An engaging and accessible introduction to a broad range of critical approaches to contemporary mass media theory and research

A decade after its first publication, *Critical Media Studies* continues to shape and define the field of media studies, offering innovative approaches that enable readers to explore the modern media landscape from a wide variety of perspectives. Integrating foundational theory and contemporary research, this groundbreaking text offers the most comprehensive set of analytical approaches currently available. Twelve critical perspectives—pragmatic, rhetorical, sociological, erotic, ecological, and others—enable readers to assess and evaluate the social and cultural consequences of contemporary media in their daily lives.

The new third edition includes up-to-date content that reflects the current developments and cutting-edge research in the field. New or expanded material includes changing perceptions of race and gender, the impact of fandom on the media, the legacy of the television age, the importance of media literacy in the face of "fake news", and developments in industry regulations and U.S. copyright law. This textbook:

- Presents clear, reader-friendly chapters organized by critical perspective
- Features up-to-date media references that resonate with modern readers
- Incorporates enhanced and updated pedagogical features throughout the text
- Offers extensively revised content for greater clarity, currency, and relevance
- Includes fully updated illustrations, examples, statistics, and further readings

Critical Media Studies, 3rd Edition is the ideal resource for undergraduate students in media studies, cultural studies, popular culture, communication, rhetoric, and sociology, graduate students new to critical perspectives on the media, and scholars in the field.

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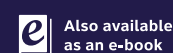
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CRITICAL MEDIA STUDIES

THIRD EDITION

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CRITICAL MEDIA STUDIES
AN INTRODUCTION

BRIAN L. OTT AND **ROBERT L. MACK** | **THIRD EDITION**

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About the Authors

ELINOR CHRISTOPHER LIGHT

Brian L. Ott (left) is a scholar and public intellectual who has been studying rhetoric, media, and their intersection for more than 20 years. He has authored numerous books and essays on the changing nature of communication in the digital era, and he has been interviewed by *The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal*, and *Politico*. His op-eds have appeared in outlets such as *USA Today, Newsweek, The Hill*, and *Salon*. He currently serves as Professor of Media and Communication and Director of the TTU Press at Texas Tech University.

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Brian L. Ott and Robert L. Mack

CRITICAL MEDIA STUDIES
AN INTRODUCTION

Third Edition

WILEY Blackwell

The right of Brian L. Ott and Robert L. Mack to be identified as the authors of this work has been asserted in accordance with law.

Contents

Preface

To our millions of readers, welcome to the third edition of *Critical Media Studies: An Introduction*! We want to begin by thanking all of you for the seemingly endless submission of fan letters. We apologize that we are not able to respond to every letter, but given their sheer number, it is simply not feasible. That is what we would be saying if this was a *New York Times* best-selling book. But, alas, it is a college textbook. So, perhaps it would be more appropriate for us to simply say, "Hey, Ian, Cara, and crazy Uncle Jeb, thanks for reading our book. Now, please stop emailing us fake negative reviews from Amazon." Truth be told, it's hard to know how many people have actually read the book. By "hard," we mean we'd have to email our publisher and ask for sales data, and that just seems like a lot of work. So, instead, we're just going to assume that the book is a big hit, especially in Wakanda (hello, fellow fans of *Black Panther*!).

When we began work on the first edition of the book nearly 10 years ago, it was tentatively titled *Critical Media Studies: An Interstellar Guide to Fabulous Dinner Conversation*. In the ensuing time, the book has undergone numerous changes, not least of which was a rethinking of its title. Apparently, "some" (who shall remain nameless, Elizabeth Swayze!) thought that the reference to *dinner conversation* might be confusing and misleading. We remain convinced, however, that it would have been an effective way to target the fans of food-themed reality TV shows – a crucial demographic that has, in our opinion, been ignored by academic publishers for far too long (hello, fellow fans of *Hell's Kitchen*!). Although we harbor no hard feelings about this change, we nevertheless hope that readers *will* discuss the book over dinner (or any meal-like activity, including tea time: hello, British readers!) and that the ensuing conversation *will* be fabulous.

Another significant development has been the book's cover art. Initially, we wanted an image of two squirrels "doing it" … a metaphor, of course, for the frenzied but emotionally hollow exchange that occurs between media producers and consumers. But, as with the title, more sensible heads prevailed, resulting in the equally enticing image of Tokyo at night. We, nevertheless, would like to thank our friend, Greg, for bravely approaching said squirrels, snapping a picture, and almost losing a finger in the process (hello and apologies, Greg!). Despite our disappointment that the squirrel-on-squirrel image was not selected, we believe that the existing cover is equally appropriate to the themes raised in the book. The rain symbolizes the steady stream of media messages that relentlessly pour down upon us each day. The unfamiliar signs of the cityscape invite readers to wonder about their meanings, just as *Critical Media Studies* asks readers to wonder about the role of media in their lives. The array

of brilliant colors that make up the image reflects the array of critical perspectives contained in the book, each shedding its own light on the media.

In closing, we wish to acknowledge our debt to the various individuals who have helped us bring this project to completion. In particular, we would like to express our gratitude to the team at Wiley-Blackwell, especially Daniel Finch, Senior Project Editor, Todd Green, Executive Editor, Nivetha Udayakumar, Production Editor, and Kelley Baylis, Editorial Assistant. We feel fortunate to have had such a dynamic, creative, and patient team working with us. We also wish to thank the permissions team for securing various copyright permissions for this edition of the book. Finally, we wish to extend a very special thanks to Katelyn Johnson, who provided invaluable research assistance for the third edition, and Jackson De Vight, who joined us at the last minute to assist with final revisions (thank you, Katelyn and Jackson, for your many contributions; we are in your debt … not legally, of course, just figuratively; please don't sue us!). Since it is cliché to say that any and all mistakes are solely our own, we instead locate the blame squarely with the Illuminati (hello, Illuminati!).

Cheers,
Brian and Rob
September 2019

About the Companion Website

This book is accompanied by a companion website, which hosts supplementary material:

www.wiley.com/go/ott/criticalmediastudies

The website includes:

- PowerPoint slides
- Study guides
- Test banks
- Sample syllabus

Scan this QR code to visit the companion website.

1 Introducing Critical Media Studies

KEY CONCEPTS

CONVERGENCE
CRITICAL MEDIA STUDIES
FRAGMENTATION
GLOBALIZATION
MASS MEDIA

MEDIUM
MOBILITY
POSTMODERNITY

SOCIALIZATION
THEORY
SIMULATION

How We Know What We Know

Everything we know is learned in one of two ways.[1] The first way is *somatically*. These are the things we know through direct sensory perception of our environment. We know what some things look, smell, feel, sound, or taste like because we personally have seen, smelled, felt, heard, or tasted them. One of the authors of this text knows, for example, that "Rocky Mountain oysters" (bull testicles) are especially chewy because he tried them once at a country and western bar. In short, some of what we know is based on first-hand, unmediated experience. But the things we know through direct sensory perception make up a very small percentage of the total things we know. The vast majority of what we know comes to us a second way, *symbolically*. These are the things we know *through* someone or something, such as a parent, friend, teacher, museum, textbook, photograph, radio, film, television, or the internet. This type of information is mediated, meaning that it came to us via some indirect channel or **medium**. The word "medium" is derived from the Latin word *medius*, which means "middle" or that which comes between two things: the way that BBC's *Planet Earth* production team might come between us and the animals of the Serengeti, for instance.

In the past 30 seconds, those readers who have never eaten Rocky Mountain oysters have come to know that they are chewy, as that information has been communicated to them through, or mediated by, this book. When we stop to think about all the things we know, we suddenly realize that the vast majority of what we know is mediated. We may know something about China even if we

have never been there thanks to Wikipedia; we may know something about Winston Churchill despite our never having met him thanks to *Darkest Hour* (2017); we may even know something about the particulars of conducting a homicide investigation even though we have likely never conducted one thanks to the crime drama *CSI*. The mass media account, it would seem, for much of what we know (and do not know) today. But this has not always been the case.

Before the invention of mass media, the spoken or written word was the primary medium for conveying information and ideas. This method of communication had several significant and interrelated limitations. First, as the transmission of information was tied to the available means of transportation (foot, horse, buggy, boat, locomotive, or automobile, depending upon the time period), its dissemination was extraordinarily slow, especially over great distances such as across continents and oceans. Second, because information could not easily be reproduced and distributed, its scope was extremely limited. Third, since information often passed through multiple channels (people), each of which altered it, if only slightly, there was a high probability of message distortion. Simply put, there was no way to communicate a uniform message to a large group of people in distant places quickly prior to the advent of the modern mass media. What distinguishes mass media like print, radio, and television from individual media like human speech and hand-written letters, then, is precisely their unique capacity to address large audiences in remote locations with relative efficiency.

Critical Media Studies is about the social and cultural consequences of that revolutionary capability. Recognizing that mass media are, first and foremost, communication technologies that increasingly mediate both what we know and how we know, this book surveys a variety of perspectives for evaluating and assessing the role of mass media in our daily lives. Whether listening to Spotify while walking across campus, sharing pictures with friends on Instagram, receiving the latest sports scores via your mobile phone, retweeting your favorite YouTube video, or binge watching popular Netflix series like *Stranger Things* or *13 Reasons Why*, the mass media are regular fixtures of everyday life. But before beginning to explore the specific and complex roles that mass media play in our lives, it is worth looking at who they are, when they originated, and how they have developed.

Categorizing Mass Media

As is perhaps already evident, "media" is a very broad term that includes a diverse array of communication technologies, such as cave drawings, speech, smoke signals, letters, books, telegraphy, telephony, magazines, newspapers, radio, film, television, smartphones, video games, and networked computers, to name just a few. But this book is principally concerned with **mass media**, or those communication technologies that have the *potential* to reach a large audience in remote locations. What distinguishes mass media from individual

media, then, is not merely audience size. While a graduation speaker or musician may address as many as 40 000 people at once in a stadium, they are not mass mediated because the audience is not remote. Now, of course, if an Ariana Grande concert is being broadcast live via satellite, those watching at home on their televisions or over the internet are experiencing it through mass media. Mass media collapse the distance between artist and audience, then. Working from this definition, we have organized the mass media into four subcategories: print media, motion picture and sound recording, broadcast media, and new media. These categories, like all acts of classification, are arbitrary, meaning that they emphasize certain features of the media they group together at the expense of others. Nonetheless, we offer them as one way of conceptually organizing mass communication technologies. As our media environment becomes increasingly digital, the utility and value of these categories is mostly historical.

Print media

In an electronically saturated world like the one in which we live today, it is easy to overlook the historical legacy and contemporary transformations of print media, the first mass medium. German printer Johannes Gutenberg invented the movable-type printing press in 1450, sparking a revolution in the ways that human beings could disseminate, preserve, and ultimately relate to knowledge. Printed materials before the advent of the press were costly and rare, but the invention of movable type allowed for the (relatively) cheap production of a diverse array of pamphlets, books, and other items. This flourishing of printed materials touched almost every aspect of human life. Suddenly knowledge could be recorded for future generations in libraries or religious texts, and social power increasingly hinged upon literacy and ownership of printed materials. Most importantly, the press allowed for an unprecedented circulation of knowledge to far-flung cities across Europe. Though still limited by class distinctions, access to information from outside of one's immediate context was a real possibility. Mass media was born.

Not long after the settlement of Jamestown in 1607, the new American colonies established their first printing press. Located in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the press was printing popular religious tracts – such as the *Bay Psalm Book*, a 148-page collection of English translations of Hebrew – by 1640.[2] Though much of the early printing in the colonies was religion-oriented, novels such as *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Tom Jones* (1749), imported from England, were also popular. Religious tracts were eventually followed by almanacs, newspapers, and magazines. The most well-known early almanac, *Poor Richard's Almanack*, which included information on the weather along with some political opinions, was printed by Benjamin Franklin in Philadelphia from 1733 to 1757. Though various cities had short-lived or local non-daily newspapers in the 1700s, the New York *Sun*, which is considered the first successful mass-circulation newspaper, did not begin operations until 1833.[3] The failure of earlier newspapers is often attributed to the fact that they were small operations run by

local printers. It was not until newspapers began using editors and receiving substantial financial backing – first from political parties and later from wealthy elites like Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst – that the newspaper industry mushroomed.

During the 19th and 20th centuries, the newspaper industry experienced rapid growth. This trend continued until 1973, at which point there were 1774 daily newspapers with a combined circulation of 63.1 million copies. This meant that about 92 percent of US households were subscribing to a daily newspaper in 1973. Since then, however, newspaper production and circulation have steadily declined, and, as of 2016, there were only 1286 daily newspapers in the United States, with a total estimated circulation 30.9 million in 2017: a more than 50 percent drop from the high water point in 1973.[4]

In many ways, the history of the magazine industry in the United States mirrors that of the newspaper industry. It began somewhat unsteadily, underwent tremendous growth, and is currently experiencing a period of instability. The first US magazine, *American Magazine*, was published in 1741. But the boom did not really begin until the mid-19th century. And though the industry continued to experience growth throughout the 20th century, more recently it has suffered a decline in both the total number of titles (Table 1.1) and paid circulation (Table 1.2). Table 1.1 illustrates that the number of magazine titles in the United States grew by roughly 38 percent from 2002 to 2012, before beginning a slow decline over the next five years.

Moreover, as Table 1.2 shows, the total paid circulation of the top 10 magazines in 2017 was more than 5 million less than the total paid circulation of the top 10 magazines in 2012, and a whopping 33 million less than in 1992. Interestingly, the highest circulating magazine in 1992, *Reader's Digest*, had fallen to 10th in 2017, while the second highest circulating magazine in 2017, *Game Informer Magazine*, was not among the top 10 in 1992, as it had then only been in existence for 1 year. Despite declining circulation and unit sales in the newspaper and magazine industries, Americans are still reading. But how they are reading is changing. Increasingly, readers are turning to online newspapers and magazines. As of 2016, nearly twice as many US adults (38%) were getting their news online – either through news websites/apps or social media – as were getting it through print newspapers (20%).[5] The book publishing industry has not experienced the deep losses occurring in the newspaper and magazine industries over the past two decades. But in 2012, unit sales of traditional paper

Table 1.1   Number of magazines in the United States from 2002 to 2017 (in 5-year intervals)

	2002	2007	2012	2017
Number of magazines	5340	6809	7390	7176

Source: MPA. (n.d.). Number of Magazines in the United States from 2002 to 2017. In *Statista – The Statistics Portal*. Retrieved October 10, 2018, from https://www.statista.com/statistics/238589/number-of-magazines-in-the-united-states/.

Table 1.2 Top 10 US consumer magazines by paid circulation in 1992, 2012, and 2017*

1992		2012		2017	
Rank/Publication	Circulation	Rank/Publication	Circulation	Rank/Publication	Circulation
Reader's Digest	16 258 476	*Game Informer Magazine*	7 864 326	*Better Homes and Gardens*	7 645 364
TV Guide	14 498 341	*Better Homes and Gardens*	7 621 456	*Game Informer Magazine*	6 353 075
National Geographic	9 708 254	*Reader's Digest*	5 527 183	*Good Housekeeping*	4 315 026
Better Homes and Gardens	8 002 585	*Good Housekeeping*	4 354 740	*Family Circle*	4 056 156
The Cable Guide	5 889 947	*Family Circle*	4 143 942	*People*	3 418 555
Family Circle	5 283 660	*National Geographic*	4 125 152	*Woman's Day*	3 275 962
Good Housekeeping	5 139 355	*People*	3 637 633	*National Geographic*	3 147 721
Ladies' Home Journal	5 041 143	*Woman's Day*	3 374 479	*Sports Illustrated*	3 057 042
Woman's Day	4 810 445	*Time*	3 281 175	*Time*	3 032 581
McCall's	4 704 772	*Taste of Home*	3 268 549	*Reader's Digest*	3 024 031
Total circulation of top 10	**79 336 978**	**Total circulation of top 10**	**47 198 635**	**Total circulation of top 10**	**41 325 513**

Source: Adweek, March 29, 1993; Alliance for Audited Media, February 7, 2013 and June 30, 2017. *Data exclude magazines whose circulation is tied to membership benefits (i.e. *AARP The Magazine* [formerly *Modern Maturity*], *AARP Bulletin, Costco Connection,* and *AAA Living*).

books fell by about 9 percent for the third year in a row; adult nonfiction was the hardest hit, falling 13 percent.[6] It is worth noting that since 2012, however, sales of printed books have stabilized and even increased somewhat, indicating that adoption rates for e-book technologies may have plateaued among some demographics.

Motion picture and sound recording

Sound recording and motion pictures may seem like an odd pairing at first, but their histories are deeply intertwined, thanks in large part to Thomas Edison. In the span of 15 years, Edison and his assistant, William Kennedy Laurie Dickson, created what would later develop into the first two new mass media since print. Edison's first invention, the phonograph, in 1877, was a device that played recorded sound, and his second, the kinetoscope, in 1892, was an early motion picture device that showed short, silent films in peep-show fashion to individual viewers. Edison's goal was to synchronize audio and visual images into a film projector that would allow for more than one viewer at a time. Though sound film did not become possible until the early 1920s, improvements in film projection – namely, the development of the vitascope – gave rise to the silent film era in the meantime. The eventual synchronization of sound and film launched talking pictures, or "talkies." The first commercially successful, feature-length talkie was a musical film, *The Jazz Singer*, in 1927. Hollywood was about to enter its Golden Age of the 1930s and 1940s, in which "the studios were geared to produce a singular commodity, the feature film."[7]

With the motion picture industry firmly established, sound recording began to receive independent attention and the record industry came to dominate the music industry, which had previously been involved primarily in the production of sheet music. By the start of the 20th century, profits from the sale of sound recordings quickly eclipsed those from the sale of sheet music. This shift was fueled in large part by the continuous development of cheap and easily reproducible formats such as magnetic tape in 1926, long-playing (LP) records in 1948, compact or audio cassettes in 1963, optical or compact discs (CDs) in 1982, and lossy bitcompression technologies such as MPEG-1 Audio Layer 3 (MP3s) in 1995. With the exception of magnetic tape for sound recording, which was invented by German engineer Fritz Pfleumer, and Columbia Records' LP, Sony and Philips were responsible for all of the previously mentioned recording formats, as well as the Betamax (1975), LaserDisc (1978), Video2000 (1980), Betacam (1982), Video8 (1985), Digital Audio Tape (1987), Hi8 (1989), CD-i (1991), MiniDisc (1992), Digital Compact Disc (1992), Universal Media Disc (2005), Blu-ray Disc (2006), and DVD (as part of the 1995 DVD Consortium) formats. Several of these more recent formats have had implications for the motion picture industry, as they allow for the playback and recording of movies on DVD players and computers at home.

Broadcast media

The development of broadcast technologies changed the media landscape once again. Instead of media physically having to be distributed to stores or shipped to audiences, as books, magazines, and newspapers are, or audiences physically having to travel to the media, as in the case of film, media could now be brought directly to audiences over public airwaves. This was an important development, because it freed mass media from transportation for the first time in history. (We have excluded the electrical telegraph (1830s) because, like the telephone (1870s), it is better classified as a personal medium than a mass medium.) Radio came on the scene first, experimenting with transmissions as early as the 1890s and making scheduled broadcasts in the 1920s. But television followed shortly thereafter, with Philo T. Farnsworth, a Mormon from the small farm community of Rigby, Idaho, applying for the first television patent in 1927 and CBS launching the first television schedule in 1941. Not only do radio and television share an overlapping technological history, but they also share an overlapping professional history, as many of television's early stars came from radio. After the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) sorted out broadcast frequencies for radio in 1945 and for television in 1952, commercial broadcast stations spread rapidly (see Table 1.3).

The tremendous growth in the number of commercial radio and television stations since 1950 suggests strong consumer demand for their content. This perception is confirmed by the data on radio and television ownership and usage. As of 2011, 99 percent of US households had at least one radio and 96.7 percent of US households had at least one television set (the lowest percentage since 1975, and down from 98.9 percent at the height of television's penetration).[8] The average US home is equipped with 8 radios and 2.93 television sets.[9] And by all accounts, these devices garner substantial use. While radio usage is difficult to measure, as we listen to the radio at work, at home, in cars, and in a variety of other contexts, industry experts estimate that the typical American listens to about 1 hour and 30 minutes of radio per day. But television is still, far and away, the dominant medium in terms of usage. The Nielsen Company estimates that, in 2010, the average American watched more than 35½ hours of television per week.[10] Suffice it to say, Americans spend a significant amount of time with radio and television.

Table 1.3   Number of commercial broadcast stations in the United States*

	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2015
AM radio stations	2118	3539	4323	4589	4987	4685	4782	4684
FM radio stations	493	815	2196	3282	4392	5892	6526	6701
Television stations	47	515	677	734	1092	1288	1390	1387

Source: The Federal Communications Commission; US Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2001, Table 1126; and US Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2016, Table 1132. *Data exclude educational broadcast stations.

Before turning to the fourth and final category of mass media, two recent developments with regard to radio and television need to be addressed: satellite radio and cable and satellite television. In many ways, these developments are analogous. Both technologies charge for content, include some content that cannot be broadcast over public airwaves, and trouble the traditional understanding of broadcast media. Satellite radio and television and, increasingly, cable television employ a digital signal, which qualifies them for inclusion in the category of new media. That said, not all cable television is digital, and satellite radio and television, which use a digital signal, are broadcast. As such, neither cable nor satellite technology fits neatly into the category of broadcast *or* new media. Confusion over how to categorize satellite radio and cable and satellite television has not stopped either one from being successful, however. Sirius XM Radio Inc., the sole satellite radio provider in the United States, has 21 million paying subscribers and made $763 million in 2017.[11] Meanwhile, from 1970 to 2011, the number of US households with either cable or satellite television grew from 7 to over 85 percent.[12] As these data suggest, satellite radio and cable and satellite television are growing rapidly, though even their success is threatened by the proliferation of new media.

New media

New media is the broadest and, hence, most difficult of the four categories of mass media to delimit and define. Though we offer a definition from Lev Manovich, even he is aware of its problematic nature: "new media are the cultural objects which use digital computer technology for distribution and circulation."[13] One difficulty with this definition is that what it includes must continuously be revised as computing technology becomes a more common mode of distribution. The development of digital television, film, photography, e-books, and podcasts, for instance, would place them in the category of new media along with the internet, websites, online computer games, and internet-capable mobile telephony. The ever-expanding character of this category raises a second problem, which can be posed as a question: Will it eventually come to include all media and therefore be a meaningless category? The likely answer is "yes," for reasons we will discuss later under the topic of Convergence. But, for the time being, it remains a helpful way to differentiate these forms from traditional print, celluloid film, and broadcast radio and television. As long as there are mass media that exist as something other than 0 s and 1 s, new media will remain a useful and meaningful category.

The history of new media begins with the development of the microprocessor or computer chip. Introduced in 1971, the world's first commercial microprocessor, the 4-bit Intel 4004, executed about 60 000 calculations a second. By the early 1990s, the 486 microprocessor, which was typical of computers at the time, could perform 54 million calculations per second. Intel's Pentium Pro, introduced in 1995, increased performance yet again to roughly 250 million calculations per second. But computers were not only rapidly becoming more powerful, they

were also rapidly becoming more connected. Developed initially as a communication technology for the US Department of Defense, the internet began to catch the public's attention in the 1970s, when its potential for sending personal electronic messages (emails) became evident. But it was the development of a graphic-based user interface and common network protocols in the early 1990s that really popularized the internet, by transforming it into the hypertextual platform we know now as the World Wide Web. At the turn of the millennium, experts estimated that there were more than 8 billion web pages, a number that was then doubling every 6 months.[14] Today, with the infrastructure in place, the cost of computing technology declining, and the opportunity for ordinary people to become mass producers of information, the adoption of new media in the United States is growing exponentially.

Let us consider the rate at which a few of these technologies have invaded our lives. The Pew Internet and American Life Project reports that only 10 percent of American adults were using the internet in 1995. By August 2011, that number had grown to 78 percent of adults and 95 percent of teenagers.[15] Today, millions of people use the internet for everything from online banking and bill paying to job searching and social networking. Indeed, the social networking site Facebook, which first appeared in 2004, attracted more than a billion active users worldwide in its first decade. Other new media technologies, like cell phones, MP3 players, and digital games, have also experienced staggering adoption rates. Though cell phone adoption in the United States lags behind that in many European countries, mobile telephony still boasts one of the fastest penetration rates of any communication technology in history. In 2004, only about 39 percent of youth (8- to 18-year-olds) owned a cell phone, but that number had jumped to 66 percent by 2009. In that same time span (2004 to 2009), the percentage of youth who owned an MP3 player skyrocketed from 18 to 76 percent.[16] As of 2018, 46 percent of US households (roughly 162 million people) owned a gaming console.[17] Table 1.4 shows the use of select new media technologies in 2017.

Table 1.4   Use of select new media for 2017 in the United States

	Users in millions 2017	% increase over 2016	% of US population
Internet use			
Internet users	273.3	2.2%	83.9%
Social network users	191.1	2.9%	58.7%
Online video viewers	221.8	3.1%	68.1%
Facebook users	171.4	15.8%	52.6%
Dual device users	214.6	2.0%	65.9%
Computer-only users	17.9	−11.8%	5.5%
Mobile phone use			
Mobile internet users	223.0	6.0%	68.4%
Mobile social networkers	169.7	5.0%	52.1%
Mobile internet only users	40.7	11.2%	12.5%
Wearables (adult) users	44.4	12.6%	13.6%

Source: eMarketer, *US Digital Media Usage: A Snapshot of 2017*, March 2017.

Living in Postmodernity

As the previous section illustrates, the mass media develop and change over time. It is important, therefore, to study them in historical context. Since the focus of this book is on *contemporary* mass media, this section reflects on the character of the contemporary historical moment. The present moment has variously been described as the information age, the network era, the third wave, post-industrial society, the digital age, and postmodernity. While none of these labels is without its shortcomings, we prefer the term postmodernity to refer to the contemporary moment, given its widespread adoption by media scholars. **Postmodernity** describes the historical epoch that began to emerge in the 1960s as the economic mode of production in most Western societies gradually shifted from commodity-based manufacturing to information-based services. Postmodernity should not be confused with *postmodernism*, an aesthetic sensibility or "style of culture which reflects something of this epochal change, in a … self-reflexive, playful, derivative, eclectic, pluralistic art."[18] In the transition from modernity to postmodernity, the mass production of standardized, durable goods such as automobiles and toasters has steadily given way to the reproduction of highly customizable soft goods such as digital content providers and cell phone plans. Table 1.5 highlights some of the key differences between modernity and postmodernity. As the mass media have both contributed to and been transformed by this historical transition, the remainder of this section explores five key trends driving the mass media in postmodernity: convergence, mobility, fragmentation, globalization, and simulation.

Table 1.5   Comparison of modernity and postmodernity

Modernity	Postmodernity
~1850s to 1960s	~1960s to present
Monopoly (imperial) capitalism	Multinational (global) capitalism
Industrialism	Informationalism
Fordism	Flexible accumulation
Manufacturing and production	Marketing and public relations
Mechanization	Computerization
Standardization	Customization
Heavy industries	Image industries
Durable goods	Information and ideas
Product-based	Service-oriented
Mass markets	Niche markets
Economies of scale	Economies of speed
Nation state	Global corporation
State macro-economic regulation	Free-market neoliberalism

Convergence

The previous section organizes the media into four categories as a way of sketching a brief history of mass communication technologies. Ironically, the first major trend in the mass media today involves the erasure of such boundaries. Increasingly, contemporary media reflect **convergence**, the tendency of formerly diverse media to share a common, integrated platform. As strange as it may seem today in light of the prevalence of streaming video, internet radio, and online newspapers, convergence is a relatively recent phenomenon that was considered visionary in the early 1980s when Nicholas Negroponte and others at the MIT Media Lab began exploring multimedia systems. Before media convergence could become a reality, it had to overcome two major obstacles. First, the noise associated with analog signals such as those used in television and radio broadcasting generated message distortion and decay over long distances. This problem was solved through digitization, which reduces distortion by relying on bits rather than a continuous signal. Second, bandwidth limitations prevented large data packets involving images and video from being transmitted quickly and easily over a communication channel. However, improved data-compression techniques and bandwidth expansions have made possible the real-time transmission of large data packets over communication channels. As these technical hurdles have been overcome, convergence has accelerated.

Mobility

Historically, mass media have not been very portable. If you wanted to see a film, you had to go to the theater. If you wanted to watch your favorite television show, you had to do so in the privacy of your own home. Even print media such as books, magazines, and newspapers were limited in their mobility, as their size and weight significantly restricted the amount of printed material one was likely to carry around. But the development of powerful microprocessors and wireless technology is rapidly changing all this, and today, instead of us going *to* places for media, media can increasingly go places *with* us. **Mobility** refers to the ease with which an object can be moved from place to place. As one of the book's authors typed this paragraph, for instance, he was sitting in his favorite café, listening to music on his iPhone, and working on his laptop. In addition to being able to take his whole music library with him, much of the research for this book is stored on his computer. When he needed to locate information not on his computer, he simply connected wirelessly to the university library and downloaded the necessary research. In fact, in the past few years, this author has pretty much stopped going to the library altogether. Even when he requires a book that does not exist electronically (yet!), he simply logs into the library website and arranges for delivery to his office. As technology becomes more and more mobile, media are being transformed from generic home appliances into highly personal (often fashion) accessories. In light of the drive toward mobility,

the next evolutionary stage is likely to see media go from being something we carry around or wear to something we embody or become in the form of cybernetic implants.

Fragmentation

Despite its continued use, the phrase "mass media" is rapidly becoming a misnomer. The *mass* in mass media has traditionally referred to the large, undifferentiated, anonymous, and passive audience addressed by television, radio, and print's standardized messages. But the explosion of information in postmodernity has given way to cultural **fragmentation**, a splintering of the consuming public into ever more specialized taste cultures. This, in turn, has resulted in a tremendous proliferation of media content, if not media ownership, along with niche marketing. What Alvin Toffler has called the "de-massification" of media has been underway since at least the early 1970s.[19] Decreasing production costs have greatly altered the economics of the media industry, reducing the necessity for standardization. The result has been a dramatic increase in media output that caters to specific interests and tastes. Long gone are the days of only three television networks, which could not fill 24 hours of programming. Today, there are hundreds of networks, as well as premium cable services, with around-the-clock programming. Nor is television unique; the print media and radio have witnessed a similar proliferation of specialty outlets. General-purpose magazines such as *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Life*, which dominated the magazine industry in the 1960s, had by 1980 been replaced by 4000 special-interest magazines.[20] The internet, of course, reflects the most diversified medium, delivering a dizzying array of content. Even an online bazaar like Amazon.com has country-specific portals and employs tracking software, or so-called cookies, that record user preferences to create a highly customized shopping experience. As this technology improves, we can count on media becoming more and more tailored to individual tastes.

Globalization

Globalization is *the* buzzword of the moment, having captured the attention of academics, business leaders, and politicians alike.[21] Even as the world has become increasingly fragmented by specialized interests, it has simultaneously become more global as well. **Globalization** is a complex set of social, political, and economic processes in which the physical boundaries and structural policies that previously reinforced the autonomy of the nation state are collapsing in favor of instantaneous and flexible worldwide social relations. While globalization is multidimensional, we wish to focus chiefly on economic globalization. In the past few decades, the spread of capitalism has fueled the rise of multinational corporations that wish to profit from untapped "global markets." Hence, these corporations aggressively support free-trade policies that eliminate barriers such

as trade tariffs between national and international markets. For the mass media, which are owned and controlled almost exclusively today by multinational corporations, globalization creates opportunities to bring their cultural products to distant local markets. This fact has raised fears about *cultural imperialism*, the imposition of one set of cultural values on other cultures. The process is dialectical or bidirectional, however. Local markets are influencing the products and thinking of the very companies targeting them, leading to concern that cultural difference is being eradicated in favor of one large hybridized culture.

Simulation

Though the concept of simulation can be traced back to the ancient Greeks, its current cultural cachet is due principally to the French theorist Jean Baudrillard and his book *Simulacra and Simulation*. "Simulation," Baudrillard writes, "is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyper-real."[22] According to Baudrillard, Western societies, and "America" in particular, are increasingly characterized by **simulation**, an implosion of the image (i.e. representations) and the real. This argument is premised on, in Baudrillard's words, the *precession* of simulacra, which suggests that the image has evolved from being a good representation of an external reality, to a distorted representation of an external reality, to a mask that conceals the absence of a basic reality, to bearing no relation to any reality at all.[23] The matter of simulation is an important one, as the mass media are the key social institutions fueling this social phenomenon. The media, for instance, endlessly produce and reproduce images of love, violence, and family (to name just a few) that no longer point or refer to some external reality. Rather, they exist only as images of images for which there is no original. Simulation suggests that the media no longer represent, if they ever did, our social world; they construct a realer-than-real space that *is* our social world.

Why Study the Media?

Perhaps the most important reason to study mass media today is because of their sheer ubiquity. In the transition to postmodernity, mass media have gone from being one institution among many within our cultural environment to being the very basis of our cultural environment. The further back in history one travels, the less central mass media are to social life and the more central are other social institutions such as the family, the church, the school, and the state. But today, these social institutions have been subsumed by, and are largely filtered through, the mass media. More than ever before, the mass media have replaced families as caretakers, churches as arbiters of cultural values, schools as sites of education, and the state as public agenda-setters. In the introduction, we explored the two ways we know

Table 1.6   Average time spent per day (in hrs:mins) with major media by US adults, 2012–2018

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Digital	**4:10**	**4:48**	**5:09**	**5:29**	**5:43**	**5:53**	**6:01**
• Mobile (nonvoice)	1:28	2:15	2:37	2:54	3:06	3:15	3:23
• Desktop/laptop	2:24	2:16	2:14	2:12	2:11	2:10	2:08
• Other connected device	0:18	0:17	0:19	0:23	0:26	0:28	0:30
TV	**4:38**	**4:31**	**4:22**	**4:11**	**4:05**	**4:00**	**3:55**
Radio	**1:32**	**1:30**	**1:28**	**1:27**	**1:27**	**1:26**	**1:25**
Print	**0:40**	**0:35**	**0:32**	**0:30**	**0:28**	**0:27**	**0:26**
• Newspapers	0:24	0:20	0:18	0:17	0:16	0:15	0:15
• Magazines	0:17	0:15	0:13	0:13	0:12	0:11	0:11
Other	**0:38**	**0:31**	**0:26**	**0:24**	**0:22**	**0:21**	**0:20**
Total hours	**11:39**	**11:55**	**11:57**	**12:00**	**12:05**	**12:07**	**12:08**

Source: Growth in Time Spent with Media Is Slowing, *eMarketer*, June 6, 2016, https://www.emarketer.com/Article/Growth-Time-Spent-with-Media-Slowing/1014042 (accessed November 30, 2018). Note: many of these hours are spent multitasking; numbers may not add up to total due to rounding.

things: somatically and symbolically (i.e. directly and indirectly). Not only do we know most things symbolically, but the media represent an ever-expanding piece of the total symbolic pie of social mediators. Table 1.6 illustrates the expanding number of hours the average American spends per day with select media.

As Table 1.6 indicates, though we may gradually be changing which media we use, the mass media remain a significant socializing force in contemporary society. **Socialization** describes the process by which persons – both individually and collectively – learn, adopt, and internalize the prevailing cultural beliefs, values, and norms of a society. Because all social institutions are mediators, they all contribute to socialization. When information passes through a channel or medium, it is translated from direct sensory experience into a set of symbols. Since symbols are selective, privileging some aspects of the thing being represented at the expense of others, they function as filters. Language is perhaps the most obvious example of how symbols operate as filters. When you listen to a friend tell a story or read about history in a textbook, you are not experiencing the events being described directly. You are only experiencing them symbolically. The words you hear or read are representations of the event you are learning about, not the actual event itself. This is why two accounts of the same event, while potentially very similar, are never identical. Stories are inevitably filtered through the symbols, and therefore the perspective, of the storyteller. As society's main storytellers, the mass media filter virtually every aspect of our world, shaping both *what* we learn and *how* we learn.

What we learn

Mediated messages are composed of content and form. Broadly speaking, the content influences what we learn and the form influences how we learn. Both content and form are central to the socializing function of the mass media, though content has typically been given more attention. *Content* refers to the informational component of a message, to the specific details, facts, ideas, and opinions communicated through mass media. Audiences are often consciously aware of the content of mediated messages. We know, for instance, that when we read the news we are learning specifics about our world. After just briefly scanning *USA Today* online, one author learned that the Marriott hotel corporation has acknowledged a data breach affecting more than 500 million people, that Facebook is dragging its heels over releasing the results of a civil rights audit, and that Vladamir Putin and the Saudi Crown Prince have shown remarkable closeness at the most recent G-20 Summit. It should probably be noted at this point that the content of a message need not have use-value or truth-value to be classified as informational. As both misinformation and disinformation would suggest, fairness and accuracy are not defining attributes of information. Information need only be *meaningful*, as opposed to gibberish, to count as information.

The content of the mass media matters for several reasons. First, by choosing to include or cover some topics and to exclude or ignore others, the media establish which social issues are considered important and which are considered unimportant. Simply put, the mass media largely determine what we talk and care about. Second, content lacking a diversity of views and opinions significantly limits the scope of public debate and deliberation on matters of social importance. Unpopular and dissenting viewpoints are essential to a healthy democracy, however, as they often reframe issues in fresh, productive ways. Third, because media content is communicated using symbols and all symbols are selective, media content is necessarily biased. The language and images used to inform, educate, and entertain you also convey selective attitudes and beliefs. In short, the content of the mass media socializes us to care about some issues and not others, to see those issues from some perspectives and not others, and to adopt particular attitudes toward the perspectives it presents.

How we learn

Whereas content refers to the informational component of a message, *form* describes the cognitive component of a message. Form can be thought of as the way a message is packaged and delivered. The packaging of a message is a consequence, first, of the medium and, second, of the genre or class. Every medium or communication technology packages messages differently.[24] The unique ways that a message is packaged influence how we process it. In other words, communication mediums train our conscious to think in particular ways: not *what* to think, but *how* to think. Media scholars generally agree, for instance,

that the way we interpret and make sense of language differs radically from the way we interpret and make sense of images. Whereas language is highly temporal and thus favors a sequential or linear way of knowing,[25] images are decidedly spatial and hence privilege an associative or nonlinear way of knowing. A simple way to confirm this difference is to place a page of printed text next to an image. While the printed text only makes sense when the words are read in succession, the elements within the image can be processed simultaneously.

Because the medium of a message conditions how one processes the informational elements within that message, some media scholars contend that message form is a more fundamental and important socializing force than message content. This position is most famously associated with Marshall McLuhan, who succinctly claimed, "The medium is the message." Given the transition to postmodernity, in which the image has steadily replaced the word as the prevailing form in mass media (even print media such as magazines and newspapers are increasingly filled with pictures), the belief that young people today are cognitively different than their parents is rapidly gaining adherents. If media guru Douglas Rushkoff is correct, then television and MTV, along with video games and the internet, may account for everything from the invention and popularity of snowboarding to the emergence and spread of attention deficit disorder. As such, critical media scholars must attend not only to what the mass media socialize us to think, but also to how they socialize us to think.

Doing Critical Media Studies

As powerful socializing agents that shape what we know of ourselves and the world, and how we know it, it is vital that we analyze and evaluate the mass media critically. **Critical media studies** is an umbrella term used to describe an array of theoretical perspectives that, though diverse, are united by their skeptical attitude, humanistic approach, political assessment, and commitment to social justice. Before turning to the individual perspectives that make up critical studies, let us examine the four key characteristics they share in greater detail.

Attitude: skeptical

The theoretical perspectives that make up critical studies all begin with the assumption that there is more at stake in mass media than initially meets the eye. To the lay-person, for instance, what gets reported on the evening news may appear to be an objective retelling of the day's major events. But to the critical scholar, the production of news is a complex process shaped by the pragmatic need to fill a 1-hour time block every day, as well as to garner high ratings. These factors, in large part, determine what counts as news, how the news is produced, and what the news looks like. Just as there is value in looking more closely at the news, there is value in looking more closely at all media. Thus, the

various perspectives within the field of critical media studies adopt an attitude of *skepticism*, not as a way of rejecting media, but as a way of understanding how they work and what they do. Some critics refer to this skeptical attitude as a "hermeneutics of suspicion."[26] Hermeneutics describes a mode of interpretation grounded in close analysis. So, a hermeneutics of suspicion would be a mode of close analysis with a deep distrust of surface appearances and "commonsense" explanations.

Approach: humanistic

Universities, like many other cultural institutions, are divided into various departments and units. Though the precise character of such divisions varies from one institution to the next, one common way of organizing disciplines and departments is according to the categories of natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities. These categories, while neither rigid nor entirely discrete, reflect a set of general distinctions concerning subject matter, outlook, and method (i.e. procedure of investigation). Whereas the natural sciences seek to understand the physical world by empirical and "objective" means, for instance, the humanities aim to understand cultural and social phenomena by interpretive and analytical means. To say that critical media studies is humanistic, then, is to associate it with a particular set of intellectual concerns and approaches to the discovery of knowledge. Adopting a humanistic approach to the social world and our place in it, critical media studies emphasizes self-reflection, critical citizenship, democratic principles, and humane education.[27] This is an approach that entails "thinking about freedom and responsibility and the contribution that intellectual pursuit can make to the welfare of society."[28] Because of the subjective element of humanistic criticism, the knowledge it creates is never complete, fixed, or finished.[29]

Assessment: political

In many scholarly arenas, the final step in research is the objective reporting of one's findings (usually in an academic journal). But critical media studies is interested in the practical and political implications of those findings and, thus, entails judgment. Though there is no universal criterion for leveling political judgments across individual studies of the mass media, critical studies are generally concerned with determining whose interests are served by the media, and how those interests contribute to the domination, exploitation, and/or asymmetrical relations of power. Research in this tradition interrogates how media create, maintain, or subvert particular social structures, and whether or not such structures are just and egalitarian. A Feminist study of television sitcoms, for instance, would examine how the representation of male and female characters in such programs functions to reinforce or challenge gender and sexual stereotypes. Critical studies view society as a complex network of interrelated power relations that symbolically privilege and materially benefit some individuals and groups over others. The

central aim of critical scholarship is to evaluate the media's role in constructing and maintaining particular relationships of power.

Ambition: social justice

One of the most unique and, at times, controversial characteristics of critical media studies is its desire to better our social world. While scholars in many fields believe that research should be neutral and non-interventionist, critical media studies aims not only to identify political injustices but also to confront and challenge them. Critical media studies is premised on a commitment to social justice and maintains that scholars should "have as their determinate goal the improvement of society."[30] Many media scholars who work within the critical media studies paradigm belong to media-reform organizations such as Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), the Media Education Foundation, Media Democracy in Action, Free Press, the Action Coalition for Media Education, the Center for Creative Voices in Media, and countless others. Critical media studies scholars believe that it is incumbent upon citizens, and not just their governments, to hold big corporate media accountable. Social activism can take many forms, from boycotts and culture jamming to producing alternative media and supporting independent media outlets.

Key Critical Perspectives

In an effort to assist students in evaluating the media critically, this book examines, explains, and demonstrates 12 critical perspectives, each of which is rooted in a different social theory. **Theory** is an explanatory and interpretive tool that simultaneously enables and limits our understanding of the particular social product, practice, or process under investigation. The term "theory" derives from the Greek word *theoria*, which refers to vision, optics, or a way of seeing. Since, as Kenneth Burke notes in *Permanence and Change*, "Every way of seeing is also a way of not seeing,"[31] no theory is without limitations. We believe that since every theory has biases and blind spots, no theory ought to be treated as the final word on any subject. Theory is most useful when it is used and understood as a partial explanation of the phenomenon being studied. Students are strongly encouraged to take each perspective seriously, but none as infallible or universal. We have grouped the 12 critical perspectives in this book into three clusters based upon whether their primary focus is on media industries, messages, or audiences. A brief examination of these three theory clusters provides a chapter overview of the book.

Media industries: Marxist, Organizational, and Pragmatic

Part I of *Critical Media Studies* examines media industries and their practices of production, paying particular attention to the economic, corporate, and governmental structures that enable and constrain how mass media operate.

Chapter 2 explores the media from a Marxist theoretical perspective by examining the ways that capitalism and the profit-motive influence media-ownership patterns and corporate practices. Chapter 3 approaches the media from an Organizational perspective by focusing on the work routines and professional conventions within media industries. Chapter 4, the final chapter in Part I, investigates media industries from a Pragmatic perspective, exploring how government laws and regulations impact media products.

Media messages: Rhetorical, Cultural, Psychoanalytic, Feminist, and Queer

Part II of the book centers on media messages, and concerns how the mass media convey information, ideas, and ideologies. Chapter 5 utilizes a Rhetorical perspective to illuminate how the various structures within media texts work to influence and move audiences. Chapter 6 reflects a Cultural perspective and investigates how the media convey ideologies about matters such as class and race that, in turn, shape cultural attitudes toward various social groups. Chapter 7 adopts a Psychoanalytic perspective, considering parallels between media messages and the unconscious structures of the human psyche. Chapter 8 approaches media from a Feminist perspective, highlighting the complex ways that media influence our cultural performances of gender, whereas Chapter 9 adopts a Queer perspective to illustrate how media contribute to our attitudes about sexuality.

Media audiences: Reception, Sociological, Erotic, and Ecological

In Part III, *Critical Media Studies* turns to media audiences, attending to the diverse ways that audiences interpret, negotiate, and use media to create meanings, pleasures, and identities. Employing a Reception approach, Chapter 10 explores the various meaning-making practices in which audiences engage. Chapter 11 adopts a Sociological approach to media, exploring how audiences use media to negotiate the symbolic and material demands of their everyday lives. Chapter 12 employs an Erotic perspective to understand the transgressive pleasures that audiences experience as they increasingly become active producers as well as consumers of media. Chapter 13 concludes Part III by offering an Ecological perspective, which concerns the ways media technologies dominate our social environment and shape human consciousness.

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Part I

Media Industries: Marxist, Organizational, and Pragmatic Perspectives

2 Marxist Analysis

KEY CONCEPTS

ADVERTISING
BASE
CELEBRITY
CONCENTRATION

CONGLOMERATION
HISTORICAL MATERIALISM
JOINT VENTURES
INTEGRATION
LOGIC OF SAFETY
MARXISM

MULTINATIONALISM
PLANNED OBSOLESCENCE
PROFIT-MOTIVE
SPECTACLE
SUPERSTRUCTURE
SYNERGY

Shadowhunters – a supernatural teen drama about human–angel hybrids who protect other humans from demons – debuted on Disney's Freeform channel (formerly known as ABC Family) on January 12, 2016 to many indicators of success. In addition to deriving its source material from Cassandra Clare's popular book series, *The Mortal Instruments*, the new series received a coveted broadcast slot following the network's most popular program, *Pretty Little Liars*, which is also based on a successful novel series. *Pretty Little Liars* was in its seventh season when *Shadowhunters* premiered, and network executives were hopeful that the substantial following of the former program would carry over to the latter. Their plan was largely successful. The pilot episode of *Shadowhunters* attracted Freeform's largest audience in more than 2 years and was the fourth highest-rated scripted cable launch in 12 months, behind AMC's *Fear the Walking Dead*, *Better Call Saul*, and *Into the Badlands*. Based on its success, *Shadowhunters* was renewed for a second and third season, each involving 20 episodes. During this 3-year period, the series received numerous Teen Choice Awards and developed a passionate fan following.[1]

Fans of the show were understandably surprised and puzzled, then, to learn in June 2018 that Freeform was cancelling the series after only three seasons. Why would the network cancel something so popular, especially when it fit so well with its brand? The answer to that question comes down to economics. As Britt Lawrence explains, "Freeform's co-production partner, the Germany-located company Constantin Film, lost its output deal with Netflix when Freeform decided to start ordering original series in smaller doses. In light of that move, the burden was on the network and the production company to make a bigger

financial commitment, but the talks fell apart in the end."[2] As Freeform's head of programming Karey Burke noted, "We were very happy creatively with it [*Shadowhunters*] … We went back and forth with them [Constantin Film] but ultimately we just couldn't make the economics work."[3] Though fans launched an online campaign with #saveshadowhunter, an effort that garnered more than 114 000 signatures and $10 000 for charity, the final episodes aired early in 2019.

The cancellation of *Shadowhunters* is as an important reminder to media consumers about the powerful role that economic factors play in shaping our media landscape. Though the program had strong ratings and a dedicated fan base, its production and distribution costs made it too financially risky for Freeform. In many ways, this case study illustrates the usefulness of a critical perspective in media studies commonly referred to as Marxist analysis. Generally speaking, Marxist media scholars are interested in how economic contexts and imperatives impact the production and distribution of media content. Books, films, and television shows do not just spontaneously occur; they are all *products* to be bought and sold in a greater system of commodity exchange. Marxist scholars are concerned with how conceptualizing media content as products, in turn, shapes the way that content looks and circulates.

We begin this chapter with an overview of Marxist theory, before turning our attention to patterns of media ownership, focusing on how concentration, conglomeration, integration, and multinationalism diminish competition, maximize profits, and exploit foreign markets. Next, we explore several of the key strategies of profit maximization utilized by multinational media conglomerates to increase their bottom line and maintain their economic dominance. Then, we examine the role that advertising plays in the media industry, looking at its changing dynamics over time. We conclude the chapter by considering how media ownership patterns and strategic practices reduce diversity in media content, limit the breadth of voices and ideas found in media, and fuel cultural imperialism.

Marxist Theory: An Overview

Marxism is both a social theory and a political movement rooted in the idea that "society is the history of class struggles." Its origins lie in the work of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who collaborated on *The German Ideology* in 1845 (though it was not published until long after their deaths) and the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848. Marx, who was born in Prussia in 1818, is the more well known of the two, due, in part, to his single-authored works, including *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847), *Theories of Surplus Value* (1860), *Capital* (1867), *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), and *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, which was published posthumously in 1930. The central premise of Marxism is that the mode of production in society (i.e. its underlying economic structure and practices) determines the social relations of production (i.e. its class structure). This theory understands and makes sense of the world through the perspective of **historical materialism**, which regards

the character of social life as a reflection of the material conditions that exist at a particular historical juncture.

Marx believed that the material world (i.e. natural phenomena and processes) precedes human thought: that the external, concrete, material conditions of social existence determine or ground human consciousness. As such, Marxism is considered a *materialist* philosophy rather than an *idealist* philosophy; idealists maintain that ideas, not material conditions, determine social existence. Marx also believed that the material conditions of societies change over time and must, therefore, be viewed in historical context. As he explains in the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*:

> In the social production of their existence, men [sic] inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.[4]

Marxism, then, holds that social consciousness, as encoded in institutions such as religion, politics, government, education, law, and art and media, which Marx collectively referred to as the cultural **superstructure**, reflects or mirrors the material conditions of society, which he termed the economic **base**. Figure 2.1 represents Marx's famous base/superstructure model.

For Marx, the cultural superstructure and the social institutions that make it up operate in the realm of ideas or *ideology*. Thus, to understand the ruling ideas or dominant ideology in society, one needs to attend to the
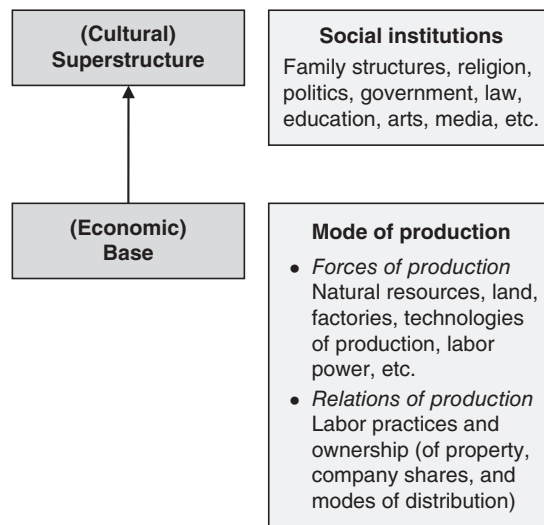

Figure 2.1   Marx's base/superstructure model.

material mode of production in that society. As Marx and Engels explain in *The German Ideology*:

> The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e. the class which is the ruling *material* force of a society is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, consequently also controls the means of mental production … The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relations, the dominant material relations grasped as ideas.[5]

The mode of production within any society is characterized by two elements: its *forces of production*, such as the land, natural resources, and technology needed to produce material goods, and its *relations of production*, such as labor practices and ownership (of property, company shares, or the ways goods are distributed). According to Marx, a society based on a capitalist mode of production is inherently exploitive because it creates two classes, a working or proletariat class and a ruling or bourgeois class.

Since the bourgeoisie owns and controls the means of production in society, the only commodity that the proletariat has to sell is its labor. For Marx, the ruling class exploits the economic value (i.e. labor) of the working class to increase surplus value or profits. But the capitalist system in many countries has changed dramatically since Marx developed his Labor Theory of Value, and the division of labor that produced such a harsh divide between the haves and the have-nots has been replaced by a system that sustains a large middle class, the petty or petite bourgeoisie, of small business owners and white-collar workers (i.e. lawyers, doctors, professors, etc.). Their ideological domination – and it is domination (e.g. the middle class still behaves in a manner that sustains the ruling elite) – appears to be less grounded in their working conditions. This has led many contemporary Marxist scholars to reject *deterministic* models, which they label "vulgar Marxism," that see the superstructure as having no autonomy from the economic base. While Marxist critics are still interested in who owns and controls the means of production in society, they also recognize that ideology can and does influence modes of production. Thus, for them, the process is much more dialectical than unidirectional, and it is this dialectic that they wish to understand.

Capitalism is driven by the continuous desire to increase capital, an ideology known as the **profit-motive**. Contemporary Marxist critics, many of whom identify as *political economists*, investigate both the prevailing patterns of media ownership and how the logic of capital (i.e. the profit-motive) influences media business practices. There is good reason to do so, as the media are big business … *very* big business! According to PQ Media, a custom media research firm, global consumer spending on media and technology, which includes media content, subscriptions, access, and devices, was $1.634 trillion in 2016. Of that total, $602 billion was spent on media content alone, which includes $219 billion on traditional content (film and home video, pay TV, CDs, print books, newspapers, and magazines) and $384 billion on digital content (online games, apps, digital

Table 2.1   Global consumer spending by media category in 2010–2020 (in billions of dollars)

	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018*	2020*
Media content (traditional and digital)						
Audio	53.5	54.5	56.8	62.7	64.7	68.8
Cinema	27.6	30.2	32.5	38.5	43.3	48.4
Consumer books	63.8	63.9	65.7	68.4	71.1	74.4
Consumer magazines	35.5	34.8	32.3	30.2	28.5	27.0
Educational publishing	35.7	35.7	37.3	37.7	38.8	40.0
In-home video	249.2	273.7	297.4	318.7	339.5	359.8
Newspapers	58.3	58.1	59.4	59.4	58.3	57.0
Video games	51.8	57.8	73.3	91.7	110.1	127.4
Media access						
Broadband	242.3	323.4	420.1	502.7	577.3	653.9
Total consumer spending	**817.7**	**932.1**	**1074.8**	**1210.0**	**1331.6**	**1456.7**

Source: McKinsey&Company, *Global Media Report 2016*. *Projected spending.

news and periodicals, digital music and video, e-books, and video-on-demand). Global consumer spending on media content, subscription, access, and devices grew to $1.742 trillion in 2017. While consumer spending varies greatly by region and country, on average consumers spent $310 each on media in 2017.[6] Table 2.1 shows global consumer spending on content and broadband access from 2010 to 2020 by media category.

Since Table 2.1 combines consumer spending on traditional content and digital content, what it does not show is that the percentage of spending on digital content is going up relative to the spending on traditional content every year. This shift in consumer spending habits can also be seen in consumer usage. In 2017, global consumer usage of media averaged 49.86 hours per week, of which 23.5% (or 11.7 hours) was spent on digital media – a 9.7% increase over the previous year.

Patterns of Media Ownership

Adopting a historical materialist perspective, Marxist analysis of mass media begins by examining the means and relations of production under contemporary capitalism, or what Marxist critic Fredric Jameson calls *multinational capitalism*. Like all economic systems, capitalism changes over time. The information-based service economy of the 21st century is substantially different than the industrial-based manufacturing economy of the 19th and 20th centuries. It is vital, therefore, to consider how the media industry is organized and controlled today. Toward that end, this section investigates four current and deeply intertwined patterns of media ownership: concentration, conglomeration, integration, and multinationalism.

Concentration

The media and entertainment industry in the United States and much of the world is highly **concentrated**, meaning that it is owned and controlled by a small group of powerful companies. The domination of an entire industry by just a few companies is sometimes referred to as an *oligopoly*, as opposed to a *monopoly* in which one company dominates an entire industry. Microsoft's domination of the software industry, for instance, is often considered a monopoly. Oligopolies reduce competition by making it all but impossible for small, independent, or start-up companies to survive in the marketplace. The big companies typically buy up the small companies or drive them out of business. Once an industry becomes highly concentrated, the few remaining companies function more like a cartel or partners than competitors. They each control such a large piece of the industry pie that the other companies do not constitute a real threat to their success.

Concentration occurs both *within* particular media industries such as music and film and *across* the media industry as a whole. The music industry, for instance, which is a $20 billion industry just in the United States, is dominated by three major companies (Warner Music Group, Universal Music Group, and Sony Corporation), who as of 2018 accounted for 71.5% of the total market share in that industry. Similarly, the media industry as a whole in the United States is dominated by six massive corporations, which we have dubbed the "Big Six"; as of 2017, these six companies controlled 90% of all media in the United States.[7] Each year, Forbes Global 2000 ranks the top 2000 public companies worldwide based on sales, profit, assets, and market value. In 2018, all six of the US-based media conglomerates made the list: Comcast (#34), The Walt Disney Company (#72), AT&T (#159), CBS Corporation (#626), Viacom (#660), and 21st Century Fox (#1642). As of October 2018, the CBS Corporation and Viacom were both controlled by National Amusements through supervoting shares. So, the Big Six US-based media conglomerates could reasonably be called the Big Five.

Though there are certainly other large, very profitable US-based media companies, such as Liberty Media, Clear Channel, Gannett Co., and The Washington Post Company, they are better classified as second-tier media companies because of their comparatively smaller influence within the media industry than the Big Six, at least presently. As a way of demonstrating the domination of the Big Six, consider the scope and power of AT&T, the third largest entertainment and media conglomerate in the United States behind Comcast and The Walt Disney Company. In 2016, AT&T's total revenues were nearly $164 billion, a 12 percent increase over the previous year. But where does all this money come from? To answer that question, we need to look at AT&T's corporate structure, which is divided into 11 major units. Just three of those are: (1) AT&T Communications, LCC (AT&T Mobility, Cricket Wireless, DirecTV, Cingular Wireless, and Alien Vault); (2) Lionsgate (Lionsgate Films, Lionsgate Home Entertainment, Summit Entertainment, Debmar-Mercury, Starz Inc., and Pilgrim Studios); and (3) WarnerMedia

(HBO, Turner Broadcasting System, Warner Bros., and Otter Media), each of which, in turn, owns dozens of brands and subsidiary companies.

WarnerMedia, for instance, consists of HBO, Turner Broadcasting System, Warner Bros., and Otter Media. HBO, or Home Box Office, Inc., which is the oldest and most-watched premium cable service, had approximately 134 million subscribers in over 60 countries in 2017. It is famous for its original programming, documentaries, comedy specials, championship boxing, and Hollywood blockbusters. A few of its original hit television series include *Veep*, *Girls*, *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*, *The Deuce*, *Big Little Lies*, *Westworld*, and *Game of Thrones*, the last of which earned 12 Emmy nominations in 2017. Turner Broadcasting System is a global sports, news, and entertainment company that features networks such as CNN, HLN, TBS, TNT, truTV, Turner Classic Movies, Cartoon Network, Boomerang, and Adult Swim. In 2017, just one of those networks, Adult Swim, was seen in 94 million US households and was the #1 basic cable network with viewers 18–49. Adding to WarnerMedia's success, Warner Bros. Entertainment celebrated its most profitable year ever in 2017, earning more than $5 billion worldwide in box-office receipts. A few of its recently released films include *Blade Runner 2049*, *Dunkirk*, *It*, *Justice League*, *Kong: Skull Island*, *The LEGO Batman Movie*, and *Wonder Woman*. But Warner Bros. is more than just films, having produced more than 70 original television series in 2017, including scripted series such as *Arrow*, *The Big Bang Theory*, *Black Lightning, Blindspot*, *DC's Legends of Tomorrow*, *Deception*, *The Flash*, *Gotham*, *iZombie*, *Lethal Weapon*, *Lucifer*, *The Middle*, *Mom*, *Riverdale*, *Supergirl*, *Supernatural, Trial & Error*, and *Young Sheldon*; reality-based non-scripted series such as *The Bachelor*, *Bachelor in Paradise*, *Bachelor Winter Games, The Bachelorette, Ellen's Game of Games*, *Little Big Shots*, *Love Connection*, and *The Voice*; and first-run syndication series such as *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, *Extra*, *The Real*, *TMZ*, and *TMZ Sports*. Finally, Otter Media is a digital branding and media company that owns Crunchyroll, VRV, Fullscreen, Rooster Teeth, Gunpowder & Spy, and Hello Sunshine. Collectively, Otter Media reaches a monthly audience of 93 million unique consumers, making it one of the largest subscription-based video-on-demand (sVOD) providers in the world.

Conglomeration

A second prevailing and closely related pattern of media ownership is **conglomeration**, the corporate practice of accumulating multiple companies and businesses through startups, mergers, buyouts, and takeovers. Whereas concentration describes the media industry as a whole and its increasing consolidation into the hands of fewer and fewer corporations, conglomeration describes a corporate structure in which a parent company owns and controls a host of subsidiary companies. Some scholars reserve the term conglomerate to describe large corporations whose *media holdings* reflect only one dimension of their overall corporate portfolio. AT&T, which is the world's largest telecommunications company, is a

good example in this regard. As previously noted, AT&T owns WarnerMedia, but it also owns numerous companies involved in fixed-line telephony, mobile telephony, home security, network security, and sports management. Hence, its media holdings are only one dimension of its larger portfolio. Since media companies are among some of the most powerful corporations in the world, we regard each of the Big Six as conglomerates regardless of whether or not the majority of their holdings are restricted to media. Table 2.2 identifies, as of 2018, the six major US-based media conglomerates, along with a few of their many subsidiaries and corporate holdings.

Let us take a closer look at how a media giant like The Walt Disney Company becomes a conglomerate. Like many conglomerates, The Walt Disney Company has rather humble origins, having been started as a small animation studio in 1923 by brothers Walt and Roy Disney. Early success at Walt Disney Studios (originally Disney Brothers Cartoon Studio) led to the formation of three other companies in 1929: Walt Disney Enterprises, Disney Film Recording Company, and Liled Realty and Investment Company. These companies later merged under the name Walt Disney Productions in 1938. In an effort to expand its business, the company began designing its theme parks in 1952 and formed Buena Vista Distribution to distribute its feature films 2 years later. But Walt Disney Productions did not become The Walt Disney Company until February of 1986, by which time it also included the Disney Channel and a new film label, Touchstone Pictures. Under the leadership of Michael Eisner, the company conducted a series of key acquisitions in the 1990s, including independent film distributor Miramax in 1993, which it sold in 2010 after a 17-year partnership, and perhaps more importantly Capital Cities/ABC, a $19 billion transaction, in 1996.[8] During the 1990s, it also established Hyperion, a book-publishing division. By decade's end, The Walt Disney Company had grown into a global empire with powerful interests in all four of the mass media industries.

In 2004, Disney narrowly escaped a hostile takeover attempt by Comcast, an event that contributed to Michael Eisner's replacement as CEO by Robert Iger the following year. Shortly after Iger assumed the reins, Disney acquired Pixar Animation Studios in a transaction worth $7.4 billion. "Disney's performance during Iger's first year," reports the company's website, "was stellar, with record revenues, record cash flow and record net earnings for fiscal year 2006."[9] In 2009, Disney acquired Marvel Entertainment, Inc. for $4.64 billion, and in 2012, it acquired Lucasfilm – the global entertainment company founded by George Lucas and home of the Star Wars franchise – for $4 billion. Presently, Disney is organized into four major business segments: (1) *Media Networks* (ESPN, Disney, Freeform, ABC TV Network, A&E Television Networks, Vice, ESPN Radio, Radio Disney); (2) *Parks and Resorts* (Walt Disney World Resort, Disneyland Resort, Aulani, Disneyland Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland Resort, Shanghai Disney, Tokyo Disney Resort, Disney Vacation Club, Disney Cruise Line, Adventures by Disney); (3) *Studio Entertainment* (Walt Disney Pictures, Pixar, Marvel, Lucasfilm, Touchstone); and (4) *Consumer Products* & *Interactive Media* (The Disney Store,

Table 2.2 The Big Six US-based media conglomerates (2018)

Conglomerate	Film and sound	TV and radio	New media	Other holdings
Comcast (Brian L. Roberts, CEO) 2018 Revenue: $95 billion	Universal Pictures, Illumination Entertainment, Focus Features, DreamWorks Animation, Gramercy Pictures, Working Title Films, United International Pictures (50%)	NBC, MSNBC, CNBC, Syfy, E!, Telemundo, USA Network, Oxygen, Golf Channel, Bravo, Universal Kids, NBC Sports Radio, 26 television stations	Fandango (70%), Rotten Tomatoes, PictureBox Films, Hulu (30%), Hayu, NBC.com, Movies.com, MovieTickets.com	Xfinity cable (largest US cable provider), Xfinity Mobile, Universal Parks & Resorts, Leisure Arts, Sky (75%), Wells Fargo Center, Philadelphia Flyers
The Walt Disney Company (Bob Iger, CEO) 2018 Revenue: $59 billion	Walt Disney Pictures, Walt Disney Animation Studios, Pixar Animation, Lucasfilm Ltd., Marvel Studios, Disneynature, Walt Disney Records, Hollywood Records	ABC, ESPN, Disney Channel, Disney Junior, A&E, Crime & Investigation Network, FYI, History, H2, Lifetime, Lifetime Movies, Marvel Television, Radio Disney, ESPN radio, 30 radio stations	ABC.com, disney.com, WatchESPN, Movies Anywhere, Hulu (30%), Babble.com, Disney Games and Interactive Experiences	Disneyland Resort, Walt Disney World, Tokyo Disney Resort, Disneyland Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland Resort, Shanghai Disney Resort, Disney Press, Marvel Comics, Marvel Toys, ESPN Books
AT&T (Randall L. Stephenson, CEO) 2018 Revenue: $171 billion	Warner Bros. Pictures, Warner Animation Group, HBO Films, DC Films, Castle Rock Entertainment, New Line Cinema, Flagship Entertainment, Cinemax Films, CNN Films, WaterTower Music, Williams Street Records	CNN, HLN, HBO, The CW (50%), Cinemax, truTV, TBS, TNT, Turner Classic Movies, Cartoon Network, Audience, Adult Swim, Boomerang, AT&T SportsNet	Fandango (30%), Machinima Inc, iStreamPlanet, DramaFever, DC Universe, HBO Go, Hulu (10%), Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment (NetherRealm Studios, Portkey Games, Turbine, Inc., Avalanche Software, TT Games)	DirecTV, U-verse, AT&T Wireless (second largest mobile provider), Cricket Wireless, DC Comics, Mad Magazine, Otter Media (Fullscreen, Inc.)

(*Continued*)

Table 2.2   (Continued)

Conglomerate	Film and sound	TV and radio	New media	Other holdings
21st Century Fox* (James Murdoch, CEO) 2018 Revenue: $30 billion	20th Century Fox, Blue Sky Studios, Fox Searchlight Pictures, Zero Day Fox, 20th Century Fox Animation, Fox Music	Fox, Fox News Channel, Fox Business Network, FX, FX Movie Channel, Fox Life, BabyTV, Fox Sports 1, National Geographic Channel, Nat Geo Wild, Big Ten Network (51%), MyNetworkTV	Fox Digital Entertainment, Fox Sports Digital Media, FoxNext, Hulu (30%)	Endemol Shine Group (50%), TrueX, National Geographic, STAR TV, LAPTV
National Amusements, Inc. (Sumner Redstone, CEO) **CBS Corporation** 2018 Revenues: $15 billion	CBS Films, CBS Records	CBS, Showtime, The CW (50%), Pop (50%), The Movie Channel, Flix, 30 television stations, hundreds of radio stations	CNET, Last.fm, Metacritic, MP3.com, TV.com, GameSpot	Simon & Schuster, Scribner, Pocket Books
Viacom 2018 Revenues: $13 billion	Paramount Pictures, Comedy Central Films, MTV Studios, Nickelodeon Movies, Nick Records, United International Pictures (50%)	MTV, VH1, TV Land, BET, CMT, Comedy Central, Logo TV, Noggin, Nickelodeon, Nick Jr, Nicktoons, Nick Radio	RateMyProfessors.com, VidCon	

*21st Century Fox was created on June 28, 2013 when the News Corporation was split into two separate entities: News Corp., which retained the publishing and Australian media assets, and 21st Century Fox, which retained the US-based film and television assets.

Table 2.3   Annual revenues for The Walt Disney Company by unit (in billions of dollars)

Disney unit	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016
Media Networks	9.7	11.8	14.6	15.9	17.2	19.4	20.4	23.7
Parks and Resorts	6.5	7.8	9.9	11.5	10.8	12.9	15.1	17.0
Studio Entertainment	6.7	8.7	7.5	7.3	6.7	5.8	7.3	9.4
Consumer Products & Interactive Media	2.4	2.5	2.2	3.1	3.5	4.1	5.3	5.5
Total revenues	**25.3**	**30.8**	**34.3**	**37.8**	**38.1**	**42.3**	**48.1**	**55.6**

Source: The Walt Disney Company, *2006 Annual Report*, *Fiscal Year 2010 Annual Financial Report and Shareholder Letter*, *Fiscal Year 2012 Annual Financial Report and Shareholder Letter*, *Fiscal Year 2015 Annual Financial Report and Shareholder Letter*, and *Fiscal Year 2017 Annual Financial Report*.
Note: numbers may not add up to total due to rounding.

shopDisney.com, shop.Marvel.com). Table 2.3 charts The Walt Disney Company's steadily increasing revenues in each of these areas from 2002 to 2016. As impressive as these numbers are, in March 2019, Disney acquired 21st Century Fox, which had previously been the fourth-largest media conglomerate, for $71.3 billion.

Integration

Media conglomerates are by definition integrated. **Integration** is an ownership pattern in which the subsidiary companies or branches within a corporation are strategically interrelated. Corporations can be integrated vertically, horizontally, or both. *Vertical integration* describes a corporation that owns and controls various aspects of production and distribution *within* a single media industry like publishing or broadcasting. Vertical integration can significantly increase the profits associated with a media product by allowing the parent corporation to oversee all stages of its development from production and marketing to distribution and exhibition. A media conglomerate that owns music copyrights, record labels, sound recording studios, and record clubs, stores, and/or online distribution outlets would possess strong vertical integration in the music industry, for instance.

The filmed entertainment division at Viacom offers a concrete example of vertical integration. In 1972, Paramount Pictures produced the Oscar-winning film *The Godfather*, which had grossed $134 million in the United States by 1973. Domestic box-office receipts are far from the end of the story, though. Today, Paramount Home Entertainment markets and distributes the film on DVD, Worldwide Television Distribution negotiates its broadcast on TV, and Famous Music licenses the use of its soundtrack. All of these companies, which continue to generate profit from *The Godfather* franchise, are part of the Paramount Pictures Corporation, a wholly owned subsidiary of Viacom.

The popular, conspiracy-driven TV drama *The X-Files* (1993–2002) provides a second example of the benefits of vertical integration. The Fox Broadcasting Company produced the show, which then aired in first-run production on the FOX network. In addition to the profits generated by its initial airing, Twentieth Television, a division of Fox Television, syndicated three rounds of reruns on local Fox affiliates and other stations, collecting an additional $35 million a year. Meanwhile, FX, one of Fox's numerous cable networks, also aired the show in rerun, generating $69 million more in annual profits. In total, Fox's yearly profits from *The X-Files*, after subtracting production costs, of course, exceeded $180 million dollars.[10] Then, in 2016, fourteen years after the original series was cancelled, Fox revived it for a tenth and an eleventh season. Nor is the success of *The X-Files* limited just to television, having spun off two feature length films, as well as comic books, novels, video games, and other merchandise.

Horizontal integration describes an ownership pattern in which a corporation dominates one stage (or level in the value chain) of the production process. This typically takes one of two forms. Some firms achieve horizontal integration through ownership of multiple media outlets in one market, thereby reducing competition. A company like Comcast, for instance, which owns 26 television stations, some of which are in the same markets, has strong horizontal integration. If a company were to control all or nearly all the radio stations, TV stations, or newspapers within a market, then it would have a horizontal *monopoly* in that market.[11] As we will see in Chapter 4, the 1996 Telecommunications Act, which eliminated or relaxed ownership restrictions in the United States, has increased this form of integration. A second way for a corporation to achieve horizontal integration is to own and control companies *across* various media industries, but typically at the same level of production, distribution, or exhibition.[12] This corporate structure is sometimes referred to alternatively as *cross-media ownership*. Like vertical integration, horizontal integration can have tremendous financial benefits, namely by enhancing synergy, a concept we will explore shortly. Table 2.4 shows the horizontal integration of the Bix Six US-based media conglomerates in January 2013. We have chosen to include this table in addition to Table 2.2, which is more up-to-date, because we want readers to see how rapidly and dramatically the media landscape can change due to buyouts and mergers. In 2018, AT&T controlled most of the assets formerly owned by Time Warner Inc., which it acquired for $108.7 billion in 2016. Just a year earlier, AT&T had acquired DirecTV for $48.5 billion. So, in a very short period of time, AT&T, the world's largest telecommunications company, also became a major leader in the media and entertainment industry. Another insight to be gleaned by comparing Tables 2.2 and 2.4 is the declining importance of print media to the overall portfolio of these companies.

Multinationalism

A fourth pattern of contemporary media ownership is **multinationalism**, or a corporate presence in multiple countries, allowing for the production and

Table 2.4 Horizontal integration of the Big Six US-based media conglomerates (January 2013)

Conglomerate	Print media	Film and sound	TV and radio	New media
The Walt Disney Company (Bob Iger, CEO)	Disney Press, Hyperion Books, Voice, Marvel Publishing, *ESPN The Magazine*	Walt Disney Pictures, Marvel Studios, Pixar Animation, Lucasfilm Ltd., Touchstone Pictures, Walt Disney Records, Hollywood Records (Mammoth and Buena Vista Records), Lyric Street Records	ABC Family, Disney Channel, Disney Junior, SOAPnet, ESPN (80%), A&E (50%), Lifetime (50%), HISTORY (50%), BIO (50%), LMN (50%), H2 (50%)	ABC.com, Disney. com, ESPN3, WatchESPN, Spoonful.com, Babble.com, DisneyBaby.com, BabyZone.com, Go.com, Hulu (32%), Disney Interactive Games
Time Warner (Jeffrey Bewkes, CEO)	Warner Books, DC Comics, *People*, *Time*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *InStyle*, *Fortune*	Warner Brothers Pictures, New Line Cinema, Castle Rock, DC Entertainment	CNN, TBS, TNT, Cartoon Network, truTV, Turner Classic Movies, Adult Swim, HLN, HBO, Cinemax, The CW (50%)	CNN.com, DCComics.com, TMZ.com, KidsWB. com, NBA. com, NCAA.com, PGA.com
News Corp (Rupert Murdoch, CEO)	HarperCollins, Zondervan, Dow Jones, *Wall Street Journal*, *Barron's, New York Post*	20th Century Fox, Fox 2000 Pictures, Fox Searchlight Pictures, Fox Music, Blue Sky Studios	FOX, FOX News FX, FUEL TV, SPEED, FSN, MyNetworkTV, Big Ten Network (51%), National Geographic Channel (70%)	FOX.com, Amplify, IGN Entertainment, AskMen, Making Fun, Wireless Generation, Hulu (32%), MySpace (until June 2011)
Viacom (Philippe Dauman, CEO)	(Viacom has not owned any print media since its split with CBS in December 2005)	Paramount Pictures, Paramount Vintage, MTV Films, Insurge Pictures, Nickelodeon Movies	MTV, VH1, CMT, Nickelodeon, Nick Jr., Nick at Nite, Comedy Central, SPIKE, TV Land, Logo, BET, CENTRIC	ParentsConnect, GoCityKids, Atom Entertainment, Shockwave, Nick. com, GameTrailers
CBS Corporation (Leslie Moonves, CEO)	Simon & Schuster, Pocket Books, Scribner, The Free Press	CBS Films	CBS, Showtime, The CW (50%), The Movie Channel, FLIX, CBS Radio	CBS Interactive, CBSSports.com, Last.fm, CNET
Comcast (Brian L. Roberts, CEO)	(Comcast does not currently own any print media)	Focus Features, Universal Pictures, Universal Home Entertainment	NBC, MNBC, E!, USA Network, Bravo, Oxygen, Golf Channel, Syfy, CNBC, Chiller, G4, Telemundo, The Weather Channel Companies	Fandango, DailyCandy, Television Without Pity, iVillage, CNBC Digital, Plaxo, NBC. com, Hulu (32%), Comcast Interactive Media

distribution of media products on a global scale. Multinationalism should not be confused with globalization. As we saw in Chapter 1, globalization is a complex set of economic and political processes, and while globalization may be contributing to the rise of multinational corporations, it cannot be reduced to this ownership trend. Multinational media conglomerates, also known as transnational corporations (TNCs), do not simply (re)distribute a static, pre-packaged product developed in one locale to various countries around the globe, nor do they completely reinvent the proverbial wheel each time. National differences in regulatory policies as well as cultural values means that TNCs often partner with national media companies to produce and distribute media that will be successful in that country or region. In some cases, the "foreign" companies owned by TNCs are former local or independent media that they have simply bought out. For most media conglomerates, international markets represent potential profits that are just too tempting to resist.

The German-based media conglomerate Bertelsmann provides an excellent example of a powerful multinational media conglomerate. It is made of eight units or divisions: RTL Group, Penguin Random House, Gruner + Jahr, BMG, Arvato, Bertelsmann Printing Group, Bertelsmann Education Group, and Bertelsmann Investments. Consider the expansive reach of Bertelsmann's broadcasting production and distribution company, RTL Group:

> RTL Group is a leader across broadcast, content and digital, with interests in 56 television channels and 31 radio stations, content production throughout the world, and rapidly growing digital video businesses. The television portfolio of RTL Group includes RTL Television in Germany; M6 in France; the RTL channels in the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Croatia and Hungary; and Antena 3 in Spain. The Group's flagship radio station is RTL in France, and it also owns or has interests in other stations in France, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain and Luxembourg. Fremantle Media is one of the largest international creators, producers and distributors of multi-genre content outside the United States. Combining the on-demand services of its broadcasters, the multi-platform networks BroadbandTV, StyleHaul, Divimove, United Screens and Fremantle Media's 296 YouTube channels, RTL Group has become the leading European media company in online video.[13]

Like RTL Group, Bertelsmann's book publishing division Penguin Random House is a global giant that prides itself on penetrating foreign markets:

> With more than 250 imprints and brands on six continents, over 15 000 new titles, and more than 600 million print, audio and e-books sold annually, Penguin Random House is the world's leading trade book publisher. Penguin Random House is committed to publishing adult and children's fiction and nonfiction print editions and is a pioneer in digital publishing. Its book brands include storied imprints such as Doubleday, Viking and Alfred A. Knopf (United States); Ebury, Hamish Hamilton and Jonathan Cape (United Kingdom); Plaza & Janés and Alfaguara (Spain); Sudamericana (Argentina); and the international imprint DK. Its publishing lists include more than 60 Nobel Prize laureates and hundreds of the world's most widely read authors.[14]

Bertelsmann's global domination in the book-publishing industry is mirrored by News Corporation's massive international newspaper empire, Thompson Reuters' global supremacy in providing electronic information, and Viacom's global reach in the television industry, which includes "approximately 4.3 billion cumulative television subscribers in 183 countries and 43 languages, via 300 locally programmed and operated television channels."[15]

While all of the Big Six US-based media companies are multinational conglomerates, perhaps none of them possesses the global reach of The Walt Disney Company. Here is what Reuters reported about Disney's worldwide influence as of October 1, 2016:

> [T]he Company operated over 100 Disney branded television channels, which were broadcasted in 34 languages and 163 countries/territories … ESPN owned 19 television networks outside of the United States that allowed ESPN to reach sports fans in over 60 countries and territories in four languages … [T]he Company owned and operated 223 stores in North America, 78 stores in Europe, 48 stores in Japan and one store in China … Hungama is a general entertainment cable network for kids in India, which features a mix of animation, Hindi-language series and game shows. The Company also operates UTV- and Bindass-branded cable television networks in India. The networks include UTV Action and UTV Movies, which offer Bollywood movies, as well as Hindi-dubbed Hollywood movies. Bindass is a youth entertainment channel, and the networks also include Bindass Play, which is a music channel.[16]

In addition to its media assets in India, namely Hungama, the report mentions Europe, Japan, and China, which are all places in which Disney operates parks and resorts. Through its media content, worldwide resorts and theme parks, and unparalleled toy merchandizing capability, Disney is truly a global force in entertainment. The Walt Disney Company is not alone, of course, as all six of the major US-based media companies are fully integrated, multinational conglomerates.

Strategies of Profit Maximization

As we have just seen, ownership and control of the mass media is driven by a profit-motive. But ownership alone does not guarantee financial success. Thus, the few multinational conglomerates that dominate the media industry typically follow a series of specific strategies designed to maximize profits. We are using the term *strategy* here in a very specific way, consistent with the French sociologist Michel de Certeau. For de Certeau, strategies are the exclusive domain of the "strong" or subjects of will and power. "A strategy," he writes, "assumes a place that can be circumscribed as *proper* (*propre*) and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it (competitors, adversaries, 'clientèles,' 'targets,' or 'objects' of research)."[17] De Certeau contrasts strategies with *tactics*, which he defines as the everyday practices used by the "weak" to

resist domination (tactics will be explored in Chapter 12). The distinction between strategies and tactics hinges on ownership; only those who have a "place" to stockpile their winnings can carry out strategies. Five key strategies of profit maximization in the media industry are: synergy, planned obsolescence, the logic of safety, celebrity and spectacle, and joint ventures.

Synergy

The first key strategy of media conglomerates is **synergy**, or the involvement of multiple subsidiary companies in the cross-development, production, and distribution of a media brand for the purpose of "exploiting it for all the profit possible."[18] Synergy is made possible by horizontal integration, and since all six of the major US-based media conglomerates are horizontally integrated, the examples are virtually endless. AT&T, which owns WarnerMedia, for instance, publishes over 900 comic book titles, including those of DC Comics, which features such well-known characters as Batman, the Flash, Green Arrow, Superman, and Wonder Woman. In 2017, Warner Bros. released three films based on DC Entertainment characters, *Justice League, The LEGO Batman Movie*, and *Wonder Woman*; in 2018, it released *Aquaman* and *Teen Titans GO! to the Movies*; and, in 2019, it released *Shazam!* On television, Warner Bros. aired nine live-action series during the 2017–18 season based on DC characters (*Arrow*, *Black Lightning*, *DC's Legends of Tomorrow*, *The Flash*, *iZombie*, *Krypton*, *Lucifer*, *Gotham*, and *Supergirl*).[19] Iconic DC characters such as Superman and Batman, who started out as comic book heroes, have repeatedly found their way on to the big screen in feature films produced and distributed by Warner Bros. Entertainment. The television series *Smallville*, which also taps the Superman mythology, was produced by Warner Bros. Television and aired on the Warner Bros. network. Similarly, the Academy Award-winning 1989 film *Batman*, which grossed a record-setting (at the time) $40 489 746 during its opening weekend, was released in conjunction with two albums.[20] The first was Prince's *Batman* soundtrack on Warner Brothers Records, which debuted at number one on the Billboard 200 charts and went multi-platinum, selling 11 million copies worldwide. The second, also released on Warner Bros. Records, featured the original score composed by Danny Elfman. In short, the DC universe allows for synergy across comic books, films, television, and music, as well as video games and other merchandising. Even more remarkably, it is only one of WarnerMedia's major brands, which also includes Harry Potter, Looney Tunes, and Hanna-Barbera.

Increasingly, the summer blockbuster lies at the heart of cross-promotional efforts. In fact, big-budget films often only get made today if they can demonstrate strong cross-promotional potential. Typically, this means a film that will appeal to a wide audience and can be marketed to children through toy lines and the fast-food industry. While no media conglomerate has perfected this formula better than Disney, MCA/Universal offers one compelling example: the 1993 mega hit *Jurassic Park*. Created by Steven Spielberg and based on the

Michael Crichton book by the same name, *Jurassic Park* cost Universal Studios a whopping $56 million to produce.[21] So, MCA/Universal could not take any chances and undertook a $65 million licensing and promotional campaign, which involved making deals with over 100 companies, from Kenner and Kellogg's to SEGA and Ocean Software, to market 1000 products.[22] The marketing hype paid off and *Jurassic Park* cleared a record $50 million its first weekend, passed $100 million in 9 days, and eventually grossed over $350 million in the United States and Canada. But, as Thomas Schatz notes, "Its overseas box-office performance was even stronger, and together with its huge success on video cassette [distributed by MCA/Universal Home Video], pay-cable, and other ancillary markets pushed the film's revenues to well over a billion dollars."[23] The film's international success was due in part to screenings of its trailer in Japan through Panasonic, a company owned by Matsushita Electric Industrial Co. and the parent corporation of MCA/Universal. Nor did the profits end with the film. In 1996, a year after the Canadian media conglomerate Seagrams purchased MCA/Universal from Matsushita, Jurassic Park – The Ride opened at Universal Studios Hollywood, boosting attendance at the park by 40 percent compared with the previous year.

Planned obsolescence

One of the central challenges faced by the media industry is getting consumers to consume media continuously, especially when the content endlessly being churned out is formulaic rather than creative (see the section on the Logic of Safety). One strategy designed to accomplish this is planned obsolescence. According to *The Economist*, **planned obsolescence** "is a business strategy in which the obsolescence (the process of becoming obsolete – that is, unfashionable or no longer usable) of a product is planned and built into it from its conception. This is done so that in [the] future the consumer feels a need to purchase new products and services that the manufacturer brings out as replacements for old ones."[24] As Giles Slade explains in his 2006 book, *Made to Break: Technology and Obsolescence in America*, planned obsolescence typically takes one of two forms: technological or psychological.[25] *Technological obsolescence* occurs when a development in technology causes the previous generation of that technology to become obsolete, such as how CDs made cassette tapes obsolete and digital music is now making CDs obsolete. *Psychological obsolescence* arises not when a new technology replaces an older one, but when a new style or product replaces an older style or product, such as the way new music is endlessly turned into hits through frequent radio play. Let us look at both of these processes in more detail.

Technological obsolescence is a mainstay of the media industry. The sound recording and film industries are forever releasing their content in new formats, which requires users both to regularly upgrade their playback equipment and to repurchase media content they already own in the new format. Just as the shift in audio from LP record to cassette tape to CD to digital file forced the serious music collector to reinvest in an entirely new music library, so the shift in video

from VHS tape to DVD to Blu-ray Disc to digital video is causing serious movie collectors to restock their libraries. Table 2.5 demonstrates the shift in consumer spending on home video rental and sales across these formats in the United States over the decade of the 2000s. In 2000, VHS sales were an $11.4 billion industry, but by the end of the decade sales had dropped to virtually zero. On the other hand, the Blu-ray Disc, which did not exist until 2006, had become a $2.3 billion industry by the end of the decade.

Since 2010, the way users consume entertainment has continued to change dramatically. Table 2.6 highlights US home entertainment spending by category in recent years. While the purchase and rental of VHS, DVD, and Blu-ray Discs has declined precipitously from 2010 to 2017, video-on-demand (VOD) and subscription streaming services (sVOD) like Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon have grown dramatically. This change in consumption habits has fueled the adoption of 4 K ultra-high-definition (UHD) TVs. According to the Digital Entertainment Group's (DEG) Year-End 2017 Home Entertainment Report, "More than 14.6 million 4 K UHD TVs were sold in 2017, bringing the total households [with this technology] to more than 30 million."

Table 2.5   US consumer spending on home video rental and sales, 2000–10 (in billions of dollars)

Category	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010
VHS & UMD	11.4	9.6	4.4	0.4	0.1	0.0
DVD	2.4	8.6	16.7	20.2	18.4	14.0
Blu-ray	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.9	2.3
Digital	0.7	0.7	0.7	1.0	1.6	2.5
Total revenues	**14.5**	**19.0**	**21.8**	**21.6**	**21.0**	**18.8**

Source: DEG Year-End 2010 Home Entertainment Report, 2011.

Table 2.6   US home entertainment consumer spending by category, 2010–17 (in billions of dollars)

Category	2010	2012	2014	2016	2017
Sell-thru packaged goods					
VHS, DVD, Blu-ray Disc	10.3	8.5	6.9	5.5	4.7
Rental					
Brick and mortar rental	2.3	1.2	.7	.5	.4
Physical subscription	2.3	1.3	.8	.5	.5
Kiosk	1.3	1.9	1.8	1.5	1.3
Digital					
Electronic sell-thru	.5	.8	1.6	2.0	2.2
Video-on-demand (VOD)	1.8	2.0	2.0	2.1	2.0
Subscription streaming (sVOD)	*	2.3	4.1	7.3	9.5
Total revenues	**18.5**	**18.0**	**17.9**	**19.4**	**20.6**

Source: DEG's Year-End 2011 Home Entertainment Report, 2012; DEG's Year-End 2012 Home Entertainment Report, 2013; DEG's Year-End 2015 Home Entertainment Report, 2016; and DEG's Year-End 2017 Home Entertainment Report, 2018. *Not tracked.

Though the strategy of technological obsolescence can be found in all sectors of media, it is particularly evident in the video game industry, where new game consoles are released every couple of years. Many of these systems are specifically designed to prevent *backwards compatibility*, meaning that the newer systems will not play older games. In 2010, about 41 percent of US households owned a seventh-generation game console, which includes Microsoft's Xbox 360, Nintendo's Wii, and Sony's PlayStation 3, and about 23 percent owned a handheld console like the Nintendo DS or Sony PSP.[26] The current generation of consoles/handheld games has hurt the PC game market and made previous generations of game consoles obsolete. When was the last time you heard someone say, "Hey, wanna come over tonight and play Atari?" Forecasters predict it will not be long, however, before online and wireless gaming overtakes the console market, thereby making consoles obsolete. Technological obsolescence in the music, video, and gaming industries ensures that customers must continually "upgrade" (i.e. replace) their playback devices. After all, media producers eventually stop producing media in older formats, effectively rendering the technology that plays the older formats obsolete.

Whereas technological obsolescence is closely tied to innovations in technology, psychological obsolescence is linked to the manipulation of time. "This was the great achievement of the newspaper," explains Nicholas Garnham, "which, by creating rapidly decaying information, created thereby a constant need to re-consume."[27] The production of daily news in newspapers, then morning and afternoon news on broadcast TV, and finally up-to-the minute news on 24-hour cable news networks has created a media product ("the news") that must be continuously updated, making older news obsolete. When was the last time you read a week-old newspaper or digitally recorded the news to watch at a later date? Nor is psychological obsolescence limited to the news media. The ongoing success of the music industry depends upon consumers continuously developing an interest in new artists. Thus, new musical artists must constantly be discovered, packaged, and sold by the music industry as "the next big thing." Horizontal integration has allowed media conglomerates to fulfill the need for the next big thing in music through singing competitions on television. *American Idol*, *The X Factor*, and *The Voice* are designed not so much to find stars as to create them, which in turn creates new "hit" music to purchase.

Logic of safety

A third strategy of profit maximization is the **logic of safety**, which is based on two principles: the belief that "nothing succeeds like success" and the idea that "change" and "innovation" are financially risky. Because of the first principle, when a format or concept meets with financial success, media companies have a strong incentive to replicate it (often endlessly). Since exploiting proven formulas is driven by risk avoidance, media companies are, in most circumstances, reluctant to produce highly original, innovative, or creative content. The reward for trying something new and unproven, which may fail, is simply not worth the financial risk. Hence, the major media conglomerates

have perfected the art of imitation, which comes in three basic flavors: sequels, remakes, and spin-offs. Let us begin with movies, which are especially costly to make. In 2016, the average cost to produce and distribute a Hollywood film was $61.1 million (with another $40 million in marketing).[28] If a studio is going to invest that kind of money upfront, then it wants a guarantee of success, or as close to a guarantee as it can get. So, in 2009, when the action-thriller *Taken* (distributed by 20th Century Fox), starring Liam Neeson, which cost a comparatively small $25 million to produce, grossed $227 million worldwide, scoring the best-ever opening day for a Super Bowl weekend, a sequel was a safe bet. And when the sequel, *Taken 2* (2012), grossed $376 million in box-office receipts worldwide, out-earning the original, it ensured that – despite how badly it sucked (and it really sucked!) – the franchise would be, at least, a trilogy. The virtually unwatchable *Taken 3* was released in 2015.

Taken was itself a rehash of a familiar Hollywood formula, the renegade-with-special-skills-rescues-an-innocent-in-distress film. As it turns out, that basic formula underlies a lot of Hollywood films, and even a lot of successful Hollywood franchises. Table 2.7 lists the 10 most successful movie franchises of all time based on worldwide box-office receipts. Many of them are superhero films and, hence, rescue narratives, and the others – while perhaps not explicitly rescue narratives – stage epic battles between good and evil (*Star Wars*, *Harry Potter*, and *Lord of the Rings*). The *Jurassic Park* franchise is both a rescue narrative and an epic battle between good and evil; evil just happens to take on a nonhuman form. Following a proven formula is not the only way Hollywood reduces risk, however. Sometimes, film production houses show even less originality, recycling not just a generic formula, but actual films. A few US films that drew their inspiration from foreign cinema are the 2018 film *Puzzle*, which is a remake of the 2010 Argentine film of the same name; the 2017 film *The Dinner*, which is a remake of the 2013 Dutch film *Het Diner*; the 2011 mystery thriller *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, which is a remake of the 2009 Swedish film *Män Som Hatar Kvinnor*; and the 2006 Oscar-winning film *The Departed*, which is a remake of the 2002 Hong Kong crime-thriller *Infernal Affairs*. And when Hollywood is not replicating foreign titles, it is quite content simply to copy itself, as suggested by recent remakes such as *A Star is Born* (2018/1937), *Beauty and the Beast* (2017/1991), *Flatliners* (2017/1990), *The Jungle Book* (2016/1994/1942), *Poltergeist* (2015/1982), *RoboCop* (2014/1987), *Carrie* (2013/1976), *Total Recall* (2012/1990), *Footloose* (2011/1984), *The Karate Kid* (2010/1984), and *Clash of the Titans* (2010/1981).

Nor is the film industry alone in playing it safe by trying to replicate past successes. In the music industry, remakes or "covers" are exceedingly common. A few notable covers in just 2018 include:

- Lady Gaga's cover of Elton John's "Your Song"
- Lorde's cover of Frank Ocean's "Solo"
- Morgan Saint's cover of Cardi B's "Thru Your Phone"
- Calumn Scott's cover of Robyn's "Dancing on My Own"
- Charlie Puth's cover of Sean Mendes' "In My Blood"
- Jorja Smith's cover of Drake's "Get It Together"

Television is also known for remakes, like its recent reboots (or returns) of *Charmed*, *Dynasty*, *Dallas*, *Roseanne*, *Will & Grace*, *MacGyver*, and *Queer Eye*. US television also often adapts successful British shows like *The Office*, *Pop Idol* (as *American Idol*), and *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* But the more common strategy is what sociologist Todd Gitlin calls "recombinancy." Television is a particularly formulaic medium. Audiences can count not only on popular genres such as the game show, drama, situation comedy, and reality TV, but on subgenres with very specific traits; primetime would simply not be complete without a medical drama, crime drama, legal drama, and police drama, for instance. In many instances, when a show is nearing the end of its run, producers will simply create a spin-off that focuses on a popular or even secondary character from the original. *All in the Family* spun off *The Jeffersons*, *Mary Tyler Moore* spun off *Lou Grant*, *Happy Days* spun off *Laverne & Shirley*, and *Dallas* spun off *Knots Landing*, to name just a few. More recently, when a show has been particularly successful, producers have spun off additional versions of the same thing, as has happened with NBC's *Law and Order* and CBS's *CSI*, *Criminal Minds*, and *NCIS*.

Thus, movie sequels, music covers, and television remakes and spin-offs all share the logic of safety. When "innovation" does emerge in the media industry, it is typically because a small, independent producer has "broken the rules." The "emergent rules" are then quickly co-opted and endlessly reproduced by the large conglomerates, or else the smaller company is simply bought out. This is precisely what happened at Miramax. After the unlikely success of controversial films like *sex, lies, and videotape* (1989), *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* (1990), and *The Crying Game* (1992), Disney acquired Miramax in 1993. Releasing future films such as *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Chasing Amy* (1997), and *Kill Bill* (2003) under the Miramax label allowed Disney to branch into more risqué filmmaking without endangering its wholesome, family image.

Table 2.7   Top 10 highest-grossing movie franchises (2018)

Franchise	Number of films (as of 2018)	Worldwide box office (in billions)
Marvel Cinematic Universe	20	17.51
Star Wars	11	9.31
Harry Potter	11	9.19
James Bond	25	7.08
Lord of the Rings	6	5.87
X-Men	11	5.80
Fast and the Furious	8	5.14
Jurassic Park	5	4.98
DC Extended Universe	6	4.91
Transformers	7	4.85

Source: "Movie Franchises," *The Numbers*, https://www.the-numbers.com/movies/franchises/sort/World (accessed July 5, 2019).

Celebrity and spectacle

A fourth strategy of profit maximization involves the deeply interconnected concepts of celebrity and spectacle. Whereas the logic of safety could be said to rule the *form* of media (suggesting what general formats, formulas, and patterns to follow), celebrity and spectacle might be said to govern the *content* of media (suggesting what particular ingredients to include). The concept of **celebrity** refers to "those people who are well known for their well-knownness."[29] This includes high-profile public officials, popular entertainers and artists, and others who seize, if only momentarily, the public spotlight. If history has proven anything in the media industry, it is that audiences will pay to consume virtually anything that features celebrity personalities. Celebrity, it should be noted, has nothing to do with talent, only with well-knownness. Consequently, socialite Kim Kardashian West gained media fame in 2007 after a sex tape of her and singer Ray J went public. Interest in the tape and the lawsuit that ensued allowed Kardashian to spin her newfound fame into the successful reality TV series *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*. As of 2016, Kim Kardashian West was the highest-paid woman in reality TV, making roughly $51 million per year; *Forbes* estimates Kardashian West's worth to be $350 million, ranking her no. 54 on the fourth annual list of America's Richest Self-Made Women.[30]

When celebrities are unavailable or too expensive to feature in media, the media industry frequently resorts to its other proven content strategy: spectacle. The concept of **spectacle** describes the media's obsession with the sensational and arresting, scandalous and shocking dimensions of a situation or context. It refers to that which grabs hold of our attention either because it is tantalizing or because it is startling. So prevalent is the role of spectacle that Guy Debord argues in his 1967 book, *The Society of the Spectacle*, that our whole society submits to its logic. In its opening pages, Debord explains:

> Understood in its totality, the spectacle is both the outcome and the goal of the dominant mode of production. It is not something *added* to the real world – not a decorative element, so to speak. On the contrary, it is the very heart of society's real unreality. In all its specific manifestations – news or propaganda, advertising or the actual consumption of entertainment – the spectacle epitomizes the prevailing mode of social life. It is the omnipresent celebration of a choice *already made* in the sphere of production, and the consummate result of that choice.[31]

For Debord, our whole society has become little more than *spectacle* – mere exhibition and display. Through the endless reproduction of shocking images, be they of sex or of violence, and glitzy promotions, the media collapses news into entertainment and entertainment into life. The production of a hypersensational world through spectacle ensures that viewers will attend to media. After all, its depiction of life is more compelling than life itself. Consider gangsta rap's creation of what Debord calls a "real unreality," in which multi-million-dollar artists who drive luxury automobiles, cover themselves in bling, and work for transnational media conglomerates rap about gang violence, growing up in