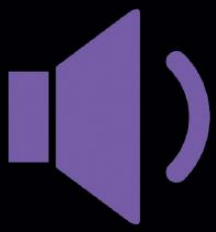
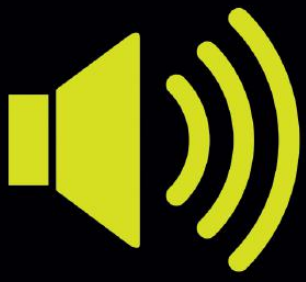
RALPH E.
HANSON





MASS COMMUNICATION

LIVING • IN A • MEDIA WORLD

8e

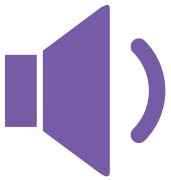
MASS COMMUNICATION

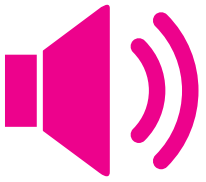
8e

To my father, Roger J. Hanson

Sara Miller McCune founded SAGE Publishing in 1965 to support the dissemination of usable knowledge and educate a global community. SAGE publishes more than 1000 journals and over 800 new books each year, spanning a wide range of subject areas. Our growing selection of library products includes archives, data, case studies and video. SAGE remains majority owned by our founder and after her lifetime will become owned by a charitable trust that secures the company's continued independence.

Los Angeles | London | New Delhi | Singapore | Washington DC | Melbourne





MASS COMMUNICATION

LIVING IN A MEDIA WORLD

8e

RALPH E. HANSON

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT KEARNEY

SAGE

Los Angeles | London | New Delhi
Singapore | Washington DC | Melbourne

FOR INFORMATION:

SAGE Publications, Inc.
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320
E-mail: order@sagepub.com

SAGE Publications Ltd.
1 Oliver's Yard
55 City Road
London EC1Y 1SP
United Kingdom

SAGE Publications India Pvt. Ltd.
B 1/I 1 Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area
Mathura Road, New Delhi 110 044
India

SAGE Publications Asia-Pacific Pte. Ltd.
18 Cross Street #10-10/11/12
China Square Central
Singapore 048423

Printed in Canada

ISBN 9781544382999 (paperback)
ISBN 9781544383033 (loose-leaf)

LCCN 2020915253

Acquisitions Editor: Lily Norton
Editorial Assistant: Sarah Wilson
Content Development Editor: Jennifer Jovin-Bernstein
Production Editor: Andrew Olson
Copy Editor: Heather Kerrigan
Typesetter: C&M Digitals (P) Ltd.
Proofreader: Rae-Ann Goodwin
Indexer: Integra
Cover Designer: Janet Kiesel
Marketing Manager: Staci Wittek

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

21 22 23 24 25 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

BRIEF CONTENTS

Justin Setterfield/ Getty Image News/ GettyImages

DETAILED CONTENTS

Theo Wargo/Staff/Getty Images

Taylor Hill / Stringer / Getty Images

Drew Angerer / Staff / Getty Images

Courtesy of Bryce Jensen

ZUMA Press, Inc. / Alamy Stock Photo

Matthew Hoist / Contributor / Getty Images

Jeff Kravitz / Contributor / Getty Images

Tide, "Gronk knows that Ride PODS® are for DOING LAUNDRY. Nothing else." January 12, 2018. Retrieved from YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-DrC_PF_3Lg.

Sean Gallup / Staff / Getty Images

PART V. REGULATION AND CONTROL OF THE MEDIA

Win McNamee/Getty Images News/Getty Images

PREFACE

Many of the defining moments of our lives come from our shared experiences with the media. It could be witnessing the Black Lives Matter protests across the country on both TV and through social media, following the scary news about the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic through the various news media, experiencing the thrill of the World Cup competition viewed streaming on the internet, going to the latest Marvel Cinematic Universe movie as the backdrop to a first date, or hearing "that" song from the summer you turned sixteen. For my generation, it was the moon walk. Parents across the United States let their nine-year-olds stay up way past their bedtimes to watch the biggest show of their lives on television—*Apollo 11* astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin setting foot on the moon.

On September 11, 2001, my eldest son and his fellow fifth-grade classmates sat mesmerized by news coverage of the airplanes crashing into the World Trade Center Twin Towers, the Pentagon, and a field in southwestern Pennsylvania. Some parents questioned whether their children ought to have watched these events, but my son said, "We begged the teacher to keep the TV on. We had to know." As I write this, my former fifth-grader has his master's degree and has lived in Canada, Europe, and Asia with a global perspective brought in part by that fateful day in 2001. In the fall of 2021, I will have incoming freshman students for whom 9/11 is something that happened before they were born. It will simply be a thing that has always been. Now their top media memory might be watching the results come in as we elected our first black president, watching *Hannah Montana* (Miley Cyrus, was that really you?), Pixar's *WALL-E*, or listening and singing along to country music in their parents' cars.

Then there are the myriad trivial aspects of everyday life that come from our time with the media: finding the perfect little brunch café through restaurant review site Yelp, watching the band American Football play a music festival on the Minecraft game site during a COVID-19 online music festival, or arguing on social media as to who should be the top pick in your fantasy basketball league.

The media world we inhabit is constantly changing, as is our relationship with the media. In my first job as a college professor, I taught a course in media effects. On the first day of class, a student raised his hand and asked, "When do we get to the part where we talk about how television turns people into zombies?" His question has stayed with me through the years because it represents the view many people have about the media. The student's attitude had been fostered by media critics with an agenda—getting elected to office, getting a regulation approved, promoting a product, or even pushing a moral choice. I have long taken the view that the successful study of mass communication is also a journey of self-awareness. We are students of media and players in a media world.

Approach of the Book

Dr. James Potter, in his book *Media Literacy*, reports that people spend an average of twelve hours and one minute a day interacting with mass media of one form or another. Timewise, the biggest medium is television, but in terms of growth, it's online media—much of it mobile. Much of this time is also multitasking, interacting with your phone while watching TV, for example. That is how people squeeze in that much time with the media.

Mass Communication: Living in a Media World views the media in our world not as isolated institutions that somehow "do something" to us, but rather as forces that are central to how we live, work, and play. The media are not outside influences; they are part of who we are. From mobile media devices to streaming video, the pervasiveness of mass communication in our daily lives complicates our ability to understand the media's rich history of technical, cultural, sociological, political, economic, and artistic achievements. *Mass Communication* reveals the forces

that drive the industry, while at the same time motivating readers to think critically about how they consume media. It uses compelling stories and examples drawn from everyday life. Readers are encouraged to consider the media industry from the inside out and, in so doing, to explore the many dimensions of mass communication that operate in our society.

My students over the years have told me that they remember information better if it is presented as a story, and so I strive to be a storyteller. Some of these stories are unpleasant and ugly. But that doesn't mean we don't need to tell them. The narrative style of this book will help motivate students to do the reading and facilitate their recall of the material. Many of the Test Your Media Literacy exercises are based on writing assignments I've used in classroom settings, as well as in more writing-intensive online sections. These exercises connect the material from the book to the media that students use every day, and students say that these assignments make them really think about how they experience the media.

Organization

Previous adopters will note that there have been substantial changes within the organization with this edition, including the retirement of the old magazine chapter and the addition of a stand-alone chapter on social media and video games. It was a difficult decision to remove the magazine chapter, but it is clear that much of the old magazine industry is dying. Former magazine giant Time Inc. has been sold by WarnerMedia, with some titles being eliminated and the flagship *Time* magazine sold off to an individual investor. It was becoming problematic trying to keep the chapter up-to-date with every month bringing news that another publication had gone digital-only or been discontinued completely. Much of the material about how magazines influence our culture has found its way into other chapters. This has made room for something users have been requesting for several years: a stand-alone chapter on video games and social media.

The book is organized into five parts, each examining critical dimensions that comprise the world of mass communication. *Part I: Introduction to the Media* presents the institutions, social effects, and business workings of the media in order to lay the foundation for understanding mass communication. *Part II: Legacy Media* explores the development of mass literacy and mass communication and what has traditionally been the paper-oriented print media, including newspapers and books, as well as legacy audiovisual media, such as audio, movies, and television. But these media are now increasingly delivered in digital form as well. *Part III: Digital and Global Media* covers the internet, social media, video games, and critiques of normative theories of the press in various countries; and it looks at how the media operate around the globe. *Part IV: Strategic Communication* delves into the advertising and public relations industries. *Part V: Regulation and Control of the Media* looks at the institutions, conventions, and rules that regulate and control the media in the United States and around the world.

Most of the chapters about the individual media (Parts II and III) are organized around the same basic structure. Following an opening vignette come four major sections:

1. How the medium developed along with major changes in society and culture. More than just a history of the medium, this section considers how societal, cultural, and technological elements came together to create the medium we have today.
2. How the medium operates within the business and social world. This section looks at why the medium behaves the way it does within our economy.
3. Current issues and controversies between the medium and society. These often include issues involving media effects, such as the concern about the importance of seeing people like yourself portrayed in the media.
4. The future of the medium, including the effects mobile technology and the long tail have had on it.

New to the Eighth Edition

The media world of 2021 is vastly different from that of 2015 or 2010, and it is unimaginably different from the year 2000 and the turn of the millennium. "Fake news" used to refer to late-night satirical comedy from *Saturday Night Live* or *The Daily Show*. Now that term is used as an attack on the news media or as a description of deceptive social media propaganda efforts. Powerful men showing up unexpectedly in the news used to mean they had completed some big business deal or died. Now, it often means they have been accused of sexual misconduct. Talk about hip-hop used to be talk about BET videos. Now it is a discussion of the Broadway hit show *Hamilton* or the Pulitzer Prize–winning album *DAMN.* from Kendrick Lamar.

In the seventh edition of *Mass Communication*, I focused on the importance of representation, inclusion, and diversity with an emphasis on whose voices get heard. Your author is a firm believer that everything can be explained by the hip-hop musical *Hamilton*. In this case, the line comes at the end from President George Washington, who asks the musical question, "Who lives, who dies, who tells your story?" In this eighth edition, we look at how media have covered the conflicts between police, journalists, and protesters marching for Black Lives Matter. It is almost exactly 216 years after the death of founding father and treasury secretary Alexander Hamilton as I write this preface. And the reason that no one questions why I would bring him up is that Ron Chernow wrote a brilliant biography of Hamilton that Lin-Manuel Miranda used as the basis for a musical. Hamilton, his nemesis Aaron Burr, his wife Eliza, and his sister-in-law Angelica live on for us because we tell their stories.

In 2020 we started hearing the story of the spread of a brutal emergent virus, COVID-19, that became a global pandemic, killing more than 200,000 Americans at the time of this writing. This virus forced many Americans out of their jobs with the more fortunate being able to work from home. College and university classes were almost universally moved online to slow the spread of the disease. The media industry also underwent massive effects, with virtually every movie theater in the United States closing for at least three months. Studios experimented with releasing first-run movies as premium video on demand, thus bypassing theaters entirely. Sports on all levels were cancelled, thus eliminating much of the most popular television programming. Local media lost devastating amounts of advertising leading to employee layoffs and furloughs, along with some having to just close their doors permanently.

We also continued to hear the stories of women who had suffered harassment and abuse by powerful men in Hollywood, politics, and business. The point here is that what we talk about in our media matters a lot. The stories we talk about are the stories that get told.

New Chapter-Opening Vignette. Seven of the chapters feature brand-new stories about key figures and issues in the media to provide a powerful narrative thread exemplifying the major themes of each chapter. These vignettes convey the excitement and relevance of media studies and critical inquiry by way of those whose lives have been profoundly affected by the media. New vignettes include how the story broke in early 2020 about the novel coronavirus as people slowly came to terms with a disease that would kill thousands of people and crash the American economy; how Amazon founder Jeff Bezos became the owner of the *Washington Post* and ended up transforming himself into a much more public figure; and how COVID-19 transformed the movie industry and forced televised sports to resort to covering reruns of old games, talking about sports returning, and broadcasting professional athletes playing video games of their sports.

Review Questions. The central concepts that were listed at the end of each chapter have been converted to review questions. These questions will encourage students to apply critical thinking skills to examples of mass communication from literature and popular culture.

Updated Chapters. Each chapter has been thoroughly updated to include new developments, new scholarship, and recent events in mass communication. Highlights of the revisions include the following:

- **Chapter 1**, *Living in a Media World*, starts the book with a look at how the news of the COVID-19 novel coronavirus spread and transformed the United States during the winter and spring of 2020. It would create new concepts of social distancing, create new norms about wearing masks in public, and lead to major changes in various media industries, along with killing more than 200,000 people in the United States as of this writing. There is also new material on how we develop our media literacy, drawing on the work of Dr. James Potter.
- **Chapter 2**, *Mass Communication Effects*, has been substantially reorganized, bringing in material on media effects that had previously been in other chapters. This includes critical theory examples on gender and race issues that had been previously covered in the magazine chapter. The materials on the Payne Fund Studies previously covered in the movie chapter have also been placed here. Finally, there is an expanded look at the history of the direct and indirect effects models.
- **Chapter 3**, *The Media Business*, has been updated to look at how Facebook handles the balance of targeting advertising and respecting user privacy. It looks at the big changes that have taken place at a number of media giants, including Disney acquiring much of Fox's properties, the launch of streaming service Disney+, the changes of what used to be Time Warner with its sale to AT&T to become WarnerMedia, the long anticipated re-merger of ViacomCBS, and investigations of both monopoly behavior and charges of bias at Google.
- **Chapter 4**, *Books*, continues its longstanding look at new words that have found their way into the dictionary. The chapter also looks at how independent booksellers are resurgent at a time when chain bookstores are having difficulties, the radical changes taking place in the textbook industry, and a look at how Japanese American actor George Takei has told his story of growing up in a World War II internment camp through a new graphic novel.
- **Chapter 5**, *The News Business*, looks at how buying the *Washington Post* was transformative for both the paper and its new owner, Amazon founder and world's richest man Jeff Bezos. There is a new section moved from elsewhere on the role magazines have played in the news industry. Finally, there is an in-depth look at the future of the local news industry.
- **Chapters 6 and 7**, *Audio* and *Movies*, both look at how the COVID-19 pandemic has transformed both the lives of musicians and the entire movie industry. With virtually every theater and concert venue in the country closed for months, both industries have been forced to reconsider how they reach their publics and make an income. The audio chapter also takes an updated look at the issue of smart speakers and privacy. The movie chapter has expanded its consideration of a wide range of diversity issues, including the role that black actor/director/producer Tyler Perry has had in making the state of Georgia a major location for movie production.
- **Chapter 8**, *Television and Video*, opens with a discussion of how live television, that depends on sports for viewers, has dealt with the complete shutdown of all sports globally during the spring of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The chapter has also been updated with a continued look at how television has dealt with its lack of diversity, especially in terms of Asian characters, along with looking at the move of television from broadcasting to cable to streaming, and how streaming changes the economic model of television.
- **Chapters 9 and 10**, *Online and Mobile Media* and *Social Media and Video Games*, contain information that in previous editions was included in a single chapter on a range of interactive media. In this edition, online and mobile media continue to be in one chapter, while the more interactive social media and video games now have their own, expanded chapter. *Online and Mobile Media* looks at concerns about electronic tracking of individuals, both real and imagined, along with charges of bias in Google's search algorithms. *Social Media and Video Games* has a new opening vignette considering the costs of making unwise

posts on social media and how these posts can change people's lives. The chapter continues with an examination of how conflict over recent political events have driven people on special interest and geographical community Facebook groups apart.

Finally, the new chapter includes a discussion of the controversy surrounding the Chinese video-sharing social media channel TikTok; an in-depth history of video games and how they have reshaped popular culture; an updated look at how the president has used social media to communicate directly with voters; and a consideration of how people have used online video game platforms for social interaction during times of social isolation.

- **Chapter 11**, *Global Media*, has been lightly restructured to match its movement from the end of the textbook to coming immediately following the individual media chapters, in part to highlight the importance of global media. There is an expanded analysis of press freedom around the world based on the World Press Freedom Index throughout the chapter, including an updated look at how press freedom has been rolled back in India, the world's largest democracy. Finally, material on international privacy laws has been moved from the law chapter to here and expanded to deal with recent changes in European Union privacy rules.
- **Chapter 12**, *Advertising*, opens with a new look at the role of YouTube influencers in the advertising market through the actions of kid-toy influencer Ryan Kaji and his parents. This is also an updated look at advertising to children. The chapter also has an expanded look at controversies companies can face for targeting ads at LGBTQ families and how they handle that criticism. The chapter closes with an expanded section on social marketing ranging from the role of online celebrities to the use of Twitter for marketing chicken sandwiches.
- **Chapter 13**, *Public Relations*, considers how aerospace giant Boeing mishandled its response to and communication surrounding its 737 MAX airplane safety crisis.
- **Chapter 14**, *Media Law*, has an updated look at media law, including a consideration of the writings of conservative United States Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas on *Times v. Sullivan*, along with a look at a high school student's libel suit against multiple national media.
- **Chapter 15**, *Media Ethics*, has an expanded section on how news outlets handle mistakes and misjudgments that includes how news media dealt with the rapidly breaking news of NBA star Kobe Bryant's death. Material on how the news media covered stories about the Flint, Michigan, water crisis was moved from the *News Business* chapter to here.

Returning Favorites

While some of the book's new features were described above, the eighth edition contains many returning features and coverage that have been updated to enhance and improve on the existing content.

In the sixth edition, it became clear that it was time to update the Seven Secrets to better match our changing media world. These updated secrets all deal with what the media are, who controls the media, how media content is selected, why the media behave the way they do, and how society and the media interact with each other. The Seven Secrets are as follows:

SECRET 1 The media are essential components of our lives.

SECRET 2 There are no mainstream media.

SECRET 3 Everything from the margin moves to the center.

SECRET 4 Nothing is new: Everything that happened in the past will happen again.

SECRET 5 All media are social.

SECRET 6 Online media are mobile media.

SECRET 7 There is no "they."

The secrets are presented in depth in the last section of Chapter 1, and they recur, when relevant, in the subsequent chapters to remind students of these concepts and also to serve as a springboard for discussions or writing assignments. These important principles of media literacy are highlighted to call attention to where the Seven Secrets appear throughout the chapters, reminding readers to be attentive and thoughtful.

Chapter Objectives. Learning objectives appear at the start of each chapter and call out key topics for close, focused reading. Students can refer to them for study guidance as well.

Test Your Media Literacy Boxes. There is no better way to cultivate critical media consumers than by modeling critical thinking. These boxes present students with current research, interviews, and issues relating to the practice of mass communication, and ask questions that challenge students to evaluate and analyze the story being told. The readings are engaging and fun, but more important, the questions get students to do more than summarize what they have read—they encourage them to think.

Test Your Visual Media Literacy Boxes. These boxes showcase images—sometimes controversial, sometimes disturbing—from various media to seek instinctive reactions from students before providing context and questions that encourage critical assessment of how we see and interpret images, and what more may be behind them. Both media literacy boxes are supplemented with up-to-the-minute additions and further related information through my blog at **https://www.ralphehanson.com/**.

Chapter Summary. Each chapter concludes with a brief recap of important points to assist students in reviewing key themes, events, and concepts.

Key Terms. A list of key terms—with page references—appears at the end of each chapter to make the terms easy to locate.

Living in a Media World's Social Media

Located at **https://www.ralphehanson.com/**, my blog *Living in a Media World* covers the entire mass media. One of the blog's biggest benefits to you is that it provides a single destination for up-to-date material on the topics covered in this book. It also occasionally features guest posts by national experts on a wide range of media issues. Think of it as a clearinghouse for current media news and features. You may find examples of new assignments or early versions of new book features, along with links associated with book material on the blog as well.

The *Living in a Media World* blog has been joined by several other social media feeds. You can follow me on Twitter **(https://twitter.com/ralphehanson)** for daily links to media news and whatever else I am reading. (Expect links to web comics, motorcycle news, and whatever I am reading to make an appearances as well.) I also have a Tumblr **(https://ralphehanson.tumblr.com)** that will feature a lot of great video clips that work well as a pre-class feature, along with photos and other images I have found online or created myself. Typical content includes music clips, viral videos, memes, and commentary on geek culture. The Tumblr tends to be a bit less focused than the blog and sometimes includes photos I have taken. Finally, this book has a Facebook page **(https://www.facebook.com/livinginamediaworld)** where you can share materials and find links to what I have been posting about on the blog and on Tumblr.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As always, I want to thank my students at the University of Nebraska at Kearney for letting me test out materials from this book on them. I would also like to thank the many journalists, musicians, and media professionals who spoke with me about what they do, particularly Candice Roberts for her work on queer media; Doug and Telisha Williams, also known as the band Wild Ponies; Chip Stewart for his feedback on media law issues; Jeremy Littau for his work on local media economics; and Michael Socolow for his help with a whole range of journalistic issues. I would like to express a special thanks to the University of Nebraska at Kearney's Aaron Blackman for his research work on eSports and video game streams as well as sharing about his personal media use. I would also like to thank the many professors who use this book, have welcomed me into their classrooms electronically, and/or have provided me with invaluable feedback, particularly Chris Allen, Rosemarie Alexander-Isett, David Baird, Rick Bebout, Elaine Gale, Peter J. Gloviczki, Marty Sommerness, Jeff South, Brian Steffen, and Peggy Watt.

A panel of expert reviewers was instrumental in shaping the direction of this book, and I wish to thank them:

Glenda J. Alvarado, *University of South Carolina*

Herbert Amey, *Ohio University*

Tim J. Anderson, *Old Dominion University*

Karl Babij, *DeSales University*

Thomas Baggerman, *Point Park University*

Rick Bebout, *West Virginia University*

Frederick R. Blevens, *Florida International University*

Joan Blumberg, *Drexel University*

Mary A. Bock, *Kutztown University*

Jeff Boone, *Angelo State University*

Courtney C. Bosworth, *Radford University*

Michael Bowman, *Arkansas State University*

Scott Brown, *California State University–Northridge*

Larry L. Burriss, *Middle Tennessee State University*

Patricia Cambridge, *Ohio University*

Douglas J. Carr, *El Paso Community College*

Meta G. Carstarphen, *University of Oklahoma*

Aaron Chimbel, *Texas Christian University*

Tom Clanin, *California State University–Fullerton*

Lance Clark, *Huntington University*

Richard T. Craig, *George Mason University*

Barbara J. DeSanto, *Maryville University*

Roger Desmond, *University of Hartford*

Jules d'Hemecourt (late), *Louisiana State University*

Michael Eberts, *Glendale Community College*

Bobbie Eisenstock, *California State University–Northridge*

Anthony J. Ferri, *University of Nevada–Las Vegas*

Fred Fitch, *Eastern Kentucky University*

Jennifer Fleming, *California State University–Long Beach*

Dennis Owen Frohlich, *Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania*

Donna Gough, *East Central University*

Kara Jolliff Gould, *University of Arkansas*

Christopher Gullen, *Westfield State University*

Meredith Guthrie, *University of Pittsburgh*

Louisa Ha, *Bowling Green State University*

Wendy J. Hajjar, *Tulane University*

Katharine J. Head, *University of Kentucky*

Aaron Heresco, *California Lutheran University*

Heloiza Herscovitz, *California State University–Long Beach*

Elizabeth Blanks Hindman, *Washington State University*

Sharon Hollenback, *Syracuse University*

Patricia Holmes, *University of Louisiana–Lafayette*

Brian Howard, *Brigham Young University–Idaho*

James L. Hoyt, *University of Wisconsin*

Hans Peter Ibold, *Indiana University*

Kim Mac Innis, *Bridgewater State University*

Marcia Ladendorff, *University of North Florida*

Kim Landon, *Utica College*

Phyllis Larsen, *University of Nebraska–Lincoln*

Christopher Leigh, *University of Charleston*

Charles W. Little Jr., *Santa Ana College*

Martin P. LoMonaco, *Neumann University*

Lori Kido Lopez, *University of Wisconsin–Madison*

Alfred L. Lorenz, *Loyola University*

Don Lowe, *University of Kentucky*

Jenn Burleson Mackay, *Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University*

Stephanie Marchetti, *Mount Wachusett Community College*

Willie Terry Marsh, *Norfolk State University*

Denise Matthews, *Eastern Connecticut State University*

Karen Smith McGrath, *College of Saint Rose*

Carole McNall, *St. Bonaventure University*

Michael Meadows, *Griffith University*

Eileen R. Meehan, *Southern Illinois University–Carbondale*

Gary Metzker, *California State University–Long Beach*

Steve Miller, *Livingston College of Rutgers*

James C. Mitchell, *University of Arizona*

Andrew Moemeka, *Central Connecticut State University*

Timothy C. Molina, *Northwest Vista College*

Jennifer Mullen, *Colorado State University–Pueblo*

Mary Jo Nead, *Thomas More College*

Andrew T. Nelson, *Loyola University New Orleans School of Mass Communication*

Robin Newcomer, *Olympic College*

Sandy Nichols, *Towson University*

Dr. Shirley Oakley, *St. Petersburg College*

Kurt Odenwald, *Wentworth Institute of Technology*

Roy Overmann, *Webster University*

Douglas Pastel, *Bunker Hill Community College*

Martin J. Perry, *St. John's University*

Elizabeth L. Petrun, *University of Kentucky*

Mark Plenke, *Normandale Community College*

Terri F. Reilly, *Webster University*

Candice D. Roberts, *St. John's University*

Richelle Rogers, *Loyola University*

Felecia Ross, *The Ohio State University*

Marshel D. Rossow, *Minnesota State University*

Enid Sefcovic, *Broward College*

Mitchell E. Shapiro, *University of Miami*

Danny Shipka, *Louisiana State University*

Martin D. Sommerness, *Northern Arizona University*

Jeff South, *Virginia Commonwealth University*

Cathy Stablein, *College of DuPage*

Richard F. Taflinger, *Washington State University*

Christopher R. Terry, *University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee*

Phillip A. Thompson, *West Chester University*

Mike Trice, Florida *Southern College*

Venise Wagner, *San Francisco State University*

Yvette Walker, *University of Oklahoma*

Hazel Warlaumont, *California State University–Fullerton*

Patsy G. Watkins, *University of Arkansas*

Wendy Weinhold, *Coastal Carolina University*

Mark West, *University of North Carolina–Asheville*

Valerie Whitney, *Bethune-Cookman University*

Jan Whitt, *University of Colorado–Boulder*

Danielle E. Williams, *Georgia Gwinnett College*

Marvin Williams, *Kingsborough Community College*

David Wolfe, *Mountain View College*

Nerissa Young, *Ohio University*

Jonna Reule Ziniel, *Valley City State University*

I owe a great debt to the people at CQ Press and SAGE who took a chance on a different kind of introduction to mass communication textbook that had greater depth and a narrative storytelling style. I would like to thank Lily Norton, Acquisitions Editor; Jen Jovin-Bernstein, Senior Content Development Editor; and Sarah Wilson, Senior Editorial Assistant. I also thank Janet Kiesel, designer of the book's cover and interior; Heather Kerrigan, copy editor; and Andrew Olson, production editor, who have all been so patient with me over the past several months. I would like to give special thanks to development editor Kate Russillo for her great help and problem-solving skills!

This edition is dedicated to my father, Roger J. Hanson, who is ninety-two years old as I write this in the summer of 2020. Dad is a retired physics professor who instilled an intense sense of curiosity and wonder about the world in both me and my siblings. I would also like to thank the many teachers and students I am privileged to talk with about media literacy.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Pam; my sons, Erik and Andrew; my daughter-in-law, Jasmine; and my mother-in-law, Barbara Andrews. I will always be grateful to my late mother, Marilyn, for believing in me and pushing me as a writer.

REH, June 2020

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ralph E. Hanson is a professor in the communication department at the University of Nebraska at Kearney, where he teaches courses in writing, blogging, reporting, and mass communication. Previously, he was on the faculty at West Virginia University and Northern Arizona University. He has been teaching introduction to mass communication for more than twenty-five years, and he has worked extensively on developing online courses and degree programs. Hanson has a bachelor's degree in journalism and anthropology from Iowa State University, a master's degree in journalism from Iowa State, and a doctorate in sociology from Arizona State University. He recently completed a book chapter on the long-standing connections between the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday and the NFL's Super Bowl. When Ralph is not out on his motorcycle riding to places a long way from Nebraska, he is blogging on mass communication issues at **https://www.ralphehanson.com**. He tweets as @ralphehanson.

PART I

INTRODUCTION TO THE MEDIA

Chapter 1

Living in a Media World

An Introduction to Mass Communication

Chapter 2

Mass Communication Effects

How Society and Media Interact

Chapter 3

The Media Business

Consolidation, Globalization, and the Long Tail

CHAPTER 1

LIVING IN A MEDIA WORLD

An Introduction to Mass Communication

Justin Setterfield/ Getty Image News/ GettyImages

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter, you will be able to

1. Identify and describe the four levels of communication
2. Define the term *media literacy* and identify the four dimensions of media literacy
3. Define the term *mass media* and identify the four models of mass communication
4. Explain the historical evolution of the media world
5. Describe the "Seven Secrets" about the mass media

It is difficult now to think back to a time when most of us had not heard of words like coronavirus, COVID-19, pandemic, community spread, social distancing, and self-quarantining. A time before all classes were abruptly moved online.[1] A time before people started dying by the thousands from a newly emergent respiratory virus that forced people to stay isolated at home for weeks at a time and essentially shut down the world's economy. A time where we could go where we wanted, when we wanted without worry. A time when the story of the virus did not dominate our media for months at a time.

The *New York Times* ran its first story mentioning the coronavirus on January 8, 2020, announcing that researchers in China had identified a new virus that had infected "dozens of people across Asia."[2] (There actually was a mention of "a pneumonia-like illness, the cause of which is unclear" in the *Times* on January 6, but it was not yet labeled as a coronavirus.) On January 11, 2020, Chinese state media made the first reports about the new illness, "including seven severe cases and one dead case."[3] (Note that the English translation here is from Google Translate.) Less than two weeks after the *Times* story, the United States had its first documented case of the virus that would turn out to be one of the most contagious and deadly viruses since the massive flu epidemic of 1918.

As the disease moved from something to be concerned about to being considered a likely pandemic, events that we would normally consume through our media started to get canceled.

On March 11, 2020, Italian NBA star Danilo Gallinari was getting ready to start the evening's game between the Oklahoma Thunder and the Utah Jazz. But the game never started, given that Utah All-Star Rudy Robert had just disclosed that he had tested positive for the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19. The cancellation was not a huge surprise to Gallinari, given the enormous toll that the disease had taken on his home country of Italy.[4] This cancellation would be the harbinger of the cancellation of most of the rest of the season. (And as of this writing, it appears likely that the whole season will be canceled.)

This was followed in short order with the cancellation of the NCAA basketball tournament, popularly known as March Madness, for the first time since it started in 1939. The College World Series also had to cancel, in large part because none of the teams that might be in contention were able to play their regular season games.

Not long after this, essentially all competitive sports in the United States, from professional basketball to youth league soccer, have been shut down for the foreseeable future. And all of these sports cancellations have had an enormous effect on the television industry. The NCAA basketball tournament alone is worth an estimated $800 million a year to the television networks.[5] ESPN was making plans to have a H-O-R-S-E free throw contest for NBA players competing individually from their home gyms, given that globally there were no sports to broadcast.[6]

The pandemic has also had a massive effect on Hollywood. Summer blockbusters like the James Bond flick *No Time to Die* or the Marvel Cinematic Universe movie *Black Widow* have had their summer 2020 releases delayed, while Pixar's *Onward* went from being released in theaters on March 6 to having a digital release on March 20 and made it onto Disney's new streaming service on April 3. That is less than a month from initial release to showing up on a streaming service. Of course, most of the movie theater industry had shut down by March 17.[7]

New York's Broadway theaters went dark starting March 12, closing performances of hits like *Hamilton*, *Oklahoma*, and *Frozen*.[8] But the stars of these shows have turned to streaming and social media to keep the buzz going. For example, the Broadway Cares charity put together a crowdsourced version of the song "Non-Stop" from *Hamilton*. The show's official Twitter account posted a request in late March 2020—after Broadway had been closed for several weeks—asking fans to submit videos of themselves performing all or

part of the song. An editor then assembled the clips into a video featuring dozens of separate performances from singers of all ages as a charity fundraiser.[9]

As this is being written in April 2020, almost all college classes in the United States are being taught using distance education technology as students were sent home from their schools. Many students were home for spring break when they were told not to come back. This created a bit of a crisis for those students who had left their books back on campus, not having planned to study during vacation. In response, SAGE and other textbook publishers made e-book copies of their materials available for free for the rest of the semester.

The COVID-19 epidemic that started in the winter of 2020 will have a long-lasting impact with many thousands of deaths, people forced to stay home and away from public places, and massive changes to our media industry.

It's not just massive social disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic that acquire significance and meaning from the media use that surround them—our whole world is shaped by the way we take in messages, share them with each other, and attach significance to them. In this chapter we are going to look at how we experience the world and define what it means though **legacy media** like newspapers, television, podcasts, streaming video and audio, and interactive social media.

The Four Levels of Communication

As the director of forensics and a communication instructor at the University of Nebraska at Kearney, Aaron Blackman communicates a lot, for both work and hobbies. His communication often flows through social media platforms, such as Twitter, Discord, Instagram, and occasionally Facebook. Using these outlets to stay in touch with friends and family, attend meetings, and form new connections with gamers around the world Aaron says that,

> Communicating with others through social media weaves in and out of my daily routine. I check numerous forms of social media throughout the day for a variety of reasons. I use Twitter the most to keep up on video game news, politics, and the weather. I'm a freelance esports journalist on top of being an instructor, so Twitter serves as my first point of contact when it comes to interviewing pro players and gauging fan reactions to pro games. Twitter is also useful for promoting my articles as well as when I go live with my Twitch stream. I've been streaming video games on Twitch every Monday night (my latest game was *Borderlands 3*), which, in addition to reaching my general audience, allows me to chat about gaming and life with my friends and family, including cousins from Minnesota that I don't get to see very often.
>
> I also use Instagram, but mostly for sharing pictures of our adorable 16-year-old Jack Russell terrier named Bailey. Additionally, I cross-stitch video game art as a hobby and have started to paint miniatures, so I tend to share my progress pictures via Instagram. Another major service I use every day is Discord, which is a voice/text chat app that lets me connect with various gaming groups and provides a fantastic option for voice communication for meetings or while playing video games. Finally, as a Facebook member since 2005, I don't update it very often anymore, but I find myself scrolling through from time to time to catch up on life updates from family members, friends, and the forensics community.[10]

When Aaron is on social media, he is engaging in almost every possible level of communication, but before we try to analyze these, we need to define what communication is. Media scholar George Gerbner provides a simple definition: **Communication** is "social interaction through messages."[11] More plainly put, communication is how we interact with our entire world, whether through spoken words, written words, gestures, music, paintings, photographs, or dance. In the classical theory of communication there are four distinct levels of communication:

1. Intrapersonal—One to Self
2. Interpersonal—One to One
3. Public Speaking—One to a Group
4. Mass Communication—One to Many

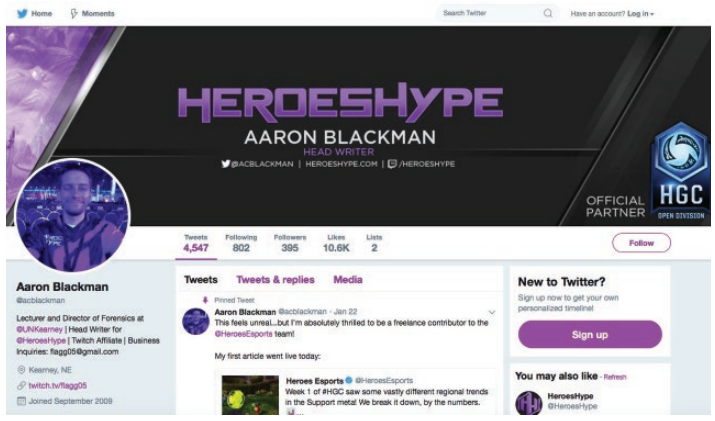
The important point is that communication is a process, not a static thing. Communication is an interaction that allows individuals, groups, and institutions to share ideas. Several of us engage hourly every day in a range of general levels of communication, often switching between them from moment to moment. Because of this, it is worth understanding what the four distinct levels of communication are and how we interact with them.

Intrapersonal Communication

Communication at its most basic level is **intrapersonal communication**, which is really communication within the self. This is how we think and how we assign meaning to all the messages and events that surround our lives. It ranges from the simple act of smiling in response to the smell of a favorite food coming from the kitchen to thinking about whether we really want to share that photo on Snapchat. Feedback, or the response from the receiver of the message, is constant because we are always (or should be always) reflecting on what we have done and how we will react. When Aaron is thinking over in his own mind whether to share a cute dog photo of Baily on Instagram, he is engaging in intrapersonal communication. Our own thoughts on what we want to communicate directly or indirectly with others are parts of important decisions that we may not pay enough attention to. People who have been drinking alcohol or using recreational drugs may suffer impaired intrapersonal communication, which may lead them to engage in more public communication they will later regret.

Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication, or one-on-one communication, is "the intentional or accidental transmission of information through verbal or nonverbal message systems to another human being."[12] Interpersonal communication can be a conversation with a friend or a hug that tells your mother you love her. Like communication with the self, interpersonal communication is continual when others are around because we constantly send out messages, even if those messages consist of nothing more than body language indicating that we want to be left alone.



Aaron Blackman's HeroesHype Twitter page.

Courtesy of Michelle Blackman

University of Nebraska at Kearney Director of Forensics Aaron Blackman handles his own communication with his friends, colleagues, and even fans of his video game streams through his Twitter account.

Interpersonal communication provides many opportunities for feedback. Your friend nods, raises an eyebrow, touches you on the arm, or simply answers your question. Not all interpersonal communication is done face-to-face, however. A telephone conversation, an SMS text message, an email, or even a greeting card can be interpersonal communication, though at a somewhat greater emotional distance than in a face-to-face conversation. When Aaron carries out a personal conversation over Discord, sends an email to an editor about a possible esports story, or talks to his wife over dinner, he's engaging in interpersonal communication.

Group Communication

Group communication is when a network of people are communicating with each other. There might be a leader who is dominating the communication in the group, such as with a teacher in the classroom. Students in the class will also have many opportunities to communicate—asking questions, demonstrating their boredom by playing games on their phone, or even by falling asleep and snoring in the back row of the room. But sometimes the group communication is more evenly interactive, such as when a group of friends are arguing about the merits of the latest movie they just watched.

Other situations test the boundaries of group communication, such as a Kendrick Lamar concert at an amphitheater or concert hall. With the amplifiers and multiple video screens, there is a high level of communication technology but limited possibilities for audience members to provide direct feedback to the performers. However, there is still interaction between the rapper and his audience through cheers, applause, and answering back. A key characteristic here is that our roles as senders and receivers are constantly changing. At one moment we are sending out messages and in the next instant we are receiving them. Aaron engages in group communication when he meets with his forensics team, cheers while attending an esports event in person, or shares a photo on Instagram.[13]

Mass Communication

Mass communication is a society-wide communication process in which an individual or institution uses technology to send messages to a large, mixed audience, most of whose members are not known to the sender. Nationally broadcast speeches by politicians, stories about crime in the newspapers, and popular new novels are all forms of mass communication. These communications are fundamentally different from the forms described previously because the sender is separated in space, and possibly in time, from the receiver. Also, the audience is not really known to the communicator. When a communicator appears on television or writes an article for a newspaper, he or she doesn't know who will be listening or reading. What is more, the audience consists of many types of people. It might contain a young man in prison, an old woman in a nursing home, a child eating Cheerios for breakfast, or Aaron as he's getting ready to go to the office to meet with his speech students. The message is communicated to all these people and to thousands or millions of others.[14]

Traditionally, mass communication has allowed only limited opportunities for feedback because the channels of communication are largely one way, but with the rise of interactive communication networks, the opportunities for feedback are growing rapidly. Aaron consumes a wide range of mass communication types during his day, including binge-watching shows on Netflix, Hulu, and Disney+; watching video game streamers and *Overwatch* tournaments on Twitch; playing video games on Blizzard, Steam, and the PlayStation Network; and listening to music through YouTube or Spotify. "My wife and I haven't paid for cable or satellite for years," Aaron says. "Aside from *Watchmen*, *Westworld* and *This is Us*, we are perfectly content to catch up on TV shows months or years after their initial run. Entertainment fits into our busy schedules, not the other way around."[15]

Always a Mix of Levels. The distinctions among the various levels of communication are useful, but don't assume that every instance of communication can automatically be placed in one

category or another. There are frequent crossovers in the levels of communication. Consider online communication. You can share a photo with a friend via Snapchat. Through a Tumblr blog, you can share your favorite images and videos. With an intranet, an employer can communicate with employees throughout the world. And through websites and podcasts, messages can go out to the entire world. The same is true of a newspaper, in which a classified ad can carry a proposal of marriage, a notice of a group meeting, or a political manifesto. When Aaron goes out to dinner with friends, they cheer when the *Overwatch* esports tournament being shown on ESPN gets exciting and talk about the competitors with each other, thus engaging in mass and group communication at the same time. When Aaron thinks about what he is going to say to the friends he is with or share on social media, he's engaging is intrapersonal communication.

The purpose of this book is to help you better understand mass communication and the mass media. In the fifteen chapters of this book, we look at a variety of topics:

- The institutions that make up the media and how they function in and affect our society
- The owners and controllers of the media business
- The media themselves, including books, newspapers, audio, movies, television, online media and social media
- The roles the media play in countries and cultures around the world
- The industries that support the media, including advertising and public relations
- The laws and ethics that regulate and control the media

Mike Marsland/WireImage/Getty Images

▲ Dan Middleton, better known as YouTube video game streamer DanTDM, has managed to become enough of a media star to be invited to attend the BAFTA Children's Awards in London.

By the time you are finished, you will better understand what the media are, how we interact with them, and what roles they play in our lives.

Understanding Our Media World

Most people have ambivalent feelings about their high levels of media use. Dr. James Potter, in his book *Media Literacy*, writes that our society is overwhelmed with media content spraying out through a virtual firehose. These messages include the following:

- More than 700 hours of feature films per year. (Just think of how many hours of Marvel Cinematic Universe movies get released per year.)
- More than 300 hours of video are added to YouTube per minute.
- More than 48 million hours of video every year globally from commercial television.
- More than 1,500 book titles published globally per day.

With the pervasiveness of our mobile devices that seem to be physically attached to our bodies, we are rarely out of range of this content and our ability to share it with others. It is liberating to be connected to the entire industrialized world online, but the risk of invasion of privacy is troubling.

Research shows that this mix of growing amounts of content and easier access has resulted in us spending more and more time with our media, which by 2017 had reached an average of

twelve hours and one minute—literally more than half our day.[16] The provocative question Potter raises is how do we deal with this high-pressure flow of content? How do we select what to consume? How do we process it? How do we integrate it or dismiss it from our lives? And, perhaps most importantly, what do we know about the choices we make? This section discusses the concept of media literacy and examines some common misconceptions about the mass media.

The term **media literacy** refers to people's understanding of what the media are, how they operate, what messages they are delivering, what roles they play in society, and how audience members respond to media messages. Potter defines media literacy this way: "Media literacy is a set of perspectives that we actively use to expose ourselves to the mass media to process and interpret the meaning of the messages we encounter."

Potter argues that media literacy is not something that we either have or lack; instead, it is something we each have in varying levels. Potter writes that people with high levels of media literacy have a great deal of control over the vision of the world they see through the media and can decide for themselves what the messages mean. In contrast, those with low levels of media literacy can develop exaggerated impressions of problems in society, even when those impressions conflict with their own experience. For example, media consumers who spend large amounts of time watching television often perceive society as far more dangerous and crime-ridden that it is because that's the image they see on television.[17] Potter says that too often consumers with low levels of media literacy assume that the media have large, obvious, and mostly negative effects on other people but little or no effect on themselves. Finally, those with low levels of media literacy are often unwilling to use the media literacy skills they have and thus those skills remain underdeveloped.

Potter has identified four basic perspectives or dimensions of media literacy:

1. Cognitive
2. Emotional
3. Aesthetic
4. Moral[18]

The Cognitive Dimension

The cognitive dimension of media literacy deals with the ability to intellectually process the information being communicated by the media. This can involve interpreting the meaning of words on a printed page, appreciating the implications of ominous music in a movie, or understanding that a well-dressed character in a television show is wealthy. For example, the *Wonder Woman* mythos has changed multiple times through its incarnations in comic books, as a TV series, and now as big-budget movies. The 2017 version directed by Patty Jenkins and portrayed by Israeli actress Gal Gadot makes extensive use of Greek and Roman mythology, giving a depth of meaning to those who know the stories.[19]

The cognitive dimension also includes the skills necessary to access the media: using a tablet, accessing 4K ultra high-definition (UHD) programming on your UHD television, or finding a book in the library. All of these are learned skills. We learn to read in school, learn the meaning of musical cues from movies we have seen, and learn how to navigate online through repeated practice.

The Emotional Dimension

The emotional dimension of media literacy covers the feelings created by media messages. Sometimes the emotions can be overwhelming; examples include the fear of a young child watching a scary movie or the joy of a parent watching a news story about a child in danger being rescued. People often spend time with songs, movies, books, and other media specifically

to feel the emotions they generate.[20] *Wonder Woman* became a box office champion in part because groups of women went together to see the movie, sometimes attending special women-only screenings to experience a sense of empowerment from a story that focused on a powerful female superhero.[21] And it is unlikely that many of the truly fake news stories out there would spread so quickly if they didn't resonate so emotionally with audiences.

iStockphoto.com/Paolo Cipriani

▲ One of the many reasons we go to the movies is to experience strong emotions, such as fear, horror, surprise, or romance, in a safe environment.

The Aesthetic Dimension

The aesthetic dimension of media literacy involves interpreting media content from an artistic or critical point of view. How well is the media artifact produced? What skills were used in producing it? How does it compare in quality to other, similar works? Understanding more than the surface dimensions of media content can require extensive learning. *Wonder Woman* was unquestionably a commercial success, and it was largely a critical success as well. The movie was praised for excellent performances by the leads Gadot and Chris Pine, but also for the casting of Robin Wright, who played Princess Buttercup in 1987's *The Princess Bride*, as the fierce and powerful General Antiope.[22] This didn't stop critics, though, from almost universally panning the movie's ending with an all-too-conventional boss fight.

The Moral Dimension

The moral dimension of media literacy consists of examining the values of the medium or the message. In a television situation comedy, for example, an underlying message might be that a quick wit is an important tool for dealing with problems or that a problem can be solved in a short time. In an action movie, the moral lessons may be that violence and authority are needed if one is to succeed and that the world is a mean and dangerous place. The moral message of most advertisements is that problems can be solved by purchasing something.[23] According to *New Yorker* movie critic Richard Brody, one of the most powerful issues raised by *Wonder Woman* is that evil doesn't come from "overtly monstrous villains but arises within humankind itself."[24]

Developing Our Media Literacy. Like any skill, developing media literacy demands hard work and practice. It is also not something we develop all at once, Potter writes.[25] Instead we have a wide range of skills that are developed slowly across our lifetime. At the most basic level are the skills we learn as a baby or a toddler—acquiring the fundamentals of communication. As babies we learn there are people other than ourselves and that they can communicate with us through sounds and actions. This is the discovery that communication with other people exists.

The second step is acquiring language. Young children learn that sounds and expressions not only convey feelings through smiles, frowns, loving sounds, and angry shouts, but that sounds can have specific meanings. They learn they can communicate with others using those sounds. Beyond the language of words, young children can also start developing the vocabulary of music and other sounds; they start to understand happy and sad music along with the meanings of other non-verbal sounds.

The third step in developing media literacy is developing an understanding of narrative. Once we learn to use language, we can start to understand the meaning of stories, including the differences between fiction and non-fiction, as well as how stories are told in terms of the basics of

plot and time sequence. Understanding the difference between stories that are true versus those that are made up is a basic level. At a higher level comes the ability to understand that stories that are made up can still tell us things that are real about our lives. At a different level, learning how to make sense out of flashbacks and varying points of view in a story that are not immediately obvious to the novice media consumer. A first-time moviegoer would likely have difficulty with complex narrative timelines used by movie director Christopher Nolan in his films like *Dunkirk* and *Inception*.

The fourth step is developing skepticism. As we learn to examine who is sending us messages, we use that knowledge to analyze how people sending out messages are trying to persuade us. As we learn the differences between advertisements and programming, we learn to discount the claims made in ads. As we learn more about the media outlets, we are consuming information from, we get a better idea of what kind of skepticism we need to be applying. Is this someone who is presenting us with unbiased information or is it someone who is making an active effort to persuade us?

The fifth step is intensive development. We start to have specific interests that we want to learn about in more depth. We will develop complex thought structures about the topics we are most interested in. These allow us to think about these topics in more intricate ways. For example, if you are interested in politics, you will likely seek out stories about the issues you are passionate about. You will also be much better at decoding the news about politics than people who don't care. The more you learn about current politics, the more you will be able to remember and the better you will be at analyzing the information you consume. The more you learn about your favored topic, the better you will be at learning more.

The sixth step is experiential exploring. We consume different types of media and content because we are looking for different types of experiences. You might watch a new horror movie because you are seeking the excitement and adrenaline rush that being frightened in a safe environment provides. Our reactions and sensations are not a negative part of media consumption, they are often the point of it.

The seventh step is critical appreciation. This is when we start being able to analyze media content apart from your own feelings about it. For example, you might not be a big fan of hip-hop, but you can still analyze and appreciate the complex rhymes and sampling that goes into producing the commentary and sonic mix. You don't have to like something to be able to appreciate it. Similarly, you realize that the fact that you like a particular book doesn't necessarily make it a brilliant bit of writing.

The eighth and final step is social responsibility. As we grow in media literacy, we learn to take a moral stand about the value of certain content over that of other content. We realize that some media content and our use of it can have moral and ethical consequences for society as a whole and that through our media decisions we have the ability to make the world a better place. As an example, you might decide to always check the accuracy of provocative social media posts that might be from a bot account or an online troll before passing it on. Even if a meme says something you absolutely agree with, you still try to figure out where it came from before you share it.

Models of Mass Communication

Although people often use the terms *mass communication* and *mass media* interchangeably, they are significantly different concepts. Mass communication is a process, whereas the **mass media** are simply the technological tools used to transmit the messages of mass communication.[26] Earlier in this chapter, we defined mass communication as a society-wide communication process in which an individual or institution uses technology to send messages to a large mixed audience, most of whose members are not known to the sender. There are many ways to approach looking at mass communication. Media scholar Denis McQuail lays out four models that help us answer different questions about the nature of mass communication:

1. Transmission Model
2. Ritual Model
3. Publicity Model
4. Reception Model[27]

Transmission Model

There is an old way of describing mass communication known as the **Sender Message Channel Receiver (SMCR) or transmission model**. The transmission model does not do justice to the complexity of the mass communication process because it tends to portray mass communication as a largely one-directional flow of messages from the sender to the receiver, rather than as a complex interaction where senders and receivers are constantly changing places. What it does is lay out the key elements in mass communication.

The **sender** is the source of messages that go out through mass communication. When critics talk about "the media" as a potent force, they are often talking about the few large corporations that control the flow of messages from our major commercial channels. But as you have already figured out, there are many other senders than just the major media corporations. For example, when the *New York Times* started reporting on the COVID-19 virus in January 2020, they were the sender.

The **message** is the content being transmitted by the sender and reacted to by the receiver. Before the message can be transmitted, it must be encoded. **Encoding** requires at least two steps. First the sender's ideas must be turned into a message—a script for the video is drafted, a graphic is created, or a tweet is written. Second, the message must be prepared for transmission—the script is recorded, the tweet is sent out, or the graphic is placed on an online page. When the various professional and collegiate sports leagues started cancelling their seasons and the broadcasts of their games, that started sending out a message of how serious the COVID-19 pandemic was likely to be. But did the message mean what the sender intended? That is a question we will address later in this chapter.

The **channel** is the medium used to transmit the message. Recall that a mass medium is a technological tool. Think about a newspaper. It consists of black and colored ink printed on relatively low-quality paper. It is portable, readily available, and cheap. Channels can include books, newspapers, social media, streaming audio and video, or movies in a theater. What about faxes, text messages, letters, and email? Do they fit in as channels for mass communication? It depends. If you receive sports scores sent out as mass SMS text messages by your favorite sports news service, then it certainly is a mass communication channel. When you send a text to your sweetie, it is much more like interpersonal communication. When the Broadway Cares charity created the crowd-sourced version of the song "Non-Stop" from the musical *Hamilton*, their channels were the YouTube video service and a variety of social media outlets.

The **receiver** is the audience for the mass communication message—that is, the people who are receiving and decoding the message. **Decoding** is the process of translating a signal from a mass medium into a form the receiver can understand. Receivers do not always get a clear message from the sender, however. Several types of **noise** can interfere with the delivery of the message. For example, there is semantic noise, which occurs when the receiver does not understand the meaning of the message, such as when you can't understand the lyrics on a Latin music channel because you don't speak Spanish; mechanical noise, which occurs when the channel has trouble transmitting the message, such as when you are a long way from a cell tower so you can't get a web page to load on your mobile device; and environmental noise, which occurs when the action and sounds surrounding the receiver interfere with the reception of the message, such as when your roommate's loud video game keeps you from concentrating on your *Media Literacy* textbook. It is also the receiver who ultimately assigns the meaning to the message they are receiving.

The sender may have intended a message as a sarcastic joke while the receiver might interpret the joke as an offensive serious statement. Which meaning matters? The one assigned to it by the receiver.

Though the transmission model (SMCR) is useful for laying out the various elements of the mass communication process, it does not explain how mass communication works in our lives. It focuses primarily on the process of transmitting messages largely from the point of view of a sender trying to influence the receiver. However, in the real world we are constantly switching between being a sender and receiver, translating messages from one channel to another. And as the messages bounce back and forth; their meanings transform depending on who is receiving them and who is sending them out.

▼ TABLE 1.1

Mass Communication Models

Model	Orientation of Sender	Orientation of Receiver
Transmission Model	Transfer of meaning	Cognitive processing
Ritual Model	Performance	Shared experience
Publicity Model	Competitive display	Attention-giving spectatorship
Reception Model	Preferential encoding	Differential decoding/construction of meaning

Source: Denis McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*, 6th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2010). Reproduced by permission of SAGE. Copyright © Denis McQuail, 2005.

Ritual Model

Whereas the transmission model looks at how a message is sent, the **ritual model** puts audience members at the center of the equation. The ritual model looks at how and why audience members (receivers) consume media messages. This model suggests that we watch a program such as *The Voice* not so much to learn about aspiring singers or to receive advertising messages, but rather to interact with family and friends. Lots of people who are not football fans will attend Super Bowl watch parties to participate in the mid-winter celebration of sports, commercials, and chicken wings. Media consumption thus goes beyond simply delivering messages and becomes a shared experience that brings us together as a people.

Carter Wilkerson, a then sixteen-year-old from Reno, Nevada, holds the record for Twitter engagement with 3.6 million retweets and 1 million likes for his tweet trying to get a year's worth of free chicken nuggets from Wendy's. The fast-food chain told him he would need to get 18 million shares to gets his free chicken, but in the end, they gave him his nuggets anyway. For what it's worth, Wilkerson told the *New York Times* that he might use his experience as a launching ground for a career in marketing. "It'd be pretty cool to put on my college applications that I'm the No. 1 retweeted tweet of all time," he said.[28]

Publicity Model

Sometimes media messages are not trying to convey specific information as much as they are trying to draw attention to a particular person, group, or concept. According to the **publicity model**, the mere fact that a topic is covered by the media can make the topic important, regardless of what is said about it. For example, when Justin Timberlake exposed Janet Jackson's right nipple for nine-sixteenths of a second during the 2004 Super Bowl, there were all sorts of charges that broadcast network CBS was lowering the moral standards of America's young people. The major effect of Jackson's stunt was that the Federal Communications Commission adopted increasingly strict rules on broadcast decency. As a result, at least twenty Sinclair-owned ABC affiliates refused to air the World War II movie *Saving Private Ryan* the

following November for fear that they would be fined for all the bad language contained in the movie. Concerns about changing television standards had existed for several years prior to Jackson flashing Super Bowl viewers, but the attention Jackson brought to the issue put broadcast decency in the limelight.[29] By 2018, however, Timberlake's role in the affair seemed to have been forgotten with the singer giving the Super Bowl halftime show. Miss Jackson, on the other hand, was not invited back.

Reception Model

The **reception model** moves us out of the realm of social science analysis and into the world of critical theory (something we will spend time on in Chapter 2). Instead of looking at how messages affect audiences or are used by the senders or receivers, the reception model looks at how audience members derive and create meaning out of media content. Rather than seeing content as having an intended, fixed meaning, the reception model says that each receiver decodes the message based on his or her own unique experiences, feelings, and beliefs. You can take a single news story and show it to liberal and conservative observers, and both will claim that it is biased against their point of view. In fact, a 1982 study showed that the more journalists tried to present multiple sides of an issue, the more partisans on either side of the issue viewed the story as biased.[30]

Evolution of the Media World

Where did our media world come from? Is it just a product of the late twentieth century with its constant flow of print and electronic messages? Not really. The world of interconnected and overlapping communication networks that surrounds us has been evolving for hundreds of years. Before the advent of the mass media, people interacted primarily face-to-face. Most of the time, they interacted only with people like themselves and had little contact with the outside world. But people gradually created communication networks that used first interpersonal channels, then print media, electronic media, and, most recently, interactive media. This section examines how various communication networks have grown over the centuries to form the media world in which we now live.

Before print, the first major communication network in the Western world predates the mass media and was developed by the Roman Catholic Church in the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries. During that period, messages flowed from the Vatican in Italy through the cardinals and bishops to priests in cathedrals and villages throughout Europe and finally to congregations through sermons from the pulpit.[31]

The first major expansion in communication beyond the Church was the development of the printing press—in particular, the development of practical movable type in the 1450s—and the subsequent mass production of printed materials. Mass printing made it possible for major social changes, such as the Protestant Reformation, to spread from their country of origin to the rest of Europe and the world beyond.

Although the printing press allowed for the mass production of information, printing was still relatively slow, and publications remained expensive. The addition of steam power to the printing press in 1814 dramatically increased the rate at which printed material could be reproduced.

AP Images/Associated Press

▲ By the 1880s, telegraph wires crisscrossed the New York City skyline, sending messages rapidly through the city, across the country, and around the world.

The advent of electronic communication made the media world much more complex. This type of communication began in 1844 with the opening of the first telegraph line from Baltimore, Maryland, to Washington, DC. In 1866, telegraph cables spanned the Atlantic

TEST YOUR MEDIA LITERACY

CAN TELEVISION TAKE ANYTHING SERIOUSLY?

Back in 1985, New York University communication professor Neil Postman published his book, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. In it, Postman argues that the primary effect of television is that it changes how people see the world; that is, with television, people start viewing everything as entertainment. Young people get their news in a comedy format, watching *The Late Show With Stephen Colbert* the same way they watch the newsmagazine *60 Minutes* on CBS. They learn about politics on the same channel that shows a professional football game.[32]

In an interview with Robert Nelson for the *Civic Arts Review*, Postman described the major point of *Amusing Ourselves to Death*:

> Television always recreates the world to some extent in its own image by selecting parts of that world and editing those parts. So, a television news show is a kind of symbolic creation and construction made by news directors and camera crews. . . .
>
> Americans turn to television not only for their light entertainment but for their news, their weather, their politics, their religion, their history, all of which may be said to be their furious entertainment. What I am talking about is television's preemption of our culture's most serious business. It is one thing to say that TV presents us with entertaining subject matter. It is quite another to say that on TV all subject matter is presented as entertaining and it is in that sense that TV can bring ruin to any intelligent understanding of public affairs. . . .
>
> And stranger still is the fact that commercials may appear anywhere in a news story, before, after, or in the middle, so that all events are rendered essentially trivial, that is to say, all events are treated as a source of public entertainment. How serious can an earthquake in Mexico be or a hijacking in Beirut, if it is shown to us prefaced by a happy United Airlines commercial and summarized by a Calvin Klein jeans commercial? Indeed, TV newscasters have added to our grammar a new part of speech altogether. What may be called the "now this" conjunction. "Now this" is a conjunction that does not connect two things but does the opposite. It disconnects. When newscasters say, "Now this," they mean to indicate that what you have just heard or seen has no relevance to what you are about to hear or see. There is no murder so brutal, no political blunder so costly, no bombing so devastating that it cannot be erased from our minds by a newscaster saying, "Now this." The newscaster means that you have thought long enough on the matter, let's say 45 seconds, that you must not be morbidly preoccupied with it, let us say for 90 seconds, and that you must now give your attention to a commercial. Such a situation in my view is not news. And in my opinion it accounts for the fact that Americans are among the most ill informed people in the Western world.[33]

WHO is the source?

Neil Postman (1931–2003), a prominent American educator, media theorist, and cultural critic, founded the media ecology program at New York University (NYU) and chaired the NYU Department of Culture and Communication. Postman wrote eighteen books and more than two hundred magazine and newspaper articles for such periodicals as the *New York Times Magazine*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's*, and the *Washington Post*. He also edited the journal *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* and was on the editorial board of the *Nation*.

WHAT is he saying?

Postman argues that the primary effect of television is that it changes how people see the world; that is, with television, people start viewing everything as entertainment. In comparison, think about your own viewing habits. Do you watch the news the same way you watch *Big Bang Theory*? Or learn about politics on the same channel that shows *Big Brother*? Or see news about the war in Syria, followed by a commercial for Domino's Pizza?

WHAT kind of evidence does the book provide?

What kind of data does Postman provide to support his arguments? What kind of evidence is needed to bolster these claims? Is there evidence that disputes his claims? How do you think Postman's background is likely to have shaped his view of television?

HOW do you or your classmates react to Postman's arguments?

What does the title *Amusing Ourselves to Death* mean to you? Do you feel that television trivializes important issues or makes them more palatable? Have you noticed similar effects in yourself as described by Postman? Do you notice differences in how news anchors make the transition from news to commercials and back again? Are the stories before and after the break any different from stories during the rest of the newscast?

DOES it all add up?

Do you believe that Postman's arguments are true today? In October 2017, CBS News was so eager to break the news about the death of rock legend/entertainer Tom Petty that its anchors started reporting it in the early afternoon, nearly half a day before he actually died. The news then rapidly spread to other major news outlets that did not want to miss out on the breaking story, including *Entertainment Weekly*, the *Huffington Post*, and *Rolling Stone* magazine. This led to music stars such as John Mayer, Shania Twain, and Jon Bon Jovi expressing their sympathy. But within an hour of having set off this flurry of interest, the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), supposedly the source of the story, said it could not confirm the report. Finally, at 11:30 p.m. on October 2, the LAPD confirmed that Petty had died.[34]

Do you think that this fascination with celebrity deaths supports Postman's claims? Why or why not? Do you think that Petty's death was newsworthy enough to merit the coverage it received? Or were CBS and its fellow news channels just trying to entertain their viewers?

Ocean, overcoming a seemingly insurmountable barrier that had long hindered transoceanic communication. Instead of sending a message on a two-week journey by boat across the ocean and waiting for a reply to come back the same way, two people on opposite sides of the ocean could carry on a dialogue via telegraph.

In the 1880s, Emile Berliner invented the gramophone, or phonograph, which played mass-produced discs containing about three minutes of music. Just as printed books made possible the storage and spread of ideas, the gramophone allowed musical performances to be captured and reproduced.

The invention of radio in the late nineteenth century freed electronic communication from the limits imposed on it by telegraph wires. Messages could come into the home at any time and at almost no cost to the receiver. All that was needed was a radio set to receive an endless variety of cultural content, news, and other programming.

Movies were first shown at nickelodeon theaters in the late 1890s and early 1900s and were produced by an entertainment industry that distributed films worldwide. Young couples on a date in London, Ohio, and in London, England, could see the same movie, copy the same styles of dress, and perhaps even practice the same kisses they saw in the movie. Due to radio and the movies, the media world became a shared entertainment culture produced for profit by major media corporations.

In 1939, patrons in New York's neighborhood taverns no longer had to settle for radio broadcasts of Yankees games being played at the Polo Grounds. Instead, a small black-and-white television set located on a pedestal behind the bar showed a faint, flickering image of the game. After a series of delays caused by World War II, television surpassed radio in popularity. It also became a lightning rod for controversy as people stayed home to watch whatever images it would deliver.

After several decades of television, people had gotten used to the idea that news, information, and entertainment could be delivered almost magically into their homes, although they could do little to control the content of this medium other than change channels. Then a new medium emerged, one that made senders and receivers readily interchangeable. The internet became a full-fledged mass communication network in the 1990s (though many people were unaware that the first nodes of this new medium were being linked together as far back as 1969). Rather than simply making it easier for individuals and organizations to send messages to a mass audience, the new computer networks were designed for two-way communication. Audience members were becoming message providers themselves.

AP Photo/Carlos Giusti

▲ After Hurricane Maria, power lines came down all over Puerto Rico. Facebook pledged to send a "connectivity team" to help restore communications to the island, in a move by one of several tech companies—among them Tesla, Google, Cisco, Microsoft, and a range of startups—who came with disaster response proposals, most aimed at getting phone and internet service up and running.

Online and Mobile Media: Interactive Communication

Online media's interactivity was the culmination of a trend toward giving audience members new control over their communication world. The growth of cable and satellite television, along with the VCR, had already given viewers more choices and more control, and the remote control allowed them to choose among dozens of channels without leaving their chairs.

In 2000, when the Pew Research Center first started tracking Americans' use of the internet, slightly more than 50 percent of us were online. That number has increased steadily during the ensuing two decades; in 2018, approximately 90 percent of American adults are online.[35] The implications of interactivity are significant. Whereas the commercial media have come to be controlled by a smaller and smaller number of large corporations (see Chapter 3), an important channel of mass communication is open to ordinary people in ways that were never before possible. With a trivial investment in a mobile device or computer, individuals can grab the spotlight with news and entertainment through social media and the World Wide Web.

Consider the example of artist Danielle Corsetto, creator of the popular web comic *Girls With Slingshots*. Her comic started under the name *Hazelnuts* when she was in high school, but she took it online in October 2004 when fans of her sketches asked her when she was going to start publishing her comic. Corsetto explained to the *Frederick News-Post* that *Girls With Slingshots* (or *GWS*) is a slice-of-life comic that tells the story of "sour, grumpy girl" Hazel and her best friend, Jamie, a "bubbly girl who is very comfortable with herself."[36] One of the fascinating things about the comic is the level of diversity within its cast. There is Melody, who is deaf; Soo Lin, who is blind; Darren, who is gay; Erin, who is asexual; and McPedro, a cactus who talks when Hazel's been drinking. Anna Pearce, writing for *Bitch Media*, says that her favorite thing about the comic is that it looks at disability from the point of view of a disabled person. "What I like about the jokes in this strip are that they are all over the place. Some are about how clueless people can be about blindness. Some are disability-related humour as told by people with disabilities."[37]

Although her comic is online, she still does her drawing by hand. Corsetto explains, "It's more realistic and less stereotypical. All the characters have these unusual relations, both romantic and platonic . . . that are not what you would find in, say, a sitcom, but it's written like a sitcom. I'm kind of trying to normalize these things that are taboo."

Since 2007, she has made her living exclusively through drawing and writing comics. In addition to *Girls With Slingshots*, Corsetto works on a variety of side projects, including writing three volumes of the *Adventure Time* graphic novel series. Although *GWS* started out small, Corsetto's website drew about one hundred thousand readers a day at its peak. In March 2015, Corsetto brought *GWS* to a close, with her heroine Hazel coming to terms with her long-absent father. Given the subject matter, alcohol use, and language in *GWS*, Corsetto would not have been able to publish her work in a legacy newspaper or magazine.[38]

Courtesy of Danielle Corsetto

▲ Self portrait of Danielle Corsetto with her cat.

Following the completion of the comic, Corsetto has taken what she called a "sabbatical," working on advancing her art skills, teaching art classes, editing a two-volume hardcover book edition of *GWS*, writing the text for a sex education comic for high school and college aged

students, and developing a graphic novel she has started publishing pages for on her Patreon page.[39] Corsetto says she has been depending on donations from the crowdfunding platform Patreon for most of her current income.

While Corsetto is "making a living" from her artwork, she wrote in a recent post to her Patreon supporters that this can mean different things to different people:

> I net more than the average schoolteacher, but less than the average accountant. My income fluctuates year to year. I live comfortably and I feel wealthy. . . . But I guarantee if I showed my bookkeeping to an old-school cartoonist who hit it big in newspaper syndication in the 90s, they'd think I was insane to say that I "feel wealthy."[40]

Some critics would argue that the growth of cable television stations, websites, and magazines creates only an illusion of choice because a majority of the channels are still controlled by the same five or six companies.[41] Even so, it is a new media world, one in which audience members are choosing what media content they will consume and when they will consume it. It's a world that even media giants are being forced to adjust to.

The Seven Secrets About the Media "They" Don't Want You to Know 2.0

Media literacy is a tricky subject to talk about because few people admit that they really don't understand how the media operate and how messages, audiences, channels, and senders interact. After all, since we spend so much time with the media, we must know all about them, right? As an example, most students in an Introduction to Mass Communication class will claim that the media and media messages tend to affect other people far more than themselves. The question of media literacy can also become a political question, for which the answer depends on whether you are a liberal or a conservative, rich or poor, young or old. But the biggest problem in the public discussion of media literacy is that certain routine issues get discussed repeatedly, while many big questions are left unasked.

- Secret 1—The media are essential components of our lives.
- Secret 2—There are no mainstream media (MSM).
- Secret 3—Everything from the margin moves to the center.
- Secret 4—Nothing is new: Everything that happened in the past will happen again.
- Secret 5—All media are social.
- Secret 6—Online media are mobile media.
- Secret 7—There is no "they."

Six editions of this book ago, I first came out with the Seven Secrets About the Media "They" Don't Want You to Know. These were things we do not typically hear about in the media. Secret things. Perhaps it is because there is no one out there who can attract an audience by saying these things. Or maybe it is because the ideas are complicated, and we do not like complexity from our media. Or maybe it is because "they" (whoever "they" may be) do not want us to know them.

But the media world has changed considerably since the secrets were first developed in 2006:

- Netflix had no streaming service—it was only a DVD-by-mail service.
- There was no iPhone—the BlackBerry with its little Chiclet keyboard was the height of smartphone technology.

- There were no tablet computers.
- Cell phone service was typically sold by the minute, and most mobile plans had a limit to the number of text messages that were included in the basic plan.
- Google was in the process of buying a cell phone video sharing service called YouTube created by three former PayPal employees.
- Facebook was only two years old, and use of it was limited to college students.
- Instagram had not yet gone online—that wouldn't happen until 2010. By 2018, it had eight hundred million active users.[42]

Today, my students tell me they watch most of their video using Netflix streaming, virtually all of them have a smartphone and several social media accounts, and their most frequent way of going online is with a mobile device. So in the sixth edition, it became clear that it was time to update the Seven Secrets to better match the current media world—we were releasing the Seven Secrets About the Media "They" Don't Want You to Know 2.0. These key issues of media literacy—which do not get the discussion they deserve—provide a foundation for the rest of the chapters in this book. (And just who are "they"? Wait for Secret 7.)

SECRET 1: The Media Are Essential Components of Our Lives

Critics often talk about the effects the media have on us as though the media were something separate and distinct from our everyday lives. But conversations with my students have convinced me otherwise. Every semester I poll my students as to what media they have used so far that day, with the day starting at midnight. I run through the list: checking Twitter, Snapchat, or Instagram; listening to the radio; checking the weather on a mobile device; binge-watching on Netflix; reading the latest Margaret Atwood novel; listening to Spotify on an iPhone; and so it goes. In fact, media use is likely to be the most universal experience my students will share. Surveys of my students find that more of my morning class students have consumed media content than have eaten breakfast or showered since the day began at midnight. Are the media an important force in our lives? Absolutely! But the media are more than an outside influence on us. They are a part of our everyday lives.

iStockphoto.com/HildeAnna

▲ The meaning of yellow ribbons tied into a bow has transformed many times over the past several decades.

Think about how we assign meanings to objects that otherwise would have no meaning at all. Take a simple yellow ribbon twisted in a stylized bow. You've seen thousands of these, and most likely you know exactly what they stand for—"Support Our Troops." But that hasn't always been the meaning of the symbol.

The yellow ribbon has a long history in American popular culture. It played a role in the rather rude World War II–era marching song "She Wore a Yellow Ribbon." The ribbon was a symbol of a young woman's love for a soldier "far, far away," and the lyrics mention that her father kept a shotgun handy to keep the soldier "far, far away." The yellow ribbon was also a symbol of love and faithfulness in the John Ford film *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*. In the 1970s, the ribbon became a symbol of remembering the U.S. staff in the Iranian embassy who had been taken hostage. This meaning came from the song "Tie a Yellow Ribbon 'Round the Old Oak Tree," made popular by the group Tony Orlando and Dawn. The song tells about a prisoner coming home from jail hoping that his girlfriend will remember him. She can prove her love by displaying the yellow ribbon.

The prisoner arrives home to find not one, but one hundred yellow ribbons tied to the tree. The display of yellow ribbons tied to trees became commonplace in newspaper articles and television news stories about the ongoing hostage crisis after the wife of a hostage started displaying one in her yard.

Later, during the 1990–1991 Persian Gulf War, Americans were eager to show their support for the troops fighting overseas, even if they did not necessarily support the war itself, and the stylized ribbon started to become institutionalized as a symbol of support. The yellow "Support Our Troops" ribbon was followed by the red ribbon of AIDS awareness, the pink ribbon of breast cancer awareness, and ribbons of virtually every color for other issues. And how do we know the meanings of these ribbons? We hear or see them being discussed through our media. The meaning is assigned by the creators of a ribbon, but the success of the ribbon depends on its meaning being shared through the media. So, do the media create the meanings? Not really. But could the meanings be shared nationwide without the media? Absolutely not. The media may not define our lives, but they do help transmit and disseminate shared meanings from one side of the country to the other.[43]

SECRET 2: There Are No Mainstream Media (MSM)

We often hear charges related to perceived sins of the so-called mainstream media. But who exactly are these mainstream media? For some, the MSM are the heavyweights of journalism, especially the television broadcast networks and the major newspapers, such as the *New York Times*. For others, the MSM are the giant corporations that run many of our media outlets. New York University journalism professor and blogger Jay Rosen says that the term MSM is often used to refer to media we just don't like—a "them."[44] It isn't always clear who constitutes the MSM, but in general we can consider them to be the old-line legacy media—the big-business newspapers, magazines, and television.

But are these old media more in the mainstream than our alternative media? Look at talk radio. Afternoon talk radio is dominated by conservative political talk show hosts, such as Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity. Limbaugh is fond of complaining about how the MSM don't "get it." But how mainstream are the MSM? For 2019, Fox News averaged 2.49 million viewers in prime time, making it the number 1 basic cable network; MSNBC averaged 1.73 million viewers in prime time and was the second most watched basic cable network, and CNN averaged 971,000 viewers, making it the seventh most watched basic cable network.[45]

With all the talk of cable news, it's easy to forget that the legacy broadcast networks have significant audiences as well: ABC with 8.6 million viewers, NBC with 7.8 million, and CBS with 5.5 million, as of the final three months of 2019. (The Fox broadcast network does not have a network evening news broadcast.)[46] *The Sean Hannity Show*, on the other hand, averages 14 million radio listeners a week, followed closely by *The Rush Limbaugh Show*.[47] (Note that television audiences and radio audiences are measured differently.) So, which is more mainstream? A popular afternoon radio show with a large daily audience or a television news program with a somewhat smaller audience?

And then there is video game streamer Daniel Middleton, a.k.a. DanTDM, who has more than twenty-two million followers and more than sixteen billion (that is *billion* with a *b*) views on YouTube, streaming *Minecraft* and other video games. What could possibly be more mainstream than twenty-two million viewers and 16 billion views?[48] Again, these numbers are not directly comparable with television ratings—they are much, much bigger. Overall, YouTube claims to have more than two billion monthly users. Most videos do not get a particularly large viewership, but the combined total is massive.[49]

So, it is largely meaningless to describe one medium as mainstream and another as nonmainstream. They are all significant presences in our world. Can we distinguish between old and new media? Perhaps. Can we argue that our alternative sources of news and entertainment are any less significant than the traditional ones? Absolutely not.

SECRET 3: Everything From the Margin Moves to the Center

The mass media, both news and entertainment, are frequently accused of trying to put forward an extremist agenda of violence, permissiveness, homosexuality, drug use, edgy fashion, and nonmainstream values.

People in the media business, be they entertainers or journalists, respond with the argument that they are just "keeping it real," portraying the world as it is by showing aspects of society that some people want to pretend don't exist. They have no agenda, the argument goes; they just want to portray reality.

Now it is true that much of what the media portray that upsets people is real. On the other hand, it is a bit disingenuous to argue that movie directors and musicians are not trying for shock value when they use offensive language or portray stylized violence combined with graphic sexuality. Think back to any of a few recent horror movies. We all know that teenagers routinely get slashed to ribbons by a psycho killer just after having sex, right? Clearly, movie producers are trying to attract an audience by providing content that is outside of the mainstream.

The problem with the argument between "keeping it real" and "extremist agenda" is that it misses what is happening. There can be no question that audiences go after media content that is outside of the mainstream. Similarly, the more nonmainstream content is presented, the more ordinary it seems to become. This is what is meant by Secret 3—one of the mass media's biggest effects on everyday life is to take culture from the margins of society and make it into part of the mainstream, or center. This process can move people, ideas, and even individual words from small communities into mass society.

We can see this happening in several ways. Take the 1975 cult movie *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* that tells the story of a gay male transvestite (Dr. Frank-N-Furter) who is building a muscle-bound boyfriend (Rocky) for himself when a newly engaged straight couple show up at his castle's doorstep seeking shelter from a storm. While the movie found success as a midnight movie in the counterculture community, it took years to move from being considered a flop to a cult classic.

Dan MacMedan/Getty Images

▲ Laverne Cox starred in Fox's TV remake of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* as the mad scientist/alien/transvestite Dr. Frank-N-Furter, replacing Tim Curry. The film is easily the most beloved camp cult movie of all time.

Rocky Horror Picture Show

▲ Tim Curry as Dr. Frank-N-Furter.

But in recent years *Rocky Horror* has moved from simply a midnight movie to a core element of popular culture. The Fox Broadcasting show *Glee* did a Halloween episode in 2010 where the kids in the show's glee club produced *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* as a high school musical. But the *Glee* version had actress Amber Riley playing the part of Dr. Frank-N-Furter, while the part of Rocky was still played by a male actor, Chord Overstreet. Thus, the central plotline went from gay to straight. The *Glee* version also had Frank-N-Furter singing about being from "Sensational, Transylvania" instead of "Transsexual, Transylvania." With these changes, *The Rocky Horror Glee Show* became a perfect example of Secret 3. *Rocky Horror* started out as a camp musical in the 1970s that found enormous success in the counterculture community. But *Glee* sanitized it from a celebration of cross-dressing gay culture into a mass-market story of straight people playing with gay themes. In 2016, Fox Broadcasting showed a full remake of *Rocky Horror* that aired in October featuring trans actress Laverne Cox (of *Orange Is the New Black* fame) as Dr. Frank-N-Furter. *Hollywood Reporter* reviewer Daniel Finberg noted in 2016 that the show is no longer shocking in that "one of the most unorthodox characters in the history of musicals has become oddly conventional."[50]

An alternative approach is to look at how the media accelerate the adoption of activist language into the mainstream. Take the medical term *intact dilation and extraction*, which describes a controversial type of late-term abortion. A search of the LexisNexis news database shows that newspapers used the medical term only five times over a six-month period. On the other hand, *partial-birth abortion*, the term for the procedure used by abortion opponents, was used in more than 125 stories during the same time. Opponents even got the term used in the title of a bill passed by Congress that outlawed the procedure, thus moving the phrase into the mainstream through repeated publication of the bill's name.

This process is not a product of a liberal or conservative bias by the news media. It's simply a consequence of the repeated use of the term in the press.

SECRET 4: Nothing Is New: Everything That Happened in the Past Will Happen Again

Secret 4 is a little different from the oft-repeated slogan, "Those who ignore the past are doomed to repeat it." Instead, it says that media face the same issues repeatedly as technologies change and new people come into the business.

The fight between today's recording companies and file sharers has its roots in the battle between music publishers and the distributors of player piano rolls in the early 1900s. The player piano was one of the first technologies for reproducing musical performances. Piano roll publishers would buy a single copy of a piece of sheet music and hire a skilled pianist to have his or her performance recorded as a series of holes punched in a paper roll. That roll (and the performance) could then be reproduced and sold to anyone who owned a player piano without further payment to the music's original publisher.[51]

Then, in 1984, Sony successfully defended itself against a lawsuit from Universal Studios by arguing that it had a right to sell VCRs to the public because there were legitimate, legal uses for the technology. Universal had protested the sales because the video recorders could be used to duplicate its movies. Before long, the studios quit trying to ban the VCR and started selling videocassettes of movies directly to consumers at reasonable prices. Suddenly, the studios had a major new source of revenue.[52]

This can also be seen with the repeated fears of new media technologies emerging over the years. In the 1930s, there was fear that watching movies, especially gangster pictures, would lead to precocious sexual behavior, delinquency, lower standards and ideals, and poor physical and emotional health. The 1940s brought concern about how people would react to radio programs, particularly soap operas.[53] Comic books came under attack in the 1950s. The notion that comic books were dangerous was popularized by a book titled *Seduction of the Innocent* by Dr. Fredric Wertham. Wertham also testified before Congress that violent and explicit comic books were a

©Bettmann/Getty Images

▲ Congressional hearings in the 1950s about horror comics, such as those pictured here, show how adults are always concerned about the possible effects of new media on children.

cause of teenage delinquency and sexual behavior. The industry responded to the criticism by forming the Comics Code Authority and ceasing publication of popular crime and horror comics, such as *Tales From the Crypt* and *Weird Science*.

The 1980s and 1990s saw controversies over offensive rap and rock lyrics.[54] These controversies reflected widespread concern about bad language and hidden messages in songs. In 2009, pop star Britney Spears had a not-so-hidden allusion to the "*F* word" in her song "If U Seek Amy." If you speak the title aloud, it sounds like you are spelling out *F*, *U*, . . . well, you get the picture. Critics were, of course, shocked and dismayed at this example of a pop star lowering public taste. Of course, Spears did not really create her naughty little lyric on her own. Aside from a host of rock and blues singers who have used similar lines, *Slate* writer Jesse Sheidlower notes that James Joyce used the same basic line in *Ulysses*, when he has a group of women sing:

If you see kay

Tell him he may

See you in tea

Tell him from me.

A careful reading of the third line will let you find a second hidden obscenity as well.[55]

Numerous media critics and scholars have argued that television and movies present a distorted view of the world, making it look like a much more violent and dangerous place than it is. More recently, mobile devices have been blamed for a range of social ills, from car accidents caused by distracted drivers to promiscuity caused by sexually explicit mobile phone text and photo messages.

Why has there been such long-running, repeated concern about the possible effects of the media? Media sociologist Charles R. Wright says that people want to be able to solve social ills, and it is easier to believe that poverty, crime, and drug abuse are caused by media coverage than to acknowledge that their causes are complex and not fully understood.[56]

Writing in 1948, sociologists Robert Merton and Paul Lazarsfeld identified four major aspects of public concern about the media:

- Concern that because the media are everywhere, they might be able to control and manipulate people. This is a large part of the legacy of fear.
- Fear that those in power will use the media to reinforce the existing social structure and discourage social criticism. When critics express concern about who owns and runs the media, this is what they are worried about.
- Fear that mass entertainment will lower the tastes and standards for popular culture by trying to attract the largest-possible audience. Criticism of action movies, soap operas, and wrestling as replacements for healthier entertainment, such as Shakespeare's plays, is at the heart of this concern.
- The belief that mass entertainment is a waste of time that detracts from more useful activities. When your mother told you to turn off the television set and go outside, this was her concern![57]

SECRET 5: All Media Are Social

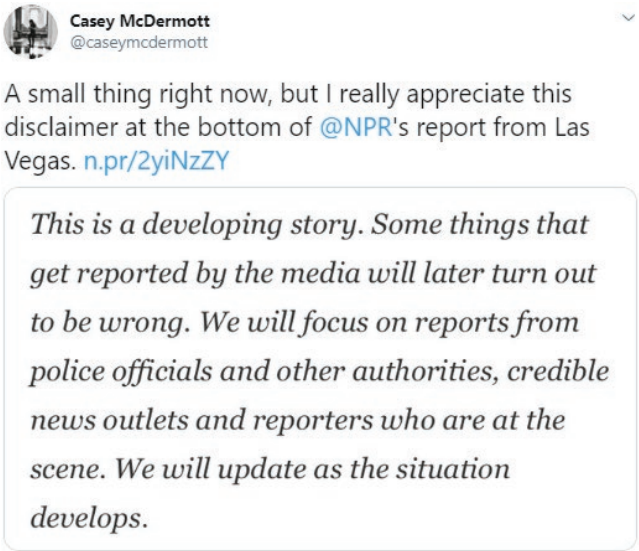
No matter what media you are using—whether it be a legacy newspaper or television station or a social media channel like Facebook—you are always interacting with it at a social level—whether it be face-to-face, with friends on Facebook, or with the entire world via Twitter.

Take, as an example, when your author went to hear President Barack Obama speak at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) campus. I got the expected reactions from friends to the selfie of my wife and me standing in line to enter the arena. I also shared news on Twitter about the president's visit from social media guru Dr. Jeremy Lipschultz. And while I was on Lipschultz's Twitter page, *Omaha World-Herald* weather reporter Nancy Gaarder tweeted out a photo of me at work. Now, in this case, Gaarder and I were interacting because she was sitting behind me and we got to talking face-to-face. But this was only the first of many social interactions for the day based on news being shared socially.

As everyone in the arena waited for the president to appear, I tweeted out a photo of the press corps area on the floor of the arena, along with the hashtag #POTUSatUNO, one of several in use at the event. Before long I picked up a response from Marjorie Sturgeon, a multimedia journalist for Omaha's Action 3 News, who noted she could see herself in my photo. Meanwhile, I was sharing news from the *Omaha World-Herald*, UNO student journalists, and other observers. Media recall research tells us that one of the best predictors of the news we will remember is the news we talk about. Thus, the news we share socially will become the news that matters most to us.

When important news breaks, it is likely we'll hear about it first through social media. When a mass shooter killed at least fifty-eight people and left more than five hundred people injured in Las Vegas in October 2017, there were a lot of contradictory stories circulating on Twitter and other social media. But with all the reports circulating, it could be hard to tell which stories should be believed. New Hampshire Public Radio reporter Casey McDermott noted that NPR included the following statement at the bottom of its web stories about the shooting:

> This is a developing story. Some things that get reported by the media will later turn out to be wrong. We will focus on reports from police officials and other authorities, credible news outlets and reporters who are at the scene. We will update as the situation develops.[58]



Twitter/@caseymcdermott

▲ New Hampshire Public Radio reporter Casey McDermott noted that NPR included the following statement at the bottom of its web stories about the Las Vegas shooting.

SECRET 6: Online Media Are Mobile Media

When the internet first started to gain a following, going online used to mean a person would need to physically go to a location where there was a computer that was plugged into an Ethernet cable. At the turn of the millennium, going online typically involved a slow, loud, dial-up line. However, as of 2019, approximately 75 percent of adults had access to high-speed broadband Internet at home, most likely using either a cable modem or a landline-based DSL service.[59] Increasingly, going online now means a person needs only to access a smartphone; in many parts of the world, the mobile Internet is the only Internet.

In January 2007, Apple announced the first version of its iconic iPhone, and the world of mobile internet would never be the same. It is not that the iPhone was the first phone to access the internet. The BlackBerry had been around for eight years at that point with its little chiclet keyboard. But the BlackBerry was always primarily an email and messaging device.[60] If the BlackBerry looked like

a glorified pager, Apple's iPhone looked like something out of Steven Spielberg's futuristic movie *Minority Report* with its touch screen interface and full internet access.[61] Android phones featuring Google's mobile operating system were launched in the United States in October 2008, bridging the gap between the iPhone and the BlackBerry with both a touch screen and a slide-out keyboard.[62]

In 2013, the *Washington Post* reported that mobile internet use was expected to grow at a rate of 66 percent a year globally as an increased number of people connect more devices online. In fact, the number of online devices in the world was expected to exceed the number of people on earth. (You wondering when the computers are going to take over? They already outnumber us.)[63] In addition to outnumbering people, mobile devices have outnumbered traditional personal computers since 2012.[64]

With the prevalence of mobile media, going online is not something we do; it's something we are. In the days of AOL and dial-up internet, going online involved planning for internet use at a specific time and space. With the coming of broadband access, you could go online as much as you wanted, but you were still tethered to a space. But with mobile internet, the online world is where we live. It goes with us everywhere. We have moved to a world where, instead of deliberately going online, we need to deliberately go offline.

Another way to get a feel for the growing impact of mobile media is to look at the size of the audience for various channels. Those that allow people to express themselves publicly through their mobile devices have much bigger audiences than those that call for passive consumption. So, Facebook has 2.5 billion active monthly users, YouTube has 2 billion, and the 2019 Super Bowl (on television) had an audience of 98.2 million. Think about it—the Super Bowl has less than 4 percent of the audience size of Facebook.[65]

If you look outside the United States, the use of mobile media becomes even more significant. Among refugees from Syria and elsewhere in the Middle East, mobile media are the only media people have access to. During the Arab Spring movement in Egypt in 2011, much of the news coming out of the country was by way of mobile phones.[66]

Computers and laptops are still important tools for going online, but with the growing power, size, and availability of mobile devices, we can now think of online being everywhere/all the time.

SECRET 7: There Is No "They"

If you listen to media criticism for long, you will hear a pair of words used over and over again: *they* and *them*. It is easy to take potshots at some anonymous bogeymen—they—who embody all evil. I even engaged in it at the beginning of this section with the title "The Seven Secrets About the Media 'They' Don't Want You to Know 2.0."

So, who are they? No one. Everyone. A nonspecific other we want to blame. Anytime I used *they* in a news story, my high school journalism teacher would ask who "they" were. And that's what you need to ask whenever you hear criticism of the media. It is not that the criticism is not accurate. It very well may be. But it probably applies to a specific media outlet, a specific journalist, a certain song, or a particular movie. But *we* can make few generalizations about an industry so diverse that it includes everything from a giant corporation spending a reported $1 billion to produce *Avengers: Infinity War* and *Avengers: Endgame* to young people posting photos and messages on Snapchat.[67] There are a lot of media out there, but no unified *them*.

CHAPTER REVIEW

CHAPTER SUMMARY ▶▶

Communication takes place at several levels, including intrapersonal (within the self), interpersonal (between individuals), group (between three or more individuals), and mass (between a single sender and a large audience). Mass communication is a process that covers an entire society, in which an individual or institution uses technology to send messages to large, mixed

audiences, most of whose members are not known to the sender. Communication is an interactive process and rarely takes place at just a single level.

The rapid growth of the mass media has led the public and critics to raise questions about the effects various media might have on both society and individuals. Researchers have suggested that the best way to control the impact of the media in our lives is to develop high levels of media literacy—an understanding of what the media are, how they operate, what messages they are delivering, what roles they play in society, and how audience members respond to these messages. Media literacy includes cognitive, emotional, aesthetic, and moral dimensions. Developing media literacy requires active work on a range of skills over a person's lifetime. These include acquiring the fundamentals of communication, acquiring language, acquiring an understanding of narrative, developing skepticism, intensive development, experiential exploring, critical appreciation, and social responsibility.

Mass communication can be examined in terms of the process of transmission; the rituals surrounding its consumption; the attention its messages draw to persons, groups, or concepts; or how audience members create meaning out of media content.

The first communication network was developed by the Roman Catholic Church, which could send messages reliably throughout Europe as early as the twelfth century. In the mid-fifteenth century, the development of printing made it possible for books and other publications to be mass produced for the first time, leading to numerous cultural changes. Books, magazines, newspapers, and other printed media forms became readily available, although they were expensive before steam-driven printing presses became common in the nineteenth century.

The electronic media emerged in the mid-nineteenth century with the invention of the telegraph, followed by recorded music, radio, movies, and television. These media allowed popular culture to be produced commercially and to be delivered easily and inexpensively into people's homes. The first interactive digital communication network, the internet, was developed starting in the late 1960s but wasn't available to the general public until the 1990s. Online media added a return channel to the mass communication process, initiating a much higher level of audience feedback. Online media also allowed individuals to disseminate their own ideas and information without the costs of a traditional mass medium.

Your text suggests that the following seven principles can guide your understanding of how the media operate: (1) The media are essential components of our lives, (2) there are no mainstream media, (3) everything from the margin moves to the center, (4) nothing is new—everything that happened in the past will happen again, (5) all media are social, (6) online media are mobile media, and (7) there is no "they."

KEY TERMS

legacy media 4
communication 4
intrapersonal communication 5
interpersonal communication 5
group communication 6
mass communication 6
media literacy 8
mass media 10
Sender Message Channel Receiver (SMCR) or transmission model 11
sender 11
message 11
encoding 11
channel 11
receiver 11
decoding 11
noise 11
ritual model 12
publicity model 12
reception model 13

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How did the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic affect how and where we consume mass media?
2. What are the four different levels of communication? Explain how many of our interactions with mass communication involve several levels of communication.
3. What are the elements that make mass communication mass? Would you consider social media like Facebook to be mass communication? Why or why not?
4. Some people compare the development of the internet to the invention of moveable type and the printing press. Do you think they are of comparable importance? Why or why not?
5. List two of the Seven Secrets and provide a current example of each from the news.

CHAPTER 2

MASS COMMUNICATION EFFECTS

How Society and Media Interact

Theo Wargo/Staff/Getty Images