

**MCQUAIL'S
MEDIA & MASS
COMMUNICATION
THEORY**

ION

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The text serves two purposes and can therefore be best used on two levels. First, it is a narrative – a ‘grand narrative’ even – of the field of media and mass communication theory and research: where it comes from, what traditions of thinking and studying have shaped it, how we come to observe and interpret media and the mass communication process today. Secondly, it can be used by readers as a resource for learning about a particular topic. There are several ways this can be approached. The table of contents provides an initial orientation, or map, to the book, and each chapter begins with a list of the main headings to help you orient yourself. The subject index at the end of the book includes all key words and topics and can also be used for an initial search. Each chapter contains boxes to help you explore the background to, relevance of and research on the themes and theories discussed in the book. At the end of every chapter you will find a curated list of further readings, intended to provide a guide to follow-up study of the particular issues outlined in that particular chapter. The extensive Reference list at the end of the book can be seen as your initial library, from where you can chart your own path through the literature.

PART 1

PRELIMINARIES

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INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK

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OUR OBJECT OF STUDY

At the heart of media and mass communication in society lies the realization that there is nothing ‘outside’ media anymore. In some way, all the experiences in everyday life are connected to media. Some of this refers to the professionally produced media at our disposal: from the smartphone to the television, from newspapers and books to motion pictures, digital games and recorded music. Yet much of the media that play such a profound role in people’s daily lives consist of data, content and experiences that are produced by us – via logins and uploads to social media and platforms, voluntary (and involuntary) participation in all kinds of digital surveillance mechanisms, and by making our own media. Although ‘mass’ audiences for the most part may be a thing of the past, the potentials of ‘mass’ media and ‘mass’ communication are still part of almost all our engagements with media.

Sonia Livingstone (2011: 1472) considers that the significance of media and mass communication theory lies in the fact that ‘everything is mediated—from childhood to war, politics to sex, science to religion—and more so than ever before [...] Nothing remains unmediated’. Her analysis of the human condition in the context of a media environment that is both ubiquitous and pervasive underscores our decision to expand the coverage in this book from mass communication theory to include the media more explicitly than before. As Livingstone suggests, (mass) communication has always been constitutive of society, fundamental to all human action. However, what is particular about the last few decades is how a whole range of rapidly expanding media technologies have amplified and accelerated human communication on an unprecedented scale. In the process of this ‘mediation of everything’ (Livingstone, 2009), media have permeated not only the world but also, and perhaps more importantly, the ways in which we (as humans) have access to, act in, and make sense of that world. The study of media and mass communication can therefore be seen as contributing to understanding their role in ‘the ordering of social life more generally’ (Couldry, 2004: 128).

Media and mass communication theory is crucial to consider, given the fundamental challenges of our time regarding big data, the role of algorithms and the dissolution of individuals into endless databanks, samples, targets and markets, the ‘Internet of things’ and a renewed scholarly as well as public interest in the political economy of digital culture, and the many efforts in the field (especially since the 2000s) to rethink and re-theorize the profound role media and mass communication play in everyday life, in politics, and in the construction of reality itself (Couldry and Hepp, 2016). The (continued and growing) significance of media and mass communication theory and research in part follows from its status as a ‘practical discipline’ (Craig, 2018), in that the field primarily concerns itself with what people and social institutions actually do with media – and is generally committed to answering societal communication problems with research of real-world relevance. Additionally, Jensen (2019: 144) considers the role media and communication

research play as ‘a strategically important (secondary) institution-to-think-with about the performance of media as (primary) institutions-to-think-with’. This is a ‘double hermeneutics’ typical of the field – as media scholars interpret a reality (such as a media text, a production process or audience behaviour) that has already been interpreted by the senders and receivers of media. In the process, both theory and practice – scholarly analysis and lived reality – (can) change.

The study of media and mass communication follows a few fundamental assumptions (paraphrasing Lang, 2013):

- First, media and mass communication are pervasive and ubiquitous.
- Secondly, media and mass communication act upon (and are acted upon by) people and their social environments.
- Thirdly, media and mass communication change both the environment and the person.
- Fourthly, the primary goals and questions of media and mass communication researchers are to demonstrate the various elements (production – content – reception), roles, influences and effects of media and mass communication, and, if possible, explain how they come about.

The foundational assumptions of the disciplined study of media and mass communication are grounded in a set of basic definitions. Mass communication, first and foremost, refers to messages transmitted to a large audience via one or more media. Media are the (technological and formally organized) means of transmission of such messages. Media theory considers how these messages mean different things to different people as determined by the different channels used to communicate them. Given the proliferation of media in people’s everyday lives, it becomes crucial not only to understand and explain how mediated (mass) communication works, but also to appreciate the role specific media play in bringing about certain meanings and impact.

The term ‘mass communication’ was coined, along with that of ‘mass media’, early in the twentieth century to describe what was then a new social phenomenon and a key feature of the emerging modern world that was being built on the foundations of industrialism and democracy. To some extent similar to the early twenty-first century, this was an age of mass migration into cities and across frontiers and also of struggle between forces of change and repression and of conflict. Mass media were born into the context and conflicts of this age of transition and have continued to be deeply implicated in the trends and changes of society and culture, as experienced at the personal level as well as that of society.

The early mass media (newspapers, magazines, phonogram, cinema and radio) developed rapidly to reach formats that are still largely recognizable today, with changes mainly of scale and diversification as well as the addition of television and the Internet in the

twentieth century. What were regarded as the key features of mass communication a century ago are still foremost in our minds today: their capacity to reach large swaths of the population rapidly; the universal fascination they hold; their stimulation of hopes and fears in equal measure; the presumed relation to sources of power in society; the assumption of great impact and influence.

Since the late twentieth century new technologies have been developed and taken up – most notably the Internet and mobile hardware and software – that constitute an alternative network of communication. Mass communication, in the sense of a large-scale, one-way flow of public content, continues unabated, and exists next to different types of content and flow that are also carried on a mass scale online. Next to mass communication there has emerged a new kind of system of information and communication on a global scale: **mass self-communication**. According to Castells (2007: 248), it is mass communication because it reaches potentially a global audience online, and it is simultaneously self-communication ‘because it is self-directed in the elaboration and sending of the message, self-selected in the reception of the message, and self-defined in terms of the formation of the communication space’.

Much has been made in the literature about the collapse, convergence and continued significance of mass communication theory. Whatever changes are underway there is no doubting the continuing significance of mass media in contemporary society, in the spheres of politics, culture, everyday social life and economics. In respect of politics, the media provide an arena of debate and a set of channels for making policies, candidates, relevant facts and ideas more widely known as well as providing politicians, corporations and brands, interest groups and agents of government with a means of publicity and influence. Through mass self-communication, the political realm becomes accessible to a variety of actors – both individuals sending and forwarding information, and all kinds of more or less transparent organizations seeking to influence elections and the political process through micro-targeted campaigns online.

In the realm of culture, the media are for most people the main channel of cultural representation and expression, and the primary source of images of social reality and materials for forming and maintaining social identity. At the same time, the media have become a playground (if not a battleground) of representations and symbolic struggles over meaning, as original sources compete with the parody and remix culture of the Web, disinformation spreads faster than fact-checked information can keep up with, and anyone can find confirmation of their personal biases and beliefs online. Everyday social life is strongly patterned by the routines of media use and infused by its contents through the way leisure time is spent, lifestyles are influenced, conversation is given its topics and models of behaviour are offered for all contingencies. Particularly through the widespread use of advanced mobile devices, people today have an instantly accessible and highly personalized world of information, culture and entertainment in the palm of their hand, and at their fingertips. In the process, the media have grown in economic

value, with ever larger and more international media corporations dominating the media market, with influence extending through sport, travel, leisure, food and clothing industries, and with interconnections with all information-based economic sectors – especially technology and telecommunications companies.

Our focus on mass communication is not confined to the mass media, but relates to all types and processes of communication that are extensive, public and technically mediated. In contrast with earlier editions of this book, and as we will outline below and in subsequent chapters, it would be an increasingly artificial manoeuvre to distinguish mass communication from other types of communication – especially interpersonal communication. Here the word ‘public’ not only means open to all receivers and to a recognized set of senders, but also relates to matters of information and culture that are of wide interest and concern in a society, without being addressed to any particular individual. There is no absolute line between what is private and what is public, and a key observation about our current media environment must be that ‘It used to take effort to be public. Today, it often takes effort to be private’ (boyd, 2010: n.p.). This book is designed to contribute to public scrutiny and understanding of media and mass communication in all its forms, and to provide an overview of ideas and research, guided by the themes and issues summarized below.

THEMES AND ISSUES IN MEDIA AND MASS COMMUNICATION

The contents of the book are cross-cut by a number of general themes that recur in discussions of the social origins, significance and effects of communication, whether at the personal level or that of a whole society. While acknowledging that many more are possible, and that the different matters cross-cut and overlap in various ways, we identify the main themes as follows:

- *Time.* Communication takes place in time and it matters when it occurs and how long it takes. Communication technology has steadily increased the speed at which a given volume of information can be transmitted from point to point. It also stores information for recovery at a later point in historic time. Mass media content in particular serves as a store of memory for a society and for groups within it, and this can be selectively recovered or lost. The way personal data are recorded, stored and used online is a matter of great public concern, involving individual consumers, policy-makers, the legal system and a range of companies and corporations.
- *Place.* Communication is produced in a given location and reflects features of that context. It serves to define a place for its inhabitants and to establish an identity.

It connects places, reducing the distance that separates individuals, countries and cultures. Major trends in mass communication are said to have a delocalizing effect, or to establish a new global ‘place’, which people may not only recognize as familiar, but at times they may even come to prefer the ‘placeless place’ of a mediated reality (as can be the case for certain online communities).

- *Power.* Social relationships are structured and driven by power, where the will of one party is imposed on another, whether legitimately or not, or by influence, where the wishes of another are sought out or followed. Communication as such has no power of compulsion but it is an invariable component and a frequent means of the exercise of power, whether effectively or not. Despite the generally voluntary character of attention to (and participation in) mass media, the question of their power over people is never far away, as are related concerns regarding the power of media to bridge social differences as well as reinforce them, and to both combat and enhance existing social inequalities.
- *Social reality.* The assumption behind classical theory of media and mass communication is that we inhabit a ‘real’ world of material circumstances and events that can be known. In this view, the media provide us with reports or reflections of this reality, with varying degrees of accuracy, completeness or dependability. The notion of ‘truth’ is often applied as a standard to the contents of news and non-fiction, however difficult to define and assess – especially in a time of ‘fake news’ and the rapid spread of disinformation online. With the rise of the Internet has come a growing body of work that considers the contemporary ‘mediation of everything’ as collapsing the boundaries between online and offline life, between public and private communication, and between mediated and non-mediated lived experience (introducing a ‘mixed’ reality).
- *Meaning.* A related theme that continually arises concerns the interpretation of the ‘message’, or content, of mass media. Most theories of mass media depend on some assumption being made about the meaning of what they carry, whether viewed from the point of view of the sender, the receiver or the neutral observer. As noted above, there is no unique source of meaning and no way of saying for certain what is meant, providing an endless potential for dispute and uncertainty.
- *Causation and determinism.* It is in the nature of theory to try to solve questions of cause and effect, whether by proposing some overall explanation that links observations or by directing inquiry to determine whether one factor caused another. Questions of cause arise not only in relation to the consequences of media messages on individuals, but also in relation to historical questions of the rise of media institutions in the first place and the reasons why they have certain typical characteristics of production process, content and appeal. Do the media cause effects in society, or are they themselves more the outcome and reflection of prior and deeper social forces?
- *Mediation.* As an alternative to the idea of cause and effect, we can consider the media to provide occasions, links, channels, arenas and platforms for information and

ideas to circulate. By way of the media, meanings are formed and social and cultural forces operate freely according to various logics and with no predictable outcome. The process of mediation inevitably influences or changes the meaning received and there is an increasing tendency for ‘reality’ to be adapted to the demands of media presentation rather than vice versa.

- *Identity*. This refers to both an individual sense of wholeness (‘self-identity’) and to a shared sense of belonging to a culture, society, place or social grouping (‘social identity’) and involves many factors, including nationality, language, work, ethnicity, religion, belief, lifestyle, etc. The mass media are associated with many different aspects of self- and social identity formation, maintenance and dissolution. They can drive as well as reflect social change and lead to either more or less integration.
- *Cultural difference*. At almost every turn, the study of media-related issues reminds us how much the workings of mass communication and media institutions, despite their apparent similarities across the globe, are affected by differences in culture at the level of individual, subgroup, nation, and so on. The production and use of mass media are cultural practices that can both reinforce and resist the universalizing tendencies of the technologies involved, and of much mass-produced content.
- *Governance*. This refers to all the means by which the various media are regulated and controlled by laws, rules, customs and codes, as well as by market management. There is a continuing evolution in these matters in response to changes in technology and society.

When we speak of the issues that will be dealt with in this book, we are referring to more specific matters that are problematic or in dispute in the public arena. They relate to questions on which public opinion often forms, on which governments may be expected to have policies for prevention or improvement, or on which the media themselves might have some responsibility. Not all issues are problematic in the negative sense, but they involve questions of current and future trends that are significant for good or ill. No list of issues can be complete, but the following comprise the main headings that come to mind when studying the literature of the field as represented in this book. They serve as a reminder of the significance of the topic of media in society and the potential relevance of theory to handling such questions. The issues are divided according to the terrain they occupy.

- Relations with politics and the state
 - Political campaigns and propaganda.
 - Citizen participation and democracy.
 - Media role in relation to war and terrorism.
 - Influence on the making of foreign policy.
 - Serving or resisting sources of power.

- Cultural issues
 - Globalization of content and flow.
 - Promoting the quality of cultural life and cultural production.
 - Effects on cultural and social identity.
- Social concerns
 - The definition of reality and mediation of social experience.
 - Links to aggression, crime and violence.
 - Relation to social order and disorder.
 - Promotion of an information and media literate society.
 - The use and quality of leisure time.
 - Social and cultural inequality.
- Normative questions
 - Freedom of speech and expression.
 - Social and cultural inequality: class, ethnicity, gender and sexuality.
 - Media norms, ethics and professionalism.
 - Media accountability and social responsibility.
- Economic concerns
 - Degree of concentration.
 - Commercialization of content.
 - Privacy and surveillance capitalism.
 - Global imperialism and dependency.

MANNER OF TREATMENT

The book has been written as a continuous narrative, following a certain logic. It begins with a brief history of the different media, followed by a general overview of the main concepts and theories that deal with the relation between media and mass communication on the one hand and (individuals and groups in) society and culture on the other. Subsequently, the sequence of content follows a line from the ‘source’, in the form of mass media organizations, to the content they produce and disseminate, to reception by audiences and to a range of possible effects. This does seem to imply in advance a view of how we should approach the subject, although that is not the intention.

Because of the wide-ranging character of the issues outlined above and the complexity of many of them, it is only possible to give quite brief accounts. Each chapter begins with

an introduction giving an overview of the main topics to be covered. Within chapters, the substance of the book is dealt with in headed sections. The topics are not defined according to the themes and issues just outlined, but they reflect the varying focus of theory and the research that has been carried out to test theories. In general, the reader will find a definition of relevant concepts, an explanation of the topic, a short review of relevant evidence from research and an overall assessment of matters of dispute. Each chapter ends with a brief overview of what has been concluded. Key points are summarized in the text in ‘boxes’ to provide a focus and to aid recall.

LIMITATIONS OF COVERAGE AND PERSPECTIVE

Although the book is wide-ranging in its coverage and is intended to have an application to the mass communication phenomenon in general, rather than to any particular country, the viability of this aim is limited in various ways. First, the authors have a location, a nationality, a subjective position and a cultural background that shape their experience, knowledge and outlook. There is much scope for personal judgement and it is impossible to avoid it, even when trying to be fair to the various approaches and positions found in the literature. Secondly, the ‘mass communication phenomenon’ is itself not independent of the cultural context in which it is observed, despite similarities of technology and tendencies to uniformity of media organizational form and conduct as well as content. Although some histories of the mass media institution consider it more or less exclusively as part of a process of ‘modernization’ from America and Europe to the rest of the world, there are different histories and the diffusion is far from a one-way or deterministic process. In short, this account of theory has an inevitable ‘western’ bias. Its body of theory derives to a large extent from institutionally dominant white sources, mainly located in Europe, Australia and North America and written in English, and the research reported to test the ideas is overwhelmingly from the same locations. This does not mean it is invalid for other settings, but it means that conclusions are provisional and that a much greater variety of ideas need to be formulated and tested.

We have endeavoured to include a wider range of voices and to nuance our perspective to suit for regional histories of media and mass communication. At the same time we acknowledge the under-representation of many voices in the scholarly debate, in part due to the uneven way research funding works and gets distributed, and also due to the nature of publication and citation practices in the key scholarly media and communication journals, which continue to privilege established white (Chakravarty, Kuo, Grubbs and McIlwain, 2018) and male (Knobloch-Westerwick, Glynn and Huge, 2013) voices. We are committed to heed the call from the field to disseminate diversity widely (Mayer, Press, Verhoeven and Sterne, 2017), even though we are bound to make numerous mistakes and omissions.

The nature of the relation between media and society depends on circumstances of time and place. As noted above, this book largely deals with mass media and mass

communication in modern, ‘developed’ nation states, mainly elective democracies with free-market (or mixed) economies which are integrated into a wider international set of economic and political relations of exchange, competition and also domination or conflict. It is most probable that mass media are experienced differently in societies with ‘non-western’ characteristics, especially those that are less individualistic and more communal in character, or less secular and more religious. The differences are not just a matter of more or less economic development, since profound differences of culture and long historical experience are involved. The problem goes deeper than an inevitable element of authorial ethnocentrism, since it also lies in the mainstream scholarly tradition that has its roots in western thought.

Although the aim is to provide as ‘objective’ an account as possible of theory and evidence, the study of media and mass communication cannot avoid dealing with questions of values and of political and social conflict. All societies have latent or open tensions and contradictions that often extend to the international arena. The media are inevitably involved in these disputed areas as producers and disseminators of meaning about the events and contexts of social life, private as well as public. It follows from these remarks that we cannot expect the study of media and mass communication to provide theoretically neutral, scientifically verified information about the ‘effects’ or the significance of something that is an immensely complex as well as intersubjective set of processes. For the same reasons, it is often difficult to formulate theories about mass communication in ways that are open to empirical testing, or that escape the conclusion that contextual, situational and environmental aspects have greater explanatory value than broad theories of media influence and effects. At the same time, it is clear to all who study media and mass communication that (mediated) communication is ‘fundamentally powerful and adaptive’ (Lang, 2013: 19). The solution, as many in the field would argue, is to consider theories in context, to develop research designs that are sensitive to individual, communal and cultural specificities, and overall to integrate perspectives and methods from the humanities and the social sciences.

Not surprisingly, the field of media theory is also characterized by widely divergent perspectives. A difference of approach between progressive and conservative tendencies can sometimes be discerned. Progressive theory is, for instance, critical of the power exercised by media in the hands of a dominant class in society (such as the state or large global corporations), while conservative theorists point to the ‘liberal bias’ of the news or the damage done by media to traditional values, and the perceived power of media to corrupt the minds, attitudes and behaviours of the young. There has also been a difference between a critical and a more applied approach to theory that does not necessarily correspond to the political axis. Lazarsfeld (1941) referred to this as a critical versus administrative orientation. Critical theory seeks to expose underlying problems and faults of media practice and to relate them in a comprehensive way to social issues, guided by certain values. Applied theory aims to harness an understanding of communication processes to solving practical

problems of using media and mass communication more effectively (Windahl, Signitzer and Olson, 2007). Given the intense nature of competition for students and research funding that the contemporary university faces, some suggest that this has privileged more applied, 'administrative' and quantitative types of research. On the other hand, we would like to signal an overall expansion of media and mass communication scholarship in all theoretical and empirical directions, as for example expressed in the growing output of research in countless journals, volumes, conferences, and other venues for the dissemination of academic work.

We can also distinguish two other axes of theoretical variation. One of these separates 'media-centric' from 'society-centric' (or 'socio-centric') approaches. The former approach attributes much more autonomy and influence to communication and concentrates on the media's own sphere of activity, as well as its materiality. Media-centric theory sees mass media as a primary mover in social change, driven forward by irresistible developments in information and communication technology. It also pays much more attention to the specific content of media and the potential consequences of the different kinds of media (print, audiovisual, mobile, etc.). Furthermore, media theory emphasizes the importance of the material properties of media, highlighting how elements of particular media as artefacts and infrastructures shape and influence people's experience.

Socio-centric theory mainly views the media as a reflection of larger social, political and economic forces. Theory for the media is a special application of broader social theory (Golding and Murdock, 1978). Theory about (mass) media from a socio-centric perspective uses social theory to historicize trends and developments regarding media and mass communication, emphasizing continuity over novelty. The role of (critical) social theory also puts media and mass communication in a broader context of social transformation and change, encouraging 'reflexivity about the position from which researchers research' when looking beyond media to find answers about what counts as good, just and desirable about the role and performance of media in society (Hesmondhalgh and Toynbee, 2008: 10). Whether or not society is driven by the media, it is certainly true that media and mass communication theory itself is so driven, tending to respond to each major shift of media technology and structure.

The second, horizontal, dividing line is between those theorists whose interest (and conviction) lies in the realm of culture, representation and ideas and those who emphasize material forces and factors. This divide corresponds approximately with certain other dimensions: humanistic versus social scientific; qualitative versus quantitative; and subjective versus objective. While these differences partly reflect the necessity for some division of labour in a wide territory and the multidisciplinary character of media study, they also often involve competing and contradictory ideas about how to pose questions, conduct research and provide explanations. These two alternatives are independent of each other, and between them they identify four different perspectives on media and society (Figure 1.1).

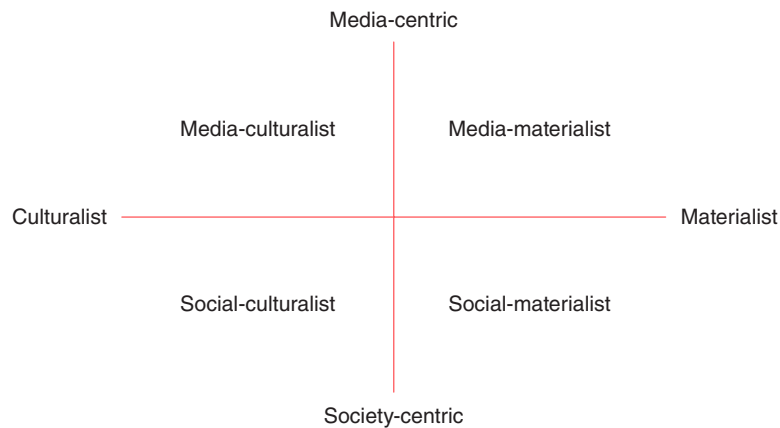


Figure 1.1 Dimensions and types of media theory. Four main approaches can be identified according to two dimensions: media-centric versus society-centric and culturalist versus materialist

The four types of perspective can be summarized as follows:

1. *A media-culturalist perspective.* This approach takes the perspective of the audience member in relation to some specific genre or example of media culture (e.g. reality TV, violent video games or online social networking) and explores the subjective meaning of the experience in a given context.
2. *A media-materialist approach.* Research in this tradition emphasizes the shaping of media content and therefore of potential effects, by the nature of the medium in respect of the technology and the social relations of reception and production that are implicated by this. It also attributes influence to the specific organizational contexts and dynamics of production.
3. *A social-culturalist perspective.* Essentially, this view subordinates media and media experience to deeper and more powerful forces affecting society and individuals. Social and cultural issues also predominate over political and economic ones.
4. *A social-materialist perspective.* This approach has usually been linked to a critical view of media ownership and control, which ultimately are held to shape the dominant ideology transmitted or endorsed by the media. Calls for more stringent regulation of technology and telecommunications industries – such as platforms and social media – tend to be informed by this perspective.

While these differences of approach can still be discerned in the structure of the field of enquiry, there has been a trend towards convergence between the different schools, and integration regarding theory and methods. Even so, the various topics and approaches outlined involve important differences of philosophy and theory that need careful articulation.

DIFFERENT KINDS OF THEORY

If theory is understood not only as a system of law-like propositions, but as any systematic set of ideas that can help make sense of a phenomenon, guide action or predict a consequence, then one can distinguish at least five kinds of theory which are relevant to media and mass communication. These can be described as: social scientific, cultural, normative, operational and everyday theory.

Social scientific theory offers general statements about the nature, working and effects of media and mass communication, based on systematic and objective observation of media and other relevant sources, which can in turn be put to the test and validated or rejected by similar methods. There is a large body of such theory and it provides much of the content of this book. It covers a very wide spectrum, from broad questions of society to detailed aspects of individual information sending and receiving. Some social scientific theory is concerned with understanding what is going on, some with developing a critique and some with practical applications in processes of public information or persuasion.

Cultural theory is much more diverse in character. In some forms it is evaluative, seeking to differentiate cultural artefacts according to some criteria of quality. Sometimes its goal is almost the opposite, seeking to challenge hierarchical classification as irrelevant to the true significance of culture. Different spheres of cultural production have generated their own corpus of cultural theory, sometimes along aesthetic or ethical lines, sometimes with a social-critical purpose. This applies to film, literature, television, graphic art, digital media, and any other media forms. While cultural theory demands clear argument and articulation, coherence and consistency, its core component is often itself imaginative and ideational. It resists the demand for testing or validation by observation, confident in its solid grounding in (normative) philosophy. Nevertheless, there are opportunities for combined cultural and scientific approaches, and the many problematics of the media call for both.

A third kind of theory can be described as normative since it is concerned with examining or prescribing how media ought to operate if certain social and public values are to be observed or attained. Such theory usually stems from the broader social philosophy or ideology of a given society. This kind of theory is important because it plays a part in shaping and legitimating media institutions and has considerable influence on the expectations concerning the media that are held by other social institutions and by the media's own audiences. A good deal of research into mass media has been stimulated by the wish to apply norms of social and cultural performance. A society's normative theories concerning its own media are usually to be found in laws, regulations, media policies, codes of ethics and the substance of public debate. While normative media theory is not in itself 'objective', it can be studied by the 'objective' methods of the social sciences (McQuail, 1992), just as much as its insistence on public values as the primary

drivers of debate and policy regarding the (converging) media, technology and telecommunications sector can be effectively grounded in humanistic enquiry (Van Dijck, Poell and De Waal, 2018).

A fourth kind of knowledge about the media can best be described as praxeological or operational theory since it refers to the practical ideas assembled and applied by both professional and amateur media practitioners in the conduct of their own media work (Deuze, 2007; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011; Duffy, 2017). Similar bodies of accumulated practical wisdom are to be found in most organizational and professional settings. In the case of the media, operational theory serves to guide solutions to fundamental tasks, including how to select news, please audiences, self-promote, design effective advertising, keep within the limits of what platforms and regulations permit, and relate effectively to sources and society. At some points it may overlap with normative theory, for instance in matters of journalistic ethics and codes of conduct, the call for greater social responsibility in public relations practice, and the game industry's accountability for its representation of women. Such knowledge merits the name of theory because it is usually patterned and persistent, even if rarely codified, and it is influential in respect of behaviour. It comes to light in the study of communicators and their organizations (for comprehensive reviews see Banks, Taylor and Gill, 2013; Paterson, Lee, Saha and Zoellner, 2016; Deuze and Prenger, 2019). Katz (1977) compared the role of the researcher in relation to media production to that of the theorist of music or philosopher of science who can see regularities which a musician or scientist does not even need to be aware of.

Finally, there is everyday or common-sense theory of media use, referring to the knowledge we all have from our own personal experience with media. This enables us to make sense of what is going on, and allows us to fit a range of media into our daily lives, to understand how its content is intended to be 'read' as well as how we like to use it, to know what the differences are between different media and media genres, and much more. On the basis of such 'theory' is grounded the ability to make consistent choices, develop patterns of taste, and construct lifestyles and identities as media users, producers and consumers. It also supports the ability to make critical judgements. All this, in turn, shapes what the media actually offer and sets both directions and limits to media influence. For instance, it enables us to distinguish between 'reality' and 'fiction', to 'read between the lines' or to see through the persuasive aims and techniques of advertising and other kinds of propaganda, to resist many of the potentially harmful impulses that the media are said to provoke. The working of common-sense theory can be seen in the norms for use of media which many people recognize and follow. The social definitions that mass media acquire are not established by media theorists or legislators, or even professional media makers themselves, but emerge from the experience and practices of people as media users over time. Such common sense can often be discredited based on scholarly research – a particular example would be the widespread public,

political and scientific concern about ‘screen time’ for children and teenagers, even though the research generally offers ‘little evidence for substantial negative associations between digital-screen engagement and adolescent well-being’ (Orben and Przybylski, 2019: 1). Common sense, assumptions based on lived experience, and all the biases and prejudices that come with such ‘praxeological’ theorizing are part and parcel of doing research about media and mass communication, both frustrating and enriching the field.

THE STUDY OF MEDIA AND MASS COMMUNICATION

Media and mass communication are topics among many for the humanities and social sciences, and only one part of a wider field of enquiry into human communication, including interpersonal and computer-mediated communication (CMC). Under the name ‘communication science’ (within the social sciences) and ‘media studies’ (in the humanities), the field has traditionally focused on media ownership and control, content and audiences (Miller, 2009). In the social sciences, the study of media and mass communication has been defined by Berger and Chaffee (1987: 17) as a field that ‘seeks to understand the production, processing and effects of symbol and signal systems by developing testable theories, containing lawful generalizations, that explain phenomena associated with production, processing and effects’. While this was presented as a ‘mainstream’ definition to apply to most research, in fact it is very much biased towards one model of enquiry – the ‘objective’ quantitative study of communicative behaviour and its causes and effects. It tends to be less successful in dealing with the nature of ‘symbol systems’ and signification, the process by which meaning is given and made in varied social and cultural contexts, and often bypasses the ‘why’ of communication. It also leaves something to be considered when it comes to questions of power and normative notions of what can be considered to be ‘good’ and ‘just’ when it comes to the relations between people, media and society. Likewise, the more qualitative and interpretative traditions more often found within the umbrella term ‘media studies’ are generally not based on replicable methods for the gathering and analysis of data – also because scholars in this tradition tend to advocate greater awareness of the influence of the researcher in the research encounter. However, in recent decades the oftentimes sharp divisions between these two fields have blurred (Brannen, 2005), leading to students being trained in both quantitative and qualitative methods, to the rise of more multimethod and triangulated approaches to research, as well as to the emergence of ‘hybrid’ fields such as digital methods (Rogers, 2013) and digital humanities (Terras, Nyhan and Vanhoutte, 2013).

Difficulties in defining the field have also arisen because of developments of technology, which have blurred the line between public and private communication and between mass, interpersonal and computer-mediated communication. It is now impossible to find

any single agreed definition of a science or study of communication, for a number of circumstantial reasons, but most fundamentally because there has never been an agreed definition of the central concept of ‘communication’ (while such uniform definitions for media have become equally complicated given the often digital, convergent and always-on properties of contemporary media). The term can refer to very diverse things, especially the act or process of information transmission; the giving or making of meaning; the sharing of information, ideas, impressions or emotions; the process of reception, perception and response; the exertion of influence; any form of interaction. To complicate matters further, communication can be either intentional or involuntary and the variety of potential channels and content is unlimited.

No ‘science of communication’ or ‘study of media’ can be independent and self-sufficient, given the origins of the study of media and (mass) communication in many disciplines and the wide-ranging nature of the issues that arise, including matters of economics, law, politics and ethics as well as culture. The study of communication has to be interdisciplinary and must adopt varied approaches and methods (see McQuail, 2003b). The range of theory, methods and (operational) definitions in the field of media and mass communication research is neither coherent nor consensual. Like any other academic field or discipline, communication science and media studies comprise a wide-ranging, heterogeneous and not necessarily consistent body of work. Given the ‘diversity and creative chaos’ (Calhoun, 2011: 1482) or rather ‘extraordinary pluralism’ (Fuchs and Qui, 2018: 220) in the field, our book does not aim to provide an overarching, all-encompassing theory of media and mass communication that would neatly ‘tie the room together’ (paraphrasing the character Jeffrey Lebowski in the 1998 movie *The Big Lebowski*). Instead, following Livingstone (2011), we highlight the ways in which the various parts that make up our field are connected, in the process identifying where the expertise and specific knowledges and arguments of the discipline lie. On the other hand, we do suggest that the field of media and mass communication theory has its own ‘grand narrative’ (Lyotard, [1979]1984), providing connections between the various themes, issues and approaches that are brought into conversation with each other in this book. We will return to this meta-narrative in the concluding chapter, but it is safe to say that it is grounded in a convergence of the concepts and categories we have traditionally used to study the seemingly stable processes of production, distribution and reception of media and mass communication, which in turn necessitates an interdisciplinary integration of theories and methods.

A useful way of locating the topic of media and mass communication in a wider field of communication enquiry is according to the different levels of social organization at which communication takes place. According to this criterion, mass communication can then be seen as one of several society-wide communication processes, at the apex of a pyramidal distribution of other communication networks according to this criterion (Figure 1.2). A communication network refers to any set of interconnected points

(persons or places) that enable the transmission and exchange of information between them. Mass communication is a network that connects very many receivers to one source, while recognizing how the ongoing digitalization and convergence of media can serve to conflate mass communication with other networks of communication – simply with a click or a swipe.

At each descending level of the pyramid indicated there is an increasing number of cases to be found, and each level presents its own particular set of problems for research and theorizing. In modern society there will often be one large public communication network, usually depending on the mass media, which can reach and involve all citizens to varying degrees, although the media system is also itself often fragmented according to regional and other social or demographic factors.

Mass media are not the only possible basis for an effective communication network that extends throughout a society. Alternative (non-mass media) technologies for supporting society-wide networks do also exist (especially the network of physical transportation, the telecommunications infrastructure and the postal system), but these usually lack the society-wide social elements and public roles which mass communication has. In the past (and in some places still today), society-wide public networks were provided by the church or state or by political organizations, based on shared beliefs and usually a hierarchical chain of contact. This extended from the ‘top’ to the ‘base’ and employed diverse means of communication – from broadcast channels to newspapers, via dedicated online communities and government-controlled telecommunications providers – ranging from formal publications all the way to personal contacts.

Alternative communication networks can be activated under unusual circumstances to replace mass media, for instance in the case of a natural disaster, major accident or outbreak of war, or another emergency. In the past, direct word of mouth was the only possibility, while today mobile telephones and the Internet can be effectively employed for interconnecting a large population. In fact, the original motive for designing the Internet in the USA (through both joint and separate efforts of academics and the military) in the 1970s was precisely to provide an alternative communication system in the event of a nuclear attack.

At a level below that of the whole society, there are several different kinds of communication network. One type duplicates the social relations of larger society at the level of region, city or town and may have a corresponding media system of its own (local press, radio, etc.). Another is represented by the company, work organization or profession, which may not have a single location but is usually very integrated within its own organizational boundaries, within which much communication flow takes place. A third type is that represented by the ‘institution’ – for instance, that of government, or education, or justice, or religion, or social security. The activities of a social institution are always diverse and also require correlation and much communication, following patterned routes and forms. The networks involved in this case are limited to achieving certain limited ends

(e.g. education, maintaining order, circulating economic information, etc.) and they are not open to participation by all.

Below this level, there are even more and more varied types of communication network, based on some shared feature of daily life: an environment (such as a neighbourhood), an interest (such as music), a need (such as the care of small children) or an activity (such as sport). At this level, the key questions concern attachment and identity, co-operation and norm formation. At the intragroup (e.g. family) and interpersonal levels, attention has usually been given to forms of conversation and patterns of interaction, influence, affiliation (degrees of attachment) and normative control. At the intrapersonal level, communication research concentrates on the processing of information (e.g. attention, perception, attitude formation, comprehension, recall and learning), the giving of meaning and possible effects (e.g. on knowledge, opinion, self-identity and attitude).

This seemingly neat pattern has been complicated by the growing ‘globalization’ of social life, in which media and mass communication play an important part, mainly regarding their role in offering a window on (and a way for universal comparison of) news, information and culture from all over the world into the comforts of our homes (and, in the case of mobile media, our hands). This introduces a yet higher level of communication and exchange to consider – that of crossing and even ignoring national frontiers, in relation to an increasing range of activities (economic, political, scientific, publicity, sport, lifestyle, entertainment, etc.). Organizations and institutions are less confined within national frontiers, and individuals can also satisfy communication needs outside their own society and their immediate social environments. The once strong correspondence between patterns of personal social interaction in shared space and time on the one hand, and systems of communication on the other, have been much weakened, and our cultural and informational choices have become much wider – which of course does not mean people are all making use of this.

This is one reason why notions of ‘networked communication’ (Cardoso, 2008) governing a ‘network society’ (Castells, 1996; Van Dijk, 2005), and a ‘networked self’ in the context of media (Papacharissi, 2010, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d), have taken hold, suggesting that the logic of networks – grounded in the rapid rise of new information technologies and spurred on by the decline of nation states and other traditional forms of institutional organization in society – has become the most important causal power in explaining how people experience, participate and make sense of themselves and the world. Such developments also mean that networks are to an increasing degree not confined to any one ‘level’ of society or communication, as implied by Figure 1.2. New hybrid (both public and private, both individual and collective) means of communication allow networks to form more easily without the usual ‘cement’ of shared space or personal acquaintance.

In the past, it was possible to match a particular communication technology approximately with a given ‘level’ of social organization as described, with television at the

highest level, the press and radio at the regional or city level, internal systems, telephone and mail at the institutional level, and so forth. Advances in communication technology and their widespread adoption mean that this is no longer possible. The Internet, for instance, supports communication at virtually all levels – and as it moves gradually into all other channels and applications, it potentially transforms every level of communication into any other level. It also sustains chains or networks that connect the social ‘top’ with the ‘base’ and are vertical (in both directions) or diagonal, not just horizontal. For instance, a political social media account can provide access to political leaders and elites as well as to citizens at the grass-roots level, allowing a wide range of patterns of flow. The society-wide communicative function of the ‘traditional’ core mass media of newspapers, television and radio has not greatly changed or disappeared, but their near monopoly of public communication increasingly runs parallel to the power of a variety of networks and platforms to publish and circulate information with great impact.

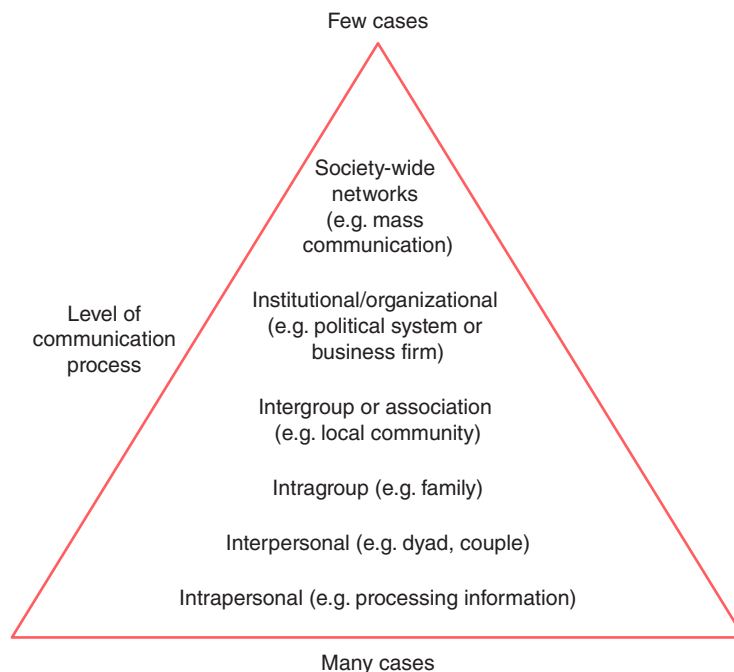


Figure 1.2 The pyramid of communication networks: mass communication is one among several processes of social communication

Despite the complexity of modern society and the contemporary media environment, each level indicates a range of similar questions for communication theory and research. These are posed in Box 1.1.

1.1

Questions for theory and research about communication networks and processes

- Who is connected to whom in a given network and for what purpose?
- What is the pattern and direction of flow?
- How does communication take place (channels, languages, codes, protocols)?
- What types of content are observed?
- What are the outcomes of communication, intended or unintended?

TRADITIONS OF ANALYSIS: STRUCTURAL, BEHAVIOURAL AND CULTURAL

While the questions raised at different levels are similar in very general terms, in practice very different concepts are involved, and the reality of communication differs greatly from level to level. For instance, a conversation between two family members takes place according to different ‘rules’ from those governing a news broadcast to a large audience, a television quiz show or a chain of command in a work organization. For this reason, among others, the scholarly pursuit of media and (mass) communication has, necessarily, to be constructed from several different bodies of theory and evidence, drawn from several disciplines and academic traditions (especially sociology and psychology in the earlier days, but now also economics, history and literary and film studies and more besides), as well as unique approaches developed from within. What cut across all of this are three main alternative approaches to what we are primarily interested in when we study media and mass communication: the structural, the behavioural and the cultural.

The *structural* approach derives mainly from sociology, history, politics, law and economics. Its starting point is ‘socio-centric’ rather than ‘media-centric’ (as shown in Figure 1.1), and its primary object of attention is likely to be media systems and organizations and their relationship to the wider society. In so far as questions of media content arise, the focus is likely to be on the effect of social structure and media systems on the patterns and circulation of news, (dis-)information and entertainment. This includes, for instance, the influence of micro-targeted advertising on the outcome of elections, or the role of news management and PR in government policy and business performance. The fundamental

dynamics of media phenomena are located in the exercise and abuse of power, in the economy and the socially organized application of technology. The structural approach to media analysis is more linked to the needs of media policy formation, of articulating media with public values, and concerns over human (and equal) rights in a digital context.

The *behavioural* approach has its principal roots in psychology and social psychology but it also has a sociological variant. In general, the primary object of interest is individual human behaviour, especially in matters to do with choosing, processing and responding to communication messages over time. Mass media use is generally treated as a form of motivated (yet also automatic and reflexive) action that has a certain function or use for the individual and also some objective consequences. Psychological approaches are more likely to use experimental methods of research based on individual subjects. The sociological variant focuses on the behaviour of members of socially defined populations and favours the multivariate analysis of representative survey data collected in natural conditions. Individuals are classified according to relevant variables of social position, disposition and behaviour, and the variables can be statistically manipulated. In the study of organizations, (participant) observation is commonly adopted. This approach is often found in relation to the study of persuasion, propaganda and advertising. Communication is primarily understood in the sense of transmission.

The *cultural* approach has its roots in the humanities, in anthropology and in linguistics. While very broad in potential, it has been mainly applied to questions of power, meaning, language and discourse, to the minutiae of particular contexts and experiences. The study of media is part of a wider field of cultural studies. It is more likely to be ‘media-centric’ (although this is an object of intense debate), sensitive to differences between media and settings of media transmission and reception, most interested in the in-depth understanding of particular contents and situations. Its methods favour the qualitative and in-depth analysis of social and human signifying practices and the analysis and interpretation of ‘texts’ (which can be the content of media, but also their materiality, the way people make sense of them, and the formulaic, protocol-based and routinized nature of the media production process). The cultural approach draws on a much wider range of theory, including feminist, philosophical, semiotic, psychoanalytic, film and literary theories.

It is important to note that these three traditions, much like the different types of theory and perspectives discussed earlier, have as much overlap as they can be considered to be distinct. It is our contention that a full understanding of media and mass communication in society needs insights from all these traditions, and may particularly benefit from integrated approaches.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The contents are divided into eighteen chapters, grouped according to eight headings. The first substantive part, ‘Preliminaries’, articulates the need for an overview of media and

mass communication theory in the context of the profound changes and transformations in information and communication technologies in the decade since the previous edition of our book was published. It offers a brief history of the key mass media, articulating media specificity with regard to regulation and control, affordances and adoption. This overview concludes with an appreciation of the various ways in which these different media (and related industry sectors) are converging, and how this impacts our understanding of the role media and mass communication play. The second part, ‘Theories’, provides a grounding in the most basic and also the most general ideas about media and mass communication, with particular reference to the many relations that exist between media and social and cultural life. It starts with a brief historical review of the rise of mass media and follows with an explanation of the richly diverse ways of studying and theorizing mass media and society. The differences stem from varying perspectives on the media, the diversity of topics addressed, and the different ways of defining the issues and problems depending on the values of the observer. There is not a single set of methods specific to the study of media and mass communication, and it can be argued that the field is becoming increasingly diverse when it comes to approaches to research and theory.

There are different kinds of theory, ranging from strictly scientific (and therefore grounded in empirical research) to normative and everyday theories that people refer to when discussing media among each other. Most basically, a theory is a general proposition, itself based on observation and logical argument, that states the relationship between observed phenomena and seeks either to explain, critique or to predict the relationship, in so far as this is possible. The main purpose of theory is to make sense of an observed reality and guide the collection and evaluation of evidence. A concept is a core term in a theory that summarizes an important aspect of the problem under study and can be used in collecting and interpreting evidence. It requires careful definition. When making sense of some aspect of the dynamic process in media and mass communication, it sometimes helps to use a model to represent the phenomenon under investigation. A model is a selective representation of a phenomenon in verbal or diagrammatic form. It can also describe the relationship between elements in a process – for example, how the process develops over time, where different concepts or actors are located in the process, and how power flows across the process.

The ‘Theories’ part deals separately with ‘society’ and ‘culture’, although the separation is artificial since one cannot exist without the other. But by convention, ‘society’ refers primarily to social relationships within and across social institutions of all kinds, ranging from those of power and authority (government) to friendship and family relations as well as all material aspects of life. ‘Culture’ refers to ideas, beliefs, identity and symbolic expression of all kinds, including language, visuals, art, information and entertainment, plus customs and rituals. There are two other components. One relates to the norms and values that apply to the conduct of media organizations. Here theory deals with what media ought to be doing or not doing, rather than simply with why they do

what they do. Not surprisingly, there are divergent views on this matter, especially given the strong claims that media make to freedom from regulation and control in the name of free speech and artistic expression and the strong public feelings that also exist about their responsibilities. Normative discussions about the role of media as a social institution are further complicated by the fact that many new and powerful companies have entered the media system – most notably telecommunication providers, platforms (such as Facebook and Google), and other so-called ‘Net native’ companies that increasingly offer media products and services (consider, for example, Apple, Amazon and Netflix) while insisting they are not media companies in order to prevent falling under the same regulatory regime as broadcast organizations and publishers.

A second component of the ‘Theories’ section deals with the consequences of media change for theory. Given the ongoing digitalization and convergence of all sectors of the telecommunications, information and media industries, the issue faced is whether such constant transformations require a new and different theory from that applying to ‘mass communication’ and whether mass communication is in decline. The approach in this book is that ‘old’ and ‘new’ media are not as distinct as they seem to be, and that processes of mass communication, interpersonal communication and mass self-communication exist side by side (and often overlap). Media and mass communication research can therefore benefit from classical theories as well as articulate what is different, innovative and possibly new.

The third part, entitled ‘Structures’, deals with three main topics. First, it deals with the overall media system and the way it is typically organized at a national as well as an international level. The central concept is that of a media ‘institution’, which applies to media both as a branch of industry subject to economic laws, and as a social institution meeting needs in society and subject to some requirements of law and regulation, guided in some degree by public policy. The media are unusual in being a business ‘invested with a public interest’ and yet free, for the most part, from any positive obligations (the exception being public broadcasting in most countries). We will consider developments of media (de-)concentration, digitization, and the increasingly global structure of the media industry.

The second topic dealt with is a detailed enquiry into the normative expectations from media on the part of the public, government and audiences, with particular references to the principles and standards of their performance. What are the standards that should apply, how can media performance be assessed, and by what means can the media be made accountable? Thirdly, this part looks at the growing phenomenon of global media and the ‘world system’ of media that has its origins both in the new computer-based technologies and online modes of production, transmission and (providing) connection and in larger globalizing trends of society.

Part 4, headed ‘Organizations’, focuses on the locus of media production, whether a firm or a department within a larger firm, or local, regional and global production networks of firms and media professionals, and deals with the numerous influences that

shape the production process and the entire product cycle of media. These include pressures and demands from outside the boundaries of the organization, the requirements of routine ‘mass production’ of news and culture, and the personal and professional tendencies of the ‘mass communicators’. There are several theories and models that seek to explain observed regularities in the process of the selection and internal shaping of ‘content’ before it is transmitted. The most pressing issues in these fields of research are the increased integration of various businesses and modes of production in media and mass communication industries, and the growing role the audience plays in the production process.

The ‘Content’ part (Part 5) is divided into two chapters, the first of which deals primarily with approaches to, and methods for, the analysis of content. Aside from the simple description of media output according to internally given labels, it is not at all easy to describe content in a more illuminating manner, since there is no agreement on where the ‘true meaning’ is to be found, as between its producers, its recipients and the text of the ‘message’ itself. Secondly, theory and evidence are assembled to account for some of the observed regularities in content, with particular reference to the news genre, and to the emergence of new storytelling traditions and formats that seek to engage audiences across multiple media channels, devices and platforms.

In Part 6, ‘Audiences’, the ‘audience’ refers to all the many sets of people using media. These are the targets of mass media messages or those who engage in some kind of mediated self-communication. Without the audience there would be no media and mass communication, and it plays a dynamic role in shaping the flow and effects of media. Audience analysis has numerous tasks and can be carried out for many different purposes. It is far more than audience ‘measurement’ on behalf of the media industry and it has evolved along several theoretically distinct paths. Audience theory deals not only with the ‘why’ of media use, but also with its determinants and correlates in social and cultural life. Media ‘use’ has become so intertwined with other activities that we can no longer treat it in isolation from other factors of our experience, nor can we appreciate it solely in ‘individual’ terms. A key issue to be considered is the evolution of media beyond the stage of mass communication, making a concept based on the image of ‘just’ a recipient of media inadequate.

Questions of media ‘Effects’ (Part 7) stand at the start and at the conclusion of the book and are at the centre of social and cultural concern about mass media. They continue to give rise to different theories and much disagreement. Alternative paths towards the goal of assessing effects are outlined. Differences of type of effect are explained, especially the differences between intended and unintended effect and between short-term impact on individuals, groups and communities and longer-term influence on culture and society. The main areas of media effects theory and research still tend to focus, on the one hand, on the potentially harmful social and cultural effects of the most popular forms of content, especially those that involve representations of violence, and on the other hand,

on media influence on public knowledge and opinion. Given the contemporary context of a profoundly mediated lifeworld, theorizing media influence and effects faces unique challenges. As Neuman (2016) outlines, there are more sources of authoritative knowledge to choose from, more ways in which people and companies can disseminate and influence public opinion, and more ways of reinforcing beliefs by ignoring unwanted information and remaining within niches of ideological seclusion.

Additionally, it has become crucial to not just consider the reception effects of mediated messages (on people and institutions), but in an age of mass self-communication one also has to appreciate the ‘self-effects’ of creating or sending messages for the purpose of communicating to others (Valkenburg, 2017). In fact, a review of the emerging research in this area suggests that self-effects may be stronger than reception effects, and that self-effects may reinforce reception effects. As Patti Valkenburg concludes, these and other developments call for integrative research that crosses different communication subdisciplines. This book correspondingly ends with Part 8, an ‘Epilogue’, discussing possible futures of media and mass communication theory as its themes and issues increasingly feature in the research questions of disciplines across the university.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has been intended to provide a brief sketch of the overall field of enquiry within which the humanistic and social scientific study of media and mass communication is located. It should be clear that the boundaries around the various topics are not clearly fixed, but change according to shifts of technology and society. Nevertheless, there is a distinct community of scholarship that shares a set of concerns, concepts and tools of analysis that will be explored in the chapters that follow.

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2

THE RISE, DECLINE AND RETURN OF MASS MEDIA

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The aim of this chapter is to set out the approximate sequence of development of the present-day set of mass media. It is also to indicate major turning points and to tell briefly something of the circumstances of time and place in which different media acquired their public definitions in the sense of their institutional establishment as technologies and industries of mass appeal and production, perceived utility for audiences, and their role in society. These definitions have tended to form early in the history of any given medium and to have been subsequently adapted in the light of newer media and changed conditions. This is a continuing process. The chapter concludes with some reflections about the continued significance of mass media and mass communication in the context of ubiquitous digital, converging, and always online devices and processes.

FROM BEGINNINGS TO MASS MEDIA

In the opening chapter we distinguished between a *process* of mass communication and the actual *media* that make it possible. The occurrence of human communication over time and at a distance is much older than the mass media now in use. This process was integral to the organization of early societies, which persisted for long periods and extended over large areas. Even the element of large-scale (mass) dissemination of ideas was present at an early point in time, in the propagation of political and religious awareness and obligations. The first mass media as a vehicle for disseminating culture and transmitting messages from a ruling elite to the people and vice versa have been labelled as ‘oramedia’ in an African context (Ugboajah, 1986). **Oramedia** consist of various forms of indigenous media, including opera, music, dance, drama, poetry and folktales. Similarly, the production of poetry has historically been a key source of mass communication in the Arab world – in particular for state propaganda and religious decrees (Armbrust, 2012). It is important to note that some of the earliest theories of media and mass communication – and in particular those outside the western world – were developed to account for the various ways in which social groups, local communities and indigenous storytelling traditions resisted, subverted or provided a significant alternative to mass communication processes and mass-mediated messages. Next to Ugboajah’s concept of oramedia, Luiz Beltrão (1971) developed a theory of ‘**folkcommunication**’ in the 1960s, articulating a process of interpersonal and group forms of cultural expression (mainly identified among marginalized groups and lower classes) existing independently of those by mass and industrialized forms of communication, often developing in contestation of such mass media, and at times being incorporated by the media industry (Woitowicz and Gadini, 2018). The emergence and existence of mass media always exists next to already established mass communication traditions, and develop in conjunction with such forms of expression.

The earliest forms of mass media were printed. Printed mass media got their start in China in approximately 600 BC, as the forerunner of today's newspaper was printed as a daily gazette of government proclamations and edicts – followed some 500 years later by a similar printed version in ancient Rome. By the early Middle Ages, the church in Europe had elaborate and effective means in place to ensure transmission to everyone without exception. This could be called mass communication, although it was largely independent of any 'media' in the contemporary sense, aside from the sacred texts. When independent media arrived in the form of printing, authorities of church and state across all continents reacted with alarm at the potential loss of control that this represented and at the opportunities that opened up for disseminating new and deviant ideas. In much of the Asia-Pacific region this led to tight control over media and direct **censorship** – a practice more or less invented in China with publication ordinances forbidding certain types of private printing decreed as far back as 835 AD (Green, 2003: 3). Other regions of the world share similar histories of tight state, religious or military control over the (earliest types of) mass media, either through direct ownership or censorship. In Europe, the bitter propaganda struggles of the religious wars during the sixteenth century are evidence enough of the power attributed to mass media. It was a historical moment when a technology for mass communication – the printing press – irrevocably acquired a particular social and cultural definition.

In telling the history of mass media, we deal with four main elements that are of significance in the wider life of society. These are:

- certain communicative purposes, needs or uses;
- technologies for communicating publicly to many at a distance;
- forms of social organization that provide the skills and frameworks for organizing production and distribution;
- forms of regulation and control.

These elements do not have a fixed relationship to each other and depend very much on the circumstances of time and place. Sometimes a technology of communication is applied to a pre-existing need or use, as when printing replaced copying by hand or the telegraph replaced the physical transport of key messages. But sometimes a technology, such as film or broadcast radio, precedes any clear evidence of need.

The combinations of the above elements that actually occur are usually dependent both on material factors and on features of the social and cultural climate that are not easy to pin down. Even so, it seems probable that a certain degree of freedom of thought, expression and action has been the single most necessary condition for the development of print and other media, although not for the initial invention. In general, the more open the society, the more inclination there has been to develop communication technology to its fullest potential, especially in the sense of being universally available and widely used.

More closed or repressive regimes either limit development of or set strict boundaries to the ways in which technology can be used. Printing was not introduced into Russia until the early seventeenth century and not in the Ottoman Empire until 1726.

In the following summary of the history and characteristics of different media, a predominantly ‘western’ perspective and set of values are being applied, since the institutional frameworks of mass media were initially mainly western (European or North American). Even so, cultural differences in part trump technological imperatives and vice versa, and we endeavour to acknowledge key divergences across the various continents (without claiming to offer a complete account for regional diversity). The history of media shows up certain important differences between societies, for instance the large variation in the readership of books and newspapers, the significance of particular media for specific regions, such as community radio in Africa or the genre of **telenovela** throughout Latin America (starting on the radio in the 1930s, then developed for television since the 1950s), or in the rates and pace of Internet diffusion or broadband connectivity.

In the following pages, each of the main mass media is identified in respect of its technology and material form, typical formats and genres, perceived uses and institutional setting.

PRINT MEDIA: THE BOOK

The history of modern media begins with the printed book – certainly a kind of revolution, yet initially only a technical device for reproducing a range of texts the same as, or similar to, what was already being extensively copied by hand. Only gradually does printing lead to a change in content – more secular, practical and popular works (especially in the vernacular languages) as well as political and religious pamphlets and tracts – which played a part in the transformation of the medieval world. At an early date, laws and proclamations were also printed by royal and other authorities. Thus, there occurred a revolution of society in which printing played an inseparable part (Eisenstein, 1978).

The antecedents of the book lie in classical times when there were numerous established authors and when works of many kinds, both fictional and non-fictional, were copied and circulated for reading or verbal transmission. The printing press greatly accelerated the process of cultural exchange between European, Arab and Eastern ideas, materials and discoveries. However, this was also a cause of great concern of the ruling elites, particularly among religious authorities. In the Arab world book printing became forbidden and, in the West, the culture of the book largely disappeared after the end of the Roman Empire until it was revived by monastic activities, although some key texts were preserved for reasons of learning or religion.

In the early medieval period, the book was not regarded primarily as a means of communication. Rather, it was a store or repository of wisdom, and especially of sacred writings and religious texts that had to be kept in uncorrupted form. Around the central

core of religious and philosophical texts there accumulated also works of science and practical information. The main material form of the book at this time was of bound volumes of separate pages within strong covers (known as the *codex*), reflecting the requirements for safe storage and reading aloud from a lectern, plus the demands of travel and transportation. Books were meant both to last and to be disseminated within limited circles. The modern book is a direct descendant of this model, and similar uses are embedded within it. The alternative form of rolls of paper or parchment was discontinued, especially when the printing press replaced writing by hand and required the pressing of flat sheets. This ensured the triumph of the medieval manuscript book format, even when miniaturized.

Another important element of continuity between writing and printing is the library, a store or collection of books (and later on many other media). Libraries, first designed and developed across the Middle East, were initially seen as prestigious status symbols for many empires, and were generally part of temples and palaces, only accessible to a handful of people (often also the only ones who were literate). This remained similar in concept and physical arrangement, at least until the advent of digital libraries. It also reflected and confirmed the idea of a book as a powerful record or permanent work of reference. The character of the library did not change much with printing, although printing stimulated the acquisition of private libraries. The later development of the library has given it some claim to be considered not only as a medium but as a mass medium. It is certainly often organized as a means of public information and was envisaged from the mid-nineteenth century onwards as an important tool of mass enlightenment, coinciding with rapidly rising levels of literacy. It is interesting to note that literacy in these times was considered to be the ability to accurately reproduce a text – not so much the development of a (critical) understanding of it.

The successful application of print technology to the reproduction of texts in place of handwriting was only the first step in the emergence of what we now call a ‘media institution’ – an organized set of interrelated activities and roles, directed towards goals related to the production and dissemination of media, as governed by a set of rules and procedures. Printing gradually became a new craft and a significant branch of commerce (Febvre and Martin, 1984). Printers were later transformed from tradespeople into publishers, and the two functions gradually became distinct. Equally important was the emergence of the idea and role of the ‘author’ since earlier manuscript texts were not typically authored by living individuals, or were co-authored by many (often unnamed) authors.

A natural further development was the role of professional author, as early as the late sixteenth century, typically supported by wealthy patrons. Each of these developments reflects the emergence of a market and the transformation of the book into a commodity. Although print runs were small by modern standards, cumulative sales over time could be large. Although printing was invented and pioneered in East Asia, a printing industry developed in the West. There was a thriving book trade across Europe, with much export and import between those countries with printing industries, especially France, England,

the German states and Italy. After European sailors, conquistadors, missionaries, travelers, merchants and functionaries brought European books into Latin America, printing presses were established (starting in Mexico and Peru) in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, leading to a market where the role of the Spanish language, thought and culture was both celebrated and contested. Africa followed later, in the nineteenth century, with missionaries acting as intermediaries for the diffusion of Bibles and the early establishment of printing presses (mainly in what is now South Africa).

Many of the basic features of modern media were already embodied in book publishing by the end of the sixteenth century, including the earliest form of a reading public. There was the beginning of **copyright** in the form of privileges granted to printers in respect of certain texts. Various forms of monopoly practice were appearing, which was convenient for the purposes of censorship, but also offered some protection to authors and maintained standards.

The later history of the book is one of steady expansion in volume and range of content and also of struggle for freedom of the press and the rights of authors. Nearly everywhere from the early sixteenth century onwards, government and church authorities applied advance censorship to printed matter (or even claimed outright ownership over printing presses and industries), even if not always with the effectiveness of a modern totalitarian state. A famous early claim for freedom from government licensing was made by the English poet John Milton in a tract published in 1644 (*Areopagitica*). Freedom of the press went hand in hand with democratic political freedoms and the former was only achieved where democracy had triumphed. This close association remains.

The key features of the book both as a medium and as an institution are summarized in Box 2.1. These typical features are interrelated in the idea of the book as it has been known since the sixteenth century. The ‘medium’ features relate to technology, form and manner of use, and the wider institution of production and distribution.

2.1

The book as a medium and institution: key features

Medium aspects

- Technology of movable type
- Bound pages, *codex* form
- Multiple copies
- For personal reading

(Continued)

- Individual authorship
- Developing beyond the print form (e-books)

Institutional aspects

- Commodity form
- Market distribution
- Diversity of content and form
- Claim to freedom of publication
- Subject to some legal limits

PRINT MEDIA: THE NEWSPAPER

It was almost two hundred years after the invention of printing before what we now recognize as a prototypical newspaper could be distinguished from the handbills, pamphlets and newsletters of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Its chief precursor seems, in fact, to have been the letter rather than the book – newsletters circulating via the rudimentary postal service, concerned especially with transmitting news of events relevant to international trade and commerce (Raymond, 1999). It was thus an extension into the public domain of an activity that had long taken place for governmental, diplomatic or commercial as well as for private purposes. The early newspaper was marked by its regular appearance, commercial basis (openly for sale) and public character. Thus, it was used for information, records, advertising, diversion and gossip.

The seventeenth-century commercial newspaper was not identified with any single source but was a compilation made by a printer-publisher. The official variety (as published by Crown or government) showed some of the same characteristics but was also a voice of authority and an instrument of state. The commercial newspaper was the form that has given most shape to the newspaper institution, and its development can be seen in retrospect as a major turning point in communication history – offering first of all a service to its anonymous readers rather than an instrument to propagandists or authorities.

In a sense the newspaper was more of an innovation than the printed book – the invention of a new literary, social and cultural form – even if it might not have been perceived as such at the time. Its distinctiveness, compared with other forms of cultural communication, lies in its orientation to the individual reader and to reality, its utility and disposability, and its secularity and suitability for the needs of a new class: literate town-based business and professional people. Its novelty consisted not in its technology or manner of distribution, but in its functions for a distinct class in a changing and in some cases more liberal social-political climate.

The later history of the newspaper can be told either as a series of struggles, advances and reverses in the cause of liberty, or as a more continuous history of economic and technological progress. The most important phases in press history that enter into the modern definition of the newspaper are described in the following paragraphs. While separate national histories differ too much to tell a single story, the elements mentioned, often intermingling and interacting, have all played a part in the development of the press institution. The principal features of the newspaper are summarized in Box 2.2.

2.2

The newspaper as medium and institution: key features

Medium aspects

- Technology: print (and Internet)
- Periodicity: regular and frequent appearance
- Topicality (and currency) of contents and reference
- Individual or group reading

Institutional aspects

- Urban, secular audience
- Relative freedom, but self-censored
- In public domain
- Commodity form
- Commercial basis

From its early days, the newspaper was an extension of either the state (through ownership, censorship or self-regulation) or religious authority, yet also could become an actual or potential adversary of established power, especially in its own self-perception. Potent images in press history refer to violence done to printers, editors and journalists around the world. The struggle for freedom to publish, often within a broader struggle for freedom and human and communication rights, is emphasized in journalism's own mythology. The part played by alternative media (for example in Latin America) and underground presses under foreign occupation or dictatorial rule (across Europe and the Indian subcontinent) has also been celebrated. Established authority has often confirmed this self-perception of the press by finding it irritating and inconvenient (although also often malleable and, in

the last resort, very vulnerable to power). However, early newspapers did not generally seek to offend authorities and were oftentimes produced on their behalf. Then, as now, the newspaper was likely to identify most with its intended readers, as well as with its benefactors – whether private enterprise or state-owned or controlled industry.

There has been a steady progression towards more press freedom, despite major setbacks from time to time. This progress has sometimes taken the form of greater sophistication in the means of control applied to the press. Legal restraint replaced violence, then fiscal burdens were imposed (and later reversed). Now institutionalization of the press within a market system serves as a form of control, and the modern newspaper, as a large business enterprise, is vulnerable to more kinds of pressure or intervention than its simpler forerunners were. The newspaper did not really become a true ‘mass’ medium until the twentieth century, in the sense of directly reaching a majority of the population on a regular basis, and there are still quite large inter-country differences in the extent of newspaper reading. There has been a gradual worldwide decline in newspaper reading – starting slowly but surely in the late twentieth century and accelerating in the 2010s (with some exceptions in Latin America, Asia and the Middle East). Print revenue went up until the early 2000s and has since plateaued or dropped, despite the growth in online publishing. With social media and the Web becoming the main source of (free) news for young people in particular, the newspaper industry has responded with reducing overheads, reorganizing workflows and cutting jobs. Especially on the local level, many newspapers are struggling or have disappeared.

It has been customary and it is still useful to distinguish between certain types or genres of newspaper (and of journalism), although there is no single typology to suit all epochs and countries. The following passages describe the main variants.

THE PARTY-POLITICAL PRESS

One common early form of the newspaper was the party-political paper dedicated to the task of activation, information and organization. The party newspaper (published by or for the party or the state) has lost ground to commercial press forms, both as an idea and as a viable business enterprise. The idea of a party press, even so, still has its place as a component in different forms of political governance. Where it does survive in Europe (and there are examples elsewhere), it is typically independent from the state (though possibly subsidized), professionally produced, serious and opinion-forming in purpose. Its uniqueness lies in the attachment of its readers by way of shared party allegiance, its sectionalism and its mobilizing function for party objectives. Examples include the ‘vanguard press’ of the Russian revolutionary movement, the party-political newspapers (especially social democratic) of several Scandinavian countries, and the official party press of former communist regimes. Some form of state ownership of newspapers exists in some African and Asian countries, Cuba and the Middle East.

THE PRESTIGE PRESS

The late-nineteenth-century bourgeois newspaper was a focal point in press history and contributed much to our modern understanding of what a newspaper is or should be. The ‘high-bourgeois’ phase of press history – from about 1850 to the turn of the century in Europe, a bit later on in Latin America (especially regarding the role of community newspapers) and across Africa and Asia – was the product of several events and circumstances. In Europe, the part of the world where the press as a formidable industry took hold, these included the triumph of liberalism and the absence or ending of direct censorship or fiscal constraint, the forging of a business-professional establishment, plus many social and technological changes favouring the rise of a national or regional press of high information quality.

The new prestige or ‘elite’ press was independent from the state and from vested interests and was often recognized as a major institution of political and social life (especially as a self-appointed former of opinion and voice of the ‘national interest’). It tended to show a highly developed sense of social and ethical responsibility (in practice fundamentally conformist) and it fostered the rise of a journalistic profession dedicated to the objective reporting of events. Many countries still have one or more newspapers that try to maintain this tradition. By wide consensus, the newspapers still recognized as having an ‘elite’ status are likely to include *The New York Times* (United States), *The Guardian* (London), *Le Monde* (France), *El País* (Spain), *NRC Handelsblad* (The Netherlands), *Times of India* (India), *The Sydney Morning Herald* (Australia), *Asahi Shimbun* (Japan), *Daily Nation* (Kenya) and *La Nación* (Argentina). Current expectations about what is a ‘quality’ newspaper still reflect the professional ideals of the prestige press and provide the basis for criticisms of newspapers that deviate from the ideal by being either too partisan or too ‘sensational’, or just too ‘commercial’. The (national) prestige press currently seems better placed than most to survive the current pressure on newspapers, by virtue of their importance to a political and economic elite, and to do so these newspapers are diversifying their offerings, shifting to a ‘digital first’ publishing process, and innovating their business model (beyond advertising, subscriptions and sales).

THE POPULAR PRESS

The last main type of newspaper has been with us for a century or so without much change of essential character. This is the truly ‘mass’ newspaper that was created for sale to the urban industrial masses and designed to be read by almost everyone. It was a fundamentally commercial enterprise (rather than a political or professional project) and was made possible by advances in technologies of scale, concentrations of population, the spread of literacy, low cost to the reader and large amounts of advertising revenue. In general, the popular press has always specialized in ‘human interest’ stories (Hughes, 1940), in dramatic

and sensational styles of reporting and presentation, in the coverage of crime, disasters, crises, scandals, war and celebrities. Although not primarily interested in politics, it has often played a political role at key moments in national societies. Because of its typical smaller page format, the term ‘tabloid’ has been widely applied to this type of newspaper and its contents, as in the term ‘tabloidization’ (Connell, 1998). This means a process of becoming more sensational, trivial and irresponsible.

THE LOCAL AND REGIONAL PRESS

In many countries, the most important newspaper sectors have been and remain the local and regional press. The forms are too varied to be described as a single type. They can be serious or popular, daily or weekly, urban or rural, with large as well as small circulations. The main features they have in common are a set of news values relevant to a local readership, a typically consensual and bipartisan approach (although there are exceptions), and a dependence on support from local advertisers and sponsors. Some local papers are free, others are paid for and they have generally been most threatened by online news, social media and (loss of) advertising. Local free newspapers or ‘freesheets’, such as *Metro* (appearing in Asia, Europe and across the Americas; not to be confused with the free *Metro* newspaper in London), *20 minutes* (appearing in Switzerland, Spain and France), and many others around the world earn their revenue almost exclusively from advertising, as advertisers covet the generally younger (and steady) readership these papers provide. Since rapid market expansion in the early 2000s, several of these freesheets have closed down again. Given the global shift to digital and online publication – where freesheets tend to have a minimal presence – the future of these papers is uncertain.

OTHER PRINT MEDIA

The printing press gave rise to other forms of publication than book and newspaper. These include plays, songs, tracts, serial stories, poems, pamphlets, comics, reports, prospectuses, maps, posters, music, handbills, wall newspapers and much more. The single most significant is probably the periodical (weekly or monthly) magazine that appeared in great diversity and with wide circulations from the early eighteenth century onwards. Initially aimed at the domestic and cultural interests of the gentry, it eventually developed into a mass market of high commercial value and enormous breadth of coverage. The periodical magazine still belongs largely to the domestic and personal sphere and supports a wide range of interests, activities and markets. In the early twentieth century it was more like a mass medium than it is today, and its diffuseness and uncertain impact have led to a general neglect by media and communication research.

These comments apply to the commercial periodical. In many countries there has been and remains a significant opinion-forming or political periodical press, often with an influence beyond its generally modest circulation size. At key moments in some societies particular magazines have played important social, cultural or political roles. In conditions of political oppression or commercial domination, the ‘alternative’ periodical has often been an essential instrument of resistance and expression for minority movements (see Downing, 2000; Huesca, 2003; Gumucio-Dagron, 2004).

FILM AS A MASS MEDIUM

Film began at the end of the nineteenth century almost simultaneously in different parts of the world – notably Europe, East Asia, the United States and Latin America – as a technological novelty, but what it offered was scarcely new in content or function. It transferred to a new means of presentation and distribution of an older tradition of entertainment, offering stories, spectacles, music, drama, humour and technical tricks for popular consumption. It was also almost instantly a true mass medium in the sense that it quite quickly reached a very large proportion of populations, even in rural areas. As a mass medium, film was partly a response to the ‘invention’ of leisure – time out of work – and an answer to the demand for affordable and (usually) respectable ways of enjoying free time for the whole family. Thus, it provided for the working class some of the cultural benefits already enjoyed by their social ‘betters’. To judge from its phenomenal growth, the latent demand met by film was enormous. Of the main formative elements named above, it would not be the technology or the social climate but the needs met by the film for individuals that mattered most. The most apparent are those for escape from humdrum reality into a more glamorous world, the wish for strong narratives to be caught up in, the search for role models and heroes, and the need to fill leisure time in safe, affordable and sociable ways. In these respects, not much has changed.

The characterization of the film as ‘show business’ in a new form for an expanded market is not the whole story. There have been three other significant strands in film history. First, the use of film for propaganda is noteworthy, especially when applied to national or societal purposes, based on its great reach, supposed realism, emotional impact and popularity. The two other strands in film history were the emergence of several schools of film art (Huaco, 1963) and the rise of the social documentary film movement. These were different from the mainstream in having a minority appeal, a strong element of realism, and in containing social critique (or a combination thereof). Both have a link, partly fortuitous, with film as propaganda in that both tended to develop at times of *social crisis*.

There continue to be thinly concealed ideological and implicitly propagandist elements in many popular entertainment films, even in politically ‘free’ societies. This reflects a

mixture of forces: deliberate attempts at social control; an unthinking adoption of populist or conservative values; various marketing and PR infiltrations into entertainment; and the pursuit of mass appeal. Despite the dominance of the entertainment function in film history, films have often displayed didactic, propagandistic tendencies. Film is certainly more vulnerable than other media to outside interference and may be more subject to conformist pressures because so much capital is at risk. It is a reflection of this situation that, in the aftermath of the 9/11 attack on the Twin Towers, US government leaders sought a meeting with leaders of the film industry to discuss ways in which film could make a contribution to the newly announced ‘war on terror’. Similarly, in 2018, the Chinese government created special units for film, press and publication, directly under Communist Party control, whose responsibilities include overseeing film production, distribution, exhibition and censorship in a recognition of the powerful role of cinema. It subsequently stimulated the production of (commercially very successful) action movies with patriotic messages.

The main turning points in film history have been: the ‘Americanization’ of the film industry and film culture in the years after the First World War (Tunstall, 1977); the rise and global success of large commercial film industries in India (‘Bollywood’ from the 1970s) and Nigeria (sometimes labelled ‘Nollywood’, emerging in the 1970s and 1980s, although the term does not do justice to the production of successful films in over 300 Nigerian languages); the rise of Latin American filmmaking, partly inspired by the establishment of a Foundation of the New Latin American Cinema in 1985 as an emancipation project for the production, preservation and development of the region (and exemplified by the enormous success and Oscar wins of Mexican directors Alfonso Cuarón, Guillermo del Toro and Alejandro González Iñárritu in the 2010s); and globally the coming of television and the separation of film from the cinema. Although ‘Americanization’ is not so much on the research agenda anymore, the growing globalization of the film (and television) industry and the rise of international co-productions (Baltruschat, 2010) have led to concerns about the worldwide dominance of the English language, as well as a possible homogenization of narrative development and genre conventions.

After the Second World War, the US film industry quickly established itself as a dominant model for filmmaking around the world, which contributed to a homogenization of film culture and a convergence of ideas about the definition of film as a medium. Television took away a large part of the film-viewing public, especially the general family audience, leaving a much smaller and younger film audience. It also took away or diverted the social documentary stream of film development and gave it a more congenial home in television, where it appeared in journalistic magazines, special reports and ‘public affairs’ programming. However, it did not have similar effects on the art film or for film aesthetics, although the art film may have benefited from the ‘demassification’ and greater specialization of the film/cinema medium. For the first two generations of filmgoers, the film experience was inseparable from having an evening out, usually with friends and usually in venues that were far grander than the home. In addition, the

darkened cinema offered a mixture of privacy and sociability that gave another dimension to the experience. Just as with television later, ‘going to the pictures’ was as important as seeing any particular film.

The ‘separation of film and cinema’ refers to the many ways in which films can be seen, after initial showing in a film theatre. These include television broadcasting, cable transmission, videotape and disc sale or hire, satellite TV, digital broadband Internet and mobile streaming. These developments have several potential consequences. They make film less typically a shared public experience and more a private one. They reduce the initial ‘impact’ of mass exposure to a given film. They shift control of selection in the direction of the audience and allow new patterns of repeat viewing and collection. They make it possible to serve many specialist markets and easier to cater for the demand for any kind of content, including violent, horrific or pornographic content. They also prolong the life of films. Despite the liberation entailed in becoming a less ‘mass’ medium, the film has not been able to claim full rights to political and artistic self-expression, and most countries retain an apparatus of licensing, censorship and powers of control.

Although the film/cinema medium has been subordinated to television in many respects, it has also become more integrated with other media, especially book publishing, popular music and television itself. In terms of the Internet, the emergence and global popularity of streaming services has injected film production and distribution with new emphasis. Overall, film has acquired a greater centrality (Jowett and Linton, 1980), despite the reduction of its immediate audience, as a showcase for other media and as a cultural source, out of which come books, strip cartoons, songs and television ‘stars’ and series. Thus, film is as much as ever a mass culture creator. Even the decline of the cinema audience has been more than compensated by a new domestic film audience reached by television, digital recordings, platforms and streaming services. Key features are summarized in Box 2.3.

2.3

The film medium and institution: key features

Medium aspects

- Audiovisual channels of reception
- Private experience of public content
- Extensive (universal) appeal
- Predominantly narrative fiction
- International in genre and format

(Continued)

Institutional aspects

- Subjection to social control
- Complex organization of and distribution
- High cost of production
- Multiple platforms of distribution
- Increasingly international co-productions

BROADCASTING

Radio and television have, collectively, a hundred-plus-year history as mass media, and both grew out of pre-existing technologies – telephone, telegraph, moving and still photography, and sound recording. Despite their obvious differences in content and use, radio and television can be treated together in terms of their history. Radio seems to have been a technology looking for a use, rather than a response to a demand for a new kind of service or content, and much the same is true of television. According to Williams (1975: 25), ‘Unlike all previous communications technologies, radio and television were systems primarily designed for transmission and reception as abstract processes, with little or no definition of preceding content’. As with all newer media, radio and television came to borrow from existing media, and most of the popular content forms of both are derivative from film, music, stories, theatre, news and sport.

A distinctive feature of radio and television has been their high degree of regulation, control or licensing by public authority – initially out of technical necessity, later from a mixture of democratic choice, state self-interest, economic convenience and sheer institutional custom. A second and related feature of radio and television media has been their centralized pattern of distribution, with supply radiating out from metropolitan centres, with little or no return flow. Perhaps because of their closeness to power, radio and television have hardly anywhere acquired, as of right, the same freedom that the press enjoys, to express views and act with political independence. Broadcasting was thought too powerful as an influence to fall into the hands of any single interest without clear limitations to protect the public from potential harm or manipulation. A major exception is the history of community radio across the African continent (except the Arab north and South Africa), where it is the dominant mass medium up to this day, largely because of its flexibility, low cost and oral character.

Television has been continuously evolving, and it would be risky to try to summarize its features in terms of communicative purposes and effects. Initially, the main genre

innovation of television stemmed from its capacity to transmit many pictures and sound live, and thus act as a ‘window on the world’ in real time. Even studio productions were live broadcasts before the days of efficient video recording. This capacity of simultaneity has been retained for some kinds of content, including sporting events, some newscasting and certain kinds of entertainment show. What Dayan and Katz (1992) characterize as ‘media events’ (such as state visits, the Olympic Games, coronations, large political demonstrations) are often likely to have significant live coverage. Most TV content is not live, although it often aims to create an illusion of ongoing reality. A second important feature of television is the sense of intimacy and personal involvement that it seems able to cultivate between the spectator and presenter or the actors and participants on screen.

The status of television as the most ‘massive’ of the media in terms of reach, time spent and popularity has barely changed and it adds all the time to its global audience. However, live television consumption is on the decline around the world as streaming on-demand video takes hold.

Despite the fact that television has been largely denied an autonomous political role and is primarily considered a medium of entertainment, it plays a vital role in modern politics. It is considered to be the main source of news and information for most people, the mass medium people across all walks of life find easiest to understand, and the main channel of communication between politicians and citizens at election times (Grabe and Bucy, 2009). In this informally allocated role of public informer, television has generally remained a force to be reckoned with. Television broadcasting in most countries follows one of two trajectories: resembling the American model of national, regional and local outlets (such as in China, Japan and the Philippines), and the British model of national public service broadcasting (which can be found all over the former British colonies in Asia and Africa). Latin America knows a television landscape dominated by a small number of big corporations (often with strong current or former ties with governments and former dictatorships in the region; see Sparks, 2011).

Beyond providing public information, television plays the role of educator – for children at school and adults at home. For many decades it was largest single channel of advertising in nearly all countries, and this has helped to confirm its mass entertainment functions. This role is increasingly being usurped by online advertising, as the Internet consumes most of people’s ‘media time’ in many countries around the world. In terms of its distribution, broadcast television has fragmented in most countries into many separate channels. Even so, the typical pattern that remains is one in which a few (national) channels are very dominant in audience and financial terms. An enduring feature of the appeal of television seems to lie in the very fact that it is a medium that brings people together to share the same experiences in an otherwise fragmented and individuated society, and not only in the circle of the family.

The main features of broadcast television and radio are summarized in Box 2.4.

2.4

Television as medium and institution: key features

Medium aspects

- Very diverse types of content
- Audiovisual channels
- Close, personal and domestic association
- Varied intensity and involvement experience

Institutional aspects

- Complex technology and organization
- Subject to legal and social control
- National *and* international character
- High public visibility

Radio notably refused to die in the face of the rise of television and it has prospered on the basis of several distinctive features. Competition with television led to a degree of deliberate differentiation. The close supervision of national radio systems relaxed after the rise of television and, given the relative flexibility and cost-efficient nature of the technology, there was an alternative, oppositional or ‘pirate’ phase, in which amateurs, community organizations and independent entrepreneurs set up competing stations. Radio ceased to be a highly regulated national ‘voice’ and became freer to experiment and to express new, minority and even deviant sounds in voice and music. As a medium, it has much more channel capacity and therefore much greater and more diverse access. It is much cheaper and more flexible in production than television and also cheap and flexible in use for its audience. There are no longer limitations on the place where radio can be listened to or the time of reception, since listening can be combined with other routine activities. It has possibilities for interaction with its audience by way of the telephone and can accommodate many different genres. In fact, radio has flourished since the coming of television and the Internet, even if it can no longer claim the mass audience of its glory days. With the advent of streaming audio and podcasting, and the consistently significant role of the mass medium in various regions of the world (in particular as it supports small-scale broadcasting in indigenous languages), the future of radio looks bright. The main features discussed are outlined in Box 2.5.

2.5

Radio as medium and institution: key features

Medium aspects

- Sound appeal only
- Portable and flexible in use
- Multiple types of content, but more music
- Participative (two-way) potential
- Individual and intimate in use

Institutional aspects

- Relative freedom
- Local and decentralized
- Economical to produce

RECORDED MUSIC

Until recently, relatively little attention has been given to music as a mass medium in theory and research, perhaps because the implications for society have never been clear and, until the late 1990s era of filesharing online – which so-called ‘Napster effect’ accelerated digital developments throughout the industry (see Waldfogel, 2012) – there have not been sharp discontinuities in the possibilities offered by successive technologies of recording, reproduction and distribution. Recorded and replayed music has not even enjoyed a convenient label to describe its numerous media manifestations, although the generic term ‘phonogram’ has been suggested (Burnett, 1996) to cover music accessed via record players, tape players, compact disc players, VCRs (video cassette recorders), broadcasting and cable. With the emergence of digital audio, peer-to-peer filesharing and streaming music in the 1990s and early 2000s, the music industry was forced to transform – the first of all the other media industries to do so with regard to the challenge of surviving the digital age.

The recording and replaying of music began around 1880 and records were quite rapidly diffused, on the basis of the wide appeal of popular songs and melodies. The first record stores opened their doors in Wales (1894) and the USA (1930s). Their popularity and diffusion were closely related to the already established place of the piano (and other instruments) in the home. Much radio content since the early days has consisted of music, even more so since the rise of television. While there may have been a gradual tendency

for the ‘phonogram’ to replace private music-making, there has never been a large gap between mass-mediated music and personal and direct audience enjoyment of musical performance (concerts, choirs, bands, dances, etc.). The phonogram makes music of all kinds more accessible at all times in more places to more people, but it is hard to discern a fundamental discontinuity in the general character of popular musical experience, despite changes of genre and fashion.

Even so, there have been big changes in the broad character of the phonogram since its beginnings. The first change was the addition of radio broadcast music to phonogram records, which greatly increased the range and amount of music available and extended it to many more people than had access to gramophones or jukeboxes. The transition of radio from a family to an individual medium in the post-war ‘transistor’ revolution was a second major change, which opened up a relatively new market of young people for what became a burgeoning record industry. Each development since then – portable tape players, the Sony Walkman (1979), the compact disc and music video (accelerated with the launch of MTV in 1981), the iPod (2001), and streaming music platforms such as Swedish company Spotify (premiering in 2008) – has given the spiral another twist, still based on a predominantly young audience. The result has been a mass media industry which is very interrelated, concentrated in ownership and internationalized (Negus, 1992). Despite this, music media have significant radical and creative strands, which have developed despite increased commercialization (Frith, 1981).

The growth of music downloading and sharing via the Internet has added to the distribution traffic and seriously challenged the power of music rights holders. Through the establishment of (or participation in) ad-supported and subscription streaming services, which pay artists or labels a tiny portion of each song streamed, the global music industry, after decades of decline, from 2014 started to recoup its revenue lost from the decline of physical sales. Another significant development for recorded music has been its expansion into other media, most notably advertising, film and digital games. Music licensed or composed specifically for inclusion in campaigns, independent and major motion pictures and ‘triple A’ games (a reference to big budget console video games) earns a significant return on investment, whereas sales of CDs (and other physical carriers) fall.

While the cultural significance of music has received sporadic attention, its relationship to social and political events has been recognized and occasionally celebrated or feared. Since the rise of the youth-based industry in the 1960s, mass-mediated popular music has been linked to youthful idealism and political concern, to supposed degeneration and hedonism, to drug-taking, violence and anti-social attitudes. Music has also played a part in various nationalist independence movements. For instance, songs of self-empowerment and protest were a potent element in the pursuit of civil rights in the United States and independence of Ireland from Britain, in the fight against apartheid in South Africa, and more generally in the emancipation of women (and other minorities) in many parts of the world. The end of Soviet control of Estonia was described as the ‘singing revolution’ (from 1987 to the establishment

of independence in 1991) because music enabled people to come together and express their aspirations for restoration of autonomy and the suppressed national culture.

While the content of music has never been easy to regulate, its distribution has predominantly been in the hands of established institutions, and its perceived deviant tendencies have been subject to some sanctions. In any case, most popular music expresses and responds to rather enduring conventional values and personal needs, with no subversive aim or potential. These points about music are summarized in Box 2.6.

2.6

Recorded music (phonogram) as medium and institution: key features

Medium aspects

- Sound experience only
- Personal and emotional satisfactions
- Main appeal to youth
- Mobile, flexible individual in use
- Increasingly distributed via streaming services

Institutional aspects

- Low degree of regulation
- High degree of internationalization
- Multiple technologies and platforms
- Links to major media industry
- Organizational fragmentation
- Central to youth culture

DIGITAL GAMES

As with recorded music, the digital games industry and its enormously popular products have yet to receive much mainstream attention in media and mass communication research. However, the field of digital games studies is growing rapidly, led by prominent scholars who either focus on the aesthetic of game narratives and gameplay, or seek to understand the rather unique features of production and game work

(Raessens and Goldstein, 2011). A key debate early in the history of the computer game industry and the field of game studies was whether games should be examined in the same way as films, books and television programmes, or whether games are an entirely different medium (Juul, 2005). It has become quite clear that understanding the role and impact of digital games needs both perspectives. Digital games have a rich heritage in multiple fields, including the personal computing industry, software programming, cartoons and animated films, and toy manufacturing and design (Izushi and Aoyama, 2006).

From relatively modest beginnings, when games were developed as ways to test computers, to impress visitors and sponsors of computer labs (at universities and corporate research and development divisions), or were made just for fun in the 1950s and 1960s, the 1970s saw the emergence of digital games as a fully fledged commercial mass media industry. As computers were still too expensive for the home, digital games became popular and commercially viable as arcade games – especially from 1972 with the release of *Pong* (now part of the permanent collection of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC due to its cultural impact). After an early crash of the (North American) games industry, Japanese companies came to dominate the global market, starting in 1983 with the release of the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES), bringing successful arcade games such as *Donkey Kong* into the home. Around the same time, personal computers became more affordable and user-friendly, and machines running games next to home office software, such as the Commodore (Commodore Business Machines, 1982), MSX (Microsoft Japan and Sanyo, 1983) and Macintosh (Apple, 1984), entered the general consumer market. In the 1990s and 2000s, digital games made numerous advances (in terms of graphics, sound, complexity of gameplay, the introduction of motion sensing hardware, and increased interaction with ‘gamers’), accelerated by the introduction of dedicated game consoles that doubled as multimedia and multi-purpose entertainment units, such as the PlayStation (Sony, 1994) and the Xbox (Microsoft, 2001). Since the introduction of smartphones and tablet computers, mobile gaming has added a third global market for digital games (next to personal computers and consoles).

The majority of digital games are produced and sold in Japan, the United States and the United Kingdom. The games industry has become so commercially successful (and culturally influential) that numerous governments (such as in Singapore, South Korea, and Ireland) have developed policies to stimulate these industries in their countries – similar to efforts made by governments to lure film and television productions, for example through tax credits, subsidies for training and studio facilities, and the provision of resources. Despite this kind of support, the global success of digital games is also a cause for concern for governments, parents, teachers and scholars alike. Consistent among such concerns are:

- Production
 - The often less-than-ideal working conditions that exist throughout the industry.
 - A lack of diversity among those making games (Kerr, 2016).

- Content
 - Their graphic and increasingly realistic nature.
 - The addictive qualities of certain games and game features (Bean, Nielsen, van Rooij and Ferguson, 2017).
- Reception
 - The potential effects of (violent, addictive) games (Kowert and Quandt, 2015).
 - The overly sexualized representation of female characters (Lynch, Tompkins, van Driel and Fritz, 2016).

With the growing popularity of mobile games and a shift towards cloud-computing-based gaming applications, new competitors (from the Internet and telecommunications sectors) have entered the global market. Additionally, with the success of digital games comes more regulation, for example, regarding intellectual property rights and licences, consumer protection, age ratings and classification, data protection and privacy, and gambling legislation. It is safe to say that digital games are not just a mass media industry in their own right, but that elements from the production, content and reception of games are now present in all other industries, and that tie-ins of games with other media offerings are increasingly common. Key features about digital games today are summarized in Box 2.7.

2.7

Digital games as medium and institution: key features

Medium aspects

- Comprehensive multimedia experience
- Personal and emotional satisfactions
- Mass appeal (different game types appeal to different generations)
- High involvement

Institutional aspects

- High degree of regulation
- High degree of internationalization
- Multiple technologies and platforms
- Global media industry
- Increasingly central to popular culture

THE COMMUNICATIONS REVOLUTION: NEW MEDIA VERSUS OLD

The expression ‘new media’ has been in use since the 1960s and has had to encompass an expanding and diversifying set of applied communication technologies. The editors of *The Handbook of New Media* (Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2006) point to the difficulties of saying just what the ‘new media’ comprise. They choose to define them in a composite way, linking information communication technologies (ICT) with their associated social contexts, bringing together three elements: technological artefacts and devices; activities, practices and uses; and social arrangements and organizations that form around the devices and practices. As noted above, much the same definition applies to ‘old media’, although the artefacts, uses and arrangements are different. As far as the essential features of ‘new media’ are concerned, the main ones seem to be their interconnectedness, their accessibility to individual users as senders and/or receivers, their interactivity, their multiplicity of use and open-ended character, and their ubiquity. Another key marker for these newer media is their convergent nature, in that they increasingly mix different media – in hardware, software, in form and content, as in everyday use. This is part of the reason that the distinction ‘old’ versus ‘new’ media is difficult to uphold.

Our primary concern in this book is with media and mass communication, which is closely related to the old media and seems thus to be rendered obsolete by new media. However, as noted already, mass communication is not a process that is limited to mass media, nor has it necessarily declined. The new media technologies also carry mass communication activities, and in many ways heighten concerns about the role and impact of mass media and communication in society. The key to the immense power of the computer as a communication machine – and computation as a communication technique – lies in the process of digitalization that allows information of all kinds in all formats to be carried with the same efficiency and without hierarchy. In principle, there is no longer any need for the various different media that have been described, since they can all be subsumed in the same computerized communication network and reception centre (in the home or on a smartphone, for instance). Alongside computer-based technologies there are other innovations that have in some degree changed some aspects of mass communication (Carey, 2003). While mostly supporting mass self-communication, the many new possibilities for private ‘media-making’ (camcorders, PCs, printers, cameras, mobile phones, etc.) have expanded the world of media and forged bridges between public and private communication and between the spheres of the professional and the amateur.

The implications of all this for mass media are still far from clear, although it is certain that the ‘traditional’ media have simultaneously benefited greatly from new media innovations and have experienced profound challenges to their business models and production practices by new technologies and competitors. Secondly, we can conclude

that the communications revolution has generally shifted the ‘balance of power’ from the media into two directions. First, to the audience in so far as there are more options to choose from and more active uses of media available. Traditional mass communication was essentially one-directional, while the new forms of communication are essentially *interactive*. Mass communication has in several respects become less massive and less centralized. Secondly, power has shifted from those who control the means of production and distribution – traditionally the key source of revenue for mass media industries – to those who have successfully monetized the place and moment of (digital) consumption: hardware and software manufacturers such as Microsoft and Apple, Internet giants such as Alphabet (parent company of Google) and Tencent, and online platforms such as Facebook and WeChat.

THE INTERNET

Beyond that, it is useful to distinguish between the implications of enhanced transmission and the emergence of any new medium as such. The former means more speed, capacity and efficiency, while the latter opens up new possibilities for content, use, influence and effects. The foremost claim to status as a new medium and a mass medium is the Internet. Even so, ‘mass’ features are not its primary characteristic. The Internet began primarily as a non-commercial means of intercommunication and data exchange between professionals operating at the behest of the US military, but its more recent rapid advance has been fuelled by its potential as a purveyor of goods and many profitable services and as an alternative to other means of personal and interpersonal communication (Castells, 2001). The ‘killer application’ of the Internet is social media, which dominates the use of the Internet around the world. Initially, diffusion proceeded most rapidly in North America and Northern Europe. A little over half of the world’s population uses the Internet today, with Africa, the Middle East and Latin America being the fastest-growing markets (Arora, 2019). Some applications of the Internet, such as online news, are clearly extensions of newspaper journalism, although online news itself is also evolving in new directions, with new capabilities of content and new forms (such as where a member of the public adopts the role of journalist). As the Internet moves into other sectors and industries, it becomes increasingly difficult to separate its status as a medium from other media.

The Internet’s claim to full medium status is based in part on it having a distinctive technology, manner of use, range of content and services, and a distinct image of its own. However, the Internet has no clear institutional status and is not owned, controlled or organized by any single body, but is simply a network of internationally interconnected computers operating according to agreed protocols. Numerous organizations, but especially service providers and telecommunication bodies, contribute to its operation (Braman and Roberts, 2003). The Internet as such does not exist anywhere as a legal entity and is not subject to any single set of national laws or regulations (Lessig, 1999). On the

other hand, many international organizations as well as national governments are seeking more legal control over the Internet, and specifically the dominant role social media companies and search engines (such as Facebook and Google) have come to play in everyday life. Those who use the Internet can be accountable to the laws and regulations of the country in which they reside as well as to international law. We return to the question of the Internet throughout this book, but for the moment we can record its chief characteristics as a (mass) medium. Essential features of the Internet are summarized in Box 2.8, without distinguishing between ‘medium’ and ‘institutional’ aspects.

2.8

The Internet as a medium: key features

- Computer-based technologies
- Hybrid, non-dedicated, flexible character
- Interactive potential
- Private and public functions
- Growing degree of regulation
- Interconnectedness
- Ubiquity and de-locatedness
- Accessible to individuals as communicators
- A medium of both mass and interpersonal communication

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MEDIA

It is much less easy to distinguish these various media from each other than it used to be. This is partly because some media forms are now distributed across different types of transmission channel, reducing the original uniqueness of form and experience in use. Secondly, the increasing convergence of technology, based on digitalization, can only reinforce this tendency. The clear lines of regulatory regime between the various media are already blurred, both recognizing and encouraging greater similarity between different media. Thirdly, globalizing tendencies are reducing the distinctiveness of any particular national variant of media content and institution. Fourthly, the continuing trends towards integration of national and global media corporations have led to the housing of different media under the same roof, encouraging convergence by another route.

Nevertheless, on certain dimensions, clear differences do remain. There are some obvious differences in terms of typical content. There is also evidence that media are perceived differently in terms of physical and psychosocial characteristics (see Box 6.4, Chapter 6). Media vary a good deal in terms of perceived trust and credibility, although findings vary from country to country. Here we look only at two enduring questions. First, how *free* is a medium in relation to the wider society? Secondly, what is a medium good for and what are its perceived *uses*, from the point of view of an individual audience member?

DIMENSION OF FREEDOM VERSUS CONTROL

Relations between media and society have a material, a political and a normative or social-cultural dimension. Central to the political dimension is the question of freedom and control. The main normative issue concerns how media ought to use the freedom they have. As noted above, near-total freedom was claimed and eventually gained for the *book*, for a mixture of reasons, in which the claims of politics, religion, science and art all played some part. This situation remains unchallenged in free societies, although the book has lost some of its once subversive potential as a result of its relative marginalization (book reading is a minority or minor form of media use). The influence of books remains considerable, but has to a large extent to be mediated through other more popular media or other institutions (education, politics, etc.).

The *newspaper* press bases its historical claim to freedom of operation much more directly on its political functions of expressing opinion and circulating political and economic information. But the newspaper is also a significant business enterprise for which freedom to produce and supply its primary product (information) is a necessary condition of successful operation in the marketplace. Broadcast television and radio are still generally licensed and have limited political freedom in practice, partly because of their privileged access to scarce spectrum space (despite the proclaimed ‘end of scarcity’) and partly because of their believed impact and power to persuade. But they are also often expected to use their informative capacity to support the democratic process and serve the public good in other ways. Even so, the current trend is for market forces to have a greater influence on the conduct of broadcasting than either political control or voluntary social responsibility.

The various *newer media*, using cable, satellite or telecommunications networks for distribution, have often successfully staved off more regulation regarding their appropriate degree of political freedom, but this situation is changing. Freedom from control may be claimed on the grounds of privacy or the fact that these are not media of indiscriminate mass distribution but are directed to specific users. They are so-called ‘common carriers’ that generally escape control over their content because they are open to all on equal terms and primarily for personal or business rather than public matters.

They also increasingly share the same communicative tasks as media with established editorial autonomy. The ‘underdetermined’ status of most digital and online media in respect of freedom is a matter of dispute, since they are *de facto* very free, but also give rise to widespread fears of misuse, and have become indispensable to the lives of so many people around the world.

The intermedia differences relating to *political* control (freedom means few regulations and little supervisory apparatus) follow a general pattern. In practice, this means that the nearer any medium gets to operating as a *mass medium*, the more it can expect the attention of governments and politicians, since it affects the exercise of power (and the maintenance of social order). In general, activities in the sphere of art, fiction, fantasy or entertainment are more likely to escape attention than are activities that touch directly on the ongoing reality of events and circumstances.

Virtually all media of public communication have a radical potential, in the sense of being potentially subversive of reigning systems of social control. They can provide access for new voices and perspectives on the existing order; new forms of organization and protest are made available for the subordinate or disenfranchised. The role of social (and mobile) media in the mobilization and organization of new (mass) social movements, such as the Arab Spring, the Indignados in Spain, the globally dispersed Occupy movement, and the Black Lives Matter and #MeToo movements, is crucial to consider in this context. Even so, the institutional development of successful media has usually resulted in the elimination of the early radical potential, partly as a side-effect of commercialization, partly because authorities fear disturbance to society (Winston, 1986). According to Beniger (1986), the driving logic of new communication technology has always been towards increased control. This generalization is now being tested with reference to the Internet and looks like being validated.

The *normative* dimension of control operates according to the same general principles, although sometimes with different consequences for particular media. For instance, film, which has generally escaped direct political control, has often been subject to self-censorship and to monitoring of its content, on grounds of its potential moral impact on the young and impressionable (especially in matters of violence, crime or sex). The widespread restrictions applied to television in matters of culture and morals stem from the same tacit assumptions. More recently, digital games have come to the forefront of normative concerns. These are all media that are very popular and have a potentially strong emotional impact on many people, and thus need to be supervised in ‘the public interest’.

However, the more communication activities can be defined as either educational or ‘serious’ in purpose or, alternatively, as artistic and creative, the more freedom from normative restrictions can usually be claimed. There are complex reasons for this, but it is also a fact that ‘art’ and content of higher moral seriousness do not usually reach large numbers and are seen as marginal to power relations.

The degree of control of media by state or society depends partly on the feasibility of applying it. The most regulated media have typically been those whose distribution is most easily supervised, such as centralized national radio or television broadcasting or local cinema distribution. Books and print media generally are much less easy to monitor or to suppress. The same applies to local radio, while desktop publishing and photocopying and all manner of ways of reproducing sound and images have made direct censorship a very blunt and ineffective instrument.

The difficulty of policing national frontiers to keep out unwanted foreign communication is another consequence of new technology that promotes more freedom. While new technology in general seems to increase the promise of freedom of expression, the continued strength of institutional controls, including those of the market, over actual flow and reception should not be underestimated. It is also becoming clearer that the Internet is not impossible to control, as once believed, since all traffic can be monitored and traced and some countries have effectively blocked certain websites, applications and content they dislike and can punish users. There is also extensive self-censorship by service providers and platform companies in the face of threats or legal uncertainty.

The main issues raised in this section are summarized in Box 2.9, dealing with social control, with particular reference to two aspects: means or types of control and motives.

2.9

Social control of media

Types of control

- Censorship of content
- Legal restrictions
- Control of infrastructures
- Economic means
- Self-regulation or self-censorship

Motives for control

- Fear of political subversion
- For moral or cultural reasons
- Combat cyber-crime
- National security

DIMENSIONS OF USE AND RECEPTION

The increasing difficulty of typifying or distinguishing media channels in terms of content and function has undermined once stable social definitions of media. The newspaper, for instance, may now be as much an entertainment medium, or a consumers' guide, as it is a source of information about political and social events. Cable and satellite television systems are no longer confined to offering general programming for all. Streaming services (for music, film, television and games) blur the boundaries between all kinds of media. Even so, a few dominant images and definitions of what media 'are best for' do appear to survive, the outcome of tradition, social forces and the 'bias' of certain technologies.

For instance, television, despite the many changes and extensions relating to production, transmission and reception, remains primarily a medium of family entertainment, even if the family is less likely to be viewing together (see Chapter 15). It is still a focus of public interest and a shared experience in most societies – whether people are 'binge-watching' a series via a streaming service or tuning in to a regular scheduled programme. It has both a domestic and a collective character that seem to endure. The traditional conditions of family living (shared space, time and conditions) may account for this, despite the technological trend to individuation of use and specialization of content. Even those who watch on their own often participate through what the industry calls 'second screen' activities, as people increasingly share their viewing experience online via social media.

2.10

Dimensions of media use: questions arising

Inside or outside the home?

Individual or shared experience?

Public or private in use?

Interactive or not?

The questions about media use in Box 2.10 indicate three dimensions of media reception that mainly apply to traditional media: whether it is within or outside the home; whether it is an individual or a shared experience; and whether it is more public or more private. Television is typically shared, domestic and public. The newspaper, despite its changing content, conforms to a different type. It is certainly public in character, but is less purely domestic and is individual in use. Radio is now many things but often rather private, not exclusively domestic and more individual in use than television. The book,

the music phonogram and digital games also largely follow this pattern. In general, the distinctions indicated have become less sharp as a result of the changes of technology in the direction of proliferation and convergence of reception possibilities.

Digital and online media have added to the uncertainty about which medium is good for what purpose, but they have also added a fourth dimension by which media can be distinguished: that of degree of interactivity. The more interactive media are those that allow continual motivated choice and response by users. While the video game, Internet and social media platform are clear examples where interaction is the norm, it is also the case that multi-channel cable or satellite television has an increased interactive potential, as do the recording and replay facilities of analogue and digital video recorders and applications. Interactivity has developed from a simple reaction possibility to the creation and supply of content across all media industries.

THE CONTINUED SIGNIFICANCE OF MASS MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION

Throughout the history of (the study of) media and mass communication, claims have been made that ‘mass media’ as well as ‘mass communication’ are concepts that perhaps do not fit the contemporary media environment (anymore). Especially following the rapid developments in new information and communication technologies, scholars postulated as far back as the 1980s that ‘technological change may facilitate a long-needed paradigm shift in communication science’ (Reardon and Rogers, 1988: 297). The introduction of GSM (Global System for Mobile communications) phones and the World Wide Web as the graphic user interface of the Internet – both in the early 1990s – amplified predictions about the end of mass media and communication, as ‘the [portable and decentralized] characteristics of the new media are cracking the foundations of our conception of mass communication’ (Chaffee and Metzger, 2001: 369). However, after studying ‘old’ and ‘new’ media as well as offline and online communication practices over several decades, and considering the various ways in which media devices, institutions and (networks of) people adapt to this constantly changing context, we have to conclude that mass communication has remained (or returned as) a significant way to make sense of our media environment. Similarly, the former mass media organizations (such as publishers, broadcast and cable television firms) are in many ways bigger and more influential than ever before, increasingly operating on a global scale. With this we do not wish to claim that existing theories, models and approaches to media and mass communication can be seamlessly deployed to describe and explain the current state of affairs. It is clear that many, if not most of media and mass communication theories ‘need to be readjusted to some degree to reflect changes brought about by the patterns of flow, structure, access, and ownership of new media’ (Weimann et al., 2014: 821).

To some extent it is possible to argue that online, social and mobile media bring a return to the ‘mass’ concept in media and communication. Whereas mass media and communication can be typified with the characteristics of generally less-than-interactive, one-to-many types of transmission, new media add elements of multiple-way interaction and many-to-many communication, blurring the boundaries between formerly distinct media and communication types. As defined in the first chapter, mass communication refers to messages transmitted to a large audience via one or more media, whereas mass media are the (technological and formally organized) means of transmission of such messages. In a new media context, the distinctions between one or more senders and a ‘mass’ of receivers versus the perceived intimacy of personal communication, between the formal and informal organization of communication, and between different (yet converging) technologies seem to be difficult to maintain.

It is important to note that the distinctions between mass and (inter-)personal media and communication were never that clear to begin with – as the concept of ‘mass’ media and communication emerged in the 1930s – and always had a normative bent. At that time, ‘mass communication’ was set aside as one-way, impersonal and distant communication – related to the realm of politics, propaganda, advertising and public relations – whereas ‘interpersonal communication’ was considered to be the holy grail of direct, immediate, face-to-face and body-to-body contact (Fortunati, 2005b). John Durham Peters (1994) has argued that the privileging of interpersonal communication as a ‘warmer’ form of communication may in fact be quite incorrect, in that the opportunities for highly individual experience and sensemaking that mass media and mass communication afford (in other words: how people fill the gap between sending and receiving messages) can in fact be found in any form of conversation. To Peters, mass communication is the most basic form of communication, whereas ‘[i]nterpersonal communication could be seen as a series of interlocked acts of mass communication’ (ibid.: 132). In a contemporary context, it can certainly be argued that interactive communication technologies simply multiply opportunities for all forms of conversation, and ‘[w]hat has evolved is mass communication, and as a result, the joint effects of mass and interpersonal communication differ from those which they formerly rendered’ (Walther and Valkenburg, 2017: 421).

Collapsing mass communication and interpersonal communication along dimensions of personalization into a model of ‘masspersonal’ communication (O’Sullivan and Carr, 2018) in fact reaffirms their age-old separation, highlighting the significance of Peters’ (1994) observation that people can serve as mass media (think about door-to-door election campaigners, salespeople and teachers) and mass media can simulate interpersonal communication (especially in the age of social bots, ‘smart’ speakers, adaptive web design, etc.). In today’s digital, online and interconnected media environment, ‘the three forms of communication (interpersonal, mass communication, and mass self-communication) coexist, interact, and complement each other rather than substituting

for one another’ (Castells, 2009: 55). As the presupposed warmth and authenticity of interpersonal contact converges with the distant and public nature of mass communication in the context of our comprehensively mediated lifeworld, new and pressing questions of import, impact and efficacy emerge.

The study of mass media and communication is still at the heart of this book and our field – in part, because the contemporary ‘media manifold’ (Couldry, 2016) reinvigorates concerns about the role and influence of mass media and mass communication practices, and in part due to the nature of mass communication as underlying all forms of communication, in turn amplified by processes particular to mass media. We observe how all of this gets exemplified by a preponderance of research topics covered in contemporary scholarship signalling a prevalence of ‘mass’ concepts (often mixed or integrated with other levels of communication) including, but not limited to, the following:

- Big data as a primary driver of the digital economy, and as an increasingly powerful tool in political communication (for example, regarding the micro-targeting of individuals on a massive scale with customized messages as a staple of contemporary election campaigns).
- The Internet of things as the rise of a ‘non-human’ mass communication network (linking things such as home appliances, health monitoring systems and all kinds of sensors to the Internet), affecting our lives in numerous ways.
- A political economy of digital capitalism, inspired by the enormous global (market) power of telecommunications, information and media corporations, such as Microsoft, Apple, Amazon, Alphabet (including Google), Facebook, Tencent and the Alibaba Group.
- The recurring public concern with ‘balkanization’ (Sunstein, 2001), ‘telecocoon’ (Habuchi, 2005), ‘echo chambers’ (Jamieson and Cappella, 2008), ‘filter bubbles’ (Pariser, 2012) and other forms of highly personalized information spaces within which people spend significant time when using media, suggesting an ongoing conflation of ‘mass’ communication and interpersonal (and even intrapersonal) communication (Walther and Valkenburg, 2017). The empirical work to date tends to find that people’s media habits are a complex mix between self-selected and pre-selected personalization that generally does not lead to polarization, and that there are many factors mitigating the role of personal preferences, algorithms and recommender systems (Moller, Trilling, Helberger & Van Es, 2018; Dutton and Fernandez, 2019).
- The rise of all kinds of (more or less) new social movements and forms of collective action primarily facilitated and organized through online and mobile communication networks, which are playing a key role in influencing sentiments around matters of public interest.

- A growing recognition by teachers, scholars, policymakers and politicians regarding the need to invest in digital literacy and making citizens ‘mediawise’, while at the same time developing new policies to effectively govern the Internet (and curtail people’s Internet use) with regard to areas such as privacy, online harm and copyrights.
- A renewed interest in the influence and impact of media, featuring multivariate, mixed method and multi-step flow communication research designs to accommodate the ‘double bind’ of media effects: on the one hand, scholars in the field do not assume – as was common in much of the twentieth century – that media are all-powerful and have direct effects on people, instead acknowledging how the impact of media is indirect, conditional and transactional (Valkenburg, Peter and Walther, 2016). On the other hand, it is beyond any doubt that we live in a time of ‘deep mediatization’ (Couldry and Hepp, 2016), where media can be considered to be at the centre of today’s institutions and activities, fuelling social and political transformations through an interplay of people’s use and consumption practices and the media’s own internal logic.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has offered a commentary on the evolution of mass media from the early days of printing to the present age of information communication technology and the global information society. It has told the story not as neat genealogy, but mostly in terms of brief sketches of the mass media and their main forms, with examples and cases in various regions around the world. It has highlighted their main characteristics in terms of capacity to communicate, uses for an audience and regard by the larger society. Although the primary distinction used to be according to a type of technology, equal importance attaches to social, cultural and political factors. Certain technologies survived the evolutionary struggle, so to speak, and few others (not described here) did not make it. All the different media can be considered to be converging subsequent to the rise of the Internet. The same applies to the various uses to which the media have been put.

There is no overall determining logic at work and it must be noted that the evolution of media is much more complex and messier than represented here. As Dourish and Bell (2011) suggest, one has to recognize both the ‘myth’ and the ‘mess’ of media and communication technologies when trying to understand them. Notable is the fact that all the media described are still with us and, in different ways in different parts of the world, flourishing, despite predictions to the contrary. They have all found a means of adapting to changed conditions and new competitors. This does not provide a happy new equilibrium, however. Briggs and Burke (2010) conclude, upon reviewing the social history of media from the early days of the printing press up to the contemporary convergent media ecosystem: all of this can best be understood as being in continuous flux.

FURTHER READING

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