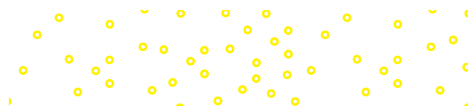**Twelfth Edition**

Introduction to
Mass Communication
MEDIA LITERACY AND CULTURE

Stanley J. Baran

Bryant University

McGraw Hill

INTRODUCTION TO MASS COMMUNICATION, TWELFTH EDITION

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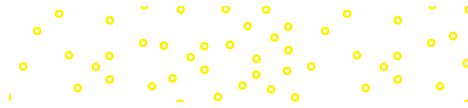
In loving memory of my mother,
Margaret Baran—
she gave me life;
and in honor of my wife,
Susan Baran—
she gave that life meaning.
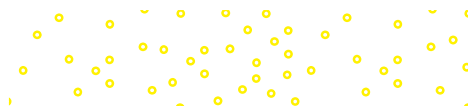
From the Author

Dear Friends,

The media, like sports and politics, are what we talk about, argue over, dissect, and analyze. Those of us who teach media know that these conversations are essential to the functioning of a democratic society. We also know that what moves these conversations from simple chatting and griping to effective public discourse is media education. And regardless of what we might call the course–Introduction to Mass Communication, Introduction to Mass Media, Media and Society, or Media and Culture–media education has been part of the university for more than seven decades. From the outset, the course has fulfilled these goals:

- Increasing students' knowledge and understanding of the mass communication process and the mass media industries
- Increasing students' awareness of how they interact with those industries and their content to create meaning
- Helping students become more skilled and knowledgeable consumers of media content and therefore more ethical and confident participants in their worlds

We now call the fulfillment of these goals *media literacy.*

Courtesy of Stanley Baran

A Cultural Perspective

This text's cultural orientation toward mass communication places a great deal of responsibility on media consumers. In the past, people were considered either victims of media influence or impervious to it. The cultural orientation asserts that audience members are as much a part of the mass communication process as are the media technologies and industries. As important agents in the creation and maintenance of their own culture, audience members have a moral obligation not only to participate in the process of mass communication but also to participate critically as better consumers of mass media.

Enriching Students' Literacy

The focus of this book, from the start, has been on media literacy and culture, and those emphases have shaped its content and its various learning aids and pedagogical features. Every chapter's *Cultural Forum* box poses a critical thinking dilemma based on a current social problem and asks students to work through their solution. The *Using Media to Make a Difference* feature offers chapter-specific examples of how people in and outside the media industries have employed technology to meet important cultural and social needs. And each chapter ends with a *Media Literacy Challenge* that asks students to apply what they've learned to a contemporary media issue. Literacy, in this case media literacy, is about living in, interacting with, and making the most of the world that surrounds us. That belief is the central philosophy of this text.

My Thanks to You

Thank you for teaching mass communication. There are few college courses that will mean more to our students' lives now and after they graduate than this one. Thank you, too, for considering *Introduction to Mass Communication: Media Literacy and Culture* for use in your course. I have poured the last 50 years of my career into this text and what it has to say about mass communication and the world that our interaction with the media produces. Your interest in this text confirms my passion.

—Stanley J. Baran

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Preface

Introduction to Mass Communication, 12e*,* focuses on literacy and culture, equipping students with essential skills in today's ever-changing media landscape. Along with the core content, students are supported by a suite of personalized study tools, customizable assessments, new scenario-driven activities, and writing tools in McGraw Hill Connect™.

Instructor's Guide to Connect for *Introduction to Mass Communication: Media Literacy and Culture*

McGraw Hill Connect offers full-semester access to comprehensive, reliable content and learning resources for the Communication course. **Connect's** deep integration with most learning management systems (LMSs), including Blackboard and Desire2Learn (D2L), offers single sign-on and deep gradebook synchronization. Data from Assignment Results reports synchronize directly with many LMSs, allowing scores to flow automatically from Connect into school-specific gradebooks, if required.

When you assign **Connect** you can be confident—and have data to demonstrate—that your students, however diverse, are acquiring the skills, principles, and critical processes that constitute effective communication. This leaves you to focus on your highest course expectations.

Connect offers on-demand, single sign-on access to students—wherever they are and whenever they have time. With a single, one-time registration, students receive access to McGraw Hill's trusted content. **Connect** seamlessly supports all major learning management systems with content, assignments, performance data, and SmartBook, the leading adaptive learning system. With these tools you can quickly make assignments, produce reports, focus discussions, intervene on problem topics, and help at-risk students—as you need to and when you need to.

A PERSONALIZED AND ADAPTIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCE WITH SMARTBOOK 2.0®. SmartBook 2.0 is the leading adaptive reading and study experience designed to change the way students read and master key course concepts. As a student engages with SmartBook 2.0, the program creates a personalized learning path by highlighting the most impactful concepts the student needs to learn at that moment in time.

READER/eBOOK. Alongside SmartBook 2.0, there is also Connect eBook for simple and easy access to reading materials on smartphones and tablets. Students can study on the go without an Internet connection, highlight important sections, take notes, search for materials quickly, and read in class. Offline reading is available by downloading the eBook app on smartphones and tablets, and any notes and highlights created by students will be synced between devices when they reconnect. Unlike SmartBook 2.0, there is no pre-highlighting, practice of key concepts, or reports on usage and performance.

A SUITE OF APPLICATION-BASED ACTIVITIES. New to this edition and positioned at the higher level of Bloom's taxonomy, McGraw Hill's Application-Based Activities are highly interactive, automatically graded, learn-by-doing assignments that provide students with a safe space to apply their knowledge and problem-solving skills. Topics include Media Freedom, Regulation, Ethics, and Media Literacy.

ACCESS TO JUST-IN-TIME GRAMMAR & WRITING REMEDIATION AND ORIGINAL-ITY DETECTOR. McGraw Hill's new Writing Assignment Plus tool delivers a learning experience that improves students' written communication skills and conceptual understanding with every assignment. Instructors can assign, monitor, and provide feedback on writing more efficiently and grade assignments more easily within McGraw Hill Connect.

INFORMED BY THE LATEST RESEARCH. The best insights from today's leading mass communication scholars infuse every lesson and are integrated throughout the text.

FRESH EXAMPLES ANCHORED IN THE REAL WORLD. Every chapter of *Introduction to Mass Communication: Media Literacy and Culture* opens with a vignette exploring media literacy situations in our everyday lives. Dozens of additional examples appear throughout the text. Whether students are reading the text, responding to question probes, or reviewing key concepts in a learning resource, their every instructional moment is rooted in the real world. McGraw Hill Education research shows that high-quality examples reinforce academic theory throughout the course. Relevant examples and practical scenarios—reflecting engagement with multiple forms of mass media—demonstrate how effective communication informs and enhances students' lives and media literacy skills.

BOXED FEATURES. Students must bring media literacy—the ability to critically comprehend and actively use mass media—to the mass communication process. This edition of *Introduction to Mass Communication: Media Literacy and Culture* includes a variety of boxed features to support student learning and enhance media literacy skills.

Using Media to Make a Difference boxes highlight interesting examples of how media practitioners and audiences use the mass communication process to further important social, political, or cultural causes.

Cultural Forum boxes highlight media-related cultural issues that are currently debated in the mass media to help students develop their moral reasoning and critical thinking skills.

Media Literacy Challenge boxes build on ideas from each chapter's "Developing Media Literacy Skills" section and ask students to think critically about media content they encounter in their daily lives and actually use the skills they've learned.

Video Capture Powered by GoReact™

With just a smartphone, tablet, or webcam, students and instructors can capture video of presentations with ease. Video Capture Powered by GoReact, fully integrated in McGraw Hill's Connect platform, doesn't require any extra equipment or complicated training. All it takes is five minutes to set up and start recording! Create your own custom Video Capture assignment, including in-class and online speeches and presentations, self-review, and peer review. With our customizable rubrics, time-coded comments, and visual markers, students will see feedback at exactly the right moment, and in context, to help improve their speaking, presentation skills, and confidence!

- Time-coded feedback via text, video & audio
- Visual markers for short-hand, repetitive comments
- Customizable rubrics

Functionality List

- Asynchronous video
- Synchronous screen capture & video ("Live Event")
- Group assignment/presentation
- Presenter split screen for visual aids or presentation decks
- Customizable rubrics
- Self and peer review
- Time-coded feedback with text, video & audio
- Customizable in-line comment markers
- Rubric placement and comment box next to video for easier grading
- Mobile recording & uploading
- Improved accessibility
- Deep integration with most Learning Management Systems via McGraw Hill's Connect

Instructor Reports

Found in Connect, Instructor Reports allow instructors to quickly monitor learner activity, making it easy to identify which students are struggling and to provide immediate help to ensure performance improvement. The Instructor Reports also highlight the concepts and learning objectives that the class as a whole is having difficulty grasping. This essential information lets you know exactly which areas to target for review during limited class time.

Some key reports include:

Progress Overview report—View student progress for all chapters, including how long students have spent working, which chapters they have used outside of any that were assigned, and individual student progress.

Missed Questions report—Identify specific assessment items, organized by chapter, that are problematic for students.

Most Challenging Learning Objectives report—Identify the specific topic areas that are challenging for your students; these reports are organized by chapter and include specific page references. Use this information to tailor your lecture time and assignments to cover areas that require additional remediation and practice.

Metacognitive Skills report—View statistics showing how knowledgeable your students are about their own comprehension and learning.

Classroom Preparation Tools

Whether before, during, or after class, there is a suite of Baran tools designed to help instructors plan their lessons and to keep students building upon the foundations of the course.

POWERPOINT SLIDES. Accessible PowerPoint presentations for *Introduction to Mass Communication: Media Literacy and Culture* provide chapter highlights that help instructors create focused yet individualized lesson plans.

TEST BANK AND TEST BUILDER. The *Introduction to Mass Communication: Media Literacy and Culture* Test Bank is a treasury of more than 1,000 examination questions based on the most important mass communication concepts explored in the text. New to this edition and available within Connect, Test Builder is a cloud-based tool that enables instructors to format tests that can be printed and administered within a learning management system. Test Builder offers a modern, streamlined interface for easy content configuration that matches course needs without requiring a download. Test Builder enables instructors to:

- Access all test bank content
- Easily pinpoint the most relevant content through robust filtering options
- Manipulate the order of questions or scramble questions and answers
- Pin questions to a specific location within a test
- Determine the preferred treatment of algorithmic questions
- Choose the layout and spacing
- Add instructions and configure default settings

REMOTE PROCTORING. New remote proctoring and browser-locking capabilities are seamlessly integrated within Connect to offer more control over the integrity of online assessments. Instructors can enable security options that restrict browser activity, monitor student behavior, and verify the identity of each student. Instant and detailed reporting gives instructors an at-a-glance view of potential concerns, thereby avoiding personal bias and supporting evidence-based claims.

MEDIA LITERACY WORKSHEETS. Media literacy worksheets provide students with thought-provoking questions and exercises based on the most important concepts addressed in each chapter. Students are encouraged to examine their own experiences with media and form their own opinions.

INSTRUCTOR'S MANUAL. Written by the author, this comprehensive guide to teaching from *Introduction to Mass Communication* contains lecture suggestions and resources for each chapter.

> **CONTACT OUR CUSTOMER SUPPORT TEAM**
>
> McGraw Hill is dedicated to supporting instructors and students. To contact our customer support team, please call us at 800-331-5094 or visit us online at http://mpss.mhhe.com/contact.php

Changes to the New Edition: Highlights

The new edition maintains its commitment to enhancing students' critical thinking and media literacy skills. New and updated material in this edition reflects the latest developments in new digital technologies and highlights the most current research in the field.

Chapter 1 Mass Communication, Culture, and Media Literacy: Discussion of anti-Asian discrimination and the increase in media consumption during the pandemic.

Chapter 2 Convergence and the Reshaping of Mass Communication: Investigation of video streaming during the pandemic and the rise of user-generated content; examination of ghost papers and the value of enterprise reporting; discussion of the danger of meme wars.

Chapter 3 Books: Discussion of the popularity of anti-racist books in the wake of social justice protests; coverage of the troubling rise in American illiteracy; introduction of shopfiction (books as sales devices) and bibliotherapy (books as therapeutic devices).

Chapter 4 Newspapers: Discussion of the importance of engagement reporting, newspapers dropping their paywalls for coronavirus coverage, hyperlocal free weeklies, and online e-replica editions of papers' print versions.

Chapter 5 Magazines: Discussion of technologies like Google Lens connecting readers to wider arrays of content. For example during "Say Their Names" reporting and advances in magazines' use of artificial intelligence writing.

Chapter 6 Film: Examination of the importance of women to origins of movie making and a look at challenges to the theatrical window and movie theaters themselves because of the pandemic lockdown.

Chapter 7 Radio, Recording, and Popular Music: New Cultural Forum box on how streaming changes the nature of the music itself. Added discussions of the return of protest music, the popularity of deep catalog albums, and industry use of album equivalents as unit of sales measure.

Chapter 8 Television, Cable, and Mobile Video: Discussion of Peak TV, television's new Golden Age; total viewer impressions as an alternative to traditional ratings; the increase in long-tail viewing; and the rise of virtual multichannel video programming distributors (VMVPD).

Chapter 9 Video Games: Discussion of technological advances such as ray tracing and the growth of hyper-casual gaming.

Chapter 10 The Internet and Social Media: New Cultural Forum box debating high-speed Internet as a human right; an examination of fake news as disinformation rather than misinformation, producing truth decay, as well as the impact of social media on the insurrectionist attack on the U.S. Capitol; exploration of "finstas," fake Instagram accounts for the presentation of the real self; and discussion of several troubling new Internet phenomena, including facial recognition technology, the growth of surveillance capitalism, the rise of the "manosphere," and deep fakes.

Chapter 11 Public Relations: Examination of the troubling trends of mercenary science, "Black PR," and pink slime journalism; a detailed look at paid vs earned media; and a discussion of the relationship between the new Principles of Corporate Governance and the practice of public relations.

Chapter 12 Advertising: Expanded discussion of neuromarketing research and associative and demonstrative advertising; look at blinks and increased hypercommercialism.

Chapter 13 Theories and Effects of Mass Communication: Introduction and discussion of mediatization theory and its resulting media logic.

Chapter 14 Media Freedom, Regulation, and Ethics: Examination of informed consent and the ethics of privacy; discussion of the coverage of protests and the value of movement journalism; look at deplatforming as a response to harmful speech.

Chapter 15 Global Media: Discussion of the independence of the VOA and an examination of authoritarian governments' throttling of the Internet and its potential to create the splinternet.

Acknowledgments

A project of this magnitude requires the assistance of many people. For this latest edition, I benefited from several e-mails from readers—instructors and students—making suggestions and offering advice. This book is better for those exchanges. Rather than run the risk of failing to include one of these essential correspondents, I'll simply say, "Thanks. You know who you are."

Reviewers are an indispensable part of the creation of a good textbook. In preparing for the 12th edition, I was again impressed with the thoughtful comments made by my colleagues in the field. Although I didn't know them by name, I found myself in long-distance, anonymous debate with several superb thinkers, especially about some of the text's most important concepts. Their collective keen eye and questioning attitude sharpened each chapter to the benefit of both writer and reader. Now that I know who they are, I would like to thank the reviewers by name.

Mario Acerra, *Northampton Community College*

Alan Buck, *Meredith College*

Jill Gibson, *Amarillo College*

Carmen Brookins House, *Lincoln University*

Ron McBride, *Northwestern State University of Louisiana*

Travice Baldwin Obas, *Georgia Highlands College*

Martin Sommerness*, Northern Arizona University*

Michelle Steven, *St. Francis College*

Leesha Throner*, Cincinnati State Technical and Community College*

Bertena Varney, *Southcentral Kentucky Community and Technical College*

Chris Willis, *Chattanooga State Community College*

I would also like to thank the reviewers of the first 10 editions. **Tenth Edition Reviewers:** Shira Chess, The University of Georgia; Phillip Cunningham, Quinnipiac University; Robert F. Darden, Baylor University; Meredith Guthrie, University of Pittsburgh; Kelli Marshall, DePaul University; Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz, University of Missouri–Columbia; Pamela Hill Nettleton, Marquette University; Rick Stevens, University of Colorado Boulder; Matthew R. Turner, Radford University. **Ninth Edition Reviewers:** Cathy Ferrand Bullock, Utah State University; Alta Carroll, Worcester State University; Antoinette Countryman, McHenry County College; Adrienne E. Hacker Daniels, Illinois College; Lori Dann, Eastfield College; Jessica M. Farley, Delaware Technical Community College; Jeffrey Goldberg, Mass Bay Community College; Barbara J. Irwin, Canisius College; Christopher Leigh, University of Charleston; Katherine Lockwood, University of Tampa; Jodi Hallsten Lyczak, Illinois State University; Susan McGraw, Henry Ford College; Larry Moore, Auburn University at Montgomery; Travice Baldwin Obas, Georgia Highlands College–Cartersville; Luis Lopez-Preciado, Lasell College; Terri F. Reilly, Webster University; Joseph M. Sirianni, Niagara University; Sandra Luzzi Sneesby, Community College of Rhode Island; Martin D. Sommerness, Northern Arizona University; Pamela Stovall, University of New Mexico–Gallup; Joanne A. Williams, Olivet College; Joe Wisinski, University of Tampa; Robert Wuagneux, Castleton State College. **Eighth Edition Reviewers:** Lee Banville, University of Montana; Rick Bebout, West Virginia University; Bob Britten, West Virginia University; Cathy Bullock, Utah State University; James Burton, Salisbury University; Yolanda Cal, Loyola University–New Orleans; Nathan Claes, State University of New York–Buffalo; Helen Fallon, Point Park University; Ray Fanning, University of Montana; Richard Ganahl, Bloomsburg University; Paul Hillier, University of Tampa; Daekyung Kim, Idaho State University; Charles Marsh, University of Kansas–Lawrence; Susan McGraw, Henry Ford Community College; Bob Mendenhall,

Finally, my most important inspiration throughout the writing of this book has been my family. My wife, Susan, is educated in media literacy and a strong disciple of spreading its lessons far and wide—which she does with zest. Her knowledge and assistance in my writing is invaluable; her love in my life is sustaining; her fire—for improved media literacy and for our marriage—is empowering. My children—Jordan and Matthew—simply by their existence require that I consider and reconsider what kind of world we will leave for them. I've written this text in the hope that it helps make the future for them and their friends better than it might otherwise have been.

S.J.B.

Twelfth Edition

Introduction to
Mass Communication
MEDIA LITERACY AND CULTURE

Mass Communication, Culture, and Media Literacy

1

◀ We touch the world, and the world touches us, through mass communication.

Elnur/Shutterstock

Learning Objectives

Mass communication, mass media, and the culture that shape us (and that we shape) are inseparable. After studying this chapter, you should be able to

▶ Define *communication, mass communication, mass media,* and *culture.*

▶ Describe the relationships among communication, mass communication, culture, and those who live in the culture.

▶ Evaluate the impact of technology and economics on those relationships.

▶ List the components of media literacy.

▶ Identify key skills required for developing media literacy.

c 600 Wooden block printing press invented in China

c 1000 The Chinese develop movable clay type

c 1200 Simple movable metal printing press invented in Korea

1446 Gutenberg printing press perfected

1456 ▶ First Gutenberg Bible printed ·

1400

North Wind Picture Archives/Alamy Stock Photo

1800s Availability of printed materials spreads knowledge that leads to the Industrial Revolution; the Industrial Revolution leads to the creation of the first mass audiences

1830s Publishers begin selling newspapers for a penny and profitting from ad sales, selling readers rather than papers

1800

1948 Harold Laswell defines communication in its simplest, linear form

1954 Osgood–Schramm model of communication and mass communication developed

1962 Marshall McLuhan publishes *The Gutenberg Galaxy* and argues the advent of print is the key to modern consciousness

1975 Carey's cultural definition of communication

1900
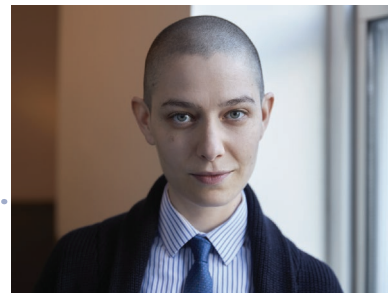
Showtime Networks/Photofest

2008 Art Silverblatt identifies elements of media literacy

2013 Term "binge viewing" enters mainstream use

2016 Annual global Internet traffic passed the zettabyte threshold

2017 ▶ First gender non-binary character on American TV appears in *Billions* · · · · · · · ·

2020 ▶ Coronavirus in the US; anti-Asian discrimination rises; controversy over racist brand imagery · · · · · · · · · · ·

2000

John Angelillo/UPI/Alamy Stock Photo

YOUR SMARTPHONE'S RADIO ALARM SINGS YOU AWAKE. It's Lil Naz X, the last few lyrics of "Old Town Road." The upbeat DJ shouts at you that it's 7:41 and you'd better get going. But before you do, she adds, listen to a few words from your friends at Best Buy electronics, home of fast, friendly, courteous service—"Expert Service. Unbeatable Price!"

Before you get up, though, you take a quick pass at Facebook and Instagram. But you have to get going now. In the living room, you find your roommate has left the television on. You stop for a moment and listen: Interest rates are rising, which may affect the availability of student loans; several states are considering providing free high-speed Internet to all students to improve their access to the digital world; a massive storm, not yet a hurricane, is working its way up the coast; and you deserve a break today at McDonald's. As you head toward the bathroom, your bare feet slip on some magazines littering the floor—*Wired, Fast Company, People.* You need to talk to your roommate about cleaning up!

After showering, you quickly pull on your Levi's, lace up your Nike cross-trainers, and throw on an Under Armour jacket. No time for breakfast; you grab a Nature Valley granola bar and your tablet and head for the bus stop. As the bus rolls up, you can't help but notice the giant ad on its side: another *Marvel* movie. Rejecting that as a film choice for the weekend, you sit down next to a teenager listening to music on his Beats headphones and playing *Words With Friends.* You fire up your tablet and busy yourself with a few quick TikTok videos, raucous Twitter celebrity feuds, and your favorite news app, scanning the lead stories and the local news, then checking out *Zits* and *Garfield.*

Hopping off the bus at the campus stop, you run into your friend Chris. You walk to class together, talking about last night's *Walking Dead* episode. It's not yet 9:00, and already you're involved in mass communication. In fact, like 80% of smartphone owners, you're involved with media first thing in the morning, checking your device even before brushing your teeth (Pinkham, 2020), or perhaps like two-thirds of all American adults, you've even slept with your technological best friend (Doby, 2020).

In this chapter, we define *communication, interpersonal communication, mass communication, media,* and *culture,* and explore the relationships among them and how they define us and our world. We investigate how communication works, how it changes when technology is introduced into the process, and how differing views of communication and mass communication can lead to different interpretations of their power. We also discuss the opportunities mass communication and culture offer us and the responsibilities that come with those opportunities. Always crucial, these issues are of particular importance now, when we find ourselves in a period of remarkable development in new communication technologies. This discussion inevitably leads to an examination of media literacy, its importance, and its practice.

What Is Mass Communication?

"Does a fish know it's wet?" influential cultural and media critic Marshall McLuhan would often ask. The answer, he would say, is "No." The fish's existence is so dominated by water that only when water is absent is the fish aware of its condition.

So it is with people and mass media. The media so fully saturate our everyday lives that we are often unconscious of their presence, not to mention their influence. Media inform us, entertain us, delight us, annoy us. They move our emotions, challenge our intellects, insult our intelligence. Media often reduce us to mere commodities for sale to the highest bidder. Media help define us; they shape our realities.

A fundamental theme of this book is that media do none of this alone. They do it *with* us as well as *to* us through mass communication, and they do it as a central—many critics and scholars say *the* central—cultural force in our society.

Communication Defined

In its simplest form, **communication** is the transmission of a message from a source to a receiver. For more than 70 years now, this view of communication has been identified with
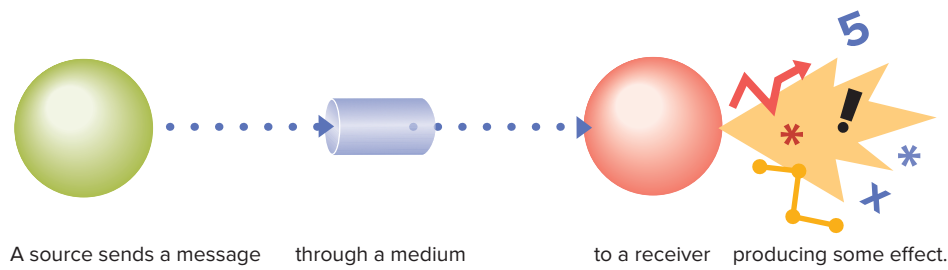
◀ **Figure 1.1** The Basic Communication Process.

A source sends a message   through a medium   to a receiver   producing some effect.

the writing of political scientist Harold Lasswell (1948). He said that a convenient way to describe communication is to answer these questions:

- *Who*?
- Says *what*?
- Through *which* channel?
- To *whom*?
- With *what effect*?

Expressed in terms of the basic elements of the communication process, communication occurs when a source sends a message through a medium to a receiver, producing some effect (Figure 1.1).

This idea is straightforward enough, but what if the source is a professor who insists on speaking in a technical language far beyond the receiving students' level of skill? Obviously, communication does not occur. Unlike mere message-sending, communication requires the response of others. Therefore, there must be a *sharing* (or correspondence) of meaning for communication to take place.

A second problem with this simple model is that it suggests that the receiver passively accepts the source's message. However, if our imaginary students do not comprehend the professor's words, they respond with "Huh?" or look confused or yawn. This response, or **feedback**, is also a message. The receivers (the students) now become a source, sending their own message to the source (the offending professor), who is now a receiver. Hence, communication is a *reciprocal* and *ongoing process* with all involved parties more or less engaged in creating shared meaning. Communication, then, is better defined as *the process of creating shared meaning*.

Communication researcher Wilbur Schramm, using ideas originally developed by psychologist Charles E. Osgood, developed a graphic way to represent the reciprocal nature of communication (Figure 1.2). This depiction of **interpersonal communication**—communication between two or a few people—shows that there is no clearly identifiable source or receiver. Rather, because communication is an ongoing and reciprocal process, all the participants, or "interpreters," are working to create meaning by **encoding** and **decoding** messages. A message is first *encoded,* that is, transformed into an understandable sign and symbol system. Speaking is encoding, as are writing, printing, and filming a television program. Once
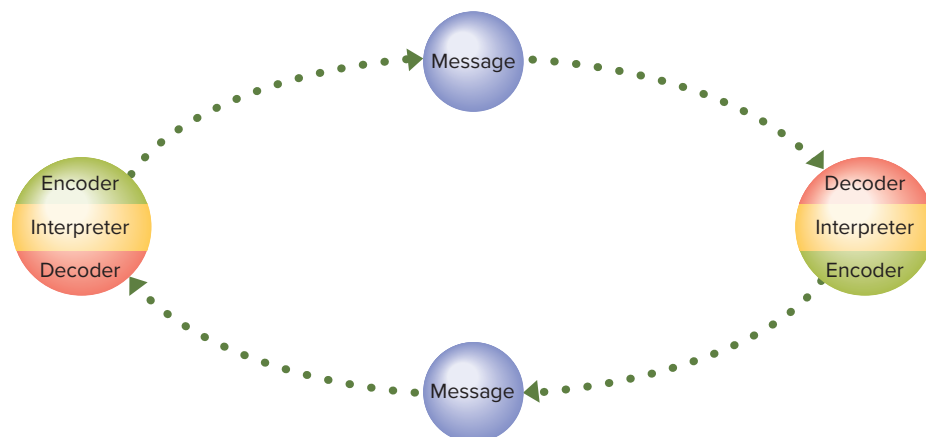
◀ **Figure 1.2** Osgood and Schramm's Model of Communication.
Source: Schramm, Wilbur Lang, The Process and Effects of Mass Communication. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1954, 586.

received, the message is *decoded*; that is, the signs and symbols are interpreted. Decoding occurs through listening, reading, or watching that television show.

The Osgood–Schramm model demonstrates the ongoing and reciprocal nature of the communication process. There is, therefore, no source, no receiver, and no feedback. The reason is that, as communication is happening, both interpreters are simultaneously source and receiver. There is no feedback because all messages are presumed to be in reciprocation of other messages. Even when your friend starts a conversation with you, for example, it can be argued that it was your look of interest and willingness that communicated to her that she should speak. In this example, it is improper to label either you or your friend as the source—who really initiated this chat?—and, therefore, it is impossible to identify who is providing feedback to whom.

Not every model can show all aspects of a process as complex as communication. Missing from this representation is **noise**—anything that interferes with successful communication. Noise is more than screeching or loud music when you are trying to work online. Biases that lead to incorrect decoding, for example, are noise, as is a page torn out of a magazine article you want to read or that spiderweb crack in your smartphone's screen.

Encoded messages are carried by a **medium**, that is, the means of sending information. Sound waves are the medium that carries our voice to friends across the table; the telephone is the medium that carries our voice to friends across town. When the medium is a technology that carries messages to a large number of people—as the Internet carries text, sounds, and images and radio conveys the sound of news and music—we call it a **mass medium** (the plural of medium is *media*). The mass media we use regularly include radio, television, books, magazines, newspapers, movies, sound recordings, and computer networks. Each medium is the basis of a giant industry, but other related and supporting industries also serve them and us—advertising and public relations, for example. In our culture, we use the words *media* and *mass media* interchangeably to refer to the communication industries themselves. We say, "The media entertain" or "The mass media are too conservative (or too liberal)."

Mass Communication Defined

We speak, too, of mass communication. **Mass communication** is the process of creating shared meaning between the mass media and their audiences. Schramm recast his and Osgood's general model of communication to help us visualize the particular aspects of the mass communication process (Figure 1.3). This model and the original Osgood–Schramm model have much in common—interpreters, encoding, decoding, and messages—but it is their differences that are most significant for our understanding of how mass communication differs from other forms of communication. For example, whereas the original model

▶ **Figure 1.3** Schramm's Model of Mass Communication.

Source: Schramm, Wilbur Lang, The Process and Effects of Mass Communication. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1954, 586.

Organization

Encoder
Interpreter
Decoder

Many identical messages

The mass audience

Many receivers, each decoding, interpreting, encoding

Each connected with a group in which the message is reinterpreted and often acted upon

Delayed inferential feedback

Input from news sources, art sources, etc.
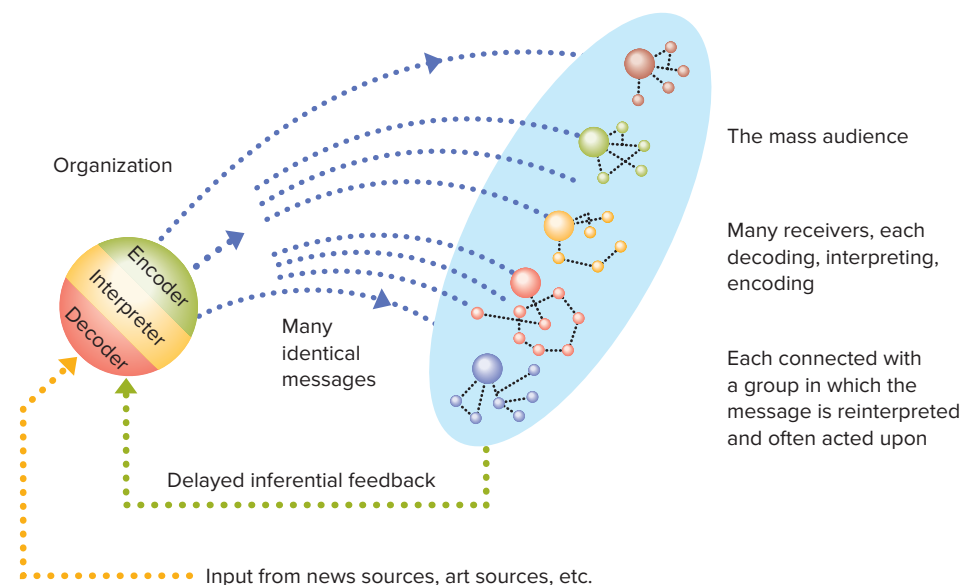
includes "message," the mass communication model offers "many identical messages." In addition, the mass communication model specifies "feedback," whereas the interpersonal communication model does not. When two or a few people communicate face-to-face, the participants can immediately and clearly recognize the feedback residing in the reciprocal messages (our boring professor can see and hear the students' disenchantment as they listen to the lecture). Things are not nearly as simple in mass communication.

In Schramm's mass communication model, feedback is represented by a dotted line labeled "delayed **inferential feedback**." This feedback is indirect rather than direct. Television executives, for example, must wait a day, at the very minimum, and sometimes a week or a month, to discover the ratings for new programs. Even then, the ratings measure only how many sets are tuned in, not whether people liked or disliked the programs. As a result, these executives can only infer what they must do to improve programming, hence the term *inferential feedback.* Mass communicators are also subject to additional feedback, usually in the form of criticism in other media, such as a television critic writing a column in a newspaper.

The differences between the individual elements of interpersonal and mass communication change the very nature of the communication process. How those alterations influence the message itself and how the likelihood of successfully sharing meaning differs are shown in Figure 1.4. For example, the immediacy and directness of feedback in interpersonal communication free communicators to gamble, to experiment with different approaches. Their knowledge of one another enables them to tailor their messages as narrowly as they wish. As a result, interpersonal communication is often personally relevant and possibly even adventurous and challenging. In contrast, the distance between participants in the mass communication process, imposed by the technology, creates a sort of "communication conservatism." Feedback comes too late to enable corrections or alterations in communication that fails. The sheer number of people in many mass communication audiences makes personalization and specificity difficult. As a result, mass communication tends to be more constrained, less free. This does not mean, however, that it is less potent than interpersonal communication in shaping our understanding of ourselves and our world.

Media theorist James W. Carey (1975) recognized this and offered a **cultural definition of communication** that has had a profound impact on the way communication scientists and others have viewed the relationship between communication and culture. Carey wrote, "Communication is a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired and transformed" (p. 10).

Carey's (1989) definition asserts that communication and reality are linked. Communication is a process embedded in our everyday lives that informs the way we perceive, understand, and construct our view of reality and the world. Communication is the foundation of our culture. Its truest purpose is to maintain ever-evolving, "fragile" cultures; communication is that "sacred ceremony that draws persons together in fellowship and commonality" (p. 43).

What Is Culture?

Culture is the learned behavior of members of a given social group. Many writers and thinkers have offered interesting expansions of this definition. Here are four examples, all from anthropologists. These definitions highlight not only what culture *is* but also what culture *does*:

- Culture is the learned, socially acquired traditions and lifestyles of the members of a society, including their patterned, repetitive ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. (Harris, 1983, p. 5)
- Culture lends significance to human experience by selecting from and organizing it. It refers broadly to the forms through which people make sense of their lives, rather than more narrowly to the opera or art of museums. (Rosaldo, 1989, p. 26)
- Culture is the medium evolved by humans to survive. Nothing is free from cultural influences. It is the keystone in civilization's arch and is the medium through which all of life's events must flow. We are culture. (Hall, 1976, p. 14)
- Culture is an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbolic forms by means of which [people] communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life. (Geertz, as cited in Taylor, 1991, p. 91)

	Interpersonal Communication You invite a friend to lunch.		**Mass Communication** Idiot Box Productions produces *The Walking Dead*.	
	Nature	**Consequences**	**Nature**	**Consequences**
Message	Highly flexible and alterable	You can change it in midstream. If feedback is negative, you can offer an alternative. Is feedback still negative? Take a whole new approach.	Identical, mechanically produced, simultaneously sent Inflexible, unalterable The completed *The Walking Dead* episode that is aired	Once production is completed, *The Walking Dead* cannot be changed. If a plotline or other communicative device isn't working with the audience, nothing can be done.
Interpreter A	One person—in this case, you	You know your mind. You can encode your own message to suit yourself, your values, and your likes and dislikes.	A large, hierarchically structured organization—in this case, Idiot Box Productions and the AMC television network	Who really is Interpreter A? Production's executives? The writers? The director? The actors? The network and its standards and practices people? The sponsors? All must agree, leaving little room for individual vision or experimentation.
Interpreter B	One or a few people, usually in direct contact with you and, to a greater or lesser degree, known to you—in this case, your friend	You can tailor your message specifically to Interpreter B. You can make relatively accurate judgments about B because of information present in the setting. Your friend is a vegetarian; you don't suggest a steak house.	A large, heterogeneous audience known to Interpreter A only in the most rudimentary way, little more than basic demographics—in this case, several million viewers of *The Walking Dead*	Communication cannot be tailored to the wants, needs, and tastes of all audience members or even those of all members of some subgroup. Some more or less generally acceptable standard is set.
Feedback	Immediate and direct yes or no response	You know how successful your message is immediately. You can adjust your communication on the spot to maximize its effectiveness.	Delayed and inferential Even overnight ratings are too late for this episode of *The Walking Dead*. Moreover, ratings are limited to telling the number of sets tuned in.	Even if the feedback is useful, it is too late to be of value for this episode. In addition, it doesn't suggest how to improve the communication effort.
Result	Flexible, personally relevant, possibly adventurous, challenging, or experimental		Constrained by virtually every aspect of the communication situation A level of communication most likely to meet the greatest number of viewers' needs A belief that experimentation is dangerous A belief that to challenge the audience is to risk failure	

▲ **Figure 1.4** Elements of Interpersonal Communication and Mass Communication Compared.

(photo left): Daniel Thistlewaite/Image Source; (photo right): Jace Downs/AMC/PictureLux/The Hollywood Archive/Alamy Stock Photo

Culture as Socially Constructed Shared Meaning

Virtually all definitions of culture recognize that culture is *learned.* Recall the opening vignette. Even if this scenario does not exactly match your early mornings, you probably recognize its elements. Moreover, all of us are familiar with most, if not every, cultural reference in it. *Transformers*, *The Walking Dead*, McDonald's, Under Armour, TikTok—all are points of reference, things that have some meaning for all of us. How did this come to be?

Creation and maintenance of a more or less common culture occur through communication, including mass communication. When we talk to our friends, when a parent raises a child, when religious leaders instruct their followers, when teachers teach, when grandparents pass on recipes, when politicians campaign, and when media professionals produce content that we read, listen to, or watch, meaning is being shared and culture is being constructed and maintained.

▲ These images have meaning for all of us—meaning that is socially constructed through communication in our culture. How many can you recognize? What specific meaning or meanings does each have for you? How did you develop each meaning? How closely do you think your meanings match those of your friends? Of your parents? What value is there—if any—in having shared meaning for these things in our everyday lives?

(top left) Fadziel Nor/Shutterstock; (top right) John Flournoy/McGraw Hill; (bottom left) Kevin Dietsch/UPI/Alamy Stock Photo; (bottom right) Rokas Tenys/Alamy Stock Photo

Functions and Effects of Culture

Culture serves a purpose. It helps us categorize and classify our experiences; it helps define us, our world, and our place in it. In doing so, culture can have a number of sometimes conflicting effects.

LIMITING AND LIBERATING EFFECTS OF CULTURE A culture's learned traditions and values can be seen as patterned, repetitive ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. Culture limits our options and provides useful guidelines for behavior. For example, when conversing, you do not consciously consider, "Now, how far away should I stand? Am I too close?" You simply stand where you stand. After a hearty meal with a friend's family, you do not engage in mental self-debate, "Should I burp? Yes! No! Arghhhh. . . ." Culture provides information that helps us make meaningful distinctions about right and wrong, appropriate and inappropriate, good and bad, attractive and unattractive, and so on. How does it do this?

Obviously, it does so through communication. Through a lifetime of communication, we have learned just what our culture expects of us. The two examples given here are positive results of culture's limiting effects. But culture's limiting effects can be negative, such as when we are unwilling or unable to move past patterned, repetitive ways of thinking, feeling, and acting or when we entrust our "learning" to teachers whose interests are selfish, narrow, or otherwise inconsistent with our own.

US culture, for example, values thinness and beauty in women. How many women endure weeks of unhealthy diets and succumb to potentially dangerous surgical procedures in search of a body that for most is physically unattainable? How many women are judged by the men and other women around them for not conforming to our culture's standards of thinness and beauty? Why does an expression like "fat shaming" exist in our language? Why are 50% of preadolescent girls and 30% of preadolescent boys unhappy with their bodies (Muhlheim, 2020)? Why do over one-half of teenage girls and nearly one-third of teenage boys use unhealthy weight control behaviors like skipping meals, fasting, smoking cigarettes, vomiting, and taking laxatives (National Eating Disorders Association, 2020)?

Now consider how this situation may have come about. Our parents did not bounce us on their knees when we were babies, telling us that thin was good and heavy was bad. Think back, though, to the stories you were told and the television shows and movies you watched growing up. The heroines (or, more often, the beautiful love interests of the heroes) were invariably tall, beautiful, and thin. The bad guys were usually mean and fat. From Disney's depictions of Snow White, Cinderella, Belle, Jasmine, and Pocahontas to the impossible dimensions of most video-game and comic book heroines, the message is embedded in the conscious (and unconscious) mind of every girl and boy: You can't be too thin or too beautiful! As it is, 69% of women and 65% of girls cite constant pressure from advertising and media to reach unrealistic standards of beauty as a major factor fueling their anxiety about their appearance (Dove, 2020). And it does not help that these messages are routinely reinforced throughout the culture—for example, in the recent explosion of plastic surgery game apps that let kids give perfect nose jobs and face-lifts, all with brightly colored graphics (Yan, 2018); the popularity of Instagram's plastic surgery filters—a billion applications in 2019 alone, leading the company to ban them from its platform (Marikar, 2019); and the now-routine "sexy fill-in-the-blank" women's Halloween costumes (Lake, Macedo, & Riegle, 2019).

This message and millions of others come to us primarily through the media, and although the people who produce these media images are not necessarily selfish or mean, their motives are undeniably financial. Their contribution to our culture's repetitive ways of thinking, feeling, and acting is most certainly not primary among their concerns when preparing their communication.

Culture need not only limit. The fact that media representations of female beauty often meet with debate and disagreement points out that culture can be liberating as well. This is so because cultural values can be *contested.* In fact, today, we're just as likely to see strong, intelligent female characters who save the day, such as *Brave*'s Merida, *Mulan*'s Fa Mulan, *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*'s Sam Sparks, and *Frozen*'s sisters, Anna and Elsa, as we are movie princesses who need to be saved by the hero.

▲ Culture can be contested. Actor Asia Kate Dillon plays Taylor Mason in the hit Showtime series *Billions*. They (Dillon's preferred self-referencing pronoun) identify as non-binary, in stark contrast to the actors typically chosen for prime roles on big-budget TV shows. Dillon's role on *Billions* is the first gender non-binary main character on North American television and challenges the culture's everyday assumption of what a TV star should be and look like, as you can clearly see when looking at the casts of other video fare such as those of *Riverdale*, *NCIS*, and *Chicago Fire*. *Showtime Networks/Photofest*

Especially in a pluralistic, democratic society such as ours, the **dominant culture** (or **mainstream culture**)—the one that seems to hold sway with the majority of people—is often openly challenged. People do meet, find attractive, like, and love people who do not fit the standard image of beauty. In addition, media sometimes present images that suggest different ideals of beauty and success. Actors Katy Mixon, Issa Rae, Dascha Polanco, and Mindy Kaling; singer/actor Beyoncé; and comedians Riki Lindhome and Amy Schumer all represent alternatives to our culture's idealized standards of beauty, and all have undeniable appeal (and power) on the big and small screens. Liberation from the limitations imposed by culture resides in our ability and willingness to learn and use *new* patterned, repetitive ways of thinking, feeling, and acting; to challenge existing patterns; and to create our own.

DEFINING, DIFFERENTIATING, DIVIDING, AND UNITING EFFECTS OF CULTURE Have you ever made the mistake of calling a dolphin, porpoise, or even a whale a fish? Maybe you have heard others do it. This error occurs because when we think of fish, we think "lives in the water" and "swims." Fish are defined by their "aquatic culture." Because water-residing, swimming dolphins, porpoises, and whales share that culture, we sometimes forget that they are mammals, not fish.

We, too, are defined by our culture. We are citizens of the United States; we are Americans. If we travel to other countries, we will hear ourselves labeled "American," and this label will conjure up stereotypes and expectations in the minds of those who use and hear it. The stereotype, whatever it may be, will probably fit us only incompletely, or perhaps hardly at all—perhaps we are dolphins in a sea full of fish. Nevertheless, being American defines us in innumerable important ways, both to others (more obviously) and to ourselves (less obviously).

▲ *Riverdale*, *NCIS*, and *Chicago Fire*—these three television programs are aimed at different audiences, yet in each, the characters share certain traits that mark them as attractive. Must people in real life look like these performers to be considered attractive? Successful? Good? The people shown are all slender, tall, and attractive. Yes, they are just make-believe television characters, but the producers of the shows on which they appear chose these people—as opposed to others—for a reason. What do you think it was? How well do you measure up to the cultural standard of beauty and attractiveness represented here? Do you ever wish that you could be just a bit more like these people? Why or why not?

(top) The CW Television Network/Photofest; (bottom left) Kevin Lynch/CBS/Getty Images; (bottom right) NBC/Photofest

Within this large, national culture, however, there are many smaller, **bounded cultures** (or **co-cultures**). For example, we speak comfortably of Italian neighborhoods, fraternity row, the South, and the suburbs. Because of our cultural understanding of these categories, each expression communicates something about our expectations of these places. We think we can predict with a good deal of certainty the types of restaurants and shops we will find in the

Italian neighborhood, even the kind of music we will hear escaping from open windows. We can predict the kinds of clothes and cars we will see on fraternity row, the likely behavior of shop clerks in the South, and the political orientation of the suburbs' residents. Moreover, the people within these cultures usually identify themselves as members of those bounded cultures. An individual may say, for example, "I'm Italian American" or "I'm a Southerner." These smaller cultures unite groups of people and enable them to see themselves as different from other groups around them. Thus, culture also serves to differentiate us from others.

In the United States, we generally consider this a good thing. We pride ourselves on our pluralism, on our diversity, and on the richness of the cultural heritages represented within our borders. We enjoy moving from one bounded culture to another or from a bounded culture to the dominant national culture and back again.

Problems arise, however, when differentiation leads to division. All Americans suffered the painful personal, financial, and physical effects of the coronavirus pandemic of 2020. But that ongoing tragedy was compounded for the millions of Asian Americans whose "Americanness" was challenged simply because of their perceived cultural connection to the people of Wuhan, China, where the disease originated. Before the virus struck the United States, anti-Asian hate crimes had been on a two-decade decline (Feinberg, 2020). But 4 months into the country's battle against the disease's physical and economic toll, the Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council had received more than 1,800 reports of harassment or violence against Asian Americans in 45 states and Washington, D.C. (Kambhampaty, 2020), and by the end of that year, there were 2,808 *reported* "hate incidents" nationwide aimed at Asian Americans (Nakamura, 2021). Asian Americans' looks, names, and sometimes facility with a "strange-sounding" language somehow communicated otherness, not-American, to many of their fellow citizens. Just as culture is constructed and maintained through communication, it is also communication (or miscommunication) that turns differentiation into division.

Yet Americans of all colors, ethnicities, genders, nationalities, places of birth, economic strata, and intelligence levels often get along; in fact, we *can* communicate, *can* prosper, and *can* respect one another's differences. Culture can divide us, but culture also unites us. Our culture represents our collective experience. We converse easily with strangers because we share the same culture. We automatically know when a handshake is appropriate, use titles or first or last names appropriately, know how much to say, and know how much to leave unsaid. Through communication with people in our culture, we internalize cultural norms and values—those things that bind our many diverse bounded cultures into a functioning, cohesive society.

From this discussion comes the definition of culture on which the remainder of this book is based: Culture is the world made meaningful; it is socially constructed and maintained through communication. It limits as well as liberates us; it differentiates as well as unites us. It defines our realities and thereby shapes the ways we think, feel, and act.

◀ There is nothing about these Asian American people that should "communicate otherness" in the United States, yet too many people cannot see beyond their own bounded cultures.
Ron Adar/Alamy Stock Photo

Mass Communication and Culture

Despite the fact that culture can limit and divide, it can also liberate and unite. As such, it offers us infinite opportunities to use communication for good—if we choose to do so. James Carey (1975) wrote:

> Because we have looked at each new advance in communication technology as opportunities for politics and economics, we have devoted them, almost exclusively, to government and trade. We have rarely seen them as opportunities to expand [our] powers to learn and exchange ideas and experience. (pp. 20–21)

Who are "we" in this quote? *We* are the people involved in creating and maintaining the culture that defines us. *We* are the people involved in mass media industries and the people who compose their audiences. Together we allow mass communication not only to occur but also to contribute to the creation and maintenance of culture.

Everyone involved has an obligation to participate responsibly. For people working in the media industries, this means professionally and ethically creating and transmitting content. For audience members, it means behaving as critical and thoughtful consumers of that content. Two ways to understand our opportunities and our responsibilities in the mass communication process are to view the mass media as our cultural storytellers and to conceptualize mass communication as a cultural forum.

Mass Media as Cultural Storytellers

A culture's values and beliefs reside in the stories it tells. Who are the good guys? Who are the bad guys? How many of your childhood heroines were even slightly overweight? How many good guys dressed in black? How many heroines lived happily ever after without marrying Prince Charming? Probably not very many. How many news accounts of demonstrations in our streets take the vantage point of the protesters? Again, probably not very many. Our stories help define our realities, shaping the ways we think, feel, and act. "Stories are sites of observations about self and society," explains media theorist Hanno Hardt (2007, p. 476). The media's stories—real, imaginary, an intentional or unintentional mixture of the two—become the material for our cultural conversations. Therefore, the "storytellers" have a responsibility to tell their stories in as professional and ethical way as possible.

At the same time, we, the audience for these stories, also have opportunities and responsibilities. We use these stories to learn about the world around us, to understand the values, the way things work, and how the pieces fit together. We have a responsibility to question the tellers and their stories, to interpret the stories in ways consistent with larger or more important cultural values and truths, to be thoughtful, and to reflect on the stories' meanings and what they say about us and our culture. To do less is to miss an opportunity to construct our own meaning and, thereby, culture.

▼ For 131 years the central character in the Aunt Jemima maple syrup story was an unkind racial stereotype. The culture wanted a different take on its past; Aunt Jemima disappeared, but not before she became a central character in an important conversation about race and racism.

John Angelillo/UPI/Alamy Stock Photo

For example, for 131 years, Aunt Jemima, a character from a 19th-century minstrel song that longed for the days before the Civil War ended slavery, was the name and face of a popular maple syrup, featured in its branding and advertising. The product's maker, Quaker Oats, knew something was not quite right about using a racial stereotype as the central character in the story of its brand, so over the years it occasionally updated her look, replacing the "Mammy" kerchief on her head with a plaid headband and later adding pearl earrings and a lace collar to her outfit. But in the wake of the video documentation of George Floyd's killing by Minneapolis police, America undertook a serious reconsideration of their nation's often racist past (and the

stories it told itself to gloss over many uncomfortable truths). Quaker Oats responded, deciding it was time to tell a different story with different characters, announcing in mid-2020 the aunt's retirement (Hsu, 2020). Mars Food quickly followed suit with its Uncle Ben's Rice (becoming Ben's Original Rice), and two other companies announced they would rethink the racist imagery central to their brands' stories: ConAgra Brands (Mrs. Butterworth's pancake syrup) and B&G Foods (Cream of Wheat porridge, dropping altogether the image of the grinning Black chef). The culture was tired of these ignorant stories and demanded something better (Cramer, 2020).

Mass Communication as Cultural Forum

Imagine a giant courtroom in which we discuss and debate our culture—what it is, and what we want it to be. What do we think about welfare? Single motherhood? Labor unions? Nursing homes? What is the meaning of "successful," "good," "loyal," "moral," "honest," "beautiful," or "patriotic"? We have cultural definitions or understandings of all these things and more. Where do they come from? How do they develop, take shape, and mature?

Mass communication has become a primary forum for the debate about our culture. Logically, then, the most powerful voices in the forum have the most power to shape our definitions and understandings. Where should that power reside—with the media industries or with their audiences? If you answer "media industries," you will want members of these industries to act professionally and ethically. If you answer "audiences," you will want individual audience members to be thoughtful and critical of the media messages they consume. The forum is only as good, fair, and honest as those who participate in it.

Scope and Nature of Mass Media

No matter how we choose to view the process of mass communication, it is impossible to deny that an enormous portion of our lives is spent interacting with mass media. We spend well over half our day, 13 hours and 35 minutes, interacting with media of some sort (Dolliver, 2020).

The average American adult watches 27 hours per week of traditional television; that is, in the home and including live, on-demand, and recorded viewing (Epstein, 2020). Watching online video adds another 100 minutes a day (Brooks, 2020). A large majority of TV viewers admit to **binge watching**, watching five or more episodes of a series in one sitting. As for 18- to 29-year-old bingers, 76% stay up all night to do so; 51% will watch an entire new season of a show within 24 hours of its release; 45% cancel social plans to binge; and 42% will watch at work to finish a series (Feldman, 2018). People watch more than 1 billion hours of video daily on YouTube alone; and there's plenty of material, as 500 hours of new content are uploaded to the site every minute (Chi, 2021).

Ninety-three percent of Americans will tune in to the radio every week, averaging 102 minutes a day (Watson, 2020), and Americans also stream over 1 trillion songs a year (Blake, 2020). We spend more than $11 billion a year at the movies, buying more than a billion-and-a-quarter tickets (McNary, 2020). If Facebook were a country, its 2.6 billion users would make it the largest in the world; 1.7 billion people log on daily (Noyes, 2020). Seventy-five percent of American households are home to at least one person who plays video games three or more hours a week, and 65% of American adults play video games (Entertainment Software Association, 2020).

More than 333 million North Americans, 90% of the population, use the Internet. Globally, 4.9 billion people go online, 63% of the world's population and a 1,271% increase since 2000 ("Internet Usage," 2021). One-third of American adults are online "almost constantly" (Perrin & Atske, 2021). In *one minute* of Internet time, users will send 210 million e-mails, download 26,000 apps, make 4.2 million Google searches, and send 15.2 million texts (Heitman, 2021). There's little doubt that we actively engage the media, but you can see in Figure 1.5 how Americans' typical levels of consumption rose dramatically when sheltering at home during the 2020 coronavirus pandemic. In fact, so reliant were we on the media to help us get through that difficult time, that 2 months into states' stay-at-home orders, nearly half of Americans "ran out" of things to watch, read, and listen to (Mandese, 2020).

Despite the pervasiveness of mass media in our lives, many of us are dissatisfied with or critical of the media industries' performance and much of the content provided. For example,

▶ **Figure 1.5** Increase in Media Usage over a Typical Pre-Pandemic Day.
Source: Waterman, 2020.
(tablet pc) ra2studio/Shutterstock

Change vs. prepandemic typical day

- Gaming: 115%
- Watching video: 36%
- Downloading content: 39%
- Time on the Web: 27%
- Time on social media: −12%
- Talking on the phone: 25%

Type of usage
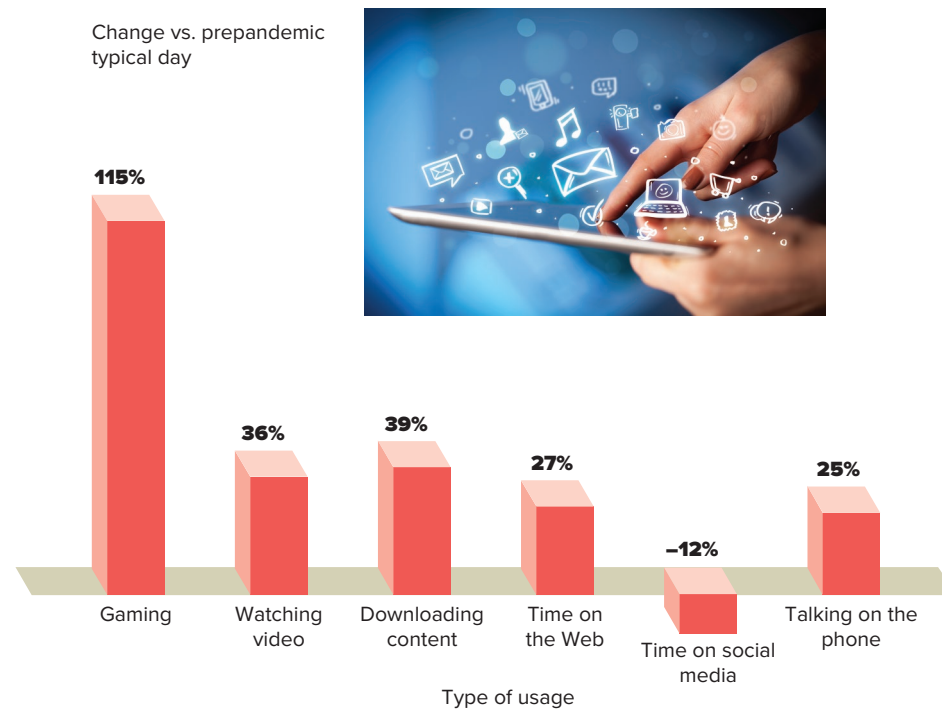
fewer than half of all Americans trust the traditional mass media, and only 27% trust social media as a source of information (Salmon, 2021); globally, only 14% of consumers trust advertising to help them gain information about a business (Stewart, 2020); 91% of Americans think advertising has become more intrusive in the past few years (Coppola, 2020), and even advertising professionals hate commercials: 27% block digital ads, 79% skip TV commercials on their DVRs, and 98% stream ad-free content (Whitman, 2018).

Our ambivalence—we criticize, yet we consume—comes in part from our uncertainties about the relationships among the elements of mass communication. What is the role of technology? What is the role of money? And what is *our* role in the mass communication process?

The Role of Technology

To some thinkers, it is machines and their development that drive economic and cultural change. This idea is referred to as **technological determinism**. Certainly, there can be no doubt that movable type contributed to the Protestant Reformation and the decline of the Catholic Church's power in Europe, or that television changed the way members of American families interact, or that social media have altered the nature of friendship. Those who believe in technological determinism would argue that these changes in the cultural landscape were the inevitable result of new technology.

But others see technology as more neutral and claim that the way people *use* technology is what gives it significance. This perspective accepts technology as one of many factors that shape economic and cultural change; technology's influence is ultimately determined by how much power it is given by the people and cultures that use it.

This disagreement about the power of technology is at the heart of the controversies that always seem to spring up with the introduction of new communication technologies. Are we more or less powerful given the range of media available to us in the digital age? If we are at the mercy of technology, the culture that surrounds us will not be of our making, and the best we can hope to do is make our way reasonably well in a world outside our control. But if these technologies are indeed neutral and their power resides in *how* we choose to use them, we can utilize them responsibly and thoughtfully to construct and maintain whatever kind of culture we want.

Technology does have an impact on communication. At the very least it changes the basic elements of communication (see Figure 1.4). But what technology does not do is relieve us of our obligation to use mass communication responsibly and wisely.

The Role of Money

Money, too, alters communication. It shifts the balance of power; it tends to make audiences products rather than consumers.

The first newspapers were financially supported by their readers; the money they paid for the paper covered its production and distribution. But in the 1830s, a new form of newspaper financing emerged. Publishers began selling their papers for a penny—much less than it cost to produce and distribute them. Because so many more papers were sold at this bargain price, publishers could "sell" advertising space based on their readership. However, what they were actually selling to advertisers was not space on the page—it was readers. How

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CULTURAL FORUM
Audience as Consumer or Audience as Product?
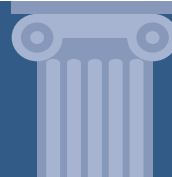
the economics of the media industry. Businesses operate to serve their consumers and make a profit. The consumer comes first, then, but who *is* the consumer in our mass media system? This is a much-debated issue among media practitioners and media critics. Consider the following models.

People base their judgments of media performance and content on the way they see themselves fitting into

BUSINESS MODEL	PRODUCER	PRODUCT	CONSUMERS
Basic US Business Model	A manufacturer . . .	produces a product . . .	for consumers who choose to buy or not. The manufacturer must satisfy the consumer. Power resides with consumers.
Basic US Business Model for Cereal: Rice Krispies as Product, Public as Consumer	Kellogg's . . .	produces Rice Krispies . . .	for us, the consumers. If we buy Rice Krispies, Kellogg's makes a profit. Kellogg's must satisfy the consumer. Power resides with consumers.
Basic US Business Model for Television (A): Audience as Product, Advertisers as Consumer	NBC . . .	produces audiences (using its programming) . . .	for advertisers. If they buy NBC's audiences, NBC makes a profit from ad time. NBC must satisfy its consumers, the advertisers. Power resides with advertisers.
Basic US Business Model for Television (B): Programming as Product, Audience as Consumer	NBC . . .	produces (or distributes) programming . . .	for us, the audience. If we watch NBC's shows, NBC makes a profit from ad sales. NBC must satisfy its audience. Power resides with audiences.

Enter Your Voice

The first three models assume that the consumer *buys* the product; that is, the consumer is the one with the money and therefore the one who must be satisfied. The last model makes a different assumption. It sees the audience, even though it does not buy anything, as sufficiently important to NBC's profit-making ability to force NBC to consider the audience's interests above others' (even those of advertisers).

- Which model do you think best represents the economics of American mass media?
- Can you speculate on how the different models might influence the relationship between the media and their audiences?
- How might different models shape the kinds of content available to audiences?

much they could charge advertisers was directly related to how much product (how many readers) they could produce for them.

This new type of publication changed the nature of mass communication. The goal of the process was no longer for audience and media to create meaning together. Rather, it was to sell those readers to a third participant: advertisers.

Some observers think this was a devastatingly bad development, not only in the history of mass communication but also in the history of democracy. It robbed people of their voices, or at least made the voices of the advertisers more powerful. Others think it was a huge advance for both mass communication and democracy because it vastly expanded the media, broadening and deepening communication. Models showing these two different ways of viewing mass communication are presented in the box "Audience as Consumer or Audience as Product?" Which model makes more sense to you? Which do you think is more accurate? ABC journalist Ted Koppel once explained to *The Washington Post,* "[Television] is an industry. It's a business. We exist to make money. We exist to put commercials on the air. The programming that is put on between those commercials is simply the bait we put in the mousetrap" (in "Soundbites," 2005, p. 2). Do you think Koppel is unnecessarily cynical, or is he correct in his analysis of television?

The goals of media professionals will be questioned repeatedly throughout this book. For now, keep in mind that ours is a capitalist economic system and that media industries are businesses. Movie producers must sell tickets, book publishers must sell books, and even public broadcasters have bills to pay.

This does not mean, however, that the media are or must be slaves to profit. Our task is to understand the constraints placed on these industries by their economics and then demand that, within those limits, they perform ethically and responsibly. We can do this only by being thoughtful, critical consumers of the media.

Two Revolutions in Mass Communication

Culture and communication are inseparable, and mass communication, as we've seen, is a particularly powerful, pervasive, and complex form of communication. Our level of skill in the mass communication process is therefore of utmost importance. This skill is not necessarily a simple one to master (it is much more than booting up the computer, turning on the television, or flipping through the pages of your favorite magazine). But it is, indeed, a learnable skill, one that can be practiced. This skill is **media literacy**—the ability to effectively and efficiently comprehend and use any form of mediated communication. But let's start with the first mass medium, books, and the technology that enabled their spread, the printing press.

The Gutenberg Revolution

As it is impossible to overstate the importance of writing, so too is it impossible to overstate the significance of Johannes Gutenberg's development of movable metal type. Historian S. H. Steinberg (1959) wrote in *Five Hundred Years of Printing*:

> Neither political, constitutional, ecclesiastical, and economic, nor sociological, philosophical, and literary movements can be fully understood without taking into account the influence the printing press has exerted upon them. (p. 11)

Marshall McLuhan expressed his admiration for Gutenberg's innovation by calling his 1962 book *The Gutenberg Galaxy.* In it, he argued that the advent of print is the key to our modern consciousness because **literacy**—the ability to effectively and efficiently comprehend and use written symbols—had existed since the development of the first alphabets more than 5,000 years ago, it was reserved for very few, the elites. Gutenberg's invention was world-changing because it opened literacy to all; that is, it allowed *mass* communication.

THE PRINTING PRESS Printing and the printing press existed long before Gutenberg perfected his process in or around 1446. The Chinese were using wooden block presses as early as 600 C.E. and an artisan named Bi Sheng developed movable clay type by 1000 C.E. (Marantz, 2019). A simple movable metal type was even in use in Korea in the 13th century. Gutenberg's printing press was a significant leap forward, however, for two important reasons.

Gutenberg was a goldsmith and a metallurgist. He hit on the idea of using metal type crafted from lead molds in place of type made from wood or clay. This was an important advance. Not only was movable metal type durable enough to print page after page, but letters could be arranged and rearranged to make any message possible, and Gutenberg was able to produce virtually identical copies.

▲ Johannes Gutenberg takes the first proof from his printing press.
North Wind Picture Archives

In addition, Gutenberg's advance over Korean metal mold printing was one of scope. The Korean press was used to produce books for a very small, royal readership. Gutenberg saw his invention as a way to produce many books for profit. He was, however, a poor businessman. He stressed quality over quantity, in part because of his reverence for the book he was printing, the Bible. He used the highest-quality paper and ink and turned out far fewer volumes than he otherwise could have.

Other printers, however, quickly saw the true economic potential of Gutenberg's invention. The first Gutenberg Bible appeared in 1456. By the end of that century, 44 years later, printing operations existed in 12 European countries, and the Continent was flooded with 20 million volumes of 7,000 titles in 35,000 different editions (Drucker, 1999).

THE IMPACT OF PRINT Although Gutenberg developed his printing press with a limited use in mind, printing Bibles, the cultural effects of mass printing have been profound.

Handwritten or hand-copied materials were expensive to produce, and the cost of an education, in time and money, had made reading an expensive luxury. However, with the spread of printing, written communication was available to a much larger portion of the population, and the need for literacy among the lower and middle classes grew. The ability to read became less of a luxury and more of a necessity; eventually literacy spread, as did education. Soldiers at the front needed to be able to read the emperor's orders. Butchers needed to understand the king's shopping list. So the demand for literacy expanded, and more (and more types of) people learned to read.

Tradespeople, soldiers, clergy, bakers, and musicians all now had business at the printer's shop. They talked. They learned of things, both in conversation and by reading printed material. As more people learned to read, new ideas germinated and spread, and cross-pollination of ideas occurred.

More material from various sources was published, and people were freer to read what they wanted when they wanted. Dominant authorities—the Crown and the Church—were now less able to control communication and, therefore, the people. New ideas about the world appeared; new understandings of the existing world flourished.

In addition, duplication permitted standardization and preservation. Myth and superstition began to make way for standard, verifiable bodies of knowledge. History, economics, physics, and chemistry all became part of the culture's intellectual life. Literate cultures were now on the road to modernization.
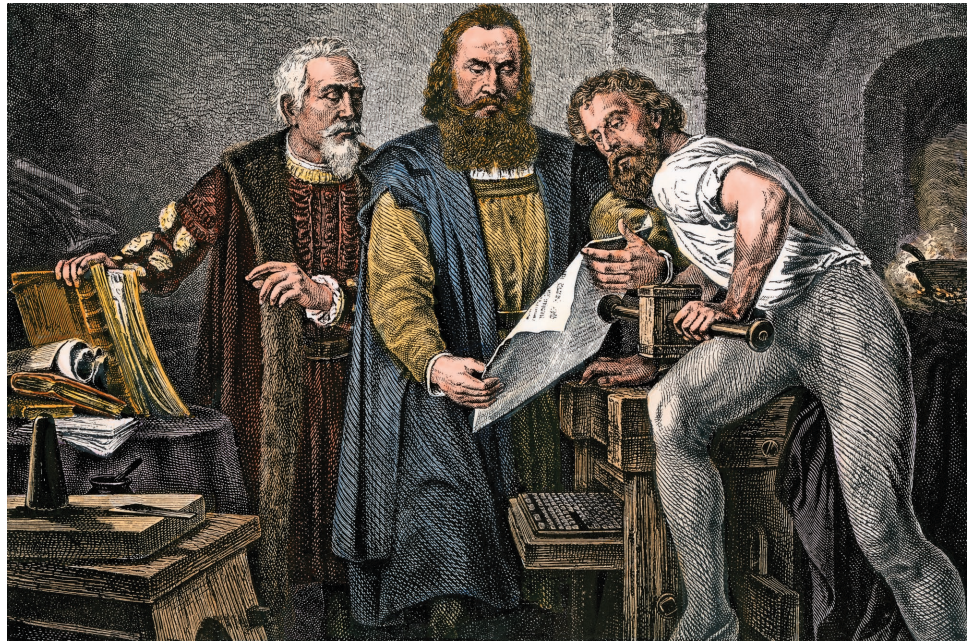
▲ This page from a Gutenberg Bible shows the exquisite care the printer used in creating his works. The artwork in the margins is hand painted, but the text is mechanically printed.

North Wind Picture Archives/Alamy Stock Photo

Printed materials were the first mass-produced product, speeding the development and entrenchment of capitalism. We live today in a world built on these changes. Use of the printing press helped fuel the establishment and growth of a large middle class. No longer must societies be composed of rulers and subjects; printing sped the rise of democracy. No longer were power and wealth solely functions of birth; power and wealth could now be created by the industrious. No longer was political discourse limited to accepting the dictates of Crown and Church; printing had given ordinary people a powerful voice.

The Industrial Revolution

By the mid-18th century, printing and its libraries of science and mathematics had become powerful engines driving the Industrial Revolution. Print was responsible for building and disseminating bodies of knowledge, leading to scientific and technological developments and the refinement of new machines. In addition, industrialization reduced the time necessary to complete work, and this created something previously unknown to most working people—leisure time.

Industrialization had another effect as well. As workers left their sunrise-to-sunset jobs in agriculture, the crafts, and trades to work in the newly industrialized factories, not only did they have more leisure time, but they also had more money to spend on their leisure. Farmers, fishermen, and tile makers had to put their profits back into their jobs. But factory workers took their money home; it was spendable. Combine leisure time and expendable cash with the spread of literacy, and the result is a large and growing audience for printed *information* and *entertainment*. By the mid-19th century, a mass audience and the means to reach it existed.

Media Literacy

Television influences our culture in innumerable ways. One of its effects, according to many people, is that it has encouraged violence in our society. For example, American television viewers overwhelmingly say there is too much violence on television. Yet, almost without exception, the local television news program that has the largest proportion of violence in its nightly newscast is the ratings leader. "If it bleeds, it leads" has become the motto for much of local television news. It leads because people watch.

So, although many of us are quick to condemn improper media performance or to identify and lament its harmful effects, we rarely question our own role in the mass communication process. We overlook it because we participate in mass communication naturally, almost without conscious effort. We possess high-level interpretive and comprehension skills that make even the most sophisticated television show, movie, or magazine story understandable and enjoyable. We are able, through a lifetime of interaction with the media, to *read media texts*.

Media literacy is a skill we take for granted, but like all skills, it can be improved. And if we consider how important the mass media are in creating and maintaining the culture that helps define us and our lives, it is a skill that *must* be improved.

Hunter College media professor Stuart Ewen (2000) emphasized this point in comparing media literacy with traditional literacy. "Historically," he wrote, "links between literacy and democracy are inseparable from the notion of an informed populace, conversant with the issues that touch upon their lives, enabled with tools that allow them to participate actively in public deliberation and social change" (p. 448). To Ewen, and others committed to media literacy, media literacy represents no less than the means to full participation in the culture.

Elements of Media Literacy

Media scholar Art Silverblatt (2008) identifies seven fundamental elements of media literacy. To these, we will add an eighth. Media literacy includes these characteristics:

1. *A critical thinking skill enabling audience members to develop independent judgments about media content.* Thinking critically about the content we consume is the very essence of media literacy. Why do we watch what we watch, read what we read, listen to what we listen to? Is that story you saw on Twitter real? If we cannot answer these questions, we have taken no responsibility for ourselves or our choices. As such, we have taken no responsibility for the outcome of those choices.

2. *An understanding of the process of mass communication.* If we know the components of the mass communication process and how they relate to one another, we can form expectations of how they can serve us. How do the various media industries operate? What are their obligations to us? What are the obligations of the audience? How do different media limit or enhance messages? Which forms of feedback are most effective, and why?

3. *An awareness of the impact of media on the individual and society.* Writing and the printing press helped change the world and the people in it. Mass media do the same. If we ignore the impact of media on our lives, we run the risk of being caught up and carried along by that change rather than controlling or leading it.

4. *Strategies for analyzing and discussing media messages.* To consume media messages thoughtfully, we need a foundation on which to base thought and reflection. If we make meaning, we must possess the tools with which to make it (for example, understanding the intent and impact of film and video conventions, such as camera angles and lighting, or the strategy behind the placement of images on a newspaper's website). Otherwise, meaning is made for us; the interpretation of media content will then rest with its creator, not with us.

5. *An understanding of media content as a text that provides insight into our culture and our lives.* How do we know a culture and its people, attitudes, values, concerns, and myths? We know them through communication. For modern cultures like ours, media messages increasingly dominate that communication, shaping our understanding of and insight into our culture.

6. *The ability to enjoy, understand, and appreciate media content.* Media literacy does not mean living the life of a grump, liking nothing in the media, or always being suspicious of harmful effects and cultural degradation. We take high school and college classes to enhance our understanding and appreciation of novels; we can do the same for media texts. Learning to enjoy, understand, and appreciate media content includes the ability to use **multiple points of access**—to approach media content from a variety of directions and derive from it many levels of meaning. Thus, we control meaning making for our own enjoyment or appreciation. For example, we can enjoy the hit show *The Handmaid's Tale* on Hulu as an action-laden adventure full of intrigue, danger, and romance, perfect for binge watching. But as TV buffs we might see it as a feminist manifesto, a story of an oppressed woman taking on a powerful man. Or we might read it as a cautionary tale for what might happen in America if women lose the right to control their bodies. Maybe it's a history lesson disguised as dystopian fiction, reminding us that women have always had to fight for their rightful place in society. Or maybe it's just a fun way to spend a cozy night, entertained by the same streaming video industry that so delights us with other prestige programming, such as *The Mandalorian*, *13 Reasons Why*, and *Fleabag*.

7. *Development of effective and responsible production skills.* Traditional literacy assumes that people who can read can also write. Media literacy also makes this assumption. Our definition of literacy (of either type) calls not only for effective and efficient comprehension of content but also for its effective and efficient *use*. Therefore, media-literate individuals should develop production skills that enable them to create useful media messages. If you have ever tried to make a narrative home video—one

that tells a story—you know that producing content is much more difficult than consuming it. If you have ever posted to Snapchat or Instagram or uploaded a video to TikTok, you are indeed a media content producer; why not be a good media content producer?

8. *An understanding of the ethical and moral obligations of media practitioners.* To make informed judgments about the performance of the media, we also must be aware of the competing pressures on practitioners as they do their jobs. We must understand the media's official and unofficial rules of operation. In other words, we must know, respectively, their legal and ethical obligations. Return, for a moment, to the question of televised violence. It is legal for a station to air graphic violence. But is it ethical? If it is unethical, what power, if any, do we have to demand its removal from our screens? Dilemmas such as this are discussed at length in Chapter 14.

▶ *Family Guy* has all the things you would expect from a television situation comedy—an inept dad, a precocious daughter, a slacker son, a loving wife, and zany situations. Yet it also offers an intellectual, philosopher dog and an evil-genius, scheming baby. Why do you think the producers have gone to the trouble to populate this show with the usual trappings of a sitcom but then add other, bizarre elements? And what's going on in *The Handmaid's Tale*? Is it an action-laden adventure full of intrigue, danger, and romance? A feminist manifesto? A history lesson disguised as dystopian fiction. Or maybe it's just a fun way to spend a cozy night binge watching.

(top) FOX Image Collection/Getty Images; (bottom) Calla Kessler for The Washington Post/Getty Images

Media Literacy Skills

Consuming media content is simple. Push a button and you have images on a television or music on your car radio. Come up with enough cash and you can see a movie or buy an e-book. Media-literate consumption, however, requires a number of specific skills.

1. *The ability and willingness to make an effort to understand content, to pay attention, and to filter out noise.* As we saw earlier, anything that interferes with successful communication is called noise, and much of the noise in the mass communication process results from our own consumption behavior. When we watch television, often we are also doing other things, such as eating, reading, or checking Instagram. We drive while we listen to the radio. We text while we read. Obviously, the quality of our meaning making is related to the effort we give it.

2. *An understanding of and* respect *for the power of media messages.* We are surrounded by mass media from the moment we are born. Just about every one of us can enjoy them. Their content is either free or relatively inexpensive. Much of the content is banal and a bit silly, so it is easy to dismiss media content as beneath serious consideration or too simple to have any influence. We also disregard media's power through the **third-person effect**—the common attitude that others are influenced by media messages but that we are not. That is, we are media literate enough to understand the influence of mass communication on the attitudes, behaviors, and values of others but not self-aware or honest enough to see its influence on our lives.

3. *The ability to distinguish emotional from reasoned reactions when responding to content and to act accordingly.* Media content is often designed to touch us at the emotional level. We enjoy losing ourselves in a good song or in a well-crafted movie or television show; this is among our great pleasures. But because we react emotionally to these messages does not mean they don't have serious meanings and implications for our lives. Television images, for example, are intentionally shot and broadcast for their emotional impact. Reacting emotionally is appropriate and proper. But then what? What do these images tell us about the larger issue at hand? We can use our feelings as a point of departure for meaning making. We can ask, "Why does this content make me feel this way?"

4. *The development of heightened expectations of media content.* We all use media to tune out, waste a little time, and provide background noise. When we decide to watch television, we are more likely to turn on the set and flip channels until we find something passable than we are to read the listings to find a specific program to view. When we search for online video, we often settle for the "10 most shared today," or we let Netflix's algorithm choose for us. When we expect little from the content before us, we tend to give meaning making little effort and attention.

5. *A knowledge of genre conventions and the ability to recognize when they are being mixed.* The term **genre** refers to the categories of expression within the different media, such as "evening news," "documentary," "horror movie," or "entertainment magazine." Each genre is characterized by certain distinctive, standardized style elements—the **conventions** of that genre. The conventions of the evening news, for example, include a short, upbeat introductory theme and one or two good-looking people sitting at a large, modern desk. When we hear and see these style elements, we expect the evening news. We can tell a documentary film from an entertainment movie by its more serious tone and a number of talking heads. We know by their appearance—the use of color, the types of images, and the amount of text on the cover—which magazines offer serious reading and which provide entertainment. Knowledge of these conventions is important because they cue or direct our meaning making.

6. *The ability to think critically about media messages, no matter how credible their sources.* It is crucial that media be credible in a democracy in which the people govern because the media are central to the governing process. This is why the news media are sometimes referred to as the fourth branch of government, complementing the executive, judicial, and legislative branches. This does not mean, however, that we should accept uncritically everything they report. But media-literate people know not to discount *all*

news media; they must be careful to avoid the **hostile media effect**, the idea that people see media coverage of important topics of interest as less sympathetic to their position, more sympathetic to the opposing position, and generally hostile to their point of view regardless of the quality of the coverage (Tsfati & Cohen, 2013). There are indeed very good media sources, just as there are those not deserving of our consideration. Media literacy, as you'll read throughout this text, helps us make that distinction. For example, the Internet has made possible the widespread of **fake news**, intentionally and verifiably false news stories designed to be spread and to deceive. Disguised to appear authentic, its real intention is to sow confusion and damage political discourse. Fake news is successful because its arresting headlines easily catch our attention and because **confirmation bias**, our tendency to accept information that confirms our beliefs and dismiss information that does not, encourages us to pass it on with little evaluation. How do we combat fake news?

- *First, vet the publisher's credibility*. Does the report meet traditional journalistic standards of evidence and corroboration? Has the author published anything else? What's the domain name? Check out the "About Us" page for indicators of bias.
- *Second, pay attention to quality and timeliness*. Is the story current, or is it recycled? Are there a lot of spelling errors, ALL CAPS, or dramatic punctuation???!!!
- *Third, check sources and citations*. How did you come upon the article? Who is or is not quoted? Is there supporting information on other sites? Can you perform reverse searches for sources and images?
- *Finally, ask a pro*. There are several good fact-checking sites such as FactCheck.org, International Fact-Checking Network, PolitiFact, and Snopes (Nagler, 2018).

7. *A knowledge of the internal language of various media and the ability to understand its effects, no matter how complex*. Just as each media genre has its own distinctive style and conventions, each medium also has its own specific internal language. This language is expressed in **production values**—the choice of lighting, editing, special effects, music, camera angle, location on the page, and size and placement of headlines. To be able to read a media text, you must understand its language. We learn the grammar of this language as early as childhood—for example, we know that when the television image goes "all woozy," the character is dreaming. Let's consider two versions of the same movie scene. In the first, a man is driving a car. Cut to a woman lying tied up on a railroad track. What is the relationship between the man and the woman? Where is he going? With no more information than these two shots, you know automatically that he cares for her and is on his way to save her. Now, here is the second version. The man is driving the car. Fade to black. Fade back up to the woman on the tracks. Now, what is the relationship between the man and the woman? Where is he going? It is less clear that these two people even have anything to do with each other. We construct completely different meanings from exactly the same two scenes because the punctuation (the quick cut/fade) differs. Media texts tend to be more complicated than these two scenes. The better we can handle their grammar, the more we can understand and appreciate texts. The more we understand texts, the more we can be equal partners with media professionals in meaning making.

▼ *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* offers all the conventions we'd expect from the news—background digital graphics, an anchor behind his desk, and a well-known interviewee. But it also contains conventions we'd expect from a comedy program—a satirist as host and an unruly, loud audience. Why does this television show mix the conventions of these two very different genres? Does your knowledge of those conventions add to your enjoyment of this hit program?

Jason Kempin/Getty Images Entertainment/Getty Images

MEDIA LITERACY CHALLENGE
Recognizing Cultural Values

Media-literate people develop *an understanding of media content as a text that provides insight into our culture and our lives,* and they have *an awareness of the impact of media on the individual and society.* So, challenge your own media literacy skills. You can do this exercise with a parent or another person older than you, or you can speculate after using the Internet to view movies and television shows from 20 years ago. Compare your childhood heroes and heroines with those of someone older. What differences are there between the generations in what you consider heroic qualities? What are some similarities and differences between the heroic qualities you and people from an earlier generation identify? Are the good qualities of your personal heroes something you can find in today's movies or TV? If so, where on TV or in film can you find the qualities you consider heroic? Which cultural values, attitudes, and beliefs, if any, do you think have influenced how heroes and heroines have changed throughout the last few decades? How have the media helped establish the values you identify as important qualities in people?

Resources for Review and Discussion

REVIEW POINTS: TYING CONTENT TO LEARNING OBJECTIVES

▶ **Define** *communication, mass communication, mass media,* **and** *culture.*
  □ Communication is the process of creating shared meaning.
  □ Mass communication is the process of creating shared meaning between the mass media and their audiences.
  □ *Mass media* is the plural of *mass medium,* a technology that carries messages to a large number of people.
  □ Culture is the world made meaningful. It resides all around us; it is socially constructed and maintained through communication. It limits as well as liberates us; it differentiates as well as unites us. It defines our realities and shapes the ways we think, feel, and act.

▶ **Describe the relationships among communication, mass communication, culture, and those who live in the culture.**
  □ Mass media are our culture's dominant storytellers and the forum in which we debate cultural meaning.

▶ **Evaluate the impact of technology and economics on those relationships.**
  □ Technological determinism argues that technology is the predominant agent of social and cultural change. But it is not technology that drives culture; it is how people use technology.
  □ With technology, money, too, shapes mass communication. Audiences can be either the consumer or the product in our mass media system.

▶ **List the components of media literacy.**
  □ Media literacy, the ability to effectively and efficiently comprehend and use any form of mediated communication, consists of eight components:
    1. A critical thinking skill enabling the development of independent judgments about media content
    2. An understanding of the process of mass communication
    3. An awareness of the impact of the media on individuals and society
    4. Strategies for analyzing and discussing media messages
    5. An awareness of media content as a "text" providing insight into contemporary culture
    6. A cultivation of enhanced enjoyment, understanding, and appreciation of media content
    7. The development of effective and responsible production skills
    8. The development of an understanding of the ethical and moral obligations of media practitioners

▶ **Identify key skills required for developing media literacy.**
  □ Media skills include the following:
    ▪ The ability and willingness to make an effort to understand content, to pay attention, and to filter out noise
    ▪ An understanding of and respect for the power of media messages

- The ability to distinguish emotional from reasoned reactions when responding to content and to act accordingly
- The development of heightened expectations of media content

- A knowledge of genre conventions and the recognition of their mixing
- The ability to think critically about media messages
- A knowledge of the internal language of various media and the ability to understand its effects

KEY TERMS

communication, 4

feedback, 5

interpersonal communication, 5

encoding, 5

decoding, 5

noise, 6

medium (pl. media), 6

mass medium, 6

mass communication, 6

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fake news, 24

confirmation bias, 24

production values, 24

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. What is culture? How does culture define people?
2. What is communication? What is mass communication?
3. What are encoding and decoding? How do they differ when technology enters the communication process?
4. What does it mean to say that communication is a reciprocal process?
5. What is James Carey's cultural definition of communication? How does it differ from other definitions of that process?
6. What do we mean by mass media as cultural storyteller?
7. What do we mean by mass communication as cultural forum?

8. What is media literacy? What are its components?
9. What are some specific media literacy skills?
10. What is the difference between genres and production conventions? What do these have to do with media literacy?

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QUESTIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND DISCUSSION

1. Who were your childhood heroes and heroines? Why did you choose them? What cultural lessons did you learn from them?
2. The arrival of the printing press dramatically changed history. Traditional seats of power lost influence, science flourished, and the seeds were planted for capitalism and the growth of a middle class. What effects has the Internet had on how you

live different aspects of your life? Will its ultimate impact be less than, equal to, or greater than the impact wrought by the printing press? Defend your answer.

3. How media literate do you think you are? What about those around you—your parents, for example, or your best friend? What are your weaknesses as a media-literate person?

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Convergence and the Reshaping of Mass Communication

2

◀ Netflix's *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt: Kimmy vs. The Reverend* lets viewers control the movie's narrative—a clear sign of significant change in how we interact with media.

PictureLux /The Hollywood Archive/ Alamy Stock Photo

Learning Objectives

The mass media system we have today has existed more or less as we know it since the 1830s. It is a system that has weathered repeated significant change with the coming of increasingly sophisticated technologies—the penny press newspaper was soon followed by mass-market books and mass-circulation magazines.

As the 1800s made way for the 1900s, these popular media were joined by motion pictures, radio, and sound recording. A few decades later came television, combining news and entertainment, moving images, and sound all in the home and all, ostensibly, for free. The traditional media found new functions and prospered side by side with television. Then came the Internet, the World Wide Web, and mobile technologies such as smartphones, tablets, and of course social media.

Now, because of these new technologies, all the media industries are facing profound alterations in how they are structured, how they do business, the nature of their content, and how they interact with and respond to their audiences. Naturally, as these changes unfold, the very nature of mass communication and our role in that process will evolve. After studying this chapter, you should be able to

▶ Summarize broad current trends in mass media, especially concentration of ownership and conglomeration, globalization, audience fragmentation, hypercommercialization, and convergence.

▶ Describe in broad terms how the mass communication process itself will evolve as the role of the audience in this new media environment is altered.

1830s Birth of the mass media system as we know it today

Interfoto/History/Alamy Stock Photo; CBS/Photofest

1945 Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black claims that a free press is a condition of a free society

1900

1950s ▶ Television displaces radio

1950

1967 Richard Dawkins introduces the term "meme"

1970 Postal Reorganization Act

1974 Internet emerges

1982 60% of journalists say they had compete freedom to choose their stories, as opposed to 34% 25 years later after explosion of concentration and conglomeration

1996 ▶ DVD introduced

Howard Kingsnorth/ Photodisc/Getty Images

fyv6561/Shutterstock

2004 ▶ Facebook debuts

2000

2012 ▶ Facebook buys Instagram

2014 Apple buys Beats Music; YouTube buys Twitch

2015 Actavision buys game company King Digital Entertainment; AT&T buys DirecTV

2016 Pepe the Frog becomes a hate symbol due to meme portrayals; news deserts proliferate

2018 State of New Jersey funds local journalism; Sirius XM buys Pandora

2019 Americans stream more than 1 trillion tunes for first time

2020 Coronavirus in US

2021 Warner Bros. releases all new films day-and-date

fyv6561/Shutterstock

"I DIDN'T LIKE THE ENDING."

"But you made it happen. The producers gave you a lot of choices. Make out or read the book? Walk 12 miles or wait 4,000 minutes for Uber? Eat the mushrooms and skip the banquet or eat the food and the women get harassed? The whole point of *Kimmy vs. The Reverend* is that it's interactive. You create your own movie through the choices you make. Netflix did this before; remember the *Black Mirror* episode *Bandersnatch*?"

"Yeah, but *Bandersnatch* was science fiction. It wasn't supposed to have a happy ending. I wanted *Kimmy* to have a happy ending."

"So you got the not-so-happy ending, but it was *your* ending."

"I don't get it. Maybe I should pay more attention!"

Like our disappointed viewer, we all will need to pay better attention to a mass communication process undergoing fundamental alteration, and that change goes far beyond interactive storylines. Well before the coronavirus shut down all US movie theaters, for example, producers were already streaming their films directly to fans. In 2018 Netflix gave the Sandra Bullock horror hit *Birdbox* **day-and-date release**, simultaneously streaming it on its pay service and screening it in theaters. Netflix's Spanish-language *Roma* had day-and-date release that same year, earning 10 Oscar nominations, including one for Best Picture and winning for Best International Feature Film.

So, already interested in direct-to-audience distribution, the big Hollywood studios jumped in full force when the pandemic struck. Disney rushed *Frozen 2*, scheduled for summer release, to its streaming service, and Universal's animated feature, *Trolls World Tour*, made $100 million in streaming rentals in 3 weeks, more than the original on which it was based earned in 5 months in theaters (Friedman, 2020b). Before the pandemic was fully controlled, even much-anticipated blockbusters like *Wonder Woman 1984* were enjoying Christmas Day, 2020, day-and-date release, and Warner Bros. decided to release every one of its 17 new 2021 movies day-and-date, including big-budget titles like *Dune*, *The Matrix 4*, and *The Suicide Squad* (Barnes & Sperling, 2020). Not to be outdone, Netflix debuted 71 feature films, some streaming only, some day-and-date, in 2021, more than one a week (Friedman, 2021).

There is indeed a seismic shift going on in the mass media—and therefore in mass communication—that dwarfs the changes to the media landscape wrought by television's assault on the preeminence of radio and movies in the 1950s and 1960s. Encouraged by the Internet, digitization, and mobility, producers are finding new ways to deliver new content to audiences. The media industries are in turmoil, and audience members, as they are confronted by a seemingly bewildering array of possibilities, are now coming to terms with these new media.

How will you listen to the radio—satellite radio, terrestrial radio, digital terrestrial radio, or streamed Internet radio? If it's streamed over the Internet, is it still "radio"? You may not hold the physical newspaper in your hands, but when you access a newspaper's story on its app (abbreviation for *application*; software for mobile digital devices), you're reading the newspaper. Or are you? What will you pay to stream movies, $20, or will you subscribe to Red Carpet Home Cinema and get immediate access to first-run movies not otherwise available for home viewing for $1,500 to $3,000 each? What about on-demand TV shows? Would you be willing to view the commercials they contain if you could pay a bit less per episode? Would you pay more or less for classic programming than for contemporary shows? On which platform (the means of delivering a specific piece of media content) might you most enjoy watching your movies? Would you be willing to pay more or less for different platforms? In theaters? On your tablet or phone? On a wide-screen home TV? Is there such a thing as the "moviegoing experience" anymore? These are precisely the kinds of questions that audiences will continue to answer in the next several years. Media-literate audiences will be better equipped to do so.

▲ *Trolls World Tour earned Universal Pictures $100 million in three weeks from 5 million streaming rentals.*
DreamWorks/Universal/Kobal/Shutterstock

Traditional Media Industries in Transition: The Bad News and the Good

The way we interact with the mass media is indeed changing. Although this shift is good news for media consumers, it has not necessarily been beneficial for the established media industries. Just how much pain has been produced by this "perfect storm" of rapid technological change and our shifting consumption behavior? Here are a few examples:

- Although Americans typically spend over $11 billion a year at the movies, they continue to buy fewer tickets per person every year than they did in the past. Only 14% of American adults go to the movies once a month or more ("Frequency," 2020).
- Sales in the US of physical and digital music albums continue to fall, declining 18.7% between 2018 and 2019; the sale of individual digital songs dropped 25% in that time (Nielsen Music, 2020).
- Fifteen years ago, the four major broadcast networks commanded over 60% of all television viewing. Today their share hovers around 30%. The top-rated program in 1980 was *Dallas*, viewed in more than 34% of all homes with a television. In 1990, it was *Cheers*, watched by 21% of all TV homes. Today a top-rated show, such as *NCIS,* will draw 5% ("Tops of," 2020).
- US sales of DVD and Blue-Ray discs continue to decline, dropping 22% between 2018 and 2019 (Schnieder, 2020).
- One in five American newspapers has closed since 2004 (Sullivan, 2020); circulation has fallen to its lowest level since 1940 (Grieco, 2020).
- The US magazine industry saw a 20% drop in revenues from 2019 to 2020 (Gingerich, 2020).
- Annual revenue for traditional AM/FM radio in the US has decreased every year since 2015 (Hissong, 2020).

The challenge facing the traditional media industries today is how to capture a mass audience now fragmented into millions of niches, that is, into increasingly smaller subaudiences now accustomed to interacting with them in a growing variety of ways. Yet there is some good news for the media industries in all this change. Despite the fact that we are indeed consuming media in new and different ways, our levels of consumption are at an all-time high.

We saw in Chapter 1 that Americans spend well over half of a full day engaged with media of some sort, a practice made possible in part by the comfort with **media multitasking**, engaging simultaneously with many different media. Those declining ratings for network television? Viewers returned in droves during 2020's coronavirus shelter-at-home. The four national networks (ABC, CBS, Fox, and NBC) saw a 20% increase in viewership. Ratings for their evening news programs jumped 42% over those of the same period the year before (Epstein, 2020). Time with television, already on the rise because of the many subscription video streaming services, such as HBO Now, Apple +, Amazon Prime, Netflix, Hulu, and scores more, boomed during the coronarivus quarantine. Viewers spend $16 billion a year on these services ("The Quarantine," 2020). Those declining disc sales? They have been more than made up by **electronic sell-through (EST)**, the buying and downloading of digital movies that annually brings studios $2.6 billion (Gingerich, 2020). Falling music sales? American music fans more than made up for that decline by streaming 1.15 trillion tunes in 2019 (the first time that the number exceeded 1 trillion; Nielsen Music, 2020); world-wide, 2020's 2.2 trillion music streams propelled the industry to over $20 billion in revenues ("Year End," 2021).

The sad state of the newspaper industry? Tumultuous times—both political and medical—have driven news readership to record levels. The *Wall Street Journal* has more than 2 million digital subscribers; the *New York Times* has more than 5.3 million total subscriptions across print and digital editions; papers across the country of all sizes are experiencing growing digital subscriptions, fewer cancellations, and increased page views and daily visits (Benton, 2020; Doctor, 2020). You can see the number of hours in a day a typical American adult spends with media in Figure 2.1.

▶ **Figure 2.1** Average Daily Time US Adults Spend with Media, 2020 (in hours/minutes). *Source: Dolliver, 2020.*

(Young woman using laptop) Photo-Alto/Matthieu Spohn/Getty Images; (Phone) Thomas Northcut/Photo-disc/Getty Images; (Car key) Bura-zin/Photographer's Choice/Getty Images; (TV remote & CD disc) George Doyle & Ciaran Griffin/Getty Images; (Folded Newspaper) Fuse/Getty Images

Hours/minutes per day

Mobile digital — 4:18

TV — 3:49

Desktop/Laptop — 2:00

Radio — 1:35

Other connected devices — 1:13

Other traditional media — :22

Newspaper — :09

Magazine — :08

Total : 13:35

In fact, even before the coronavirus altered every aspect of our lives, we were watching more videos, listening to more music, reading more often, playing more video games, consuming more news, and accessing the Internet more often than ever before; we were simply doing it in new and different ways. For media industries, these facts offer good news—readers, viewers, and listeners are out there in ever-increasing numbers, and they value the mass communication experience. These data also offer good news for literate media consumers—their consumption choices will shape the media landscape to come and, inevitably, the mass communication process itself.

Changes in the Process of Mass Communication

Media industries face a number of challenges that promise to alter their relationship with their audiences. Concentration of media ownership and conglomeration can constrict the number and variety of voices available to audiences. Those audiences are becoming fragmented,