. Once piracy was under control, satellite television companies began to emerge and become profitable. The two biggest current satellite television providers are DirecTV, which targets its services toward affluent consumers, and Dish Network, which targets lower-earning consumers. Since the 1999 legislation enabled satellite companies to broadcast local channels, satellite TV has become a viable threat to cable. Satellite companies attempt to lure cable customers by offering premium channels, sports and movie packages, and competitive prices.
- Unlike some other forms of media, television is so far surviving the impact of the Internet. However, the World Wide Web is changing content delivery methods and the way people conceive television and program scheduling. New viewing outlets such as YouTube and Hulu enable viewers to watch online video clips, entire episodes of TV shows, and movies free of charge (although Hulu also offers paid content with a wider selection of programs to offset the losses in network advertising revenue). Video-on-demand services, now available through most cable and satellite providers, allow viewers to order movies or TV programs at their convenience, rather than having to adhere to a fixed programming schedule. VOD is also available through Internet sites such as Amazon.com and Netflix, allowing people to stream shows and video clips to their smartphones and watch television while on the go. Thanks to the influence of the Internet, television is becoming more interactive, with providers combining aspects of traditional viewing and online content. This is manifested in two ways: new features that provide viewers with hundreds of additional options while they watch their favorite shows (for example, the ability to look up a news story or get a weather update), and social television, which encourages viewers to combine TV viewing with social networking (for example, by blogging or joining an online chat forum about the show).

## Exercises

Please respond to the following short-answer writing prompts. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. What is the difference between satellite and cable television? In today's market, who is winning the battle for consumers?
2. Aside from DirecTV and Dish Network, what other satellite options do consumers have? How do these options differ from DirecTV and Dish Network?
3. How have the Internet and DVRs affected your television viewing habits?

PART XII

# CHAPTER 12: MUSIC RECORDING, SHARING, AND THE INFORMATION ECONOMY

The arrival of Edison's phonograph and Berliner's gramophone changed the way music was accessed and consumed, making it a middle-class necessity rather than a luxury. This technological revolution permitted mass manufacture of sound recordings, promoting the growth of the music industry and shifting the landscape away from sheet music and opera singers and toward a developing market for recorded sound. This change was accelerated by the establishment of Tin Pan Alley in New York, where composers and publishers worked together to create and market music that reflected changing consumer tastes.

The development and adoption of radio and LP records allowed for much wider distribution of music, which challenged the formats that had become entrenched. The dominance of jazz and blues gave way to rock and roll, with artists like Elvis Presley popularizing music that was written by Black musicians. More recently, globalization and the power of the internet has afforded the rise of international music trends such as K-pop. The shift away from physical media toward the digital has democratized access to music but also raises new ethical concerns about fair compensation for artists and data privacy for consumers.

# 12.1 THE EVOLUTION OF POPULAR CULTURE

**Learning Objectives**

- Assess the impact of three technologies that changed the face of the music industry.
- Determine the influences and characteristics of each genre of popular music.
- Describe the evolution of pop music throughout the last century.

The first stirrings of popular or pop music—any genre of music that appeals to a wide audience or subculture—began in the late 19th century, with discoveries by Thomas Edison and Emile Berliner. In 1877, Edison discovered that sound could be reproduced using a strip of tinfoil wrapped around a rotating metal cylinder. Edison's **phonograph** provided ideas and inspiration for Berliner's **gramophone**, which used flat discs to record sound. The flat discs were cheaper and easier to produce than were the cylinders they replaced, enabling the mass production of sound recordings. This would have a huge impact on the popular music industry, enabling members of the middle class to purchase technology that was previously available only to an elite few. Berliner founded the Berliner Gramophone Company to manufacture his discs, and he encouraged popular operatic singers such as Enrico Caruso and Dame Nellie Melba to record their music using his system. Opera singers were the stars of the 19th century, and their music generated most of the sheet music sales in the United States. Although the gramophone was an exciting new development, it would take 20 years for disc recordings to rival sheet music in commercial importance (Shepherd, 2003).[1]

1. Shepherd, John. Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World (New York: Continuum, 2003), 483.

Figure 1: A photo of the first phonograph on display at the Thomas Edison National Historic Park in West Orange, NJ. The label reads: "The First Phonograph, 1877. The first time anyone ever recorded sound and played it back was when Edison used this machine to record "Mary Had a Little Lamb." It recorded sound waves as indentations on a sheet of tinfoil."

You can listen to the earliest known recording of Thomas Edison's voice here:

*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://rotel.pressbooks.pub/comm-media-studies/?p=343#audio-343-1*

Additionally, you can list to the composer, Arthur Sullivan, describing his reaction to the invention of sound after being introduced to Edison's phonograph:

*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://rotel.pressbooks.pub/comm-media-studies/?p=343#audio-343-2*

> . . . For myself, I can only say that I am astonished and somewhat terrified at the results of this evening's experiment — astonished at the wonderful power you have developed and terrified at the thought that so much

hideous and bad music may be put on record forever. But all the same, I think it is the most wonderful thing that I have ever experienced, and I congratulate you with all my heart on this wonderful discovery.[2]

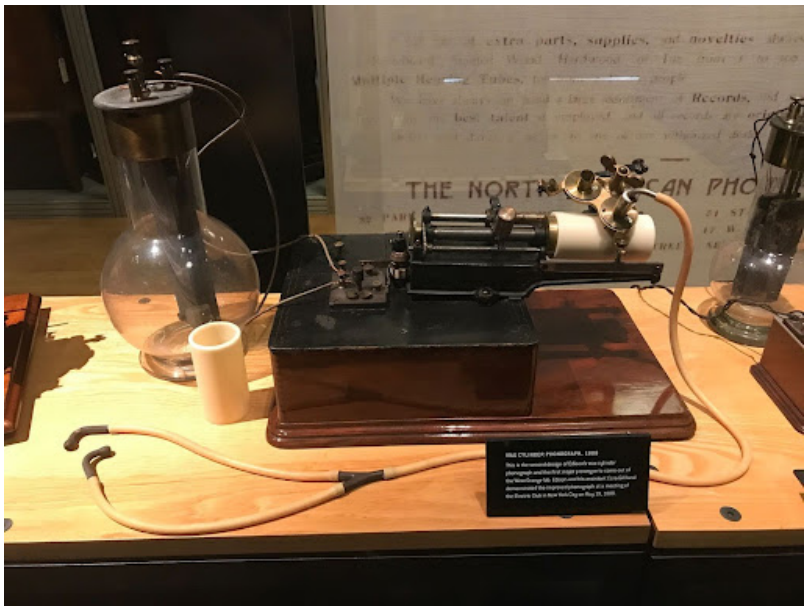

Figure 2: A photo of the second design of a phonograph on display at the Thomas Edison National Historic Park in West Orange, NJ. The label reads: "This is the second design of Edison's wax cylinder phonograph and the first major prototype to come out of the West Orange lab. Edison and his assistant Ezra Gilliland demonstrated the improved phonograph at a meeting of the Electric Club in New York City on May 19, 1888.

2. https://www.nps.gov/edis/learn/photosmultimedia/very-early-recorded-sound.htm

Figure 3: Photo of ca. 1890 Kämmer and Reinhardt hand-crank gramophone in the collection of the Science Museum

In the late 19th century, the lax copyright laws that existed in the United States at the beginning of the century were strengthened, providing an opportunity for composers, singers, and publishers to work together to earn money by producing as much music as possible. Numerous publishers began to emerge in an area of New York that became known as Tin Pan Alley. Allegedly named because the cacophony of many pianos being played in the publishers' demo rooms sounded like people pounding on tin pans, Tin Pan Alley soon became a prolific source of popular music, with its publishers mass-producing sheet music to satisfy the demands of a growing middle class. You can hear an example of a popular song created for Tin Pan Alley here, titled, "Which Switch is the Switch, Miss, for Ipswich?" from from "Rosy Rapture" (not the telephone reference!):

*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://rotel.pressbooks.pub/comm-media-studies/?p=343#audio-343-3*

Whereas classical artists were exalted for their individuality and expected to differ stylistically from other classical artists, popular artists were praised for conforming to the tastes of their intended audience. Popular genres expanded from opera to include vaudeville—a form of variety entertainment containing short acts featuring singers, dancers, magicians, and comedians that opened new doors for publishers to sell songs popularized by the live shows—and ragtime, a style of piano music characterized by a syncopated melody.

The Tin Pan Alley tradition of song publishing continued throughout the first half of the 20th century with the show tunes and soothing ballads of Irving Berlin, Cole Porter, and George Gershwin, and songwriting teams of the early 1950s, such as Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller. By hiring songwriters to compose music based on public demand and mainstream tastes, the Tin Pan Alley publishers introduced the concept of popular music as we know it.

## Other Commercial Uses

Aiming to surpass Thomas Edison's original phonograph, Alexander Graham Bell and his colleagues at the Volta Laboratory believed there was a sizable market for an improved sound recording device. They concentrated on developing a machine that could more accurately record spoken words for use in offices. In order to do this, they created the Graphophone, a device for playing wax cylinder records. At first, sound recording technology was mostly used as a commercial tool rather than for leisure. These "talking machines" were viewed by businesses as a way to expedite processes, particularly in managerial positions. Technology, however, also brought about new working conditions where male CEOs would record messages that female secretaries would later transcribe.[3] This invention was improved several times, and its updated iterations continued to sell well for many decades. These included the Edison Business Graphophone and the Ediphone Recorder.

3. **Figure 4** National Museum of American History. "Bell's Graphophone," November 28, 2018. https://web.archive.org/web/20220524123837/https://americanhistory.si.edu/americas-listening/bell's-graphophone.

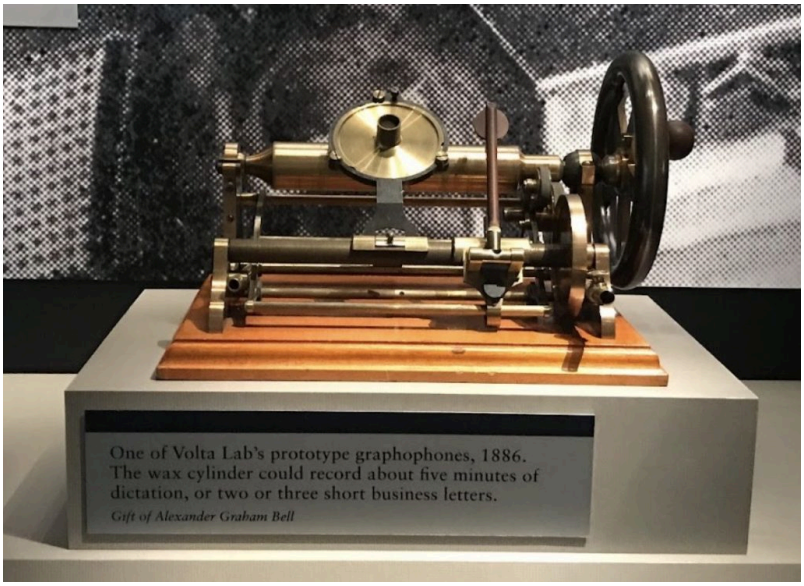


Figure 4: A photograph of an 1886 graphophone on display at the National Museum of American History. The label reads: "One of Volta Lab's prototype graphophones, 1886. The wax cylinder could record about five minutes of dictation, or two or three short business letters.

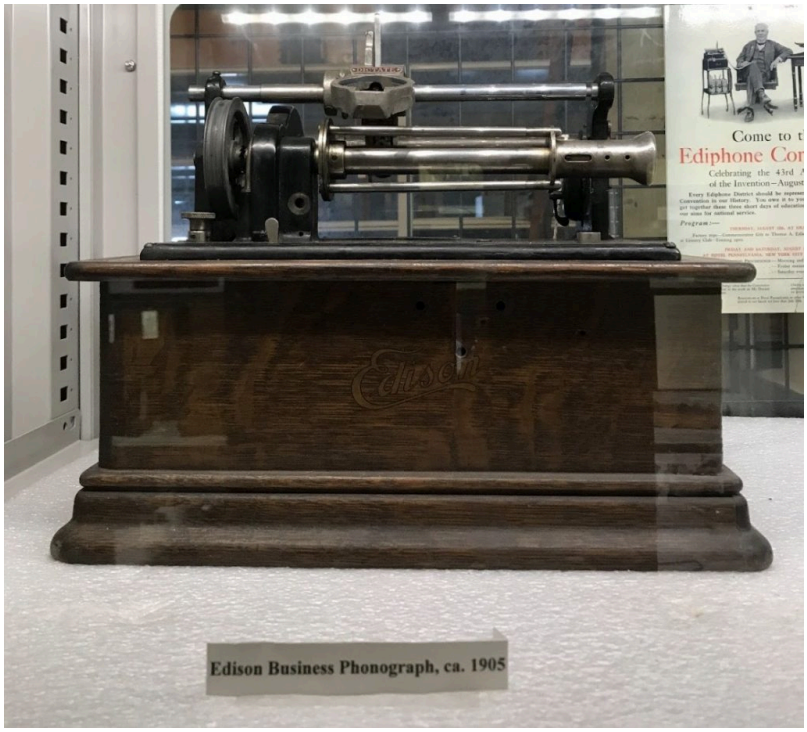


Figure 5: A photo of an Edison Business Phonograph, ca. 1905, on display Thomas Edison National Historic Park in West Orange, NJ; developed at Edison's Newark, NJ lab.

Figure 6: A photograph of a ca. 1920 Ediphone Recorder on display at Thomas Edison National Historic Park in West Orange, NJ; developed at Edison's Newark, NJ lab.

Figure 7: A photo of an Ediphone, on display at Thomas Edison National Historic Park in West Orange, NJ; developed at Edison's Newark, NJ lab. This version has several additional features, including a stethoscope-like device for listening to recordings, a toe-trip plate for activating recording, and a storage cabinet for wax cylinders.

## The Roaring 1920s: Radio versus Records

In the 1920s, Tin Pan Alley's dominance of the popular music industry was threatened by two technological developments: the advent of electrical recording and the rapid growth of radio.

During the early days of its development, the gramophone was viewed as a scientific novelty that posed little threat to sheet music because of its poor sound quality. However, as inventors improved various aspects of the device, the sales of gramophone records began to affect sheet music sales. The Copyright Act of 1911 had imposed a royalty on all records of copyrighted musical works to compensate for the loss in revenue to

composers and authors. This loss became even more prominent during the mid-1920s, when improvements in electrical recording drastically increased sales of gramophones and gramophone records. The greater range and sensitivity of the electrical broadcasting microphone revolutionized gramophone recording to such an extent that sheet music sales plummeted. From the very beginning, the record industry faced challenges from new technology.

Composers and publishers could deal with the losses caused by an increase in gramophone sales because of the provisions made in the Copyright Act. However, when radio broadcasting emerged in the early 1920s, both gramophone sales and sheet-music sales began to suffer. Radio was an affordable medium that enabled listeners to experience events as they took place. Better yet, it offered a wide range of free music that required none of the musical skills, expensive instruments, or sheet music necessary for creating one's own music in the home, nor the expense of purchasing records to play on the gramophone. This development was a threat to the entire recording industry, which began to campaign for, and was ultimately granted, the right to collect license fees from broadcasters. With the license fees in place, the recording industry eventually began to profit from the new technology.

## The 1930s: The Rise of Jazz and Blues

The ascendance of Tin Pan Alley coincided with the emergence of jazz in New Orleans. An improvisational form of music that was primarily instrumental, jazz incorporated a variety of styles, including African rhythms, gospel, and blues. Established by New Orleans musicians such as King Oliver and his protégé, Louis Armstrong, who is considered by many to be one of the greatest jazz soloists in history, jazz spread along the Mississippi River by the bands that traveled up and down the river playing on steamboats. During the Prohibition era in the 1920s and early 1930s, some jazz bands played in illegal speakeasies, which helped generate the genre's reputation for being immoral and for threatening the country's cultural values. You can hear a recording of this from one of Edison's diamond disc phonographs. This piece is "Jazz de luxe – fox trot" performed by Earl Fuller's Famous Jazz Band:

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However, jazz became a legitimate form of entertainment during the 1930s, when White orchestras began to incorporate jazz style into their music. During this time, jazz music began to take on a big band style, combining elements of ragtime, Black spirituals, blues, and European music. Key figures in developing the big jazz band included bandleaders Duke Ellington, Coleman Hawkins, and Glenn Miller. These big band

orchestras used an arranger to limit improvisation by assigning parts of a piece of music to various band members. Although improvisation was allowed during solo performances, the format became more structured, resulting in the swing style of jazz that became popular in the 1930s. As the decade progressed, social attitudes toward racial segregation relaxed and big bands became more racially integrated.

At the heart of jazz, the blues was a creation of former Black slaves who adapted their African musical heritage to the American environment. Dealing with themes of personal adversity, overcoming hard luck, and other emotional turmoil, the blues is a 12-bar musical form with a call-and-response format between the singer and his guitar. Originating in the Mississippi Delta, just upriver from New Orleans, blues music was exemplified in the work of W. C. Handy, Ma Rainey, Robert Johnson, and Lead Belly, among others. Unlike jazz, the blues did not spread significantly to the Northern states until the late 1930s and 1940s. Once Southern migrants introduced the blues to urban Northern cities, the music developed into distinctive regional styles, ranging from the jazz-oriented Kansas City blues to the swing-based West Coast blues. Chicago blues musicians such as Muddy Waters were the first to electrify the blues through the use of electric guitars and to blend urban style with classic Southern blues. The electric guitar, first produced by Adolph Rickenbacker in 1931, changed music by intensifying the sound and creating a louder volume that could cut through noise in bars and nightclubs.[4] By focusing less on shouting, singers could focus on conveying more emotion and intimacy in their performances. This electrified form of blues provided the foundations of rock and roll.

The 1920s through the 1950s is considered the golden age of radio. During this time, the number of licensed radio stations in the United States exploded from five in 1921 to over 600 by 1925.[5] The introduction of radio broadcasting provided a valuable link between urban city centers and small, rural towns. Able to transmit music nationwide, rural radio stations broadcasted local music genres that soon gained popularity across the country.

## The 1940s: Technology Progresses

Technological advances during the 1940s made it even easier for people to listen to their favorite music and for artists to record it. The introduction of the reel-to-reel tape recorder paved the way for several innovations that would transform the music industry. The first commercially available tape recorders were monophonic, meaning that they only had one track on which to record sound onto magnetic tape. This may seem limiting today, but at the time it allowed for exciting innovations. During the 1940s and 1950s, some musicians—most notably guitarist Les Paul, with his song "Lover (When You're Near Me)"—began to experiment with

4. Rickenbacker, "Early Years: The Earliest Days of the Electric Guitar," Rickenbacker International Corporation, June 22, 2010, http://www.rickenbacker.com/history_early.asp

5. Salamon, Ed. Pittsburgh's Golden Age of Radio (Chicago: Arcadia, 2010), 8.

overdubbing, in which they played back a previously recorded tape through a mixer, blended it with a live performance, and recorded the composite signal onto a second tape recorder. By the time four-track and eight-track recorders became readily available in the 1960s, musicians no longer had to play together in the same room; they could record each of their individual parts and combine them into a finished recording.

Figure 8: Photo of reel-to-reel tape recorder in action, taken at Fitchburg State University, Fitchburg, MA. Reel-to-reel tape recorders and magnetic tape not only helped artists experiment with overdubbing, but they also were a compact method for reproducing and preserving audio.

While the reel-to-reel recorders were in the early stages of development, families listened to records on their gramophones. The 78 revolutions per minute (rpm) disc had been the accepted recording medium for many years despite the necessity of changing the disc every 5 minutes. In 1948, Columbia Records perfected the 12-inch 33 rpm long-playing (LP) disc, which could play up to 25 minutes per side and had a lower level of surface noise than the earlier (and highly breakable) shellac discs.[6] The 33 rpm discs became the standard form for full albums and would dominate the recorded music industry until the advent of the compact disc (CD).

During the 1940s, a mutually beneficial alliance between sound recording and radio existed. Artists such as Frank Sinatra and Ella Fitzgerald profited from radio exposure. Until this time, music had primarily been recorded for adults, but the popularity of Sinatra and his contemporaries revealed an entirely untapped market: teenagers. The postwar boom of the 1930s and early 1940s provided many teenagers spending money for records. Radio airplay helped to promote and sell records and the recording artists themselves, which in turn

6. Lomax, Alan. Alan Lomax: Selected Writings 1934–1997, ed. Ronald D. Cohen (New York: Routledge, 2003), 102.

stabilized the recording industry. The near riots caused by the appearance of New Jersey crooner Frank Sinatra in concert paved the way for mass hysteria among Elvis Presley and Beatles fans during the rock and roll era.

## The 1950s: The Advent of Rock and Roll

New technology continued to develop in the 1950s with the introduction of television. The new medium spread rapidly, primarily because of cheaper mass-production costs and war-related improvements in technology. In 1948, only 1 percent of America's households owned a television; by 1953 this figure had risen to nearly 50 percent, and by 1978 nearly every home in the United States owned a television.[7] The introduction of television into people's homes threatened the existence of the radio industry. The radio industry adapted by focusing on music, joining forces with the recording industry to survive. In an effort to do so, it became somewhat of a promotional tool. Stations became more dependent on recorded music to fill airtime, and in 1955 the Top 40 format was born. Playlists for radio stations were based on popularity (usually the Billboard Top 40 singles chart), and a popular song might be played as many as 30 or 40 times a day. Radio stations began to influence record sales, which resulted in increased competition for spots on the playlist. This ultimately resulted in payola—the illegal practice of receiving payment from a record company for broadcasting a particular song on the radio. The payola scandal came to a head in the 1960s, when Cleveland, Ohio, DJ Alan Freed and eight other disc jockeys were accused of taking money for airplay. Following Freed's trial, an anti-payola statute was passed, making payola a misdemeanor crime.

Technology wasn't the only revolution that took place during the 1950s. The urban Chicago blues typified by artists such as Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, and B. B. King surged in popularity among White and Black teenagers alike. Marketed under the name rhythm and blues, or R&B, the sexually suggestive lyrics in songs such as "Sexy Ways" and "Sixty Minute Man" and the electrified guitar and wailing harmonica sounds appealed to young listeners. At the time, R&B records were classified as "race music" and their sales were segregated from the White music records tracked on the pop charts.[8] Nonetheless, there was a considerable amount of crossover among audiences. In 1952, the Dolphin's of Hollywood record store in Los Angeles, which specialized in R&B music, noted that 40 percent of its sales were to White individuals.[9]

Although banned from some stations, others embraced the popular new music. In 1951, Freed started a late-night R&B show called The Moondog Rock & Roll House Party and began referring to the music he

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7. Genova, Tom. "Number of TV Households in America," Television History – The First 75 Years, https://web.archive.org/web/20110128131034/http://www.tvhistory.tv/Annual_TV_Households_50-78.JPG.

8. Szatmary, David. Rockin' in Time: A Social History of Rock and Roll (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2010), 16.

9. *ibid*

played as rock and roll.[10] Taking its name from a blues slang term for sex, the music obtained instant notoriety, gaining widespread support among teenage music fans and widespread dislike among the older generation.[11] Frenetic showmen Little Richard and Chuck Berry were early pioneers of rock and roll, and their wild stage performances became characteristic of the genre. As the integration of White and Black individuals progressed in the 1950s with the repeal of segregation laws and the initiation of the civil rights movement, aspects of Black culture, including music, became more widely accepted by many White individuals. However, it was the introduction of a White man who sang songs written by Black musicians that helped rock and roll really spread across state and racial lines. Elvis Presley, a singer and guitarist, the "King of Rock and Roll," further helped make music written by Black individuals acceptable to mainstream White audiences and also helped popularize rockabilly—a blend of rock and country music—with Black audiences during the mid-1950s. Heavily influenced by his rural Southern roots, Presley combined the R&B music of bluesmen B. B. King, John Lee Hooker, and Howlin' Wolf with the country-western tradition of Roy Acuff, Ernest Tubb, and Jimmie Rodgers, and added a touch of gospel.[12] The reaction Presley inspired among hordes of adolescent girls—screaming, crying, rioting—solidified his reputation as the first true rock and roll icon.

10. History of Rock, "Alan Freed" History-of-rock.com, http://www.history-of-rock.com/freed.htm.

11. *ibid*

12. Elvis, "Biography," Elvis Presley: Official Site of the King of Rock 'n' Roll, https://web.archive.org/web/20110213235206/http://www.elvis.com/about-the-king/biography_.aspx.

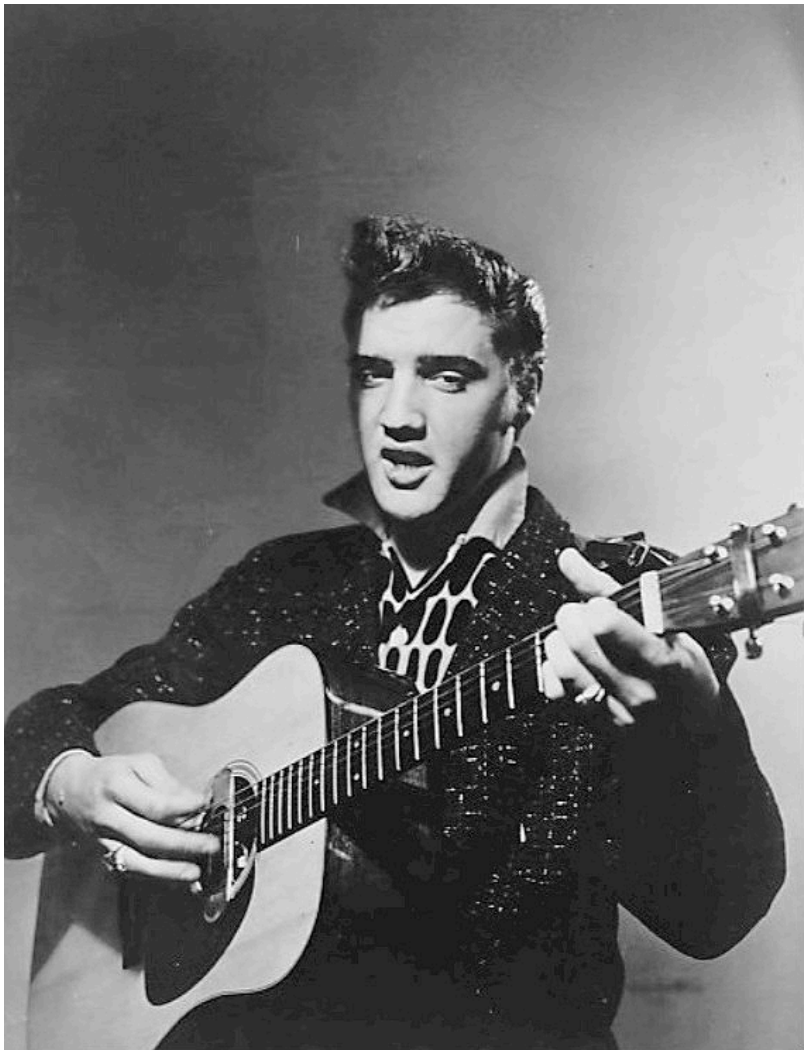

Figure 9: A photo of Elvis Presley. Elvis Presley brought the style of R&B bluesmen to mainstream audiences in the 1950s.

## The 1960s: Rock and Roll Branches Out From R&B

Prior to 1964, rock and roll was primarily an American export. Although U.S. artists frequently reached the top of the charts overseas, few European artists achieved success on this side of the Atlantic. This situation changed almost overnight with the arrival of British pop phenomenon the Beatles. Combining elements of skiffle—a type of music played on rudimentary instruments, such as banjos, guitars, or homemade instruments—doo-wop, and soul, the four mop-haired musicians from Liverpool, England, created a genre of music known as Merseybeat, named after the River Mersey. The Beatles' genial personalities and catchy pop tunes made them an instant success in the United States, and their popularity was heightened by several appearances on The Ed Sullivan Show. When the Beatles arrived in New York in 1964, they were met by hundreds of reporters and police officers and thousands of fans. Their appearance on The Ed Sullivan Show

a few days later was the largest audience for an American television program, with approximately one in three Americans (74 million) tuning in.[13] Beatlemania—the term coined to describe fans' wildly enthusiastic reaction to the band—extended to other British bands, and by the mid-1960s, the Kinks, the Zombies, the Animals, Herman's Hermits, and the Rolling Stones were all making appearances on the U.S. charts. The Rolling Stones' urban rock sound steered away from pop music and remained more true to the bluesy, R&B roots of rock and roll. During their first appearance on The Ed Sullivan Show, the Stones were lewd and vulgar, prompting host Ed Sullivan to denounce their behavior (although he privately acknowledged that the band had received the most enthusiastic applause he had ever seen).[14] The British Invasion transformed rock and roll into the all-encompassing genre of rock, sending future performers in two different directions: the melodic, poppy sounds of the Beatles, on the one hand, and the gritty, high-volume power rock of the Stones on the other.

13. Gould, Jonathan. Can't Buy Me Love: The Beatles, Britain, and America (New York: Harmony Books, 2007), 3–4.

14. Ed Sullivan, "The Rolling Stones," The Official Ed Sullivan Site, http://www.edsullivan.com/artists/the-rolling-stones.

Figure 10: A photo of Ed Sullivan. After the Rolling Stones' first appearance on The Ed Sullivan Show, host Ed Sullivan apologized to the viewing audience for the band's lewd behavior.

The branching out of rock and roll continued in several other directions throughout the 1960s. Surf music, embodied by artists such as the Beach Boys, Jan and Dean, and Dick Dale, celebrated the aspects of youth culture in California. With their twanging electric guitars and glossy harmonies, the surf groups sang of girls, beaches, and convertible cars cruising along the West Coast. In Detroit, some Black performers were developing a sound that would have crossover appeal with both Black and White audiences. Combining R&B, pop, gospel, and blues into a genre known as soul, vocalists such as James Brown, Aretha Franklin, Otis Redding, and Wilson Pickett sang about the lives of Black Americans. Producer and songwriter Berry Gordy Jr. developed soul music through the creation of his Motown label, which would become one of the

most successful businesses owned by a Black individual in American history.[15] Capitalizing on the 1960s girl-group craze, Gordy produced hits by the Marvelettes, Martha and the Vandellas, and, most successfully, Diana Ross and the Supremes. For his bands, he created a slick, polished image designed to appeal to the American mainstream.

In the late 1960s, supporters of the civil rights movement—along with feminists, environmentalists, and Vietnam War protesters—were gravitating toward folk music, which would become the sound of social activism. Broadly referring to music that is passed down orally through the generations, folk music retained an unpolished, amateur quality that inspired participation and social awareness. Carrying on the legacy of the 1930s labor activist Woody Guthrie, singer-songwriters such as Joan Baez; Peter, Paul, and Mary; and Bob Dylan sang social protest songs about civil rights, discrimination against Black Americans, and the Cuban Missile Crisis. Having earned himself a reputation as a political spokesperson, Dylan was lambasted by traditional folk fans for playing an electric guitar at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival. However, his attempt to reach a broader crowd inspired the folk rock genre, pioneered by the Los Angeles band the Byrds.[16] Even though many fans questioned his decision to go electric, Dylan's poetic and politically charged lyrics were still influential, inspiring groups like the Beatles and the Animals. Protest music in the 1960s was closely aligned with the hippie culture, in which some viewed taking drugs as a form of personal expression and free speech. Artists such as Jimi Hendrix, Jefferson Airplane, the Grateful Dead, and the Doors believed that the listening experience could be enhanced using mind-altering drugs. This spirit of freedom and protest culminated in the infamous Woodstock festival in the summer of 1969, although the subsequent deaths of many of its stars from drug overdoses cast a shadow over the psychedelic culture.

## The 1970s: From Glam Rock to Punk

After the Vietnam War ended, college students began to settle down and focus on careers and families. For some, selfish views took the place of concern with social issues and political activism, causing writer Tom Wolfe to label the 1970s the "me" decade.[17] Musically, this ideological shift resulted in the creation of glam rock, an extravagant, self-indulgent form of rock that incorporated flamboyant costumes, heavy makeup, and elements of hard rock and pop. A primarily British phenomenon, glam rock was popularized by acts such as Slade, David

15. Notable Biographies, "Berry Gordy Jr. Biography," Encyclopedia of World Biography, http://www.notablebiographies.com/Gi-He/Gordy-Jr-Berry.html.

16. PBS, "Bob Dylan," PBS.org: American Roots Music: The Songs & the Artists, https://web.archive.org/web/20100217011258/http://www.pbs.org/americanrootsmusic/pbs_arm_saa_bobdylan.html.

17. Wolfe, Tom. "The 'Me' Decade and the Third Great Awakening," New York Magazine, August 23, 1976, http://nymag.com/news/features/45938/.

Bowie, the Sweet, Elton John, and Gary Glitter. It proved to be a precursor for the punk movement in the late 1970s. Equally flamboyant, but rising out of a more electronic sound, disco also emerged in the 1970s. Popular disco artists included KC and the Sunshine Band, Gloria Gaynor, the Bee Gees, and Donna Summer, who helped to pioneer its electronic sound. Boosted by the success of 1977 film Saturday Night Fever, disco's popularity spread across the country. Records were created especially for discos, and record companies churned out tunes that became huge hits on the dance floor.

Reacting against the commercialism of disco and corporate rock, punk artists created a minimalist, angry form of rock that returned to rock and roll basics: simple chord structures, catchy tunes, and politically motivated lyrics. Like the skiffle bands of the 1950s, the appeal of punk rock was that anyone with basic musical skills could participate. The punk rock movement emerged from CBGB, a small bar in New York City that featured bands such as Television, Blondie, and the Ramones. Never a huge commercial success in the United States, punk rock exploded in the United Kingdom, where high unemployment rates and class divisions had created angry, disenfranchised youths.[18] The Sex Pistols, fronted by Johnny Rotten, developed an aggressive, pumping sound that appealed to a rebellious generation of listeners, although the band was disparaged by many critics at the time. In 1976, British music paper Melody Maker complained that "the Sex Pistols do as much for music as World War II did for the cause of peace."[19] Punk bands began to abandon their sound in the late 1970s, when the punk style became assimilated into the rock mainstream.

18. BBC, "Making ends meet in the 70s," BBC News Magazine, June 7, 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/6729847.stm.

19. Gray, Marcus. The Clash: Return of the Last Gang in Town (London: Helter Skelter, 2001), 147.

Figure 11: Photo of the Sex Pistols. Even though the Sex Pistols were severely criticized in the 1970s, their music went on to inspire countless acts and helped develop the underground music scene in England and the United States.

## The 1980s: The Hip-Hop Generation

Whereas many British youths expressed their displeasure through punk music, many disenfranchised Black American youths in the 1980s turned to hip-hop—a term for the urban culture that includes break dancing, graffiti art, and the musical techniques of rapping, sampling, and scratching records. Reacting against the extravagance of disco, many poor urban rappers developed their new street culture by adopting a casual image consisting of T-shirts and sportswear, developing a language that reflected the everyday concerns of the people in low-income, urban areas, and by embracing the low-budget visual art form of graffiti. They described their new culture as hip-hop, after a common phrase chanted at dance parties in New York's Bronx borough.

The hip-hop genre first became popular among Black youths in the late 1970s, when record spinners in the Bronx and Harlem started to play short fragments of songs rather than the entire track (known as sampling).[20] Early hip-hop artists sampled all types of music, like funk, soul, and jazz, later adding special effects to the samples and experimenting with techniques such as rotating or scratching records back and forth to create a rhythmic pattern. For example, Kool Moe Dee's track "How Ya Like Me Now" includes samples from James Brown's classic funk song "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag." The DJs would often add short raps to their music to let audiences know who was playing the records, a trend that grew more elaborate over time to include entire

20. Demers, Joanna. "Sampling the 1970s in Hip-Hop," Popular Music 21 (2003): 41–56.

spoken verses. Artists such as Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five added political and social commentary on the realities of life in low-income, high-crime areas—a trend that would continue with later rappers such as Public Enemy and Ice-T.

In the early 1980s, a second wave of rap artists brought inner-city rap to American youths by mixing it with hard guitar rock. Pioneered by groups such as Run-D.M.C. and the Beastie Boys, the new music appealed to Black and White audiences alike. Another subgenre that emerged was gangsta rap, a controversial brand of hip-hop epitomized by West Coast rappers such as Ice Cube and Tupac Shakur. Highlighting violence and gang warfare, gangsta rappers faced accusations that they created violence in inner cities—an argument that gained momentum with the East Coast–West Coast rivalry of the 1990s.

## The 1990s: New Developments in Hip-Hop, Rock, and Pop

Hip-hop and gangsta rap maintained their popularity in the early 1990s with artists such as Tupac Shakur, the Notorious B.I.G., Dr. Dre, Eazy-E, Ice Cube, and Snoop Dogg at the top of the charts. West Coast rappers such as Tupac Shakur and Snoop Dogg favored gangsta rap, while East Coast rappers, like the Notorious B.I.G. and Sean Combs, stuck to a traditional hip-hop style. The rivalry culminated with the murders of Shakur in 1996 and B.I.G. in 1997.

Along with hip-hop and gangsta rap, alternative rock came to the forefront in the 1990s with grunge. The grunge scene emerged in the mid-1980s in the Seattle area of Washington State. Inspired by hardcore punk and heavy metal, this subgenre of rock was so-called because of its messy, sludgy, distorted guitar sound, the disheveled appearance of its pioneers, and the disaffected nature of the artists. Initially achieving limited success with Seattle band Soundgarden, Seattle independent label Sub Pop became more prominent when it signed another local band, Nirvana. Fronted by vocalist and guitarist Kurt Cobain, Nirvana came to be identified with Generation X—the post–baby boom generation, many of whom came from broken families and experienced violence both on television and in real life. Nirvana's angst-filled lyrics spoke to many members of Generation X, launching the band into the mainstream. Ironically, Cobain was uncomfortable and miserable, and he would eventually commit suicide in 1994. Nirvana's success paved the way for other alternative rock bands, including Green Day, Pearl Jam, and Nine Inch Nails. More recently, alternative rock has fragmented into even more specific subgenres.

By the end of the 1990s, mainstream tastes leaned toward pop music. A plethora of boy bands, girl bands, and pop starlets emerged, sometimes evolving from gospel choir groups, but more often than not created by talent scouts. The groups were aggressively marketed to teen audiences. Popular bands included the Backstreet Boys, 'N Sync, and the Spice Girls. Meanwhile, individual pop acts from the MTV generation such as Madonna, Michael Jackson, and Prince continued to generate hits.

## The 2000s: Pop Stays Strong as Hip-Hop Overtakes Rock in Popularity

The 2000s began right where the 1990s left off, with young singers such as Christina Aguilera and Destiny's Child ruling the pop charts. Pop music stayed strong throughout the decade with Gwen Stefani, Mariah Carey, Beyoncé, Katy Perry, and Lady Gaga achieving mainstream success. By the end of the decade, country artists, like Carrie Underwood and Taylor Swift, transitioned from country stars to bona fide pop stars. While rock music started the decade strong, by the end of the 2000s, rock's presence in mainstream music had waned, with a few exceptions such as Nickelback, Linkin Park, and Green Day.

Unlike rock music, hip-hop maintained its popularity, with more commercial, polished artists such as Kanye West, Jay-Z, Lupe Fiasco, and OutKast achieving enormous success. While some gangsta rappers from the 1990s—like Dr. Dre and Snoop Dogg—softened their images, other rappers—such as 50 Cent and Eminem—continued to project a tough image and to use violent lyrics. An alternative style of hip-hop emerged in the 2000s that infused positive messages and an element of social conscience to the music that was missing from early hip-hop tracks. Artists such as Common, Mos Def, and the Black Eyed Peas found success even though they didn't represent traditional stereotypes of hip-hop.

## The K-pop impact to the world from 2010s to 2020s

K-pop gave the Western music industry a huge sound impact from around 2010 to 2020. Examples include BTS and Blackpink. It is true that they have recently made an impact on the world, and to show it, they have won various awards and participated in ceremonies not only in Korea but around the world. First, BTS went to the White House to visit U.S. President Biden and had a conversation with him. This is said to be the artist from Korea. And Blackpink is a female artist from Korea with the highest number of Youtube subscribers in the world, 86.9 million, among all artists in the world. Thus, you can see that K-pop is being transmitted to the world.

K-pop artists use SNS to connect with their fans, posting private photos of themselves on SNS and group photos after singing shows to show their personalities when they are not performing and to attract more fans. They are trying to increase the number of fans by showing their personalities when they are not performing.

Fandom is very important in K-pop. Fandom is a way for fans to get together and raise money to support their favorite artists by placing advertisements on buses and buildings to support the artists. This is something that is not seen in other countries and is unique to K-pop. Now it has spread not only to Korea but also to Japan, Europe, and the United States. For example, if it were in Japan, there was the time when fans collected money to advertise on an electronic billboard in Shinjuku on the day of BTS's debut. In this way, we can see that the culture of fandom is spreading from Korea to the rest of the world.

The demand for YouTube is very high in K-pop, and it is one of the ways to shorten the distance between

artists and fans, it is also one of the major ways for artists to promote their activities. YouTube also plays a major role in the lives of people outside of K-pop and has become an integral part of our lives. This document focuses on K-pop's YouTube activities, but it is a document that gives us an idea of how YouTube is used today and how it will be used in the future.

Today, Korean culture is becoming known around the world not only for K-pop, but also for its language, fashion, and food culture. The number of foreign tourists to Korea is also increasing. Evidence of this can be seen in economic growth. As a data point, the GDP in 2004 was $1.87 billion, while in 2019 the figure is $12.3 billion.[21] Thus, it is easy to see the picture of Korea's culture being known as well as its economy growing significantly.

### Key Takeaways

- Popular music as we know it originated out of the Tin Pan Alley tradition that emerged at the beginning of the 20th century in which composers, singers, and publishers worked together to create hit songs. The primary difference between popular music and classical music is that, whereas classical artists were exalted for their individuality and expected to differ stylistically from other classical composers, popular artists were praised for conforming to the tastes of their intended audience.
- Technological developments played a vital role in bringing popular music to people's homes. The invention of the phonograph and gramophone in the late 19th century enabled the reproduction and mass distribution of sound recordings for the first time. The invention of the reel-to-reel tape recorder and the development of vinyl records in the 1940s drastically improved this process. The postwar prevalence of radio hugely impacted popular music, with radio airplay of popular songs promoting record sales.
- Throughout the last century, tastes in popular music have evolved to encompass a wide variety of styles. People who enjoyed opera at the turn of the 20th century saw the rise of vaudeville and ragtime in the Tin Pan Alley era. Jazz and blues emerged from New Orleans and the Mississippi Delta during the 1930s, and musical styles adapted as people migrated to Northern urban areas. Rhythm and blues laid the groundwork for rock and roll that shook up popular music in the 1950s. Popular music diversified in the 1960s to encompass surf, folk,

21. AFM Editorial Office (2022) "K-pop is making billions for South Korea" Asia Fund Manager.

and soul music. In the 1970s, glam rock and disco became popular, and punk rockers revolted against the excesses of these styles. Hip-hop dominated the 1980s, and its popularity continued into the 1990s and 2000s. Pop was also successful in the 1990s and 2000s, while mainstream interest in alternative rock waned at the end of the 2000s.

**Exercises**

1. How did the transition from sheet music to recorded music in the form of gramophones and phonographs impact the popular music industry and the role of opera singers in the late 19th century?
2. Research the rise and influence of Tin Pan Alley on popular music. Create a timeline that highlights key milestones, including its impact on genres like vaudeville and ragtime.
3. Examine the technological advancements in the music industry, from reel-to-reel tape recorders to the advent of LPs and CDs. How have these changes influenced the way music is produced and consumed?
4. Choose a decade between 1900 and 2010. Research a technological development that took place during this time that influenced pop music—for example, the development of the electric guitar and its influence on rock and roll. Consider how this development influenced trends within the industry.

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# 12.2 THE RECORDING INDUSTRY AS HARBINGER OF DIGITAL DISRUPTION

"I definitely wanted to earn my freedom. But the primary motivation wasn't making money, but making an impact." — Sean Parker, Napster co-founder, Spotify board member and former Facebook president

**Learning Objectives**

- Analyze the historical and contemporary challenges faced by the recording industry, including issues related to copyright, digital disruption, and the shift from a manufacturing to a service and information economy.
- Gain an understanding of the ethical and legal considerations surrounding copyright and fair use, especially in the context of digital media and the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA).
- Critically evaluate the impact of digital technologies on the music industry, including the role of platforms like Spotify and Pandora, and will be able to articulate the implications for future media professionals in a rapidly evolving landscape.

By reputation, the recording industry is rife with schmucks and cheats, gangsters and goons. It is also one of the most important cultural industries of all time. Popular music reflects and shapes our culture, provides a soundtrack for our lives and loves, and builds the emotional framework for our best and worst moments. Some music producers have a reputation for being unscrupulous and for caring more about making money than making music. Mob involvement in the industry is well-documented.[1] This is not to say that the industry is completely corrupt; it is true, however, that corruption is an ongoing problem.

Still, most of us have a favorite genre of music and at least a dozen favorite artists. It is rare that you will love

1. Appelo, Tim. "Stiffed: A True Story of MCA, The Music Business, and the Mafia." EW.com, April 30, 1993. https://ew.com/article/1993/04/30/stiffed-true-story-mca-music-business-and-mafia/.

a film but hate the soundtrack. It is more rare, perhaps, to find a person who cannot tell you which songs were popular when they were in high school and what kind of music they would like at their wedding reception. For a speed run through the history of popular recorded music:

> *One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://rotel.pressbooks.pub/comm-media-studies/?p=360#oembed-1*

The link goes to a YouTube presentation tracking the "Evolution of Popular Music by Year." The list of performers can be found in this blog post,[2] which notes the gender balance in pop music over the years, as well as a few other brief highlights.

This chapter about recorded music focuses mostly on the changing industry. But as you consider the industry from an academic perspective, don't lose sight of your relationship with music. What you enjoy is an expression of yourself and of your personal culture. Preserving the emotional impact of music should concern us all, even if we are more or less enthusiastic about preserving the old order of the recording industry and the interests of the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA).

## Recording Industry History

The RIAA built a reputation for suing individual users of file sharing sites for making songs protected under copyright available to other users. A discussion about recorded music in the digital age quickly becomes a discussion about copyright. The RIAA is a trade organization. It was formed to protect record labels and their products. It fought file "sharing" — the free digital distribution of music files, most often in MP3 format — with limited success in the early 2000s. By suing consumers for making music files available online, the Association cracked down on digital music piracy somewhat, but it also angered a generation of music consumers.[3] Around the same time that the RIAA became known for suing users for sharing music, it was sued for alleged antitrust violations related to downloading services the industry had launched.[4] Specifically, record

2. Mill, Hayen. "Misguided Rant: The Evolution of Popular Music, by Year, in the U.S.A. (1890-2009)." *Misguided Rant* (blog), October 6, 2010. http://misguidedrant.blogspot.com/2010/10/evolution-of-popular-music-by-year-in.html.

3. Electronic Frontier Foundation. "RIAA v. The People: Five Years Later," September 30, 2008. https://www.eff.org/wp/riaa-v-people-five-years-later.

4. Michaels, Sean. "Major Labels to Face Price-Fixing Lawsuit." *The Guardian*, January 11, 2011, sec. Music. https://www.theguardian.com/music/2011/jan/11/major-labels-lawsuit.

labels were accused of artificially inflating the prices of music downloads on services they had established. Since the U.S. Supreme Court decided to let the case proceed in 2011, it appears from an exhaustive web search that the case is still pending. Music distributors lost a separate $143 million case that found they illegally inflated the price of CDs in the late 1990s.[5] The RIAA is both a staunch protector of artists' copyright-protected material and a monopolistic trade group.

## A Detour Through Disney to Discuss Copyright

View the video below "A Fair(y) Use Tale," for a unique take on what copyright is and how it currently functions. The film does not argue that the illegal downloading and sharing of music files is fair use, but it does suggest that intellectual property copyright protections might be designed to protect corporate profits over creative endeavors.

*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://rotel.pressbooks.pub/comm-media-studies/?p=360#oembed-2*

There will always be a battle between creators, who value the disruption of previous regimes in favor of developing new products on new platforms that remediate previous works, and original producers, who want to preserve the right to earn money from their creative works. As a reminder, remediation is taking existing media content and concepts and using them in new media platforms. It may include mashups of existing content, sampling, stacking and compiling. Remediation works with many forms of media, but much of the content that cutting-edge creative producers want to use is still under copyright. At issue is under what circumstances is remediation considered fair use of material under copyright and under what circumstances does remediation violate copyright. This text does not offer a simple answer. Please note, however, that this text itself is presented on an open platform with a Creative Commons copyright license, and has been written, edited, and adapted by multiple authors, including your instructor for this course! This ensures that this text will always be available for all to use, repurpose, build on or subtract from. At least some of the authors involved work in a non-profit academic setting, and the incentive is to earn tenure by publishing this and other works. This form of publishing under a Creative Commons license is growing in popularity, but it cannot necessarily be expected of those working in for-profit media industries.

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5. Staff. "CD Price Fixing Suit Settled For $143 Million." *Billboard* (blog), October 1, 2002. https://www.billboard.com/music/music-news/cd-price-fixing-suit-settled-for-143-million-74008/.

At the root of copyright law is whether a new work hurts the market value of the original work (assuming the original is not yet in the public domain). This question is sometimes settled on a case-by-case basis. Before students as would-be disruptors begin to think the system is unfair, they must remember that their own products will be protected by copyright. Weak copyright law makes it easy for works to be altered slightly and republished with little or no gain going to the creator.[6] Aspiring mass communication professionals often find themselves tied in conceptual knots over how to think about copyright law. A few suggestions: Obey it without letting it stop you from producing works you love. Work around violations and assume your digital work will be open to disruption and copying the moment it is made public.

The film *Downloaded* directed by Alex Winter (Ted of *Bill & Ted* fame) documents the battle between the founders of Napster and the RIAA in the first major intellectual property battle of the digital age. The entire recording industry was shaken up by young college students who identified as hackers. The RIAA won the battle against Napster but lost the war against digital music sharing and the formation of digital music platforms. Apple's iTunes legitimized digital music sharing. Spotify and Pandora created legal means for people to consume mass amounts of digital content for free. For a fee, you can usually access most of the music you want, and you can create playlists from massive music databases that put pre-digital download music collections to shame.

On the other hand, there has been something of a backlash against digital music downloading as a new generation of audiophiles discover the LP record as a means of owning physical copies of the music they love. Records can be owned and cherished, but they are also cumbersome. Digital music is ubiquitous but the sound quality is often lacking, and maintaining a digital library takes effort and often an investment in cloud storage. One way or another, if you want to hold onto recorded music for your own personal use, you are probably going to have to pay. Even if you use YouTube as your own personal music collection, when you search for a specific song you will often pay with your attention by watching pre-roll ads.

The recording industry and many artists would argue that *of course* music should not be available for free. It costs time and effort to create popular professional music. On the other hand, the recording industry is notorious for not paying artists.[7] Much of the money to be made in professional music comes from live performances and merchandise sales. An option for artists is to release their music for free and use it to garner attention and bring people into live shows where they can sell apparel, artistic LPs and CD box sets to "true" fans for a greater percentage of the profit.[8]

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6. Porteous, Chris. "How To Proactively Protect Your Intellectual Property Online." Entrepreneur, November 16, 2021. https://www.entrepreneur.com/leadership/how-to-proactively-protect-your-intellectual-property-online/394813.

7. Masnick, Mike. "RIAA Accounting: Why Even Major Label Musicians Rarely Make Money From Album Sales." Techdirt, July 13, 2010. https://www.techdirt.com/2010/07/13/riaa-accounting-why-even-major-label-musicians-rarely-make-money-from-album-sales/.

8. Kelly, Kevin. "1,000 True Fans." *The Technium* (blog). Accessed September 3, 2023. https://kk.org/thetechnium/1000-true-fans/.

As consumers, you should be aware of where your money goes when you pay for music and who benefits from the attention you pay to advertisers when you do not pay for music.[9] The popularity of Pandora and Spotify helped drive radio broadcasting conglomerates to act more like streaming services. The iHeartRadio app, for example, is a paid app that gives you a digital connection to a host of radio stations. It takes something that was free — over-the-air radio — and makes it a paid service, albeit with added features and convenience.

In the history of broadcasting in the United States, there is a long tradition of production and distribution companies either directly collaborating or being one and the same. The people who made radio also made recorded music or had close relationships with those who did, and they could determine what music and other programming went over the air. This is different from agenda setting where messages in the mass media can set the bulk of the public's political agenda. This is a matter of keeping messages off the air that are considered too disruptive or radical. In some countries, the airwaves are directly regulated by the government. In the U.S., closely watched monopolies give the appearance that the government is not censoring music, but in essence, the monopolies do it for them. Before there were Napster "pirates," there was pirate radio.[10] The freedom for an individual to play the songs they want to play when they want to play them over the airwaves for public consumption has not existed since the very early days of radio. Consider this the next time you build and share a Spotify playlist (or, if you're old school, make a mixtape).

Music monopolies existed with government support and were justified as being necessary, particularly during times of war when leaders wanted to keep tight control over messages. When political will built up in support of splitting mass media monopolies in favor of protecting the intent of the First Amendment, antitrust laws were used; however, if history shows anything it is that powerful people in the media seek to consolidate their power. In other words, we should expect music broadcasters to attempt to form monopolies, even as existing radio broadcasting conglomerates such as iHeart Radio face hard times.[11]

## Music, Culture and Lessons of Disruption

The film *Downloaded* is more than just a history of Napster. It briefly traces the transition of the media field from an industrial manufacturing production model to a digital service model. The next few sections of this chapter explore this evolution.

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9. Kafka, Peter. "Here's Why the Music Labels Are Furious at YouTube. Again." Vox, April 11, 2016. https://www.vox.com/2016/4/11/11586030/youtube-google-dmca-riaa-cary-sherman.

10. Gioia, Ted. "When Music Pirates Used Pirate Ships." *The Daily Beast*, April 18, 2016, sec. entertainment. https://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/04/18/when-music-pirates-used-pirate-ships.

11. Moon, Mariella. "IHeartRadio Owner Files for Bankruptcy, but You Won't Feel It." Engadget, July 20, 2019. https://www.engadget.com/2018-03-15-iheartradio-owner-iheartmedia-bankruptcy.html.

The implications of this shift are difficult to explain in a few passages, but some important details are the social nature of Napster; the rhetoric of "sharing"; the age and sophistication of the innovators in the Napster versus RIAA case; and the response from industry bosses, artists and the public.

The recording industry is one of the first media industries to undergo this dramatic change in their primary focus from producing tangible goods to producing digital media and trying to profit from it at similar levels. It was difficult for the established corporate interests — especially the record labels, record executives and the RIAA — to switch from the industrial production of CDs and other materials to the production of digital music for download and streaming.

The transition was disruptive for the creators of Napster too, who took years to recover after losing to the RIAA in the epic lawsuit covered in the *Downloaded* film.

The recording industry was not by any means the last industry to be challenged by digital technology. It is necessary to very briefly trace the history that undergirds this discussion for readers to understand what is meant by "manufacturing model" and "digital service model."

## Industrial Production and Media

Before the manufacturing boom of the early 1900s came the early Industrial Revolution. It took approximately half a century to take shape, beginning in the late 1700s and continuing through the early 1800s.

Steam power became viable in the mid-1800s. Electrical power was used in manufacturing in the late 1800s, which further accelerated the revolution. Electricity production and its application increased immensely throughout the 1900s.

The Industrial Revolution was largely made possible by a shift to capitalism. It was often a matter of rapid and dangerous development, but at times, manufacturing growth progressed more steadily. A lack of regulation under capitalism has helped manufacturing to grow quickly in some parts of the world, but unregulated manufacturing takes a toll on people and the environment.

Average incomes increased greatly during the Industrial Revolution, but so did wealth disparity.

One thing media professionals should note is that averages do not always mean much to the average person. If average gains for a group include a small group of very high numbers and a large group of low numbers (a long tail, so to speak), average gains are not really felt by the average person.[12]

At any rate, economies built on manufacturing grew rapidly. Between World War I and the end of World War II in the United States, manufacturing grew incredibly quickly and successfully. Radio's first major use was not to broadcast music and news but to coordinate ship movements in WWI. After WWI in 1919, the United

12. Leonhardt, David. "Opinion | Our Broken Economy, in One Simple Chart." *The New York Times*, August 7, 2017, sec. Opinion. https://web.archive.org/web/20170808041536/https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/08/07/opinion/leonhardt-income-inequality.html.

States helped facilitate the development of the Radio Corporation of America to take control of the industry away from Guglielmo Marconi's corporation. Marconi, who played a major role in the development of radio broadcast technology, went on to support fascism in Italy.[13] RCA in the USA had a government-protected monopoly, but it must be noted that control over broadcast technologies is about more than commercial interests.

Strategic military interests also depend on advancing communication technologies. Government entities and private corporations are always locked in a dance of control over emerging and developing ICTs. Entrepreneurs can get caught up in the dance or, perhaps worse, be left without a partner and without access.

The Modern Era started with the end of World War II in about 1946. Modern communication technologies from recorded sound to the telephone, radio and television continued to develop in part as military technologies, but the products of recorded music and later on of videotapes were manufactured goods. Prices could be set in a monopolistic environment by the respective industries because owning the music or the movie required someone to purchase a physical copy.

Before the digital revolution, there was a transition to the service economy.

## Manufacturing vs. Service

The mindset of the mid-to-late 20th century was one where manufacturing mattered most. In 1960, for example, the split between manufacturing and service jobs in the US was about 40 percent manufacturing and 60 percent service.

This means that 40 percent of the jobs were ones where people made and sold goods. The service economy had more people in it, but manufacturing jobs paid better and provided a base of consumers for the service *and* manufacturing economies to build on.

As of 2010, the split was about 15-85. That is, only 15 percent of U.S. jobs are currently in manufacturing. The other 85 percent are in the service sector. The globalization of labor and communication has made this possible. Specifically, large multinational corporations can now coordinate multiple levels of manufacturing in many places at once. Communication aids this process. So does the ability to transport materials and finished goods cheaply using oil-based fuels.

The downside of having access to cheap goods is that wages are stagnant in the US. Without good-paying jobs, there is not as much money in the *consumer* economy as there was. This explains why personal debt is at an all-time high.

With the loss of manufacturing jobs, states do not have the same income tax base that they used to, so they

13. Raboy, Marc. "How Marconi Gave Us the Wireless World." *The Daily Beast*, August 20, 2016, sec. tech. https://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/08/20/how-marconi-gave-us-the-wireless-world.

often drastically cut support for colleges and other services. This is part of the reason why college costs more than it used to. The transition to the service economy played a significant role.

Is this text suggesting that you push for a return to manufacturing and give up on the service economy? No. In fact, the service economy as it developed in the late 20th century may be coming to an end.

In the United States, the manufacturing model of media production still holds much power in the recorded music, newspaper, magazine and book industries. It would be foolish to ignore that power, but it would be more foolish to tell you to prepare for those modes of production when your working world may be two evolutions beyond the manufacturing age.

## From the Service Economy to the Information Economy

Although it is difficult for people accustomed to a manufacturing economy, the transition to the service economy makes sense in the network society. What is perhaps most difficult to comprehend is that even major service industry sectors are being disrupted by digital technologies.

As a society, we have shifted our focus from making and selling goods to providing services. The service industry includes computers and technology writ large; the health industry; tangible trades such as plumbing and carpentry; the restaurant, tourism and hospitality industries; as well as for-profit education.

Of major concern now is that our society and economy are not yet fully adjusted to a focus on the service economy even as it is being disrupted by digital technologies and the information economy.

This is the point of studying the recording industry at this stage. It was doubly disrupted, if you will. It did not just shift from a focus on providing manufactured CDs to a focus on services. If this had been the case, it might have looked like a renewed focus on live performances and music curation in the form of niche radio broadcasts and even personal music advising. Instead, it is as though the industry skipped a step from the transition to the service economy and shifted directly to the **information economy**. The information economy is one where manufacturing and services still exist, but they are dependent upon information and communication technologies for strategic planning capabilities, managing transactions, the moving and storage of currency, and, ultimately, for the ability to automate as many tasks as possible. If a task is information-oriented or is simple enough to be broken down into a few automated steps (such as driving a taxi — I mean an Uber), it probably will be.

What will be left for workers? Consider the recording industry. Live performances can make money. The production and sale of merchandise (often specialized or limited in nature) can turn a profit. You can do a complex task with tangible goods or you can learn to manage the systems that automate digital work. In other words, if you can master not only mediated message production but also platform maintenance, you might have a job with growth potential.

You can find work in fields that marry manufacturing to the information economy or that merge the service

and information economies well. This is your choice for a job with a future. High school and college guidance counselors may or may not articulate this clearly, but this is what industries that have already been disrupted by the information economy have to teach us.

## Get a Jobby-Job

What are some examples of the marriage of the service economy and information economy in the mass media field? Spotify has already been mentioned. Facebook does not produce content. It provides a service where all sorts of content produced elsewhere can be shared.

Facebook is the Napster of news. It often goes unnoticed, though, because news content on Facebook, Twitter and other platforms stand alongside all other types of messages, professionally mediated or not.

The point is that it pays to be a platform rather than a content producer. The experience with the information economy that we have in the mass communication field suggests that the best bets for developing, getting, and holding jobs in the network society is to work in fields providing services of convenience and personalized attention.

Today, people expect personalized products, or better yet, the ability to personalize products or experiences for themselves. If you go to work in a media company, you will likely spend much time looking for a happy medium in which people feel personally attended to but your company does not have to make a new product for every consumer.

Reddit is a good example of a customizable platform that interests individuals and all kinds of social groups. That said, even successful online communication platforms struggle with growth and profitability. A company's financial success is necessary to pay good wages to a large number of employees; this, in turn, provides for a successful middle class, bolsters the consumer economy, and supports the service, manufacturing and information economies.

**Key Takeaways**

- The recording industry has undergone significant transformations, moving from a focus on manufacturing physical products like CDs to digital services and now to an information economy, highlighting the challenges and opportunities in adapting to technological changes.
- Copyright issues have been a longstanding concern in the recording industry, with organizations like the RIAA taking legal measures to protect intellectual property, but often

at the cost of public sentiment and evolving consumer behaviors.

- The shift to digital platforms like Spotify and Pandora has democratized access to music but has also raised ethical questions about artist compensation, consumer data, and the potential for monopolistic practices in the industry.

## Exercises

1. How has the transition from a manufacturing to a digital service model in the recording industry impacted your personal consumption of music? Discuss the pros and cons.
2. Conduct a case study on the RIAA's approach to copyright infringement. Analyze its strategies and public reception, and propose an alternative approach that could be more effective in the digital age.
3. Considering the rise of digital platforms like Spotify and Pandora, what ethical considerations should be taken into account regarding artist compensation and consumer data? How do these platforms balance profitability and ethical responsibility?

PART XIII

# CHAPTER 13: RADIO BROADCASTING, PODCASTING, AND SUPERBUG MEDIA

The Golden Age of Radio occurred during the 1930s-1950s, as it provided an inexpensive source of entertainment during the Great Depression. The ability to broadcast live created a heightened sense of immediacy and greater emotional connection with audiences, who tuned in for coverage of breaking news. Moreover, radio contributed to the rise of national music stars and the dissemination of regional music styles to a broader audience, influencing both modern music and television programming. Politically, radio underwent significant changes too, especially with regulations like the Fairness Doctrine, which shaped political broadcasting until its repeal in 1987, subsequently fostering a surge in AM talk radio and the emergence of prominent political commentators.

The concept of "superbug media" highlights how media products can survive and thrive by being persistent, adaptive, independent, niche-focused, and symbiotic. The rise of podcasting is particularly noteworthy; what often starts as a passion project can grow into a powerful media presence. However, this shift towards Internet broadcasting and podcasting introduces complex ethical and legal issues, including those related to royalties, licensing, and the broader social implications of content. These developments require a deep and nuanced understanding of the media landscape, challenging both creators and consumers to adapt to the ever-changing dynamics of radio.

# 13.1 EVOLUTION OF RADIO BROADCASTING

**Learning Objectives**

- Identify the major technological changes in radio as a medium since its inception.
- Explain the defining characteristics of radio's Golden Age.
- Describe the effects of networks and conglomerates on radio programming and culture.

At its most basic level, radio is communication through the use of radio waves. This includes radio used for person-to-person communication as well as radio used for mass communication. Both of these functions are still practiced today. Although most people associate the term radio with radio stations that broadcast to the general public, radio wave technology is used in everything from television to cell phones, making it a primary conduit for person-to-person communication.

## The Invention of Radio

Guglielmo Marconi is often credited as the inventor of radio. As a young man living in Italy, Marconi read a biography of Heinrich Hertz, who had written and experimented with early forms of wireless transmission. Marconi then duplicated Hertz's experiments in his own home, successfully sending transmissions from one side of his attic to the other).[1] He saw the potential for the technology and approached the Italian government for support. When the government showed no interest in his ideas, Marconi moved to England and took out a patent on his device. Rather than inventing the radio from scratch, however, Marconi essentially combined the ideas and experiments of other people to make them into a useful communications tool.[2]

1. PBS, "Guglielmo Marconi," American Experience: People & Events, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/rescue/peopleevents/pandeAMEX98.html.

2. Coe, Lewis. Wireless Radio: A Brief History (Jefferson, NC: MacFarland, 1996), 4–10.

Figure 1: A photo of Guglielmo Marconi. Marconi developed an early version of the wireless radio.

In fact, long-distance electronic communication has existed since the middle of the 19th century. The telegraph communicated messages through a series of long and short clicks. Cables across the Atlantic Ocean connected even the far-distant United States and England using this technology. By the 1870s, telegraph technology had been used to develop the telephone, which could transmit an individual's voice over the same cables used by its predecessor.

When Marconi popularized wireless technology, contemporaries initially viewed it as a way to allow the telegraph to function in places that could not be connected by cables. Early radios acted as devices for naval ships to communicate with other ships and with land stations; the focus was on person-to-person communication. However, the potential for broadcasting—sending messages to a large group of potential listeners—wasn't realized until later in the development of the medium.

For a more in-depth analysis of the development of the radio as well as what the future holds for radio broadcasting, view the following video:

*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://rotel.pressbooks.pub/comm-media-studies/?p=362#oembed-1*

## Broadcasting Arrives

The technology needed to build a radio transmitter and receiver was relatively simple, and the knowledge to build such devices soon reached the public. Amateur radio operators quickly crowded the airwaves, broadcasting messages to anyone within range and, by 1912, incurred government regulatory measures that required licenses and limited broadcast ranges for radio operation.[3] This regulation also gave the president the power to shut down all stations, a power notably exercised in 1917 upon the United States' entry into World War I to keep amateur radio operators from interfering with military use of radio waves for the duration of the war.[4]

Wireless technology made radio as it is known today possible, but its modern, practical function as a mass communication medium had been the domain of other technologies for some time. As early as the 1880s, people relied on telephones to transmit news, music, church sermons, and weather reports. In Budapest, Hungary, for example, a subscription service allowed individuals to listen to news reports and fictional stories on their telephones.[5] Around this time, telephones also transmitted opera performances from Paris to London. In 1909, this innovation emerged in the United States as a pay-per-play phonograph service in Wilmington, Delaware.[6] This service allowed subscribers to listen to specific music recordings on their telephones.[7]

In 1906, Massachusetts resident Reginald Fessenden initiated the first radio transmission of the human

3. White, Thomas. "Pioneering Amateurs (1900–1917)," United States Early Radio History, http://earlyradiohistory.us/sec012.htm.

4. White, "Pre-War Vacuum Tube Transmitter Development 1914–1917)," United States Early Radio History, http://earlyradiohistory.us/sec011.htm.

5. White, "Broadcasting After World War I (1919–1921)," United States Early Radio History, http://earlyradiohistory.us/sec016.htm.

6. White, "News and Entertainment by Telephone (1876–1925)," United States Early Radio History, http://earlyradiohistory.us/sec003.htm.

7. *ibid*

voice, but his efforts did not develop into a useful application.[8] Ten years later, Lee de Forest used radio in a more modern sense when he set up an experimental radio station, 2XG, in New York City. De Forest gave nightly broadcasts of music and news until World War I halted all transmissions for private citizens.[9]

## Radio's Commercial Potential

After the World War I radio ban lifted with the close of the conflict in 1919, a number of small stations began operating using technologies that had developed during the war. Many of these stations developed regular programming that included religious sermons, sports, and news.[10] As early as 1922, Schenectady, New York's WGY broadcast over 40 original dramas, showing radio's potential as a medium for drama. The WGY players created their own scripts and performed them live on air. This same groundbreaking group also made the first known attempt at television drama in 1928.[11]

Businesses such as department stores, which often had their own stations, first put radio's commercial applications to use. However, these stations did not advertise in a way that the modern radio listener would recognize. Early radio advertisements consisted only of a "genteel sales message broadcast during 'business' (daytime) hours, with no hard sell or mention of price."[12] In fact, radio advertising was originally considered an unprecedented invasion of privacy, because—unlike newspapers, which were bought at a newsstand—radios were present in the home and spoke with a voice in the presence of the whole family.[13] However, the social impact of radio was such that within a few years advertising was readily accepted on radio programs. Advertising agencies even began producing their own radio programs named after their products. At first, ads ran only during the day, but as economic pressure mounted during the Great Depression in the 1930s, local stations began looking for new sources of revenue, and advertising became a normal part of the radio soundscape.[14]

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8. Grant, John. Experiments and Results in Wireless Telegraphy (reprinted from The American Telephone Journal, 49–51, January 26, 1907), http://earlyradiohistory.us/1907fes.htm.

9. White, "Broadcasting After World War I (1919–1921)," United States Early Radio History, http://earlyradiohistory.us/sec016.htm.

10. White, "News and Entertainment by Telephone (1876–1925)," United States Early Radio History, http://earlyradiohistory.us/sec003.htm.

11. McLeod, Elizabeth. "The WGY Players and the Birth of Radio Drama," 1998, https://web.archive.org/web/20130525015424/http://www.midcoast.com:80/~lizmcl/wgy.html.

12. Sterling, Christopher and John Kittross, Stay Tuned: A History of American Broadcasting, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 124.

13. *ibid*

14. *ibid*

## The Rise of Radio Networks

Not long after radio's broadcast debut, large businesses saw its potential profitability and formed networks. In 1926, RCA started the National Broadcasting Network (NBC). Groups of stations that carried syndicated network programs along with a variety of local shows soon formed its Red and Blue networks. Two years after the creation of NBC, the United Independent Broadcasters became the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) and began competing with the existing Red and Blue networks.[15]

Although early network programming focused mainly on music, it soon developed to include other programs. Among these early innovations was the variety show. This format generally featured several different performers introduced by a host who segued between acts. Variety shows included styles as diverse as jazz and early country music. At night, dramas and comedies such as *Amos 'n' Andy*, *The Lone Ranger*, and *Fibber McGee* and *Molly* filled the airwaves. News, educational programs, and other types of talk programs also rose to prominence during the 1930s.[16]

## The Radio Act of 1927

In the mid-1920s, profit-seeking companies such as department stores and newspapers owned a majority of the nation's broadcast radio stations, which promoted their owners' businesses.[17] Nonprofit groups, such as churches and schools, operated another third of the stations. As the number of radio stations outgrew the available frequencies, interference became problematic, and the government stepped into the fray.

The Radio Act of 1927 established the Federal Radio Commission (FRC) to oversee the regulation of the airwaves. A year after its creation, the FRC reallocated station bandwidths to correct interference problems. The organization reserved 40 high-powered channels, setting aside 37 of these for network affiliates. The remaining 600 lower-powered bandwidths went to stations that had to share the frequencies; this meant that as one station went off the air at a designated time, another one began broadcasting in its place. The Radio Act of 1927 allowed major networks such as CBS and NBC to gain a 70 percent share of U.S. broadcasting by the

15. *ibid*

16. *ibid*

17. ThinkQuest, "Radio's Emergence," Oracle ThinkQuest: The 1920s, https://web.archive.org/web/20080411153035/http://library.thinkquest.org/27629/themes/media/md20s.html.

early 1930s, earning them $72 million in profits by 1934.[18] At the same time, nonprofit broadcasting fell to only 2 percent of the market.[19]

In protest of the favor that the 1927 Radio Act showed toward commercial broadcasting, struggling nonprofit radio broadcasters created the National Committee on Education by Radio to lobby for more outlets. Basing their argument on the notion that the airwaves—unlike newspapers—were a public resource, they asserted that groups working for the public good should take precedence over commercial interests. Nevertheless, the Communications Act of 1934 passed without addressing these issues, and radio continued as a mainly commercial enterprise.[20]

## The Impact of Disease: Distance Learning

In the autumn of 1937, Chicago was gripped by a polio outbreak, a deadly and paralyzing disease especially threatening to young children. This health crisis forced a delay in the opening of schools, causing public concern over lost educational time and leaving students without structured learning. To tackle this, Superintendent William H. Johnson and Assistant Superintendent Minnie Fallon spearheaded an ingenious solution—a mass distance education program using the power of radio. In partnership with major radio stations, daily newspapers, and local libraries, they broadcasted succinct 15-minute lessons covering subjects from social studies to mathematics. Detailed schedules were published in local papers, and an array of committees ensured the quality of the lessons. Despite some households lacking access to radios and others complaining about the pace of the broadcasts, this experiment reached an estimated 315,000 students, pioneering a form of remote learning long before the advent of the Internet.[21]

Chicago's ingenuity caught the attention of educators nationwide, serving as a prototype for cities grappling with similar health emergencies. Cities like Rochester, New York, and Cleveland quickly adapted radio-based distance education following Chicago's lead. Beyond its immediate impact, Chicago's experiment also had long-term implications. It laid the groundwork for educational broadcasting, culminating in the formation of Chicago's own educational radio station, WBEZ, in 1943. Thus, at a time when a virus threatened to put an

18. McChesney, Robert W. "Media and Democracy: The Emergence of Commercial Broadcasting in the United States, 1927–1935," in "Communication in History: The Key to Understanding," OAH Magazine of History 6, no. 4 (1992).

19. *ibid*

20. *ibid*

21. Strauss, Valerie. "Perspective | In Chicago, Schools Closed during a 1937 Polio Epidemic and Kids Learned from Home — over the Radio." *Washington Post*, April 3, 2020. https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2020/04/03/chicago-schools-closed-during-1937-polio-epidemic-kids-learned-home-over-radio/.

entire generation's education on hold, the innovative use of radio emerged not only as a stop-gap measure but also as a lasting legacy, influencing educational approaches for decades to come.[22]

The lessons learned from Chicago's 1937 experiment in radio-based distance learning resonate with the challenges and solutions we have encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic. As schools worldwide were forced to close their doors, technology stepped in to fill the void, this time in the form of online platforms rather than radio broadcasts. While the tools have evolved, the core idea remains the same: leveraging available technology to ensure educational continuity during public health crises. Chicago's early experiment serves as a historical touchstone, reminding us that necessity often catalyzes innovation in education, a lesson that remains relevant as educators continue to adapt and evolve remote learning methods today.

## The Golden Age of Radio

The so-called Golden Age of Radio occurred between 1930 and the mid-1950s. Because many associate the 1930s with the struggles of the Great Depression, it may seem contradictory that such a fruitful cultural occurrence arose during this decade. However, radio lent itself to the era. After the initial purchase of a receiver, radio was free and so provided an inexpensive source of entertainment that replaced other, more costly pastimes, such as going to the movies.

Radio also presented an easily accessible form of media that existed on its own schedule. Unlike reading newspapers or books, tuning in to a favorite program at a certain time became a part of listeners' daily routine because it effectively forced them to plan their lives around the dial.

## Daytime Radio Finds Its Market

During the Great Depression, radio became so successful that another network, the Mutual Broadcasting Network, began in 1934 to compete with NBC's Red and Blue networks and the CBS network, creating a total of four national networks.[23] As the networks became more adept at generating profits, their broadcast selections began to take on a format that later evolved into modern television programming. Serial dramas and programs that focused on domestic work aired during the day when many women were at home. Advertisers

22. Field, Jerry J. "A History of Educational Radio in Chicago with Emphasis on WBEZ-FM, 1920-1960." Loyola University Chicago, 1991. https://ecommons.luc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3272&context=luc_diss.

23. Cashman, Sean. America in the Twenties and Thirties: The Olympian Age of Franklin Delano Roosevelt (New York: New York University Press, 1989), 328.

targeted this demographic with commercials for domestic needs such as soap.[24] Because they were often sponsored by soap companies, daytime serial dramas soon became known as soap operas. Some modern televised soap operas, such as Guiding Light, which ended in 2009, actually began in the 1930s as radio serials.[25]

## The Origins of Prime Time

During the evening, many families listened to the radio together much as modern families may gather for television's prime time. Popular evening comedy variety shows such as George Burns and Gracie Allen's *Burns and Allen*, the *Jack Benny Show*, and the *Bob Hope Show* all began during the 1930s. These shows featured a central host—for whom the show was often named—and a series of sketch comedies, interviews, and musical performances, not unlike contemporary programs such as *Saturday Night Live*. Performed live before a studio audience, the programs thrived on a certain flair and spontaneity. Later in the evening, so-called prestige dramas such as *Lux Radio Theater* and *Mercury Theatre* on the Air aired. These shows featured major Hollywood actors recreating movies or acting out adaptations of literature.[26]

# Instant News

By the late 1930s, the popularity of radio news broadcasts had surpassed that of newspapers. Radio's ability to emotionally draw its audiences close to events made for news that evoked stronger responses and, thus, greater interest than print news could. For example, the infant son of famed aviator Charles Lindbergh was kidnapped and murdered in 1932. Radio networks set up mobile stations that covered events as they unfolded, broadcasting nonstop for several days and keeping listeners updated on every detail while tying them emotionally to the outcome.[27]

As recording technology advanced, reporters gained the ability to record events in the field and bring them back to the studio to broadcast over the airwaves. One early example of this was Herb Morrison's recording of the Hindenburg disaster. In 1937, the Hindenburg blimp exploded into flames while attempting to land, killing 37 of its passengers. Morrison was already on the scene to record the descent, capturing the fateful crash. The entire event was later broadcast, including the sound of the exploding blimp, providing listeners with

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24. Museum, "Soap Opera," The Museum of Broadcast Communications, https://web.archive.org/web/20130513033245/http://www.museum.tv/eotvsection.php?entrycode=soapopera.

25. Hilmes, Michele. Radio Voices: American Broadcasting 1922–1952 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 157.

26. *ibid*

27. Brown, Robert. Manipulating the Ether: The Power of Broadcast Radio in Thirties America (Jefferson, NC: MacFarland, 1998), 134–137.

an unprecedented emotional connection to a national disaster. Morrison's exclamation, "Oh, the humanity!" became a common phrase of despair after the event.[28]

Radio news became even more important during World War II when programs such as Norman Corwin's *This Is War!* sought to bring more sober news stories to a radio dial dominated by entertainment. The program dealt with the realities of war in a somber manner; at the beginning of the program, the host declared, "No one is invited to sit down and take it easy. Later, later, there's a war on."[29] In 1940, Edward R. Murrow, a journalist working in England at the time, broadcast firsthand accounts of the German bombing of London, giving Americans a sense of the trauma and terror that the English were experiencing at the outset of the war.[30] Radio news outlets were the first to broadcast the attack on Pearl Harbor that propelled the United States into World War II in 1941. By 1945, radio news had become so efficient and pervasive that when Roosevelt died, only his wife, his children, and Vice President Harry S. Truman were aware of it before the news was broadcast over the public airwaves.[31]

## The Birth of the Federal Communications Commission

The Communications Act of 1934 created the **Federal Communications Commission** (FCC) and ushered in a new era of government regulation. The organization quickly began enacting influential radio decisions. Among these was the 1938 decision to limit stations to 50,000 watts of broadcasting power, a ceiling that remains in effect today.[32] As a result of FCC anti-monopoly rulings, RCA was forced to sell its NBC Blue network; this spun-off division became the American Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) in 1943.[33]

Another significant regulation with long-lasting influence was the **Fairness Doctrine**. In 1949, the FCC established the Fairness Doctrine as a rule stating that if broadcasters editorialized in favor of a position on a

28. *ibid*

29. Horten, Gerd. Radio Goes to War: The Cultural Politics of Propaganda During World War II (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 48–52.

30. *ibid*

31. Brown, Robert. Manipulating the Ether: The Power of Broadcast Radio in Thirties America (Jefferson, NC: MacFarland, 1998).

32. Cashman, Sean. America in the Twenties and Thirties: The Olympian Age of Franklin Delano Roosevelt (New York: New York University Press, 1989).

33. Brinson, Susan. The Red Scare, Politics, and the Federal Communications Commission, 1941–1960 (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 42.

particular issue, they had to give equal time to all other reasonable positions on that issue.[34] This tenet came from the long-held notion that the airwaves were a public resource, and that they should thus serve the public in some way. Although the regulation remained in effect until 1987, the impact of its core concepts are still debated. This chapter will explore the Fairness Doctrine and its impact in greater detail in a later section.

## Radio on the Margins

Despite the networks' hold on programming, educational stations persisted at universities and in some municipalities. They broadcast programs such as School of the Air and College of the Air as well as roundtable and town hall forums. In 1940, the FCC reserved a set of frequencies in the lower range of the FM radio spectrum for public education purposes as part of its regulation of the new spectrum. The reservation of FM frequencies gave educational stations a boost, but FM proved initially unpopular due to a setback in 1945, when the FCC moved the FM bandwidth to a higher set of frequencies, ostensibly to avoid problems with interference.[35] This change required the purchase of new equipment by both consumers and radio stations, thus greatly slowing the widespread adoption of FM radio.

One enduring anomaly in the field of educational stations has been the Pacifica Radio network. Begun in 1949 to counteract the effects of commercial radio by bringing educational programs and dialogue to the airwaves, Pacifica has grown from a single station—Berkeley, California's KPFA—to a network of five stations and more than 100 affiliates.[36] From the outset, Pacifica aired newer classical, jazz, and folk music along with lectures, discussions, and interviews with public artists and intellectuals. Among Pacifica's major innovations was its refusal to take money from commercial advertisers, relying instead on donations from listeners and grants from institutions such as the Ford Foundation and calling itself listener-supported.[37]

Another important innovation on the fringes of the radio dial during this time was the growth of **border stations**. Located just across the Mexican border, these stations did not have to follow FCC or U.S. regulatory laws. Because the stations broadcast at 250,000 watts and higher, their listening range covered much of North America. Their content also diverged—at the time markedly—from that of U.S. stations. For example, Dr. John Brinkley started station XERF in Del Rio, Mexico, after being forced to shut down his station in

34. Browne, Ray and Glenn Browne, Laws of Our Fathers: Popular Culture and the U.S. Constitution (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1986), 132.

35. Longley, Lawrence D. "The FM Shift in 1945," Journal of Broadcasting 12, no. 4 (1968): 353–365.

36. Pacifica Network, "Pacifica Network Stations," The Pacifica Foundation, https://web.archive.org/web/20120529174826/http://www.pacificanetwork.org:80/radio/content/section/7/42/.

37. Mitchell, Jack. Listener Supported: The Culture and History of Public Radio (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005), 21–24.

Nebraska, and he used the border station in part to promote a dubious goat gland operation that supposedly cured sexual impotence.[38] Besides the goat gland promotion, the station and others like it often carried music such as country and western, which could not be heard on regular network radio. Later border station disc jockeys, such as Wolfman Jack, were instrumental in bringing rock and roll music to a wider audience.[39]

## Television Steals the Show

A great deal of radio's success as a medium during the 1920s and 1930s was due to the fact that no other medium could replicate it. This changed in the late 1940s and early 1950s as television became popular. A 1949 poll of people who had seen television found that almost half of them believed that radio was doomed.[40] Television sets had come on the market by the late 1940s, and by 1951, more Americans were watching television during prime time than ever.[41] Famous radio programs such as *The Bob Hope Show* were made into television shows, further diminishing radio's unique offerings.[42]

Surprisingly, some of radio's most critically lauded dramas launched during this period. Gunsmoke, an adult-oriented Western show (that later become television's longest-running show) began in 1952; crime drama *Dragnet*, later made famous in both television and film, broadcast between 1949 and 1957; and *Yours Truly, Johnny Dollar* aired from 1949 to 1962, when CBS canceled its remaining radio dramas. However, these respected radio dramas were the last of their kind.[43] Although radio was far from doomed by television, its Golden Age was.

## Transition to Top 40

As radio networks abandoned the dramas and variety shows that had previously sustained their formats, the soundscape was left to what radio could still do better than any other mass medium: play music. With

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38. Dash, Mike. "John Brinkley, the goat-gland quack," The Telegraph, April 18, 2008, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/non_fictionreviews/3671561/John-Brinkley-the-goat-gland-quack.html.

39. Rudel, Anthony. Hello, Everybody! The Dawn of American Radio (Orlando, FL: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008), 130–132.

40. Gallup, George. "One-Fourth in Poll Think Television Killing Radio," Schenectady (NY) Gazette, June 8, 1949, http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=d3YuAAAAIBAJ&sjid=loEFAAAAIBAJ&pg=840,1029432&dq=radio-is-doomed&hl=en.

41. Bradley, Becky. "American Cultural History: 1950–1959," Lone Star College, Kingwood, https://web.archive.org/web/20140817064005/http://kclibrary.lonestar.edu:80/decade50.html.

42. Cox, Jim. American Radio Networks: A History (Jefferson, NC: MacFarland, 2009), 171–175.

43. Cox, Jim. Say Goodnight, Gracie: The Last Years of Network Radio (Jefferson, NC: MacFarland, 2002), 39–41.

advertising dollars down and the emergence of better recording formats, it made good business sense for radio to focus on shows that played prerecorded music. As strictly music stations began to rise, new innovations to increase their profitability appeared. One of the most notable and far-reaching of these innovations was the Top 40 station, a concept that supposedly came from watching jukebox patrons continually play the same songs[44] Robert Storz and Gordon McLendon began adapting existing radio stations to fit this new format with great success. In 1956, the creation of limited playlists further refined the format by providing about 50 songs that disc jockeys played repeatedly every day. By the early 1960s, many stations had developed limited playlists of only 30 songs.[45]

Another musically fruitful innovation came with the increase of Black disc jockeys and programs created for Black audiences. Because its advertisers had nowhere to go in a media market dominated by White performers, Black radio became more common on the AM dial. As traditional programming left radio, disc jockeys began to develop as the medium's new personalities, talking more in between songs and developing followings. Early Black disc jockeys even began improvising rhymes over the music, pioneering techniques that later became rap and hip-hop. This new personality-driven style helped bring early rock and roll to new audiences.[46]

## FM: The High-Fidelity Counterculture

As music came to rule the airwaves, FM radio drew in new listeners because of its high-fidelity sound capabilities. When radio had primarily featured dramas and other talk-oriented formats, the sound quality had simply not mattered to many people, and the purchase of an FM receiver did not compete with the purchase of a new television in terms of entertainment value. As FM receivers decreased in price and stereo recording technology became more popular, however, the high-fidelity trend created a market for FM stations. Mostly affluent consumers began purchasing component stereos with the goal of getting the highest sound quality possible out of their recordings.[47] Although this audience often preferred classical and jazz stations to Top 40 radio, they were tolerant of new music and ideas.[48]

Both the high-fidelity market and the growing youth counterculture of the 1960s had similar goals for the FM spectrum. Both groups eschewed AM radio because of the predictable programming, poor sound quality, and over-commercialization. Both groups wanted to treat music as an important experience rather than as just

44. Brewster, Bill and Frank Broughton, Last Night a DJ Saved My Life: The History of the Disc Jockey, (New York: Grove Press, 2000), 48.

45. Walker, Jesse. Rebels on the Air: An Alternative History of Radio in America (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 56.

46. *ibid*

47. Douglas, Susan. Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 266–268.

48. *ibid*

a trendy pastime or a means to make money. Many adherents to the youth counterculture of the 1960s came from affluent, middle-class families, and their tastes came to define a new era of consumer culture. The goals and market potential of both the high-fidelity lovers and the youth counterculture created an atmosphere on the FM dial that had never before occurred.[49]

Between the years 1960 and 1966, the number of households capable of receiving FM transmissions grew from about 6.5 million to some 40 million. The FCC also aided FM by issuing its non-duplication ruling in 1964. Before this regulation, many AM stations had other stations on the FM spectrum that simply duplicated the AM programming. The non-duplication rule forced FM stations to create their own fresh programming, opening up the spectrum for established networks to develop new stations.[50]

The late 1960s saw new disc jockeys taking greater liberties with established practices; these liberties included playing several songs in a row before going to a commercial break or airing album tracks that exceeded 10 minutes in length. University stations and other nonprofit ventures to which the FCC had given frequencies during the late 1940s popularized this format, and, in time, commercial stations tried to duplicate their success by playing fewer commercials and by allowing their disc jockeys to have a say in their playlists. Although this made for popular listening formats, FM stations struggled to make the kinds of profits that the AM spectrum drew.[51]

In 1974, FM radio accounted for one-third of all radio listening but only 14 percent of radio profits.[52] Large network stations and advertisers began to market heavily to the FM audience in an attempt to correct this imbalance. Stations began tightening their playlists and narrowing their formats to please advertisers and generate greater revenues. By the end of the 1970s, radio stations were beginning to play specific formats, and the progressive radio of the previous decade had become difficult to find.[53]

## The Rise of Public Radio

After the Golden Age of Radio came to an end, most listeners tuned in to radio stations to hear music. The variety shows and talk-based programs that had sustained radio in early years could no longer draw enough listeners to make them a successful business proposition. One divergent path from this general trend, however, was the growth of public radio.

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49. *ibid*

50. *ibid*

51. *ibid*

52. *ibid*

53. *ibid*

Groups such as the Ford Foundation had funded public media sources during the early 1960s. When the foundation decided to withdraw its funding in the middle of the decade, the federal government stepped in with the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967. This act created the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) and charged it with generating funding for public television and radio outlets. The CPB, in turn, created National Public Radio (NPR) in 1970 to provide programming for already-operating stations. Until 1982, in fact, the CPB entirely and exclusively funded NPR. Public radio's first program was *All Things Considered*, an evening news program that focused on analysis and interpretive reporting rather than cutting-edge coverage. In the mid-1970s, NPR attracted Washington-based journalists such as Cokie Roberts and Linda Wertheimer to its ranks, giving the coverage a more professional, hard-reporting edge.[54]

However, in 1983, public radio was pushed to the brink of financial collapse. NPR survived in part by relying more on its member stations to hold fundraising drives, now a vital component of public radio's business model. In 2003, Joan Kroc, the widow of McDonald's CEO and philanthropist Ray Kroc, bequeathed a grant of over $200 million to NPR that may keep it afloat for many years to come.

Having weathered the financial storm intact, NPR continued its progression as a respected news provider. During the first Gulf War, NPR sent out correspondents for the first time to provide in-depth coverage of unfolding events. Public radio's extensive coverage of the 2001 terrorist bombings gained its member stations many new listeners, and it has since expanded.[55] Although some have accused NPR of presenting the news with a liberal bias, its listenership in 2005 was 28 percent conservative, 32 percent liberal, and 29 percent moderate. Newt Gingrich, a conservative Republican and former Speaker of the House, has stated that the network is "a lot less on the left" than some may believe.[56] With more than 26 million weekly listeners and 860 member stations in 2009, NPR has become a leading radio news source.[57]

Public radio distributors such as Public Radio International (PRI) and local public radio stations such as WBEZ in Chicago have also created a number of cultural and entertainment programs, including quiz shows, cooking shows, and a host of local public forum programs. Storytelling programs such as *This American Life* have created a new kind of free-form radio documentary genre, while shows such as PRI's variety show *A Prairie Home Companion* have revived older radio genres. This variety of popular public radio programming has shifted radio from a music-dominated medium to one that is again exploring its vast potential.

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54. Schardt, Sue. "Public Radio—A Short History," Christian Science Monitor Publishing Company, 1996, https://web.archive.org/web/20110809080512/http://www.wsvh.org/pubradiohist.htm.

55. Clift, Nick. "Viewpoint: Protect NPR, It Protects Us," Michigan Daily, February 15, 2011, http://www.michigandaily.com/content/viewpoint-npr.

56. Sherman, Scott. "Good, Gray NPR," The Nation, May 23, 2005, 34–38.

57. Kamenetz, Anya. "Will NPR Save the News?" Fast Company, April 1, 2009, http://www.fastcompany.com/magazine/134/finely-tuned.html.

## Conglomerates

During the early 1990s, many radio stations suffered the effects of an economic recession. Some stations initiated **local marketing agreements** (LMAs) to share facilities and resources amid this economic decline. LMAs led to consolidation in the industry as radio stations bought other stations to create new hubs for the same programming. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 further increased consolidation by eliminating a duopoly rule prohibiting dual station ownership in the same market and by lifting the numerical limits on station ownership by a single entity.

As large corporations such as Clear Channel Communications bought up stations around the country, they reformatted stations that had once competed against one another so that each focused on a different format. This practice led to mainstream radio's present state, in which narrow formats target highly specific demographic audiences.

Ultimately, although the industry consolidation of the 1990s made radio profitable, it reduced local coverage and diversity of programming. Because stations around the country served as outlets for a single network, the radio landscape became more uniform and predictable.[58] Much as with chain restaurants and stores, some people enjoy this type of predictability, while others prefer a more localized, unique experience.[59]

### Key Takeaways

- The Golden Age of Radio covered the period between 1930 and 1950. It was characterized by radio's overwhelming popularity and a wide range of programming, including variety, music, drama, and theater programs.
- Top 40 radio arose after most non-music programming moved to television. This format used short playlists of popular hits and gained a great deal of commercial success during the 1950s and 1960s.
- FM became popular during the late 1960s and 1970s as commercial stations adopted the practices of free-form stations to appeal to new audiences who desired higher fidelity and a less restrictive format.

58. Keith, Michael. The Radio Station: Broadcast, Satellite and Internet (Burlington, MA: Focal Press, 2010), 17–24.

59. *ibid*

- Empowered by the Telecommunications Act of 1996, media conglomerates have subsumed unprecedented numbers of radio stations by single companies. Radio station consolidation brings predictability and profits at the expense of unique programming.

**Exercises**

Please respond to the following short-answer writing prompts. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. Explain the advantages that radio had over traditional print media during the 1930s and 1940s.
2. Do you think that radio could experience another golden age? Explain your answer.
3. How has the consolidation of radio stations affected radio programming?
4. Characterize the overall effects of one significant technological or social shift described in this section on radio as a medium.

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# 13.2 RADIO'S IMPACT ON CULTURE

**Learning Objectives**

- Analyze radio as a form of mass media.
- Describe the effects of radio on the spread of different types of music.
- Analyze the effects of the Fairness Doctrine on political radio.
- Formulate opinions on controversial issues in radio.

Since its inception, radio's impact on American culture has been immense. Modern popular culture is unthinkable without the early influence of radio. Entire genres of music that are now taken for granted, such as country and rock, owe their popularity and even existence to early radio programs that publicized new forms.

## A New Kind of Mass Media

Mass media such as newspapers had been around for years before the existence of radio. In fact, radio was initially considered a kind of disembodied newspaper. Although this idea gave early proponents a useful, familiar way to think about radio, it underestimated radio's power as a medium. Newspapers had the potential to reach a wide audience, but radio had the potential to reach almost everyone. Neither illiteracy nor even a busy schedule impeded radio's success—one could now perform an activity and listen to the radio at the same time. This unprecedented reach made radio an instrument of social cohesion as it brought together members of different classes and backgrounds to experience the world as a nation.

Radio programs reflected this nationwide cultural aspect of radio. *Vox Pop*, a show originally based on person-in-the-street interviews, was an early attempt to quantify the United States' growing mass culture. Beginning in 1935, the program billed itself as an unrehearsed "cross-section of what the average person really knows" by asking random people an assortment of questions. Many modern television shows still employ this

format not only for viewers' amusement and information but also as an attempt to sum up national culture.[1] *Vox Pop* functioned on a cultural level as an acknowledgement of radio's entrance into people's private lives to make them public.[2]

Radio news was more than just a quick way to find out about events; it was a way for U.S. citizens to experience events with the same emotions. During the Ohio and Mississippi river floods of 1937, radio brought the voices of those who suffered as well as the voices of those who fought the rising tides. A West Virginia newspaper explained the strengths of radio in providing emotional voices during such crises: "Thanks to radio...the nation as a whole has had its nerves, its heart, its soul exposed to the needs of its unfortunates...We are a nation integrated and interdependent. We are 'our brother's keeper.'"[3]

Radio's presence in the home also heralded the evolution of consumer culture in the United States. In 1941, two-thirds of radio programs carried advertising. Radio allowed advertisers to sell products to a captive audience. This kind of mass marketing ushered in a new age of consumer culture.[4]

## War of the Worlds and the Power of Radio

During the 1930s, radio's impact and powerful social influence was perhaps most obvious in the aftermath of the Orson Welles's notorious *War of the Worlds* broadcast. On Halloween night in 1938, radio producer Orson Welles told listeners of the *Mercury Theatre on the Air* that they would be treated to an original adaptation of H. G. Wells's classic science fiction novel of alien invasion *War of the Worlds*. The adaptation started as if it were a normal music show that was interrupted by news reports of an alien invasion. Many listeners had tuned in late and did not hear the disclaimer, and so were caught up by the realism of the adaptation, believing it to be an actual news story.

1. Loviglio, Jason. "Vox Pop: Network Radio and the Voice of the People" in Radio Reader: Essays in the Cultural History of Radio, ed. Michele Hilmes and Jason Loviglio (New York: Routledge, 2002), 89–106.

2. *ibid*

3. Brown, Robert J. *Manipulating the Ether: The Power of Broadcast Radio in Thirties America*. Repr. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2004.

4. Cashman, Sean. America in the Twenties and Thirties: The Olympian Age of Franklin Delano Roosevelt (New York: New York University Press, 1989), 328.

Figure 1: An image of the cover of The War of the Worlds. Orson Welles's War of the Worlds broadcast terrified listeners, many of whom actually believed a Martian invasion was actually occurring.

According to some, an estimated 6 million people listened to the show, with an incredible 1.7 million believing

it to be true.[5] Some listeners called loved ones to say goodbye or ran into the street armed with weapons to fight off the invading Martians of the radio play.[6] In Grovers Mill, New Jersey—where the supposed invasion began—some listeners reported nonexistent fires and fired gunshots at a water tower thought to be a Martian landing craft. One listener drove through his own garage door in a rush to escape the area. Two Princeton University professors spent the night searching for the meteorite that had supposedly preceded the invasion.[7] As calls came in to local police stations, officers explained that they were equally concerned about the problem.[8]

Figure 2: A photograph of a 1926 typewriter, that was used by Orson Welles at the peak of his career, on display at the National Museum of American History.

Although the story of the *War of the Worlds* broadcast may be funny in retrospect, the event traumatized those who believed the story. Individuals from every education level and walk of life had been taken in by the program, despite the producers' warnings before, during the intermission, and after the program.[9] This event

5. Lubertozzi, Alex and Brian Holmsten, The War of the Worlds: Mars' Invasion of Earth, Inciting Panic and Inspiring Terror From H. G. Wells to Orson Welles and Beyond (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2005), 7–9.

6. *ibid*

7. *ibid*

8. *ibid*

9. *ibid*

revealed the unquestioning faith that many Americans had in radio. Radio's intimate communication style was a powerful force during the 1930s and 1940s.

# Radio and the Development of Popular Music

One of radio's most enduring legacies is its impact on music. Before radio, most popular songs were distributed through piano sheet music and word of mouth. This necessarily limited the types of music that could gain national prominence. Although recording technology had also emerged several decades before radio, music played live over the radio sounded better than it did on a record played in the home. Live music performances thus became a staple of early radio. Many performance venues had their own radio transmitters to broadcast live shows—for example, Harlem's Cotton Club broadcast performances that CBS picked up and broadcast nationwide.

Radio networks mainly played swing jazz, giving the bands and their leaders a widespread audience. Popular bandleaders including Duke Ellington, Benny Goodman, and Tommy Dorsey and their jazz bands became nationally famous through their radio performances, and a host of other jazz musicians flourished as radio made the genre nationally popular.[10] National networks also played classical music. Often presented in an educational context, this programming had a different tenor than did dance-band programming. NBC promoted the genre through shows such as the *Music Appreciation Hour*, which sought to educate both young people and the general public on the nuances of classical music.[11] It created the NBC Symphony Orchestra, a 92-piece band under the direction of famed conductor Arturo Toscanini. The orchestra made its first performance in 1937 and was so popular that Toscanini stayed on as conductor for 17 years.[12] The Metropolitan Opera was also popular; its broadcasts in the early 1930s had an audience of 9 million listeners.[13]

## Regional Sounds Take Hold

The promotional power of radio also gave regional music an immense boost. Local stations often carried their own programs featuring the popular music of the area. Stations such as Nashville, Tennessee's WSM

10. Wald, Elijah. How the Beatles Destroyed Rock 'n' Roll: An Alternative History of American Popular Music (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 100–104.

11. Howe, Sondra Wieland "The NBC Music Appreciation Hour: Radio Broadcasts of Walter Damrosch, 1928–1942," Journal of Research in Music Education 51, no. 1 (Spring 2003).

12. Horowitz, Joseph. Classical Music in America: A History of Its Rise and Fall (New York: Norton, 2005), 399–404.

13. *ibid*

played early country, blues, and folk artists. The history of this station illustrates the ways in which radio—and its wide range of broadcasting—created new perspectives on American culture. In 1927, WSM's program *Barn Dance*, which featured early country music and blues, followed an hour-long program of classical music. George Hay, the host of *Barn Dance*, used the juxtaposition of classical and country genres to spontaneously rename the show: "For the past hour we have been listening to music taken largely from Grand Opera, but from now on we will present 'The Grand Ole Opry.'"[14] NBC picked up the program for national syndication in 1939, and it is currently one of the longest-running radio programs of all time.

Figure 3: Country musician Dolly Parton sings a song on stage during a Grand Ole Opry live broadcast in Nashville, Tenn. as U.S. soldiers watch the show simultaneously in Iraq on April 23, 2005. Secretary of Defense Donald. H. Rumsfeld also visited Nashville to thank Dolly Parton, the Grand Ole Opry and the American people for their support of our troops. DoD photo by Tech. Sgt. Cherie A. Thurlby, U.S. Air Force. The Grand Ole Opry gave a national stage to country and early rock musicians.

Shreveport, Louisiana's KWKH aired an *Opry*-type show called *Louisiana Hayride*. This program propelled stars such as Hank Williams into the national spotlight. Country music, formerly a mix of folk, blues, and mountain music, was made into a genre that was accessible by the nation through this show. Without programs

14. Kyriakoudes, Louis. The Social Origins of the Urban South: Race, Gender, and Migration in Nashville and Middle Tennessee, 1890–1930 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 7.

that featured these country and blues artists, Elvis Presley and Johnny Cash would not have become national stars, and country music may not have risen to become a popular genre.[15]

In the 1940s, other Southern stations also began playing rhythm and blues records recorded by Black artists. Artists such as Wynonie Harris, famous for his rendition of Roy Brown's "Good Rockin' Tonight," were often played by White disc jockeys who tried to imitate Black Southerners.[16] During the late 1940s, both Memphis, Tennessee's WDIA and Atlanta, Georgia's WERD were owned and operated by Black individuals. These disc jockeys often provided a measure of community leadership at a time when few Black individuals were in powerful positions.[17]

The WANN, a radio station in Annapolis, Maryland, gained notoriety and success after it shifted its format to what was then termed as "race" music. Featuring R&B icons like Ruth Brown and Sarah Vaughn, the station was a cultural lifeline, especially for the Black community in the Annapolis area. Spearheaded by Charles W. "Hoppy" Adams II, a former cab driver and barber, the station gained a loyal local following despite societal resistance to its genre. Larry Blum, the son of the station's founder, emphasized his father's commitment to community service over profits, making WANN a platform for free expression. The station's impact extended beyond music; it was a catalyst in broadening racial lines, particularly during the Civil Rights era. Interestingly, WANN's playlist predated the British Invasion, giving local youth an early introduction to what would later become global hits. The station had far-reaching signals and a diverse set of advertisers, capitalizing on Hoppy's charismatic selling skills. Throughout its run, WANN was not merely a business but a cause—serving as a cultural touchstone that helped transform lives in a racially divided society.[18]

15. DiMeo, Nate. "New York Clashes with the Heartland," Hearing America: A Century of Music on the Radio, American Public Media, 2010, http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/radio/b1.html.

16. Laird, Tracey. Louisiana Hayride: Radio and Roots Music Along the Red River (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4–10.

17. Walker, Jesse. Rebels on the Air: An Alternative History of Radio in America (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 56.

18. Reynolds, Cate. "A Broadcasting Beacon: WANN Radio, From 'The Other' Annapolis to the Smithsonian." What's Up? Media, February 5, 2016. https://whatsupmag.com/api/content/d34b5f74-0858-565c-9d76-412498ed6e91/.

Figure 4: A photo of a studio microphone used as WANN in the 1940s, on display at the National Museum of American History.

## Radio's Lasting Influences

Radio technology changed the way that dance and popular music were performed. Because of the use of microphones, vocalists could be heard better over the band, allowing singers to use a greater vocal range and create more expressive styles, an innovation that led singers to become an important part of popular music's image. The use of microphones similarly allowed individual performers to be featured playing solos and lead parts, features that were less encouraged before radio. The exposure of radio also led to more rapid turnover in

popular music. Before radio, jazz bands played the same arrangement for several years without it getting old, but as radio broadcasts reached wide audiences, new arrangements and songs had to be produced at a more rapid pace to keep up with changing tastes.[19]

The spotlight of radio allowed the personalities of artists to come to the forefront of popular music, giving them newfound notoriety. Phil Harris, the bandleader from the *Jack Benny Show*, became the star of his own program. Other famous musicians used radio talent shows to gain fame. Popular programs such as *Major Bowes and His Original Amateur Hour* featured unknown entertainers trying to gain fame through exposure to the show's large audience. Major Bowes used a gong to usher bad performers offstage, often contemptuously dismissing them, but not all the performers struck out; such successful singers as Frank Sinatra debuted on the program.[20]

Television, much like modern popular music, owes a significant debt to the Golden Age of Radio. Major radio networks such as NBC, ABC, and CBS became—and remain—major forces in television, and their programming decisions for radio formed the basis for television. Actors, writers, and directors who worked in radio simply transferred their talents into the world of early television, using the successes of radio as their models.

## Radio and Politics

Over the years, radio has had a considerable influence on the political landscape of the United States. In the past, government leaders relied on radio to convey messages to the public, such as President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "fireside chats." Radio was also used as a way to generate propaganda for World War II. The War Department established a Radio Division in its Bureau of Public Relations as early as 1941. Programs such as the *Treasury Hour* used radio drama to raise revenue through the sale of war bonds, but other government efforts took a decidedly political turn. Norman Corwin's *This Is War!* was funded by the federal Office of Facts and Figures (OFF) to directly garner support for the war effort. It featured programs that prepared listeners to make personal sacrifices—including death—to win the war. The program was also directly political, popularizing the idea that the New Deal was a success and bolstering Roosevelt's image through comparisons with Lincoln.[21]

Certainly, radio has been used by the government for its own purposes, but it has had an even greater impact

19. Wald, Elijah. How the Beatles Destroyed Rock 'n' Roll: An Alternative History of American Popular Music (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 100–104.

20. Sterling, Christopher and John Kittross, Stay Tuned: A History of American Broadcasting, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 124.

21. Horten, Gerd. Radio Goes to War: The Cultural Politics of Propaganda During World War II (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 48–52.

on politics by serving as what has been called "the ultimate arena for free speech."[22] Such infamous radio firebrands as Father Charles Coughlin, a Roman Catholic priest whose radio program opposed the New Deal, criticized Jews, and supported Nazi policies, aptly demonstrated this capability early in radio's history.[23] In recent decades, radio has supported political careers, including those of U.S. Senator Al Franken of Minnesota, former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani, and presidential aspirant Fred Thompson. Talk show hosts such as Rush Limbaugh have gained great political influence, with some even viewing Limbaugh as the de facto leader of the Republican Party.[24]

## FDR's Fireside Chats

President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Depression-era radio talks, or "fireside chats," remain one of the most famous uses of radio in politics. While governor of New York, Roosevelt had used radio as a political tool, so he quickly adopted it to explain the unprecedented actions that his administration was taking to deal with the economic fallout of the Great Depression. His first speech took place only 1 week after being inaugurated. Roosevelt had closed all of the banks in the country for 4 days while the government dealt with a national banking crisis, and he used the radio to explain his actions directly to the American people.[25]

Roosevelt's first radio address set a distinct tone as he employed informal speech in the hopes of inspiring confidence in the American people and of helping them stave off the kind of panic that could have destroyed the entire banking system. Roosevelt understood both the intimacy of radio and its powerful outreach.[26] He was thus able to balance a personal tone with a message that was meant for millions of people. This relaxed approach inspired a CBS executive to name the series the "fireside chats."[27]

Roosevelt delivered a total of 27 of these 15- to 30-minute-long addresses to estimated audiences of 30 million to 40 million people, then a quarter of the U.S. population.[28] Roosevelt's use of radio was both a testament to his own skills and savvy as a politician and to the power and ubiquity of radio during this period. At the time, there was no other form of mass media that could have had the same effect.

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22. Davis, Richard. and Diana Owen, New Media and American Politics (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 54.

23. Sterling, Christopher and John Kittross, Stay Tuned: A History of American Broadcasting, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 124.

24. Halloran, Liz. "Steele-Limbaugh Spat: A Battle for GOP's Future?" NPR, March 2, 2009, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=101430572.

25. Grafton, John. ed., Great Speeches—Franklin Delano Roosevelt (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1999), 34.

26. *ibid*

27. *ibid*

28. *ibid*

## The Importance of Talk Radio

An important contemporary convergence of radio and politics can be readily heard on modern talk radio programs. Far from being simply chat shows, the talk radio that became popular in the 1980s features a host who takes callers and discusses a wide assortment of topics. Talk radio hosts gain and keep their listeners by sheer force of personality, and some say shocking or insulting things to get their message across. These hosts range from conservative radio hosts such as Rush Limbaugh to so-called shock jocks such as Howard Stern.

# Repeal of the Fairness Doctrine

While talk radio first began during the 1920s, the emergence of the format as a contemporary cultural and political force took place during the mid- to late-1980s following the repeal of the Fairness Doctrine.[29] As you read earlier in this chapter, this doctrine, established in 1949, required any station broadcasting a political point of view over the air to allow equal time to all reasonable dissenting views. Despite its noble intentions of safeguarding public airwaves for diverse views, the doctrine had long attracted a level of dissent. Opponents of the Fairness Doctrine claimed that it had a chilling effect on political discourse as stations, rather than risk government intervention, avoided programs that were divisive or controversial.[30] In 1987, the FCC under the Reagan administration repealed the regulation, setting the stage for an AM talk radio boom; by 2004, the number of talk radio stations had increased by 17-fold.[31]

The end of the Fairness Doctrine allowed stations to broadcast programs without worrying about finding an opposing point of view to balance the stated opinions of its host. Radio hosts representing all points of the political spectrum could say anything that they wanted to—within FCC limits—without fear of rebuttal. Media bias and its ramifications will be explored at greater length in the chapter on ethics.

# The Revitalization of AM

The migration of music stations to the FM spectrum during the 1960s and 1970s provided a great deal of space on the AM band for talk shows. With the Fairness Doctrine no longer a hindrance, these programs slowly

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29. Cruz, Gilbert. "GOP Rallies Behind Talk Radio," Time, June 28, 2007, https://web.archive.org/web/20130824183545/http://www.time.com/time/politics/article/0,8599,1638662,00.html.

30. *ibid*

31. Anderson, Brian. South Park Conservatives: The Revolt Against Liberal Media Bias (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2005), 35–36.

gained notoriety during the late 1980s and early 1990s. In 1998, talk radio hosts railed against a proposed congressional pay increase, and their listeners became incensed; House Speaker Jim Wright received a deluge of faxes protesting it from irate talk radio listeners from stations all over the country.[32] Ultimately, Congress canceled the pay increase, and various print outlets acknowledged the influence of talk radio on the decision. Propelled by events such as these, talk radio stations rose from only 200 in the early 1980s to more than 850 in 1994.[33]

## Coast to Coast AM

Although political programs unquestionably rule AM talk radio, that dial is also home to a kind of show that some radio listeners may have never experienced. Late at night on AM radio, a program airs during which listeners hear stories about ghosts, alien abductions, and fantastic creatures. It's not a fictional drama program, however, but instead a call-in talk show called *Coast to Coast AM*. In 2006, this unlikely success ranked among the top 10 AM talk radio programs in the nation—a stunning feat considering its 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. time slot and bizarre format.[34]

Originally started by host Art Bell in the 1980s, *Coast to Coast* focuses on topics that mainstream media outlets rarely treat seriously. Regular guests include ghost investigators, psychics, Bigfoot biographers, alien abductees, and deniers of the moon landing. The guests take calls from listeners who are allowed to ask questions or talk about their own paranormal experiences or theories.

*Coast to Coast's* current host, George Noory, has continued the show's format. In some areas, its ratings have even exceeded those of Rush Limbaugh's.[35] For a late-night show, these kinds of high ratings are rare. The success of *Coast to Coast* is thus a continuing testament to the diversity and unexpected potential of radio.[36]

## On-Air Political Influence

As talk radio's popularity grew during the early 1990s, it quickly became an outlet for political ambitions. In 1992, nine talk show hosts ran for U.S. Congress. By the middle of the decade, it had become common for

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32. Douglas, Susan. Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 266–268.

33. *ibid*

34. Vigil, Delfin. "Conspiracy Theories Propel AM Radio Show Into the Top Ten," San Francisco Chronicle, November 12, 2006, http://articles.sfgate.com/2006-11-12/news/17318973_1_radio-show-coast-cold-war.

35. *ibid*

36. *ibid*

many former—or failed—politicians to attempt to use the format. Former California governor Jerry Brown and former New York mayor Ed Koch were among the mid-1990s politicians that had AM talk shows.[37] Both conservatives and liberals widely agree that conservative hosts dominate AM talk radio. Many talk show hosts, such as Limbaugh, who began his popular program 1 year after the repeal of the Fairness Doctrine, have made a profitable business out of their programs.

During the 2000s, AM talk radio continued to build. Hosts such as Michael Savage, Sean Hannity, and Bill O'Reilly furthered the trend of popular conservative talk shows, but liberal hosts also became popular through the short-lived Air America network. The network closed abruptly in 2010 amid financial concerns.[38] Although the network was unsuccessful, it provided a platform for such hosts as MSNBC TV news host Rachel Maddow and Minnesota Senator Al Franken. Other liberal hosts such as Bill Press and Ron Reagan, son of President Ronald Reagan, have also found success in the AM political talk radio field.[39] Despite these successes, liberal talk radio is often viewed as unsustainable.[40] To some, the failure of Air America confirms conservatives' domination of AM radio. In response to the conservative dominance of talk radio, many prominent liberals, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, have advocated reinstating the Fairness Doctrine and forcing stations to offer equal time to contrasting opinions.[41]

## Freedom of Speech and Radio Controversies

While the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution gives radio personalities the freedom to say nearly anything they want on the air without fear of prosecution (except in cases of obscenity, slander, or incitement of violence), it does not protect them from being fired from their jobs when their controversial comments create public outrage. Many talk radio hosts, such as Howard Stern, push the boundaries of acceptable

37. Annenberg Public Policy Center, Call-In Political Talk Radio: Background, Content, Audiences, Portrayal in Mainstream Media, Annenberg Public Policy Center Report Series, August 7, 1996, https://web.archive.org/web/20170713172355/http://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/Downloads/Political_Communication/Political_Talk_Radio/1996_03_political_talk_radio_rpt.PDF.

38. Stelter, Brian. "Liberal Radio, Even Without Air America," New York Times, January 24, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/25/arts/25radio.html.

39. *ibid*

40. Hallowell, Billy. "Media Matters' Vapid Response to Air America's Crash," Big Journalism, January 26, 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20111208183415/http://bigjournalism.com/bhallowell/2010/01/26/media-matters-vapid-response-to-air-americas-crash/.

41. Stotts, Bethany. "Pelosi Supports Return of Fairness Doctrine," Accuracy in Media Column, June 26, 2008, https://web.archive.org/web/20230127084712/https://www.aim.org/aim-column/pelosi-support-return-of-fairness-doctrine/.

speech to engage listeners and boost ratings, but sometimes radio hosts push too far, unleashing a storm of controversy.

## Making (and Unmaking) a Career out of Controversy

Talk radio host Howard Stern has managed to build his career on creating controversy—despite being fined multiple times for indecency by the FCC, Stern remains one of the highest-paid and most popular talk radio hosts in the United States. Stern's radio broadcasts often feature scatological or sexual humor, creating an "anything goes" atmosphere. Because his on-air antics frequently generate controversy that can jeopardize advertising sponsorships and drive away offended listeners—in addition to risking fines from the FCC—Stern has a history of uneasy relationships with the radio stations that employ him. In an effort to free himself of conflicts with station owners and sponsors, in 2005 Stern signed a contract with Sirius Satellite Radio, which is exempt from FCC regulation, so that he can continue to broadcast his show without fear of censorship.

Stern's massive popularity gives him a lot of clout, which has allowed him to weather controversy and continue to have a successful career. Other radio hosts who have gotten themselves in trouble with poorly considered on-air comments have not been so lucky. In April 2007, Don Imus, host of the long-running *Imus in the Morning*, was suspended for racist and sexist comments made about the Rutgers University women's basketball team.[42] Though he publicly apologized, the scandal continued to draw negative attention in the media, and CBS canceled his show to avoid further unfavorable publicity and the withdrawal of advertisers. Though he returned to the airwaves in December of that year with a different station, the episode was a major setback for Imus's career and his public image. Similarly, syndicated conservative talk show host Dr. Laura Schlessinger ended her radio show in 2010 due to pressure from radio stations and sponsors after her repeated use of a racial epithet on a broadcast incited a public backlash.[43]

As the examples of these talk radio hosts show, the issue of freedom of speech on the airwaves is often complicated by the need for radio stations to be profitable. Outspoken or shocking radio hosts can draw in many listeners, attracting advertisers to sponsor their shows and bringing in money for their radio stations. Although some listeners may be offended by these hosts and may stop tuning in, as long as the hosts continue to attract advertising dollars, their employers are usually content to allow the hosts to speak freely on the air. However, if a host's behavior ends up sparking a major controversy, causing advertisers to withdraw their sponsorship to avoid tarnishing their brands, the radio station will often fire the host and look to someone who can better sustain advertising partnerships. Radio hosts' right to free speech does not compel their employer to give them the forum to exercise it. Popular hosts like Don Imus may find a home on the air again once the

42. MSNBC, Imus in the Morning, MSNBC, April 4, 2007.

43. *ibid*

furor has died down, but for radio hosts concerned about the stability of their careers, the lesson is clear: there are practical limits on their freedom of speech.

## Key Takeaways

- Radio was unique as a form of mass media because it had the potential to reach anyone, even the illiterate. Radio news in the 1930s and 1940s brought the emotional impact of traumatic events home to the listening public in a way that gave the nation a sense of unity.
- Radio encouraged the growth of national popular music stars and brought regional sounds to wider audiences. The effects of early radio programs can be felt both in modern popular music and in television programming.
- The Fairness Doctrine was created to ensure fair coverage of issues over the airwaves. It stated that radio stations must give equal time to contrasting points of view on an issue. An enormous rise in the popularity of AM talk radio occurred after the repeal of the Fairness Doctrine in 1987.
- The need for radio stations to generate revenue places practical limits on what radio personalities can say on the air. Shock jocks like Howard Stern and Don Imus test, and sometimes exceed, these limits and become controversial figures, highlighting the tension between freedom of speech and the need for businesses to be profitable.

## Exercises

Please respond to the following writing prompts. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. Describe the unique qualities that set radio apart from other forms of mass media, such as newspapers.
2. How did radio bring new music to places that had never heard it before?

3. Describe political talk radio before and after the Fairness Doctrine. What kind of effect did the Fairness Doctrine have?
4. Read this brief analysis by Dr. J.J. Sylvia IV on the feasibility of the Fairness Doctrine in the 21st Century.
5. Do you think that the Fairness Doctrine can or should be reinstated? Explain your answer.
6. Investigate the controversy surrounding Don Imus and the comments that led to his show's cancellation. What is your opinion of his comments and CBS's reaction to them?

## Media Attributions


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# 13.3 RADIO'S NEW FUTURE

**Learning Objectives**

- Understand the historical evolution and technological advancements in radio broadcasting, including the rise of satellite, HD, and Internet radio, and how these have impacted the diversity and accessibility of content.
- Gain insights into the concept of "superbug media," learning how media products can be persistent, adaptive, independent, niche, and symbiotic to survive and thrive in a competitive digital landscape.
- Critically analyze the ethical and legal challenges facing Internet broadcasting and podcasting, including issues related to royalties, licensing, and the social impact of content, especially in the context of real-life events.

Although the future of radio has been doubted many times throughout its history, it is still in existence. The inherent portability of the medium gives it an advantage over other types of media that require an individual's full attention, such as television or print. The simplicity of radio has lent itself to a variety of uses.

In recent years, new technologies have promised to expand the reach of radio and to expand the kinds of programming it offers. Satellite and HD radio have increased the amount and diversity of available programming by making more stations available. Internet radio has increased the accessibility of radio communication, and practically anyone who has access to a computer can create subscription podcasts to distribute around the world. These new technologies promise to make radio an enduring, innovative form of media.

## Satellite Radio

In 1998, the FCC awarded licenses to two businesses interested in creating a radio version of cable television—without the cables. This act was the beginning of **satellite radio**, and the companies soon became XM and Sirius. These two networks sold special receivers that could pick up satellite transmissions

broadcasting a wide range of formats on different channels to listeners who paid a monthly fee for the commercial-free programming.

Like cable television, satellite radio was not required to censor its disc jockeys or guests for profanity. This attracted somewhat controversial radio personalities known for their conflicts with the FCC, such as Howard Stern and Opie and Anthony. The networks also drew hosts such as NPR's Bob Edwards and Bruce Springsteen's guitarist "Little" Steven Van Zandt to create their own shows. Because listeners paid one price for access to all of the channels, disc jockeys experienced less pressure to adhere to the limited playlist style of programming that was the norm for terrestrial radio stations.[1] In 2008, Sirius and XM merged to form Sirius XM. In 2010, the company recorded its first profits.[2]

## HD Radio

Developed around 2001 to help terrestrial radio stations compete with emerging satellite radio technology, **HD radio** is essentially a digital transmission of radio signals resulting in less static and better sound quality, even for AM stations. Upgraded quality is not the major benefit of HD radio, however; the technology allows signals to be compressed so that one station can air so-called shadow stations on the same frequency as its regular broadcast. Although listeners need an HD radio to receive these channels, they pay no subscription fee, as independent stations provide their own programming as they deem necessary.[3]

Stations such as NPR's WAMU in Washington, DC, broadcast different types of programming on their shadow channels. For example, the station's 88.5-1 broadcasts the regular analog schedule of WAMU, while 88.5-2 broadcasts bluegrass and country music programming, and 88.5-3 broadcasts public radio programs not available on the analog version of 88.5.[4]

HD radio allows current broadcasters to provide content that they would normally put aside in favor of more commercial programs. WAMU's bluegrass and country shadow station plays content originally played over the airwaves but relegated to the Internet in favor of more marketable programs. The innovation of HD radio allowed the station to reintroduce the programs without risking its financial stability. With this financial freedom, HD radio offers a host of programming possibilities for traditional radio.

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1. Breen, Bill. "Written in the Stars," Fast Company, February 1, 2005, http://www.fastcompany.com/magazine/91/open_stars.html.

2. Reuters, "Sirius XM Posts Profit, Its First Since Merger, New York Times, February 25, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/26/technology/26radio.html.

3. Pogue, David. "HD Radio Crying Out to Be Heard," New York Times, April 8, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/09/technology/personaltech/09pogue.html.

4. American Universe Radio, WAMU, "Schedules," http://wamu.org/programs/schedule/.

# Internet Radio

Broadcasting is both a strength and limitation of broadcasting. Although technological advances of the past 50 years such as audio recorders and microphones have made creating a radio program simple, finding a way to broadcast that program presents difficulties for the average person. The expansion of the Internet, however, has changed this limitation into a manageable hurdle for both businesses and individuals alike.

At its core, **Internet radio** is simply the streaming of audio programs through the medium of the Internet. As early as 1994, radio stations such as Chapel Hill, North Carolina's WXYC were broadcasting their signal over the Internet, and so potentially gaining a worldwide audience.[5] Soon, online-only radio stations were created to broadcast programs. Services such as Live 365, founded in 1999, have acted as distributors for Internet radio programs, charging broadcasters fees to stream their programs to a large listening audience.

Another type of Internet radio service is Pandora radio. This radio website does not distribute existing programs but rather allows users to create their own custom music radio stations. A listener creates a Pandora account and types in a song, composer, or artist, and the service creates a station that plays songs that are similar to the user's selection. This analysis of music attempts to collect as many details about a song as possible, from lyrics to instrumentation to harmony, and then categorizes songs according to these attributes, making it possible for listeners to customize their own stations based on one or more of the cataloged attributes. The listener can delete unwanted songs from the playlist and create new stations as well. Pandora currently relies on on-screen advertising and has implemented audio advertisements as well.[6] Other music services such as Yahoo! Music, AOL Radio, and Jango offer radio stations with multiple programmed genres.

## Problems of Internet Broadcasting

Despite the rise of Internet radio over the past several years, its success has never been a sure thing. As the trend gained momentum, many inexperienced broadcasters confronted the issue of royalties, and many experienced broadcasters encountered new legal issues related to streaming. Stations that broadcast over the airwaves must pay publishing royalties to the musicians and songwriters behind the recordings. Rather than pay an individual musician or songwriter each time a recording is played, however, broadcasters—including radio stations, coffee shops, and restaurants—pay for a blanket license that allows them to play any song. As Internet broadcasting grew, musicians and record labels began demanding royalties from Internet stations and

5. WXYC, "Simulcast," https://web.archive.org/web/20181120204158/http://www.wxyc.org/about/simulcast.

6. Beltrone, Gabriel. "Pandora's Back," The Big Money, July 23, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20101021083809/http://www.thebigmoney.com/articles/monetize/2009/07/23/pandora-s-back.

specifying new licensing restrictions. For instance, Pandora radio's license specifies that users can buy a song, but they can't replay a song without purchasing it, nor can they skip more than six songs per hour.

Other issues arose as terrestrial stations began streaming on the Internet. Since its inception, the medium has struggled with such concerns as whether advertisers should pay for commercials played over the Internet as well as over the air and what types of licenses should be used for Internet radio stations. In time, the federal government mediated an agreement between broadcasters and record companies with the Webcasters Settlement Act of 2009. This legislation designated Internet-only stations as pure-play stations, dividing them according to the types of coverage they offer. Each category pays royalties in different ways, ensuring both fair compensation for artists and the future viability of Internet radio.[7]

# Podcasting

> "We thought we were doing this little experiment, and it became this huge thing." — Sarah Koenig, host and co-producer of the Serial podcast

## Podcasting Echoes the rise of Broadcasting

The Serial podcast is a true crime drama that calls into question the efforts of Adnan Syed's defense attorney as well as several elements of the case against him.[8] Syed was convicted of murdering his former girlfriend Hae Min Lee in January 1999. The podcast analyzes, among other things, the use of a questionable timeline and questionable witnesses by prosecutors as well as the failure of Syed's defense attorney to use a witness who could have provided him with an alibi. Syad was eventually released from prison in 2022 when his conviction was overturned, but listeners of the podcast are still divided on whether or not he is guilty.[9] Among other issues, the podcast questions whether Syed's alibi would hold up in court. The story was released in serial fashion (that is, one piece at a time), in the autumn of 2014. Listeners were enthralled. This podcast more than any other helped establish the platform, and advertisers learned that podcasting could be a viable mass medium.

The ability to engage with murder mystery stories is not new. Serial dramas have appeared since the early days of mass book publishing, but basing a podcast around a real-life murder adds an element of voyeurism

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7. Albenesius, Chloe. "Internet Radio Reaches Deal on Royalty Rates," PC Magazine, July 7, 2009, http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,2817,2349813,00.asp.

8. Serial. "Serial: Season One." Accessed September 4, 2023. https://serialpodcast.org/season-one/13/adnan-is-out.

9. Hanlon, Greg, Tristan Balagtas, and Diane Herbst. "A Timeline of Adnan Syed's Case, Conviction and Release from Prison — and What's Next for 'Serial' Subject." Peoplemag, March 29, 2023. https://people.com/crime/adnan-syed-hae-min-lee-case-timeline/.

that makes some question the podcast's social impact.[10] The reporting was journalistically sound, but what happens when online audiences dissect real tragedies? Such podcasts are potentially dehumanizing for the story's subjects even as they show the platform's potential. The social and cultural reach of podcasts now rivals that of radio. It is a broad reach indeed.

The term podcasting is derived from blending "iPod" and "broadcasting," although Apple no longer manufactures the iPod and most podcasts are not broadcast over the airwaves.[11] Because alternative terms such as "mobile audio blogging" do not exactly roll off the tongue, "podcasting" remains in popular use. Podcasting can be traced to the popularity of blogging in the early 2000s. Bloggers wrote about niche topics, and some of them developed sizable followings. Podcasting is in some ways a natural extension of this form of direct communication with organically cultivated groups. It caught on with wider audiences in 2004 as broadband internet penetration increased rapidly and as more and more people owned iPods or iPhones capable of storing and playing back several episodes at a time. Expectations for podcasting as an industry rose and fell for about a decade until 2014. There were two important occurrences that year. First, the Serial podcast demonstrated podcasting's ability to reach beyond niche audiences to become a truly national media phenomenon. Second, Apple created a separate iPhone app dedicated to downloading and listening to podcasts, which help boost the prominence of the entire field.[12]

Many of the top podcasts are National Public Radio shows rebroadcast or repackaged in podcast form, but several successful shows originated as podcasts. Like magazines, cable television and niche news sites of the past, podcasts often develop in niche environments. Only a tiny percentage reach mass popularity. One of 2018's top podcasts about the state of the War on Terrorism.[13] You can find it online as part of a visual presentation, on iTunes or via other podcast apps. The methods of accessing podcasts vary widely. Even novice smartphone users can find podcasts through popular apps. Podcasts rise to popularity by word of mouth or by reaching enough critical mass that they are referenced in other media platforms. We often learn about live music based on which bands are popular locally and regionally. Instead of being organized geographically, podcasting is often organized by topic. Comedians, talk show hosts, academics and other experts, scientists, engineers, philosophers, writers, musicians and many others have podcasts serving various functions. Their podcasts may or may not be promoting other products, services or digital media properties. They may be

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10. Genaro, Teresa. "Serial: Was It Worth It?" Forbes. Accessed September 4, 2023. https://www.forbes.com/sites/teresagenaro/2014/12/19/serial-was-it-worth-it/.

11. Pierce, David. "Goodbye IPod, and Thanks for All the Tunes." *Wired*. Accessed September 4, 2023. https://www.wired.com/story/goodbye-ipod-and-thanks-for-all-the-tunes/.

12. Quah, Nicholas. "The Three Fundamental Moments of Podcasts' Crazy Rise." *Wired*. Accessed September 4, 2023. https://www.wired.com/story/podcast-three-watershed-moments/.

13. *The New York Times*. "Caliphate." March 10, 2018, sec. Podcasts. https://web.archive.org/web/20180311015726/https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/podcasts/caliphate-isis-rukmini-callimachi.html.

fiction or non-fiction. What links the vast majority of podcasts is they begin as passion projects. They are cheap to produce and free to download, and they grow niche audiences before, sometimes, making it big. Podcast advertising will soon be a $500 million industry.[14] Observations on what helps a podcast thrive can teach us the keys to success that we expect will translate to a variety of emerging digital media platforms.

## "Superbug" Media

Podcasting as a medium seems to have stumbled on a sort of "superbug" model of mass media production and audience building. Think about bacteria and our unending desire to kill them with anti-bacterial soaps, wipes and hand sanitizers. Only the strongest, antibiotic-resistant bacteria survive attempts at eradication. Successful podcasts function similarly. Those that survive the media free-for-all often build mass audiences rather than tapping into them on legacy media platforms.

Superbug media products are the opposite of viral media. A virus develops and spreads via a host, and if it does not spread to another host relatively quickly, it dies. Either the host system kills it, it kills the host, or it leaves the host and dies. Generally speaking, viruses do not work in symbiosis with their hosts. We can vaccinate ourselves against viruses, and this happens with viral media messages too. If we view a new video on social media with some of the elements of viral videos we have seen before, we may ignore it. We inoculate ourselves against things that waste our time. Novelty is part of the joy of viral content. Thus, copycat content has a difficult time spreading. This makes audience-building on digital platforms difficult. You cannot reliably produce viral content. Exponentially more media products are created than go viral, no matter how hard the creator tries.

The "superbug" process is different. Bacteria can often survive without a host. They can lie dormant for years with very little to sustain them and then return to devastate populations. In the human body, there are about as many bacteria cells as there are human cells.[15] Some bacteria are not only beneficial but also necessary. Bacteria can be localized, while viruses tend to attack an entire system. The media equivalent of successful superbug bacteria is a podcast that grows inside a niche population, sometimes rising and falling in popularity before reaching a mass audience who then looks into the back catalog to see what the podcast is all about. What follows is a summary of the nascent theory of "superbug media." For now, it is a list of characteristics that will be explicated to conclude this chapter. This is not a media studies theory arrived at through extensive peer review. These concepts are meant to describe phenomena that appear to be happening all around us. Over

14. IAB. "U.S. Podcast Ad Revenues Reached Landmark 4 Million in 2017, Marking 86% Growth Year-Over-Year, According to IAB & PwC Research," June 11, 2018. https://www.iab.com/news/us-podcast-ad-revenues-2017/.

15. Abbott, Alison. "Scientists Bust Myth That Our Bodies Have More Bacteria than Human Cells." *Nature*, January 8, 2016. https://doi.org/10.1038/nature.2016.19136.

time, the author hopes to publish more about this topic and begin to test these concepts as a cohesive theory built on empirical facts. That said, here is the working definition: **Superbug media products** are those that survive and thrive in highly competitive environments with limited initial access to traditional media resources. They are persistent, adaptive, independent, niche and symbiotic.

- **Persistent:** Media creators should expect to be producing a podcast or other form of a superbug media product for a year before it becomes recognized. Audiences expect good, consistent, free content as a starting point when selecting which media products to adopt and support. To have a chance at long-term survival, a potential "superbug" media product should be published at least weekly. A mix of regular themes combined with fresh guests, topics, and additional media content appears to work best. Another feature of persistent "superbug" media is that they fend off challengers. You never really know how many people are researching a certain area or producing podcasts or apps in a particular field until you try to produce your own. Often, there are many market players you were not aware of. Some may operate in "regions" of the network society or intellectual community. It is your job to know the field and to know the competition from the outset when you are striving to create a "superbug" media product, such as a podcast, a web application, a smartphone app, a niche advertising agency, a PR firm or a news agency. Whatever it is that you make, your brand needs to be ready to fend off both existing and up-and-coming competitors.
- **Adaptive:** Successful podcasts and other "superbug" media products adapt to new environments. They may start out as audio podcasts but later become video posts because the content demands it. They may begin with interviews or content displays from people in the producers' close circle and then expand to bigger names and better content as the development of the media brand progresses.
- **Independent:** Potential "superbug" media products often begin as independent productions from makers with personal passion. That is, they start out almost entirely as products of culture, and only later, with time, success, and reinvestment, do they begin to resemble institutional productions that are designed for long-term survival and capable of helping their producers and owners to thrive. Some "superbug" products, brands, and even platforms might emerge from existing institutional production houses or even major corporate conglomerate media companies, but they must be given the freedom to adapt if they are to last long. This raises a question: What defines success for a superbug? There are, perhaps, three tiers of success. The first is when a "superbug" project breaks even and no longer costs more to produce than it makes. The second is when it earns enough money to reasonably support one person for a year, which is a major milestone. The third tier is when the project earns enough money to warrant hiring a number of people and occupying some space in the physical world. What has been described here might also be thought of as the process through which a cultural product becomes part of an institution.
- **Niche:** Growing mass audiences is different from reaching ready audiences in "legacy" broadcast settings. It helps to begin by focusing on a niche audience with the potential for mass appeal. The choice

of topic is a personal one; however, what differentiates future commercial efforts from passion projects is the consideration given to market potential. Consider the topic of strategic landscaping planning: A podcast or app dealing with the issues faced when trying to manage a common household yard might grow to reach millions, whereas a podcast about formal French gardens will probably start in a niche and stay there. Neither media product is broad, general interest news, but one fits a more narrowly defined niche. If it is your goal to produce something for your cultural passion, you can work in whatever niche interests you; for something to qualify as having "superbug" media potential, there must be plenty of room to grow.

- **Symbiotic:** For many "superbug" media products to ultimately reach success, they will need to join with other independently produced brands or allow themselves to be swallowed and possibly rebranded under the umbrella of a large conglomerated media company. Symbiosis comes when the small, upstart media product and the larger "host" corporation help one another to grow. Often, a large media company will have money to invest in updated equipment and marketing, but for every Beyoncé, there is a Destiny's Child. The process of entering into a symbiotic relationship changes both the host and the "superbug." This might be unappealing from the aspect of pure cultural production, but on the other hand, it is often helpful and necessary from the institutional point of view. Again, creators are free to produce their passion project online, but the descriptive theoretical definition of "superbug" media is that it survives and goes on to thrive in a hostile environment.

An easy way to remember this material is that it takes PAINS to build an audience on a digital platform. Cultural production is at the heart of much of what we do in the mass media, but institutional demands are never far behind for those who want to create successful products or for those who may not want to make their own "superbug" media outlets but who are looking for good places to work.

The final lesson of this chapter is this: Regardless of whether you plan to start your own media product or create a "superbug" of your own, when looking for work in the mass communication field, you owe it to yourself to look for companies that are capable of producing products and brands that can survive in this environment. At your internships and your first jobs, ask yourself if the company seems like it could produce a "superbug" if it had to. If the answer is "no," you may need to look somewhere else for an enterprise that can create a media product with that rare mix of cultural meaning, social impact and financial success.

## Key Takeaways

- The future of radio is far from stagnant; advancements like satellite, HD, and Internet radio are not only diversifying the types of programming available but also making it more accessible to a global audience.
- The concept of "superbug media" outlines a new paradigm for understanding how media products can survive and thrive in a digital age, emphasizing qualities like persistence, adaptability, and symbiosis with larger platforms.
- Ethical and legal challenges, particularly in Internet broadcasting and podcasting, are evolving rapidly, necessitating a nuanced understanding of issues like royalties, licensing, and the social implications of content.

## Exercises

1. How do the advancements in satellite, HD, and Internet radio challenge or complement traditional terrestrial radio? Discuss the pros and cons of each medium in the context of accessibility, diversity of content, and user experience.
2. Choose a popular podcast and analyze it using the "superbug media" framework. Identify how the podcast demonstrates persistence, adaptability, independence, niche focus, and symbiosis. Present your findings in a short essay or presentation.

Reflection Question: What are some of the ethical and legal challenges that Internet radio and podcasting face, such as royalties and licensing? How do these challenges impact both creators and consumers of this content?

PART XIV

# CHAPTER 14: DIGITAL GAMING

Video games have come a long way from using a simple joystick to guide Pac-Man on his mission to find food and avoid ghosts. This is illustrated by a 2007 Southwest Airlines commercial in which two friends are playing a baseball video game on a Nintendo Wii–like console. The batting friend tells the other to throw his pitch—and he does, excitedly firing his controller into the middle of the plasma TV, which then falls off the wall. Both friends stare in shock at the shattered flat screen as the narrator asks, "Want to get away?"

Such a scene is unlikely to have taken place in the early days of video games when Atari reigned supreme and the action of playing was limited by the buttons on the controller and what was possible to program at the time. Players maneuvered a joystick to shoot lines of aliens in the sky, or they turned the wheel on a paddle to play a virtual game of table tennis. The power of Atari at the time simply didn't allow for more complex games.

But as video games became increasingly popular, they also became increasingly technologically powerful. Consoles upgraded and evolved on a regular basis, with a new version coming out around every 7 years, and the games kept up. Players called each other with loopholes and tips on how to get Mario and Luigi onto the next level, and now they exchange their tricks on gaming blogs. Games like *The Legend of Zelda* and *Final Fantasy* (role playing games) created alternate worlds and intricate story lines, providing multiple-hour epic adventures.

Long criticized for taking kids out of the backyard and into a sedentary spot in front of the TV, many video games have circled back to their simpler origins and, in doing so, have made players more active. Casual gamers who could quickly figure out how to put together puzzle pieces in Tetris can now just as easily figure out how to "swing" a tennis racket with a Wiimote. Video games are no longer a convenient scapegoat for America's obesity problems; Wii Fit offers everything from yoga to boxing, and *Dance Dance Revolution* estimates calories burned while players dance.

The logistics of video games continue to change, and as they do, gaming has begun to intersect with every other part of culture. Players can learn how to "perform" their favorite songs with Guitar Hero and Rock Band. Product placement akin to what is seen in movies and on TV is equally prevalent in video games such as the popular Forza Motorsport or FIFA series. As the Internet allows for players across the world to participate simultaneously, as seen in massively multiplayer online games such as World of Warcraft, video games have the potential to one day look like competitive reality shows.[1] Arguably, video games even hold a place in the art

1. Dolan, Michael. "The Video Game Revolution: The Future of Video Gaming," PBS, http://www.pbs.org/kcts/videogamerevolution/impact/future.html.

world, with the increasing ability to express one's vision through interactive storytelling or as an outlet to create animations.[2]

And now, with endless possibilities for the future, video games are attracting new and different demographics. Avid players who grew up with video games may be the first ones to purchase 3-D televisions for the 3-D games of the future.[3] But casual players, perhaps of an older demographic, will be drawn to the simplicity of a game like Wii Bowling. Video games have become more accessible than ever. Social media websites like Facebook offer free video game applications, and smartphone users can download apps for as little as a dollar, literally putting video games in one's back pocket. Who needs a cumbersome Scrabble board when it's available on a touch screen anytime, anywhere?

Video games have become ubiquitous in modern culture. Understanding them as a medium allows a fuller understanding of their implications in the realms of entertainment, information, and communication. Studying their history reveals new perspectives on the ways video games have affected mainstream culture. Not only are video games ubiquitous, being found everywhere, but they also also carry a lot of societal impact. They have become a core part of modern culture.

### Fitchburg State Connection

The Game Design program at Fitchburg State, while part of the Communications Media department, is a separate major[4] and minor.[5] The Game Design major was the first of its kind at a public university in the Northeast. It is a professional program, like all of those in the department, where students learn how to make games, mostly video games but tabletop ones as well. Students also learn about the history of their medium as well as the wide range of issues in games and game culture. The program focuses on collaboration and student-led projects. It culminates in a capstone class, typically Game Studio, a professional experience held at the IdeaLab where students work in teams, full time, to make a game.

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2. Tres Kap, Jona. "The Video Game Revolution: But is it Art?" PBS, http://www.pbs.org/kcts/videogamerevolution/impact/art.html.

3. Williams, M. H. "Study Shows Casual and Core Gamers Are Ready for 3-D Gaming," Industry Gamers, June 15, 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20100619122836/http://www.industrygamers.com/news/study-shows-casual-and-core-gamers-are-ready-for-3d-gaming/.

4. https://www.fitchburgstate.edu/academics/programs/game-design-bs

5. https://www.fitchburgstate.edu/academics/programs/game-design-minor

# 14.1 THE EVOLUTION OF ELECTRONIC GAMES

**Learning Objectives**

- Identify the major companies involved in video game production.
- Explain the important innovations that drove the acceptance of video games by mainstream culture.
- Determine major technological developments that influenced the evolution of video games.

Pong, the electronic table tennis simulation game, was the first video game for many people who grew up in the 1970s and is now a famous symbol of early video games. However, the precursors to modern video games were created as early as the 1950s. In 1952 a computer simulation of tic-tac-toe was developed for the Electronic Delay Storage Automatic Calculator (EDSAC), one of the first stored-information computers, and in 1958 a game called Tennis for Two was developed at Brookhaven National Laboratory as a way to entertain people coming through the laboratory on tours.[1]

1. Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Simon. Understanding Video Games: The Essential Introduction (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2008), 50.

Figure 1: A photo of Tennis for Two, a rudimentary game designed to entertain visitors to the Brookhaven National Laboratory.

These games would generate little interest among the modern game-playing public, but at the time, they enthralled their users and introduced the basic elements of the cultural video game experience. In a time before personal computers, these games allowed the general public to access technology that had been restricted to the realm of abstract science. Tennis for Two created an interface where anyone with basic motor skills could use a complex machine. The first video games functioned early on as a form of media by essentially disseminating the experience of computer technology to those who did not have access to it.

As video games evolved, their role as a form of media grew as well. Video games have grown from simple tools that made computing technology understandable to forms of media that can communicate cultural values and human relationships.

# The 1970s: The Rise of the Video Game

The 1970s saw the rise of video games as a cultural phenomenon. A 1972 article in *Rolling Stone* describes the early days of computer gaming:

Reliably, at any nighttime moment (i.e. non-business hours) in North America hundreds of computer technicians are effectively out of their bodies, locked in life-or-death space combat computer-projected onto cathode ray tube display screens, for hours at a time, ruining their eyes, numbing their fingers in frenzied mashing of control buttons, joyously slaying their friend and wasting their employers' valuable computer time. Something basic is going on.[2]

This scene was describing *Spacewar!*, a game developed in the 1960s at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) that spread to other college campuses and computing centers. In the early '70s, very few people owned computers. Most computer users worked or studied at university, business, or government facilities. Those with access to computers were quick to utilize them for gaming purposes.

## Arcade Games

The first coin-operated **arcade game** was modeled on *Spacewar!* It was called *Computer Space*, and it fared poorly among the general public because of its difficult controls. In 1972, *Pong*, the table-tennis simulator that has come to symbolize early computer games, was created by the fledgling company **Atari**, and it was immediately successful. *Pong* was initially placed in bars with pinball machines and other games of chance, but as video games grew in popularity, they were placed in any establishment that would take them. By the end of the 1970s, so many video arcades were being built that some towns passed zoning laws limiting them.[3]

The end of the 1970s ushered in a new era—what some call the golden age of arcade games—with the game *Space Invaders*, an international phenomenon that exceeded all expectations. In Japan, the game was so popular that it caused a national coin shortage. Games like *Space Invaders* illustrate both the effect of arcade games and their influence on international culture. In two different countries on opposite sides of the globe, Japanese and American teenagers, although they could not speak to one another, were having the same experiences thanks to a video game.

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2. Brand, Stewart. "Space War," Rolling Stone, December 7, 1972.

3. Kent, Steven. "Super Mario Nation," American Heritage, September 1997, https://web.archive.org/web/20100116135603/http://americanheritage.com/articles/magazine/ah/1997/5/1997_5_65.shtml.

## The Hangers

Fitchburg State University professor, **Samuel Tobin**, delves into the complex social dynamics of 1980s video arcades, expanding the narrative beyond the conventional focus on active gamers to include the often-overlooked "hangers"—individuals who frequented these spaces without necessarily engaging in gameplay. Tobin explores how different payment models, such as pay-per-game and flat-fee systems, influenced not only the types of players who visited arcades but also the social interactions that occurred within these spaces. He scrutinizes the role of arcade attendants, who were tasked with maintaining order and control, emphasizing that their responsibilities extended to monitoring both players and hangers.[4]

Tobin argues that these hangers were a vital yet underappreciated component of the arcade ecosystem. Utilizing a variety of tactics to remain in the arcade without drawing the attention of attendants, hangers subtly resisted the rules and norms established by arcade operators. Tobin contends that the decline of arcades in the late '90s was not solely due to the advent of advanced home gaming systems but was also influenced by the migration of social interactions to online platforms. By examining the nuanced behaviors and strategies of hangers, Tobin's work challenges us to reconsider who constitutes a participant in gaming spaces and invites us to explore the multifaceted ways in which individuals interact within these environments.[5]

# Video Game Consoles

The first video game **console** for the home began selling in 1972. It was the Magnavox Odyssey, and it was based on prototypes built by Ralph Baer in the late 1960s. This system included a *Pong*-type game, and when the arcade version of Pong became popular, the Odyssey began to sell well. Atari, which was making arcade games at the time, decided to produce a home version of Pong and released it in 1974. Although this system could only play one game, its graphics and controls were superior to the Odyssey, and it was sold through a major department store, Sears. Because of these advantages, the Atari home version of *Pong* sold well, and a host of other companies began producing and selling their own versions of *Pong*.[6]

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4. Tobin, Samuel. "Hanging in the Video Arcade." *Journal of Games Criticism* (blog), July 2016. https://gamescriticism.org/2023/07/24/hanging-in-the-video-arcade/.

5. *ibid*

6. Herman, Leonard. "Early Home Video Game Systems," in The Video Game Explosion: From Pong to PlayStation and Beyond, ed. Mark Wolf (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2008), 54.

Figure 2: A photo of the American Classic Arcade Museum entrance in Weirs Beach, NH. Several arcade machines line the sides of the walls in a hallway below a sign with the name of the museum.

A major step forward in the evolution of video games was the development of **game cartridges** that stored the games and could be interchanged in the console. With this technology, users were no longer limited to a set number of games, leading many video game console makers to switch their emphasis to producing games. Several groups, such as Magnavox, Coleco, and Fairchild, released versions of cartridge-type consoles, but Atari's 2600 console had the upper hand because of the company's work on arcade games. Atari capitalized off of its arcade successes by releasing games that were well known to a public that was frequenting arcades. The popularity of games such as *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man* made the Atari 2600 a successful system. The late 1970s also saw the birth of companies such as Activision, which developed third-party games for the Atari 2600.[7]

7. Wolf, Mark J. P. "Arcade Games of the 1970s," in The Video Game Explosion (see note 7), 41.

Figure 3: Photo of the Coleco Vision video game system on display at the American Classic Arcade Museum, Weirs Beach, NH.

## Ralph Baer's Contributions

Ralph Baer, often hailed as the "Father of Videogames," made groundbreaking contributions to the world of gaming while working at Sanders Associates in Nashua, New Hampshire. His seminal invention, initially known as the "Brown Box," laid the foundation for the first-ever video game console, the Magnavox Odyssey. Developed between the mid to late 1960s, the console featured a variety of games, including the ping pong game that became a sensation. Baer's vision was not just about technology; he aimed to create a form of family entertainment, assuming from the outset that the games would be played by multiple people.

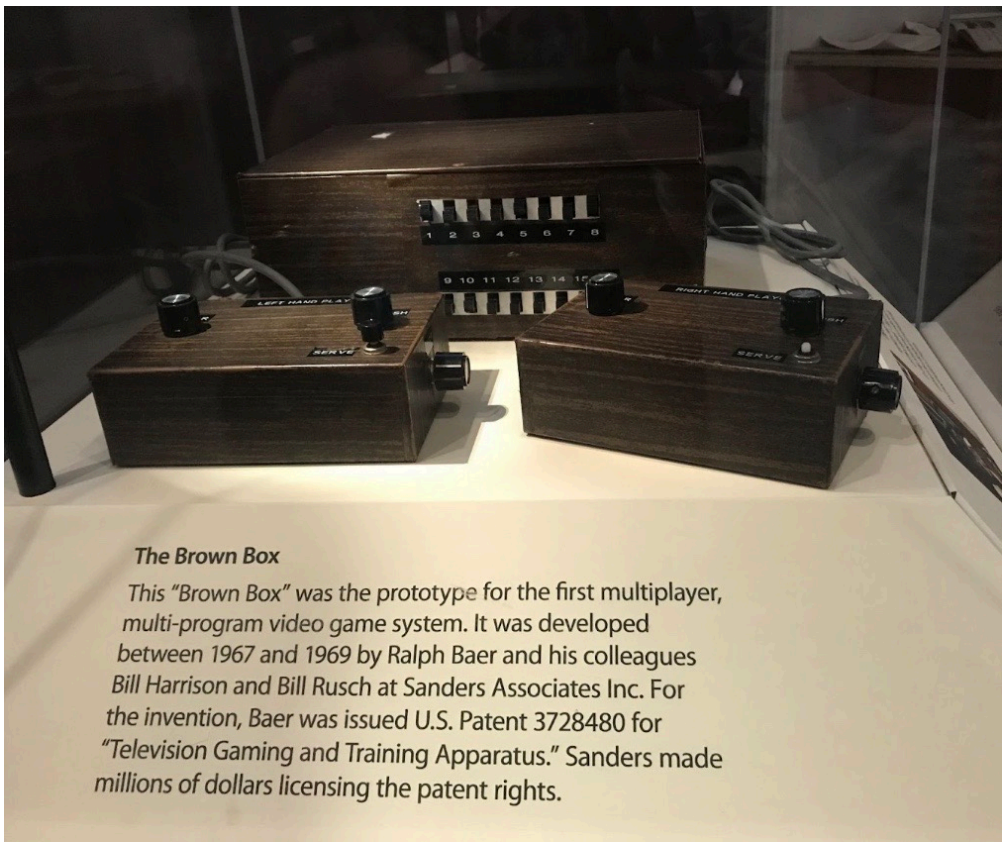


Figure 4: A photo of a replica of the "Brown Box," on display at the National Museum of American History. The display reads: "This 'Brown Box' was the prototype for the first multiplayer, multi-program video game system. It was developed between 1967 and 1969 by Ralph Baer and his colleagues Bill Harrison and Bill Rusch at Sanders Associates, Inc. For this invention, Baer was issued U.S. Patent 3728480 for 'Television Gaming and Training Apparatus.' Sanders made millions of dollars licensing the patent rights."

Beyond the Magnavox Odyssey, Baer had a hand in various other gaming projects and electronic toys throughout the 1970s. He was instrumental in the development of arcade games like Hit-N-Run, Pro Soccer, and Skate-N-Score, as well as home consoles like Coleco Telstar. His influence even extended to electronic handheld games like Simon. Baer's work has deep roots in New Hampshire, making it a significant location in the history of video game development. His legacy is commemorated by the American Classic Arcade Museum (ACAM), which proudly displays a replica of the "Brown Box," serving as a testament to Baer's enduring impact on the gaming industry.

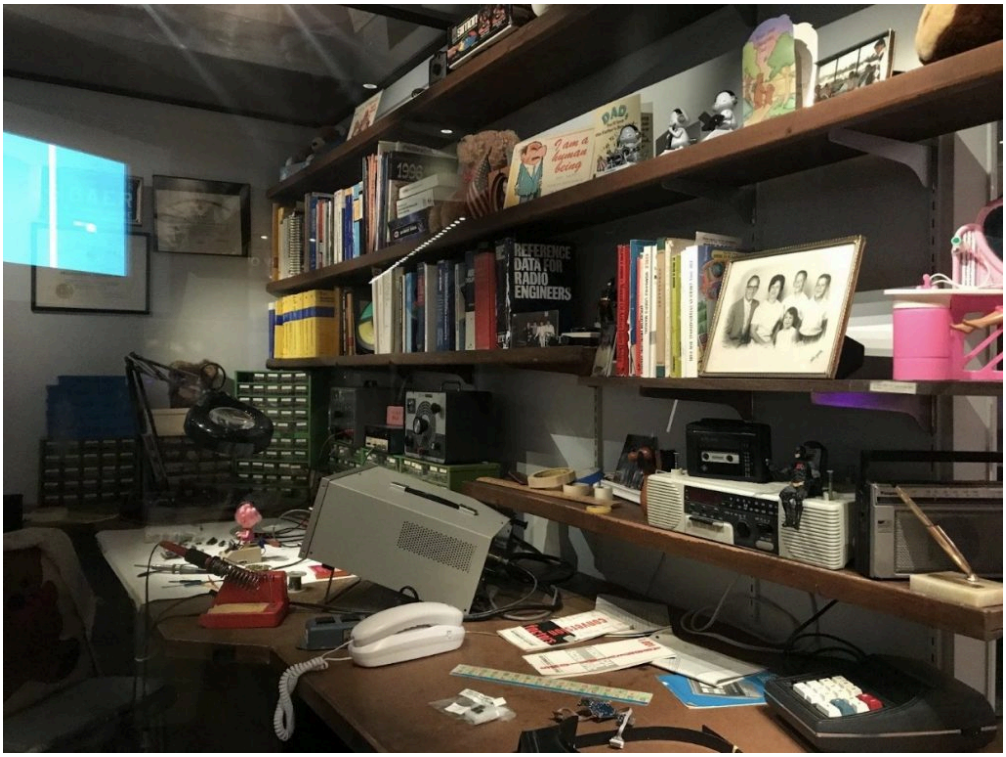


Figure 5: A photo of Ralph Baer's home game design studio, on display at the National Museum of American History. It features a desk with bookshelves above it. A phone, soldering iron, and magnifying glass are most prominently displayed in the desk.

## Home Computers

The birth of the home computer market in the 1970s paralleled the emergence of video game consoles. The first computer designed and sold for the home consumer was the Altair. It was first sold in 1975, several years after video game consoles had been selling, and it sold mainly to a hobbyist market. During this period, people such as Steve Jobs, the founder of Apple, were building computers by hand and selling them to get their start-up businesses going. In 1977, three important computers—Radio Shack's TRS-80, the Commodore PET, and the Apple II—were produced and began selling to the home market.[8]

The rise of personal computers allowed for the development of more complex games. Designers of games such as *Mystery House*, developed in 1979 for the Apple II, and Rogue, developed in 1980 and played on IBM PCs, used the processing power of early home computers to develop video games that had extended plots and storylines. In these games, players moved through landscapes composed of basic graphics, solving problems and

8. Reimer, Jeremy. "The Evolution of Gaming: Computers, Consoles, and Arcade," Ars Technica (blog), October 10, 2005, http://arstechnica.com/old/content/2005/10/gaming-evolution.ars/4.

working through an involved narrative. The development of video games for the personal computer platform expanded the ability of video games to act as media by allowing complex stories to be told and new forms of interaction to take place between players.

## The 1980s: The Crash

Atari's success in the home console market was due in large part to its ownership of already-popular arcade games and the large number of game cartridges available for the system. These strengths, however, eventually proved detrimental to the company and led to what is now known as the video game crash of 1983. Atari bet heavily on its past successes with popular arcade games by releasing *Pac-Man* for the Atari 2600. *Pac-Man* was a successful arcade game that did not translate well to the home console, leading to disappointed consumers and lower-than-expected sales. Additionally, Atari produced 10 million of the lackluster *Pac-Man* games on its first run, despite the fact that active consoles were only estimated at 10 million. Similar mistakes were made with a game based on the movie *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*, which has gained notoriety as one of the worst games in Atari's history. It was not received well by consumers despite the success of the movie, and Atari had again bet heavily on its success. Piles of unsold *E.T.* game cartridges were reportedly buried in the New Mexico desert under a veil of secrecy.[9]

As retail outlets became increasingly wary of home console failures, they began stocking fewer games on shelves. This action, combined with an increasing number of companies producing games, led to overproduction and a resulting fallout in the video game market in 1983. Not only that, there were multiple consoles with their own libraries. Multiple companies were battling for a small market. Another big issue is the fact that video games were seen as kids' toys and not an overall medium for all ages. In other words, those who were buying video games weren't the fans playing them, but rather the parents.

Many smaller game developers did not have the capacity to withstand this downturn and went out of business. Although Coleco and Atari were able to make it through the crash, neither company regained its former share of the video game market. It was 1985 when the video game market picked up again.

## The Rise of Nintendo

Nintendo, a Japanese card and novelty producer that had begun to produce electronic games in the 1970s, was responsible for arcade games such as *Donkey Kong* in the early 1980s. Its first home console, developed in 1984 for sale in Japan, tried to succeed where Atari had failed. The Nintendo system (known as Famicom in Japan)

9. Montfort, Nick and Ian Bogost, Racing the Beam: The Atari Video Computer System (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 127.

used newer, better microchips, bought in large quantities, to ensure high-quality graphics at a price consumers could afford. Keeping console prices low meant Nintendo had to rely on games for most of its profits and maintain control of game production. This was something Atari had failed to do, and it led to a glut of low-priced games that caused the crash of 1983. Nintendo got around this problem with proprietary circuits that would not allow unlicensed games to be played on the console. This would become the standard for many game consoles to come, with most games for the console being on proprietary hardware. The cartridge system still exists as of 2023 in the form of the Nintendo Switch. This degree of quality control and the increased scope of video games that go beyond simple arcade experiences caused Nintendo to become a household name. This allowed one-third of homes in the United States to have a Nintendo system.[10]

Nintendo introduced its Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) in the United States in 1985. The game *Super Mario Brothers*, released with the system, was also a landmark in video game development. The game employed a narrative in the same manner as more complicated computer games, but its controls were accessible and its objectives were simple. The game appealed to a younger demographic, generally boys in the 8–14 range, than the one targeted by Atari.[11] Its designer, Shigeru Miyamoto, tried to mimic the experiences of childhood adventures, creating a fantasy world not based on previous models of science fiction or other literary genres.[12] *Super Mario Brothers* also gave Nintendo an iconic character who has been used in numerous other games, television shows, and even a movie. The development of this type of character and fantasy world became the norm for video game makers. Games such as *The Legend of Zelda* became franchises with film and television possibilities rather than simply one-off games.

As video games developed as a form of media, the public struggled to come to grips with the kind of messages this medium was passing on to children. These were no longer simple games of reflex that could be compared to similar non-video games or sports; these were forms of media that included stories and messages that concerned parents and children's advocates. Arguments about the larger meaning of the games became common, with some seeing the games as driven by ideas of conquest and gender stereotypes, whereas others saw basic stories about traveling and exploration.[13]

Over a 20 year period, Nintendo went from a great to not-so-great company. Starting in the mid 1980's "Golden Age", the NES was the next big thing. Following this, in the early to mid 90's, we saw their "Silver

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10. Cross, Gary and Gregory Smits, "Japan, the U.S. and the Globalization of Children's Consumer Culture," Journal of Social History 38, no. 4 (2005).

11. Kline, Stephen, Nick Dyer-Witheford, and Greig De Peuter, Digital Play: The Interaction of Technology, Culture, and Marketing (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 119.

12. McLaughlin, Rus. "IGN Presents the History of Super Mario Bros.," IGN Retro, November 8, 2007, https://web.archive.org/web/20100701134147/http://games.ign.com/articles/833/833615p1.html.

13. Fuller, Mary and Henry Jenkins, "Nintendo and New World Travel Writing: A Dialogue," Cybersociety: Computer-Mediated Communication and Community, ed. Steven G. Jones (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995), 57–72.

Age" with the Super NES, doubling the data these consoles stored from its predecessor. Finally in the mid 90's to mid 2000's, Nintendo fell into its worst times, or "Dark Age". The newest system at this time quadrupled the data of the previous system, but this wasn't enough to keep them at the top. It's very important when viewing a product to look at what came before this, and how previous designs influenced what you are looking at. This will be talked about extensively in this chapter.

While studying the history of Nintendo, it's important to ask ourselves a few questions. What makes Nintendo important? Why do people use Nintendo products over others? Is Nintendo just video games? To start on that last question, no, Nintendo is not just video games. Originally, Nintendo was producing playing cards which then advanced to video games as technology improved. This is important because we can see Nintendo has a history of developing games with modern technology.

Nintendo over the years has developed a range of different products, not all just being home consoles. Two of these products are specific and the 3DS and Wii Balance Boards. These two items were used in research to help people in need. For the 3DS, non-English speaking patients of all ages were able to perform different forms of near-vision tests more than a quarter of the time more quickly than their original methods. The game they used was called "PDI Check" on the 3DS, which is a vision screening game displaying stereoscopic images without the need of special equipment like glasses, headsets or anything else. It was now condensed into the Nintendo 3DS. But this was just a coincidence. Why should Nintendo get credit for research that just happened to use their product? The Nintendo 3DS wasn't intended to be used for research purposes.

Many companies release products with an intended purpose. For example, most Nintendo items are for pass time. They are known for putting out video games. So is it a bad thing when someone uses their item for a purpose other than what it was created for? An interview at Fitchburg State University with Dr. Sam Tobin, a game design professor and author of *Portable Play in Everyday Life: The Nintendo DS.* talks about questions like these and much more.

Tobin is asked about his thoughts on product usage by consumers. There is no way to control how someone uses a product you make for them once they purchase it. He goes in depth with great examples such as "The car wasn't made to crash" and points out how everything will have good and bad, or an accident. He explains how all technology has these accidents that can be results of trying to do good in the world. "There are consequences with the usage of technology that are unavoidable."

*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://rotel.pressbooks.pub/comm-media-studies/?p=381#oembed-1*

*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://rotel.pressbooks.pub/comm-media-studies/?p=381#oembed-2*

Tobin is then questioned on the idea of restricting permissions of usage to avoid the previous problem. His first thought is that this could never happen after quickly pointing out that it's already the world we live in today. "Do you really own the objects you own?" are the words Tobin uses to show that just because we purchase something and can say it's ours, we do not have full control over it. This is something very important to point out because it definitely goes over all our heads.

*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://rotel.pressbooks.pub/comm-media-studies/?p=381#oembed-3*

## Other Home Console Systems

Other software companies were still interested in the home console market in the mid-1980s. Atari released the 2600jr and the 7800 in 1986 after Nintendo's success, but the consoles could not compete with Nintendo. The Sega Corporation, which had been involved with arcade video game production, released its Sega Master System in 1986. Although the system had more graphics possibilities than the NES, Sega failed to make a dent in Nintendo's market share until the early 1990s, with the release of Sega Genesis.[14]

# Computer Games Flourish and Innovate

The enormous number of games available for Atari consoles in the early 1980s took its toll on video arcades. In 1983, arcade revenues had fallen to a 3-year low, leading game makers to turn to newer technologies that could not be replicated by home consoles. This included arcade games powered by laser discs, such as *Dragon's*

14. Kerr, Aphra. "Spilling Hot Coffee? Grand Theft Auto as Contested Cultural Product," in The Meaning and Culture of Grand Theft Auto: Critical Essays, ed. Nate Garrelts (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005), 17.

*Lair* and *Space Ace*, but their novelty soon wore off, and laser-disc games became museum pieces.[15] In 1989, museums were already putting on exhibitions of early arcade games that included ones from the early 1980s. Although newer games continued to come out on arcade platforms, they could not compete with the home console market and never achieved their previous successes from the early 1980s. Increasingly, arcade gamers chose to stay at home to play games on computers and consoles. Today, dedicated arcades are a dying breed. Most that remain, like the Dave & Buster's and Chuck E. Cheese's chains, offer full-service restaurants and other entertainment attractions to draw in business.

Home games fared better than arcades because they could ride the wave of personal computer purchases that occurred in the 1980s. Some important developments in video games occurred in the mid-1980s with the development of online games. Multi-user dungeons, or MUDs, were role-playing games played online by multiple users at once. The games were generally text-based, describing the world of the MUD through text rather than illustrating it through graphics. The games allowed users to create a character and move through different worlds, accomplishing goals that awarded them with new skills. If characters attained a certain level of proficiency, they could then design their own area of the world. *Habitat*, a game developed in 1986 for the Commodore 64, was a graphic version of this type of game. Users dialed up on modems to a central host server and then controlled characters on screen, interacting with other users.[16]

One of the more important computers to come out in the 80s was Japan's NEC PC-8800 series. A lot of popular companies that exist today actually found their footing in the PC market. Not having to worry about getting denied by Nintendo or Sega because of what they wanted your game to be, you could just release it on PC without paying cartridge fees. For example, Square, which would go on to become Square Enix, started making games on the PC-8800.

During the mid-1980s, a demographic shift occurred. Between 1985 and 1987, games designed to run on business computers rose from 15 percent to 40 percent of games sold.[17] This trend meant that game makers could use the increased processing power of business computers to create more complex games. It also meant adults were interested in computer games and could become a profitable market.

## The 1990s: The Rapid Evolution of Video Games

Video games evolved at a rapid rate throughout the 1990s, moving from the first 16-bit systems (named for

15. Harmetz, Aljean. "Video Arcades Turn to Laser Technology as Queues Dwindle," Morning Herald (Sydney), February 2, 1984.

16. Reimer, Jeremy. "Total share: 30 years of personal computer market share figures," Ars Technica (blog), December 14, 2005, http://arstechnica.com/old/content/2005/12/total-share.ars/2.

17. Elmer-Dewitt, Philip and others, "Computers: Games that Grownups Play," Time, July 27, 1987, https://web.archive.org/web/20130819192316/http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,965090,00.html.

the amount of data they could process and store) in the early 1990s to the first Internet-enabled home console in 1999. As companies focused on new marketing strategies, wider audiences were targeted, and video games' influence on culture began to be felt.

## Console Wars

Nintendo's dominance of the home console market throughout the late 1980s allowed it to build a large library of games for use on the NES. This also proved to be a weakness, however, because Nintendo was reluctant to improve or change its system for fear of making its game library obsolete. Technology had changed in the years since the introduction of the NES, and companies such as NEC and Sega were ready to challenge Nintendo with 16-bit systems.[18]

The Sega Master System had failed to challenge the NES, but with the release of its 16-bit system, the Sega Genesis, the company pursued a new marketing strategy. Whereas Nintendo targeted 8- to 14-year-olds, Sega's marketing plan targeted 15- to 17-year-olds, making games that were more mature and advertising during programs such as the MTV Video Music Awards. The campaign successfully branded Sega as a cooler version of Nintendo and moved mainstream video games into a more mature arena. Nintendo responded to the Sega Genesis with its own 16-bit system, the Super NES, and began creating more mature games on consoles as well. Games such as Sega's *Mortal Kombat* and Nintendo's *Street Fighter* competed to raise the level of violence possible in a video game. Sega's advertisements even suggested that its game was better because of its more violent possibilities.[19] Games such as Final Fantasy 6 went for more mature storylines, showing themes that weren't able to be tackled before on home console games.

By 1994, companies such as 3DO, with its 32-bit system, and Atari, with its allegedly 64-bit Jaguar, attempted to get in on the home console market but failed to use effective marketing strategies to back up their products. Both systems fell out of production before the end of the decade. Sega, fearing that its system would become obsolete, released the 32-bit Saturn system in 1995. The system was rushed into production and did not have enough games available to ensure its success.[20] Sony stepped in with its PlayStation console at a time when Sega's Saturn was floundering and before Nintendo's 64-bit system had been released. This system targeted an even older demographic. With its E3 reveal in 1995, at a time when most consoles focused almost

18. Slaven, Andy. Video Game Bible, 1985–2002, (Victoria, BC: Trafford), 70–71.

19. Gamespot, "When Two Tribes Go to War: A History of Video Game Controversy," http://www.gamespot.com/features/6090892/p-5.html.

20. CyberiaPC.com, "Sega Saturn (History, Specs, Pictures)," https://web.archive.org/web/20040116012755/http://www.cyberiapc.com/vgg/sega_saturn.htm.

exclusively on younger audiences, Sony pitched their console to the general public. The console had a large effect on the market; by March of 2007, Sony had sold 102 million PlayStations.[21]

## Computer Games Gain Mainstream Acceptance

Computer games had avid players, but they were still a niche market in the early 1990s. An important step in the mainstream acceptance of personal computer games was the development of the **first-person shooter** genre. First popularized by the 1992 game *Wolfenstein 3D*, these games put the player in the character's perspective, making it seem as if the player were firing weapons and being attacked. *Doom*, released in 1993, and *Quake*, released in 1996, used the increased processing power of personal computers to create vivid three-dimensional worlds that were impossible to fully replicate on video game consoles of the era. These games pushed realism to new heights and began attracting public attention for their graphic violence.

Another trend was reaching out to audiences outside of the video-game-playing community. *Myst*, an adventure game where the player walked around an island solving a mystery, drove sales of CD-ROM drives for computers. *Myst*, its sequel *Riven*, and other non-violent games such as *SimCity* actually outsold *Doom* and *Quake* in the 1990s.[22] These nonviolent games appealed to people who did not generally play video games, increasing the form's audience and expanding the types of information that video games put across.

## Online Gaming Gains Popularity

A major advance in game technology came with the increase in Internet use by the general public in the 1990s. A major feature of *Doom* was the ability to use multiplayer gaming through the Internet. Strategy games such as *Command and Conquer* and *Total Annihilation* also included options where players could play each other over the Internet. Other fantasy-inspired role-playing games, such as *Ultima Online*, used the Internet to initiate the **massively multiplayer online role-playing game** (MMORPG) genre.[23] These games used the Internet as their platform, much like the text-based MUDs, creating a space where individuals could play the game while socially interacting with one another.

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21. Edge staff, "The Making Of: Playstation," Edge, April 24, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20110507025227/http://www.next-gen.biz:80/features/the-making-of-playstation.

22. Miller, Stephen C. "News Watch; Most-Violent Video Games Are Not Biggest Sellers," New York Times, July 29, 1999, http://www.nytimes.com/1999/07/29/technology/news-watch-most-violent-video-games-are-not-biggest-sellers.html.

23. Reimer, Jeremy. "Total share: 30 years of personal computer market share figures," Ars Technica (blog), December 14, 2005, http://arstechnica.com/old/content/2005/12/total-share.ars/2.

## Portable Game Systems

The development of portable game systems was another important aspect of video games during the 1990s. Handheld games had been in use since the 1970s, and a system with interchangeable cartridges had even been sold in the early 1980s. Nintendo released the Game Boy in 1989, using the same principles that made the NES dominate the handheld market throughout the 1990s. The Game Boy was released with the game Tetris, using the game's popularity to drive purchases of the unit. The unit's simple design meant users could get 20 hours of playing time on a set of batteries, and this basic design was left essentially unaltered for most of the decade. More advanced handheld systems, such as the Atari Lynx and Sega Game Gear, could not compete with the Game Boy despite their superior graphics and color displays.[24]

The decade-long success of the Game Boy belies the conventional wisdom of the console wars that more advanced technology makes for a more popular system. The Game Boy's static, simple design was readily accessible, and its stability allowed for a large library of games to be developed for it. Despite using technology almost a decade old, the Game Boy accounted for 30 percent of Nintendo of America's overall revenues at the end of the 1990s.[25]

# The Early 2000s: 21st-Century Games

## The Console Wars Continue

Sega gave its final effort in the console wars with the Sega Dreamcast in 1999. This console could connect to the Internet, emulating the sophisticated computer games of the 1990s. The new features of the Sega Dreamcast were not enough to save the brand, however, and Sega discontinued production in 2001, leaving the console market entirely.[26]

A major problem for Sega's Dreamcast was Sony's release of the PlayStation 2 (PS2) in 2000. The PS2 could function as a DVD player, expanding the role of the console into an entertainment device that did more than play video games. This console was incredibly successful, enjoying a long production run, with more than 106 million units sold worldwide by the end of the decade.[27]

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24. Hutsko, Joe. "88 Million and Counting; Nintendo Remains King of the Handheld Game Players," New York Times, March 25, 2000, http://www.nytimes.com/2000/03/25/business/88-million-and-counting-nintendo-remains-king-of-the-handheld-game-players.html.

25. *ibid*

26. Business Week, "Sega Dreamcast," slide in "A Brief History of Game Console Warfare," Business Week, https://archive.ph/Zfv8q.

27. A Brief History of Game Console Warfare, "PlayStation 2," slide in "A Brief History of Game Console Warfare."

In 2001, two major consoles were released to compete with the PS2: the Xbox and the Nintendo GameCube. The Xbox was an attempt by Microsoft to enter the market with a console that expanded on the functions of other game consoles. The unit had features similar to a PC, including a hard drive and an Ethernet port for online play through its service, Xbox Live. The popularity of the first-person shooter game *Halo*, an Xbox exclusive release, boosted sales as well. Nintendo's GameCube did not offer DVD playback capabilities, choosing instead to focus on gaming functions. Both of these consoles sold millions of units but did not come close to the sales of the PS2.

## The Evolution of Portable Gaming

Nintendo continued its control of the handheld game market into the 2000s with the 2001 release of the Game Boy Advance, a redesigned Game Boy that offered 32-bit processing and compatibility with older Game Boy games. In 2004, anticipating Sony's upcoming handheld console, Nintendo released the Nintendo DS, a handheld console that featured two screens and Wi-Fi capabilities for online gaming. Sony's PlayStation Portable (PSP) was released the following year and featured Wi-Fi capabilities as well as a flexible platform that could be used to play other media such as MP3s.[28] These two consoles, along with their newer versions, continue to dominate the handheld market.

One interesting innovation in mobile gaming occurred in 2003 with the release of the Nokia N-Gage. The N-Gage was a combination of a game console and mobile phone that, according to consumers, did not fill either role very well. The product line was discontinued in 2005, but the idea of playing games on phones persisted and has been developed on other platforms.[29] Apple currently dominates the industry of mobile phone games; in 2008 and 2009 alone, iPhone games generated $615 million in revenue.[30] As mobile phone gaming grows in popularity and as the supporting technology becomes increasingly more advanced, traditional portable gaming platforms like the DS and the PSP will need to evolve to compete. Nintendo is already planning a successor to the DS that features 3-D graphics without the use of 3-D glasses, which it hopes will help the company retain and grow its share of the portable gaming market.

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28. Patsuris, Penelope. "Sony PSP vs. Nintendo DS," Forbes, June 7, 2004, http://www.forbes.com/2004/06/07/cx_pp_0607mondaymatchup.html.

29. Stone, Brad. "Play It Again, Nokia. For the Third Time," New York Times, August 27, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/27/technology/27nokia.html.

30. Farago, Peter. "Apple iPhone and iPod Touch Capture U.S. Video Game Market Share," Flurry (blog), March 22, 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20100326181135/http://blog.flurry.com/bid/31566/Apple-iPhone-and-iPod-touch-Capture-U-S-Video-Game-Market-Share.

# Video Games Today

The trends of the late 2000s have shown a steadily increasing market for video games. Newer control systems and family-oriented games have made it common for many families to engage in video game play as a group. Online games have continued to develop, gaining unprecedented numbers of players. The overall effect of these innovations has been the increasing acceptance of video game culture by the mainstream.

## Home Consoles in the 2000s

The current state of the home console market still involves the three major companies of the past 10 years: Nintendo, Sony, and Microsoft. The release of Microsoft's Xbox 360 led this generation of consoles in 2005. The Xbox 360 featured expanded media capabilities and integrated access to Xbox Live, an online gaming service. Sony's PlayStation 3 (PS3) was released in 2006. It also featured enhanced online access as well as expanded multimedia functions, with the additional capacity to play Blu-ray discs. Nintendo released the Wii at the same time. This console featured a motion-sensitive controller that departed from previous controllers and focused on accessible, often family-oriented games. This combination successfully brought in large numbers of new game players, including many older adults. In its lifetime, the Wii had over 101 million sales, while the PS3 had a late generation surge and managed to surpass the sales of the Xbox 360 with 87.4 million and 85.7 million units sold respectively.[31] In the wake of the Wii's success, Microsoft and Sony have introduced their own motion-sensitive systems.[32]

## The 2010s and beyond

The next generation of consoles would usher in a new dynamic in the ever-changing market as Nintendo introduced the long-anticipated successor to the Wii, the Wii U. The confusing name, along with poor marketing and lack of Nintendo's more famous franchises being available on the console led to poor sales,[33] selling only 13.6 million units globally.

The PlayStation 4 continued Sony's ascension to the top of the market as the Xbox One also suffered from

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31. VGChartz, "Weekly Hardware Chart: 19th June 2010," http://www.vgchartz.com.

32. Mangalindan, J. P. "Is Casual Gaming Destroying the Traditional Gaming Market?" Fortune, March 18, 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20130128232513/http://tech.fortune.cnn.com/2010/03/18/is-casual-gaming-destroying-the-traditional-gaming-market/.

33. Shay, R., & Palomba, A. (2020). First-Party Success or First-Party Failure? A Case Study on Audience Perceptions of the Nintendo Brand During the Wii U's Product Life Cycle. *Games and Culture*, *15*(5), 475–500. https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412018813666

poor marketing and a lack of focus on the console's core features. The PS4 would break franchise records and sell 117 million units, while the Xbox One sold a respectable 57.9 million units.

In 2017, Nintendo launched the Nintendo Switch, their successor to the Wii U. While the console shared many features with its predecessor, the versatility it offered as a hybrid portable device and a strong library of games to choose from led to the Switch becoming Nintendo's highest selling console of all time, selling a staggering 130.7 million units.[34]

## Covid-19 and Online Gaming

In 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic, Sony and Microsoft launched the PlayStation 5 and Xbox Series X/S, respectively. This came at a time when video games were played by more people than ever since many looked to them as an escape from a scary time. According to a study by the University of Glasgow, the pandemic saw a 71% increase in playing time for people and a major shift toward online multiplayer games.[35]

One of the defining games of this era is *Fortnite*, which has set the industry standard for multiplayer shooters. Fortnite popularized the use of a controversial monetization system commonly referred to as the Battle Pass. The Battle Pass is commonly a seasonal payment that unlocks a timed unlock path, with these unlocks granting players cosmetic items as a reward for time spent playing the game. This recurring engagement loop leads to continuously high player counts, which leads to more opportunities for players to spend money.[36] This Battle Pass system is now in nearly every multiplayer shooter, from *Battlefield* to *Call of Duty*, to even games geared towards children like *Fall Guys*.

**Key Takeaways**

- In a time before personal computers, early video games allowed the general public to access technology that had been restricted to the realm of abstract science. Tennis for Two created

34. *Platform Totals*. (n.d.). VGChartz. Retrieved January 5, 2024, from https://www.vgchartz.com

35. Barr, M., & Copeland-Stewart, A. (2022). Playing Video Games During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Effects on Players' Well-Being—Matthew Barr, Alicia Copeland-Stewart, 2022. *Games and Culture*, *17*(1), 122–139. https://doi.org/10.1177/15554120211017036

36. Joseph, Daniel. (2021) "Battle Pass Capitalism." Journal of Consumer Culture 21(1), 68–83. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540521993930

an interface where anyone with basic motor skills could use a complex machine. The first video games functioned early on as a form of media by essentially disseminating the experience of computer technology to those without access to it.
- Video games reached wider audiences in the 1990s with the advent of the first-person shooter genre and popular nonaction games such as *Myst*. The games were marketed to older audiences, and their success increased demand for similar games.
- Online capabilities that developed in the 1990s and expanded in the 2000s allowed players to compete in teams. This innovation attracted larger audiences to gaming and led to new means of social communication.
- A new generation of accessible, family-oriented games in the late 2000s encouraged families to interact through video games. These games also brought in older demographics that had never used video games before.

**Exercises**

Video game marketing has changed to bring in more and more people to the video game audience. Think about the influence video games have had on you or people you know. If you have never played video games, then think about the ways your conceptions of video games have changed. Sketch out a timeline indicating the different occurrences that marked your experiences related to video games. Now compare this timeline to the history of video games from this section. Consider the following questions:

1. How did your own experiences line up with the history of video games?
2. Did you feel the effects of marketing campaigns directed at you or those around you?
3. Were you introduced to video games during a surge in popularity? What games appealed to you?

## Media Attributions

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# 14.2 THE IMPACT OF VIDEO GAMES ON CULTURE

**Learning Objectives**

- Describe gaming culture and how it has influenced mainstream culture.
- Analyze the ways video games have affected other forms of media.
- Describe how video games can be used for educational purposes.
- Identify the arguments for and against the depiction of video games as an art.

An NPD poll conducted in 2007 found that 72 percent of the U.S. population had played a video game that year.[1] The increasing number of people playing video games means that video games are having an undeniable effect on culture. This effect is clearly visible in the increasing mainstream acceptance of aspects of gaming culture. Video games have also changed the way that many other forms of media, from music to film, are produced and consumed. Education has also been changed by video games through the use of new technologies that help teachers and students communicate in new ways through educational games such as *Brain Age*. As video games have an increasing influence on our culture, many have voiced their opinions on whether this form of media should be considered an art.

## Game Culture

To fully understand the effects of video games on mainstream culture, it is important to understand the development of **gaming culture**, or the culture surrounding video games. Video games, like books or movies, have avid users who have made this form of media central to their lives. In the early 1970s, programmers got

1. Faylor, Chris. "NPD: 72% of U.S. Population Played Games in 2007; PC Named "Driving Force in Online Gaming," Shack News, April 2, 2008, http://www.shacknews.com/onearticle.x/52025.

together in groups to play *Spacewar!,* spending a great deal of time competing in a game that was rudimentary compared to modern games.[2] As video arcades and home video game consoles gained in popularity, youth culture quickly adapted to this type of media, engaging in competitions to gain high scores and spending hours at the arcade or with the home console.

In the 1980s, an increasing number of kids were spending time on consoles playing games and, more importantly, increasingly identifying with the characters and products associated with the games. Saturday morning cartoons were made out of the *Pac-Man* and *Super Mario Bros*. games, and an array of nongame merchandise was sold with video game logos and characters. The public recognition of some of these characters has made them into cultural icons. A poll taken in 2007 found that more Canadians surveyed could identify a photo of Mario, from *Super Mario Bros*., than a photo of the current Canadian prime minister.[3]

As the kids who first played *Super Mario Bros*. began to outgrow video games, companies such as Sega, and later Sony and Microsoft, began making games to appeal to older demographics. This has increased the average age of video game players, which was 35 in 2009.[4] The Nintendo Wii has even found a new demographic in retirement communities, where *Wii Bowling* has become a popular form of entertainment for the residents.[5] The gradual increase in the gaming age has led to an acceptance of video games as an acceptable form of mainstream entertainment.

## The Subculture of Geeks

The acceptance of video games in mainstream culture has consequently changed the way that the culture views certain people. "Geek" was the name given to people who were adept at technology but lacking in the skills that tended to make one popular, like fashion sense or athletic ability. Many of these people, because they often did not fare well in society, favored imaginary worlds such as those found in the fantasy and science fiction genres. Video games were appealing because they were both a fantasy world and a means to excel at something. Jim Rossignol, in his 2008 book, *This Gaming Life: Travels in Three Cities*, explained part of the lure of playing *Quake III* online:

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2. Brand, Stewart. "Space War," Rolling Stone, December 7, 1972.

3. Cohn & Wolfe Toronto, "Italian Plumber More Memorable Than Harper, Dion," news release, November 13, 2007, https://web.archive.org/web/20071116053651/http://www.newswire.ca/en/releases/mmnr/Super_Mario_Galaxy/index.html.

4. Entertainment Software Association, Essential Facts About the Computer and Video Game Industry: 2009 Sales, Demographic, and Usage Data, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20141113223215/http://www.theesa.com:80/facts/pdfs/ESA_EF_2009.pdf.

5. Wischnowsky, D.: Wii bowling knocks over retirement home. Chicago Tribune, (February 16, 2007), https://web.archive.org/web/20100812034513/http://www.chicagotribune.com:80/news/local/chi-070216nintendo,0,2755896.story.

> Cold mornings, adolescent disinterest, and a nagging hip injury had meant that I was banished from the sports field for many years. I wasn't going to be able to indulge in the camaraderie that sports teams felt or in the extended buzz of victory through dedication and cooperation. That entire swathe of experience had been cut off from me by cruel circumstance and a good dose of self-defeating apathy. Now, however, there was a possibility for some kind of redemption: a sport for the quick-fingered and the computer-bound; a space of possibility in which I could mold friends and strangers into a proficient gaming team.[6]

Video games gave a group of excluded people a way to gain proficiency in the social realm. As video games became more of a mainstream phenomenon and video game skills began to be desired by a large number of people, the popular idea of geeks changed. It is now common to see the term "geek" used to mean a person who understands computers and technology. This former slur is also prominent in the media, with headlines in 2010 such as "Geeks in Vogue: Top Ten Cinematic Nerds."[7]

Many media stories focusing on geeks examine the ways in which this subculture has been accepted by the mainstream. Geeks may have become "cooler," but mainstream culture has also become "geekier." The acceptance of geek culture has led to acceptance of geek aesthetics. The mainstreaming of video games has led to acceptance of fantasy or virtual worlds. This is evident in the popularity of film/book series such as *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter*. Comic book characters, emblems of geek culture, have become the vehicles for blockbuster movies such as *Spider-Man* and *The Dark Knight*. The idea of a fantasy or virtual world has come to appeal to greater numbers of people. Virtual worlds such as those represented in the *Grand Theft Auto* and *Halo* series and online games such as *World of Warcraft* have expanded the idea of virtual worlds so that they are not mere means of escape but new ways to interact.[8]

## The Effects of Video Games on Other Types of Media

Video games during the 1970s and '80s were often **derivatives** of other forms of media. *E.T.*, *Star Wars*, and a number of other games took their cues from movies, television shows, and books. This began to change in the 1980s with the development of cartoons based on video games, and in the 1990s and 2000s with live-action feature films based on video games.

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6. Rossignol, Jim. This Gaming Life: Travels in Three Cities (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 17.

7. Sharp, Craig. "Geeks in Vogue: Top Ten Cinematic Nerds," Film Shaft, April 26, 2010, http://www.filmshaft.com/geeks-in-vogue-top-ten-cinematic-nerds/.

8. Konzack, Lars. "Geek Culture: The 3rd Counter-Culture," (paper, FNG2006, Preston, England, June 26–28, 2006), http://www.scribd.com/doc/270364/Geek-Culture-The-3rd-CounterCulture.

## Television

Television programs based on video games were an early phenomenon. *Pac-Man, Pole Position,* and *Q*bert* were among the animated programs that aired in the early 1980s. In the later 1980s, shows such as *The Super Mario Bros. Super Show!* and *The Legend of Zelda* promoted Nintendo games. In the 1990s, Pokémon, originally a game developed for the Nintendo Game Boy, was turned into a television series, a card game, several movies, and even a musical.[9] Recently, several programs have been developed that revolve entirely around video games—the web series *The Guild*, for instance, tells the story of a group of friends who interact through an unspecified MMORPG.

Nielsen, the company that tabulates television ratings, has begun rating video games in a similar fashion. In 2010, this information showed that video games, as a whole, could be considered a kind of **fifth network**, along with the television networks NBC, ABC, CBS, and Fox.[10] Advertisers use Nielsen ratings to decide which programs to support. The use of this system is changing public perceptions to include video game playing as a habit similar to television watching.

Video games have also influenced the way that television is produced. The Rocket Racing League, scheduled to be launched in 2011, will feature a "virtual racetrack." Racing jets will travel along a virtual track that can only be seen by pilots and spectators with enabled equipment. Applications for mobile devices are being developed that will allow spectators to race virtual jets alongside the ones flying in real time.[11] This type of innovation is only possible with a public that has come to demand and rely on the kind of interactivity that video games provide.

## Film

The rise in film adaptations of video games accompanies the increased age of video game users. In 1995, *Mortal Kombat*, a live-action movie based on the video game, grossed over $70 million at the box office, placing it 22nd in the rankings for that year.[12] *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*, released in 2001, starred well-known actress Angelina

9. Internet Movie Database, "Pokémon," https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0168366/.

10. Shields, Mike. "Nielsen: Video Games Approach 5th Network Status," Adweek, March 25, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20100329155822/http://www.adweek.com/aw/content_display/news/agency/e3i4f087b1aeac6f008d0ecadfeffe4a191.

11. Hadhazy, Adam. "'NASCAR of the Skies' to Feature Video Game-Like Interactivity," TechNewsDaily, April 26, 2010, http://www.technewsdaily.com/nascar-of-the-skies-to-feature-video-game-like-interactivity–0475/.

12. Box Office Mojo, "Mortal Kombat," http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=mortalkombat.htm.

Jolie and ranked No. 1 at the box office when it was released, and 15th overall for the year.[13] Films based on video games are an increasingly common sight at the box office, such as producer Jerry Bruckheimer's *Prince of Persia*, or the sequel to *Tron*, based on the idea of a virtual gaming arena.

Another aspect of video games' influence on films is how video game releases are marketed and perceived. The release date for the anticipated game *Grand Theft Auto IV* was announced and marketed to compete with the release of the film *Iron Man*. *Grand Theft Auto IV* supposedly beat *Iron Man* by $300 million in sales. This kind of comparison is, in some ways, misleading. Video games cost much more than a ticket to a movie, so higher sales does not mean that more people bought the game than the movie. Also, the distribution apparatus for the two media is totally different. Movies can only be released in theaters, whereas video games can be sold at any retail outlet.[14] What this kind of news story proves, however, is that the general public considers video games as something akin to a film. It is also important to realize that the scale of production and profit for video games is similar to that of films. Video games include music scores, actors, and directors in addition to the game designers, and the budgets for major games reflect this. *Grand Theft Auto IV* cost an estimated $100 million to produce.[15]

## Music

Video games have been accompanied by music ever since the days of the arcade. Video game music was originally limited to computer beeps turned into theme songs. The design of the Nintendo 64, Sega Saturn, and Sony PlayStation made it possible to use sampled audio on new games, meaning songs played on physical instruments could be recorded and used on video games. Beginning with the music of the Final Fantasy series, scored by famed composer Nobuo Uematsu, video game music took on film score quality, complete with full orchestral and vocal tracks. This innovation proved beneficial to the music industry. Well-known musicians such as Trent Reznor, Thomas Dolby, Steve Vai, and Joe Satriani were able to create the soundtracks for popular games, giving these artists exposure to new generations of potential fans.[16] Composing music for video games has turned into a profitable means of employment for many musicians. Schools such as Berklee College

13. Box Office Mojo, "Lara Croft: Tomb Raider," http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=tombraider.htm.

14. Associated Press, "'Grand Theft Auto IV' Beats 'Iron Man' by 0 Million," Fox News, May 9, 2008, http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,354711,00.html.

15. Bowditch, Gillian. "Grand Theft Auto Producer is Godfather of Gaming," Times (London), April 27, 2008, https://web.archive.org/web/20090106152440/http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/scotland/article3821838.ece.

16. Video Games Music Big Hit, "Video Games Music Big Hit," Wilmington (NC) Morning Star, February 1, 1997, 36.

of Music, Yale, and New York University have programs that focus on composing music for video games. The students are taught many of the same principles that are involved in film scoring.[17]

Many rock bands have allowed their previously recorded songs to be used in video games, similar to a hit song being used on a movie soundtrack. The bands are paid for the rights to use the song, and their music is exposed to an audience that otherwise might not hear it. As mentioned earlier, games like *Rock Band* and *Guitar Hero* have been used to promote bands. The release of *The Beatles: Rock Band* was timed to coincide with the release of digitally remastered reissues of the Beatles' albums.

Another phenomenon relating to music and video games involves musicians covering video game music. A number of bands perform only video game covers in a variety of styles, such as the popular Japanese group the Black Mages, which performs rock versions of *Final Fantasy* music. Playing video game themes is not limited to rock bands, however. An orchestra and chorus called Video Games Live started a tour in 2005 dedicated to playing well-known video game music. Their performances are often accompanied by graphics projected onto a screen showing relevant sequences from the video games.[18]

## Machinima

Recently, the connection between video games and other media has increased with the popularity of **machinima**, animated films and series created by recording character actions inside video games. Beginning with the short film "Diary of a Camper," filmed inside the game *Quake* in 1996, fans of video games have adopted the technique of machinima to tell their own stories. Although these early movies were released only online and targeted a select niche of gamers, professional filmmakers have since adopted the process, using machinima to storyboard scenes and to add a sense of individuality to computer-generated shots. This new form of media is increasingly becoming mainstream, as TV shows such as South Park and channels such as MTV2 have introduced machinima to a larger audience.[19]

## Video Games and Education

One sign of the mainstreaming of video games is the increase of educational institutions that embrace them.

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17. Khan, Joseph P. "Berklee is Teaching Its Students to Compose Scores for Video Games," Boston Globe, January 19, 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20160304054111/http://www.boston.com/news/education/higher/articles/2010/01/19/berklee_is_teaching_students_to_compose_scores_for_video_games/.

18. Play Symphony, Jason Michael Paul Productions, "About," Play! A Video Game Symphony, https://web.archive.org/web/20110925015945/http://play-symphony.com:80/about.php.

19. Strickland, Jonathan. "How Machinima Works," HowStuffWorks.com, http://entertainment.howstuffworks.com/machinima3.htm.

As early as the 1980s, games such as *Number Munchers* and *Word Munchers* were designed to help children develop basic math and grammar skills. In 2006, the Federation of American Scientists completed a study that approved of video game use in education. The study cited the fact that video game systems were present in most households, kids favored learning through video games, and games could be used to facilitate analytical skills.[20] Another study, published in the science journal *Nature* in 2002, found that regular video game players had better developed visual-processing skills than people who did not play video games. Participants in the test were asked to play a first-person shooter game for 1 hour a day for 10 days, and were then tested for specific visual attention skills. The playing improved these skills in all participants, but the regular video game players had a greater skill level than the non–game players. According to the study, "Although video-game playing may seem to be rather mindless, it is capable of radically altering visual attention processing."[21]

Other educational institutions have begun to embrace video games as well. The Boy Scouts of America have created a "belt loop," something akin to a merit badge, for tasks including learning to play a parent-approved game and developing a schedule to balance video game time with homework.[22] The federal government has also seen the educational potential of video games. A commission on balancing the federal budget suggested a video game that would educate Americans about the necessary costs of balancing the federal budget.[23] The military has similarly embraced video games as training simulators for new soldiers. These simulators, working off of newer game technologies, present several different realistic options that soldiers could face on the field. The games have also been used as recruiting tools by the U.S. Army and the Army National Guard.[24]

The ultimate effect of video game use for education, whether in schools or in the public arena, means that video games have been validated by established cultural authorities. Many individuals still resist the idea that video games can be beneficial or have a positive cultural influence, but their embrace by educational institutions has given video games validation.

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20. Feller, Ben. "Group: Video Games Can Reshape Education," MSNBC, October 18, 2006, https://web.archive.org/web/20090724121830/http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/15309615/from/ET/.

21. Green, C. Shawn. and Daphne Bavelier, "Action Video Game Modifies Visual Selective Attention," Nature 423, no. 6939 (2003): 534–537.

22. Murphy, David. "Boy Scouts Develop 'Video Game' Merit Badge," PC Magazine, May 2, 2010, http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,2817,2363331,00.asp.

23. Wolf, Richard. "Nation's Soaring Deficit Calls for Painful Choices," USA Today, April 14, 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20100416165426/https://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2010-04-12-deficit_N.htm.

24. Associated Press, "Military Training Is Just a Game," Wired, October 3, 2003, http://www.wired.com/gaming/gamingreviews/news/2003/10/60688.

# Video Games as Art

While universally accepted as a form of media, a debate has recently arisen over whether video games can be considered a form of art. Roger Ebert, the well-known film critic, has historically argued that "video games can never be art," citing the fact that video games are meant to be won, whereas art is meant to be experienced.[25]

His remarks have generated an outcry from both video gamers and developers. Many point to games such as 2009's *Flower*, in which players control the flow of flower petals in the wind, as examples of video games developing into art. *Flower* avoids specific plots and characters to allow the player to focus on interaction with the landscape and the emotion of the gameplay.[26] Likewise, more mainstream games, such as the popular *Katamari* series, released in 2004, are built around the idea of creation, requiring players to pull together a massive clump of objects in order to create a star.

Video games, once viewed as a mindless source of entertainment, are now being featured in publications such as The New Yorker magazine and The New York Times.[27] With the development of increasingly complex musical scores and the advent of machinima, the boundaries between video games and other forms of media are slowly blurring. While they may not be considered art by everyone, video games have contributed significantly to modern artistic culture.

**Key Takeaways**

- The aesthetics and principles of gaming culture have had an increasing effect on mainstream culture. This has led to the gradual acceptance of marginalized social groups and increased comfort with virtual worlds, and the pursuit of new means of interaction.
- Video games have gone from being a derivative medium that took its cues from other media, such as books, films, and music, to being a form of media that other types derive new ideas from. Video games have also interacted with older forms of media to change them and

25. Ebert, Roger. "Video Games Can Never Be Art," Chicago Sun-Times, April 16, 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20130210213747/http://blogs.suntimes.com/ebert/2010/04/video_games_can_never_be_art.html.

26. That Game Company, "Flower," http://thatgamecompany.com/games/flower/.

27. Fisher, Max. "Are Video Games Art?" The Atlantic, April 19, 2010, https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2010/04/are-video-games-art/341034/.

create new means of entertainment and interaction.

- Educational institutions have embraced the use of video games as valuable tools for teaching. These tools include simulated worlds in which important life skills can be learned and improved.
- While video games may not be accepted by everyone as a form of art, there is no doubt that they contribute greatly to artistic media such as music and film.

## Exercises

1. How has the mainstream acceptance of video games influenced the perception of "geek culture"? Discuss the transformation of the term "geek" and its implications for identity and social dynamics.
2. Choose a video game that you believe has had a significant impact on culture, either positively or negatively. Write a short essay or create a presentation explaining your choice, the game's cultural impact, and the reasons behind its influence.
3. Do you agree with the argument that video games should be considered a form of art? Why or why not? Consider examples of video games that both support and challenge this notion in your response.

# 14.3 CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

**Learning Objectives**

- Critically evaluate the impact of video game violence on society, drawing from historical controversies and current debates over the rating systems and real-life incidents.
- Understand the complexities surrounding video game addiction, including its psychological aspects, societal implications, and the measures being taken to address it.
- Analyze the representation of gender in video games, considering how sexism and stereotypes are perpetuated in the gaming industry and how they affect both male and female gamers.

The increasing realism and expanded possibilities of video games have inspired a great deal of controversy. However, even early games, though rudimentary and seemingly laughable nowadays, raised controversy over their depiction of adult themes. Although increased realism and graphics capabilities of contemporary video games have increased the shock value of in-game violence, international culture has been struggling to come to terms with video game violence since the dawn of video games.

## Violence

Violence in video games has been controversial from their earliest days. *Death Race*, an arcade game released in 1976, encouraged drivers to run over stick figures, which then turned into Xs. Although the programmers claimed that the stick figures were not human, the game was controversial, making national news on the TV talk show *Donahue* and the TV news magazine *60 Minutes*. Video games, regardless of their realism or lack thereof, had added a new potential to the world of games and entertainment: the ability to simulate murder.

The enhanced realism of video games in the 1990s accompanied a rise in violent games as companies expanded the market to target older demographics. A great deal of controversy exists over the influence of this kind of violence on children and over the rating system that is applied to video games. There are many stories of real-life violent acts involving video games. The 1999 Columbine High School massacre was quickly linked

to the teenage perpetrators' enthusiasm for video games. The families of Columbine victims brought a lawsuit against 25 video game companies, claiming that if the games had not existed, the massacre would not have happened.[1] In 2008, a 17-year-old boy shot his parents after they took away his video game system, killing his mother.[2] Also in 2008, when six teens were arrested for attempted carjacking and robbery, they stated that they were reenacting scenes from *Grand Theft Auto*.[3]

There is no shortage of news stories that involve young men committing crimes relating to an obsession with video games. The controversy has not been resolved regarding the influences behind these crimes. Many studies have linked aggression to video games; however, critics take issue with using the results of these studies to claim that the video games caused the aggression. They point out that people who enact video-game–related crimes already have psychopathic tendencies and that the results of such research studies are correlational rather than causational—a naturally violent person is drawn to play violent video games.[4] Other critics point out that violent games are designed for adults, just as violent movies are, and that parents should enforce stricter standards for their children.

The problem of children's access to violent games is a large and complex one. Video games present difficult issues for those who create the ratings. One problem is the inconsistency that seems to exist in rating video games and movies. Movies with violence or sexual themes are rated either R or NC-17. Filmmakers prefer the R rating over the NC-17 rating because NC-17 ratings hurt box office sales, and they will often heavily edit films to remove overly graphic content. The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB), rates video games. The two most restrictive ratings the ESRB has put forth are "M" (for Mature; 17 and older; "may contain mature sexual themes, more intense violence, and/or strong language") and "AO" (for Adults Only; 18 and up; "may include graphic depictions of sex and/or violence"). If this rating system were applied to movies, a great deal of movies now rated R would be labeled AO. An AO label can have a devastating effect on game sales; in fact, many retail outlets will not sell games with an AO rating.[5] This creates a situation where a video game with a sexual or violent scene as graphic as the ones seen in R-rated movies is difficult to purchase, whereas a pornographic magazine can be bought at many convenience stores. This issue reveals a unique aspect of video

1. Ward, Mark. "Columbine Families Sue Computer Game Makers," BBC News, May 1, 2001, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/1295920.stm.
2. Harvey, Mike. "Teenager Daniel Petric Shot Parents Who Took Away Xbox." *The Times*, January 13, 2009. https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/teenager-daniel-petric-shot-parents-who-took-away-xbox-3c3tzrn5v88.
3. Cochran, Lee. "Teens Say: Video Game Made Them Do It," ABC News, June 27, 2008, http://abcnews.go.com/TheLaw/story?id=5262689.
4. Adams, Jill U. "A Closer Look: Effects of Violent Video Games," Los Angeles Times, May 3, 2010, http://www.latimes.com/news/health/la-he-closer-20100503,0,5586471.story.
5. Hyman, Paul. "Video Game Rating Board Don't Get No Respect," Hollywood Reporter, April 8, 2005, https://web.archive.org/web/20100823121534/http://www.hollywoodreporter.com:80/hr/search/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1000874859.

games. Although many of them are designed for adults, the distribution system and culture surrounding video games is still largely youth-oriented.

## Video Game Addiction

Another controversial issue is the problem of video game addiction. As of the print date, the American Medical Association (AMA) has not created an official diagnosis of video game addiction, citing the lack of long-term research. However, the AMA uses the term "video game overuse" to describe game use that begins to affect other aspects of an individual's life, such as relationships and health. Studies have found that socially marginalized people have more of a tendency to overuse games, especially online role-playing games like World of Warcraft. Other studies have found that patterns of time usage and social dysfunction in players who overuse games are similar to those of other addictive disorders.[6]

Groups such as On-line Gamers Anonymous have developed a 12-step program similar to that of Alcoholics Anonymous to help gamers deal with problems relating to game overuse. This group is run by former online gamers and family members of those affected by heavy game use (On-line Gamers Anonymous).[7] This problem is not new, but it has become more prevalent. In the early 1990s, many stories surfaced of individuals dropping out of college or getting divorced because of addiction to MUDs.[8] In addition, heavy video gaming, much like heavy computer use in an office setting, can result in painful repetitive stress injuries. Even worse are the rare but serious cases of death resulting from video game overuse. In the early '80s, two deaths were linked to the video game *Berzerk*. The players, both in their late teens, suffered fatal heart attacks while struggling to achieve top scores.[9] The issue of video game addiction has become a larger one because of the ubiquity of video games and Internet technology. In countries that have a heavily wired infrastructure, such as South Korea, the problem is even bigger. In 2010, excessive game use was problematic enough that the South Korean government imposed an online gaming curfew for people under the age of 18 that would block certain sites

6. Khan, Mohamed. Emotional and Behavioral Effects of Video Games and Internet Overuse, American Medical Association, Council on Science and Public Health, 2007, https://web.archive.org/web/20111231075150/http://www.ama-assn.org:80/ama1/pub/upload/mm/443/csaph12a07-fulltext.pdf.

7. On-line Gamers Anonymous, "About OLGA & OLG-Anon," http://www.olganon.org.

8. Greene, R. W. "Is Internet Addiction for Worrywarts or a Genuine Problem?" CNN, September 23, 1998, http://www.cnn.com/TECH/computing/9809/23/netaddict.idg/index.html.

9. Arcade History, "Berzerk, the Video Game," http://www.arcade-history.com/?n=berzerk&page=detail&id=236.

after midnight. This decision followed the death of a 3-month-old baby from starvation while her parents played an online game at an Internet café.[10]

Another side of video game addiction is told well by Jim Rossignol in his book *This Gaming Life: Travels in Three Cities*. The book describes Rossignol's job as a journalist for a financial company and his increasing involvement with *Quake III*. Rossignol trained a team of players to compete in virtual online tournaments, scheduling practices and spending hours afterward analyzing strategies with his teammates. His intense involvement in the game led to poor performance at his job, and he was eventually fired. After being fired, he spent even more time on the game, not caring about his lack of a job or shrinking savings. The story up to this point sounds like a testimonial about the dangers of game addiction. However, because of his expertise in the game, he was hired by a games magazine and enjoyed full-time employment writing about what he loved doing. Rossignol does not gloss over the fact that games can have a negative influence, but his book speaks to the ways in which gaming—often what would be described as obsessive gaming—can cause positive change in people's lives.[11]

10. Cain, Geoffrey. "South Korea Cracks Down on Gaming Addiction," Time, April 20, 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20130817115322/http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1983234,00.html.

11. Rossignol, Jim. This Gaming Life: Travels in Three Cities (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

# Sexism

Figure 1: Picture of Lara Croft in Tomb Raider game. Games such as Tomb Raider and Dead or Alive Xtreme have been criticized for their demeaning depiction of women.

It is no secret that young adult men make up the majority of video gamers. A study in 2009 found that 60 percent of gamers were male, and the average age of players was 35.[12] While the gender gap has certainly narrowed in the past 30 years, video gaming is still in many ways a male-dominated medium.

Male influence can be seen throughout the industry. Women make up less than 12 percent of game designers and programmers, and those who do enter the field often find themselves facing subtle—and not so subtle—sexism.[13] When *Game Developer* magazine released its list of the top 50 people in the video game industry for 2010, bloggers were quick to note that no female developers appeared in the list.[14] In 2007, scandal erupted over a pornographic comic featuring Jade Raymond, current managing director of the French video game publisher Ubisoft, that surfaced on an online forum. The motivation behind the comic was to allege that

12. Entertainment Software Association, Essential Facts About the Computer and Video Game Industry: 2009.

13. Media Awareness Network, "Gender Stereotyping," https://web.archive.org/web/20111216182603/http://www.media-awareness.ca:80/english/parents/video_games/concerns/gender_videogames.cfm.

14. Doctorow, Cory. "Gamasutra's Most Important Gamers List Is a Boy's Club," BoingBoing (blog), April 14, 2010, http://boingboing.net/2010/04/14/gamasutras-most-impo.html.

Raymond did not deserve her position at Ubisoft because she earned it based on her looks, rather than on her abilities and experience.

Sexism in video games has existed since the early days of the medium. The plot of the infamous Custer's Revenge, released for the Atari 2600 in 1982, centered on the rape of a Native American woman. Popular NES games such as *Super Mario Bros.* and *The Legend of Zelda* featured a male figure rescuing a damsel in distress. Both the protagonist and antagonist in the original *Tomb Raider* game had hourglass figures with prominent busts and nonexistent waists, a trend that continues in the franchise today. In 2003, the fighting series *Dead or Alive* released a spin-off game titled *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball* that existed to showcase the well-endowed female characters in swim attire.[15] The spin-off was so popular that two more similar games were released.

Some note that video games are not unique in their demeaning portrayal of women. Like movies, television, and other media forms, video games often fall back on gender stereotyping in order to engage consumers. Defenders point out that many male video game characters are also depicted lewdly. Games such as *God of War* and *Mortal Kombat* feature hypersexualized men with bulging muscles and aggressive personalities who rely on their brawn rather than their brains. How are men affected by these stereotypes? Laboratory studies have shown that violence and aggression in video games affect men more than women, leading to higher levels of male aggression.[16] While sexism is certainly present in video games, it seems sexual stereotyping affects both genders negatively.

In recent years, game designers have sought to move away from these clichéd representations of gender. The popular game *Portal*, released in 2007, features a female protagonist clad in a simple orange jumpsuit who relies on her wits to solve logic puzzles. Series such as *Half-Life* and *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney* star male heroes who are intellectuals instead of warriors. Other games, like the *Mass Effect* series and *Halo: Reach*, allow gamers to choose the gender of the main character without altering elements of the plot or game-play. However, despite recent strides forward, there is no doubt that as the video game industry continues to evolve, so too will the issue of gender.

## Piracy, Live Service, and the Software They War Over

If you've worked with computers before and participated in discussions of them, you've probably heard of **software**, **hardware**, and **firmware**. These terms are used to help mark different parts of a computer on a scale

15. Strauss, Michael. "A Look at Female Characters in Video Games," Associated Content, July 16, 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20110406000056/http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/5487226/a_look_at_female_characters_in_video_pg2.html?cat=19.

16. Bartholow, Bruce D. and Craig A. Anderson, "Effects of Violent Video Games on Aggressive Behavior: Potential Sex Differences," Journal of Experimental Social Psychology 38, no. 3 (2002): 283–290.

of how easy they are to edit and adjust. If you've played a lot of video games and participated in discussion of them, you've probably heard of the term **shovelware** – this is a slang term based on the same naming convention, used to describe low-effort games or other software that are notable more for the quantity of data being offered rather than the quality of it.

You may not know that between the coinings of these terms, there were many other types of -ware, mostly used to describe different methods of software distribution rather than specifically video games. **Shareware** describes software that is offered at no cost, but only for trial use. Typically the software has certain functions removed, or is only offered for a limited period of time. When the user sends the creator payment, they are then given access to the full version of the software.

If this sounds a lot like a demo for a video game, that's because it is; demos (short for demonstrations) are essentially video game shareware, serving the same purpose of letting a consumer use *some* of the product before deciding if they want to pay for the full experience. This makes it interesting that the very first instance of Shareware was actually called by the term **freeware**, despite functioning differently. The term "freeware" is loosely agreed to mean software that is distributed in full and for free, to no expected monetary gain, but experts disagree – many cases of supposed freeware are actually shareware, due to there being no strict legal definition for the terms.

Freeware is also not to be confused with **free software**, which is also software distributed for free, but with the crucial difference of being open-source: the software's source code is freely available to anyone who wishes to modify the program or make use of its code for another project. With how similar the terms are, it's quite easy to see why the Free Software Foundation suggests retiring the word "freeware" entirely.[17]

Lastly, there is **abandonware**, which is possibly the most complicated of all of them. To quote criminologist and video game enthusiast Ross Scott, "The difference is that this used to be a commercial game that you'd pay for, but then the company shut down or got bought out, and none of the people involved with the original game are still involved with the intellectual property. The company that does own the intellectual property usually doesn't care about a game made 20 years ago that they had no involvement in and are no longer collecting any money on"[18] due to there being no legal way to purchase it from the source. So, while illegal copying of the game is still piracy by definition, pirates will "test the waters" (no pun intended) by putting the software somewhere it can be freely acquired and seeing if they receive threats of legal recourse. If they do not, it is assumed that the original creators do not care, and the software is considered abandonware.

Abandonware is a tricky subject; ask a lawyer, and they'll tell you it doesn't exist and is only wishful thinking on the part of pirates. While that is true by strict definition, critics of current copyright law will point out that

17. Stallman, Richard M (n.d.). *Categories of Free and Nonfree Software.* Free Software Foundation. Retrieved December 16, 2023 from https://www.gnu.org/philosophy/categories.html.

18. Scott, Ross (2013). *Ross's Game Dungeon: Test Drive 3.* Accursed Farms. Retrieved December 20, 2023, from https://youtu.be/68zZZn8wy4E?si=Ko86OYIkIJP0k5dy.

the only reason certain games still exist in any playable state is thanks to pirates who wanted to keep playing it after it became impossible to legally and directly purchase the software. After all, if copyright holders are simply sitting on intellectual property of media that used to be purchasable, and they don't care enough to keep it so, then functionally they are losing no profits to pirates who change that. To put it simply, many pirates say it simply isn't stealing if the copyright holders are not losing anything – or rather, it shouldn't be, and our copyright law needs to change.

It goes beyond games simply being forgotten in the past, too. **Games as a service** is a term that refers to games which require a direct connection to a central server in order to function, which the player does not have access to even if they paid money to play the game. Not all live-service games cost money, but the ones that do are becoming the subject of increasing scrutiny and anger from the gaming community – especially ones that only require a one-time payment, rather than a consistent subscription fee.

Imagine if after you paid to use Microsoft Word, a few years later, Microsoft announced they were no longer offering purchases of the software. As a direct result of that decision, your already-purchased copy no longer functioned, and Microsoft was not offering any refunds. Now imagine that after you file a complaint, you learn that this is not only completely legal, but has become standard practice for the entire industry while you weren't looking – to the point that dozens if not hundreds of paid-for pieces of software were being silently killed every single year without offering any refunds. Worst of all, you're in the miniscule minority for thinking this shouldn't be allowed. You'd think the entire world had lost their minds!

Luckily, there is legal precedent that the very idea of "games as a service" is fraudulent. The reason for this is that the vast majority of supposed games as a service are being sold as goods, not services. To quote a more in-depth discussion by Ross Scott, "If you only have to pay once, and it's not a subscription fee for your game, then by definition it's being sold under a perpetual license. Under most countries' laws, that means it's a good and not a service."[19] So, while some piracy is undoubtedly harmful and takes money away from people who worked to earn it, keep in mind that other pirates are only cracking and sharing software that's been forgotten and left to rot or has even been outright destroyed by its original creators after it was paid for by consumers.

## Drawing on Communication Theory

Communication theory can potentially help us understand games at a deeper level and may offer tools that allow us to dig deeper into the controversial issues noted above.

19. Scott, Ross (2019). *"Games as a service" is fraud*. Accursed Farms. Retrieved December 16, 2023, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tUAX0gnZ3Nw.

## Games and Behavior

Most of us who play video games enjoy a certain level of control. Video games are different from most forms of mass entertainment. Films, popular television shows, books, and other works of creative fiction (besides the choose-your-own variety) tell you who the characters are, where they are located and what their capabilities and limitations are. In video games, you control your avatar. In role-playing games (RPGs) such as *Dragon Age*, *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*, and *Divinity*, players' choices directly and deeply influence the narrative. Because these games offer a wide array of narrative paths, your choices create a varied gaming experience. While it is true that your choices in RPGs are always drawn from a finite set of options, the results of your in-game behavior give you a measure of power.

There are game worlds where cultural norms within the game are quite close to those most people experience in the physical world. There are other games where most of your actions, even negative ones, are without consequences. It is not clear that consequence-free video games create a real-world culture where people do not care about ethics or values. Time and time again, research has shown that violent video games have no direct correlation with violent behavior in the physical world.[20] Games like the *Grand Theft Auto* series are usually considered an escape rather than an example of how to live. Additionally, many social science and health studies suggest that we do not take cues from violent video games and practice those same behaviors in our real lives. Some studies show correlations between gameplay and short-term thoughts of violence, but this type of research only addresses temporary changes in mood. Direct impacts on long-term behavior from specific video games do not appear frequently enough in sample populations of gamers to suggest that games cause violent or other antisocial behaviors.

Then again, the long-term social influence of deeply immersive, violent games may not be fully understood. Many researchers who work with cultivation theory think there is a long-term social effect of this type of media content and behavior, even if limited experiments, surveys, and other research tools have failed to capture it. Following a researcher named George Gerbner, **cultivation theory** scholars often suggest that changing perceptions can change cultural values over time and that those changes can lead to long-term behavioral changes. The concern is that society, over time, has changed to become more accepting of anti-social behaviors. Historians might argue, but there are scholars who contend that based on our mass media environment, we might expect, perhaps, to reap what we sow.

20. David Zendle, Daniel Kudenko, Paul Cairns. Behavioural realism and the activation of aggressive concepts in violent video games. Entertainment Computing, 2018; 24: 21 DOI: 10.1016/j.entcom.2017.10.003

## Behavioral Theory

Developed by Albert Bandura, Social Learning Theory looks on its face like a "monkey-see-monkey-do" theory, but it goes deeper than suggesting we imitate the behaviors we see in the mass media.[21] Bandura posits that our behavior creates an environment that then helps determine group and individual behavior. In other words, Social Learning Theory seems to support the big-picture concepts behind cultivation theory. Bandura's argument is that the social environment shapes actual behavior and that messages in the mass media over time create the environment; however, the argument is not that media influence must shape behavior. Media influences often moderate or influence other behaviors that were already occurring.

Following Social Learning Theory, we can imagine a dynamic where behavior shapes our social environment and, at the same time, our environment provides limits for acceptable behavior. The mass media dynamic is part of this bigger dynamic of social influence. If the idea of this dynamic is difficult to grasp, try thinking about a sports team. A team shapes each individual player's behavior to some degree, but the players as individuals, pairs, and other groups within groups also influence the team, its mood, and the outcome of contests. Team influence and the environment of the group can set limits on individual behavior, but individuals are always free to excel or fail.

What does that leave us with? How do we reconcile the concepts of limited media effects with these ideas about how mass media — including many video games — shape the social environment? We have to place media effects in the broader context of the social sciences. In the study of social behavior, many factors, including parents, friends, school, church, our neighborhoods, income level, opportunity, and romantic relationships, may influence our behavior, but they do not have to. It is not likely you will ever pin down a single cause for a certain behavior or set of behavioral trends. Instead, consider that there are many complex and sometimes chaotic social influences rather than causes. If you stop looking for causes, you can begin to look at which influences are stronger than others and how different social influences might act together to influence people. You might also consider your media environment and your own behavior as objects under your control and try to take responsibility for your consumption, your behavior and the relationship between the two.

## Video Game Narratives

Besides social influences, video games make a cultural impact as well. One way that culture is influenced by video games is through the narratives they tell. All sorts of video games create stories. Whether you are playing as a plumber trying to save a princess, building a world out of blocks with little backstory, or going on an epic quest in a realm where distinctive characters have their own motivations, there are commonalities between

21. Mcleod, Saul. "Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory – Simply Psychology," July 25, 2023. https://www.simplypsychology.org/bandura.html.

good video games and the narratives of classic literature and film. In narrative storytelling, there are elements such as setting, characters, plot and themes that combine to make meaning for readers, viewers or users. Video games deserve credit for crafting narratives often as intricate, emotionally gripping and revealing as other forms of creative production.

Here are some questions to ask about a given video game narrative: How much control does the design of the game exert over the player and the gameplay? Are you a single character or part of a team? What is your mobility within the game, and is that a feature of gameplay?

Game design sets the stage. The narrative is the story. The two work together, and, depending on your interests, one may interest you more than the other. If you view a video game with a critical eye, you can appreciate worlds, characters and plot twists and the effort that goes into game design. If you view a game primarily as a player would, you might only see it at face value as boring, fun, immersive, and so forth. You can use almost all of the terms you use to describe great films and novels to describe contemporary video games.

Often, game design is where technological genius comes into play. The way a game environment is built matters almost as much as what you do in a game; however, we have all seen a special effects movie that was only a special effects movie. If the story falls flat, we will probably not recommend the film to our friends. Conversely, video games that start with compelling stories but have poorly executed design and functionality may be almost unplayable. The best works create compelling worlds and stories.

### Key Takeaways

- Video games have long been a subject of controversy, especially concerning their depiction of violence and its potential impact on real-world behavior, despite inconclusive evidence linking the two.
- The issue of video game addiction is gaining attention, with patterns similar to other addictive disorders although it is not yet officially recognized by the American Medical Association.
- Gender representation in video games is largely skewed, often perpetuating stereotypes and sexism although there are efforts within the industry to move away from these clichéd portrayals.
- Video games are not just entertainment but also a form of media that can influence and reflect societal norms and values, requiring a broader understanding within the context of social sciences.

**Exercises**

1. How do you think the portrayal of violence in video games impacts societal attitudes towards violence? Do you agree with the argument that violent video games can lead to real-world violence, or do you think other factors are at play?
2. Research and compare the rating systems for video games and movies. Discuss the inconsistencies, if any, and propose how the rating system for video games could be improved to better reflect the content.
3. Examine the issue of gender representation in video games. How do you think the male-dominated nature of the gaming industry affects the portrayal of female characters? What steps can be taken to make video games more inclusive and less stereotypical?

## Media Attributions

- Lara Croft in Tomb Raider game © Joshua | Ezzell via. Flickr is licensed under a CC BY-SA (Attribution ShareAlike) license

# 14.4 BLURRING THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN VIDEO GAMES, INFORMATION, ENTERTAINMENT, AND COMMUNICATION

**Learning Objectives**

- Identify how video games allow previously marginalized groups to enjoy new social experiences.
- Explain how virtual worlds can be used to facilitate learning.
- Describe the different ways video games have been used to communicate messages.

Early video games were easily identifiable as games. They had basic goals and set rules of play. As games have developed in complexity, they have allowed for newer options and an expanded idea of what constitutes a game. At the same time, the aesthetics and design of game culture have been applied to tools and entertainment phenomena that are not technically games. The result is a blurring of the lines between games and other forms of communication and the creation of new means of mixing information, entertainment, and communication.

# Video Games and the Social World of Sports

Figure 1: Photo of a group of people gathered around a screen playing video games. Team video games can provide many of the benefits of physical sports.

Video games have developed in complexity and flexibility to the point that they are providing new kinds of social interactions. This is perhaps clearest when games are compared to physical sports. Most of the abstract reasons for involvement in sports—things like teamwork, problem solving, and leadership—are also reasons to play video games that allow online team interaction. Sports are often portrayed as a social platform where people can learn new skills. Amateur sports teams provide an important means of socialization and communication for many people, allowing individuals from different gender, ethnic, and class backgrounds to find a common forum for communication. Video games have similar capacities; players who engage in online team battles must communicate with one another effectively and learn to collectively solve problems. In fact, video games could arguably provide a more inclusive platform for socializing because they do not exclude most socially or physically challenged individuals. The social platform of online games is certainly no utopia, as competitive endeavors of any sort inevitably create opportunities for negative communication, but it allows

people of different genders, races, and nationalities to play on equal footing, a feat that is difficult, if not impossible, in the physical realm.

## Virtual Worlds and Societal Interaction

Massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) such as World of Warcraft, EverQuest, and EVE Online allow for an unprecedented variety of goals to be pursued. According to one study on online communities, that means games are no longer meant to be a solitary activity played by a single individual. Instead, the player is expected to join a virtual community that is parallel with the physical world, in which societal, cultural, and economic systems arise.[1]

MMORPGs can function as a kind of hybrid of social media and video games in this respect. In some instances, these games could function entirely as social media and not as games. Consider a player who has no desire to achieve any of the prescribed goals of a game, such as going on quests or accomplishing tasks. This individual could simply walk around in social areas and talk to new people. Is the player still playing a game at this point, or has the game turned into a type of social media?

**Virtual worlds** such as *Second Life* are good examples of the thin line between games and social media. In this virtual world, users create avatars to represent themselves. They can then explore the world and take part in the culture that characterizes it. The *Second Life* website FAQ (frequently asked questions) tries to illustrate the differences between a virtual world and a video game:

> While the Second Life interface and display are similar to most popular massively multiplayer online role playing games (or MMORPGs), there are two key, unique differences:
>
> **Creativity**: The Second Life virtual world provides almost unlimited freedom to its residents. This world really is whatever you make it. If you want to hang out with your friends in a garden or nightclub, you can. If you want to go shopping or fight dragons, you can. If you want to start a business, create a game or build a skyscraper you can. It's up to you.
>
> **Ownership**: Instead of paying a monthly subscription fee, Residents can start a Basic account for FREE. Additional Basic accounts cost a one-time flat fee of just $9.95. If you choose to get land to live, work and build on, you pay a monthly lease fee based on the amount of land you have. You also own anything you create—Residents retain intellectual property rights over their in-world creations.[2]

Virtual worlds may differ from traditional video games in key ways, but these differences will likely be

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1. Zaphiris, Panayiotis, Chee Siang Ang, and Andrew Laghos, "Online Communities," in The Human-Computer Interaction Handbook: Fundamentals, Evolving Technologies, and Emerging Applications, ed. Andrew Sears and Julie Jacko (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2008), 607.

2. Second Life, "Frequently Asked Questions: Is Second Life a game?" http://secondlife.com/whatis/faq.php#02.

further blurred as games develop. Regardless of the way these worlds are classified, they are based heavily on the aesthetics and design of video games.

Virtual worlds are societies in which communication can be expanded to relay information in ways that cannot be done with other forms of media. Universities have set up virtual classrooms in *Second Life* that employ techniques for teaching that are otherwise impossible. Curriculum can be set up to take advantage of the virtual world's creative capacity.[3] For example, a class on architecture could lead students through a three-dimensional recreation of a Gothic cathedral, a history class could rely on an interactive battlefield simulation to explain the mechanics of a famous battle, or a physics class could use simulations to demonstrate important principles.

Virtual worlds have been used to relay new kinds of information as well. In 2007, specialists developed virtual-reality simulations to help patients with Asperger's syndrome navigate through social situations. Individuals with Asperger's syndrome have difficulty recognizing nonverbal cues and adapting to change. The simulations allowed these patients to create avatars that then played out social situations such as job interviews. The simulations could be adjusted to allow for more complicated interactions, and the users could replay their own performances to better understand the simulation.[4] The creation of avatars and the ability to replay scenes until the user improves performance is a direct influence of video games.

3. Kluge, Stacy. and Liz Riley, "Teaching in Virtual Worlds: Issues and Challenges," Issues in Informing Science and Information Technology 5 (2008): 128.

4. University of Texas at Dallas News Center, "Avatars Help Asperger Syndrome Patients Learn to Play the Game of Life," news release, University of Texas at Dallas News Center, November 18, 2007, https://web.archive.org/web/20071120194042/http://www.utdallas.edu/news/2007/11/18-003.html.

## Social Media and Games

Figure 2: An image of the game *FarmVille*. *FarmVille* is integrated with Facebook and lets players grow and harvest crops to expand their farms.

Social media outlets such as Facebook have also used video games to expand their communication platforms. *FarmVille*, a game in which players plant, harvest, and sell crops and expand their farm plots with the profits, is integrated with Facebook so that all users can connect with their real-life friends in the game. The game adds another aspect of communication—one centered on competition, strategy, and the aesthetics of gameplay—to the Facebook platform. In 2010, *FarmVille* had 80 million users, an unprecedented number of people playing a single game. Other games for Facebook include *Lexulous* (formerly *Scrabulous*), a game that mimicked the board game *Scrabble* closely enough that it had to be changed, and *Pet Society*, a game that allows users to raise virtual animals as pets. These games are unique in their demographic scope; they seek to engage literally anyone. By coupling games with social media sites, game designers have pushed the influence of video games to unprecedented levels.[5]

Due to the increasing popularity of video games, many social networking websites have emerged in recent

5. Walker, Tim. "Welcome to FarmVille: Population 80 million," Independent (London), February 22, 2010, http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/features/welcome-to-farmville-population-80-million-1906260.html.

years that target hard-core gamers and casual gamers alike. The website GamingPassions.com describes itself as a "free online dating and social networking site for the Video Gaming community" that "allows you to meet other video game lovers who 'get it.'"[6] Others, such as DateCraft, target players who share a love of specific games, such as *World of Warcraft*. These websites allow players to socialize outside of the confines of a video game and provide a way for fans of any game to connect.[7]

## Mobile Phones and Gaming

The maker of *FarmVille*, a company called Zynga, has released a number of social networking games that can be played via Internet-enabled mobile phones. *Mafia Wars*, a simulated version of organized crime that originated as an online game, lets users manage their money and complete jobs from their mobile phones. This innovation is only a change of platform from the computer to the phone, but it promises to make gaming a common means of social interaction.

Phones are used to communicate directly with another person, whether through text messages, Facebook posts, or phone calls. Adding games to phones creates a new language that people can use to communicate with each other. One can imagine the ways in which a spat between friends or a couple hooking up could be communicated through this medium. During the week of Valentine's Day in 2010, the creators of *FarmVille* reported that users sent more than 500 million copies of virtual gifts to each other.[8] Competition, aggression, hostility, as well as generosity and general friendliness are given new means of expression with the addition of video games to the mobile platform.

## Video Games and Their Messages

An important genre of games is often overlooked when focusing on the overall history and effect of video games. These games are created to get a specific point across to the player and are generally low-budget efforts by individuals or small groups. The group Molleindustria puts out a host of these games, including *Oligarchy*, a game in which the player is an oil-drilling business executive who pursues corruption to gain profits, or

6. Gaming Passions, "Welcome to Gaming Passions," http://www.gamingpassions.com/.

7. Thorsen, Tor, and Tim Surette. "World of...Datecraft?" *GameSpot* (blog), July 26, 2006. https://www.gamespot.com/articles/world-ofdatecraft/1100-6154788/.

8. Ingram, Mathew. "Farmville Users Send 500M Valentines in 48 Hours," GigaOM, February 10, 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20230202073547/https://old.gigaom.com/2010/02/10/farmville-users-send-500m-valentines-in-48-hours/.

*Faith Fighter*, in which religious icons fight each other.[9] *Downing Street Fighter* is a similar game, designed as a satirical representation of the United Kingdom's 2010 elections.[10]

Other games in this genre include a great deal of content that informs players about current events. One example is *Cutthroat Capitalism*, where users play the part of Somali pirates who are carrying out kidnapping and piracy missions. The player must weigh the risks and rewards of their exploits given a variety of economic factors.[11] This game allows players to understand the forces at work behind international phenomena such as piracy. Other games include the *Redistricting Game*, a game aimed at encouraging congressional redistricting reform, and *Planet Green Game*, in which players find ways to conserve energy.[12] These games' publishers have used their medium to transmit information in new ways. Political satire in the medium of the video game allows the player to, in effect, play a satirical joke to its logical conclusion, exploring the entire scope of the joke. Advocacy games engage players with an interactive political message, rather than sending out traditional media ads. Mainstream groups such as PETA have also turned to video games to convey messages. During the 2008 Thanksgiving season, the animal-rights group released a parody of the popular *Cooking Mama* games to demonstrate the cruelty of eating meat.[13]

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9. Industria, Molle. http://www.molleindustria.org/en/home.

10. Verjee, Zain. "Will There Be a Knockout Blow?" CNN, May 3, 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20100506053538/http://ukelection.blogs.cnn.com/2010/05/03/will-there-be-a-knock-out-blow/.

11. Carney, Scott. "An Economic Analysis of the Somali Pirate Business Model," Wired, July 13, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20140227063808/http://www.wired.com:80/politics/security/magazine/17-07/ff_somali_pirates.

12. McGeveran, William. "Video Games With a Message," Info/Law (blog), June 18, 2007, https://web.archive.org/web/20080129101337/http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/infolaw/2007/06/18/video-games-with-a-message/.

13. Sliwinski, Alexander. "PETA Parody Grills Cooking Mama," Joystiq, November 17 2008, https://web.archive.org/web/20100819153615/http://www.joystiq.com/2008/11/17/peta-parody-grills-cooking-mama/.

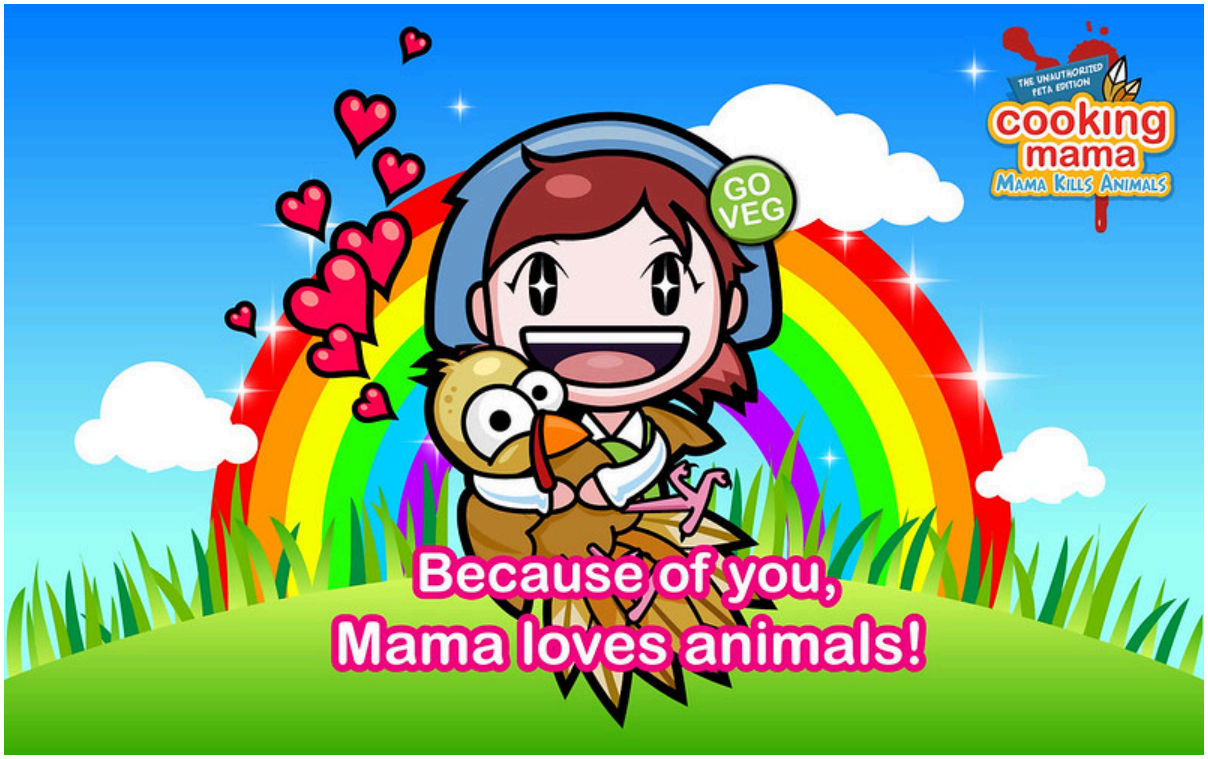


Figure 3: Image from the game, The unauthorized PETA edition of Cooking Mama. A woman holds a chicken in front of rainbows and hearts. Text in front of her reads, "Because of you, Mama loves animals!" The game tackles the issue of animal cruelty.

Although games of this type are not in a league with game series like Halo—either in design or in popularity—they are pushing the boundaries of the video game as a form of media. Political pamphlets were a major source of information and political discourse during the American Revolution. Video games may well come to serve a similar informational function.

**Key Takeaways**

- Team-oriented video games have allowed new groups to learn skills similar to those learned in physical sports. Team building, competition, and problem-solving are all major components of playing on a virtual team.
- Virtual worlds, though not video games in themselves, use the design and principles of video games to create new social spaces. These spaces are being used to create new social platforms and new ways of communicating complex ideas.

- Video games have been added to social networking sites to expand the ways in which people can communicate with each other. The medium of the game allows players to interact with their friends in new ways.

**Exercises**

1. Think of ways in which this course could be taught in a virtual world. What advantages would this kind of teaching bring to a course like this? What disadvantages does it carry with it?
2. How do video games serve as a platform for social interaction, paralleling traditional physical sports? Do you think video games can replace physical sports as a medium for socialization, teamwork, and leadership? Why or why not?
3. Choose a Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game (MMORPG) or a virtual world like Second Life. Spend some time exploring the environment and interacting with other players. Write a report discussing whether you consider this platform more of a game or a form of social media and explain your reasoning.

## Media Attributions

- people gathered around a screen playing video games © Fabio Hofnik via. Flickr
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- Cooking Mama © Shahab Zargari via. Flickr is licensed under a CC BY-SA (Attribution ShareAlike) license

PART XV

# CHAPTER 15: ADVERTISING, PUBLIC RELATIONS, AND PROPAGANDA

**Fitchburg State Connection**

The Public Relations (PR), Social Media, and Advertising Production concentration gives students the opportunity to focus their career goals in the following areas: public relations, advertising, marketing communications, multimedia and document design, and professional leadership.[1]

1. https://www.fitchburgstate.edu/academics/programs/public-relations-social-media-and-advertising-production-concentration-communications-media-bs

# 15.1 ADVERTISING

**Learning Objectives**

- Describe important eras in the history of American advertising.
- Analyze the overall effects of government regulation on advertising.
- Identify the types of advertising used today.
- Describe the impact of advertising on American consumerism and cultural values.

**Advertising** is defined as promoting a product or service through the use of paid announcements.[1] These announcements have had an enormous effect on modern culture, and thus deserve a great deal of attention in any treatment of the media's influence on culture.

Advertising dates back to ancient Rome's public markets and forums and continues into the modern era in most homes around the world. Contemporary consumers relate to and identify with brands and products. Advertising has inspired an independent press and conspired to encourage carcinogenic addictions. An exceedingly human invention, advertising is an unavoidable aspect of the shared modern experience.

## Ancient and Medieval Advertising

In 79 CE, the eruption of Italy's Mount Vesuvius destroyed and, ultimately, preserved the ancient city of Pompeii. Historians have used the city's archaeological evidence to piece together many aspects of ancient life. Pompeii's ruins reveal a world in which the fundamental tenets of commerce and advertising were already in place. Merchants offered different brands of fish sauces identified by various names such as "Scaurus' tunny jelly." Wines were branded as well, and their manufacturers sought to position them by making claims about

1. Dictionary.com, s.v. "Advertising," http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/advertising.

their prestige and quality. Toys and other merchandise found in the city bear the names of famous athletes, providing, perhaps, the first example of endorsement techniques.[2]

The invention of the printing press in 1440 made it possible to print advertisements that could be put up on walls and handed out to individuals. By the 1600s, newspapers had begun to include advertisements on their pages. Advertising revenue allowed newspapers to print independently of secular or clerical authority, eventually achieving daily circulation. By the end of the 16th century, most newspapers contained at least some advertisements.[3]

## Selling the New World

European colonization of the Americas during the 1600s brought about one of the first large-scale advertising campaigns. When European trading companies realized that the Americas held economic potential as a source of natural resources such as timber, fur, and tobacco, they attempted to convince others to cross the Atlantic Ocean and work to harvest this bounty. The advertisements for this venture described a paradise without beggars and with plenty of land for those who made the trip. The advertisements convinced many poor Europeans to become indentured servants to pay for the voyage.[4]

# Nineteenth-Century Roots of Modern Advertising

The rise of the penny press during the 1800s had a profound effect on advertising. The New York Sun embraced a novel advertising model in 1833 that allowed it to sell issues of the paper for a trifling amount of money, ensuring a higher circulation and a wider audience. This larger audience in turn justified greater prices for advertisements, allowing the paper to make a profit from its ads rather than from direct sales.[5]

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2. Hood, John. Selling the Dream: Why Advertising Is Good Business (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005), 12–13.

3. O'Barr, William M. "A Brief History of Advertising in America," Advertising & Society Review 6, no. 3 (2005), http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/asr/v006/6.3unit02.html.

4. Mierau, Christina B. Accept No Substitutes: The History of American Advertising (Minneapolis, MN: Lerner, 2000), 7–8.

5. Wilson, James. "What Was The Penny Press?" *Chronicle Collectibles* (blog), September 29, 2023. https://www.chroniclecollectibles.com/what-was-the-penny-press/.

## P. T. Barnum and Advertising

The career of P. T. Barnum, cofounder of the famed Barnum & Bailey circus, gives a sense of the uncontrolled nature of advertising during the 1800s. He began his career in the 1840s writing ads for a theater, and soon after, he began promoting his own shows. He advertised these shows any way he could, using not only interesting newspaper ads but also bands of musicians, paintings on the outside of his buildings, and street-spanning banners.

Barnum also learned the effectiveness of using the media to gain attention. In an early publicity stunt, Barnum hired a man to wordlessly stack bricks at various corners near his museum during the hours preceding a show. When this activity drew a crowd, the man went to the museum and bought a ticket for the show. This stunt drew such large crowds over the next 2 days, that the police made Barnum put a halt to it, gaining it even wider media attention. Barnum was sued for fraud over a bearded woman featured in one of his shows; the plaintiffs claimed that she was, in fact, a man. Rather than trying to keep the trial quiet, Barnum drew attention to it by parading a crowd of witnesses attesting to the bearded woman's gender, drawing more media attention—and more customers.

Figure 1: A flier for "The Barnum & Bailey Greatest Show on Earth: The Marvelous Foot-ball Dogs." P. T. Barnum used the press to spark interest in his shows.

Barnum aimed to make his audience think about what they had seen for an extended time. His Feejee mermaid—actually a mummified monkey and fish sewn together—was not necessarily interesting because viewers thought the creation was really a mermaid, but because they weren't sure if it was or not. Such marketing tactics brought Barnum's shows out of his establishments and into social conversations and

newspapers.[6] Although most companies today would eschew Barnum's outrageous style, many have used the media and a similar sense of mystery to promote their products. Apple, for example, famously keeps its products such as the iPhone and iPad under wraps, building media anticipation and coverage.

## First Agency

In 1843, a salesman named Volney Palmer founded the first U.S. advertising agency in Philadelphia. The agency made money by linking potential advertisers with newspapers. By 1867, other agencies had formed, and advertisements were being marketed at the national level. During this time, George Rowell, who made a living buying bulk advertising space in newspapers to subdivide and sell to advertisers, began conducting market research in its modern recognizable form. He used surveys and circulation counts to estimate the number of readers and anticipate effective advertising techniques. His agency gained an advantage over other agencies by offering advertising space most suited for a particular product. This trend quickly caught on with other agencies. In 1888, Rowell started the first advertising trade magazine, Printers' Ink (Gartrell).[7]

McClure's success in 1893 was thanks to an advertising model: selling issues for nearly half the price of other magazines and depending on advertising revenues to make up the difference between cost and sales price. Magazines such as Ladies' Home Journal focused on specific audiences, so they allowed advertisers to market products designed for a specific demographic. By 1900, Harper's Weekly, once known for refusing advertising, featured ads on half of its pages.[8]

6. Applegate, Edd. Personalities and Products: A Historical Perspective on Advertising in America (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 57–64.

7. Gartrell, Ellen. "More About Early Advertising Publications," Digital Collections, Duke University Libraries, http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/eaa/printlit.html.

8. All Classic Ads, "Advertising Timeline," Vintage Collection, All Classic Ads, http://www.allclassicads.com/advertising-timeline.html.

# The Rise of Brand Names

Figure 2: Edited illustration from the Library of Congress of an advertisement for Payn's Sure-Raising Flour and its overly-energetic, anthropomorphic tins of flour. In the early 1900s, brand-name food items, such as this one, began making a household name for themselves.

Another ubiquitous aspect of advertising developed around this time: brands. During most of the 19th century, consumers purchased goods in bulk, weighing out scoops of flour or sugar from large store barrels and paying for them by the pound. Innovations in industrial packaging allowed companies to mass produce bags, tins, and cartons with brand names on them. Although brands existed before this time, they were generally reserved for goods that were inherently recognizable, such as china or furniture. Advertising a particular kind of honey or flour made it possible for customers to ask for that product by name, giving it an edge over the unnamed competition.[9]

9. Mierau, Christina B. Accept No Substitutes: The History of American Advertising (Minneapolis, MN: Lerner, 2000), 42.

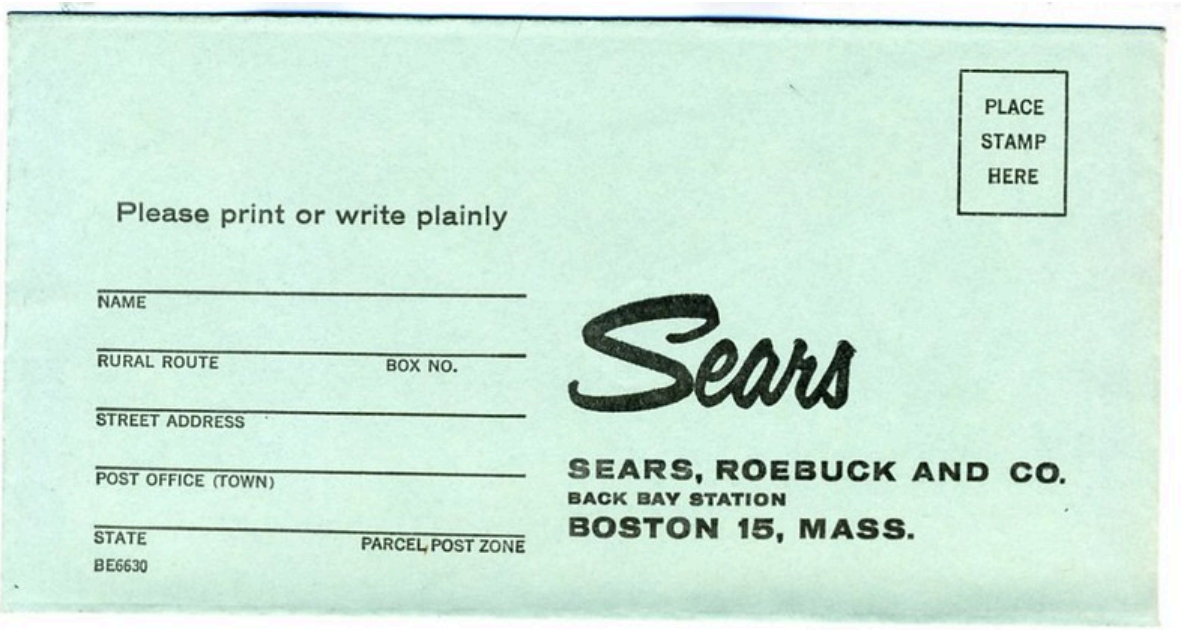


Figure 3: An image of a Sears Mail Order envelope, pre-addressed to Sears, with blanks for filling in one's address. Department stores such as Sears, Roebuck and Co. reached consumers outside of the city through mail-order catalogs.

The rise of department stores during the late 1800s also gave brands a push. Nationwide outlets such as Sears, Roebuck & Company and Montgomery Ward sold many of the same items to consumers all over the country. A particular item spotted in a big-city storefront could come to a small-town shopper's home thanks to mail-order catalogs. Customers made associations with the stores, trusting them to have a particular kind of item and to provide quality wares. Essentially, consumers came to trust the store's name rather than its specific products.[10]

## Advertising Gains Stature During the 20th Century

Although advertising was becoming increasingly accepted as an element of mass media, many still regarded it as an unseemly occupation. This attitude began to change during the early 20th century. As magazines—widely considered a highbrow medium—began using more advertising, the advertising profession began attracting more artists and writers. Writers used verse and artists produced illustrations to embellish advertisements. Not surprisingly, this era gave rise to commercial jingles and iconic brand characters such as the Jolly Green Giant and the Pillsbury Doughboy.

10. Hood, John. Selling the Dream: Why Advertising Is Good Business (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005), 28-51.

The household cleaner Sapolio produced advertisements that made the most of the artistic advertising trend. Sapolio's ads featured various drawings of the residents of "Spotless Town" along with a rhymed verse celebrating the virtues of this fictional haven of cleanliness. The public anticipated each new ad in much the same way people today anticipate new TV episodes. In fact, the ads became so popular that citizens passed "Spotless Town" resolutions to clean up their own jurisdictions. Advertising trends later moved away from flowery writing and artistry, but the lessons of those memorable campaigns continued to influence the advertising profession for years to come (Fox, 1984).[11]

## Advertising Makes Itself Useful

World War I fueled an advertising and propaganda boom. Corporations that had switched to manufacturing wartime goods wanted to stay in the public eye by advertising their patriotism. Equally, the government needed to encourage public support for the war, employing such techniques as the famous Uncle Sam recruiting poster. President Woodrow Wilson established the advertiser-run Committee on Public Information to make movies and posters, write speeches, and generally sell the war to the public. Advertising helped popularize World War I on the home front, and the war, in turn, gave advertising a much-needed boost in stature. The postwar return to regular manufacturing initiated the 1920s as an era of unprecedented advertising.[12]

## New Media

The rising film industry made celebrity testimonials, or **product endorsements**, an important aspect of advertising during the 1920s. Film stars, including Clara Bow and Joan Crawford, endorsed products such as Lux toilet soap. In these early days of mass-media consumer culture, film actors and actresses gave the public figures to emulate as they began participating in popular culture.[13]

As previously discussed, radio became an accepted commercial medium during the 1920s. Although many initially thought radio was too intrusive a medium to allow advertising, as it entered people's homes, by the end of the decade, advertising had become an integral aspect of programming. Advertising agencies often created their own programs that networks then distributed. As advertisers conducted surveys and researched prime time slots, radio programming changed to appeal to their target demographics. The famous *Lux Radio Theater*, for example, was named for and sponsored by a brand of soap. Product placement was an important

11. Fox, Stephen. The Mirror Makers (New York: William Morrow, 1984), 41–46.

12. *ibid,* 74-77

13. *ibid,* 89

part of these early radio programs. Ads for Jell-O appeared during the course of the *Jack Benny Show* and *Fibber McGee and Molly* scripts often involved their sponsor's floor wax.[14],[15] The relationship between a sponsor and a show's producers was not always harmonious; the producers of radio programs were constrained from broadcasting any content that might reflect badly on their sponsor.

## The Great Depression and Backlash

Unsurprisingly, the Great Depression, with its widespread decrease in levels of income and buying power, had a negative effect on advertising. Spending on ads dropped to a mere 38 percent of its previous level. Social reformers added to revenue woes by again questioning the moral standing of the advertising profession. Books such as *Through Many Windows* and *Our Master's Voice* portrayed advertisers as dishonest and cynical, willing to say anything to make a profit and unconcerned about their influence on society. Humorists also questioned advertising's authority. The Depression-era magazine *Ballyhoo* regularly featured parodies of ads similar to those seen later on *Saturday Night Live* or in *The Onion*. These ads mocked the claims that had been made throughout the 1920s, further reducing advertising's public standing.[16]

This advertising downturn lasted only as long as the Depression. As the United States entered World War II, advertising again returned to encourage public support and improve the image of businesses.[17] However, there was one lasting effect of the Depression. The rising consumer movement made false and misleading advertising a major public policy issue. At the time, companies such as Fleischmann's (which claimed its yeast could cure crooked teeth) were using advertisements to pitch misleading assertions. Only business owners' personal morals stood in the way of such claims until 1938, when the federal government created the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and gave it the authority to halt false advertising.

In 1955, TV outpaced all other media for advertising. TV provided advertisers with unique, geographically oriented mass markets that could be targeted with regionally appropriate ads.[18] The 1950s saw a 75 percent increase in advertising spending, faster than any other economic indicator at the time.[19]

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14. JackBennyShow.com, "Jell-O," Jack Benny Show, https://web.archive.org/web/20120323061100/https://jackbennyshow.com/index_090.htm.

15. Burgan, Read G."Radio Fun with Fibber McGee and Molly," RGB Digital Audio, January 24, 1996, http://www.rgbdigitalaudio.com/OTR_Reviews/Fibber_McGee_OTRArticle.htm.

16. Fox, Stephen. The Mirror Makers (New York: William Morrow, 1984), 121–124

17. *ibid*, 168

18. Samuel, Lawrence. Brought to You By: Postwar Television Advertising and the American Dream (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2001), 88–94.

19. Fox, Stephen. The Mirror Makers (New York: William Morrow, 1984), 173

Single sponsors created early TV programs. These sponsors had total control over programs such as *Goodyear TV Playhouse* and *Kraft Television Theatre*. Some sponsors went as far as to manipulate various aspects of the programs. In one instance, a program run by the DeSoto car company asked a contestant to use a false name rather than his given name, Ford. The present-day network model of TV advertising took hold during the 1950s as the costs of TV production made sole sponsorship of a show prohibitive for most companies. Rather than having a single sponsor, the networks began producing their own shows, paying for them through ads sold to a number of different sponsors.[20] Under the new model of advertising, TV producers had much more creative control than they had under the sole-sponsorship model.

The quiz shows of the 1950s were the last of the single-sponsor–produced programs. In 1958, when allegations of quiz show fraud became national news, advertisers moved out of programming entirely. The quiz show scandals also added to an increasing skepticism of ads and consumer culture.[21]

Advertising research during the 1950s had used scientifically driven techniques to attempt to influence consumer opinion. Although the effectiveness of this type of advertising is questionable, the idea of consumer manipulation through scientific methods became an issue for many Americans. Vance Packard's best-selling 1957 book *The Hidden Persuaders* targeted this style of advertising. *The Hidden Persuaders* and other books like it were part of a growing critique of 1950s consumer culture. The U.S. public was becoming increasingly wary of advertising claims—not to mention increasingly weary of ads themselves. A few adventurous ad agencies used this consumer fatigue to usher in a new era of advertising and American culture.[22]

## The Creative Revolution

Burdened by association with Nazi Germany, where the company had originated, Volkswagen took a daring risk during the 1950s. In 1959, the Doyle Dane Bernbach (DDB) agency initiated an ad campaign for the company that targeted skeptics of contemporary culture. Using a frank personal tone with the audience and making fun of the planned obsolescence that was the hallmark of Detroit automakers, the campaign stood apart from other advertisements of the time. It used many of the consumer icons of the 1950s, such as suburbia and game shows, in a satirical way, pitting Volkswagen against mainstream conformity and placing it strongly on the side of the consumer. By the end of the 1960s, the campaign had become an icon of American

20. *ibid,* 210–215

21. Boddy, William. "The Seven Dwarfs and the Money Grubbers: The Public Relations Crisis of US Television in the Late 1950s," in Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism, ed. Patricia Mellencamp (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), 110.

22. Frank, Thomas. The Conquest of Cool (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 41.

anticonformity. In fact, it was such a success that other automakers quickly emulated it. Ads for the Dodge Fever, for example, mocked corporate values and championed rebellion.[23]

This era of advertising became known as the **creative revolution** for its emphasis on creativity over straight salesmanship. The creative revolution reflected the values of the growing anticonformist movement that culminated in the countercultural revolution of the 1960s. The creativity and anticonformity of 1960s advertising quickly gave way to more product-oriented conventional ads during the 1970s. Agency conglomeration, a recession, and cultural fallout were all factors in the recycling of older ad techniques. Major TV networks dropped their long-standing ban on comparative advertising early in the decade, leading to a new trend in positioning ads that compared products. Advertising wars such as Coke versus Pepsi and, later, Microsoft versus Apple were products of this trend.[24]

Innovations in the 1980s stemmed from a new TV channel: MTV. Producers of youth-oriented products created ads featuring music and focusing on stylistic effects, mirroring the look and feel of music videos. By the end of the decade, this style had extended to more mainstream products. Campaigns for the pain reliever Nuprin featured black-and-white footage with bright yellow pills, whereas ads for Michelob used grainy atmospheric effects.[25]

## Advertising Stumbles

During the late 1980s, studies showed that consumers were trending away from brands and brand loyalty. A recession coupled with general consumer fatigue led to an increase in generic brand purchases and a decrease in advertising. In 1983, marketing budgets allocated 70 percent of their expenditures to ads and the remaining 30 percent to other forms of promotion. By 1993, only 25 percent of marketing budgets were dedicated to ads.[26]

These developments resulted in the rise of big-box stores such as Wal-Mart that focused on low prices rather than expensive name brands. Large brands remade themselves during this period to focus less on their products and more on the ideas behind the brand. Nike's "Just Do It" campaign, endorsed by basketball star Michael Jordan, gave the company a new direction and a new means of promotion. Nike representatives have stated they have become more of a "marketing-oriented company" as opposed to a product manufacturer.[27]

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23. *ibid*, 60–67, 159.

24. Fox, Stephen. The Mirror Makers (New York: William Morrow, 1984), 324–325.

25. New York Times, "How MTV Has Rocked Television Commercials," October 9, 1989, http://www.nytimes.com/1989/10/09/business/the-media-business-how-mtv-has-rocked-television-commercials.html.

26. Klein, Naomi. No Logo (New York: Picador, 2002), 14.

27. *ibid,* 12–22.

As large brands became more popular, they also attracted the attention of reformers. Companies such as Starbucks and Nike bore the brunt of late 1990s sweatshop and labor protests. As these brands attempted to incorporate ideas outside of the scope of their products, they also came to represent larger global commerce forces.[28] This type of **branding** increasingly incorporated public relations techniques that will be discussed later in this chapter.

# The Rise of Digital Media

Twenty-first-century advertising has adapted to new forms of digital media. Internet outlets such as blogs, social media forums, and other online spaces have created new possibilities for advertisers, and shifts in broadcasting toward Internet formats have threatened older forms of advertising. Video games, smartphones, and other technologies also present new possibilities. The next section will cover specific new media advertising techniques.

## Types of Advertising

Despite the rise of digital media, many types of traditional advertising have proven their enduring effectiveness. Local advertisers and large corporations continue to rely on billboards and direct-mail fliers. In 2009, Google initiated a billboard campaign for its Google Apps products that targeted business commuters. The billboards featured a different message every day for an entire month, using simple computer text messages portraying a fictitious executive learning about the product. Although this campaign was integrated with social media sites such as Twitter, its main thrust employed the basic billboard (Ionescu, 2009).[29]

28. Hornblower, Margot. "Wake Up and Smell the Protest," Time, April 17, 2000.

29. Ionescu, Daniel. "Google Billboard Ads Gun for Microsoft and Promote Google Apps," PC World, August 3, 2009, http://www.pcworld.com/article/169475/google_billboard_ads_gun_for_microsoft_and_promote_google_apps.html.

Figure 4: A photo of a Google billboard on the side of a building. The billboard features the phone number 800-GOOG-411 and reads "411 free from Google." Google billboards targeted commuters, creating a story that spanned the course of a month.

## Newspapers and Magazines

Although print ads have been around for centuries, Internet growth has hit newspaper advertising hard. A 45 percent drop in ad revenue between 2007 and 2010 signaled a catastrophic decline for the newspaper industry.[30] Traditionally, newspapers have made money through commercial and classified advertising. Commercial advertisers, however, have moved to electronic media forms, and classified ad websites such as Craigslist offer greater geographic coverage for free. The future of newspaper advertising—and of the newspaper industry as a whole—is up in the air.

Print magazines have suffered from many of the same difficulties as newspapers. Declining advertising revenue has contributed to the end of popular magazines such as *Gourmet* and to the introduction of new magazines that cross over into other media formats, such as *Food Network Magazine*. Until a new, effective model is developed, the future of magazine advertising will continue to be in doubt.

30. Sterling, Bruce. "More Newspaper Calamity," Wired, March 15, 2010, https://www.wired.com/2010/03/more-newspaper-calamity/.

## Radio

Compared to newspapers and magazines, radio's advertising revenue has done well. Radio's easy adaptation to new forms of communication has made it an easy sell to advertisers. Unlike newspapers, radio ads target specific consumers. Advertisers can also pay to have radio personalities read their ads live in the studio, adding a sense of personal endorsement to the business or product. Because newer forms of radio such as satellite and Internet stations have continued to use this model, the industry has not had as much trouble adapting as print media have.

## Television

TV advertisements rely on verbal as well as visual cues to sell items. Promotional ad time is purchased by the advertiser, and a spot usually runs 15 to 30 seconds. Longer ads, known as infomercials, run like a TV show and usually aim for direct viewer response. New technologies such as DVR allow TV watchers to skip through commercials; however, studies have shown that these technologies do not have a negative effect on advertising.[31] This is partly due to product placement. Product placement is an important aspect of TV advertising, because it incorporates products into the plots of shows. Although product placement has been around since the 1890s, when the Lumière brothers first placed Lever soap in their movies, the big boom in product placement began with the reality TV show *Survivor* in 2000.[32] Since then, product placement has been a staple of prime-time entertainment. Reality TV shows such as *Project Runway* and *American Idol* are known for exhibiting products on screen, and talk-show host Oprah Winfrey made news in 2004 when she gave away new Pontiacs to her audience members.[33] Even children's shows are known to hock products; a new cartoon series recently began on Nickelodeon featuring characters that represent different Sketchers sneakers.[34]

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31. Gallagher, James. "Duke Study: TiVo Doesn't Hurt TV Advertising," Triangle Business Journal, May 3, 2010, http://www.bizjournals.com/triangle/stories/2010/05/03/daily6.html.
32. Anderson, Nate. "Product placement in the DVR era," Ars Technica (blog), March 19, 2006, http://arstechnica.com/gadgets/news/2006/03/productplacement.ars.
33. Stansky, Tanner. "14 Milestones in TV Product Placement," Entertainment Weekly, July 28, 2008, https://web.archive.org/web/20180810030400/https://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,20215225,00.html.
34. Friedman, Wayne. "Product Placement in Kids' TV Programs: Stuff Your Footwear Can Slip On," TV Watch, September 16, 2010, https://www.mediapost.com/publications/article/135873/product-placement-in-kids-tv-programs-stuff-your.html.

# Digital Media

Emerging digital media platforms such as the Internet and mobile phones have created many new advertising possibilities. The Internet, like TV and radio, offers free services in exchange for advertising exposure. However, unlike radio or TV, the Internet is a highly personalized experience that shares private information.

## Viral Ads

New advertising techniques have become popular on the Internet. Advertisers have tried to capitalize on the shared-media phenomenon by creating **viral ads** that achieve spontaneous success online. Fewer than one in six ads that are intended to go viral actually succeed, so marketers have developed strategies to encourage an advertisement's viral potential. Successful spots focus on creativity rather than a hard-selling strategy and generally target a specific audience.[35] Recent Old Spice ads featured former NFL player Isaiah Mustafa in a set of continuous scenes, from a shower room to a yacht. The commercial ends with the actor on horseback, a theatrical trick that left viewers wondering how the stunt was pulled off. As of July 2010, the ad was the most popular video on YouTube with more than 94 million views, and Old Spice sales had risen 106 percent.[36]

## Social Media

Social media sites such as Facebook use the information users provide on their profiles to generate targeted advertisements. For instance, if a person is a fan of Mariah Carey or joined a group associated with the singer, he or she might see announcements advertising her new CD or a local concert. While this may seem harmless, clicking on an ad sends user data to the advertising company, including name and user ID. Many people have raised privacy concerns over this practice, yet it remains in use. Free e-mail services such as Gmail also depend on targeted advertising for their survival. Indeed, advertising is the only way such services could continue. Given the ongoing privacy debates concerning targeted Internet advertising, a balance between a user's privacy and accessibility of services will have to be settled in the near future.

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35. Brown, Millward. "Old Spice and E*TRADE Ads Provide Lessons in Viral Marketing." Market Research World, April 2, 2010. https://web.archive.org/web/20190301033219/http://www.marketresearchworld.net/content/view/3068/77/.

36. Neff, Jack. "How Much Old Spice Body Wash Has the Old Spice Guy Sold?" AdvertisingAge, July 26, 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20100820103944/http://adage.com/article?article_id=145096.

## Mobile Phones

Mobile phones provide several different avenues for advertisers. The growing use of Internet radio through mobile phone platforms has created a market for advertisements tapped by radio advertising networks such as TargetSpot. By using the radio advertising model for mobile phones, users receive increased radio broadcast options and advertisers reach new targeted markets.[37]

Another development in the mobile phone market is the use of advertising in smartphone apps. Free versions of mobile phone applications often include advertising to pay for the service. Popular apps such as WeatherBug and Angry Birds offer free versions with ads in the margins; however, users can avoid these ads by paying a few dollars to upgrade to "Pro" versions. Other apps such as Foursquare access a user's geographic location and offer ads for businesses within walking distance.[38]

37. Carl Marcucci. "TargetSpot Adds Mobile Ad Platform | Radio & Television Business Report." *Radio Television Business Report* (blog), February 22, 2010. https://rbr.com/targetspot-adds-mobile-ad-platform/.

38. Fairlee, Rik. "Smartphone Users Go for Location-Based Apps," PC Magazine, May 18, 2010, http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,2817,2363899,00.asp.

Figure 5: A screenshot of the Pandora music app with controls. It features an image of the album cover for the Brindley Brothers' Filled with FireI. It also features an ad that reads: "Brought to you by Beck's." Free smartphone apps often contain ads to help pay for the service.

## Government Regulation of Advertising

Advertising regulation has played an important role in advertising's history and cultural influence. One of the earliest federal laws addressing advertising was the Pure Food and Drug Law of 1906. A reaction to public outcry over the false claims of patent medicines, this law required informational labels to be placed on these products. It did not, however, address the questionable aspects of the advertisements, so it did not truly delve into the issue of false advertising.[39]

39. Fox, Stephen. The Mirror Makers (New York: William Morrow, 1984), 65–66.

## The Formation of the FTC

Founded in 1914, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) became responsible for regulating false advertising claims. Although federal laws concerning these practices made plaintiffs prove that actual harm was done by the advertisement, state laws passed during the early 1920s allowed prosecution of misleading advertisements regardless of the harm done.[40] The National Association of Attorneys General has helped states remain an important part of advertising regulation. In 1995, 13 states passed laws that required sweepstakes companies to provide full disclosure of rules and details of contests.[41]

During the Great Depression, New Deal legislation threatened to outlaw any misleading advertising, a result of the burgeoning consumer movement and the public outcry against advertising during the period.[42] The reformers did not fully achieve their goals, but they did make a permanent mark on advertising history. The 1938 Wheeler-Lea Amendment expanded the FTC's role to protect consumers from deceptive advertising. Until this point, the FTC was responsible for addressing false advertising complaints from competitors. With this legislation, the agency also became an important resource for the consumer movement.

## Truth in Advertising

In 1971, the FTC began the Advertising Substantiation Program to force advertisers to provide evidence for the claims in their advertisements. Under this program, the FTC gained the power to issue cease-and-desist orders to advertisers regarding specific ads in question and to order corrective advertising. Under this provision, the FTC can force a company to issue an advertisement acknowledging and correcting an earlier misleading ad. Regulations under this program established that supposed experts used in advertisements must be qualified experts in their field, and celebrities must actually use the products they endorse.[43] In 2006, Sunny Health Nutrition was brought to court for advertising height-enhancing pills called HeightMax. The FTC found the

40. Hood, John. Selling the Dream: Why Advertising Is Good Business (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005), 74–75.

41. O'Guinn, Thomas, Chris Allen, and Richard Semenik, Advertising and Integrated Brand Promotion (Mason, OH: Cengage Learning, 2009), 133.

42. Time, "The Press: Advertising v. New Deal," September 1, 1941, https://web.archive.org/web/20130828023312/http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,850703,00.html.

43. O'Guinn, Thomas, Chris Allen, and Richard Semenik, Advertising and Integrated Brand Promotion (Mason, OH: Cengage Learning, 2009), 131–137.

company had hired an actor to appear as an expert in its ads, and that the pills did not live up to their claim. Sunny Health Nutrition was forced to pay $375,000 to consumers for misrepresenting its product.[44]

In 1992, the FTC introduced guidelines defining terms such as *biodegradable* and *recyclable*. The growth of the environmental movement in the early 1990s led to an upsurge in environmental claims by manufacturers and advertisers. For example, Mobil Oil claimed their Hefty trash bags were biodegradable. While technically this statement is true, a 500- to 1,000-year decomposition cycle does not meet most people's definitions of the term.[45] The FTC guidelines made such claims false by law.[46]

## Regulation of the Internet

The FTC has also turned its attention to online advertising. The Children's Online Privacy Act of 1998 (COPA) was passed to prohibit companies from obtaining the personal information of children who access websites or other online resources. Because of the youth orientation of the Internet, newer advertising techniques have drawn increasing criticism. Alcohol companies in particular have come under scrutiny. Beer manufacturer Heineken's online presence includes a virtual city in which users can own an apartment and use services such as e-mail. This practice mirrors that of children's advertising, in which companies often create virtual worlds to immerse children in their products. However, the age-verification requirements to participate in this type of environment are easily falsified and can lead to young children being exposed to more mature content.[47]

Consumer and privacy advocates who are concerned over privacy intrusions by advertisers have also called for Internet ad regulation. In 2009, the FTC acted on complaints against Sears that resulted in an injunction against the company for not providing sufficient disclosure. Sears offered $10 to consumers to download a program that tracked their Internet browsing. The FTC came down on Sears because the downloaded software tracked sensitive information that was not fully disclosed to the consumer. Similar consumer complaints against Facebook and Google for their consumer tracking have, at present, not resulted in FTC actions; however, the growing outcry makes new regulation of Internet advertising likely.[48]

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44. ConsumerAffairs.com, "Feds Slam 'Height-Enhancing' Pills," November 29, 2006,https://web.archive.org/web/20120505113411/http://www.consumeraffairs.com/news04/2006/11/ftc_chitosan.html.

45. Lapidos, Juliet. "Will My Plastic Bag Still Be Here in 2507?" Slate, June 27, 2007, http://www.slate.com/id/2169287.

46. Schneider, Keith. "Guides on Environmental Ad Claims," New York Times, July 29, 1992, http://www.nytimes.com/1992/07/29/business/guides-on-environmental-ad-claims.html.

47. Gardner, Amanda. "Alcohol Companies Use New Media to Lure Young Drinkers: Report," Bloomberg BusinessWeek, May 19, 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20110130190621/http://www.businessweek.com/lifestyle/content/healthday/639266.html.

48. Shields, Mike. "Pitching Self-Regulation," Adweek, February 15, 2010.

# Advertising's Influence on Culture

Discussing advertising's influence on culture raises a long-standing debate. One opinion states that advertising simply reflects the trends inherent in a culture, while another claims advertising takes an active role in shaping culture. Both ideas have merit and are most likely true to varying degrees.

## Advertising and the Rise of Consumer Culture

George Babbitt, the protagonist of Sinclair Lewis's 1922 novel *Babbitt*, was a true believer in the growing American consumer culture:

> Just as the priests of the Presbyterian Church determined his every religious belief...so did the national advertisers fix the surface of his life, fix what he believed to be his individuality. These standard advertised wares—kinds of toothpaste, socks, tires, cameras, instantaneous hot-water heaters—were his symbols and proofs of excellence: at first the signs, and then the substitutes, for joy and passion and wisdom.[49]

Although Lewis's fictional representation of a 1920s-era consumer may not be an actual person, it indicates the national consumer culture that was taking shape at the time. As it had always done, advertising sought to attach products to larger ideas and symbols of worth and cultural values. However, the rise of mass media and the advertising models that these media embraced made advertising take on an increasingly influential cultural role.

Automobile ads of the 1920s portrayed cars as a new, free way of life rather than simply a means of transportation. Advertisers used new ideas about personal hygiene to sell products and ended up breaking taboos about public discussion of the body. The newly acknowledged epidemics of halitosis and body odor brought about products such as mouthwash and deodorant. A Listerine campaign of the era transformed bad breath from a nuisance into the mark of a sociopath.[50] Women's underwear and menstruation went from being topics unsuitable for most family conversations to being fodder for the pages of national magazines.[51]

## Creating the Modern World

World War I bond campaigns had made it clear that advertising could be used to influence public beliefs and

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49. Lewis, Sinclair. Babbitt (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1922), 95.

50. Ashenburg, Katherine. The Dirt on Clean: An Unsanitized History (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2008), 245–247.

51. Fox, Stephen. The Mirror Makers (New York: William Morrow, 1984), 95–96.

values. Advertising focused on the new—making new products and ideas seem better than older ones and ushering in a sense of the modernity. In an address to the American Association of Advertising Agencies in 1926, President Coolidge went as far as to hold advertisers responsible for the "regeneration and redemption of mankind."[52]

Up through the 1960s, most advertising agencies were owned and staffed by affluent white men, and advertising's portrayals of typical American families reflected this status quo. Mainstream culture as propagated by magazine, radio, and newspaper advertising was that of middle- or upper-class White suburban families.[53] This sanitized image of the suburban family, popularized in such TV programs as *Leave It to Beaver*, has been mercilessly satirized since the cultural backlash of the 1960s.

A great deal of that era's cultural criticism targeted the image of the advertiser as a manipulator and promulgator of superficial consumerism. When advertisers for Volkswagen picked up on this criticism, turned it to their advantage, and created a new set of consumer symbols that would come to represent an age of rebellion, they neatly co-opted the arguments against advertising for their own purposes. In many instances, advertising has functioned as a codifier of its own ideals by taking new cultural values and turning them into symbols of a new phase of consumerism. This is the goal of effective advertising.

Apple's 1984 campaign is one of the most well-known examples of defining a product in terms of new cultural trends. A fledgling company compared to computer giants IBM and Xerox, Apple spent nearly $2 million on a commercial that would end up only being aired once.[54] During the third quarter of the 1984 Super Bowl, viewers across the United States watched in amazement as an ad unlike any other at the time appeared on their TV screens. The commercial showed a drab gray auditorium where identical individuals sat in front of a large screen. On the screen was a man, addressing the audience with an eerily captivating voice. "We are one people, with one will," he droned. "Our enemies shall talk themselves to death. And we will bury them with their own confusion. We shall prevail!"[55] While the audience sat motionlessly, one woman ran forward with a sledgehammer and threw it at the screen, causing it to explode in a flash of light and smoke. As the scene faded out, a narrator announced the product. "On January 24, Apple Computer will introduce the Macintosh. And you'll see why 1984 won't be like 1984."[56] With this commercial, Apple defined itself as a pioneer of the new

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52. Marchand, Roland. Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920–1940 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 7–9.

53. *ibid*

54. McAloney, Curt. "The 1984 Apple Commercial: The Making of a Legend," Curt's Media, https://web.archive.org/web/20180810030407/https://www.curtsmedia.com/cine/1984.html.

55. *ibid*

56. Friedman, Ted. "Apple's 1984: The Introduction of the Macintosh in the Cultural History of Personal Computers," https://web.archive.org/web/20130130043428/http://people.duke.edu:80/~tlove/mac.htm.

generation. Instead of marketing its products as utilitarian tools, it advertised them as devices for combating conformity.[57] Over the next few decades, other companies imitated this approach, presenting their products as symbols of cultural values.

In his study of advertising's cultural impact, *The Conquest of Cool*, Thomas Frank compares the advertising of the 1960s with that of the early 1990s:

> How [advertisers] must have rejoiced when the leading minds of the culture industry announced the discovery of an all-new angry generation, the "Twenty-Somethings," complete with a panoply of musical styles, hairdos, and verbal signifiers ready-made to rejuvenate advertising's sagging credibility.... The strangest aspect of what followed wasn't the immediate onslaught of even hipper advertising, but that the entire "Generation X" discourse repeated...the discussions of youth culture that had appeared in *Advertising Age*, *Madison Avenue*, and on all those youth-market panel discussions back in the sixties.[58]

To be clear, advertisers have not set out to consciously manipulate the public in the name of consumer culture. Rather, advertisers are simply doing their job—one that has had an enormous influence on culture.

## Advertising Stereotypes

The White, middle-class composition of ad agencies contributed to advertisements' rare depictions of minority populations. DDB—the agency responsible for the Volkswagen ads of the 1960s—was an anomaly in this regard. One of its more popular ads was for Levy's rye bread. Most conventional advertisers would have ignored the ethnic aspects of this product and simply marketed it to a mainstream White audience. Instead, the innovative agency created an ad campaign that made ethnic diversity a selling point, with spots featuring individuals from a variety of racial backgrounds eating the bread with the headline "You don't have to be Jewish to love Levy's."

During the 1950s, stereotypical images of African Americans promulgated by advertisers began to draw criticism from civil rights leaders. Icons such as Aunt Jemima, the Cream of Wheat chef, and the Hiram Walker butler were some of the most recognizable black figures in U.S. culture. Unlike the African Americans who had gained fame through their artistry, scholarship, and athleticism, however, these advertising characters were famous for being domestic servants.

During the 1960s, meetings of the American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA) hosted civil rights leaders, and agencies began to respond to the criticisms of bias. A New York survey in the mid-1960s

57. *ibid*

58. Frank, Thomas. The Conquest of Cool (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 233–235.

discovered that Blacks were underrepresented at advertising agencies. Many agencies responded by hiring new African American employees, and a number of Black-owned agencies started in the 1970s.[59]

Early advertising frequently reached out to women because they made approximately 80 percent of all consumer purchases. Thus, women were well-represented in advertising. However, those depictions presented women in extremely narrow roles. Through the 1960s, ads targeting women generally showed them performing domestic duties such as cooking or cleaning, whereas ads targeting men often placed women in a submissive sexual role even if the product lacked any overt sexual connotation. A National Car Rental ad from the early 1970s featured a disheveled female employee in a chair with the headline "Go Ahead, Take Advantage of Us." Another ad from the 1970s pictured a man with new Dacron slacks standing on top of a woman, proclaiming, "It's nice to have a girl around the house."[60]

An advertising profile printed in Advertising Age magazine gave a typical advertiser's understanding of the housewife at the time:

> She likes to watch TV and she does not enjoy reading a great deal. She is most easily reached through TV and simple down-to-earth magazines.... Mental activity is arduous for her.... She is a person who wants to have things she can believe in rather than things she can think about.[61]

The National Organization for Women (NOW) created a campaign during the early 1970s targeting the role of women in advertisements. Participants complained about the ads to networks and companies and even spray-painted slogans on offensive billboards in protest.

Representation of minorities and women in advertising has improved since the 1960s and '70s, but it still remains a problem. The 2010 Super Bowl drew one of the most diverse audiences ever recorded for the event, including a 45 percent female audience. Yet the commercials remained focused strictly on men. Of 67 ads shown during the game, only four showed minority actors in a lead role. Despite the obvious economic benefit of diversity in marketing, advertising practices have resisted change.[62]

## Advertising to Children

The majority of advertisements that target children feature either toys or junk food. Children under the age

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59. Fox, Stephen. The Mirror Makers (New York: William Morrow, 1984), 278–284.

60. Frauenfelder, Mark. "Creepy Slacks Ad From 1970," Boing Boing, (blog), May 12, 2008, http://boingboing.net/2008/05/12/creepy-slacks-ad-fro.html.

61. Rodnitzky, Jerome. Feminist Phoenix: The Rise and Fall of a Feminist Counterculture (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999), 114–115.

62. Ali, Sam. "New Study: Super Bowl Ads Created by White Men," DiversityInc.com, May 10, 2010., https://web.archive.org/web/20100710192548/http://www.diversityinc.com/article/7566/New-Study-Super-Bowl-Ads-Created-by-White-Men/.

of eight typically lack the ability to distinguish between fantasy and reality, and many advertisers use this to their advantage. Studies have shown that most children-focused food advertisements feature high-calorie, low-nutrition foods such as sugary cereals. Although the government regulates advertising to children to a degree, the Internet has introduced new means of marketing to youth that have not been addressed. Online video games called **advergames** feature famous child-oriented products. The games differ from traditional advertising, however, because the children playing them will experience a much longer period of product exposure than they do from the typical 30-second TV commercial. Child advocacy groups have been pushing for increased regulation of advertising to children, but it remains to be seen whether this will take place.[63]

## Positive Effects of Advertising

Although many people focus on advertising's negative outcomes, the medium has provided unique benefits over time. Early newspaper advertising allowed newspapers to become independent of church and government control, encouraging the development of a free press with the ability to criticize powerful interests. When newspapers and magazines moved to an advertising model, these publications became accessible to large groups of people who previously could not afford them. Advertising also contributed to radio's and TV's most successful eras. Radio's golden age in the 1940s and TV's golden age in the 1950s both took place when advertisers were creating or heavily involved with the production of most of the programs.

Advertising also makes newer forms of media both useful and accessible. Many Internet services, such as e-mail and smartphone applications, are only free because they feature advertising. Advertising allows promoters and service providers to reduce and sometimes eliminate the upfront purchase price, making these services available to a greater number of people and allowing lower economic classes to take part in mass culture.

Advertising has also been a longtime promoter of the arts. During the Renaissance, painters and composers often relied on wealthy patrons or governments to promote their work. Corporate advertising has given artists new means to fund their creative efforts. In addition, many artists and writers have been able to support themselves by working for advertisers. The use of music in commercials, particularly in recent years, has provided musicians with notoriety and income. Indeed, it is hard to imagine the cultural landscape of the United States without advertising.

63. Calvert, Sandra. "Children as Consumers: Advertising and Marketing," The Future of Children 18, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 205–211.

# Communication Theory Connections

## The Advertising Funnel and Other Key Concepts

At its heart, advertising is a matter of raising awareness, creating a deeper interest in a product, and encouraging consumers to desire to make a purchase and ultimately to take action. Professional communicators tailor messages in relation to the advertising funnel or **purchase funnel**. Brands, either on their own or with the help of advertising agencies, target audiences in different ways at specific points along the funnel to reach their strategic goals. For example, if an unknown brand launches a new product, people need to be made aware of both the brand and the product. The brand may need to establish itself with an awareness campaign. If Nike introduces a new Air Jordan, the branding is easily handled.[64] The top-of-the-funnel areas of awareness and interest will not need as much focus as the decision and action areas, the "down-funnel" aspects of a campaign for a well-known and well-loved brand.

Another way to think of this is as a pathway a potential customer makes, also known as the **consumer journey**. First, the consumer needs to be made aware of the brand and its products. Then, they might take an interest in a particular product as they learn more about its features. They need to move from being interested in a product to desiring the product if they are going to make the purchase. Ultimately, from the advertiser's point of view, the goal is not only to move the consumer to purchase the product but also to inspire them to advocate for the brand. This is not conceptually complicated. The idea is to move people in straightforward steps toward desired behaviors; however, there are complex processes of cognition and persuasion that underlie consumer decisions.

Consumer behavior is about as unpredictable as other forms of human behavior. There are also ethical concerns. If a product or service proves to be harmful, advertisers and public relations professionals have to decide if and when they will stop marketing the brand. Advertising is challenging enough when products do not raise ethical dilemmas. Promoting harmful products can be damaging socially, professionally and personally. Thus, the world of consumer advertising in the mass media is more complex than the funnel makes it seem, although it is an essential strategic model in the industry. There are two other advertising concepts or theories that this text aims to introduce: the basic rule of seven and the third-person effect.

## The Rule of Seven

The advertising **rule of seven** is a rule of thumb, or what social scientists call a heuristic, which suggests that

64. Deng, Victor. "A Complete Guide to Air Jordan Release Dates." Complex. Accessed September 5, 2023. https://www.complex.com/sneakers/a/victor-deng/air-jordan-release-dates.

people need to see an advertisement seven times before they act on it. Even then, there is no guarantee that seeing something seven times will compel a person to buy a certain product, vote for a particular politician or take any other consumer action. Instead, the point is that consistent messaging is a base requirement for advertising to work.

The purchase decision is ultimately a personal one. You can create the conditions and increase the probability of a product being bought, but it is difficult (perhaps impossible) to predict behaviors based on messaging. Even the most successful advertising and propaganda campaigns only constitute one area of influence on behavior. As previously stated in this text, social institutions such as your family, friends, church and workplace can influence your behavior in tandem with or contrary to what you see and hear in the mass media.

## The Third-Person Effect

There is a theory in the study of mass communication called the third-person effect that says we tend to think advertising is effective but we believe that it does not affect us. Note here that social science theories are based on many observable facts. This is not a flight of fancy. Rather, this is a tested theory demonstrated in multiple studies. Here is how the third-person effect works with regard to advertising: You might think upon seeing a clever advertisement, "Sure, that ad probably got someone else to buy the product, but it doesn't influence me. I'm a savvy shopper. I don't just go out and buy whatever ads tell me to buy. I'm not Homer Simpson looking at billboards."[65]

And yet we do know that advertising works at least to influence behavior. It has measurable effects on attitudes, that is, what people think about brands. Advertising influences brand and product awareness in individuals and in groups. We can say with a degree of certainty that some people are directly influenced by some ads some of the time, and we can say that many people are indirectly influenced by ads almost all of the time. For example, you may not drink Coke Zero, but you probably know what it is, and you may know that it is now called Coke Zero Sugar after a name change in 2017.[66] Whether you understand the logic behind the name change or you actually buy the soft drink is another question. Campaigns to make consumers aware of new brands and products have a track record of widespread but still limited success.

Now here is what's interesting about the third-person effect. Knowing that advertising can influence people's awareness and purchase decisions, we tend to develop a sort of **double delusion** where we think other people are probably affected more than they are, and we think we are influenced less than we are. Sometimes

65. *New Billboard Day*, 2011. https://vimeo.com/30185420.

66. Bomey, Nathan. "Coke Zero out, Coca-Cola Zero Sugar in Due to Recipe Change." Accessed September 5, 2023. https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2017/07/26/coca-cola-second-quarter-earnings/511675001/.

we even base our behavior on what we think other people will do after receiving a message in the mass media. It works like this: We hear a message that a winter storm is coming, and we worry that other people will be easily influenced by that news. That worry and not the original message may influence our behavior. The author of the original study noted that if there is news of a possible shortage, people sometimes buy up that item at grocery stores. This has happened as recently as 2008. Rice futures went up and up out of fear that people were stockpiling rice. So, what did people do? They stockpiled rice. Costco and Sam's Club even put limits on the number of large bags of rice people could purchase.[67]

How does the bread and milk effect work? Following the third-person effect theory, an individual hears about a storm coming to the East Coast of the United States. He thinks that other people are going to feel the need to go out and buy up all of the bread and milk, so, aware of the threat and concerned about their behavior, he goes out and buys bread and milk. Now the concern has become a self-fulfilling prophecy. People are, in fact, buying up the bread and milk. The question is whether they are buying it up because they are unduly influenced by messages in the mass media, or they are responding out of fear of how other people will behave. You can imagine other people foolishly thinking a winter storm is going to be worse than it is, and you can think to yourself that you had better buy the bread and milk before those fools, but to them, you have become the fool.

The third-person effect is also a major issue in race relations and partisan politics. We often presume that we know how individuals from other groups will think because we have seen messages in the media and we presume to know how the "other" will respond. The third-person effect is based on three presumptions. First, we assume that other people have seen the messages we have. Then, we presume that they will be influenced by those messages. Finally, we presume that they will behave in certain ways because of the message and because of our preconceptions about different groups. For the theory to work, it does not matter if the "other" is Democrats, Republicans, frat bros, Mexican people, snobby professors, or slacker college students. Our assumptions can be completely wrong and we may still find ourselves acting in ways to pre-empt or counteract the imagined behavior of the imagined "other." There are different degrees of the third-person effect. Researchers have found it is probably strongest in situations where groups have little understanding of one another and where the messages and perceived outcomes are thought to be negative (note the section on Perloff).[68] This is not to overstate the third-person effect. Like other theories related to persuasion in the mass media, the behavioral influences it identifies have to contend with other social forces to influence behavior. Still, it is one of the most interesting theories in the field of mass communication, and it can explain why people

67. ABC News. "Sam's Club, Costco Limit Rice Purchases," February 11, 2009. https://abcnews.go.com/Business/Economy/story?id=4710874&page=1.

68. Dean, Jeremy. "Third-Person Effect Theory: The Media Only Influences Others." PsyBlog, January 16, 2023. https://www.spring.org.uk/2023/01/third-person-effect.php.

race out to buy a certain product when they perceive it to be scarce. We do not want anyone to beat us to the bread and milk.

## Content Marketing

**Content marketing** refers to a common practice where brands produce their own content or hire someone else to produce it and then market that information as an alternative to advertising. It still moves people along the purchase funnel, but there is usually added value in this type of content. If an advertisement for a mattress describes its features and price, a blog funded by the mattress brand might compare the pros and cons of many different mattresses, perhaps with a bias toward the brand. It isn't always pretty.[69] Content produced for a brand should ethically be labeled as sponsored, but it is not always done. In cases when consumers have discovered that trusted sources were content marketers rather than independent reviewers, the revelations have created public relations problems for the brands. Content marketing done ethically offers financial transparency while providing valuable information and an emotional connection to the product for consumers. It can take the form of blog posts or entire blogs. Such marketing is usually optimized for search engines, which is to say the posts are written to attract search engine attention as well as outside links, which also alerts search engines that this content is valuable. Done well, branded content can be seen as more authentic than advertising content, and it can be cheaper to produce and disseminate. It is difficult to do well, of course.

The most common types of content created in this context besides blog content are social media profiles and posts, sponsored content in social media spaces and even viral video and meme chasing. Brands might have their own social media profiles, or they might support social media influencers to promote their products in a sponsored way. Brands might also use their influencer teams or their own internal marketing teams to follow viral social media trends and to create memes. In a sense, content marketing allows a brand to create a more human profile in digital spaces. In this manner, brands can engage with potential and repeat customers. Brands can foster relationships and encourage brand advocacy among people not being paid to promote their products. Many brands use this form of marketing to engage consumers on a deep level and to offer information and emotion that might not be present in other forms of advertising.

## Marketing Disambiguated

The more you study the bigger picture of **marketing** — which includes advertising strategies and other

69. Zax, David. "The War To Sell You A Mattress Is An Internet Nightmare." Fast Company, October 16, 2017. https://www.fastcompany.com/3065928/sleepopolis-casper-bloggers-lawsuits-underside-of-the-mattress-wars.

research efforts meant to guide advertising strategies as part of larger sales and production strategies—the more you recognize how focused advertising is. It may seem that advertising is the biggest, most important element of the mass communication industry because its revenues fuel other types of mass media production, but advertising is only one piece of the marketing puzzle. **Marketing's four P's** — often described as product, price, place and promotion (or position) — encompass much more than making messages to support brands and products. Marketing professionals worry about all four and consider advertising as just one part of the promotion category. Advertising professionals will often argue that the best branding helps define and redefine the product over time so that the product only exists in consumers' minds as advertising has described it, but marketing gets into the business of deciding what products to make, how to promote them, whom to market them to and when to stop making them.

HubSpot, the advertising company that provided the quick history of advertising early on in this chapter, also gets credit for helping to popularize **inbound marketing**. The idea of inbound marketing is that you bring people in to learn about your product using content marketing and then you can make sales to them in the context of a relationship where they found you rather than vice versa. In a sense, inbound marketing turns advertising upside down by building spaces and inviting consumers in to find what they are already looking for rather than trying to create a need out of the glut of information in digital communication networks. Inbound marketing is advertising's answer to de-massification. It involves developing consistent messages and content of uses that are so compelling people will come to the brand to experience them. It is the audience-building aspect of advertising. It relates in many ways to the superbug media concept from previous chapters, and it is growing in popularity as people and companies develop new and better ways of avoiding advertising.[70]

An established method of inbound marketing is to write a blog or develop a podcast that attracts audiences who come for information and who stay for the delicious products. To fully understand the power of inbound marketing, ask yourself if you have ever become a brand advocate. Have you ever sung the praises of your new smartphone or told people they had to try a new restaurant? If you have advocated for a brand and sent people looking for it online, you have probably become part of someone's inbound marketing strategy.[71] In many ways, marketing (particularly content marketing) bridges the concepts of advertising and public relations because it includes content production similar to advertising and it establishes relationships with consumers, which is the ultimate purpose of PR.

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70. Kirkpatrick, David. "Forrester: Consumers Are Adept at Avoiding Ads." Marketing Dive, July 31, 2017. https://www.marketingdive.com/news/forrester-consumers-are-adept-at-avoiding-ads/448222/.

71. "Inbound-Methodology.Png (2207×1306)." Accessed September 5, 2023. https://www.hubspot.com/hs-fs/hubfs/Inbound-Methodology-Assets/inbound-methodology.png?t=1514914160349&width=2700&name=inbound-methodology.png.

## Key Takeaways

- Advertising has existed since ancient times but began to take on its modern form during the Age of Exploration. By the 19th century, newspapers and magazines had begun printing advertising to generate needed revenues.
- Although many considered advertising to be lowbrow or immoral up to the early 20th century, it saw greater acceptance after its use during World War I to encourage support for the war.
- Up to the mid-20th century, advertising featured stereotypical affluent White families and was sale driven. Criticism of advertiser manipulation became the basis of a new style of advertising during the creative revolution of the 1960s.
- The rise of the Internet has caused print advertising revenues to decline but allows for personally targeted ads. Such tracking practices have aroused concern from privacy groups.
- The Federal Trade Commission is charged with ensuring that advertisements make verifiable claims and do not overtly mislead consumers.
- Advertising has infused American culture with mass images and ideas, creating a nation of consumers and shaping how people view themselves and others.

## Exercises

1. Trace the evolution of advertising techniques from the 1920s to the present day, focusing on key shifts such as the creative revolution of the 1960s, the rise of digital media, and government regulation. How have these changes impacted consumer behavior and cultural values? Create a timeline or a presentation to illustrate these shifts.
2. Examine how advertising has historically portrayed various social groups, including women, minorities, and children. How have these portrayals changed over time, and what impact do you think this has had on societal perceptions? Write a short essay or create a video presentation discussing your findings.

3. Debate the ethical implications of targeted advertising, especially in the context of digital media and children. Should there be more stringent regulations on what can be advertised to children, or on how data is used for targeted advertising? Formulate your arguments and engage in a class debate or write a position paper.

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# 15.2 PUBLIC RELATIONS

**Learning Objectives**

- Describe the four models of public relations and the four stages of a typical public relations campaign.
- Analyze the role of public relations in media and culture.
- Analyze the ways public relations is taking the place of traditional advertising.
- Explain the concept of branding.
- Describe the uses of public relations in politics, government, and news media.

Whereas advertising is the paid use of media space to sell something, **public relations** (PR) is the attempt to establish and maintain good relations between an organization and its constituents.[1] Practically, PR campaigns strive to use the free press to encourage favorable coverage. In their book The Fall of Advertising and the Rise of PR, Al and Laura Ries make the point that the public trusts the press far more than they trust advertisements. Because of this, PR efforts that get products and brands into the press are far more valuable than a simple advertisement. Their book details the ways in which modern companies use public relations to far greater benefit than they use advertising.[2] Regardless of the fate of advertising, PR has clearly come to have an increasing role in marketing and ad campaigns.

1. Theaker, Alison. The Public Relations Handbook (Oxfordshire, England: Routledge, 2004), 4.

2. Ries, Al and Laura Ries, The Fall of Advertising and the Rise of PR (New York: HarperBusiness, 2004), 90.

# The Four Models of PR

| Type of Model | Description | Example |
|---|---|---|
| Traditional publicity model (the press agentry model) | Professional agents seek media coverage for a client, product, or event. | Thong-clad actor Sacha Baron Cohen promotes Bruno by landing in Eminem's lap at the 2009 MTV Video Music Awards. |
| Public information model | Businesses communicate information to gain desired results. | Colleges send informational brochures to potential students; a company includes an "about" section on its website. |
| Persuasive communication model (the two-way asymmetric model) | Organizations attempt to persuade an audience to take a certain point of view. | Public service announcements like the one that shows "your brain" and "your brain on drugs." |
| Two-way symmetric model | Both parties make use of a back-and-forth discussion. | A company sends out customer satisfaction surveys, company Facebook groups, and message boards. |

Todd Hunt and James Grunig developed a theory of four models of PR. This model has held up in the years since its development and is a good introduction to PR concepts.[3]

## Traditional Publicity Model

Under the **traditional publicity model**, PR professionals seek to create media coverage for a client, product, or event. These efforts can range from wild publicity stunts to simple news conferences to celebrity interviews in fashion magazines. P. T. Barnum was an early American practitioner of this kind of PR. His outrageous attempts at publicity worked because he was not worried about receiving negative press; instead, he believed that any coverage was a valuable asset. More recent examples of this style of extreme publicity include controversy-courting musicians such as Lady Gaga and Marilyn Manson. More restrained examples of this type of PR include the modern phenomenon of faded celebrities appearing on TV shows, such as Paula Abdul's long-running appearances on *American Idol*.

## Public Information Model

The goal of the **public information model** is to release information to a constituency. This model is less concerned with obtaining dramatic, extensive media coverage than with disseminating information in a way

3. Grunig, James E. and Todd Hunt, Managing Public Relations, 1984 (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing).

that ensures adequate reception. For example, utility companies often include fliers about energy efficiency with customers' bills, and government agencies such as the IRS issue press releases to explain changes to existing codes. In addition, public interest groups release the results of research studies for use by policymakers and the public.

## Persuasive Communication: Two-Way Asymmetric

The persuasive communication model, or the two-way asymmetric, works to persuade a specific audience to adopt a certain behavior or point of view. To be considered effective, this model requires a measured response from its intended audience.

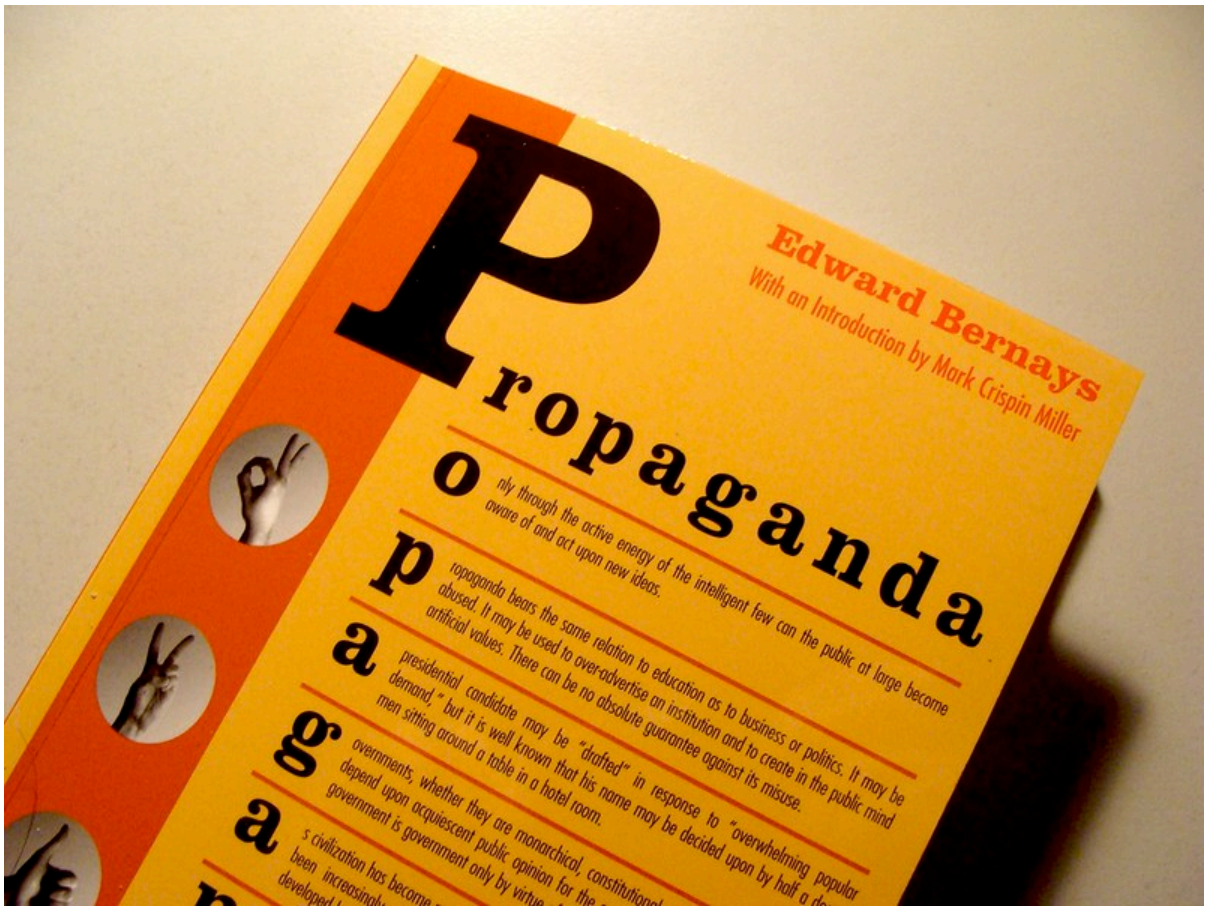


Figure 1: A photo of the book *Propaganda* by Edward Bernays. Edward Bernays created campaigns using the persuasive communication model.

Government **propaganda** is a good example of this model. Propaganda is the organized spreading of

information to assist or weaken a cause.[4] Edward Bernays has been called the founder of modern PR for his work during World War I promoting the sale of war bonds. One of the first professional PR experts, Bernays made the two-way asymmetric model his early hallmark. In a famous campaign for Lucky Strike cigarettes, he convinced a group of well-known celebrities to walk in the New York Easter parade smoking Lucky Strikes. Most modern corporations employ the persuasive communication model.

## Two-Way Symmetric Model

The **two-way symmetric model** requires true communication between the parties involved. By facilitating a back-and-forth discussion that results in mutual understanding and an agreement that respects the wishes of both parties, this PR model is often practiced in town hall meetings and other public forums in which the public has a real effect on the results. In an ideal republic, Congressional representatives strictly employ this model. Many nonprofit groups that are run by boards and have public service mandates use this model to ensure continued public support.

Commercial ventures also rely on this model. PR can generate media attention or attract customers, and it can also ease communication between a company and its investors, partners, and employees. The two-way symmetric model is useful in communicating within an organization because it helps employees feel they are an important part of the company. Investor relations are also often carried out under this model.

# PR Functions

Either private PR companies or in-house communications staffers carry out PR functions. A PR group generally handles all aspects of an organization's or individual's media presence, including company publications and press releases. Such a group can range from just one person to dozens of employees depending on the size and scope of the organization.

PR functions include the following:

- Media relations: takes place with media outlets
- Internal communications: occurs within a company between management and employees and among subsidiaries of the same company
- Business-to-business: happens between businesses that are in partnership
- Public affairs: takes place with community leaders, opinion formers, and those involved in public issues

4. Dictionary.com, s.v. "Propaganda," http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/propaganda.

- Investor relations: occurs with investors and shareholders
- Strategic communication: intended to accomplish a specific goal
- Issues management: keeping tabs on public issues important to the organization
- Crisis management: handling events that could damage an organization's image[5]

# Anatomy of a PR Campaign

PR campaigns occur for any number of reasons. They can be a quick response to a crisis or emerging issue, or they can stem from a long-term strategy tied in with other marketing efforts. Regardless of its purpose, a typical campaign often involves four phases.

## Initial Research Phase

The first step of many PR campaigns is the initial research phase. First, practitioners identify and qualify the issue to be addressed. Then, they research the organization itself to clarify issues of public perception, positioning, and internal dynamics. Strategists can also research the potential audience of the campaign. This audience may include media outlets, constituents, consumers, and competitors. Finally, the context of the campaign is often researched, including the possible consequences of the campaign and the potential effects on the organization. After considering all of these factors, practitioners are better educated to select the best type of campaign.

## Strategy Phase

During the strategy phase, PR professionals usually determine objectives focused on the desired goal of the campaign and formulate strategies to meet those objectives. Broad strategies such as deciding on the overall message of a campaign and the best way to communicate the message can be finalized at this time.

## Tactics Phase

During the tactics phase, the PR group decides on the means to implement the strategies they formulated during the strategy phase. This process can involve devising specific communication techniques and selecting

5. Theaker, Alison. The Public Relations Handbook (Oxfordshire, England: Routledge, 2004), 7.

the forms of media that suit the message best. This phase may also address budgetary restrictions and possibilities.

## Evaluation Phase

After the overall campaign has been determined, PR practitioners enter the evaluation phase. The group can review their campaign plan and evaluate its potential effectiveness. They may also conduct research on the potential results to better understand the cost and benefits of the campaign. Specific criteria for evaluating the campaign when it is completed are also established at this time.[6]

# Examples of PR Campaigns

Since its modern inception in the early 20th century, PR has turned out countless campaigns—some highly successful, others dismal failures. Some of these campaigns have become particularly significant for their lasting influence or creative execution. This section describes a few notable PR campaigns over the years.

## Diamonds for the Common Man

During the 1930s, the De Beers company had an enormous amount of diamonds and a relatively small market of luxury buyers. They launched a PR campaign to change the image of diamonds from a luxury good into an accessible and essential aspect of American life. The campaign began by giving diamonds to famous movie stars, using their built-in publicity networks to promote De Beers. The company created stories about celebrity proposals and gifts between lovers that stressed the size of the diamonds given. These stories were then given out to selected fashion magazines. The result of this campaign was the popularization of diamonds as one of the necessary aspects of a marriage proposal (Reid, 2006).[7]

6. Smith, Ronald. Strategic Planning for Public Relations (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum Associates, 2002), 9–11.

7. Reid, Stuart. "The Diamond Myth," Atlantic, http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2006/12/the-diamond-myth/5491/.

# Big Tobacco Aids Researchers

Figure 2: As ad for "Grimaults Indian Cigarettes for asthma.: The additional text reads: "Recommended by Medical Authorities for immediate relief of Asthma and Bronchial trouble, Hay Fever, Laryngitis and Irritation of the air passage. GRIMAULT'S CIGARETTES ease the feeling of tightness across the chest and give a relief from gasping for breath."
In response to the increasing number of health concerns surrounding smoking, tobacco companies began running ads that argued the benefits of smoking their brand.

In 1953, studies showing the detrimental health effects of smoking caused a drop in cigarette sales. An alliance of tobacco manufacturers hired the PR group Hill & Knowlton to develop a campaign to deal with this problem. The first step of the campaign Hill & Knowlton devised was the creation of the Tobacco Industry Research Committee (TIRC) to promote studies that questioned the health effects of tobacco use. The TIRC ran advertisements featuring the results of these studies, giving journalists who were addressing the subject an easy source to quote. The groups working against smoking were not familiar with media relations, making it harder for journalists to quote them and use their arguments.

The campaign was effective, however, not because it denied the harmful effects of smoking but because it stressed the disagreements between researchers. By providing the press with information favorable to the tobacco manufacturers and publicly promoting new filtered cigarettes, the campaign aimed to replace the idea that smoking was undeniably bad with the idea that there was disagreement over the effects of smoking. This strategy served tobacco companies well up through the 1980s.

## Taco Bell Targets Mir

When the Russian space station Mir was set to crash land in the Pacific Ocean in 2001, Taco Bell created a floating vinyl target that the company placed in the Pacific. Taco Bell promised to give every American a free taco if the space station hit the target. This simple PR stunt gave all the journalists covering the Mir crash landing a few lines to add to their stories. Scientists even speculated on the chances of the station hitting the target—slim to none. Ultimately, the stunt gained Taco Bell global advertising.[8]

# PR as a Replacement for Advertising

In some cases, PR has begun overtaking advertising as the preferred way of promoting a particular company or product. For example, the tobacco industry offers a good case study of the migration from advertising to PR. Regulations prohibiting radio and TV cigarette advertisements had an enormous effect on sales. In response, the tobacco industry began using PR techniques to increase brand presence.

Tobacco company Philip Morris started underwriting cultural institutions and causes as diverse as the Joffrey Ballet, the Smithsonian, environmental awareness, and health concerns. Marlboro sponsored events that brought a great deal of media attention to the brand. For example, during the 1980s, the Marlboro Country Music Tour took famous country stars to major coliseums throughout the country and featured talent contests that brought local bands up on stage, increasing the audience even further. Favorable reviews of

8. BBC World, "Taco Bell Cashes in on Mir," March 20, 2001, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/1231447.stm.

the shows generated positive press for Marlboro. Later interviews with country artists and books on country music history have also mentioned this tour.

On the fifth anniversary of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in 1987, Marlboro's PR groups organized a celebration hosted by comedian Bob Hope. Country music legends the Judds and Alabama headlined the show, and Marlboro paid for new names inscribed on the memorial. By attaching the Marlboro brand to such an important cultural event, the company gained an enormous amount of publicity. Just as importantly, these efforts at least partially restored the stature that the brand lost due to health concerns.[9]

# Branding

While advertising is an essential aspect of initial brand creation, PR campaigns are vital to developing the more abstract aspects of a brand. These campaigns work to position a brand in the public arena in order to give it a sense of cultural importance.

## Shift From Advertising to PR

Pioneered by such companies as Procter & Gamble during the 1930s, the older, advertising-centric model of branding focused on the product, using advertisements to associate a particular branded good with quality or some other positive cultural value. Yet, as consumers became exposed to ever-increasing numbers of advertisements, traditional advertising's effectiveness dwindled. The ubiquity of modern advertising means the public is skeptical of—or even ignores—claims advertisers make about their products. This credibility gap can be overcome, however, when PR professionals using good promotional strategies step in.

The new PR-oriented model of branding focuses on the overall image of the company rather than on the specific merits of the product. This branding model seeks to associate a company with specific personal and cultural values that hold meaning for consumers. In the early 1990s, for example, car company Saturn marketed its automobiles not as a means of transportation but as a form of culture. PR campaigns promoted the image of the Saturn family, associating the company with powerful American values and giving Saturn owners a sense of community. Events such as the 1994 Saturn homecoming sought to encourage this sense of belonging. Some 45,000 people turned out for this event; families gave up their beach holidays simply to come to a Saturn manufacturing plant in Tennessee to socialize with other Saturn owners and tour the facility.

Recently Toyota faced a marketing crisis when it instituted a massive recall based on safety issues. To counter the bad press, the company launched a series of commercials featuring top Toyota executives, urging the public

9. Saffir, Leonard. Power Public Relations: How to Master the New PR (Lincolnwood, IL: NTC Contemporary, 2000), 77–88.

to keep their faith in the brand (Bernstein, 2010).[10] Much like the Volkswagen ads half a century before, Toyota used a style of self-awareness to market its automobiles. The positive PR campaign presented Toyotas as cars with a high standard of excellence, backed by a company striving to meet customers' needs.

## Studies in Success: Apple and Nike

Apple has also employed this type of branding with great effectiveness. By focusing on a consistent design style in which every product reinforces the Apple experience, the computer company has managed to position itself as a mark of individuality. Despite the cynical outlook of many Americans regarding commercial claims, the notion that Apple is a symbol of individualism has been adopted with very little irony. Douglas Atkin, who has written about brands as a form of cult, readily admits and embraces his own brand loyalty to Apple:

I'm a self-confessed Apple loyalist. I go to a cafe around the corner to do some thinking and writing, away from the hurly-burly of the office, and everyone in that cafe has a Mac. We never mention the fact that we all have Macs. The other people in the cafe are writers and professors and in the media, and the feeling of cohesion and community in that cafe becomes very apparent if someone comes in with a PC. There's almost an observable shiver of consternation in the cafe, and it must be discernible to the person with the PC, because they never come back.

Brand managers that once focused on the product now find themselves in the role of community leaders, responsible for the well-being of a cultural image (Atkin, 2004).[11]

Kevin Roberts, the current CEO of Saatchi & Saatchi Worldwide, a branding-focused creative organization, has used the term "lovemark" as an alternative to trademark. This term encompasses brands that have created "loyalty beyond reason," meaning that consumers feel loyal to a brand in much the same way they would toward friends or family members. Creating a sense of mystery around a brand generates an aura that bypasses the usual cynical take on commercial icons. A great deal of Apple's success comes from the company's mystique. Apple has successfully developed PR campaigns surrounding product releases that leak selected rumors to various press outlets but maintain secrecy over essential details, encouraging speculation by bloggers and mainstream journalists on the next product. All this combines to create a sense of mystery and an emotional anticipation for the product's release.

Emotional connections are crucial to building a brand or lovemark. An early example of this kind of branding was Nike's product endorsement deal with Michael Jordan during the 1990s. Jordan's amazing,

10. Bernstein, Sharon. "Toyota faces a massive marketing challenge," Los Angeles Times, February 9, 2010, http://articles.latimes.com/2010/feb/09/business/la-fi-toyota-marketing10-2010feb10.

11. Atkin, Douglas. interview, Frontline, PBS, February 2, 2004, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/persuaders/interviews/atkin.html.

seemingly magical performances on the basketball court created his immense popularity, which was then further built up by a host of press outlets and fans who developed an emotional attachment to Jordan. As this connection spread throughout the country, Nike associated itself with Jordan and also with the emotional reaction he inspired in people. Essentially, the company inherited a PR machine that had been built around Jordan and that continued to function until his retirement.[12]

## Branding Backlashes

An important part of maintaining a consistent brand is preserving the emotional attachment consumers have to that brand. Just as PR campaigns build brands, PR crises can damage them. For example, the massive Gulf of Mexico oil spill in 2010 became a PR nightmare for BP, an oil company that had been using PR to rebrand itself as an environmentally friendly energy company.

In 2000, BP began a campaign presenting itself as "Beyond Petroleum" rather than British Petroleum, the company's original name. By acquiring a major solar company, BP became the world leader in solar production and in 2005 announced it would invest $8 billion in alternative energy over the following 10 years. BP's marketing firm developed a PR campaign that, at least on the surface, emulated the forward-looking two-way symmetric PR model. The campaign conducted interviews with consumers, giving them an opportunity to air their grievances and publicize energy policy issues. BP's website featured a carbon footprint calculator consumers could use to calculate the size of their environmental impact. The single explosion on BP's deep-water oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico essentially nullified the PR work of the previous 10 years, immediately putting BP at the bottom of the list of environmentally concerned companies.

A company's control over what its brand symbolizes can also lead to branding issues. The Body Shop, a cosmetics company that gained popularity during the 1980s and early 1990s, used PR to build its image as a company that created natural products and took a stand on issues of corporate ethics. The company teamed up with Greenpeace and other environmental groups to promote green issues and increase its natural image.

By the mid-1990s, however, revelations about the unethical treatment of franchise owners called this image into serious question. The Body Shop had spent a great deal of time and money creating its progressive, spontaneous image. Stories of travels to exotic locations to research and develop cosmetics were completely fabricated, as was the company's reputation for charitable contributions. Even the origins of the company had been made up as a PR tool: The idea, name, and even product list had been ripped off from a small California chain called the Body Shop that was later given a settlement to keep quiet. The PR campaign of the Body Shop made it one of the great success stories of the early 1990s, but the unfounded nature of its PR claims

12. Roberts, Kevin. interview, Frontline, PBS, December 15, 2003, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/persuaders/interviews/roberts.html.

undermined its image dramatically. Competitor L'Oréal eventually bought the Body Shop for a fraction of its previous value.

Other branding backlashes have plagued companies such as Nike and Starbucks. By building their brands into global symbols, both companies also came to represent unfettered capitalist greed to those who opposed them. During the 1999 World Trade Organization protests in Seattle, activists targeted Starbucks and Nike stores for physical attacks such as window smashing. Labor activists have also condemned Nike over the company's use of sweatshops to manufacture shoes. Eventually, Nike created a vice president for corporate responsibility to deal with sweatshop issues.

## Case Study: Marketing Partnerships – The Importance of Understanding Your Consumers

Bud Light Quickly became a staple for Anheuser-Busch when it was first introduced to the market back in 1982 while under the name Budweiser Light. In 1984 the name changed to Bud Light, and now the iconic silver and blue label is easily recognizable even through its small changes over time and has cemented itself into bars, restaurants, and events across the United States.[13] In 2017 Anheuser-Busch started selling Bud Light in the United Kingdom with commercial success, unfortunately, this was short-lived as the world was soon after turned on its head by the global health concern of COVID-19. Covid would proceed to cripple the company's sales, leading to a drop in market cap from 184.5 billion dollars to a new low of 79.7 billion dollars in early 2020.[14] The company, as of 2023, has not fully recovered to its prior financial heights before COVID-19.[15]

The company needed a strong showing as the world opened its doors and allowed public gatherings once more. In 2022, the company seemed to have finally found its footing back in the market as profits fluctuated slowly back to the norm, that is until April 1st when Bud Light made the decision to sponsor Dylan Mulvaney's 365 Days of Womanhood.[16] This short video caused public outcry from many consumers and influential figures; Most notably, Kid Rock who posted a video where he said "F*** Bud Light and f***

13. *The Impact of the Stock Market on Bud Light: Quantifying the Losses*. (n.d.). Retrieved November 5, 2023, from https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/impact-stock-market-bud-light-quantifying-losses-edward-standley

14. *Home | AB InBev. (n.d.). Retrieved December 20, 2023, from https://www.ab-inbev.com/*

15. *Anheuser-Busch Net Worth 2010-2023 | BUD*. (n.d.). Retrieved December 20, 2023, from https://www.macrotrends.net/stocks/charts/BUD/anheuser-busch/net-worth.

16. *Dylan Mulvaney on Instagram: "Happy March Madness!! Just found out this had to do with sports and not just saying it's a crazy month! In celebration of this sports thing @budlight is giving you the chance to win ,000! Share a video with #EasyCarryContest for a chance to win!! Good luck! #budlightpartner." (2023, April 1). Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/reel/CqgTftujqZc/*

Anheuser-Busch!" and then proceeded to dump a magazine from an MP5 into three cases of Bud Light.[17] This caught the eyes of news channels, and the viral protest skyrocketed with the continued exposure of the original promotion. This undoubtedly led to further support for the boycott of the products and only served to exacerbate the crisis Anheuser-Busch was now facing.

This situation was not what Anheuser-Busch needed at the time. They were worth 130.7 billion dollars at the time but this incident dropped them to 110.6 billion dollars in just a month. With the company not being well received in the eyes of their average consumer, the market cap dipped down to a low of 105.9 billion dollars. Over the last months of 2023, the company has recovered to 126 billion dollars.[18]

Why did one promotion have such a negative impact on Anheuser-Busch?

Simply put, the reason is the target audience. Being a light beer, Bud Light consumers are mainly 20-—and 30-year-olds, which is emphasized by the sports and event partnerships that they support. Most prominently, they are the "official beer" of the NFL, which draws a huge crowd and heavily associates it with a masculine setting.[19] These baselines have been set by society for Bud Light, making it a symbol of sports and young masculinity to anyone who sees the logo.

Anheuser-Busch was trying to expand the potential consumer base for their product. With that being said, looking at Dylan Mulvaney's promotion, she does not resonate with any aspect of the average consumer. First, it needs to be noted that there is nothing wrong with being transgender. The issue here arises with the symbolism of masculinity. Men who go tailgate and cheer on games feel masculine during the experience. If the beer they are drinking takes away from that feeling, they are going to go for a different brand.

If the beer they are drinking starts to have that symbolism associated with it would, in their mind, hurt their public image; however, they might not care that someone is gay or transgender.

Secondly, due to Bud Lights' tight association with sports in general, having an influencer that openly jokes about not knowing of March Madness won't constitute a good public image.[20] Considering the promotion Dylan received was for March Madness, she could have at least had the decency to inform herself about it and build a relationship with the Bud Light sports audience.

Whenever a company decides to take the risk of hiring a new influencer to promote its brand, it must decide

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17. *Bud Light partnership with trans TikTok star Dylan Mulvaney prompts conservative backlash—CBS News*. (2023, April 6). https://www.cbsnews.com/news/bud-light-dylan-mulvaney-kid-rock-tiktok-backlash-travis-tritt/

18. *Anheuser-Busch Net Worth 2010-2023 | BUD*. (n.d.). Retrieved December 20, 2023, from https://www.macrotrends.net/stocks/charts/BUD/anheuser-busch/net-worth

19. Graziano, D. (2023, April 26). *Beer and Backlash: Lessons From The Bud Light Mess*. ChiefExecutive.Net. https://chiefexecutive.net/beer-and-backlash-lessons-from-the-bud-light-mess/

20. *Dylan Mulvaney on Instagram: "Happy March Madness!! Just found out this had to do with sports and not just saying it's a crazy month! In celebration of this sports thing @budlight is giving you the chance to win ,000! Share a video with #EasyCarryContest for a chance to win!! Good luck! #budlightpartner." (2023, April 1). Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/reel/CqgTftujqZc/*

how many old consumers it's willing to lose in order to gain a new audience. Evidently, the decision to go through with this promotion alienated far too much of Bud Light's tried-and-true audience.

Take a look at the ads below and see if you can pick out the one that might hold backlash for the company.

Example 1[21]:

> *One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://rotel.pressbooks.pub/comm-media-studies/?p=413#oembed-1*

Example 2[22]:

> *One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://rotel.pressbooks.pub/comm-media-studies/?p=413#oembed-2*

Example 3[23]:

> *One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://rotel.pressbooks.pub/comm-media-studies/?p=413#oembed-3*

Example 4[24]:

21. Bud Light UK (Director). (2019, July 16). *Bud Lights For Everyone*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8SIEGnwTCUM
22. Bud Light (Director). (2023b, December 1). *BUD LIGHT | EASY ROUNDS | EASY TO DRINK EASY TO ENJOY:60*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_xXMkEb4pwc
23. Bud Light (Director). (2023a, November 2). *Bud Light Backyard College Tour | Mizzou*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_c53HXxRPTo
24. Gumper Van Lier (Director). (2013, August 10). *Bud Light Beer Commercial 1986*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RWezpesN6Fo

*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://rotel.pressbooks.pub/comm-media-studies/?p=413#oembed-4*

After watching these ads, you begin to see the light in which Bud Light views its consumers, young people reaching for the next can and ready for the next party. There exists a common sense of comedy and lightheartedness within these ads that seeks to build a positive association with the beer. In example 1, it's seen that Bud Light attempts to appeal to fans of fantasy settings by basing the ad around the highly popular TV series, Game of Thrones.[25] In doing so, they spread the appeal of Bud Light to wider audiences without pushing away the previously established consumers that they have come to base their business around. In this style, they continued to make ads that were both memorable and influential, coining the promotional phrase Dilly, Dilly which was met with widespread public approval. This was advertising to a new audience done correctly.

How the consumers perceive the company is paramount in the modern age of identity. Each and every marketing action must be weighed against the others lest they risk alienating the customers they already rely on for success. While expanding to new markets is potentially far greater profit, if you remove or move away from the appeal and mystique that you have already cultivated, you stand to lose far more than you could gain.

## Blackspot: The Anti-brand Brand

*Adbusters*, a publication devoted to reducing advertising's influence on global culture, added action to its criticisms of Nike by creating its own shoe. Manufactured in union shops, Blackspot shoes contain recycled tire rubber and hemp fabric. The Blackspot logo is a simple round dot that looks like it has been scribbled with white paint, as if a typical logo had been covered over. The shoes also include a symbolic red dot on the toe with which to kick Nike. Blackspot shoes use the Nike brand to create their own anti-brand, symbolizing progressive labor reform and environmentally sustainable business practices.[26]

25. Bud Light UK (Director). (2019, July 16). *Bud Lights For Everyone*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8SIEGnwTCUM

26. New York Times, "Nat Ives, "Anti-Ad Group Tries Advertising," New York Times, September 21, 2004, http://www.nytimes.com/2004/09/21/business/media/21adco.html.

Figure 3: A photo of Blackspot shoes developed as an anti-brand alternative to regular sneakers.

## Relationships with Politics and Government

Politics and PR have gone hand in hand since the dawn of political activity. Politicians communicate with their constituents and make their message known using PR strategies. Benjamin Franklin's trip as ambassador to France during the American Revolution stands as an early example of political PR that followed the publicity model. At the time of his trip, Franklin was an international celebrity, and the fashionable society of Paris celebrated his arrival; his choice of a symbolic American-style fur cap immediately inspired a new style of women's wigs. Franklin also took a printing press with him to produce leaflets and publicity notices that circulated through Paris's intellectual and fashionable circles. Such PR efforts eventually led to a treaty with France that helped the colonists win their freedom from Great Britain.[27]

Famous 20th-century PR campaigns include President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Fireside Chats, a series of radio addresses that explained aspects of the New Deal. Roosevelt's personal tone and his familiarity with the medium of radio helped the Fireside Chats become an important promotional tool for his administration and its programs. These chats aimed to justify many New Deal policies, and they helped the president bypass the press and speak directly to the people. More recently, Blackwater Worldwide, a private military company, dealt with criticisms of its actions in Iraq by changing its name. The new name, Xe Services, was the result of a large-scale PR campaign to distance the company from associations with civilian violence.[28]

The proliferation of media outlets and the 24-hour news cycle have led to changes in the way politicians handle PR. The gap between old PR methods and new ones became evident in 2006, when then–Vice

27. Isaacson, Walter. Benjamin Franklin: An American Life (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 325–349.

28. Associated Press, "Blackwater Ditches Tarnished Brand Name," USA Today, February 13, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20100409153055/http://www.usatoday.com:80/news/military/2009-02-13-blackwater_N.htm.

President Dick Cheney accidentally shot a friend during a hunting trip. Cheney, who had been criticized in the past for being secretive, did not make a statement about the accident for three days. Republican consultant Rich Galen explained Cheney's silence as an older PR tactic that tries to keep the discussion out of the media. However, the old trick is less effective in the modern digital world.

That entire doctrine has come and gone. Now the doctrine is you respond instantaneously, and where possible with a strong counterattack. A lot of that is because of the Internet, a lot of that is because of cable TV news.[29]

PR techniques have been used in propaganda efforts throughout the 20th century. During the 1990s, the country of Kuwait employed Hill & Knowlton to encourage U.S. involvement in the Persian Gulf region. One of the more infamous examples of their campaign was a heavily reported account by a Kuwaiti girl testifying that Iraqi troops had dumped babies out of incubators in Kuwaiti hospitals. Outrage over this testimony helped galvanize opinion in favor of U.S. involvement. As it turned out, the Kuwaiti girl was really the daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador and had not actually witnessed any of the alleged atrocities.[30]

Lobbyists also attempt to influence public policy using PR campaigns. The Water Environment Federation, a lobbying group representing the sewage industry, initiated a campaign to promote the application of sewage on farms during the early 1990s. The campaign came up with the word *biosolids* to replace the term *sludge*. Then it worked to encourage the use of this term as a way to popularize sewage as a fertilizer, providing information to public officials and representatives. In 1992, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency adopted the new term and changed the classification of biosolids to a fertilizer from a hazardous waste. This renaming helped New York City eliminate tons of sewage by shipping it to states that allowed biosolids.[31]

## Political Branding

Politics has also embraced branding. Former President Bill Clinton described his political battles in terms of a brand war:

> [The Republicans] were brilliant at branding. They said they were about values.... Everybody is a values voter, but they got the brand...they said they were against the death tax...what a great brand.... I did a disservice to the

29. Associated Press, "Cheney Hunting Accident Seen as P.R. Disaster," MSNBC, February 16, 2006, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/11396608/ns/politics/.

30. Parsons, Patricia. Ethics in Public Relations (Sterling, VA: Chartered Institute of Public Relations, 2005), 7.

31. Stauber, John and Sheldon Rampton, Toxic Sludge is Good for You! (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1995), 105–119.

> American people not by putting forth a bad plan, but by not being a better brander, not being able to explain it better.[32]

Branding has been used to great effect in recent elections. A consistently popular political brand is that of the outsider or reform-minded politician. Despite his many years of service in the U.S. Senate, John McCain famously adopted this brand during the 2008 presidential election. McCain's competitor, Barack Obama, also employed branding strategies. The Obama campaign featured several iconic portraits and slogans that made for a consistent brand and encouraged his victory in 2008. Before Obama's inauguration in January 2009, an unprecedented amount of merchandise was sold, a further testament to the power of branding.[33]

# Branding as a New Form of Communication

That so many different groups have adopted branding as a means of communication is a testament to its ubiquity. Even anti-commercial, anti-brand groups such as *Adbusters* have created brands to send messages. Social media sites have also encouraged branding techniques by allowing users to create profiles of themselves that they use to communicate their core values. This personal application is perhaps the greatest evidence of the impact of advertising and PR on modern culture. Branding, once a technique used by companies to sell their products, has become an everyday means of communication.

## PR Wars

Besides the conflict during crisis situations between journalists and PR professionals, there are PR battles that go on between competing brands and between non-profits, corporations, and government officials all the time. Lobbyists make demands on politicians but also push agendas on mass media and social media platforms. In an age of digital communication, it is cheap and easy to develop detailed, professional messages employing a variety of media types that PR pros can try to spread around the world instantaneously. You should be aware as an information consumer that there are ongoing battles for your allegiance. Corporations engage in PR combat all the time, though they often try to work undetected.[34] This is not to claim conspiracy or to frighten readers.

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32. Kiley, David. "How Will Bill Clinton Manage His Brand?" BusinessWeek, June 10, 2008, analysis. https://web.archive.org/web/20100202014819/http://www.businessweek.com/bwdaily/dnflash/content/jun2008/db2008069_046398.htm.

33. Alberts, Sheldon. "Brand Obama," Financial Post, January 17, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20201128203211/http://www.financialpost.com/m/story.html?id=1191405.

34. Fiegerman, Seth. "Apple Faces the Most Important PR Battle in Its History with the FBI." Mashable, February 26, 2016. https://mashable.com/article/apple-pr-battle-fbi.

It is simply a matter of fact that PR efforts are ongoing and that attacks within these battles do not always take the form of headlines. They may come in the form of messages from Twitter bots, **botnets**, collections of fake social media profiles run by software or blogs, or email spam.

You can influence other people by what you read and share, and you are encouraged once again to be aware of where your news sources get their information. Read and think before you share. It has become easy for individuals and fake accounts to publish information into the world's information glut. Twitter and Instagram followers and Facebook friends can easily be bought. Major political influence is now wielded by fake accounts working to drum up anger and to promote misinformation to sway public opinion. Individual information consumers must take responsibility for their own consumption and for what they spread. Your media health is as important as your sexual health. Protect yourself and those you share information with.

What you need to be able to do is to consider a source, consider how it is presenting its message, and consider the source's sources. Media literacy is about what enters your mind: what stays in (that is, what is salient) and what goes out. We are all publishers now. Media, society, and culture will always influence you to some degree, but they are also yours to try to control. Mass audiences may be in decline, but entities who know how to build mass networks of users and how to successfully, if not always ethically, use their information are only starting to show their power.

## Key Takeaways

- The four models of PR include traditional publicity, public information, persuasive communication, and two-way symmetrical models.
- PR campaigns begin with a research phase, develop objectives during a strategy phase, formulate ways to meet objectives during the tactics phase, and assess the proposed campaign during the evaluation phase.
- Branding focuses on the lifestyles and values inherent in a brand's image as opposed to the products that are manufactured. It can be quickly undone by PR crises such as the BP oil spill.
- PR has always been an important part of political campaigning and activity. In recent years, branding has become an important part of national political campaigns.

## Exercises

1. Considering the four models of PR (Traditional Publicity, Public Information, Persuasive Communication, and Two-Way Symmetric), which do you think is the most ethical and why? Provide examples to support your argument.
2. Select a famous PR campaign or crisis (e.g., BP oil spill, De Beers diamond campaign, Apple product launches). Analyze the campaign using the four phases of a PR campaign (Initial Research, Strategy, Tactics, and Evaluation). Present the findings to the class.
3. Assume the role of a PR consultant for a controversial company (e.g., a marijuana company or a fast-food chain). How would you employ the different PR functions (Media relations, Internal communications, Business-to-business, etc.) to improve the company's image? Discuss your strategies and potential challenges.

## Media Attributions


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PART XVI

# CHAPTER 16: DIGITAL CULTURE: SOCIAL MEDIA, VIRTUAL REALITY, AND AUGMENTED REALITY

**Fitchburg State Connection**

The Digital Media Innovation (DMI) major offers students an innovative and adaptive pathway model that provides cutting-edge digital skills through hands-on experiential learning. The pathways offer opportunities to study digital storytelling, culture, and societal applications of data and its ultimate goal is to have students activate their learned digital skills by way of experiential projects throughout their coursework and especially in their capstone course. Additionally, these hands-on projects demonstrate the way that digital technology and computing are changing social and cultural systems in commerce, the law, the arts, and the broader human experience.

This major is designed to creatively explore digital multimedia in a way that can be applied to a wide variety of careers and across a large cross-section of disciplinary practices (currently nine different disciplines). New digital tools continue to reshape industries across the globe. The DMI program culminates in a capstone project that demonstrates the changing ways we construct narratives using data and make technologies and practices that reconsider the human experience in a digital age. The capstone project is geared around student scholarship and professional development, providing an opportunity to develop professional portfolio pieces that will assist students in their careers.

You can find more information here: https://www.fitchburgstate.edu/academics/programs/digital-media-innovation-babs.

# 16.1 THE EVOLUTION OF THE INTERNET

**Learning Objectives**

- Define protocol and decentralization as they relate to the early Internet.
- Identify technologies that made the Internet accessible.
- Explain the causes and effects of the dot-com boom and crash.

From its early days as a military-only network to its current status as one of the developed world's primary sources of information and communication, the Internet has come a long way in a short period of time. Yet there are a few elements that have stayed constant and that provide a coherent thread for examining the origins of the now-pervasive medium. The first is the persistence of the Internet—its Cold War beginnings necessarily influencing its design as a decentralized, indestructible communication network.

The second element is the development of rules of communication for computers that enable the machines to turn raw data into useful information. These rules, or **protocols**, have been developed through consensus by computer scientists to facilitate and control online communication and have shaped the way the Internet works. Facebook is a simple example of a protocol: Users can easily communicate with one another, but only through acceptance of protocols that include wall posts, comments, and messages. Facebook's protocols make communication possible and control that communication.

These two elements connect the Internet's origins to its present-day incarnation. Keeping them in mind as you read will help you comprehend the history of the Internet, from the Cold War to the Facebook era.

## The History of the Internet

The near indestructibility of information on the Internet derives from a military principle used in secure voice transmission: **decentralization**. In the early 1970s, the RAND Corporation developed a technology (later called "packet switching") that allowed users to send secure voice messages. In contrast to a system known as the hub-and-spoke model, where the telephone operator (the "hub") would patch two people (the "spokes")

through directly, this new system allowed for a voice message to be sent through an entire network, or web, of carrier lines, without the need to travel through a central hub, allowing for many different possible paths to the destination.

During the Cold War, the U.S. military was concerned about a nuclear attack destroying the hub in its hub-and-spoke model; with this new web-like model, a secure voice transmission would be more likely to endure a large-scale attack. A web of data pathways would still be able to transmit secure voice "packets," even if a few of the nodes—places where the web of connections intersected—were destroyed. Only through the destruction of all the nodes in the web could the data traveling along it be completely wiped out—an unlikely event in the case of a highly decentralized network.

This decentralized network could only function through common communication protocols. Just as we use certain protocols when communicating over a telephone—"hello," "goodbye," and "hold on for a minute" are three examples—any sort of machine-to-machine communication must also use protocols. These protocols constitute a shared language enabling computers to understand each other clearly and easily.

## The Building Blocks of the Internet

In 1973, the U.S. Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) began research on protocols to allow computers to communicate over a distributed network. This work paralleled work done by the RAND Corporation, particularly in the realm of a web-based network model of communication. Instead of using electronic signals to send an unending stream of ones and zeros over a line (the equivalent of a direct voice connection), DARPA used this new packet-switching technology to send small bundles of data. This way, a message that would have been an unbroken stream of binary data—extremely vulnerable to errors and corruption—could be packaged as only a few hundred numbers.

Imagine a telephone conversation in which any static in the signal would make the message incomprehensible. Whereas humans can infer meaning from "Meet me [static] the restaurant at 8:30" (we replace the static with the word at), computers do not necessarily have that logical linguistic capability. To a computer, this constant stream of data is incomplete—or "corrupted," in technological terminology—and confusing. Considering the susceptibility of electronic communication to noise or other forms of disruption, it would seem like computer-to-computer transmission would be nearly impossible.

However, the packets in this packet-switching technology have something that allows the receiving computer to make sure the packet has arrived uncorrupted. Because of this new technology and the shared protocols that made computer-to-computer transmission possible, a single large message could be broken into many pieces and sent through an entire web of connections, speeding up transmission and making that transmission more secure.

One of the necessary parts of a network is a host. A host is a physical node that is directly connected to the Internet and "directs traffic" by routing packets of data to and from other computers connected to it. In a normal network, a specific computer is usually not directly connected to the Internet; it is connected through

a host. A host in this case is identified by an Internet protocol, or IP, address (a concept that is explained in greater detail later). Each unique IP address refers to a single location on the global Internet, but that IP address can serve as a gateway for many different computers. For example, a college campus may have one global IP address for all of its students' computers, and each student's computer might then have its own local IP address on the school's network. This nested structure allows billions of different global hosts, each with any number of computers connected within their internal networks. Think of a campus postal system: All students share the same global address (1000 College Drive, Anywhere, VT 08759, for example), but they each have an internal mailbox within that system.

The early Internet was called ARPANET, after the U.S. Advanced Research Projects Agency (which added "Defense" to its name and became DARPA in 1973), and consisted of just four hosts: UCLA, Stanford, UC Santa Barbara, and the University of Utah. Now there are over half a million hosts, and each of those hosts likely serves thousands of people.[1] Each host uses protocols to connect to an ever-growing network of computers. Because of this, the Internet does not exist in any one place in particular; rather, it is the name we give to the huge network of interconnected computers that collectively form the entity that we think of as the Internet. The Internet is not a physical structure; it is the protocols that make this communication possible.

One of the other core components of the Internet is the Transmission Control Protocol (TCP) gateway. Proposed in a 1974 paper, the TCP gateway acts "like a postal service."[2] Without knowing a specific physical address, any computer on the network can ask for the owner of any IP address, and the TCP gateway will consult its directory of IP address listings to determine exactly which computer the requester is trying to contact. The development of this technology was an essential building block in the interlinking of networks, as computers could now communicate with each other without knowing the specific address of a recipient; the TCP gateway would figure it all out. In addition, the TCP gateway checks for errors and ensures that data reaches its destination uncorrupted. Today, this combination of TCP gateways and IP addresses is called TCP/IP and is essentially a worldwide phone book for every host on the Internet.

## You've Got Mail: The Beginnings of the Electronic Mailbox

E-mail has, in one sense or another, been around for quite a while. Originally, electronic messages were recorded within a single mainframe computer system. Each person working on the computer would have a personal folder, so sending that person a message required nothing more than creating a new document in that

1. Central Intelligence Agency, "Country Comparison: Internet Hosts," World Factbook, https://web.archive.org/web/20100425071232/https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2184rank.html.

2. Cerf, Vincton, Yogen Dalal, and Carl Sunshine, "Specification of Internet Transmission Control Program," December 1974, http://tools.ietf.org/html/rfc675.

person's folder. It was just like leaving a note on someone's desk,[3] so that the person would see it when he or she logged onto the computer.

However, once networks began to develop, things became slightly more complicated. Computer programmer Ray Tomlinson is credited with inventing the naming system we have today, using the @ symbol to denote the server (or host, from the previous section). In other words, name@gmail.com tells the host "gmail.com" (Google's e-mail server) to drop the message into the folder belonging to "name." Tomlinson is credited with writing the first network e-mail using his program SNDMSG in 1971. This invention of a simple standard for e-mail is often cited as one of the most important factors in the rapid spread of the Internet, and is still one of the most widely used Internet services.

The use of e-mail grew in large part because of later commercial developments, especially America Online, that made connecting to e-mail much easier than it had been at its inception. Internet service providers (ISPs) packaged e-mail accounts with Internet access, and almost all web browsers (such as Netscape, discussed later in the section) included a form of e-mail service. In addition to the ISPs, e-mail services like Hotmail and Yahoo! Mail provided free e-mail addresses paid for by small text ads at the bottom of every e-mail message sent. These free "webmail" services soon expanded to comprise a large part of the e-mail services that are available today. Far from the original maximum inbox sizes of a few megabytes, today's e-mail services, like Google's Gmail service, generally provide gigabytes of free storage space.

E-mail has revolutionized written communication. The speed and relatively inexpensive nature of e-mail makes it a prime competitor of postal services—including FedEx and UPS—that pride themselves on speed. Communicating via e-mail with someone on the other end of the world is just as quick and inexpensive as communicating with a next-door neighbor. However, the growth of Internet shopping and online companies such as Amazon.com has in many ways made the postal service and shipping companies more prominent—not necessarily for communication, but for delivery and remote business operations.

## Hypertext: Web 1.0

In 1989, Tim Berners-Lee, a graduate of Oxford University and software engineer at CERN (the European particle physics laboratory), had the idea of using a new kind of protocol to share documents and information throughout the local CERN network. Instead of transferring regular text-based documents, he created a new language called hypertext markup language (HTML). Hypertext was a new word for text that goes beyond the boundaries of a single document. Hypertext can include links to other documents (hyperlinks), text-style formatting, images, and a wide variety of other components. The basic idea is that documents can be constructed out of a variety of links and can be viewed just as if they are on the user's computer.

3. Peter, Ian. "The History of Email," The Internet History Project, 2004, http://www.nethistory.info/History of the Internet/email.html.

This new language required a new communication protocol so that computers could interpret it, and Berners-Lee decided on the name hypertext transfer protocol (HTTP). Through HTTP, hypertext documents can be sent from computer to computer and can then be interpreted by a browser, which turns the HTML files into readable web pages. The browser that Berners-Lee created, called World Wide Web, was a combination browser-editor, allowing users to view other HTML documents and create their own.[4]

Modern browsers, like Microsoft Internet Explorer and Mozilla Firefox, only allow for the viewing of web pages; other increasingly complicated tools are now marketed for creating web pages, although even the most complicated page can be written entirely from a program like Windows Notepad. The reason web pages can be created with the simplest tools is the adoption of certain protocols by the most common browsers. Because Internet Explorer, Firefox, Apple Safari, Google Chrome, and other browsers all interpret the same code in more or less the same way, creating web pages is as simple as learning how to speak the language of these browsers.

In 1991, the same year that Berners-Lee created his web browser, the Internet connection service Q-Link was renamed America Online, or AOL for short. This service would eventually grow to employ over 20,000 people, on the basis of making Internet access available (and, critically, simple) for anyone with a telephone line. Although the web in 1991 was not what it is today, AOL's software allowed its users to create communities based on just about any subject, and it only required a dial-up modem—a device that connects any computer to the Internet via a telephone line—and the telephone line itself.

In addition, AOL incorporated two technologies—chat rooms and Instant Messenger—into a single program (along with a web browser). Chat rooms allowed many users to type live messages to a "room" full of people, while Instant Messenger allowed two users to communicate privately via text-based messages. The most important aspect of AOL was its encapsulation of all these once-disparate programs into a single user-friendly bundle. Although AOL was later disparaged for customer service issues like its users' inability to deactivate their service, its role in bringing the Internet to mainstream users was instrumental.[5]

In contrast to AOL's proprietary services, the World Wide Web had to be viewed through a standalone web browser. The first of these browsers to make its mark was the program Mosaic, released by the National Center for Supercomputing Applications at the University of Illinois. Mosaic was offered for free and grew very quickly in popularity due to features that now seem integral to the web. Things like bookmarks, which allow users to save the location of particular pages without having to remember them, and images, now an integral part of the web, were all inventions that made the web more usable for many people.[6]

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4. Berners-Lee, Tim. "The WorldWideWeb Browser," 2009, https://www.w3.org/People/Berners-Lee/WorldWideWeb.html.

5. Zeller, Jr., Tom. "Canceling AOL? Just Offer Your Firstborn," New York Times, August 29, 2005, all http://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/29/technology/29link.html.

6. National Center for Supercomputing Appliances, "About NCSA Mosaic," 2010, http://www.ncsa.illinois.edu/Projects/mosaic.html.

Although the web browser Mosaic has not been updated since 1997, developers who worked on it went on to create Netscape Navigator, an extremely popular browser during the 1990s. AOL later bought the Netscape company, and the Navigator browser was discontinued in 2008, largely because Netscape Navigator had lost the market to Microsoft's Internet Explorer web browser, which came preloaded on Microsoft's ubiquitous Windows operating system. However, Netscape had long been converting its Navigator software into an open-source program called Mozilla Firefox, which is now the second-most-used web browser on the Internet.[7] Firefox represents about a quarter of the market—not bad, considering its lack of advertising and Microsoft's natural advantage of packaging Internet Explorer with the majority of personal computers.

## For Sale: The Web

As web browsers became more available as a less-moderated alternative to AOL's proprietary service, the web became something like a free-for-all of startup companies. The web of this period, often referred to as Web 1.0, featured many specialty sites that used the Internet's ability for global, instantaneous communication to create a new type of business. Another name for this free-for-all of the 1990s is the "dot-com boom." During the boom, it seemed as if almost anyone could build a website and sell it for millions of dollars. However, the "dot-com crash" that occurred later that decade seemed to say otherwise. Quite a few of these Internet startup companies went bankrupt, taking their shareholders down with them. Alan Greenspan, then the chairman of the U.S. Federal Reserve, called this phenomenon "irrational exuberance,"[8] in large part because investors did not necessarily know how to analyze these particular business plans, and companies that had never turned a profit could be sold for millions. The new business models of the Internet may have done well in the stock market, but they were not necessarily sustainable. In many ways, investors collectively failed to analyze the business prospects of these companies, and once they realized their mistakes (and the companies went bankrupt), much of the recent market growth evaporated. The invention of new technologies can bring with it the belief that old business tenets no longer apply, but this dangerous belief—the "irrational exuberance" Greenspan spoke of—is not necessarily conducive to long-term growth.

Some lucky dot-com businesses formed during the boom survived the crash and are still around today. For example, eBay, with its online auctions, turned what seemed like a dangerous practice (sending money to a stranger you met over the Internet) into a daily occurrence. A less-fortunate company, eToys.com, got off to

7. NetMarketShare, "Browser Market Share," http://marketshare.hitslink.com/browser-market-share.aspx?qprid=0&qpcal=1&qptimeframe=M&qpsp=132.

8. Greenspan, Alan. "The Challenge of Central Banking in a Democratic Society, " (lecture, American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, Washington, DC, December 5, 1996), http://www.federalreserve.gov/boarddocs/speeches/1996/19961205.htm.

a promising start—its stock quadrupled on the day it went public in 1999—but then filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in 2001.[9]

One of these startups, theGlobe.com, provided one of the earliest social networking services that exploded in popularity. When theGlobe.com went public, its stock shot from a target price of $9 to a close of $63.50 a share.[10] The site itself was started in 1995, building its business on advertising. As skepticism about the dot-com boom grew and advertisers became increasingly skittish about the value of online ads, theGlobe.com ceased to be profitable and shut its doors as a social networking site.[11] Although advertising is pervasive on the Internet today, the current model—largely based on the highly targeted Google AdSense service—did not come around until much later. In the earlier dot-com years, the same ad might be shown on thousands of different web pages, whereas now advertising is often specifically targeted to the content of an individual page.

However, that did not spell the end of social networking on the Internet. Social networking had been going on since at least the invention of Usenet in 1979 (detailed later in the chapter), but the recurring problem was always the same: profitability. This model of free access to user-generated content departed from almost anything previously seen in media, and revenue streams would have to be just as radical.

## The Early Days of Social Media

The shared, generalized protocols of the Internet have allowed it to be easily adapted and extended into many different facets of our lives. The Internet shapes everything, from our day-to-day routine—the ability to read newspapers from around the world, for example—to the way research and collaboration are conducted. There are three important aspects of communication that the Internet has changed, and these have instigated profound changes in the way we connect with one another socially: the speed of information, the volume of information, and the "democratization" of publishing, or the ability of anyone to publish ideas on the web.

One of the Internet's largest and most revolutionary changes has come about through social networking. Because of Twitter, we can now see what all our friends are doing in real time; because of blogs, we can consider the opinions of complete strangers who may never write in traditional print; and because of Facebook, we can find people we haven't talked to for decades, all without making a single awkward telephone call.

Recent years have seen an explosion of new content and services; although the phrase "social media" now

9. Barnes, Cecily. "eToys files for Chapter 11," CNET, March 7, 2001, https://web.archive.org/web/20170713180419/https://www.cnet.com/news/etoys-files-for-chapter-11/.

10. Kawamoto, Dawn. "TheGlobe.com's IPO one for the books," CNET, November 13, 1998, https://web.archive.org/web/20110616050847/http://news.cnet.com/2100-1023-217913.html.

11. The Globe, theglobe.com, "About Us," 2009, http://www.theglobe.com/.

seems to be synonymous with websites like Facebook and Twitter, it is worthwhile to consider all the ways a social media platform affects the Internet experience.

## How Did We Get Here? The Late 1970s, Early 1980s, and Usenet

Almost as soon as TCP stitched the various networks together, a former DARPA scientist named Larry Roberts founded the company Telnet, the first commercial packet-switching company. Two years later, in 1977, the invention of the dial-up modem (in combination with the wider availability of personal computers like the Apple II) made it possible for anyone around the world to access the Internet. With availability extended beyond purely academic and military circles, the Internet quickly became a staple for computer hobbyists.

One of the consequences of the spread of the Internet to hobbyists was the founding of Usenet. In 1979, University of North Carolina graduate students Tom Truscott and Jim Ellis connected three computers in a small network and used a series of programming scripts to post and receive messages. In a very short span of time, this system spread all over the burgeoning Internet. Much like an electronic version of community bulletin boards, anyone with a computer could post a topic or reply on Usenet.

The group was fundamentally and explicitly anarchic, as outlined by the posting "What is Usenet?" This document says, "Usenet is not a democracy...there is no person or group in charge of Usenet ...Usenet cannot be a democracy, autocracy, or any other kind of '-acy.'"[12] Usenet was not used only for socializing, however, but also for collaboration. In some ways, the service allowed a new kind of collaboration that seemed like the start of a revolution: "I was able to join rec.kites and collectively people in Australia and New Zealand helped me solve a problem and get a circular two-line kite to fly," one user told the United Kingdom's Guardian.[13]

## GeoCities: Yahoo! Pioneers

Fast-forward to 1995: The president and founder of Beverly Hills Internet, David Bohnett, announces that the name of his company is now "GeoCities." GeoCities built its business by allowing users ("homesteaders") to create web pages in "communities" for free, with the stipulation that the company placed a small advertising

12. Moraes, Mark, Chip Salzenberg, and Gene Spafford, "What is Usenet?" December 28, 1999, https://web.archive.org/web/20110219051754/http://www.faqs.org/faqs/usenet/what-is/part1/.

13. Jeffery, Simon and others, "A People's History of the Internet: From Arpanet in 1969 to Today," Guardian (London), October 23, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20110121134313/http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/interactive/2009/oct/23/internet-arpanet.

banner at the top of each page. Anyone could register a GeoCities site and subsequently build a web page about a topic. Almost all of the community names, like Broadway (live theater) and Athens (philosophy and education), were centered on specific topics.[14]

This idea of centering communities on specific topics may have come from Usenet. In Usenet, the domain alt.rec.kites refers to a specific topic (kites) within a category (recreation) within a larger community (alternative topics). This hierarchical model allowed users to organize themselves across the vastness of the Internet, even on a large site like GeoCities. The difference with GeoCities was that it allowed users to do much more than post only text (the limitation of Usenet), while constraining them to a relatively small pool of resources. Although each GeoCities user had only a few megabytes of web space, standardized pictures—like mailbox icons and back buttons—were hosted on GeoCities's main server. GeoCities was such a large part of the Internet, and these standard icons were so ubiquitous, that they have now become a veritable part of the Internet's cultural history. The Web Elements category of the site Internet Archaeology is a good example of how pervasive GeoCities graphics became.[15]

GeoCities built its business on a freemium model, where basic services are free but subscribers pay extra for things like commercial pages or shopping carts. Other Internet businesses, like Skype and Flickr, use the same model to keep a vast user base while still profiting from frequent users. Since loss of online advertising revenue was seen as one of the main causes of the dot-com crash, many current web startups are turning toward this freemium model to diversify their income streams.[16]

GeoCities's model was so successful that the company Yahoo! bought it for $3.6 billion at its peak in 1999. At the time, GeoCities was the third-most-visited site on the web (behind Yahoo! and AOL), so it seemed like a sure bet. A decade later, on October 26, 2009, Yahoo! closed GeoCities for good in every country except Japan.

Diversification of revenue has become one of the most crucial elements of Internet businesses; from *The Wall Street Journal* online to YouTube, almost every website is now looking for multiple income streams to support its services.

## Key Takeaways

14. Archive, While GeoCities is no longer in business, the Internet Archive maintains the site at http://www.archive.org/web/geocities.php. Information taken from December 21, 1996.

15. Internet Archaeology, 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20120611125911/http://www.internetarchaeology.org/swebelements.htm.

16. Miller, Claire Cain. "Ad Revenue on the Web? No Sure Bet," New York Times, May 24, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/25/technology/start-ups/25startup.html.

- The two primary characteristics of the original Internet were decentralization and free, open protocols that anyone could use. As a result of its decentralized "web" model of organization, the Internet can store data in many different places at once. This makes it very useful for backing up data and very difficult to destroy data that might be unwanted. Protocols play an important role in this, because they allow some degree of control to exist without a central command structure.
- Two of the most important technological developments were the personal computer (such as the Apple II) and the dial-up modem, which allowed anyone with a phone line to access the developing Internet. America Online also played an important role, making it very easy for practically anyone with a computer to use the Internet. Another development, the web browser, allowed for access to and creation of web pages all over the Internet.
- With the advent of the web browser, it seemed as if anyone could make a website that people wanted to use. The problem was that these sites were driven largely by venture capital and grossly inflated initial public offerings of their stock. After failing to secure any real revenue stream, their stock plummeted, the market crashed, and many of these companies went out of business. In later years, companies tried to diversify their investments, particularly by using a "freemium" model of revenue, in which a company would both sell premium services and advertise, while offering a free pared-down service to casual users.

## Exercises

1. Research a protocol that is not covered in the material (e.g., HTTPS, FTP, etc.). Write a short essay explaining its purpose, how it works, and its significance in the development of the Internet.
2. Analyze the factors that contributed to the "dot-com boom" and subsequent "dot-com crash." What lessons can be learned from this period in Internet history? Choose one company that survived the dot-com crash and one that did not. Compare and contrast their business models and strategies, and discuss why one succeeded while the other failed.
3. How has social media changed the way we communicate and access information? Discuss

the impact of platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and blogs on our daily lives. Create a timeline that traces the development of social media from Usenet to modern platforms. Include key milestones and innovations, and reflect on how each has contributed to the evolution of online social interaction.

4. Websites have many different ways of paying for themselves, and this can say a lot about both the site and its audience. The business models of today's websites may also directly reflect the lessons learned during the early days of the Internet. Start this exercise by reviewing a list of common ways that websites pay for themselves, how they arrived at these methods, and what it might say about them:

    1. Advertising: The site probably has many casual viewers and may not necessarily be well established. If there are targeted ads (such as ads directed toward stay-at-home parents with children), then it is possible the site is successful with a small audience.
    2. Subscription option: The site may be a news site that prides itself on accuracy of information or lack of bias, whose regular readers are willing to pay a premium for the guarantee of quality material. Alternatively, the site may cater to a small demographic of Internet users by providing them with exclusive, subscription-only content.
    3. Selling services: Online services, such as file hosting, or offline services and products are probably the clearest way to determine a site's revenue stream. However, these commercial sites often are not prized for their unbiased information, and their bias can greatly affect the content on the site.

5. Choose a website that you visit often, and list which of these revenue streams the site might have. How might this affect the content on the site? Is there a visible effect, or does the site try to hide it? Consider how events during the early history of the Internet may have affected the way the site operates now. Write down a revenue stream that the site does not currently have and how the site designers might implement such a revenue stream.

# 16.2 SOCIAL MEDIA AND WEB 2.0

**Learning Objectives**

- Identify the major social networking sites, and give possible uses and demographics for each one.
- Show the positive and negative effects of blogs on the distribution and creation of information.
- Explain the ways privacy has been addressed on the Internet.
- Identify new information that marketers can use because of social networking.

Although GeoCities lost market share, and although theGlobe.com never really made it to the 21st century, social networking has persisted. There are many different types of social media available today, from social networking sites like Facebook to blogging services like Blogger and WordPress.com. All these sites bring something different to the table, and a few of them even try to bring just about everything to the table at once.

## Social Networking

Social networking services—like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google Buzz, and MySpace—provide a limited but public platform for users to create a "profile." This can range anywhere from the 140-character (that's letters and spaces, not words) "tweets" on Twitter, to the highly customizable MySpace, which allows users to blog, customize color schemes, add background images, and play music. Each of these services has its key demographic—MySpace, for example, is particularly geared toward younger users. Its huge array of features made it attractive to this demographic at first, but eventually it was overrun with corporate marketing and solicitations for pornographic websites, leading many users to abandon the service. In addition, competing social networking sites like Facebook offer superior interfaces that have lured away many of MySpace's users. MySpace has attempted to catch up by upgrading its own interface, but it now faces the almost insurmountable obstacle of already-satisfied users of competing social networking services. As Internet technology evolves rapidly, most users have few qualms about moving to whichever site offers the better experience; most users

have profiles and accounts on many services at once. But as relational networks become more and more established and concentrated on a few social media sites, it becomes increasingly difficult for newcomers and lagging challengers to offer the same rich networking experience. For a Facebook user with hundreds of friends in his or her social network, switching to MySpace and bringing along his or her entire network of friends is a daunting and infeasible prospect. Google has attempted to circumvent the problem of luring users to create new social networks by building its Buzz service into its popular Gmail, ensuring that Buzz has a built-in user base and lowering the social costs of joining a new social network by leveraging users' Gmail contact lists. It remains to be seen if Google will be truly successful in establishing a vital new social networking service, but its tactic of integrating Buzz into Gmail underscores how difficult it has become to compete with established social networks like Twitter and Facebook.

Whereas MySpace initially catered to a younger demographic, LinkedIn caters to business professionals looking for networking opportunities. LinkedIn is free to join and allows users to post resumes and job qualifications (rather than astrological signs and favorite TV shows). Its tagline, "Relationships matter," emphasizes the role of an increasingly networked world in business; just as a musician might use MySpace to promote a new band, a LinkedIn user can use the site to promote professional services. While these two sites have basically the same structure, they fulfill different purposes for different social groups; the character of social networking is highly dependent on the type of social circle.

Twitter offers a different approach to social networking, allowing users to "tweet" 140-character messages to their "followers," making it something of a hybrid of instant messaging and blogging. Twitter is openly searchable, meaning that anyone can visit the site and quickly find out what other Twitter users are saying about any subject. Twitter has proved useful for journalists reporting on breaking news, as well as highlighting the "best of" the Internet. Twitter has also been useful for marketers looking for a free public forum to disseminate marketing messages. It became profitable in December 2009 through a $25 million deal allowing Google and Microsoft to display its users' 140-character messages in their search results.[1] Facebook, originally deployed exclusively to Ivy League schools, has since opened its doors to anyone over 13 with an e-mail account. With the explosion of the service and its huge growth among older demographics, "My parents joined Facebook" has become a common complaint.[2]

Another category of social media, blogs began as an online, public version of a diary or journal. Short for "web logs," these personal sites give anyone a platform to write about anything they want to. Posting tweets on the Twitter service is considered micro-blogging (because of the extremely short length of the posts). Some services, like LiveJournal, highlight their ability to provide up-to-date reports on personal feelings, even going so far as to add a "mood" shorthand at the end of every post. The Blogger service (now owned by Google)

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1. Van Buskirk, Eliot. "Twitter Earns First Profit Selling Search to Google, Microsoft," Wired, December 21, 2009, http://www.wired.com/epicenter/2009/12/twitter-earns-first-profit-selling-search-to-google-microsoft.

2. My Parents Joined Facebook, http://myparentsjoinedfacebook.com/ for examples on the subject.

allows users with Google accounts to follow friends' blogs and post comments. WordPress.com, the company that created the open-source blogging platform WordPress.org, and LiveJournal both follow the freemium model by allowing a basic selection of settings for free, with the option to pay for things like custom styles and photo hosting space. What these all have in common, however, is their bundling of social networking (such as the ability to easily link to and comment on friends' blogs) with an expanded platform for self-expression. At this point, most traditional media companies have incorporated blogs, Twitter, and other social media as a way to allow their reporters to update instantly and often. This form of media convergence is now a necessary part of doing business.

There are many other types of social media out there, many of which can be called to mind with a single name: YouTube (video sharing), *Wikipedia* (open-source encyclopedia composed of "wikis" editable by any user), Flickr (photo sharing), and Digg (content sharing). Traditional media outlets have begun referring to these social media services and others like them as "Web 2.0." Web 2.0 is not a new version of the web; rather, the term is a reference to the increased focus on user-generated content and social interaction on the web, as well as the evolution of online tools to facilitate that focus. Instead of relying on professional reporters to get information about a protest in Iran, a person could just search for "Iran" on Twitter and likely end up with hundreds of tweets linking to everything from blogs to CNN.com to YouTube videos from Iranian citizens themselves. In addition, many of these tweets may actually be instant updates from people using Twitter in Iran. This allows people to receive information straight from the source, without being filtered through news organizations or censored by governments.

## Video and Image Sharing

Since the early days of Facebook and Twitter, more social media platforms have emerged with a basis on content sharing, popular examples being YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat. What these four platforms have in common is the focus on media in their content. While Facebook and Twitter users may include images and video links in their posts, they may choose to stick simply to text. Meanwhile, all posts from the aforementioned platforms must contain media.

YouTube is a video sharing website, allowing users to create and post their own content. It could be said that YouTube has deviated from strictly allowing video posts in recent years, as the option to run polls has been added. Users can now open polls for other users to answer as they are scrolling through YouTube's home feed. The polls update in real time as more people answer, allowing participants to see how many responses each of the other choices has received. YouTube has certainly changed a lot since its creation in 2005, however, for good and bad. The platform has experienced a rapid increase in the amount of advertisements, featuring placements before, during, and after videos. Additionally, since the introduction of ad placement in 2010, ads have gotten significantly longer with chances of being unskippable.

Instagram, which is owned by the same company that runs Facebook, features photo and video content. Despite running under the same company as Facebook, the two platforms vary greatly in their target audiences

and type of content. Instagram is targeted towards much younger users, as opposed to the older demographic of Facebook. Additionally, Instagram focuses on media posts, as opposed to Facebook's blog-like posts. Initially, Instagram served as a platform for posting and editing images, featuring a wide variety of filters and editing tools for users to adjust their images however they'd like before posting. The option to post videos on Instagram wasn't added until later. Users are also able to post to their Story, in which posts will be deleted 24 hours after posting, and interact with other users through private messages.

Snapchat is very similar to Instagram in its use of a Story to post, edit, and share images and videos. Snapchat features many of the same photo editing features that Instagram does, namely the option to use filters. Images and videos taken and edited on Snapchat can either be posted to the user's Story (where, just like with Instagram, the post will be deleted after 24 hours) or sent to a friend. Breaking the trend of similarities between Snapchat and Instagram, friends on Snapchat tend to exclusively be people the user knows in real life, as opposed to Instagram where you can add basically anyone with ease. Chats between friends on Snapchat are also deleted after 24 hours, unless one of the chat participants chooses to save the messages in chat.

## Rebranding of Twitter

Since Elon Musk's acquisition of Twitter in 2022, the platform has undergone drastic changes. Most notably, Musk has done away with the name "Twitter" entirely, rebranding the platform to "X". Now instead of using "tweets" and "retweets," the platform uses "posts" and "reposts." Musk has also introduced a new system of checkmarks. Prior to his acquisition, blue checkmarks were distributed to users of professional status (such as politicians, actors, athletes, and companies). After buying the company, Musk changed this system so that anyone can pay an $8 monthly fee to have a blue checkmark next to their username. Later, he brought back verification for companies and professionals through the use of color coded checkmarks: yellow checkmarks for corporations, and gray checkmarks for government officials. The UI for the home feed has also been changed, mimicking the UI of TikTok in that it is separated into a "Following" page and "For You" page. The Following page is based entirely on posts from accounts that the user is following, while the For You page sends posts to the user based on an algorithm. Other less noticeable, non-visual changes include the removal of content moderation rules, and changes in the verification process that confirms the identity of users.

## Chinese Social Media

American social media users may be met with unfamiliar names if they were to observe the top social media networks worldwide. WeChat, a platform used exclusively in China, has the 5th most users worldwide at 1.31

billion (based on data taken from January 2023)[3], falling just behind Instagram, Whatsapp, YouTube, and Facebook. Due to its exclusivity to China, the rest of the world may be unfamiliar with its features, making it all the more striking that it has such a high user base. For those who may not be aware, WeChat serves as an online payment system and content sharing platform all in one. Through the app, vendors are able to scan QR codes linked to their customers' bank accounts so that users may pay for goods or services. Users are also able to create and share content through "WeChat Moments" in a similar way to the content sharing features on Facebook.

Another social media platform originating in China is Douyin, the 8th most widely used network worldwide, with 715 million users (based on data taken from January 2023). Douyin is simply the Chinese version of TikTok. The key difference between the two is that Douyin is only accessible to users that are physically based in China, and it can only be downloaded from the Chinese app store. Aside from that, however, they are essentially the same.

## Going Viral

In 2009, Susan Boyle, an unemployed middle-aged Scottish woman, appeared on *Britain's Got Talent* and sang "I Dreamed a Dream" from the musical *Les Miserables*, becoming an international star almost overnight. It was not her performance itself that catapulted her to fame and sent her subsequently released album to the top of the UK Billboard charts and kept it there for 6 weeks. What did it was a YouTube video of her performance, viewed by 87,000,000 people and counting.[4]

Media that is spread from person to person when, for example, a friend sends you a link saying "You've got to see this!" is said to have "**gone viral**." Marketing and advertising agencies have deemed advertising that makes use of this phenomenon as "**viral marketing**." Yet many YouTube sensations have not come from large marketing firms. For instance, the four-piece pop-punk band OK Go filmed a music video on a tiny budget for their song "Here It Goes Again" and released it exclusively on YouTube in 2006. Featuring a choreographed dance done on eight separate treadmills, the video quickly became a viral sensation and, as of May 2011, has over 7,265,825 views. The video helped OK Go attract millions of new fans and earned them a Grammy award in 2007, making it one of the most notable successes of viral Internet marketing. Viral marketing is, however, notoriously unpredictable and is liable to spawn remixes, spinoffs, and spoofs that can dilute or damage the messages that marketers intend to spread. Yet, when it is successful, viral marketing can reach millions of people for very little money and can even make it into the mainstream news.

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3. Dollarhide, M. (2023, August 31). *Social Media: Definition, Importance, Top Websites & Apps*. Investopedia. https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/social-media.asp

4. Youtube, BritainsSoTalented, "Susan Boyle – Singer – Britains Got Talent 2009," 2009, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9lp0IWv8QZY.

Recent successes and failures in viral marketing demonstrate how difficult it is for marketers to control their message as it is unleashed virally. In 2007, the band Radiohead released their album *In Rainbows* online, allowing fans to download it for any amount of money they chose—including for free. Despite practically giving the album away, the digital release of In Rainbows still pulled in more money than Radiohead's previous album, Hail to the Thief, while the band simultaneously sold a huge number of $80 collector editions and still sold physical CDs months after the digital release became available.[5] In contrast, the food giant Healthy Choice enlisted Classymommy.com blogger Colleen Padilla to write a sponsored review of its product, leading to a featured New York Times article on the blogger (not the product), which gave the product only a passing mention.[6] Often, a successfully marketed product will reach some people through the Internet and then break through into the mainstream media. Yet as the article about Padilla shows, sometimes the person writing about the product overshadows the product itself.

Not all viral media is marketing, however. In 2007, someone posted a link to a new trailer for Grand Theft Auto IV on the video games message board of the web forum 4chan.org. When users followed the link, they were greeted not with a video game trailer but with Rick Astley singing his 1987 hit "Never Gonna Give You Up." This technique—redirecting someone to that particular music video—became known as Rickrolling and quickly became one of the most well-known **Internet memes** of all time.[7] An Internet meme is a concept that quickly replicates itself throughout the Internet, and it is often nonsensical and absurd. Another meme, "Lolcats," consists of misspelled captions—"I can has cheezburger?" is a classic example—over pictures of cats. Often, these memes take on a metatextual quality, such as the meme "Milhouse is not a meme," in which the character Milhouse (from the TV show The Simpsons) is told that he is not a meme. Chronicling memes is notoriously difficult, because they typically spring into existence seemingly overnight, propagate rapidly, and disappear before ever making it onto the radar of mainstream media—or even the mainstream Internet user.

## Benefits and Problems of Social Media

Social media allows an unprecedented volume of personal, informal communication in real time from anywhere in the world. It allows users to keep in touch with friends on other continents, yet keeps the conversation as casual as a Facebook wall post. In addition, blogs allow us to gauge a wide variety of opinions

5. New Musical Express, "Radiohead Reveal How Successful 'In Rainbows' Download Really Was," October 15, 2008, http://www.nme.com/news/radiohead/40444.

6. Joshi, Pradnya. "Approval by a Blogger May Please a Sponsor," New York Times, July 12, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/13/technology/internet/13blog.html.

7. Fox News, "The Biggest Little Internet Hoax on Wheels Hits Mainstream," April 22, 2008, http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,352010,00.html.

and have given "breaking news" a whole new meaning. Now, news can be distributed through many major outlets almost instantaneously, and different perspectives on any one event can be aired concurrently. In addition, news organizations can harness bloggers as sources of real-time news, in effect outsourcing some of their news-gathering efforts to bystanders on the scene. This practice of harnessing the efforts of several individuals online to solve a problem is known as crowdsourcing.

The downside of the seemingly infinite breadth of online information is that there is often not much depth to the coverage of any given topic. The superficiality of information on the Internet is a common gripe among many journalists who are now rushed to file news reports several times a day in an effort to compete with the "blogosphere," or the crowd of bloggers who post both original news stories and aggregate previously published news from other sources. Whereas traditional print organizations at least had the "luxury" of the daily print deadline, now journalists are expected to blog or tweet every story and file reports with little or no analysis, often without adequate time to confirm the reliability of their sources.[8]

Additionally, **news aggregators** like Google News profit from linking to journalists' stories at major newspapers and selling advertising, but these profits are not shared with the news organizations and journalists who created the stories. It is often difficult for journalists to keep up with the immediacy of the nonstop news cycle, and with revenues for their efforts being diverted to news aggregators, journalists and news organizations increasingly lack the resources to keep up this fast pace. Twitter presents a similar problem: Instead of getting news from a specific newspaper, many people simply read the articles that are linked from a Twitter feed. As a result, the news cycle leaves journalists no time for analysis or cross-examination. Increasingly, they will simply report, for example, on what a politician or public relations representative says without following up on these comments or fact-checking them. This further shortens the news cycle and makes it much easier for journalists to be exploited as the mouthpieces of propaganda.

Consequently, the very presence of blogs and their seeming importance even among mainstream media has made some critics wary. Internet entrepreneur Andrew Keen is one of these people, and his book *The Cult of the Amateur* follows up on the famous thought experiment suggesting that infinite monkeys, given infinite typewriters, will one day randomly produce a great work of literature[9]: "In our Web 2.0 world, the typewriters aren't quite typewriters, but rather networked personal computers, and the monkeys aren't quite monkeys, but rather Internet users"[10] Keen also suggests that the Internet is really just a case of my-word-against-yours, where bloggers are not required to back up their arguments with credible sources. "These days, kids can't tell

8. Auletta, Ken. "Non-Stop News," Annals of Communications, New Yorker, January 25, 2010, http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/01/25/100125fa_fact_auletta.

9. Huxley, T. H. (the father of Aldous Huxley), this thought experiment suggests that infinite monkeys given infinite typewriters would, given infinite time, eventually write Hamlet.

10. Keen, Andrew. The Cult of the Amateur: How Today's Internet Is Killing Our Culture (New York: Doubleday, 2007).

the difference between credible news by objective professional journalists and what they read on [a random website]."[11] Commentators like Keen worry that this trend will lead to young people's inability to distinguish credible information from a mass of sources, eventually leading to a sharp decrease in credible sources of information.

For defenders of the Internet, this argument seems a bit overwrought: "A legitimate interest in the possible effects of significant technological change in our daily lives can inadvertently dovetail seamlessly into a 'kids these days' curmudgeonly sense of generational degeneration, which is hardly new."[12] Greg Downey, who runs the collaborative blog Neuroanthropology, says that fear of kids on the Internet—and on social media in particular—can slip into "a 'one-paranoia-fits-all' approach to technological change." For the argument that online experiences are "devoid of cohesive narrative and long-term significance," Downey offers that, on the contrary, "far from evacuating narrative, some social networking sites might be said to cause users to 'narrativize' their experience, engaging with everyday life already with an eye toward how they will represent it on their personal pages."

Another argument in favor of social media defies the warning that time spent on social networking sites is destroying the social skills of young people. "The debasement of the word 'friend' by [Facebook's] use of it should not make us assume that users can't tell the difference between friends and Facebook 'friends,'" writes Downey. On the contrary, social networks (like the Usenet of the past) can even provide a place for people with more obscure interests to meet one another and share commonalities. In addition, marketing through social media is completely free—making it a valuable tool for small businesses with tight marketing budgets. A community theater can invite all of its "fans" to a new play for less money than putting an ad in the newspaper, and this direct invitation is far more personal and specific. Many people see services like Twitter, with its "followers," as more semantically appropriate than the "friends" found on Facebook and MySpace, and because of this Twitter has, in many ways, changed yet again the way social media is conceived. Rather than connecting with "friends," Twitter allows social media to be purely a source of information, thereby making it far more appealing to adults. In addition, while 140 characters may seem like a constraint to some, it can be remarkably useful to the time-strapped user looking to catch up on recent news.

Social media's detractors also point to the sheer banality of much of the conversation on the Internet. Again, Downey keeps this in perspective: "The banality of most conversation is also pretty frustrating," he says. Downey suggests that many of the young people using social networking tools see them as just another aspect of communication. However, Downey warns that online bullying has the potential to pervade larger social networks while shielding perpetrators through anonymity.

Another downside of many of the Internet's segmented communities is that users tend to be exposed only

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11. *ibid*

12. Downey, Greg. "Is Facebook Rotting Our Children's Brains?" Neuroanthropology.net, March 2, 2009, http://neuroanthropology.net/2009/03/02/is-facebook-rotting-our-childrens-brains/.

to information they are interested in and opinions they agree with. This lack of exposure to novel ideas and contrary opinions can create or reinforce a lack of understanding among people with different beliefs, and make political and social compromise more difficult to come by.

While the situation may not be as dire as Keen suggests in his book, there are clearly some important arguments to consider regarding the effects of the web and social media in particular. The main concerns come down to two things: the possibility that the volume of amateur, user-generated content online is overshadowing better-researched sources, and the questionable ability of users to tell the difference between the two.

## Education, the Internet, and Social Media

Although Facebook began at Harvard University and quickly became popular among the Ivy League colleges, the social network has since been lambasted as a distraction for students. Instead of studying, the argument claims, students will sit in the library and browse Facebook, messaging their friends and getting nothing done. Two doctoral candidates, Aryn Karpinski (Ohio State University) and Adam Duberstein (Ohio Dominican University), studied the effects of Facebook use on college students and found that students who use Facebook generally receive a full grade lower—a half point on the GPA scale—than students who do not.[13] Correlation does not imply causation, though, as Karpinski said that Facebook users may just be "prone to distraction."

On the other hand, students' access to technology and the Internet may allow them to pursue their education to a greater degree than they could otherwise. At a school in Arizona, students are issued laptops instead of textbooks, and some of their school buses have Wi-Fi Internet access. As a result, bus rides, including the long trips that are often a requirement of high school sports, are spent studying. Of course, the students had laptops long before their bus rides were connected to the Internet, but the Wi-Fi technology has "transformed what was often a boisterous bus ride into a rolling study hall."[14] Even though not all students studied all the time, enabling students to work on bus rides fulfilled the school's goal of extending the educational hours beyond the usual 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

## Privacy Issues With Social Networking

Social networking provides unprecedented ways to keep in touch with friends, but that ability can sometimes

13. Hamilton, Anita. "What Facebook Users Share: Lower Grades," Time, April 14, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20130826183438/http://www.time.com/time/business/article/0,8599,1891111,00.html.

14. Dillon, Sam. "Wi-Fi Turns Rowdy Bus Into Rolling Study Hall," New York Times, February 11, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/12/education/12bus.html.

be a double-edged sword. Users can update friends with every latest achievement—"[your name here] just won three straight games of solitaire!"—but may also unwittingly be updating bosses and others from whom particular bits of information should be hidden.

The shrinking of privacy online has been rapidly exacerbated by social networks, and for a surprising reason: conscious decisions made by participants. Putting personal information online—even if it is set to be viewed by only select friends—has become fairly standard. Dr. Kieron O'Hara studies privacy in social media and calls this era "intimacy 2.0,"[15] a riff on the buzzword "Web 2.0." One of O'Hara's arguments is that legal issues of privacy are based on what is called a "reasonable standard." According to O'Hara, the excessive sharing of personal information on the Internet by some constitutes an offense to the privacy of all, because it lowers the "reasonable standard" that can be legally enforced. In other words, as cultural tendencies toward privacy degrade on the Internet, it affects not only the privacy of those who choose to share their information, but also the privacy of those who do not.

## Privacy Settings on Facebook

With over 500 million users, it is no surprise that Facebook is one of the upcoming battlegrounds for privacy on the Internet. When Facebook updated its privacy settings in 2009 for these people, "privacy groups including the American Civil Liberties Union...[called] the developments 'flawed' and 'worrisome,'" reported The Guardian in late 2009.[16]

Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook, discusses privacy issues on a regular basis in forums ranging from his official Facebook blog to conferences. At the Crunchies Awards in San Francisco in early 2010, Zuckerberg claimed that privacy was no longer a "social norm."[17] This statement follows from his company's late-2009 decision to make public information sharing the default setting on Facebook. Whereas users were previously able to restrict public access to basic profile information like their names and friends, the new settings make this information publicly available with no option to make it private. Although Facebook publicly announced the changes, many outraged users first learned of the updates to the default privacy settings when they discovered—too late—that they had inadvertently broadcast private information. Facebook argues that the added complexity of the privacy settings gives users more control over their information.

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15. Kleinman, Zoe. "How Online Life Distorts Privacy Rights for All," BBC News, January 8, 2010, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/8446649.stm.

16. Johnson, Bobbie. "Facebook Privacy Change Angers Campaigners," Guardian (London), December 10, 2009, http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2009/dec/10/facebook-privacy.

17. Johnson, Bobbie. "Privacy No Longer a Social Norm, Says Facebook Founder," Guardian (London), January 11, 2010, http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2010/jan/11/facebook-privacy.

However, opponents counter that adding more complex privacy controls while simultaneously making public sharing the default setting for those controls is a blatant ploy to push casual users into sharing more of their information publicly—information that Facebook will then use to offer more targeted advertising.[18]

In response to the privacy policy, many users have formed their own grassroots protest groups within Facebook. In response to critiques, Facebook changed its privacy policy again in May 2010 with three primary changes. First, privacy controls are simpler. Instead of various controls on multiple pages, there is now one main control users can use to determine who can see their information. Second, Facebook made less information publicly available. Public information is now limited to basic information, such as a user's name and profile picture. Finally, it is now easier to block applications and third-party websites from accessing user information.[19]

Similar to the Facebook controversy, Google's social networking Gmail add-on called Buzz automatically signed up Gmail users to "follow" the most e-mailed Gmail users in their address book. Because all of these lists were public by default, users' most e-mailed contacts were made available for anyone to see. This was especially alarming for people like journalists who potentially had confidential sources exposed to a public audience. However, even though this mistake—which Google quickly corrected—created a lot of controversy around Buzz, it did not stop users from creating over 9 million posts in the first 2 days of the service.[20] Google's integration of Buzz into its Gmail service may have been upsetting to users not accustomed to the pitfalls of social networking, but Google's misstep has not discouraged millions of others from trying the service, perhaps due to their experience dealing with Facebook's ongoing issues with privacy infringement.

For example, Facebook's old privacy settings integrated a collection of applications (written by third-party developers) that included everything from "Which American Idol Contestant Are You?" to an "Honesty Box" that allows friends to send anonymous criticism. "Allowing Honesty Box access will let it pull your profile information, photos, your friends' info, and other content that it requires to work," reads the disclaimer on the application installation page. The ACLU drew particular attention to the "app gap" that allowed "any quiz or application run by you to access information about you and your friends."[21] In other words, merely using someone else's Honesty Box gave the program information about your "religion, sexual orientation, political

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18. Bankston, Kevin. "Facebook's New Privacy Changes: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly," Deeplinks Blog, Electronic Frontier Foundation, December 9, 2009, http://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2009/12/facebooks-new-privacy-changes-good-bad-and-ugly.

19. Kaste, Martin. "Facebook's Latest Privacy Changes May Quiet Critics." *NPR*, May 27, 2010, sec. Technology. https://www.npr.org/2010/05/27/127206271/facebooks-latest-privacy-changes-may-quiet-critics.

20. Jackson, Todd. "Millions of Buzz users, and improvements based on your feedback," Official Gmail Blog, February 11, 2010, http://gmailblog.blogspot.com/2010/02/millions-of-buzz-users-and-improvements.html.

21. Ozer, Nicole. "Facebook Privacy in Transition – But Where Is It Heading?" ACLU of Northern California, December 9, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20130625010421/https://www.aclunc.org/issues/technology/blog/facebook_privacy_in_transition_-_but_where_is_it_heading.shtml.

affiliation, pictures, and groups."[22] There are many reasons that unrelated applications may want to collect this information, but one of the most prominent is, by now, a very old story: selling products. The more information a marketer has, the better he or she can target a message, and the more likely it is that the recipient will buy something.

## Social Media's Effect on Commerce

Social media on the Internet has been around for a while, and it has always been of some interest to marketers. The ability to target advertising based on demographic information given willingly to the service—age, political preference, gender, and location—allows marketers to target advertising extremely efficiently. However, by the time Facebook's population passed the 350-million mark, marketers were scrambling to harness social media. The increasingly difficult-to-reach younger demographic has been rejecting radios for Apple's iPod mobile digital devices and TV for YouTube. Increasingly, marketers are turning to social networks as a way to reach these consumers. Culturally, these developments indicate a mistrust among consumers of traditional marketing techniques; marketers must now use new and more personalized ways of reaching consumers if they are going to sell their products.

The attempts of marketers to harness the viral spread of media on the Internet have already been discussed earlier in the chapter. Marketers try to determine the trend of things "going viral," with the goal of getting millions of YouTube views; becoming a hot topic on Google Trends, a website that measures the most frequently searched topics on the web; or even just being the subject of a post on a well-known blog. For example, Procter & Gamble sent free samples of its Swiffer dust mop to stay-at-home-mom bloggers with a large online audience. And in 2008, the movie *College* (or *College: The Movie*) used its tagline "Best.Weekend.Ever." as the prompt for a YouTube video contest. Contestants were invited to submit videos of their best college weekend ever, and the winner received a monetary prize.[23]

What these two instances of marketing have in common is that they approach people who are already doing something they enjoy doing—blogging or making movies—and give them a relatively small amount of compensation for providing advertising. This differs from methods of traditional advertising because marketers seek to bridge a credibility gap with consumers. Marketers have been doing this for ages—long before breakfast cereal slogans like "Kid Tested, Mother Approved" or "Mikey likes it" ever hit the airwaves. The difference is that now the people pushing the products can be friends or family members, all via social networks.

For instance, in 2007, a program called Beacon was launched as part of Facebook. With Beacon, a Facebook

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22. *ibid*

23. Hickey, Jon. "Best Weekend Ever," 2008, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pldG8MdEIOA.

user is confronted with the option to "share" an online purchase from partnering sites. For example, a user might buy a book from Amazon.com and check the corresponding "share" box in the checkout process, and all of his or her friends will receive a message notifying them that this person purchased and recommends this particular product. Explaining the reason for this shift in a *New York Times* article, Mark Zuckerberg said, "Nothing influences a person more than a trusted friend."[24] However, many Facebook users did not want their purchasing information shared with other Facebookers, and the service was shut down in 2009 and subsequently became the subject of a class action lawsuit. Facebook's troubles with Beacon illustrate the thin line between taking advantage of the tremendous marketing potential of social media and violating the privacy of users.

Facebook's questionable alliance with marketers through Beacon was driven by a need to create reliable revenue streams. One of the most crucial aspects of social media is the profitability factor. In the 1990s, theGlobe.com was one of the promising new startups, but almost as quickly, it went under due to lack of funds. The lesson of theGlobe.com has not gone unheeded by today's social media services. For example, Twitter has sold access to its content to Google and Microsoft to make users' tweets searchable for $25 million.

Google's Buzz was one of the most interesting services in this respect, because Google's main business is advertising—and it is a highly successful business. Google's search algorithms allow it to target advertising to a user's specific tastes. As Google enters the social media world, its advertising capabilities will only be compounded as users reveal more information about themselves via Buzz. Although it does not seem that users choose their social media services based on how the services generate their revenue streams, the issue of privacy in social media is in large part an issue of how much information users are willing to share with advertisers. For example, using Google's search engine, Buzz, Gmail, and Blogger give that single company an immense amount of information and a historically unsurpassed ability to market to specific groups. At this relatively early stage of the fledgling online social media business—both Twitter and Facebook only very recently turned a profit, so commerce has only recently come into play—it is impossible to say whether the commerce side of things will transform the way people use the services. If the uproar over Facebook's Beacon is any lesson, however, the relationship between social media and advertising is ripe for controversy.

## Social Media as a Tool for Social Change

The use of Facebook and Twitter in the recent political uprisings in the Middle East has brought to the fore the question whether social media can be an effective tool for social change.

On January 14, 2011, after month-long protests against fraud, economic crisis, and lack of political freedom,

24. Story, Louise. "Facebook Is Marketing Your Brand Preferences (With Your Permission)," New York Times, November 7, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/07/technology/07adco.html.

the Tunisian public ousted President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. Soon after the Tunisian rebellion, the Egyptian public expelled President Hosni Mubarak, who had ruled the country for 30 years. Nearly immediately, other Middle Eastern countries such as Algeria, Libya, Yemen, and Bahrain also erupted against their oppressive governments in the hopes of obtaining political freedom.[25]

What is common among all these uprisings is the role played by social media. In nearly all of these countries, restrictions were imposed on the media and government resistance was brutally discouraged.[26] This seems to have inspired the entire Middle East to organize online to rebel against tyrannical rule.[27] Protesters used social media not only to organize against their governments but also to share their struggles with the rest of the world.[28]

In Tunisia, protesters filled the streets by sharing information on Twitter.[29] Egypt's protests were organized on Facebook pages. Details of the demonstrations were circulated by both Facebook and Twitter. E-mail was used to distribute the activists' guide to challenging the regime.[30] Libyan dissenters too spread the word about their demonstrations similarly.[31]

Owing to the role played by Twitter and Facebook in helping protesters organize and communicate with

25. Brown, Heather, Emily Guskin, and Amy Mitchell. "The Role of Social Media in the Arab Uprisings." *Pew Research Center's Journalism Project* (blog), November 28, 2012. https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2012/11/28/role-social-media-arab-uprisings/.

26. Beaumont, Peter. "Can Social Networking Overthrow a Government?" Morning Herald (Sydney), February 25, 2011, http://www.smh.com.au/technology/technology-news/can-social-networking-overthrow-a-government-20110225-1b7u6.html.

27. Taylor, Chris. "Why Not Call It a Facebook Revolution?" CNN, February 24, 2011, https://web.archive.org/web/20221127043617/http://edition.cnn.com/2011/TECH/social.media/02/24/facebook.revolution/.

28. Brown, Heather, Emily Guskin, and Amy Mitchell. "The Role of Social Media in the Arab Uprisings." *Pew Research Center's Journalism Project* (blog), November 28, 2012. https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2012/11/28/role-social-media-arab-uprisings/.

29. Taylor, Chris. "Why Not Call It a Facebook Revolution?" CNN, February 24, 2011, https://web.archive.org/web/20221127043617/http://edition.cnn.com/2011/TECH/social.media/02/24/facebook.revolution/.

30. Beaumont, Peter. "Can Social Networking Overthrow a Government?" Morning Herald (Sydney), February 25, 2011, http://www.smh.com.au/technology/technology-news/can-social-networking-overthrow-a-government-20110225-1b7u6.html.

31. Taylor, Chris. "Why Not Call It a Facebook Revolution?" CNN, February 24, 2011, https://web.archive.org/web/20221127043617/http://edition.cnn.com/2011/TECH/social.media/02/24/facebook.revolution/.

each other, many have termed these rebellions as "Twitter Revolutions"[32] or "Facebook Revolutions"[33] and have credited social media for helping to bring down these regimes.[34]

During the unrest, social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter helped protesters share information by communicating ideas continuously and instantaneously. Users took advantage of these unrestricted vehicles to share the most graphic details and images of the attacks on protesters, and to rally demonstrators.[35] In other words, use of social media was about the ability to communicate across borders and barriers. It gave common people a voice and an opportunity to express their opinions.

Critics of social media, however, say that those calling the Middle East movements Facebook or Twitter revolutions are not giving credit where it is due .[36] It is true that social media provided vital assistance during the unrest in the Middle East. But technology alone could not have brought about the revolutions. The resolve of the people to bring about change was most important, and this fact should be recognized, say the critics.[37]

### Key Takeaways

- Social networking sites often encompass many aspects of other social media. For example, Facebook began as a collection of profile pictures with very little information, but soon expanded to include photo albums (like Flickr) and micro-blogging (like Twitter). Other sites, like MySpace, emphasize connections to music and customizable pages, catering to a

32. Morozov, Evgeny. "How Much Did Social Media Contribute to Revolution in the Middle East?" Bookforum, April/May 2011, http://www.bookforum.com/inprint/018_01/7222.

33. Davis, Eric. "Social Media: A Force for Political Change in Egypt," April 13, 2011, http://new-middle-east.blogspot.com/2011/04/social-media-force-for-political-change.html.

34. Beardsley, Eleanor. "Social Media Gets Credit for Tunisian Overthrow," NPR, January 16, 2011, http://www.npr.org/2011/01/16/132975274/Social-Media-Gets-Credit-For-Tunisian-Overthrow.

35. Beaumont, Peter. "Can Social Networking Overthrow a Government?" Morning Herald (Sydney), February 25, 2011, http://www.smh.com.au/technology/technology-news/can-social-networking-overthrow-a-government-20110225-1b7u6.html.

36. Villarreal, Alex. "Social Media A Critical Tool for Middle East Protesters," Voice of America, March 1, 2011, http://www.voanews.com/english/news/middle-east/Social-Media-a-Critical-Tool-for-Middle-East-Protesters-117202583.html.

37. Taylor, Chris. "Why Not Call It a Facebook Revolution?" CNN, February 24, 2011, https://web.archive.org/web/20221127043617/http://edition.cnn.com/2011/TECH/social.media/02/24/facebook.revolution/.

younger demographic. LinkedIn specifically caters to a professional demographic by allowing only certain kinds of information that is professionally relevant.

- Blogs speed the flow of information around the Internet and provide a critical way for nonprofessionals with adequate time to investigate sources and news stories without the necessary platform of a well-known publication. On the other hand, they can lead to an "echo chamber" effect, where they simply repeat one another and add nothing new. Often, the analysis is wide ranging, but it can also be shallow and lack the depth and knowledge of good critical journalism.
- Facebook has been the leader in privacy-related controversy, with its seemingly constant issues with privacy settings. One of the critical things to keep in mind is that as more people become comfortable with more information out in the open, the "reasonable standard" of privacy is lowered. This affects even people who would rather keep more things private.
- Social networking allows marketers to reach consumers directly and to know more about each specific consumer than ever before. Search algorithms allow marketers to place advertisements in areas that get the most traffic from targeted consumers. Whereas putting an ad on TV reaches all demographics, online advertisements can now be targeted specifically to different groups.

## Exercises

1. Draw a Venn diagram of two social networking sites mentioned in this chapter. Sign up for both of them (if you're not signed up already) and make a list of their features and their interfaces. How do they differ? How are they the same? Write a few sentences about how a marketer might use these tools to reach different demographics.
2. The material discusses the rise and fall of various social media platforms like MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter. How do you think the key demographic and features of a social platform influence its longevity and relevance? Can you think of a recent example where a social media platform failed to adapt and lost its user base?
3. The text mentions the unpredictable nature of viral marketing and how it can sometimes overshadow the product itself or dilute the intended message. Discuss the ethical

implications of viral marketing. Is it ethical for companies to attempt to create viral content that may be misleading or taken out of context?

4. The material ends by discussing the role of social media in political uprisings in the Middle East. Do you think social media is a powerful tool for social change, or does it merely provide a platform for discussion without leading to significant real-world action? Support your answer with examples.
5. Take a few minutes to review the privacy settings on your own social media accounts. Are you comfortable with the amount of information you're sharing publicly? Make necessary adjustments and share your experience with the class.
6. Research a recent case where a social media campaign backfired for a company or individual. Present your findings to the class, focusing on what went wrong and how it could have been avoided.

# 16.3 ISSUES AND TRENDS

**Learning Objectives**

- Define information superhighway as it relates to the Internet.
- Identify ways to identify credible sources online.
- Define net neutrality.
- Describe some of the effects of the Internet and social media on traditional media.

By 1994, the promise of the "**information superhighway**" had become so potent that it was given its own summit on the University of California Los Angeles campus. The country was quickly realizing that the spread of the web could be harnessed for educational purposes; more than just the diversion of computer hobbyists, this new vision of the web would be a constant learning resource that anyone could use.

The American video artist pioneer Nam June Paik takes credit for the term *information superhighway*, which he used during a study for the Rockefeller Foundation in 1974, long before the existence of Usenet. In 2001, he said, "If you create a highway, then people are going to invent cars. That's dialectics. If you create electronic highways, something has to happen."[1] Paik's prediction proved to be startlingly prescient.

Al Gore's use of the term in the House of Representatives (and later as vice president) had a slightly different meaning and context. To Gore, the promise of the Interstate Highway System during the Eisenhower era was that the government would work to allow communication across natural barriers, and that citizens could then utilize these channels to conduct business and communicate with one another. Gore saw the government as playing an essential role in maintaining the pathways of electronic communication. Allowing business interests to get involved would compromise what he saw as a necessarily neutral purpose; a freeway doesn't judge or demand tolls—it is a public service—and neither should the Internet. During his 2000 presidential campaign,

1. The Biz Media, "Video and the Information Superhighway: An Artist's Perspective," The Biz Media, May 3, 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20110228233209/http://blog.thebizmedia.com/video-and-the-information-superhighway/.

Gore was wrongly ridiculed for supposedly saying that he "invented the Internet," but in reality his work in the House of Representatives played a crucial part in developing the infrastructure required for Internet access.

Figure 1: A photo of former Vice-President Al Gore standing at a podium and presenting. Although Al Gore did not invent the Internet, he did popularize the term information superhighway in an effort to build support for Internet infrastructure and neutrality.

However, a certain amount of money was necessary to get connected to the web. In this respect, AOL was like the Model T of the Internet—it put access to the information superhighway within reach of the average person. But despite the affordability of AOL and the services that succeeded it, certain demographics continued to go without access to the Internet, a problem known as the "digital divide," which you will learn more about in this section.

From speed of transportation, to credibility of information (don't trust the stranger at the roadside diner), to security of information (keep the car doors locked), to net neutrality (toll-free roads), to the possibility of piracy, the metaphor of the information superhighway has proved to be remarkably apt. All of these issues have played out in different ways, both positive and negative, and they continue to develop to this day.

## Information Access Like Never Before

In December 2002, a survey by the Pew Internet & American Life Project found that 84 percent of Americans

believed that they could find information on health care, government, news, or shopping on the Internet.[2] This belief in a decade-old system of interconnected web pages would in itself be remarkable, but taking into account that 37 percent of respondents were not even connected to the Internet, it becomes even more fantastic. In other words, of the percentage of Americans without Internet connections, 64 percent still believed that it could be a source of information about these crucial topics. In addition, of those who expect to find such information, at least 70 percent of them succeed; news and shopping were the most successful topics, government was the least. This survey shows that most Americans believed that the Internet was indeed an effective source of information. Again, the role of the Internet in education was heralded as a new future, and technology was seen to level the playing field for all students.

Nowhere was this more apparent than in the Bush administration's 2004 report, "Toward a New Golden Age in Education: How the Internet, the Law, and Today's Students Are Revolutionizing Expectations." By this time, the term **digital divide** was already widely used and the goal of "bridging" it took everything from putting computers in classrooms to giving personal computers to some high-need students to use at home.

The report stated that an "explosive growth" in sectors such as e-learning and virtual schools allowed each student "individual online instruction ."[3] More than just being able to find information online, people expected the Internet to provide virtually unlimited access to educational opportunities. To make this expectation a reality, one of the main investments that the paper called for was increased **broadband Internet access**. As Nam June Paik predicted, stringing fiber optics around the world would allow for seamless video communication, a development that the Department of Education saw as integral to its vision of educating through technology. The report called for broadband access "24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year," saying that it could "help teachers and students realize the full potential of this technology)."[4]

## Rural Areas and Access to Information

One of the founding principles of many public library systems is to allow for free and open access to information. Historically, one of the major roadblocks to achieving this goal has been a simple one: location. Those living in rural areas or those with limited access to transportation simply could not get to a library. But

2. Jesdanun, Anick. "High Expectations for the Internet," December 30, 2002, https://www.crn.com/news/channel-programs/18822182/high-expectations-for-the-internet.

3. U.S. Department of Education, Toward a New Golden Age in American Education: How the Internet, the Law and Today's Students Are Revolutionizing Expectations, National Education Technology Plan, 2004, https://web.archive.org/web/20110403131422/http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/os/technology/plan/2004/site/theplan/edlite-intro.html.

4. *ibid*

with the spread of the Internet, the hope was that a global library would be created—an essential prospect for rural areas.

One of the most remarkable educational success stories in the Department of Education's study is that of the Chugach School District in Alaska. In 1994, this district was the lowest performing in the state: over 50 percent staff turnover, the lowest standardized test scores, and only one student in 26 years graduating from college.[5] The school board instituted drastic measures, amounting to a complete overhaul of the system. They abolished grade levels, focusing instead on achievement, and by 2001 had increased Internet usage from 5 percent to 93 percent.

The Department of Education study emphasizes these numbers, and with good reason: The standardized test percentile scores rose from the 1920s to the 1970s in a period of 4 years, in both math and language arts. Yet these advances were not exclusive to low-performing rural students. In Florida, the Florida Virtual School system allowed rural school districts to offer advanced-placement coursework. Students excelling in rural areas could now study topics that were previously limited to districts that could fill (and fund) an entire classroom. Just as the Interstate Highway System commercially connected the most remote rural communities to large cities, the Internet has brought rural areas even further into the global world, especially in regard to the sharing of information and knowledge.

## The Cloud: Instant Updates, Instant Access

As technology has improved, it has become possible to provide software to users as a service that resides entirely online, rather than on a person's personal computer. Since people can now be connected to the Internet constantly, they can use online programs to do all of their computing. It is no longer absolutely necessary to have, for example, a program like Microsoft Word to compose documents; this can be done through an online service like Google Docs or Zoho Writer.

"**Cloud computing**" is the process of outsourcing common computing tasks to a remote server. The actual work is not done by the computer attached to the user's monitor, but by other (maybe many other) computers in the "cloud." As a result, the computer itself does not actually need that much processing power; instead of calculating "1 1 = 2," the user's computer asks the cloud, "What does 1 1 equal?" and receives the answer. Meanwhile, the system resources that a computer would normally devote to completing these tasks are freed up to be used for other things. An additional advantage of cloud computing is that data can be stored in the cloud and retrieved from any computer, making a user's files more conveniently portable and less vulnerable to hardware failures like a hard drive crash. Of course, it can require quite a bit of **bandwidth** to send these messages back and forth to a remote server in the cloud, and in the absence of a reliable, always-on Internet connection, the usefulness of these services can be somewhat limited.

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5. *ibid*

The concept of the cloud takes into account all the applications that are hosted on external machines and viewed on a user's computer. Google Docs, which provides word processors, spreadsheets, and other tools, and Microsoft's Hotmail, which provides e-mail access, both constitute aspects of the "cloud." These services are becoming even more popular with the onset of mobile applications and netbooks, which are small laptops with relatively little processing power and storage space that rely on cloud computing. A netbook does not need the processing power required to run Microsoft Word; as long as it has a web browser, it can run the Google Docs word processor and leave (almost) all of the processing to the cloud. Because of this evolution of the Internet, computers can be built less like stand-alone machines and more like interfaces for interacting with the larger system in the cloud.

One result of cloud computing has been the rise in web applications for mobile devices, such as the iPhone, BlackBerry, and devices that use Google's Android operating system. **3G networks**, which are cell phone networks capable of high-speed data transfer, can augment the computing power of phones just by giving the phones the ability to send data somewhere else to be processed. For example, a Google Maps application does not actually calculate the shortest route between two places (taking into account how highways are quicker than side roads, and numerous other computational difficulties) but rather just asks Google to do the calculation and send over the result. 3G networks have made this possible in large part because the speed of data transfer has now surpassed the speed of cell phones' calculation abilities. As cellular transmission technology continues to improve with the rollout of the next-generation **4G networks** (the successors to 3G networks), connectivity speeds will further increase and allow for a focus on ever-more-comprehensive provisions for multimedia.

## Credibility Issues: (Dis)information Superhighway?

The Internet has undoubtedly been a boon for researchers and writers everywhere. Online services range from up-to-date news and media to vast archives of past writing and scholarship. However, since the Internet is open to any user, anyone with a few dollars can set up a credible-sounding website and begin to disseminate false information.

This is not necessarily a problem with the Internet specifically; any traditional medium can—knowingly or unknowingly—publish unreliable or outright false information. But the explosion of available sources on the Internet has caused a bit of a dilemma for information seekers. The difference is that much of the information on the Internet is not the work of professional authors, but of amateurs who have questionable expertise. On the Internet, anyone can self-publish, so the vetting that usually occurs in a traditional medium—for example, by a magazine's editorial department—rarely happens online.

That said, if an author who is recognizable from elsewhere writes something online, it may point to more

reliable information.[6] In addition, looking for a trusted name on the website could lead to more assurance of reliability. For example, the site krugmanonline.com, the official site of Princeton economist Paul Krugman, does not have any authorial data. Even statements like "Nobel Prize Winner and Op-Ed Columnist for the New York Times" do not actually say anything about the author of the website. Much of the content is aggregated from the web as well. However, the bottom-left corner of the page has the mark "© 2009 W. W. Norton & Company, Inc." (Krugman's publisher). Therefore, a visitor might decide to pick and choose which information to trust. The author is clearly concerned with selling Krugman's books, so the glowing reviews may need to be verified elsewhere; on the other hand, the author biography is probably fairly accurate, since the publishing company has direct access to Krugman, and Krugman himself probably looked it over to make sure it was valid. Taking the authorship of a site into account is a necessary step when judging information; more than just hunting down untrue statements, it can give insight into subtle bias that may arise and point to further research that needs to be done.

## Just Trust Me: Bias on the web

One noticeable thing on Paul Krugman's site is that all of his book reviews are positive. Although these are probably real reviews, they may not be representative of his critical reception at large. Mainstream journalistic sources usually attempt to achieve some sort of balance in their reporting; given reasonable access, they will interview opposing viewpoints and reserve judgment for the editorial page. Corporate sources, like on Krugman's site, will instead tilt the information toward their product.

Often, the web is viewed as a source of entertainment, even in its informational capacity. Because of this, sites that rely on advertising may choose to publish something more inflammatory that will be linked to and forwarded more for its entertainment value than for its informational qualities.

On the other hand, a website might attempt to present itself as a credible source of information about a particular product or topic, with the end goal of selling something. A website that gives advice on how to protect against bedbugs that includes a direct link to its product may not be the best source of information on the topic. While so much on the web is free, it is worthwhile looking into how websites actually maintain their services. If a website is giving something away for free, the information might be biased, because it must be getting its money from somewhere. The online archive of *Consumer Reports* requires a subscription to access it. Ostensibly, this subscription revenue allows the service to exist as an impartial judge, serving the users rather than the advertisers.

Occasionally, corporations may set up "credible" fronts to disseminate information. Because sources may

6. Kirk, Elizabeth E. "Evaluating Information Found on the Internet," Sheridan Libraries, Johns Hopkins University, 1996, https://web.archive.org/web/20110410183820/http://www.library.jhu.edu/researchhelp/general/evaluating/.

look reliable, it is always important to investigate further. Global warming is a contentious topic, and websites about the issue often represent the bias of their owners. For example, the Cato Institute publishes anti-global-warming theory columns in many newspapers, including well-respected ones such as the *Washington Times*. Patrick Basham, an adjunct scholar at the Cato Institute, published the article "Live Earth's Inconvenient Truths" in the Washington Times on July 11, 2007. Basham writes, "Using normal scientific standards, there is no proof we are causing the Earth to warm, let alone that such warming will cause an environmental catastrophe."[7]

However, the website ExxposeExxon.com states that the Cato Institute received $125,000 from the oil giant ExxonMobil, possibly tainting its data with bias.[8] In addition, ExxposeExxon.com is run as a side project of the international environmental nonprofit Greenpeace, which may have its own reasons for producing this particular report. The document available on Greenpeace's site (a scanned version of Exxon's printout) states that in 2006, the corporation gave $20,000 to the Cato Institute (the other $105,000 was given over the previous decade).[9]

This back-and-forth highlights the difficulty of finding credible information online, especially when money is at stake. In addition, it shows how conflicting sources may go to great lengths—sorting through a company's corporate financial reports—in order to expose what they see as falsehoods. What is the upside to all of this required fact-checking and cross-examination? Before the Internet, this probably would have required multiple telephone calls and plenty of time waiting on hold. While the Internet has made false information more widely available, it has also made checking that information incredibly easy.

## Wikipedia: The Internet's Precocious Problem Child

Nowhere has this cross-examination and cross-listing of sources been more widespread than with Wikipedia. Information free and available to all? That sounds like a dream come true—a dream that Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales was ready to pursue. Since the site began in 2001, the Wikimedia Foundation (which hosts all of the Wikipedia pages) has become the sixth-most-visited site on the web, barely behind eBay in terms of its unique page views.

Organizations had long been trying to develop factual content for the web but Wikipedia went for something else: **verifiability**. The guidelines for editing Wikipedia state: "What counts is whether readers can

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7. Basham, Patrick. "Live Earth's Inconvenient Truths," Cato Institute, July 11, 2007, http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=8497.

8. Exxon, Exxpose. "Global Warming Deniers and ExxonMobil," 2006, https://web.archive.org/web/20110907004507/http://www.exxposeexxon.com/facts/gwdeniers.html.

9. Greenpeace, ExxonMobil 2006 Contributions and Community Investments, October 5, 2007, https://web.archive.org/web/20100213104323/http://research.greenpeaceusa.org/?a=view&d=4381.

verify that material added to Wikipedia has already been published by a reliable source, not whether editors think it is true."[10] The benchmark for inclusion on Wikipedia includes outside citations for any content "likely to be challenged" and for "all quotations."

While this may seem like it's a step ahead of many other sources on the Internet, there is a catch: Anyone can edit Wikipedia. This has a positive and negative side—though anyone can vandalize the site, anyone can also fix it. In addition, calling a particularly contentious page to attention can result in one of the site's administrators placing a warning at the top of the page stating that the information is not necessarily verified. Other warnings include notices on articles about living persons, which are given special attention, and articles that may violate Wikipedia's neutrality policy. This neutrality policy is a way to mitigate the extreme views that may be posted on a page with open access, allowing the community to decide what constitutes a "significant" view that should be represented.[11]

As long as users do not take the facts on Wikipedia at face value and make sure to follow up on the relevant sources linked in the articles they read, the site is an extremely useful reference tool that gives users quick access to a wide range of subjects. However, articles on esoteric subjects can be especially prone to vandalism or poorly researched information. Since every reader is a potential editor, a lack of readers can lead to a poorly edited page because errors, whether deliberate or not, go uncorrected. In short, the lack of authorial credit can lead to problems with judging bias and relevance of information, so the same precautions must be taken with Wikipedia as with any other online source, primarily in checking references. The advantage of Wikipedia is its openness and freedom—if you find a problem, you can either fix it (with your own verifiable sources) or flag it on the message boards. Culturally, there has been a shift from valuing a few reliable sources to valuing a multiplicity of competing sources. However, weighing these sources against one another has become easier than ever before.

## Security of Information on the Internet

As the Internet has grown in scope and the amount of personal information online has proliferated, securing this information has become a major issue. The Internet now houses everything from online banking systems to highly personal e-mail messages, and even though security is constantly improving, this information is not invulnerable.

An example of this vulnerability is the Climategate scandal in late 2009. A collection of private e-mail messages were hacked from a server at the University of East Anglia, where much of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change research takes place. These e-mails show internal debates among the scientists

10. Wikipedia, s.v. "Wikipedia:Verifiability," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Verifiability.

11. Wikipedia, s.v. "Wikipedia:Neutral point of view," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Neutral_point_of_view.

regarding which pieces of data should be released and which are not relevant (or helpful) to their case.[12] In these e-mails, the scientists sometimes talk about colleagues—especially those skeptical of climate change—in a derisive way. Of course, these e-mails were never meant to become public.

This scandal demonstrates how easy it can be to lose control of private information on the Internet. In previous decades, hard copies of these letters would have to be found, and the theft could probably be traced back to a specific culprit. With the Internet, it is much more difficult to tell who is doing the snooping, especially if it is done on a public network. The same protocols that allow for open access and communication also allow for possible exploitation. Like the Interstate Highway System, the Internet is impartial to its users. In other words: If you're going to ride, lock your doors.

## Hacking E-mail: From LOVE-LETTER-FOR-YOU to Google in China

Another explosive scandal involving e-mail account hacking also occurred in late 2009, when Google's Gmail service was hacked by IP addresses originating in China. Gmail was one of the primary services used by human rights activists due to its location in the United States and its extra encryption. To understand the magnitude of this, it is important to understand the history of e-mail hacking and the importance of physical server location and local laws.

In 2000, a **computer virus** was unleashed by a student in the Philippines that simply sent a message with the subject line "I Love You." The e-mail had a file attached, called LOVE-LETTER-FOR-YOU.TXT.vbs. The suffix ".txt" is generally used for text files and was meant, in this case, as a distraction; the file's real suffix was ".vbs," which means that the file is a script. When run, this script ran and e-mailed itself across the user's entire address book, before sending any available passwords to an e-mail address in the Philippines. One of the key aspects of this case, however, was a matter of simple jurisdiction: The student was not prosecuted, due to the lack of computer crime laws in the Philippines.[13]

The encryption that Gmail uses resulted in only two of the accounts being successfully hacked, and hackers were only able to see e-mail subject lines and timestamps—no message content was available.[14] Since the chaos that ensued after the "I Love You" virus, e-mail users and service providers have become more vigilant in their

12. Revkin, Andrew C. "Hacked E-Mail Is New Fodder for Climate Dispute," New York Times, November 20, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/21/science/earth/21climate.html.

13. Zetter, Kim. "Nov. 10, 1983: Computer 'Virus' Is Born," Wired, November 10, 2009, http://www.wired.com/thisdayintech/2009/11/1110fred-cohen-first-computer-virus/.

14. Zetter, Kim. "Google to Stop Censoring Search Results in China After Hack Attack," Wired, January 12, 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20140329071855/http://www.wired.com/threatlevel/2010/01/google-censorship-china/.

defensive techniques. However, the increased reliance on e-mail for daily communication makes it an attractive target for hackers. The development of cloud computing will likely lead to entirely new problems with Internet security; just as a highway brings two communities together, it can also cause these communities to share problems.

## Can't Wait: Denial of Service

Although many people increasingly rely on the Internet for communication and access to information, this reliance has come with a hefty price. Most critically, a simple exploit can cause massive roadblocks to Internet traffic, leading to disruptions in commerce, communication, and, as the military continues to rely on the Internet, national security.

Distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks work like cloud computing, but in reverse. Instead of a single computer going out to retrieve data from many different sources, DDoS is a coordinated effort by many different computers to bring down (or overwhelm) a specific website. Essentially, any web server can only handle a certain amount of information at once. While the largest and most stable web servers can talk to a huge number of computers simultaneously, even these can be overwhelmed.

During a DDoS attack on government servers belonging to both the United States and South Korea in July 2009, many U.S. government sites were rendered unavailable to users in Asia for a short time.[15] Although this did not have a major effect on U.S. cyber-security, the ease with which these servers could be exploited was troubling. In this case, the DDoS attacks were perpetuated by an e-mail virus known as MyDoom, which essentially turned users' computers into server-attacking "zombies." This exploit—coupling an e-mail scam with a larger attack—is difficult to trace, partly because the culprit is likely not one of the original attackers, but rather the victim of a virus used to turn vulnerable computers into an automated hacker army. Since the attack, President Barack Obama has committed to creating a new post for a head of cyber-security in the government.

## Net Neutrality

Most Internet users in the United States connect through a commercial Internet service provider (ISP). The major players—Comcast, Verizon, Time Warner Cable, AT&T, and others—are portals to the larger Internet, serving as a way for anyone with a cable line or phone line to receive broadband Internet access through a dedicated data line.

Ideally, ISPs treat all content impartially; any two websites will load at the same speed if they have adequate

15. Gorman, Siobhan and Evan Ramstad, "Cyber Blitz Hits U.S., Korea," Wall Street Journal, July 9, 2009, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124701806176209691.html.

server capabilities. Service providers are not entirely happy with this arrangement. ISPs have proposed a new service model that would allow corporations to pay for a "higher tier" service. For example, this would allow AOL Time Warner to deliver its Hulu service (which Time Warner co-owns with NBC) faster than all other video services, leading to partnerships between Internet content providers and Internet service providers. The service providers also often foot the bill for expanding high-speed Internet access, and they see this new two-tiered service as a way to cash in on some of that investment (and, presumably, to reinvest the funds received).

The main fear—and the reason the FCC introduced **net neutrality** rules—is that such a service would hamper the ability of an Internet startup to grow its business. Defenders of net neutrality contend that small businesses (those without the ability to forge partnerships with the service providers) would be forced onto a "second-tier" Internet service, and their content would naturally suffer, decreasing inventiveness and competition among Internet content providers.

## Net Neutrality Legislation: The FCC and AT&T

One of the key roadblocks to Internet legislation is the difficulty of describing the Internet and the Internet's place among communication bills of the past. First of all, it is important to realize that legislation relating to the impartiality of service providers is not unheard-of. Before the 1960s, AT&T was allowed to restrict its customers to using only its own telephones on its networks. In the 1960s, the FCC launched a series of "Computer Inquiries," stating, in effect, that any customer could use any device on the network, as long as it did not actually harm the network. This led to inventions such as the fax machine, which would not have been possible under AT&T's previous agreement.

A key point today is that these proto–net neutrality rules protected innovation even when they "threatened to be a substitute for regulated services."[16] This is directly relevant to a controversy involving Apple's iPhone that culminated in October 2009 when AT&T agreed to allow VoIP (voice over Internet protocol) on its 3G data networks. VoIP services, like the program Skype, allow a user to place a telephone call from an Internet data line to a traditional telephone line. In the case of the iPhone, AT&T did not actually block the transmission of data—it just had Apple block the app from its App Store. Since AT&T runs the phone service as well as the data lines, and since many users have plans with unlimited data connections, AT&T could see its phone profits cut drastically if all its users suddenly switched to using Skype to place all their telephone calls.

16. Cannon, Robert. "The Legacy of the Federal Communications Commission's Computer Inquiries," Federal Communication Law Journal 55, no. 2 (2003): 170.

## Misleading Metaphors: It's Not a Big Truck

Senator Ted Stevens, the former head of the committee in charge of regulating the Internet, said on the floor of the Senate that the Internet is "not a big truck...it's a series of tubes" According to this metaphor, an e-mail can get "stuck in the tubes" for days behind someone else's material, leading to poorer service for the customer. In reality, service providers sell data-usage plans that only set a cap on the amount of data that someone can send over the Internet (measured in bits per second, where a bit is the smallest measurement of data). If a service is rated at 1.5 million bits per second (megabits per second, or 1.5 Mbps), it may only reach this once in a while—no one can "clog the tubes" without paying massive amounts of money for the service. Theoretically, the company will then invest this service fee in building more robust "tubes."

Net neutrality is difficult to legislate in part because it can be confusing: It relies on understanding how the Internet works and how communications are regulated. Stevens's metaphor is misleading because it assumes that Internet capacity is not already regulated in some natural way. To use the superhighway analogy, Stevens is suggesting that the highways are congested, and his solution is to allow companies to dedicate express lanes for high-paying customers (it should be noted that the revenue would go to the service providers, even though the government has chipped in quite a bit for information superhighway construction). The danger of this is that it would be very difficult for a small business or personal site to afford express-lane access. Worse yet, the pro–net neutrality organization Save the Internet says that a lack of legislation would allow companies to "discriminate in favor of their own search engines" and "leave the rest of us on a winding dirt road." For areas that only have access to one Internet service, this would amount to a lack of access to all the available content.

## Digital Technology and Electronic Media

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17. Curtis, Alex. "Senator Stevens Speaks on Net Neutrality," Public Knowledge, June 28, 2006, https://web.archive.org/web/20131211075527/http://www.publicknowledge.org/node/497.

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## Terms and Conditions

The film *Terms and Conditions May Apply* details the ways our private information, such as our emails and texts, can easily be related to our public information on social networks. The filmmakers note that the knowledge and hardware needed to snoop on people are bought and sold all over the world and are often unregulated. Are we becoming more open because of the ways social media function? Is there anything wrong with that? Are we surrendering our privacy in ways that cannot be undone?

One of the major cultural challenges of the network society will be to deal with people in power who would like to use our information against us as a means of control. It has already happened in some of the countries where the Arab Spring revolutions took place, such as Egypt.[19]

You never know what you might need to protest in the future, but we're beginning to see tools deployed to pre-empt protests and other acts of dissent.[20] What this means for our efforts to define digital culture is that digital culture can free us as individuals, but it can also imprison us.

We can use the internet and smartphones to help us to get questions answered and to draw attention to ourselves in good ways. We can coordinate with others for fundraisers and to have parties. Digital communication networks are amazingly sophisticated tools that can help us connect as individuals to form groups to celebrate all sorts of interests, political and otherwise.

On the other hand, if individuals believe they have no privacy, digital networks could become virtual

18. Save the Internet, "FAQs," 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20090612054713/http://www.savetheinternet.com/faq.

19. Hamzawy, Amr. "Legislating Authoritarianism: Egypt's New Era of Repression." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 16, 2017. https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/03/16/legislating-authoritarianism-egypt-s-new-era-of-repression-pub-68285.

20. Bamford, James. "Washington's Ministry of Preemption." *Foreign Policy* (blog), May 31, 2017. https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/05/31/washington-ministry-of-preemption-united-states-intelligence/.

wastelands where innovative collaboration is hindered and where corporate commercial speech and government surveillance dominate.

Capitalism depends on risk-taking, and if you kill risk-taking online, you have hindered the entrepreneurialism that the network society offers. We scholars will study for decades to come how individual behavior changes and how relationships morph in a digital culture that discourages behavior we want to keep private while simultaneously encouraging levels of sharing that border on exhibitionism. How can we maintain privacy and gain attention, which is so often the currency of the open Internet? This is an interesting dilemma that arises in an individualistic digital culture.

## Post-nationalism

Most simply, "**post-nationalism**" in digital culture means that one's country appears to matter less as an influence on behavior and values online than it does in the tangible world, perhaps because we can be free of our national identities when engaging in digital networks with people from around the globe.

This does not mean that we should expect to see an end to nationalism in the tangible world. Quite the opposite seems to be true: As post-nationalism appears in digital spaces, nationalism is on the rise in global politics.[21] It might seem odd that people drop their nationalism online but demand it in physical spaces, but if you look at the way culture is expressed online, it is clear that for many people their nationality has little to do with their online identities.

For example, your country may be important to you, but it may not be one of the ways you define yourself in social media environments. You can love America without talking about it all of the time on Facebook or Twitter. Remember as well that national boundaries may be felt more readily in the daily lives of Africans, Asians, Europeans and others living in nations that are geographically smaller, more tightly packed and culturally distinct. In digital spaces, these cultural differences can evaporate.

Although war and immigration are highly influential on the current cultural climate in the physical world, the perception of evaporating culture in networked spaces may help drive the sense that physical world cultures are being threatened.

Recent political developments, however, make it somewhat more difficult to think of digital culture as post-nationalistic given the rise of online nationalism — particularly white nationalism in Europe and the United States. White nationalism is a brand of nationalism related to white supremacy, but it is an identity connected to the nation-state nonetheless. A nationalist's primary *modus operandi* in digital culture may not reflect what nation states ultimately become in the 21st century, but rather what they wish it were. Even so, there is evidence that some factions will use digital spaces to promote a return to nationalism.

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21. *The Economist*. "League of Nationalists." November 19, 2016. https://www.economist.com/international/2016/11/19/league-of-nationalists.

Does this mean that post-nationalism in digital culture is a false notion conceived in the early 2000s that has no bearing on culture today? Perhaps, but it is more likely that we are seeing a backlash against the rise of a global post-nationalist space online.

## Globalization

Digital culture reflects a globalized or globalizing world.[22] Behaviors, interests, and relationships cross international boundaries. The economic structure of digital networks, including the mass media system, is global. For example, multinational conglomerate corporations tend to dominate the media industry, not just in the United States but around the world.[23] Books, academic articles and simple infographics show that most mass media companies fall under the ownership of large corporate firms. It is not accurate to say this represents all media or that "the media" are being controlled, but it is accurate to say a significant level of influence can be attributed to a handful of media corporations in most developed parts of the world.

Mass media consumers should be aware of the environment in which media products are produced, but this is not to say that the globalization of mass media is always a negative thing. When it comes to culture, globalization has its supporters. For example, K-Pop music originates in Korea, but the fanbase is spread worldwide and can reach a global audience only because of the global nature of digital networks. It works only because computer servers are connected by wires all over the globe to make this bit of culture, like many others, available to the entire globe.

There exists a global point of view in both the physical world and in digital culture which is open to all kinds of cultural production as long as it is interesting, funny and shows great talent. There are videos that go viral globally, although it is not always clear why. (If we had the formula, we'd include it here.) All we can say at this time is that you can reach the world with any online message and, for whatever reason, some things are globally likable and "shareable."

**Key Takeaways**

22. Deuze, Mark. "Participation, Remediation, Bricolage: Considering Principal Components of a Digital Culture," 2006. https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/handle/2022/3200.

23. Bagdikian, Ben H., and Ben H. Bagdikian. *The New Media Monopoly*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2004.

- On one hand, the information superhighway has opened up rural areas to global connections and made communication and trade much easier. One downside, however, is that illicit and unwanted information can move just as quickly as positive information—it is up to the recipient to decide.
- The lack of authorial attribution on many online forums can make it difficult to find credible information. However, Wikipedia's concept of "verifiability," or citing verified sources, has provided a good check to what can become a matter of mere my-word-against-yours. It is important to gauge possible bias in a source and to judge whether the author has an economic interest in the information.
- Net neutrality is a general category of laws that seek to make it illegal for service providers to discriminate among types of Internet content. One downside of content discrimination is that a service provider could potentially make competitors' sites load much more slowly than their own.

## Exercises

1. Find a website about a single product, musician, or author. Does the site have a stated or strongly implied author? Look for a copyright notice and a date, usually at the bottom of the page. How might that author's point of view bias the information on the site? How can one determine the author's credibility?
2. The text discusses the concept of net neutrality and how it could impact small businesses and individual users. What are your thoughts on net neutrality? Do you think it's essential for maintaining a "free and open" Internet?
3. Cloud computing has revolutionized the way we store and access data. What are some advantages and disadvantages of relying on cloud computing for personal and professional use? Create a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis for cloud computing. Share your findings in a presentation or written report, and discuss how the rise of cloud computing might shape the future of digital technology.
4. One of the repeated promises of the Internet is that it is truly democratic and that anyone can have a voice. Has this played out in a viable way, or was that a naive assumption that

never really came to fruition?

5. How has the concept of verifiability changed the way that "truth" is regarded on the Internet—even in the culture at large? Has the speed and volume with which new information becomes available on the Internet made verifiable information more difficult to come by?

## Media Attributions

- Al Gore at Web 2.0 Summit © Dan Farber via. Flickr is licensed under a CC BY-SA (Attribution ShareAlike) license

# PART XVII
# CHAPTER 17: ETHICAL ISSUES

Much attention has been given to the ethical issues of mass media as they relate to issues of racial and gender stereotypes and the individuals of various demographics are portrayed in ways that often marginalize them. Despite improvement, the lack of representation in media continues to be a significant challenge. The rise of the internet has created new challenges related to privacy and surveillance, as new technologies have made it easier than ever to monitor, track, and monetize user data. Plagiarism and copyright infringement have emerged as major ethical and legal challenges in this era.

These dynamics underscore the urgent need for robust guidelines and safeguards that balance technological progress with ethical standards and individual rights. Cory Doctorow's concept of "enshittification" provides a framework for understanding the lifecycle of digital platforms like TikTok, Amazon, and Twitter. Initially, these platforms prioritize delivering value to attract and build their user base. Inevitably, the focus shifts toward generating higher profits, and this harms the user experience and causes a decline of quality content. This situation highlights the critical tension between technological self-determination and profit motives. Upholding principles such as technological self-determination and the "freedom of exit" is essential for users to maintain control over their digital environments, advocating for approaches that prioritize user needs and ethical considerations.

# 17.1 ETHICAL ISSUES IN MASS MEDIA

**Learning Objectives**

- Explain the importance of racial and gender diversity in mass media.
- Identify the ethical concerns associated with race and gender stereotypes.
- List some common concerns about sexual content in the media.

In the competitive and rapidly changing world of mass-media communications, media professionals—overcome by deadlines, bottom-line imperatives, and corporate interests—can easily lose sight of the ethical implications of their work. However, as entertainment law specialist Sherri Burr points out, "Because network television is an audiovisual medium that is piped free into ninety-nine percent of American homes, it is one of the most important vehicles for depicting cultural images to our population."[1] Considering the profound influence mass media like television have on cultural perceptions and attitudes, it is important for the creators of media content to grapple with ethical issues.

## Stereotypes, Prescribed Roles, and Public Perception

The U.S. population is becoming increasingly diverse. According to U.S. Census statistics from 2010, 27.6 percent of the population identifies its race as non-White.[2] Yet in network television broadcasts, major publications, and other forms of mass media and entertainment, minorities are often either absent or presented

1. Burr, Sherri. "Television and Societal Effects: An Analysis of Media Images of African-Americans in Historical Context," Journal of Gender, Race and Justice 4 (2001): 159.

2. U.S. Census Bureau, "2010 Census Data," https://web.archive.org/web/20101216004858/http://2010.census.gov/2010census/data/.

as heavily stereotyped, two-dimensional characters. Rarely are minorities depicted as complex characters with the full range of human emotions, motivations, and behaviors. Meanwhile, the stereotyping of women, gays and lesbians, and individuals with disabilities in mass media has also been a source of concern. Straightwashing, when minor groups are portrayed by a cis or heterosexual actor in media, has been an issue constantly tackled again and again. Although awareness of the issue is being brought upon, cis actors can still be seen being offered trans roles, and the same with heterosexual actors and homosexual roles.[3]

The word stereotype originated in the printing industry as a method of making identical copies, and the practice of stereotyping people is much the same: a system of identically replicating an image of an "other." The origins and current meaning of stereotypes is also reflected off of the general expectations about particular social group members.[4] As we saw previously, D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, a film that relied on racial stereotypes to portray Southern Whites as victims in the American Civil War, stereotypes—especially those disseminated through mass media—become a form of social control, shaping collective perceptions and individual identities. Stereotyping is often used to make sense of the world. For example, stereotypical expectations activate specific areas in the brain that help one identify, interpret, and remember what we see, hear, and learn about others.[5] In American mass media, the White man is still shown as the standard: the central figure of TV narratives and the dominant perspective on everything from trends, to current events, to politics. White maleness becomes an invisible category because it gives the impression of being the norm.[6]

## Minority Exclusion and Stereotypes

In the fall of 1999, when the major television networks released their schedules for the upcoming programming season, a startling trend became clear. Of the 26 newly released TV programs, none depicted an African American in a leading role, and even the secondary roles on these shows included almost no racial minorities. When minorities do appear on screen, they are narrowed down to stereotypical and derogatory depictions whether they are black or gay.[7] In response to this omission, the National Association for the Advancement

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3. Tukachinsky Forster, Rebecca (Riva); Neuville, Caitlin; Foucaut, Sixtine; Morgan, Sara; Poerschke, Angela; Torres, Andrea. "Media Users as Allies: Personality Predictors of Dominant Group Members' Support for Racial and Sexual Diversity in Entertainment Media," The Communication Review (2022): 56

4. Ellemers, Naomi. "Gender Stereotypes," Annual Review of Psychology (2018): 276

5. *ibid*, 282

6. Hearne, Joanna. "Hollywood Whiteness and Stereotypes," Film Reference, http://www.filmreference.com/encyclopedia/Independent-Film-Road-Movies/Race-and-Ethnicity-HOLLYWOOD-WHITENESS-AND-STEREOTYPES.html.

7. Tukachinsky Forster, Rebecca (Riva); Neuville, Caitlin; Foucaut, Sixtine; Morgan, Sara; Poerschke, Angela; Torres, Andrea. "Media Users as Allies:

of Colored People (NAACP) and the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), an advocacy group for Hispanic Americans, organized protests and boycotts. Pressured—and embarrassed—into action, the executives from the major networks made a fast dash to add racial minorities to their prime-time shows, not only among actors but also among producers, writers, and directors. Four of the networks—ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox—added a vice president of diversity position to help oversee the networks' progress toward creating more diverse programming.[8]

Despite these changes and greater public attention regarding diversity issues, minority underrepresentation is still an issue in all areas of mass media. In fact, the trend in recent years has been regressive. In a recent study, the NAACP reported that the number of minority actors on network television has actually decreased, from 333 during the 2002–2003 season to 307 four years later.[9] There is also the case of whitewashing, in which a character of color in the media is portrayed by a white actor. Some modern examples include Johnny Depp as a Native American in *Lone Ranger* (2013) and Scarlett Johansson as a Japanese woman in *Ghost In the Shell* (2017).[10] Racial minorities are often absent, peripheral, or take on stereotyped roles in film, television, print media, advertising, and even in video games. Additionally, according to a 2002 study by the University of California, Los Angeles, the problem is not only a visible one, but also one that extends behind the scenes. The study found that minorities are even more underrepresented in creative and decision-making positions than they are on screen.[11] This lack of representation among producers, writers, and directors often directly affects the way minorities are portrayed in film and television, leading to racial stereotypes. There is also the case of colorblindness. What originally started as a way to give minorities the same opportunities as white actors by "not seeing race," colorblindness, unfortunately, failed to acknowledge social borders and denied the existence of racism.[12]

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Personality Predictors of Dominant Group Members' Support for Racial and Sexual Diversity in Entertainment Media," The Communication Review (2022): 56

8. Baynes, Leonard M. "White Out: The Absence and Stereotyping of People of Color by the Broadcast Networks in Prime Time Entertainment Programming," Arizona Law Review 45 (2003): 293.

9. WWAY, "NAACP Not Pleased With the Diversity on Television," January 12, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20130731085203/http://www.wwaytv3.com:80/naacp_not_pleased_diversity_television/01/2009.

10. Tukachinsky Forster, Rebecca (Riva); Neuville, Caitlin; Foucaut, Sixtine; Morgan, Sara; Poerschke, Angela; Torres, Andrea. "Media Users as Allies: Personality Predictors of Dominant Group Members' Support for Racial and Sexual Diversity in Entertainment Media," The Communication Review (2022): 56

11. Media Awareness Network, "Ethnic and Visible Minorities in Entertainment Media," 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20120506072517/http://www.media-awareness.ca:80/english/issues/stereotyping/ethnics_and_minorities/minorities_entertainment.cfm.

12. Tukachinsky Forster, Rebecca (Riva); Neuville, Caitlin; Foucaut, Sixtine; Morgan, Sara; Poerschke, Angela; Torres, Andrea. "Media Users as Allies: Personality Predictors of Dominant Group Members' Support for Racial and Sexual Diversity in Entertainment Media," The Communication Review (2022): 62

Though advocacy groups like the NCLR and the NAACP have often been at the forefront of protests against minority stereotypes in the media, experts are quick to point out that the issue is one everyone should be concerned about. As media ethicist Leonard M. Baynes argues, "Since we live in a relatively segregated country...broadcast television and its images and representations are very important because television can be the common meeting ground for all Americans."[13] There are clear correlations between mass media portrayals of minority groups and public perceptions. In 1999, after hundreds of complaints by African Americans that they were unable to get taxis to pick them up, the city of New York launched a crackdown, threatening to revoke the licenses of cab drivers who refused to stop for African American customers. When interviewed by reporters, many cab drivers blamed their actions on fears they would be robbed or asked to drive to dangerous neighborhoods.[14]

Racial stereotypes are not only an issue in entertainment media; they also find their way into news reporting, which is a form of storytelling. This topic goes into the discussion of ethnic or transnational literature presenting a challenge to historical ways of thinking as well as organizing the study of the terms of nations, religions, etc. These challenges are unfortunately overlooked and dismissed in favor of preferring privileged literacy over historical constructions of identity.[15] Journalists, editors, and reporters are still predominately white. According to a 2000 survey, only 11.6 percent of newsroom staff in the United States were racial and ethnic minorities.[16] The situation has not improved dramatically during the past decade. According to a 2008 newsroom census released by the American Society of Newspaper Editors, the percentage of minority journalists working at daily newspapers was a scant 13.52 percent.[17] Because of this underrepresentation behind the scenes, the news media is led by those whose perspective is already privileged, who create the narratives about those without privilege. In the news media, racial minorities are often cast in the role of villains or troublemakers, which in turn shapes public perceptions about these groups. Media critics Robert Entman and Andrew Rojecki point out that images of African Americans on welfare, African American violence, and

13. Baynes, Leonard M. "White Out: The Absence and Stereotyping of People of Color by the Broadcast Networks in Prime Time Entertainment Programming," Arizona Law Review 45 (2003): 293.

14. Burr, Sherri. "Television and Societal Effects: An Analysis of Media Images of African-Americans in Historical Context," Journal of Gender, Race and Justice 4 (2001): 159.

15. Gents, Natascha and Kramer, Stefan. "Globalization, Cultural Identities and Media Representations," Albany: State University of New York Press (2006): 99

16. Media Awareness Network, "Ethnic and Visible Minorities in the News," 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20120510135709/http://www.media-awareness.ca:80/english/issues/stereotyping/ethnics_and_minorities/minorities_news.cfm.

17. National Association of Hispanic Journalists, "NAHJ Disturbed by Figures That Mask Decline in Newsroom Diversity," news release, 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20140326074551/http://www.nahj.org/nahjnews/articles/2008/April/ASNE.shtml.

urban crime in African American communities "facilitate the construction of menacing imagery."[18] Similarly, a study by the National Association of Hispanic Journalists found that only 1 percent of the evening news stories aired by the three major U.S. television networks cover Latinos or Latino issues and that when Latinos are featured, they are portrayed negatively 80 percent of the time.[19] Still others have criticized journalists and reporters for a tendency toward reductive presentations of complex issues involving minorities, such as the religious and racial tensions fueled by the September 11 attacks. By reducing these conflicts to "**opposing frames**"—that is, by oversimplifying them as two-sided struggles so that they can be quickly and easily understood—the news media helped create a greater sense of separation between Islamic Americans and the dominant culture after September 11, 2001.[20]

Since the late 1970s, the major professional journalism organizations in the United States—Associated Press Managing Editors (APME), Newspaper Association of America (NAA), American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE), Society for Professional Journalists (SPJ), Radio and Television News Directors Association (RTNDA), and others—have included greater ethnic diversity as a primary goal or ethic. However, progress has been slow. ASNE has set 2025 as a target date to have minority representation in newsrooms match U.S. demographics.[21]

Because the programming about, by, and for ethnic minorities in the mainstream media is disproportionately low, many turn to niche publications and channels such as BET, Univision, Telemundo, Essence, Jet, and others for sources of information and entertainment. In fact, 45 percent of ethnic-minority adults prefer these niche media sources to mainstream television, radio programs, and newspapers.[22] These sources cover stories about racial minorities that are generally ignored by the mainstream press and offer ethnic-minority perspectives on more widely covered issues in the news.[23] It is possible for people who are not minorities to use their privilege to fight for equality and spread awareness. By being exposed to and learning of the hardships that minorities and the LGBTQ community have faced, others will recognize their role in

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18. Christians, Clifford G. "Communication Ethics," in Encyclopedia of Science, Technology, and Ethics, ed. Carl Mitchum (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 1:366.

19. Media Awareness Network, "Ethnic and Visible Minorities in the News," 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20120510135709/http://www.media-awareness.ca:80/english/issues/stereotyping/ethnics_and_minorities/minorities_news.cfm.

20. Whitehouse, Ginny. "Why Diversity Is an Ethical Issue," The Handbook of Mass Media Ethics, ed. Lee Wilkins and Clifford G. Christians (New York: Routledge, 2009), 101.

21. *ibid,* 102.

22. *ibid*

23. State of the Media, Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism, "Ethnic," in The State of the News Media 2010, https://www.issuelab.org/resources/11239/11239.pdf.

supporting them and engaging in forms of activism.[24] Entertainment channels like BET (a 24-hour cable television station that offers music videos, dramas featuring predominantly Black casts, and other original programming created by African Americans) provide the diverse programming that mainstream TV networks often drop.[25] Print sources like Vista, a bilingual magazine targeting U.S. Hispanics, and Vivid, the most widely circulated African American periodical, appeal to ethnic minority groups because they are controlled and created by individuals within these groups. Though some criticize ethnic niche media, claiming that they erode common ground or, in some instances, perpetuate stereotypes, the popularity of these media has only grown in recent years and will likely continue in the absence of more diverse perspectives in mainstream media sources.[26],[27]

## Femininity in Mass Media

In the ABC sitcom *The Donna Reed Show* (1958–1966), actress Donna Reed plays a stay-at-home mother who fills her days with housework, cooking for her husband and children, decorating, and participating in community organizations, all while wearing pearls, heels, and stylish dresses. Such a traditional portrayal of femininity no doubt sounds dated to modern audiences, but stereotyped gender roles continue to thrive in the mass media. Women are still often represented as subordinate to their male counterparts—emotional, non-competitive, domestic, and sweet-natured. These expectations and representations can impact the career opportunities that both men and women can receive. For example, mothers are approximately two times less likely to be recommended for a job than childless women, while men don't receive any changes in their likability.[28] In contrast to these types, other women are represented as unattractively masculine, crazy, or cruel. In TV dramas and sitcoms, women continue to fill traditional roles such as mothers, nurses, secretaries, and housewives. By contrast, men in film and television are less likely to be shown in the home, and male

24. Tukachinsky Forster, Rebecca (Riva); Neuville, Caitlin; Foucaut, Sixtine; Morgan, Sara; Poerschke, Angela; Torres, Andrea. "Media Users as Allies: Personality Predictors of Dominant Group Members' Support for Racial and Sexual Diversity in Entertainment Media," The Communication Review (2022): 66

25. Zellars, Rachel. "Black Entertainment Television (BET)," in Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History, 2nd ed., ed. Colin A. Palmer (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2006.) 1:259.

26. Tran, Can. "TV Network Reviews: Black Entertainment Television (BET)," Helium, https://web.archive.org/web/20130717033153/http://www.helium.com:80/items/884989-tv-network-reviews-black-entertainment-television-bet.

27. Flint, Joe. "No Black-and-White Answer for the Lack of Diversity on Television," Company Town (blog), Los Angeles Times, June 11, 2010, http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/entertainmentnewsbuzz/2010/06/diversity-television.html.

28. Ellemers, Naomi. "Gender Stereotypes," Annual Review of Psychology (2018): 281

characters are generally characterized by dominance, aggression, action, physical strength, and ambition.[29] In the mainstream news media, men are predominantly featured as authorities on specialized issues like business, politics, and economics, while women are more likely to report on stories about natural disasters or domestic violence—coverage that does not require expertise.[30] These "characteristics" of men and women can be seen as a kernel of truth underlying gender stereotypes. A kernel of truth is the core accuracy and main point of a claim or narrative that contains fictitious elements, such as not accounting for the far-reaching inferences that are made about more essential and factual differences between men and women.[31]

Not only is the white male perspective still presented as the standard, authoritative one, but also the media itself often comes to embody the male gaze. Media commentator Nancy Hass notes that "shows that don't focus on men have to feature the sort of women that guys might watch."[32] Men often claim that their ideal romantic partner is someone who is as intelligent as or more intelligent than they are despite appearing less attracted to a woman who outsmarts them. Despite claiming to value assertive and independent women, it is assumed that men will be more attracted to women with accommodating and agreeable behaviors.[33] Feminist critics have long been concerned by the way women in film, television, and print media are defined by their sexuality. Few female role models exist in the media who are valued primarily for qualities like intelligence or leadership. Inundated by images that conform to unrealistic beauty standards, women come to believe at an early age that their value depends on their physical attractiveness. According to one Newsweek article, eating disorders in girls are now routinely being diagnosed at younger ages, sometimes as early as eight or nine. The models who appear in magazines and print advertising are unrealistically skinny (23 percent thinner than the average woman), and their photographs are further enhanced to hide flaws and blemishes. Meanwhile, the majority of women appearing on television are under the age of 30, and many older actresses, facing the pressure to embody the youthful ideal, undergo surgical enhancements to appear younger.[34] One recent example is TV news host Greta Van Susteren, a respected legal analyst who moved from CNN to Fox in 2002. At the debut of her show, *On the Record*, Van Susteren, sitting behind a table that allowed viewers to see her

29. Chandler, Daniel. "Television and Gender Roles" https://homepages.dsu.edu/huenersd/engl101/final exam/chandler.htm.

30. Media Awareness Network, "Media Coverage of Women and Women's Issues," https://web.archive.org/web/20120509210400/http://www.media-awareness.ca:80/english/issues/stereotyping/women_and_girls/women_working.cfm.

31. Ellemers, Naomi. "Gender Stereotypes," Annual Review of Psychology (2018): 277

32. Media Awareness Network, "The Economics of Gender Stereotyping," https://web.archive.org/web/20120426152609/http://www.media-awareness.ca:80/english/issues/stereotyping/women_and_girls/women_economics.cfm.

33. Ellemers, Naomi. "Gender Stereotypes," Annual Review of Psychology (2018): 281

34. Derenne, Jennifer L. and Eugene V. Beresin, "Body Image, Media, and Eating Disorders," Academic Psychiatry 30 (2006), https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/16728774/.

short skirt, had undergone not only a hair and wardrobe makeover, but also surgical enhancement to make her appear younger and more attractive.[35]

In addition to the prevalence of gender stereotypes, the ratio of men to women in the mass media, in and behind the scenes, is also disproportionate. Surprisingly, though women slightly outnumber men in the general population, over two-thirds of TV sitcoms feature men in the starring role.[36] Among writers, producers, directors, and editors, the number of women lags far behind. In Hollywood, for instance, only 17 percent of behind-the-scenes creative talent is represented by women. Communications researcher Martha Lauzen argues that "when women have more powerful roles in the making of a movie or TV show, we know that we also get more powerful female characters on-screen, women who are more real and more multi-dimensional."[37] The best way to learn from these stereotypes and move on for better representation is for people to acknowledge and re-evaluate the nature of different social roles, educate others on the description and controversies of stereotypes, and support everyone equally and not treat anyone with a disadvantage.[38]

## Sexual Content in Public Communication

Creators of all forms of media know that sex—named, innuendoed, or overtly displayed—is a surefire way to grab an audience's attention. "Sex sells" is an advertising cliché; the list of products that advertisers have linked to erotic imagery or innuendo, from cosmetics and cars to vacation packages and beer, is nearly inexhaustible. Most often, sexualized advertising content is served up in the form of the female body, in part or in whole, featured in provocative or suggestive poses beside a product that may have nothing to do with sexuality. However, by linking these two things, advertisers are marketing desire itself.

35. Media Awareness Network, "Media Coverage of Women and Women's Issues," https://web.archive.org/web/20120509210400/http://www.media-awareness.ca:80/english/issues/stereotyping/women_and_girls/women_working.cfm.

36. Media Awareness Network, "Women Working in the Media," https://web.archive.org/web/20120509210400/http://www.media-awareness.ca:80/english/issues/stereotyping/women_and_girls/women_working.cfm.

37. *ibid*

38. Ellemers, Naomi. "Gender Stereotypes," Annual Review of Psychology (2018): 292

Figure 1: 1916 Ladies' Home Journal version of the famous seduction-based ad by Helen Lansdowne Resor at J. Walter Thompson Agency. It shows a man hugging a woman from behind. The headline at the top reads: "A-SKIN-YOU-LOVE-TO-TOUCH."

Sex is used to sell not just consumer goods; it sells media, too. Music videos on MTV and VH1, which promote artists and their music, capture audience attention with highly suggestive dance moves, often performed by scantily clad women. Movie trailers may flash brief images of nudity or passionate kissing to suggest more to come in the movie. Video games feature female characters like Lara Croft of *Tomb Raider*, whose tightly fitted clothes reveal all the curves of her Barbie-doll figure. An experimental study reported that teens who were persuaded into playing video games with highly sexualized female characters showed diminished

self-efficiency.[39] And partially nude models grace the cover of men's and women's magazines like *Maxim*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Vogue* where cover lines promise titillating tips, gossip, and advice on bedroom behavior.[40] Most male models are portrayed with more imagery of the face and upper body while most female models have full body images, facilitating the tendency to evaluate a woman based on her dress style and body shape.[41]

In the 1920s and 1930s, filmmakers attracted audiences to the silver screen with the promise of what was then considered scandalous content. Prior to the 1934 Hays Code, which placed restrictions on "indecent" content in movies, films featured erotic dances, male and female nudity, references to homosexuality, and sexual violence. D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916) includes scenes with topless actresses, as does *Ben Hur* (1925). In Warner Bros.' *Female* (1933), the leading lady, the head of a major car company, spends her evenings in sexual exploits with her male employees, a storyline that would never have passed the Hays Code a year later.[42] *Trouble in Paradise*, a 1932 romantic comedy, was withdrawn from circulation after the institution of the Hays Code because of its frank discussion of sexuality. Similarly, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1931), which featured a prostitute as one of the main characters, was also banned under the code.[43]

In the 1960s, when the sexual revolution led to increasingly permissive attitudes toward sexuality in American culture, the Hays Code was replaced with the MPAA rating system. The rating system, designed to warn parents about potentially objectionable material in films, allowed filmmakers to include sexually explicit content without fear of public protest. Since the replacement of the Hays Code, sexual content has been featured in movies with much greater frequency.

The problem, according to many media critics, is not that sex now appears more often but that it is almost always portrayed unrealistically in American mass media.[44] This can be harmful, they say, because the mass media are important **socialization agents**–that is, ways that people learn about the norms, expectations, and values of their society.[45] Sex, as many films, TV shows, music videos, and song lyrics present it, is frequent and casual. Rarely do these media point out the potential emotional and physical consequences of sexual

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39. Ellemers, Naomi. "Gender Stereotypes," Annual Review of Psychology (2018): 284

40. Reichert, Tom and Jacqueline Lambiase, "Peddling Desire: Sex and the Marketing of Media and Consumer Goods," Sex in Consumer Culture: The Erotic Content of Media and Marketing, ed. Tom Reichert and Jacqueline Lambiase (New York: Routledge, 2005), 3.

41. Ellemers, Naomi. "Gender Stereotypes," Annual Review of Psychology (2018): 284

42. Morris, Gary. "Public Enemy: Warner Brothers in the Pre-Code Era," Bright Lights Film Journal, September 1996, http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/17/04b_warner.php.

43. Signorelli, Priscilla. "30 Essential Films For An Introduction To Pre-Code Hollywood." *Taste of Cinema – Movie Reviews and Classic Movie Lists* (blog), November 29, 2015. https://www.tasteofcinema.com/2015/30-essential-films-for-an-introduction-to-pre-code-hollywood/.

44. Galician, Mary Lou. Sex, Love & Romance in the Mass Media (New York: Routledge, 2004), 5

45. *ibid,* 82.

behavior. According to one study, portrayals of sex that include possible risks like sexually transmitted diseases or pregnancy only occur in 15 percent of the sexually explicit material on TV.[46] Additionally, actors and models depicted in sexual relationships in the media are thinner, younger, and more attractive than the average adult. This creates unrealistic expectations about the necessary ingredients for a satisfying sexual relationship.

Social psychologists are particularly concerned with the negative effects these unrealistic portrayals have on women, as women's bodies are the primary means of introducing sexual content into media targeted at both men and women. Media activist Jean Kilbourne points out that "women's bodies are often dismembered into legs, breasts or thighs, reinforcing the message that women are objects rather than whole human beings." *Adbusters*, a magazine that critiques mass media, particularly advertising, points out the sexual objectification of women's bodies in a number of its spoof advertisements, such as the one in the figure below, bringing home the message that advertising often sends unrealistic and harmful messages about women's bodies and sexuality. Additionally, many researchers note that in women's magazines, advertising, and music videos, women are often implicitly—and sometimes explicitly—given the message that a primary concern should be attracting and sexually satisfying men.[47] Furthermore, the recent increase in entertainment featuring sexual violence may, according to some studies, negatively affect the way young men behave toward women.[48]

These negative behaviors can also lead to the topic of rape culture. Though young men, especially gay men, can be victims of sexual harassment, women tend to get the most spotlight when discussing rape culture and have fought hard to make their voices heard, and rape education and activism has recently increased in the early 2020s, with students learning consent training and the slogans "consent is sexy" and "sex without consent is rape" being heavily pushed and popularized especially on social media to fill the absence of empirical research discussing the concept of consent and rape convention.[49]

46. Parents Television Council, "Facts and TV Statistics," https://web.archive.org/web/20160117111846/http://www.parentstv.org/PTC/facts/mediafacts.asp.

47. *ibid*

48. Gunter, Barrie. Media Sex: What Are the Issues? (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), 8.

49. Dale, Catherine; Overell, Rosemary. "Orienting Feminism: Media, Activism, and Cultural Representation," Cham: Springer International Publishing (2018): 181

Figure 2: A white silhouette of a woman's body on a black background. The head is labeled: "I guess it doesn't matter what's up here." There is a hand-drawn heart over the approximate location of the heart, which reads "or in here". An arrow points down to the vulva and reads "as long as there's no hair here." Sexual objectification: Women's bodies are often headless or dismembered into legs, breasts, or thighs in media portrayals.

Young women and men are especially vulnerable to the effects of media portrayals of sexuality. Psychologists have long noted that teens and children get much of their information and many of their opinions about sex through TV, film, and online media. In fact, two-thirds of adolescents turn to the media first when they want

to learn about sexuality.[50] The media may help shape teenage and adolescent attitudes toward sex, but they can also lead young people to engage in sexual activity before they are prepared to handle the consequences. According to one study, kids with high exposure to sex on television were almost twice as likely to initiate sexual activity compared to kids without exposure.[51]

Cultural critics have noted that sexually explicit themes in mass media are generally more widely accepted in European nations than they are in the United States. However, the increased concern and debates over censorship of sexual content in the United States may in fact be linked to the way sex is portrayed in American media rather than to the presence of the sexual content in and of itself. Unrealistic portrayals that fail to take into account the actual complexity of sexual relationships seem to be a primary concern. As Jean Kilbourne has argued, sex in the American media "has far more to do with trivializing sex than with promoting it. We are offered a pseudo-sexuality that makes it far more difficult to discover our own unique and authentic sexuality."[52] However, despite these criticisms, it is likely that unrealistic portrayals of sexual content will continue to be the norm in mass media unless the general public stops consuming these images.

### Key Takeaways

- In American mass media, where the White male perspective is still presented as the standard, stereotypes of those who differ—women, ethnic minorities, and gays and lesbians—are an issue of ethical concern.
- Racial minorities are often absent, peripheral, or stereotyped in film, television, print media, advertising, and video games.
- Racial stereotypes occur in news reporting, where they influence public perceptions.
- Underrepresentation of women and racial and ethnic minorities is also a problem in the hiring of creative talent behind the scenes.

50. Media Awareness Network, "Sex and Relationships in the Media," Media Awareness Network, https://web.archive.org/web/20120521174258/http://www.media-awareness.ca:80/english/issues/stereotyping/women_and_girls/women_sex.cfm.

51. Collins, Rebecca L. and others, "Watching Sex on Television Predicts Adolescent Initiation of Sexual Behavior," Pediatrics 114, no. 3 (2004), https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/15342887/

52. Media Awareness Network, "Sex and Relationships in the Media," Media Awareness Network, https://web.archive.org/web/20120521174258/http://www.media-awareness.ca:80/english/issues/stereotyping/women_and_girls/women_sex.cfm.

- The media still often subordinate women to traditional roles, where they serve as support for their male counterparts.
- The objectification of women in various visual media has particularly led to concerns about body image, unrealistic social expectations, and negative influences on children and adolescent girls.
- "Sex sells" consumer products and media such as movies and music videos.
- The issue of sexual content in the media has become a source of concern to media critics because of the frequency with which it occurs and also because of the unrealistic way it is portrayed.

## Exercises

Choose a television show or movie you are familiar with and consider the characters in terms of racial and gender diversity. Then answer the following short-answer questions. Each response should be one to two paragraphs.

1. Does the show or movie you've chosen reflect racial and gender diversity? Why or why not? Explain why this kind of diversity is important in media.
2. Are there any racial or gender stereotypes present in the show or movie you've chosen? If so, identify them and describe how they are stereotypical. If not, describe what elements would prevent the portrayal of female or ethnic minority characters from being stereotypical.
3. Does the show or movie you've selected feature any sexual content? If so, do you think that the content is gratuitous or unrealistic, or does it serve the story? Explain your answer. Then explain why the use of sexual content in media is a concern for many media critics.
4. Watch segments of the evening news on three major television networks. Based on the information presented here about representations of women and racial minorities, what do you observe? Do your observations corroborate claims of stereotyping and underrepresentation? Do you notice important differences among the three networks regarding these issues?
5. Create a mock advertisement that breaks with common racial stereotypes, gender myths, or

media representations of sexuality.

## Media Attributions

- A-SKIN-YOU-LOVE-TO-TOUCH © By A.J.Co.(Life time: na (--work for hire for Andrew Jergens Co, Cincinnati) - Original publication: 1916 Ladies' Home Journal vol 33#9Immediate source: https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/736x/fe/d0/39/fed039a2362769617cfcd50f648aa22e.jpghttps://i1.wp.com/ilymag.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/a81ffb1a04098534ef955ba6fff4c31a.jpg?fit=10001382&ssl=1 images, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=44103795 is licensed under a Public Domain license
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# 17.2 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF THE ONLINE WORLD

**Learning Objectives**

- Explain concerns related to surveillance and personal privacy rights introduced by the Internet.
- Differentiate between copyright infringement and fair use.
- Identify plagiarism and copyright concerns introduced by the Internet.

Online media has developed rapidly, with technology advancing at a rate that often surpasses the ability of legislation and policy to keep up with it. As a result, issues like individuals' rights to privacy, copyright protections, and fair use restrictions have become the subject of numerous court cases and public debates as lawmakers, judges, and civil liberties organizations struggle to define the limits of technology and the access it provides to previously restricted information. In the following section, you will look at some of the most prominent issues in today's online media environment. You should reflect on the ethical issues in mass media raised in the two preceding sections and how they are manifested in the areas of personal privacy, copyright law, and plagiarism.

## Privacy and Surveillance

Concerns about online privacy issues in recent years have led some people to wonder whether the collection of personal information on websites has begun to infringe on individuals' constitutional rights. While the U.S. Constitution does not explicitly guarantee a general right to privacy, the Bill of Rights establishes privacy of beliefs, privacy of the home, and privacy of persons and possessions from unreasonable searches. Additionally,

in a number of court cases, the "right to liberty" clause has also been read as a guarantee of personal privacy.[1] What do these constitutional rights mean when it comes to storing a person's credit card data online, or tracking his or her Internet searches, or using cookies to collect information about his or her purchasing habits? Because online media is developing so rapidly, many of these issues have not been settled by federal legislation and remain the source of numerous courtroom battles. Consider the 2010 case in which the online services company Yahoo! entered into a legal struggle with government officials who wanted to search the e-mail account of a Yahoo! user for incriminating evidence. While Yahoo! claimed the government would need a search warrant to access a user's e-mail, the government investigators claimed the Fourth Amendment does not apply in the case of an e-mail account.[2]

In defense of information collection and surveillance, many websites argue that, by using their services, individuals are agreeing to make their personal information available. However, many people don't realize the extent of surveillance capabilities or know how to protect certain personal information while using online tools. The more people rely on the Internet for shopping, communication, social networking, and media consumption, the more their personal data is stored online. Every time a person subscribes to a magazine, joins an organization, donates money to charity, gives to a political cause, or searches the pages of a government agency, that information is stored in a computer.[3] For example, **cookies**, which are text files that web page servers embed in users' hard drives, help search engines like Google and Yahoo! track their customers' search histories, buying habits, and browsing patterns. Cookies stored by Google last for 30 years.[4] These search engine cookies are used to customize users' searches and to deliver customized third-party ads based on a particular user's demographics and behavior. However, privacy advocates claim this practice fosters predatory advertising.[5] Additionally, considering that search engines receive multiple requests per day for specific information on their users (requests that are often tied to criminal investigations and lawsuits), there is a

1. Linder, Doug. "The Right of Privacy," Exploring Constitutional Law, 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20100305152912/http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/conlaw/rightofprivacy.html.
2. Electronic Frontier Foundation, "EFF Backs Yahoo! to Protect User from Warrantless Email Search," news release, April 14, 2010, http://www.eff.org/press/archives/2010/04/13.
3. Privacy Rights Clearinghouse, "Privacy Today: A Review of Current Issues," March 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20160617232717/https://www.privacyrights.org/ar/Privacy-IssuesList.htm.
4. Godoy, Maria. "Google Records Subpoena Raises Privacy Fears," NPR, January 20, 2006, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5165854.
5. Spring, Tom. "Good-Bye to Privacy?" PC World, May 23, 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20120423195608/http://www.pcworld.com:80/article/196787/goodbye_to_privacy.html.

growing concern that unfair or even erroneous profiling may result.[6] Much of this information is stored without users' knowledge or informed consent—although agreements for most software inform users when their data is being collected, few people have the patience or time to read and understand the dense legalistic language of these agreements. Even when users invest the time and effort to understand the agreements, they are left with the difficult choice of either agreeing to have their data recorded or going without useful software.

Internet users concerned about their privacy may also be unaware of another growing trend: the combination of online data with offline information to build profiles of web surfers. Data providers like BlueKai, Datalogic, and Nielsen are now able to pool offline data and demographics to create "digital dossiers" (detailed digital records of a particular subject or market) for online advertisers who want to reach a target market.[7] This combination of online and offline information provides a nearly complete picture of someone's life. If advertisers are looking for a 56-year-old retired female educator who is divorced, owns a home and a dog, suffers from arthritis, and plays tennis at the local fitness club, they can now find her. While advertisers have been careful to point out that people are identified by demographic subgroup but never by name, many organizations that advocate for privacy, such as the Electronic Frontier Foundation, believe that protections and greater transparency should be enforced.[8]

Users also supply a wide range of information about themselves through online social networks that are connected with their names, contact information, and photographs. Creditors now look at individuals' social networks to determine whether they would be good credit customers, and banks may access social network information to make loan decisions.[9] If users aren't careful about their privacy settings on MySpace, Twitter, or Facebook, photographs and other private information may be easily accessible to anyone performing a Google search. Of even greater concern is the growing trend to publicize information that was previously private as the networking sites evolve and change their interfaces.

Surveillance can range from the monitoring of online activity by employers and other institutions that want to make sure users are following guidelines, to high-level government investigations of terrorist activity. The USA PATRIOT Act, passed just 6 weeks after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, expanded the federal government's rights to access citizens' personal information. Under the Patriot Act, authorities have access to personal records held by Internet service providers and other third parties, and government officials

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6. Godoy, Maria. "Google Records Subpoena Raises Privacy Fears," NPR, January 20, 2006, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5165854.

7. Spring, Tom. "Good-Bye to Privacy?" PC World, May 23, 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20120423195608/http://www.pcworld.com:80/article/196787/goodbye_to_privacy.html.

8. *ibid*

9. Mies, Ginny. "Skeptical Shopper: Can Your Online Life Ruin Your Credit?" PC World, March 23, 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20120705060057/http://www.pcworld.com:80/article/192207/skeptical_shopper_can_your_online_life_ruin_your_credit.html.

can tap in to an individual's e-mail communications and web searches if he or she is suspected of terrorist activity or of having connections to terrorist activity.[10],[11] One concern among civil liberties organizations is that the Patriot Act might become a back door for the government to conduct undisclosed surveillance that doesn't necessarily involve the threat of terrorism. For instance, under the Patriot Act the government can wiretap Internet communications even if the primary purpose is a criminal investigation, as long as intelligence gathering is a significant purpose of the investigation.[12]

# Fair Use and Plagiarism

Now that a large amount of research can easily be conducted online, and content can be copied and pasted from one platform to another with no more than the click of a button, concerns about plagiarism and copyright infringement are more relevant than ever. The concepts of copyright infringement and plagiarism can easily be confused with each other. The following provides an overview of copyright, its issues and limitations, and its distinction from plagiarism.

## Copyright Infringement

**Copyright** is a form of protection provided by U.S. law, under which the creator of an original artistic or intellectual work is automatically granted certain rights, including the right to distribute, copy, and modify the work.[13] If someone rents a movie from Netflix, for example, and watches it with his friends, he hasn't violated any copyright laws because Netflix has paid for a license to loan the movie to its customers. However, if the same person rents a movie and burns himself a copy to watch later, he has violated copyright law because he has not paid for nor obtained the film creators' permission to copy the movie. Copyright law applies to most books, songs, movies, art, essays, and other pieces of creative work. However, after a certain length of time (70 to 120 years depending on the publication circumstances), creative and intellectual works enter the public domain; that is, they are free to be used and copied without permission.

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10. American Civil Liberties Union, "Surveillance Under the USA PATRIOT Act," April 3, 2003, https://www.aclu.org/documents/surveillance-under-usapatriot-act.

11. Olsen, Stephanie. "Patriot Act Draws Privacy Concerns," CNET, October 26, 2001, https://web.archive.org/web/20111006003044/http://news.cnet.com/2100-1023-275026.html.

12. Harvard Law School, Berkman Center for Internet and Society, "The USA Patriot Act, Foreign Intelligence Surveillance, and Cyberspace Privacy," Harvard Law School, http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/privacy/module5.html.

13. U.S. Copyright Office, "Copyright Basics," http://www.copyright.gov/.

Some works are in the public domain because the creator has chosen to make them available to anyone without requiring permission. However, most works are in the public domain because their copyright has expired; in the United States, anything published before 1923 is automatically in the public domain. Additionally, there have been changes to U.S. copyright law over the years that caused some works to enter the public domain earlier. Before 1964, for instance, any published work had to have its copyright renewed during the 28th year after its publication. If no renewal was filed, the copyright was lost.[14]

While it is illegal to violate the rights granted by copyright law, the copyright holder's rights are not unlimited. One of the significant limitations is the policy of "fair use," under which the public is entitled to freely use copyrighted information for purposes such as criticism, commentary, news reporting, teaching, scholarship, research, or parody.[15] If a critic were writing a book review for a magazine, for instance, according to fair use, she would be allowed to summarize and quote from the book she wanted to review, whether or not the author of the book agreed to this use. According to the U.S. government, there are four issues to consider when determining fair use:

1. The purpose and character of the use, including whether such use is of commercial nature or is for nonprofit educational purposes
2. The nature of the copyrighted work
3. The amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole
4. The effect of the use on the potential market for, or value of, the copyrighted work[16]

The distinction between what is considered fair and what constitutes copyright infringement is not always clearly defined. For one thing, there are no guidelines that specify a number of words, lines, or notes that can be taken without permission. The table below provides some examples of distinctions between fair use and copyright infringement.

14. Press, Nolo. "Chapter 8: The Public Domain," Stanford University Libraries and Academic Information Resources, 2007, http://fairuse.stanford.edu/Copyright_and_Fair_Use_Overview/chapter8/index.html.

15. U.S. Copyright Office, "Fair Use," May 2009, http://www.copyright.gov/fls/fl102.html.

16. *ibid*

| Fair Use | Not Fair Use |
|---|---|
| Wright v. Warner Books Inc. (1991): In a biography of Richard Wright the biographer quoted from six of Wright's unpublished letters and 10 unpublished journal entries.<br><br>CONSIDERATIONS: The copied letters amounted to less than 1 percent of Wright's total letter material. Additionally, the biographer's purpose in copying the documents was informational. | Castle Rock Entertainment Inc. v. Carol Publication Group (1998): Carol Publication published a book of trivia questions about the TV series Seinfeld. The book included direct quotes from the show and based its questions on characters and events in the series.<br><br>CONSIDERATIONS: The book infringed on the ability of Castle Rock (the copyright holder) to make its own trivia books. |
| **Perfect 10 Inc. v. Amazon.com Inc. (2007):** A Google search engine displayed thumbnail-sized photos of nude models from a subscription-only website.<br><br>CONSIDERATIONS: The search engine's use of the photos transformed them into "pointers," directing users to the photos' original source. The transformative use was more important than any factors that would allow Google to make money from displaying the images. | **Los Angeles News Service v. KCAL-TV Channel 9 (1997):** A TV news station used a 30-second segment of a four-minute video that depicted the beating of a Los Angeles man. The video was copyrighted by the Los Angeles News Service.<br><br>CONSIDERATIONS: The segment used by the news station was a significant portion of the total video. Additionally, the use was for commercial reasons and infringed on the Los Angeles News Service's ability to market the video. |

## Google Books: Turning Copyright Law on Its Head?

In 2002, Google began scanning millions of books in academic libraries to make them available online in digital format. Of the more than 12 million books Google has digitized since then—and made searchable through Google Book Search—2 million are in the public domain. Those 2 million books are available in "full view" and free for users to download, while books still under copyright are available as limited previews, where users can access about 20 percent of the texts. According to Google, the project will pave the way for greater democratization of knowledge, making texts available to readers who formerly wouldn't have had access to them. However, many authors, publishers, and legal authorities claim the project represents a massive copyright violation. In 2005, the Authors Guild and the Association of American Publishers filed class-action lawsuits against Google.[17]

William Cavanaugh, a lawyer with the U.S. Department of Justice, claims that the Google Books Settlement, an agreement partially reached in 2008, "turns copyright law on its head." According to the settlement agreement, in exchange for $125 million, part of which would go to authors and publishers, Google was released from liability for copying the books and was granted the right to charge money for individual and institutional subscriptions to its Google Books service (which gives subscribers full access to the copied

17. Newitz, Annalee. "5 Ways the Google Books Settlement Will Change the Future of Reading," io9 (blog).April 2, 2010, http://io9.com/5501426/5-ways-the-google-book-settlement-will-change-the-future-of-reading.

books—even those under copyright). Authors have the choice to opt out of the agreement, asking to have their books removed from Google's servers. However, more than 30,000 publishers have already made deals with Google, which override the authors' rights to opt out.[18]

## Plagiarism

Sometimes plagiarism becomes confused with copyright violation. However, the two words are not synonymous; while there can be some overlap between them, not every instance of plagiarism involves copyright violation, and not every instance of copyright violation is an act of plagiarism. For one thing, while copyright violation can involve a wide range of acts, **plagiarism** is defined more narrowly as using someone else's information, writing, or speech without properly documenting or citing the source. In other words, plagiarism involves representing another person's work as one's own.

As the U.S. Copyright Office points out, it is possible to cite a copyrighted source of information without obtaining permission to reproduce that information.[19] In such a case, the user has violated copyright law even though she has not plagiarized the material. Similarly, a student writing a paper could copy sections of a document that is in the public domain without properly citing his sources, in which case he would not have broken any copyright laws. However, representing the information as his own work would be an instance of plagiarism.

Plagiarism, a perennially serious problem at academic institutions, has recently become even more prevalent. The ease of copying and pasting online content into a word-processing document can make it highly tempting for students to plagiarize material for research projects and critical papers. Additionally, a number of online "paper mills" contain archives where students can download papers for free or, in some cases, purchase them.[20] In 2003, The New York Times surveyed students at 23 college campuses and reported that 38 percent of students admitted to having committed copy-and-paste plagiarism within the previous year.[21]

To combat the rise in plagiarism, many schools and universities now subscribe to services that allow instructors to check students' work for plagiarized material. Plagiarism.org, for instance, offers an analytics tool that compares student writing against a database that includes work from online paper mills, academic

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18. Oder, Norman. "Google Settlement Fairness Hearing, Part Two: DOJ Expresses Opposition; Parties Mount Vigorous Defense," Library Journal, February 18, 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20110501054922/http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6719808.html.

19. U.S. Copyright Office, "Fair Use," May 2009, http://www.copyright.gov/fls/fl102.html.

20. Denhart, Andy. "The Web's Plagiarism Police," Salon, June 14, 1999, http://www.salon.com/technology/feature/1999/06/14/plagiarism.

21. De Leon, Michelle. "Internet Plagiarism on the Rise in Colleges," Lehigh University Brown and White, November 12, 2007, https://web.archive.org/web/20100916184052/http://media.www.thebrownandwhite.com/media/storage/paper1233/news/2007/11/12/News/Internet.Plagiarism.On.The.Rise.In.Colleges-3094622.shtml.

databases, documents available through major search engines, and other student papers submitted to Plagiarism.org.[22] According to many researchers, part of the issue may be that students don't understand what constitutes plagiarism. Some students, for instance, claim they think information available online is in the public domain.[23] The following list offers suggestions for ways to avoid plagiarism in your own work.

- Don't procrastinate.
- Avoid taking shortcuts.
- Take thorough notes and keep accurate records.
- Rephrase ideas in your own words.
- Provide citations or attributions for all sources.
- Ask your instructor when in doubt.[24]

While plagiarism is an issue of concern in academia, it occurs in print media as well. Writers, whether through carelessness or laziness, may lift content from existing materials without properly citing or reinterpreting them. In an academic setting, plagiarism may lead to consequences as severe as failure or even expulsion from an institution. However, outside of academia, the consequences may be even more damaging. Writers have lost publishing contracts, permanently damaged their reputations, and even ruined their careers over instances of plagiarism. For example, the late George Harrison of the Beatles was successfully sued by Ronald Mack for copyright infringement of his song "He's So Fine."[25] It was determined by the court that Harrison unconsciously plagiarized the musical essence of Mack's song for his composition "My Sweet Lord."

You should now have an understanding of the key issues in media ethics, particularly as they relate to privacy rights, plagiarism, and copyright laws. Please be sure you understand the key concepts listed below.

## Key Takeaways

22. Denhart, Andy. "The Web's Plagiarism Police," Salon, June 14, 1999, http://www.salon.com/technology/feature/1999/06/14/plagiarism.

23. Auer, Nicole J. and Ellen M. Krupar, "Mouse Click Plagiarism: The Role of Technology in Plagiarism and the Librarian's Role in Combating It," Library Trends, Winter 2001, https://web.archive.org/web/20110514193550/http://findarticles.com:80/p/articles/mi_m1387/is_3_49/ai_75278304/.

24. Harvard University. "How to Avoid Plagiarism." Accessed April 1, 2024. https://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/how-avoid-plagiarism.

25. Bright Tunes Music v. Harrisongs Music, 420 F. Supp. 177 (S.D.N.Y. 1976).

- Concerns about the public's right to privacy have increased in recent years as more personal information has become available online.
    - Every time someone makes a purchase, performs a web search, accesses a web page, downloads files, sends an e-mail, or engages in social networking, that information is stored in a computer and may be accessed by third parties under certain conditions.
    - The USA PATRIOT Act passed after the September 11, 2001, attacks, has broadened the federal government's rights to access individuals' personal records.
    - Civil liberties organizations are concerned about clauses of the Patriot Act, such as the one that stipulates that the government can wiretap Internet communications as long as intelligence gathering is a significant purpose of the investigation.
- Rules that distinguish copyright violation from fair use are not always entirely clear and have been the subject of debate now that a greater amount of copyrighted work is easily accessible via the Internet.
    - Works enter the public domain once their copyright has expired, at which point they can be altered, copied, and distributed freely.
    - Because of numerous changes in U.S. copyright laws, some works have entered the public domain earlier than others.
    - According to the U.S. government, when distinguishing between fair use and copyright infringement, four things must be considered: whether or not the use is for profit, the nature of the copyrighted work, the percentage of the copyrighted material being used, and the effect of that use on the value of the copyrighted work.
- Plagiarism is also a growing concern because of the ease of copying and pasting texts from online sources into computer documents. It is important to keep in mind that plagiarism and copyright infringement are different issues: Plagiarism involves not giving credit to a work's creator, whereas copyright deals with the legality of using a created work.

## Exercises

1. What might be some implications of the Google Books settlement? Why do you think William Cavanaugh claimed that it "turns copyright law on its head"?
2. You will now examine several cases in detail to further explore your understanding of the concepts and key ideas covered in this chapter. Respond to the questions asked and provide evidence or examples to defend and support your answer. Each response should be one or two paragraphs.

**Case 1.** Research the USA PATRIOT Act. You can read what the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has to say about the act here: A Call to Reconsider the Patriot Act. You can read what the federal government has to say about the act here: The USA PATRIOT Act: Preserving Life and Liberty

- What are its major stipulations?
- What are some major concerns of civil liberties advocates?
- Do you agree with the ACLU that "the Patriot Act eroded our most basic right—the freedom from unwarranted government intrusion into our private lives?" Or do you agree with the acronym the federal government created to explain the act: Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism? Explain your reasons.

**Case 2.** After the publication of author J. K. Rowling's popular Harry Potter novels, one fan created an elaborate website for Harry Potter enthusiasts. The website includes an encyclopedia of information about the books; indexed lists of people, places, and things; fan art; discussion forums; essays; timelines; and other features. Much of the content of the website's encyclopedia entries comes directly from the books. Use of the website is free and unrestricted, and while the site includes some ads, the income they generate only goes to offset the site's operating costs.

- Decide whether you believe the website represents an instance of fair use or whether the action was a copyright violation. Defend your response.

# 17.3 TIKTOK'S ENSHITTIFICATION

Editor's Note: This piece was originally a blog post written by Cory Doctorow, a science fiction author, activist, and journalist. In this essay, he explains the impact of capitalism on platforms and why this inevitably leads to what he terms enshittification, which has been embraced by many media and data scholars.

**Learning Objectives**

- Understand the concept of "enshittification" as a lifecycle that platforms undergo, starting with user-centric value and ending in a focus on shareholder profits at the expense of user experience.
- Learn how platforms like TikTok, Amazon, and Twitter manipulate algorithms and user engagement to maximize profits, often leading to a decline in the quality of the user experience.
- Explore the importance of end-to-end principles and technological self-determination, examining how these concepts could mitigate the negative impacts of platform enshittification.

Here is how platforms die: first, they are good to their users; then, they abuse their users to make things better for their business customers; finally, they abuse those business customers to claw back all the value for themselves. Then, they die.

I call this enshittification, and it is a seemingly inevitable consequence arising from the ease of changing how a platform allocates value and the nature of a "two-sided market," where a platform sits between buyers and sellers, holding each hostage to the other and raking off an ever-larger share of the value that passes between them.

When a platform starts, it needs users, so it makes itself valuable to users. Think of Amazon: for many years, it operated at a loss, using its access to the capital markets to subsidize everything you bought. It sold goods below cost and shipped them below cost. It operated a clean and useful search. If you searched for a product, Amazon tried its damndest to put it at the top of the search results.

This was a hell of a good deal for Amazon's customers. Lots of us piled in, and lots of brick-and-mortar

retailers withered and died, making it hard to go elsewhere. Amazon sold us ebooks and audiobooks that were permanently locked to its platform with DRM so that every dollar we spent on media was a dollar we'd have to give up if we deleted Amazon and its apps. And Amazon sold us Prime, getting us to pre-pay for a year's worth of shipping. Prime customers start their shopping on Amazon, and 90% of the time, they don't search anywhere else.

That tempted lots of business customers – Marketplace sellers who turned Amazon into the "everything store" it had promised from the beginning. As these sellers piled in, Amazon shifted to subsidizing suppliers. Kindle and Audible creators got generous packages. Marketplace sellers reached huge audiences and Amazon took low commissions from them.

This strategy made it progressively harder for shoppers to find things anywhere except Amazon, which meant that they only searched on Amazon, which meant that sellers had to sell on Amazon.

That's when Amazon started to harvest the surplus from its business customers and send it to Amazon's shareholders. Today, Marketplace sellers are handing 45% of the sale price to Amazon in junk fees. The company's $31b "advertising" program is really a payola scheme that pits sellers against each other, forcing them to bid on the chance to be at the top of your search.

Searching Amazon doesn't produce a list of the products that most closely match your search. It brings up a list of products whose sellers have paid the most to be at the top of that search. Those fees are built into the cost you pay for the product, and Amazon's "Most Favored Nation" requirement for sellers means that they can't sell more cheaply elsewhere, so Amazon has driven prices at every retailer.

Search Amazon for "cat beds" and the entire first screen is ads, including ads for products Amazon cloned from its own sellers, putting them out of business (third parties have to pay 45% in junk fees to Amazon, but Amazon doesn't charge itself these fees). All told, the first five screens of results for "cat bed" are 50% ads.[1]

This is enshittification: surpluses are first directed to users; then, once they're locked in, surpluses go to suppliers; then once they're locked in, the surplus is handed to shareholders and the platform becomes a useless pile of shit. From mobile app stores to Steam, from Facebook to Twitter, this is the enshittification lifecycle.

This is why – as Cat Valente wrote in her magesterial pre-Christmas essay – platforms like Prodigy transformed themselves overnight, from a place where you went for social connection to a place where you were expected to "stop talking to each other and start buying things."[2]

This shell game with surpluses is what happened to Facebook. First, Facebook was good to you: it showed you the things the people you loved and cared about had to say. This created a kind of mutual hostage-taking: once a critical mass of people you cared about was on Facebook, it became effectively impossible to leave

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1. Doctorow, Cory. "Pluralistic: How Monopoly Enshittified Amazon/28 Nov 2022 – Pluralistic: Daily Links from Cory Doctorow," August 17, 2022. https://pluralistic.net/2022/11/28/enshittification/.

2. Valente, Catherynne M. "Stop Talking to Each Other and Start Buying Things: Three Decades of Survival in the Desert of Social Media." Substack newsletter. *Welcome to Garbagetown* (blog), December 22, 2022. https://catvalente.substack.com/p/stop-talking-to-each-other-and-start.

because you'd have to convince all of them to leave too, and agree on where to go. You may love your friends, but half the time you can't agree on what movie to see and where to go for dinner. Forget it.

Then, it started to cram your feed full of posts from accounts you didn't follow. At first, it was media companies, who Facebook preferentially crammed down its users' throats so that they would click on articles and send traffic to newspapers, magazines and blogs.

Then, once those publications were dependent on Facebook for their traffic, it dialed down their traffic. First, it choked off traffic to publications that used Facebook to run excerpts with links to their own sites, as a way of driving publications into supplying fulltext feeds inside Facebook's walled garden.

This made publications truly dependent on Facebook – their readers no longer visited the publications' websites, they just tuned into them on Facebook. The publications were hostage to those readers, who were hostage to each other. Facebook stopped showing readers the articles publications ran, tuning The Algorithm to suppress posts from publications unless they paid to "boost" their articles to the readers who had *explicitly subscribed to them and asked Facebook to put them in their feeds*.

Now, Facebook started to cram more ads into the feed, mixing payola from people you wanted to hear from with payola from strangers who wanted to commandeer your eyeballs. It gave those advertisers a great deal, charging a pittance to target their ads based on the dossiers of nonconsensually harvested personal data they'd stolen from you.

Sellers became dependent on Facebook, too, unable to carry on business without access to those targeted pitches. That was Facebook's cue to jack up ad prices, stop worrying so much about ad fraud, and to collude with Google to rig the ad market through an illegal program called Jedi Blue.[3]

Today, Facebook is terminally enshittified, a terrible place to be whether you're a user, a media company, or an advertiser. It's a company that deliberately demolished a huge fraction of the publishers it relied on, defrauding them into a "pivot to video" based on false claims of the popularity of video among Facebook users. Companies threw billions into the pivot, but the viewers never materialized, and media outlets folded in droves.[4]

But Facebook has a new pitch. It claims to be called Meta, and it has demanded that we live out the rest of our days as legless, sexless, heavily surveilled low-poly cartoon characters.

It has promised companies that make apps for this metaverse that it won't drag them the way it did the publishers on the old Facebook. It remains to be seen whether they'll get any takers. As Mark Zuckerberg once candidly confessed to a peer, marveling at all of his fellow Harvard students who sent their personal information to his new website "TheFacebook":

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3. "Jedi Blue." In *Wikipedia*, June 24, 2023. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Jedi_Blue&oldid=1161748056.

4. Oremus, Will. "The Big Lie Behind the 'Pivot to Video.'" *Slate*, October 18, 2018. https://slate.com/technology/2018/10/facebook-online-video-pivot-metrics-false.html.

- I don't know why.
- They "trust me"
- Dumb fucks.[5]

Once you understand the enshittification pattern, a lot of the platform mysteries solve themselves. Think of the SEO market, or the whole energetic world of online creators who spend endless hours engaged in useless platform Kremlinology, hoping to locate the algorithmic tripwires, which, if crossed, doom the creative works they pour their money, time and energy into.[6]

Working for the platform can be like working for a boss who takes money out of every paycheck for all the rules you broke, but who won't tell you what those rules are because if he told you that, then you'd figure out how to break those rules without him noticing and docking your pay. Content moderation is the only domain where security through obscurity is considered a best practice.[7]

The situation is so dire that organizations like Tracking Exposed have enlisted a human army of volunteers and a robot army of headless browsers to try to unwind the logic behind the arbitrary machine judgments of The Algorithm, both to give users the option to tune the recommendations they receive, and to help creators avoid the wage theft that comes from being shadow banned.[8]

But what if there is no underlying logic? Or, more to the point, what if the logic shifts based on the platform's priorities? If you go down to the midway at your county fair, you'll spot some poor sucker walking around all day with a giant teddy bear that they won by throwing three balls in a peach basket.

The peach-basket is a rigged game. The carny can use a hidden switch to force the balls to bounce out of the basket. No one wins a giant teddy bear unless the carny wants them to win it. Why did the carny let the sucker win the giant teddy bear? So that he'd carry it around all day, convincing other suckers to put down five bucks for their chance to win one.[9]

The carny allocated a giant teddy bear to that poor sucker the way that platforms allocate surpluses to key

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5. Doctorow, Cory. "'Metaverse' Means 'Pivot to Video.'" *Medium* (blog), December 19, 2022. https://doctorow.medium.com/metaverse-means-pivot-to-video-adbe09319038.

6. Doctorow, Cory. "Pluralistic: 11 Apr 2022 – Pluralistic: Daily Links from Cory Doctorow," April 11, 2022. https://pluralistic.net/2022/04/11/coercion-v-cooperation/.

7. Doctorow, Cory. "Como Is Infosec." *Medium* (blog), July 30, 2023. https://doctorow.medium.com/como-is-infosec-307f87004563.

8. Doctorow, Cory. "Tracking Exposed: Demanding That the Gods Explain Themselves." Electronic Frontier Foundation, May 2, 2022. https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2022/05/tracking-exposed-demanding-gods-explain-themselves.

9. Frauenfelder, Mark. "Rigged Carny Game: The Scissor Bucket." Boing Boing, August 27, 2006. https://boingboing.net/2006/08/27/rigged-carny-game.html.

performers – as a convincer in a "Big Store" con, a way to rope in other suckers who'll make content for the platform, anchoring themselves and their audiences to it.

Which brings me to Tiktok. Tiktok is many different things, including "a free Adobe Premiere for teenagers that live on their phones."[10]

But what made it such a success early on was the power of its recommendation system. From the start, Tiktok was really, really good at recommending things to its users. Eerily good.[11]

By making good-faith recommendations of things it thought its users would like, Tiktok built a mass audience, larger than many thought possible, given the death grip of its competitors, like Youtube and Instagram. Now that Tiktok has the audience, it is consolidating its gains and seeking to lure away the media companies and creators who are still stubbornly attached to Youtube and Insta.

Yesterday, Forbes's Emily Baker-White broke a fantastic story about how that actually works inside of Bytedance, Tiktok's parent company, citing multiple internal sources, revealing the existence of a "heating tool" that Tiktok employees use to push videos from select accounts into millions of viewers' feeds.[12]

These videos go into Tiktok users' ForYou feeds, which Tiktok misleadingly describes as being populated by videos "ranked by an algorithm that predicts your interests based on your behavior in the app." In reality, For You is only sometimes composed of videos that Tiktok thinks will add value to your experience – the rest of the time, it's full of videos that Tiktok has inserted in order to make creators think that Tiktok is a great place to reach an audience.

"Sources told Forbes that TikTok has often used heating to court influencers and brands, enticing them into partnerships by inflating their videos' view count. This suggests that heating has potentially benefitted some influencers and brands — those with whom TikTok has sought business relationships — at the expense of others with whom it has not."

In other words, Tiktok is handing out giant teddy bears.

But Tiktok is not in the business of giving away giant teddy bears. Tiktok, for all that its origins are in the quasi-capitalist Chinese economy, is just another paperclip-maximizing artificial colony organism that treats human beings as inconvenient gut flora. Tiktok is only going to funnel free attention to the people it wants to entrap until they are entrapped, then it will withdraw that attention and begin to monetize it.

"Monetize" is a terrible word that tacitly admits that there is no such thing as an "Attention Economy." You can't use attention as a medium of exchange. You can't use it as a store of value. You can't use it as a unit of account. Attention is like cryptocurrency: a worthless token that is only valuable to the extent that you can

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10. Broderick, Ryan. "The Fragments of Media You Consume," July 7, 2023. https://www.garbageday.email/p/the-fragments-of-media-you-consume.

11. NPR. "TikTok to the Top : Planet Money," April 20, 2022. https://www.npr.org/2022/04/20/1093882880/tiktok-to-the-top.

12. Baker-White, Emily. "TikTok's Secret 'Heating' Button Can Make Anyone Go Viral." Forbes. Accessed September 9, 2023. https://www.forbes.com/sites/emilybaker-white/2023/01/20/tiktoks-secret-heating-button-can-make-anyone-go-viral/.

trick or coerce someone into parting with "fiat" currency in exchange for it. You have to "monetize" it – that is, you have to exchange the fake money for real money.

In the case of cryptos, the main monetization strategy was deception-based. Exchanges and "projects" handed out a bunch of giant teddy-bears, creating an army of true-believer Judas goats who convinced their peers to hand the carny their money and try to get some balls into the peach-basket themselves.

But deception only produces so much "liquidity provision." Eventually, you run out of suckers. To get lots of people to try the ball-toss, you need coercion, not persuasion. Think of how US companies ended the defined benefits pension that guaranteed you a dignified retirement, replacing it with market-based 401(k) pensions that forced you to gamble your savings in a rigged casino, making you the sucker at the table, ripe for the picking.[13]

Early crypto liquidity came from ransomware. The existence of a pool of desperate, panicked companies and individuals whose data had been stolen by criminals created a baseline of crypto liquidity because they could only get their data back by trading real money for fake crypto money.

The next phase of crypto coercion was Web3: converting the web into a series of tollbooths that you could only pass through by trading real money for fake crypto money. The internet is a must-have, not a nice-to-have, a prerequisite for full participation in employment, education, family life, health, politics, civics, even romance. By holding all those things to ransom behind crypto tollbooths, the hodlers hoped to convert their tokens to real money.[14]

For Tiktok, handing out free teddy-bears by "heating" the videos posted by skeptical performers and media companies is a way to convert them to true believers, getting them to push all their chips into the middle of the table, abandoning their efforts to build audiences on other platforms (it helps that Tiktok's format is distinctive, making it hard to repurpose videos for Tiktok to circulate on rival platforms).

Once those performers and media companies are hooked, the next phase will begin: Tiktok will withdraw the "heating" that sticks their videos in front of people who never heard of them and haven't asked to see their videos. Tiktok is performing a delicate dance here: there's only so much enshittification they can visit upon their users' feeds, and Tiktok has lots of other performers they want to give giant teddy-bears to.

Tiktok won't just starve performers of the "free" attention by depreferencing them in the algorithm, it will actively punish them by failing to deliver their videos to the users who subscribed to them. After all, every time Tiktok shows you a video *you asked to see*, it loses a chance to show you a video *it wants you to see*, because your attention is a giant teddy-bear it can give away to a performer it is wooing.

This is just what Twitter has done as part of its march to enshittification: thanks to its "monetization"

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13. Doctorow, Cory. "Pluralistic: 25 Jul 2020 – Pluralistic: Daily Links from Cory Doctorow," September 9, 2020. https://pluralistic.net/2020/07/25/derechos-humanos/.

14. Doctorow, Cory. "Cory Doctorow: Moneylike." *Locus Online* (blog), September 5, 2022. https://locusmag.com/2022/09/cory-doctorow-moneylike/.

changes, the majority of people who follow you will never see the things you post. I have ~500k followers on Twitter and my threads used to routinely get hundreds of thousands or even millions of reads. Today, it's hundreds, perhaps thousands.

I just handed Twitter $8 for Twitter Blue, because the company has strongly implied that it will only show the things I post to the people who asked to see them if I pay ransom money. This is the latest battle in one of the internet's longest-simmering wars: the fight over end-to-end.[15]

In the beginning, there were Bellheads and Netheads. The Bellheads worked for big telcos, and they believed that all the value of the network rightly belonged to the carrier. If someone invented a new feature – say, Caller ID – it should only be rolled out in a way that allows the carrier to charge you every month for its use. This is Software-As-a-Service, Ma Bell style.

The Netheads, by contrast, believed that value should move to the edges of the network – spread out, pluralized. In theory, Compuserve *could* have "monetized" its own version of Caller ID by making you pay $2.99 extra to see the "From:" line on email before you opened the message – charging you to know who was speaking before you started listening – but they didn't.

The Netheads wanted to build diverse networks with lots of offers, lots of competition, and easy, low-cost switching between competitors (thanks to interoperability). Some wanted this because they believed that the net would someday be woven into the world, and they didn't want to live in a world of rent-seeking landlords. Others were true believers in market competition as a source of innovation. Some believed both things. Either way, they saw the risk of network capture, the drive to monetization through trickery and coercion, and they wanted to head it off.

They conceived of the end-to-end principle: the idea that networks should be designed so that willing speakers' messages would be delivered to willing listeners' end-points as quickly and reliably as they could be. That is, irrespective of whether a network operator could make money by sending you the data it wanted to receive, its duty would be to provide you with the data you wanted to see.

The end-to-end principle is dead at the service level today. Useful idiots on the right were tricked into thinking that the risk of Twitter mismanagement was "woke shadowbanning," whereby the things you said wouldn't reach the people who asked to hear them because Twitter's deep state didn't like your opinions. The real risk, of course, is that the things you say won't reach the people who asked to hear them because Twitter can make more money by enshittifying their feeds and charging you ransom for the privilege to be included in them.

As I said at the start of this essay, enshittification exerts a nearly irresistible gravity on platform capitalism. It's just too easy to turn the enshittification dial up to eleven. Twitter was able to fire the majority of its skilled

15. Doctorow, Cory. "Pluralistic: Freedom of Reach IS Freedom of Speech (10 Dec 2022) – Pluralistic: Daily Links from Cory Doctorow," May 4, 2020. https://pluralistic.net/2022/12/10/e2e/.

staff and still crank the dial all the way over, even with a skeleton crew of desperate, demoralized H1B workers who are shackled to Twitter's sinking ship by the threat of deportation.

The temptation to enshittify is magnified by the blocks on interoperability: when Twitter bans interoperable clients, nerfs its APIs, and periodically terrorizes its users by suspending them for including their Mastodon handles in their bios, it makes it harder to leave Twitter, and thus increases the amount of enshittification users can be force-fed without risking their departure.

Twitter is not going to be a "protocol." I'll bet you a testicle[16] that projects like Bluesky will find no meaningful purchase on the platform, because if Bluesky were implemented and Twitter users could order their feeds for minimal enshittification and leave the service without sacrificing their social networks, it would kill the majority of Twitter's "monetization" strategies.

An enshittification strategy only succeeds if it is pursued in measured amounts. Even the most locked-in user eventually reaches a breaking-point and walks away, or gets pushed. The villagers of Anatevka in Fiddler on the Roof tolerated the cossacks' violent raids and pogroms for years, until they were finally forced to flee to Krakow, New York and Chicago.[17]

For enshittification-addled companies, that balance is hard to strike. Individual product managers, executives, and activist shareholders all give preference to quick returns at the cost of sustainability, and are in a race to see who can eat their seed-corn first. Enshittification has only lasted for as long as it has because the internet has devolved into "five giant websites, each filled with screenshots of the other four."[18]

With the market sewn up by a group of cozy monopolists, better alternatives don't pop up and lure us away, and if they do, the monopolists just buy them out and integrate them into your enshittification strategies, like when Mark Zuckerberg noticed a mass exodus of Facebook users who were switching to Instagram, and so he bought Instagram. As Zuck says, "It is better to buy than to compete."

This is the hidden dynamic behind the rise and fall of Amazon Smile, the program whereby Amazon gave a small amount of money to charities of your choice when you shopped there, but only if you used Amazon's own search tool to locate the products you purchased. This provided an incentive for Amazon customers to use its own increasingly enshittified search, which it could cram full of products from sellers who coughed up payola, as well as its own lookalike products. The alternative was to use Google, whose search tool would send

16. Not one of mine.

17. Doctorow, Cory. "How to Leave Dying Social Media Platforms." *Medium* (blog), October 30, 2022. https://doctorow.medium.com/how-to-leave-dying-social-media-platforms-9fc550fe5abf.

18. Tom Eastman [@tveastman]. "I'm Old Enough to Remember When the Internet Wasn't a Group of Five Websites, Each Consisting of Screenshots of Text from the Other Four." Tweet. *Twitter*, December 3, 2018. https://twitter.com/tveastman/status/1069674780826071040.

you directly to the product you were looking for, and then charge Amazon a commission for sending you to it.[19]

The demise of Amazon Smile coincides with the increasing enshittification of Google Search, the only successful product the company managed to build in-house. All its other successes were bought from other companies: video, docs, cloud, ads, mobile; while its own products are either flops like Google Video, clones (Gmail is a Hotmail clone), or adapted from other companies' products, like Chrome.

Google Search was based on principles set out in founder Larry Page and Sergey Brin's landmark 1998 paper, "Anatomy of a Large-Scale Hypertextual Web Search Engine," in which they wrote, "Advertising funded search engines will be inherently biased towards the advertisers and away from the needs of consumers."[20]

Even with that foundational understanding of enshittification, Google has been unable to resist its siren song. Today's Google results are an increasingly useless morass of self-preferencing links to its own products, ads for products that aren't good enough to float to the top of the list on its own, and parasitic SEO junk piggybacking on the former.

Enshittification kills. Google just laid off 12,000 employees, and the company is in a full-blown "panic" over the rise of "AI" chatbots, and is making a full-court press for an AI-driven search tool – that is, a tool that won't show you what you ask for, but rather, what it thinks you should see.[21]

Now, it's possible to imagine that such a tool will produce good recommendations, like Tiktok's pre-enshittified algorithm did. But it's hard to see how Google will be able to design a non-enshittified chatbot front-end to search, given the strong incentives for product managers, executives, and shareholders to enshittify results to the precise threshold at which users are nearly pissed off enough to leave, but not quite.

Even if it manages the trick, this-almost-but-not-quite-unusuable equilibrium is fragile. Any exogenous shock – a new competitor like Tiktok that penetrates the anticompetitive "moats and walls" of Big Tech, a privacy scandal, a worker uprising – can send it into wild oscillations.[22]

Enshittification truly is how platforms die. That's fine, actually. We don't need eternal rulers of the internet. It's okay for new ideas and new ways of working to emerge. The emphasis of lawmakers and policymakers shouldn't be preserving the crepuscular senescence of dying platforms. Rather, our policy focus should be on

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19. this_my_sportsreddit. "Here's the Most Mess...." Reddit Comment. *R/Technology*, January 19, 2023. www.reddit.com/r/technology/comments/10ft5iv/amazon_discontinues_charity_donation_program_amid/j4znb8y/.

20. Brin, S. and Page, L. (1998) The Anatomy of a Large-Scale Hypertextual Web Search Engine. In: Seventh International World-Wide Web Conference (WWW 1998), April 14-18, 1998, Brisbane, Australia. https://web.archive.org/web/20180504171047/http://ilpubs.stanford.edu:8090/361/.

21. Vincent, James, and Richard Lawlser. "Google Is Freaking out about ChatGPT." The Verge, January 20, 2023. https://www.theverge.com/2023/1/20/23563851/google-search-ai-chatbot-demo-chatgpt.

22. Doctorow, Cory. "Pluralistic: Social Quitting (09 Jan 2023) – Pluralistic: Daily Links from Cory Doctorow," June 21, 2021. https://pluralistic.net/2023/01/08/watch-the-surpluses/.

minimizing the cost to users when these firms reach their expiry date: enshrining rights like end-to-end would mean that no matter how autocannibalistic a zombie platform became, willing speakers and willing listeners would still connect with each other.[23]

And policymakers should focus on freedom of exit – the right to leave a sinking platform while continuing to stay connected to the communities that you left behind, enjoying the media and apps you bought, and preserving the data you created.[24]

The Netheads were right: technological self-determination is at odds with the natural imperatives of tech businesses. They make more money when they take away our freedom – our freedom to speak, to leave, to connect.

For many years, even Tiktok's critics grudgingly admitted that no matter how surveillant and creepy it was, it was really good at guessing what you wanted to see. But Tiktok couldn't resist the temptation to show you the things it wants you to see, rather than what you want to see. The enshittification has begun, and now it is unlikely to stop.

It's too late to save Tiktok. Now that it has been infected by enshittifcation, the only thing left is to kill it with fire.

**Key Takeaways**

- The concept of "enshittification" describes a common lifecycle for digital platforms, where they initially offer value to users, then shift focus to maximizing profits, often at the expense of user experience and satisfaction.
- Platforms like Amazon, TikTok, and Twitter manipulate their algorithms to prioritize their business interests, which can lead to a decline in the quality and relevance of content presented to users.
- The end-to-end principle, which advocates for the free flow of information between willing speakers and listeners, is increasingly compromised as platforms prioritize monetization strategies over user needs.
- Technological self-determination and freedom of exit are crucial for users to maintain control

23. Doctorow, Cory. "End-to-End." *Medium* (blog), January 15, 2023. https://doctorow.medium.com/end-to-end-d6046dca366f.

24. Doctorow, Cory. "Interoperable Facebook." Electronic Frontier Foundation, September 9, 2022. https://www.eff.org/interoperablefacebook.

over their digital lives, but these are often at odds with the business models of major platforms.

## Exercises

1. How have you personally experienced "enshittification" on any digital platform you use regularly? Describe the changes you've noticed and how they have impacted your user experience.
2. Choose a digital platform and analyze its business model, focusing on how it balances user experience with profitability. Present your findings in a short essay or presentation.
3. Do you agree with the idea that the end-to-end principle is dead in today's digital landscape? Provide examples to support your viewpoint.
4. How do you think the concept of "freedom of exit" could be practically implemented in today's digital platforms to benefit users? Provide specific examples or suggestions.

PART XVIII

# CHAPTER 18: RACIAL CAPITALISM IN THE AGE OF BIG DATA: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

In the digital age, racial capitalism manifests through data colonialism and digital inequalities, where tech giants extract data from users worldwide without explicit consent. This modern exploitation is reminiscent of historical colonial practices, particularly impacting regions like Africa. Here, data is often stored and processed outside the continent, worsening power imbalances between the Global North and Global South. Racial capitalism challenges traditional Marxist theories by emphasizing that racism is a core component of capitalist exploitation, intertwining racialization with labor and data.

New media platforms significantly shape political discourse, identity formation, and activism across various socio-political landscapes. These platforms empower marginalized communities by amplifying their voices in movements like Nigeria's #EndSARS and Kenya's #WeAre52, but they also serve as channels for misinformation and government control. This duality highlights the need for nuanced regulatory approaches that consider the complex dynamics of empowerment and control in digital spaces. The spread of false information during Kenya's 2017 elections and North Korea's use of smartphones for surveillance exemplify how digital tools can be manipulated, underscoring the importance of context-specific strategies.

Gender bias in artificial intelligence and machine learning systems poses significant ethical and societal challenges, as these technologies often perpetuate existing inequalities. AI systems can reflect the biases of their creators, impacting resource allocation, service quality, and individual well-being. Despite these issues, digital spaces offer platforms for activism and resistance, as seen in the evolution of women's activism in Kenya. Additionally, Latinx digital engagement involves a complex interplay of identity formation, activism, and commodification. Social media platforms like Instagram act as digital archives for Latinx communities, challenging dominant narratives while complicating the landscape of digital memory through the commodification of identity. These multifaceted digital spaces present both opportunities and challenges within the framework of racial capitalism.

# 18.1 RACIAL CAPITALISM IN THE AGE OF BIG DATA

**Learning Objectives**

- Critically analyze the concept of racial capitalism in the digital age, understanding its implications on data colonialism, human rights, and power imbalances between the Global North and the Global South.
- Understand the role of new media platforms in shaping political discourse, identity formation, and activism across diverse socio-political landscapes, including but not limited to Africa, Latin America, and North Korea.
- Evaluate the ethical considerations and societal impacts of gender bias in artificial intelligence and machine learning, and understand how digital spaces can serve both as sites of systemic bias and platforms for activism and resistance.

## Historical Context: Racial Capitalism and Its Digital Evolution

### The Roots of Racial Capitalism

The term "**racial capitalism**" was popularized by the scholar Cedric J. Robinson, who argued that capitalism and racism are not separate systems but rather intertwined from the very beginning. In his seminal work, "Black Marxism," Robinson posited that the development of capitalism was deeply embedded in racial and ethnic exploitation. This exploitation was not just an unfortunate byproduct but a fundamental element that fueled the growth of capitalism. From the enslavement of African people to the colonization of the Global South, racial capitalism has been a pervasive force shaping economic systems and social hierarchies.

As the 20th century came to an end, the globe started to see a substantial transition from industrial

capitalism to what is frequently referred to as "**information capitalism**." The development of the Internet, the use of digital technology, and the increasing emphasis on information as a commodity all contributed to this transformation. Although they changed and evolved, the racial undertones of capitalism persisted. For the advantage of the Global North, labor in the Global South was still exploited, but now it now included digital labor, such as data input and content moderation services.

In the digital age, the concept of racial capitalism has found new expression through "**data colonialism**." Coined by scholars at the London School of Economics, this term describes the way massive corporations collect, analyze, and profit from user data. Much like historical colonial powers extracted natural resources from colonized lands, today's tech giants extract data from users around the globe, often without their explicit consent. This form of digital extraction is particularly acute in regions like Africa, where data is frequently stored and processed outside the continent, perpetuating new forms of exploitation and power imbalances.

New media platforms have become instrumental in shaping political discourse, identity formation, and activism, especially in the Global South. While these platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for marginalized communities to have a voice, they also serve as new avenues for exploitation and control. From algorithmic biases that perpetuate stereotypes to the commodification of cultural identities, racial capitalism in the digital age is a multifaceted and deeply entrenched system.

In the age of digital technology, the allure of "free" services—be it social media platforms or search engines—is enticing. However, this ostensible freedom comes with a cost: our personal data. These companies transform our interactions and behaviors into quantifiable data to generate significant profits. The concept of data colonialism, as defined by the London School of Economics, describes the process by which massive corporations collect, analyze, and profit from user data. While we may think we are getting a service for free, the hidden trade-off is in the loss of control over personal information. This power imbalance raises new questions about human rights in the digital age, from the right to privacy to the right to be forgotten.[1]

The concept of data colonialism has a particularly potent resonance in Africa, a continent with a history marked by colonial exploitation. In the digital age, international tech giants have extended their reach into African markets, offering "free" services much like they do elsewhere. While these services may bring about increased connectivity and offer new opportunities for economic development, they also carry the risk of perpetuating new forms of exploitation. Data generated by African users are mostly stored and processed outside the continent, often leading to a form of digital extraction that parallels historical resource extraction. This situation exacerbates existing power imbalances between Africa and the Global North, where most of these tech companies are based. In the African context, these digital inequalities go beyond personal data collection to issues like the digital divide, unequal access to technology, and information poverty. Given

1. Zulu, Nobukhosi. "Nobukhosi Zulu: Digital Colonialism and My Human Rights | TED Talk." Accessed September 9, 2023. https://www.ted.com/talks/nobukhosi_zulu_digital_colonialism_and_my_human_rights.

Africa's burgeoning youth population and its drive to become a key player in the global digital economy, the stakes are high.[2] You can view a TED talk about this by Nobukhosi Zulu:

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This intricate relationship between data and racial capitalism is a focal point in modern discourse, challenging the traditional Marxist notion that racism is a secondary issue to economic exploitation. Instead, racialization is presented as a core component of capitalism, exemplified by the experiences of Indian IT workers in Berlin, Germany. Their labor is both racialized and undervalued, illustrating that a comprehensive understanding of racial capitalism requires a lens that encompasses both economic and racial dimensions. This approach emphasizes the importance of viewing issues from the margins, focusing on the uneven distribution of power dynamics and risks across different communities. The Global South thus becomes a relational term, offering a nuanced understanding of global inequalities and various forms of oppression and resistance.[3] Therefore, racial capitalism may be a more appropriate conceptual lens of analysis as opposed to data colonialism. Each of the sections below represent one way we might analyze racial capitalism. You can listen to an overview of this topic in a Data & Society podcast: *Becoming Data Episode 5: Data & Racial Capitalism*: https://listen.datasociety.net/episodes/becoming-data-episode-5-data-racial-capitalism

## Digital Democracy and Politics

The influence of new media platforms on political and social engagement in Africa is a complex interplay of democratization and control. These platforms have empowered marginalized voices, offering a space for political mobilization and accountability, as seen in Nigeria's #EndSARS campaign.[4] However, they also serve

2. *ibid*

3. Amrute, Sareeta, and Emiliano Treré. "Data & Racial Capitalism." Becoming Data. Accessed September 9, 2023. https://listen.datasociety.net/episodes/becoming-data-episode-5-data-racial-capitalism.

4. Mhaka, Tafi. "How Social Media Regulations Are Silencing Dissent in Africa." Accessed September 9, 2023. https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2020/11/12/how-social-media-regulations-are-silencing-dissent-in-africa.

as platforms for misinformation and extremist rhetoric, which has led to cautionary perspectives on their unregulated use.[5]

In Kenya, as Nanjala Nyabola outlines in "Digital Democracy, Analogue Politics," the digital space has become a crucial arena for political discourse due to the abdication of responsibility by traditional media. The relationship between media and power in Kenya has led to a preference for political news on the Internet over traditional outlets. This has resulted in a complex ecosystem where the Internet intensifies existing societal energies, both positive and negative.[6]

Governments have responded to the rise of new media with varying degrees of regulation and repression. Laws targeting social media users have been enacted in countries like Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania, often under the guise of combating fake news but effectively silencing dissent.[7],[8] In more extreme cases, governments have resorted to internet shutdowns and arrests to stifle online discourse.[9]

The issue of misinformation remains a significant challenge. During Kenya's 2017 general elections, both major political parties were accused of using social media to spread false information, contributing to a dangerous regime of misinformation that undermines democratic processes. This reflects the broader African context, where misinformation has become a significant concern.[10]

In North Korea, the increasing availability of smartphones presents a dual-edged sword for its citizens. On one hand, these devices have become more accessible and offer new means of communication within the country. On the other hand, they also serve as a mechanism for governmental surveillance and control. Although the number of mobile phone users in North Korea has surged in recent years—now reaching approximately 4 million, a significant increase from 2012—these figures are still modest in comparison to global standards. The smartphones utilized in North Korea are generally produced locally or assembled using components imported from China. These mobile devices operate on indigenous software platforms that are carefully engineered to both filter content and monitor user activity. Rather than providing access to the global

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5. Ogola, George. "How New Media Platforms Have Become Powerful across Africa." The Conversation, December 9, 2018. http://theconversation.com/how-new-media-platforms-have-become-powerful-across-africa-107294.

6. Nyabola, Nanjala. *Digital Democracy, Analogue Politics: How the Internet Era Is Transforming Politics in Kenya*. African Arguments. London: Zed, 2018.

7. *ibid*

8. Ogola, George. "How New Media Platforms Have Become Powerful across Africa." The Conversation, December 9, 2018. http://theconversation.com/how-new-media-platforms-have-become-powerful-across-africa-107294.

9. Mhaka, Tafi. "How Social Media Regulations Are Silencing Dissent in Africa." Accessed September 9, 2023. https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2020/11/12/how-social-media-regulations-are-silencing-dissent-in-africa.

10. Nyabola, Nanjala. *Digital Democracy, Analogue Politics: How the Internet Era Is Transforming Politics in Kenya*. African Arguments. London: Zed, 2018.

internet, these systems connect users to a domestic intranet, which is carefully curated to include only state-approved materials, such as speeches by Kim Jong Un and state-sanctioned news.[11]

State authorities have the ability to remotely manage the devices, including deleting files and obstructing the sharing of materials deemed undesirable. This high level of scrutiny extends to random inspections by law enforcement agencies that can examine the contents of individuals' phones. Some analysts suggest that this growing technological landscape could potentially undermine the regime by providing citizens with a glimpse of the outside world. However, the prevailing opinion among experts is that the stringent controls currently in place are more likely to consolidate the government's power rather than weaken it.[12]

In Berlin, Indian IT workers find themselves in a unique position that exemplifies the complexities of racial capitalism. These workers are often short-term migrants who engage in coding and other tech-related tasks. While their labor is essential, it is also undervalued and racialized, making them easily replaceable in the eyes of their employers. To counter this, some workers have resorted to leaving intentionally confusing or poorly documented code, making it more difficult for them to be replaced. This act serves as a form of resistance, albeit a risky one, as it could lead to their unemployment or replacement by another group. However, these actions are not necessarily part of a larger political movement; they are more individualized forms of resistance aimed at securing middle-class status rather than critiquing the broader political economy.[13]

In conclusion, the influence of new media platforms is a complex tapestry of empowerment and control that varies significantly across different socio-political landscapes. Whether facilitating democratic activism in Nigeria, serving as both liberating and constraining spaces in Kenya, enabling authoritarian surveillance in North Korea, or exposing the nuances of racial capitalism among Indian IT workers in Berlin, these platforms necessitate a nuanced regulatory approach. Such strategies must account for the multifaceted roles these platforms play in democratizing public discourse, disseminating misinformation, and being tools for government control. Given the diverse contexts, a one-size-fits-all regulatory framework is not only impractical but potentially detrimental, underscoring the need for adaptable solutions that consider each setting's unique social, political, and cultural dynamics.

## Digital Inequality, Access, and Identify Formation

The landscape of Latinx identity formation has undergone a significant transformation with the advent

11. Chomchuen, Warangkana. "How North Korea Is Using Smartphones as Weapons of Mass Surveillance." *Wall Street Journal*, December 8, 2017, sec. World. https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-north-korea-is-using-smartphones-as-weapons-of-mass-surveillance-1512719928.

12. *ibid*

13. Amrute, Sareeta, and Emiliano Treré. "Data & Racial Capitalism." Becoming Data. Accessed September 9, 2023. https://listen.datasociety.net/episodes/becoming-data-episode-5-data-racial-capitalism.

of social media platforms, particularly Instagram. These platforms serve as digital archives where Latinx individuals and communities engage in real-time negotiations of identity, activism, and nostalgia. Accounts like Barriodandy, run by De Luna, utilize Instagram to circulate Latinx memory and nostalgia, often focusing on historical events and cultural shifts such as the gentrification of Chavez Ravine in Los Angeles. These accounts not only serve as repositories of collective memory but also as platforms for activism, challenging dominant narratives and bringing visibility to marginalized histories.[14]

Another trend in Latinx digital memory is the commodification of identity through sponsorship. Accounts like mexicanProblemas curate memes that resonate with Latinx cultural experiences, but often these posts are sponsored by corporations, merging Latinx identity with global capitalist production. This dual function of social media—resisting narratives of assimilation while also serving capitalist interests—complicates the landscape of Latinx digital memory. However, not all Latinx digital memory projects aim for a unified identity. Accounts like Xicanisma's  disrupt the homogenizing tendencies within Latinx communities by calling out internal issues such as anti-Blackness, sexism, and other forms of discrimination. These accounts serve as a mirror, reflecting the complexities and contradictions within Latinx identity and challenging the community to confront its own biases. [15]

Hernán Galperin's "Why Are Half of Latin Americans Not Online?" explores the digital divide in Latin America, emphasizing that a large segment of the population remains without Internet access. This gap has significant implications for the broader discourse on Latinx identity, particularly for those who are excluded from these digital platforms. He finds that financial constraints and inadequate service infrastructure are primary roadblocks to both home-based internet subscriptions and individual utilization in the Latin American context, arguing that these barriers should be studied not just across countries but also among various socioeconomic strata.[16]

In summary, a much more comprehensive approach to studying Latinx digital engagement is needed. Future work must consider factors such as access, gender, and the fluid nature of identity formation in their analyses. This multi-dimensional perspective is crucial for understanding the complexities of Latinx identity in an increasingly digital world.

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14. Villa-Nicholas, Melissa. "Latinx Digital Memory: Identity Making in Real Time." *Social Media Society* 5, no. 4 (October 1, 2019): 2056305119862643. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305119862643.

15. *ibid*

16. Galperin, Hernan. "Why Are Half of Latin Americans Not Online? A Four-Country Study of Reasons for Internet Non-Adoption." *International Journal of Communication* 11, no. 0 (August 22, 2017): 23.

## Gender and Digital Spaces

The urgency of addressing gender bias in artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) is escalating, compelling both social change leaders and developers to engage in immediate and sustained action. AI and ML systems are far from objective; they often mirror the biases of their human creators. This problem is exacerbated when there's a lack of diversity within the fields of AI and data science, leading to a narrow perspective in system development. Another core issue is data bias. The gender digital divide means women are frequently underrepresented in datasets used for training AI systems. Even when women are included, the data might inherently carry biases due to historical discrimination. Algorithmic biases further compound the problem; they originate from biased training data and have the potential to perpetuate existing societal inequalities. The impacts of such biases are multi-faceted. For one, they affect the quality of service provided to women and non-binary individuals. Biased systems can also skew the allocation of resources, information, and opportunities, amplifying existing inequalities. These AI systems can reinforce harmful stereotypes and prejudices. Furthermore, the physical and mental well-being of individuals is at risk.[17]

At the same time, digital spaces have emerged as a site of resistance for women. In recent years, Kenya has witnessed an evolving landscape of women's activism that has found new life online. In the 2017 elections, women's advocates banded together to rally around the #WeAre52 hashtag. This digital campaign aimed to draw attention to the need for enforcing the two-thirds gender rule, which mandates that no more than two-thirds of any public body should be of a single gender. Through effective use of social media, these activists were successful in bringing this issue to the forefront of political discourse, especially given the high-stakes nature of the elections. In the past, outspoken women activists often faced isolation and were branded as acting in a masculine manner. However, the age of new media has empowered these women to form online communities, providing a supportive environment that bolsters their activism. The digital platform allows them to turn societal rejection into a tool for advocacy. They insist on being heard, rejecting conventional ideas of being the 'angry, bitter, or unmarriageable woman.'[18]

## Media and Digital Activism

To better understand digital activism around the globe, please watch the following video:

17. Birhane, Abeba. "Algorithmic Injustice: A Relational Ethics Approach." *Patterns* 2, no. 2 (February 12, 2021): 100205. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.patter.2021.100205.

18. Nyabola, Nanjala. "Kenyan Feminisms in the Digital Age." *Women's Studies Quarterly* 46, no. 3 & 4 (2018): 261–72.

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"Hannane Ferdjani, Nana Mgbechikwere Nwachukwu, and Dr. Allissa Richardson explore how young Black people around the world are utilizing tech tools to track and circumvent oppressive policies by repressive governments. The conversation includes how Black people of Nigeria, Uganda, and the United States are leveraging social media platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and Clubhouse for artistic expressions on political and social issues in their countries. The panel also considers how young digital activists highlight the importance and place of the digital civic space to rights and freedoms offline. Finally, the discussion will address some of the limitations of digital tools in holding repressive governments and institutional bodies accountable. This event was moderated by Ellery Roberts Biddle."

### Key Takeaways

- Racial capitalism in the digital age extends beyond mere economic exploitation to include the racialization of labor and data, challenging traditional Marxist views and highlighting the need for a more comprehensive lens of analysis.
- New media platforms have a dual role in both empowering marginalized communities through political mobilization and serving as tools for misinformation and government control, necessitating nuanced regulatory approaches.
- Latinx digital engagement is a complex interplay of identity formation, activism, and commodification, revealing the need for a multi-dimensional perspective that considers access, gender, and socioeconomic factors.
- Gender bias in artificial intelligence and machine learning systems is a pressing issue that not only perpetuates existing societal inequalities but also offers digital spaces as platforms for activism and resistance against such biases.

## Exercises

1. How does the concept of racial capitalism challenge or expand upon traditional Marxist theories of exploitation? Discuss its implications in the context of data colonialism and digital inequalities in Africa.
2. Analyze a social media campaign like Nigeria's #EndSARS or Kenya's #WeAre52. Evaluate its effectiveness in achieving its goals and discuss the role of the platform in either amplifying or hindering the campaign's message.
3. Considering the commodification of Latinx identity on platforms like Instagram, discuss the ethical implications of merging cultural identity with global capitalist production. How does this complicate the landscape of Latinx digital memory and activism?

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An anonymous student updated statistics about newspaper subscriptions through 2020 and added a section on AI-generated content.

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Section on Social Media Literacy added by an anonymous student.

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The case study from the following paper was also integrated into the chapter: Studying political disputes: A rhetorical perspective and a case study by Sophia Hatzisavvidou. CC BY-NC 4.0. Spelling was Americanized.

Student Frederick Hunter made updates throughout the chapter to examples.

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A case study has been incorporated into the chapter based on the following paper: Tracking Memes in the Wild: Visual Rhetoric and Image Circulation in Environmental Communication. By Madison Jones, Aaron Beveridge, Julian R. Garrison, Abbey Greene, and Hannah MacDonald. *Front. Commun.*, 09 June 2022. Sec. Science and Environmental Communication. Volume 7 – 2022 | https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2022.883278. CC BY 4.0.

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A section on the Media System in Germany was added by an anonymous student.

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Student Rika Nakano added a section on Kpop music from the 2010s to 2020s.

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An anonymous student created a video about the history of radio that was linked in the chapter.

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Student Nolan Carey made edits, corrections, and updates through section 14.1.

Student Nicky Romano substantially extended the section on The Rise of Nintendo, including interviews with Dr. Sam Tobin.

An anonymous student added sections on Consoles in the 2010s and beyond and COVID-19 and online gaming

Student Gavin Nathaniel Bayer added a section on Piracy, Live-Service, and the Software They War Over.

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Student Maggie Serratore added a section on Image and Video Sharing.

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