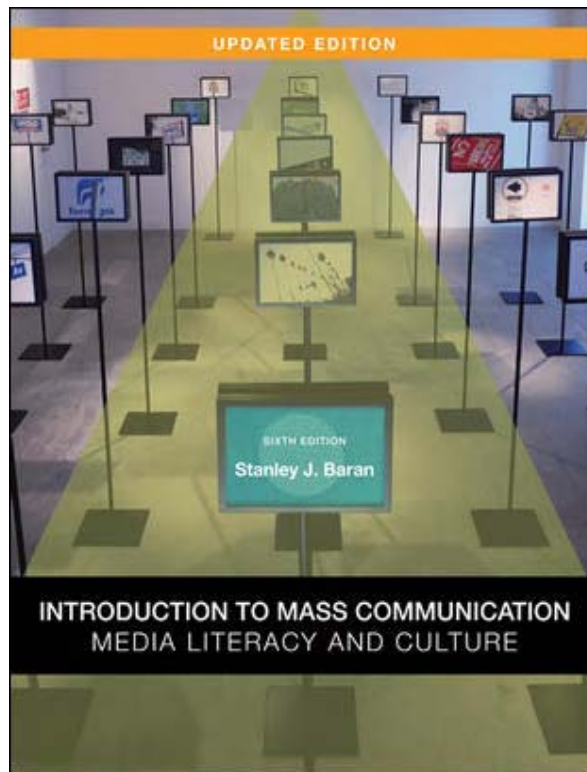


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rollingstone.com

Rolling Stone

**THE BUSH
CRIMES**
INSIDE THE
INTERIOR DEPT.

Lil Wayne Goes Rock

Rap's
Genius
Changes
His Game

The Last Outlaw

Kris Kristofferson's
American Journey
BY ETHAN HAWKE

PRINCE

ALLMAN
BROTHERS

What does it mean to "be on the cover of Rolling Stone"?

Mass Communication, Culture, and Media Literacy

1

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The clock radio jars you awake. It's Beyoncé, the last few bars of "Single Ladies." The laughing deejay shouts at you that it's 7:41 and you'd better get going. But before you do, he adds, listen to a few words from your friends at Fry's Electronics, home of fast, friendly, courteous service—"We will beat any competitive price!"

In the living room, you find your roommate has left the television on. You stop for a moment and listen: The Supreme Court has refused to hear an affirmative action appeal, your U.S. representative is under investigation for sexual harassment, and you deserve a break today at McDonald's. As you head toward the bathroom, your bare feet slip on some magazines littering the floor—*Wired*, *Rolling Stone*, *Newsweek*. You need to talk to your roommate about picking up!

After showering, you quickly pull on your Levi's, lace up your Nike cross-trainers, and throw on an American Eagle pullover. No time for breakfast; you grab a Nature Valley granola bar and the newspaper and head for the bus stop. As the bus rolls up, you can't help but notice the giant ad on its side: *Die Hard IX—Kill Before You're Killed*. Rejecting that as a movie choice for the weekend, you sit down next to a teenager listening to music on his headphones and playing a video game. You bury yourself in the paper, scanning the lead stories and the local news and then checking out *Doonesbury* and *Dilbert*.

Hopping off the bus at the campus stop, you run into Chris from your computer lab. You walk to class together, talking about last night's *Simpsons* episode.

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

- know the definitions of *communication*, *mass communication*, *mass media*, and *culture*.
- understand the relationships among communication, mass communication, culture, and those who live the culture.
- have a basis for evaluating the impact of technology and economics on those relationships.
- understand the relationship between communication and culture.
- understand the relationship between literacy and power.
- understand media literacy.
- possess the basis for developing good media literacy skills.
- be encouraged to practice media literacy.

It's not yet 9:00, and already you're awash in media messages.

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

What Is Mass Communication?

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

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

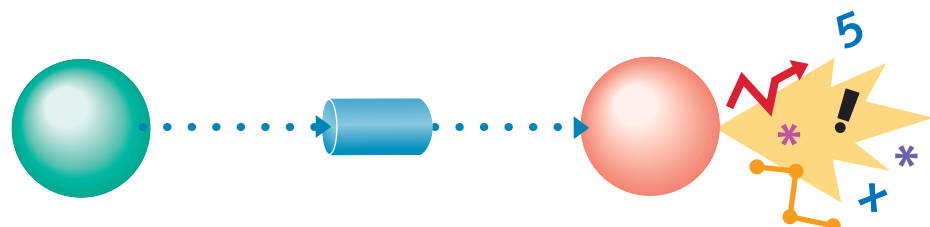
A fundamental theme of this book is that media do none of this alone. They do it *with* us as well as *to* us through mass communication, and they do it as a central—many critics and scholars say *the* central—cultural force in our society.

Communication Defined

In its simplest form **communication** is the transmission of a message from a source to a receiver. For over 60 years now, this view of communication has been identified with the writing of political scientist Harold Lasswell (1948). He said that a convenient way to describe communication is to answer these questions:

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

Expressed in terms of the basic elements of the communication process, communication occurs when



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

Straightforward enough, but what if the source is a professor who insists on speaking in a technical language far beyond the receiving students' level of skill? Obviously, communication does not occur. Unlike mere message-sending, communication requires

WWW

More on McLuhan
www.mcluhan.ca/

the response of others. Therefore, there must be a *sharing* (or correspondence) of meaning for communication to take place.

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

Communication researcher Wilbur Schramm, using ideas originally developed by psychologist Charles E. Osgood, developed a graphic way to represent the reciprocal nature of communication (Figure 1.1). This depiction of **interpersonal communication**—communication between two or a few people—shows that there is no clearly identifiable source or receiver. Rather, because communication is an ongoing and reciprocal process, all the participants, or "interpreters," are working to create meaning by **encoding** and **decoding** messages. A message is first *encoded*, that is, transformed into an understandable sign and symbol system. Speaking is encoding, as are writing, printing, and filming a television program. Once received, the message is *decoded*; that is, the signs and symbols are interpreted. Decoding occurs through listening, reading, or watching that television show.

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

Not every model can show all aspects of a process as complex as communication. Missing from this representation is **noise**—anything that interferes with successful communication. Noise is more than screeching or loud music when you are trying to read. Biases that lead to incorrect decoding, for example, are noise, as is newsprint that bleeds through from page 1 to page 2.

Encoded messages are carried by a **medium**, that is, the means of sending information. Sound waves are the medium that carries our voice to friends across the table; the telephone is the medium that carries our voice to friends across town. When the medium is a technology that carries messages to a large number of people—as newspapers carry the printed word and radio conveys the sound of music and news—we call it a **mass**

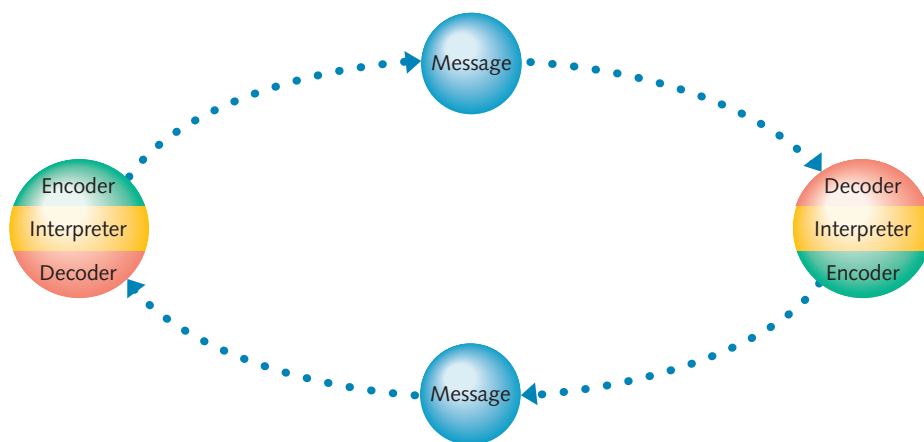


Figure 1.1 Osgood and Schramm's Model of Communication. *Source:* From *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication* by Wilbur Lang Schramm, 1954. Reprinted by permission of Wilbur Schramm's heirs.

medium (the plural of medium is **media**). The mass media we use regularly include radio, television, books, magazines, newspapers, movies, sound recordings, and computer networks. Each medium is the basis of a giant industry, but other related and supporting industries also serve them and us—advertising and public relations, for example. In our culture we use the words *media* and *mass media* interchangeably to refer to the communication industries themselves. We say, “The media entertain” or “The mass media are too conservative (or too liberal).”

Mass Communication Defined

We speak, too, of mass communication. **Mass communication** is the process of creating shared meaning between the mass media and their audiences. Schramm recast his and Osgood’s general model of communication to help us visualize the particular aspects of the mass communication process (Figure 1.2). This model and the original Osgood–Schramm model have much in common—interpreters, encoding, decoding, and messages—but it is their differences that are most significant for our understanding of how mass communication differs from other forms of communication. For example, whereas the original model includes “message,” the mass communication model offers “many identical messages.” In addition, the mass communication model specifies “feedback,” whereas the interpersonal communication model does not. When two or a few people communicate face-to-face, the participants can immediately and clearly recognize the feedback residing in the reciprocal messages (our boring professor can see and hear the students’ disenchantment as they listen to the lecture). Things are not nearly as simple in mass communication.

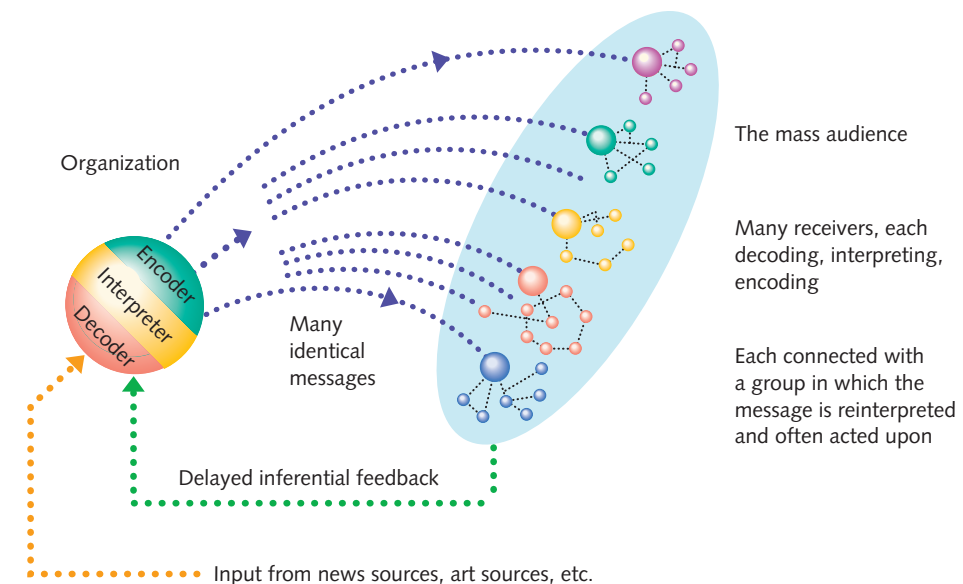
In Schramm’s mass communication model, feedback is represented by a dotted line labeled delayed **inferential feedback**. This feedback is indirect rather than direct. Television executives, for example, must wait a day, at the very minimum, and sometimes a week or a month, to discover the ratings for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

The differences between the individual elements of interpersonal and mass communication change the very nature of the communication process. How those alterations influence the message itself and how the likelihood of successfully sharing meaning varies are shown in Figure 1.3. For example, the immediacy and directness of feedback in

WWW
TV Critics Assn.
www.tvcritics.org/

Figure 1.2 Schramm’s Model of Mass Communication.

Source: From *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication* by Wilbur Lang Schramm, 1954. Reprinted by permission of Wilbur Schramm’s heirs.





Interpersonal Communication
You invite a friend to lunch.



Mass Communication
Imagine Entertainment produces 24.

	Nature	Consequences	Nature	Consequences
Message	Highly flexible and alterable	You can change it in midstream. If feedback is negative, you can offer an alternative. Is feedback still negative? Take a whole new approach.	Identical, mechanically produced, simultaneously sent Inflexible, unalterable The completed 24 episode that is aired.	Once production is completed, 24 cannot be changed. If a plotline or other communicative device isn't working with the audience, nothing can be done.
Interpreter A	One person—in this case, you	You know your mind. You can encode your own message to suit yourself, your values, your likes and dislikes.	A large, hierarchically structured organization—in this case, Imagine Entertainment Productions and the Fox television network	Who really is Interpreter A? Imagine Entertainment's executives? The writers? The director? The actors? The network and its standards and practices people? The sponsors? All must agree, leaving little room for individual vision or experimentation.
Interpreter B	One or a few people, usually in direct contact with you and, to a greater or lesser degree, known to you—in this case, Chris	You can tailor your message specifically to Interpreter B. You can make relatively accurate judgments about B because of information present in the setting. Chris is a vegetarian; you don't suggest a steak house.	A large, heterogeneous audience known to Interpreter A only in the most rudimentary way, little more than basic demographics—in this case, several million viewers of 24.	Communication cannot be tailored to the wants, needs, and tastes of all audience members or even those of all members of some subgroup. Some more or less generally acceptable standard is set.
Feedback	Immediate and direct yes or no response	You know how successful your message is immediately. You can adjust your communication on the spot to maximize its effectiveness.	Delayed and inferential Even overnight ratings too late for this episode of 24 Moreover, ratings limited to telling the number of sets tuned in	Even if the feedback is useful, it is too late to be of value for this episode. In addition, it doesn't suggest how to improve the communication effort.
Result	Flexible, personally relevant, possibly adventurous, challenging, or experimental		Constrained by virtually every aspect of the communication situation A level of communication most likely to meet the greatest number of viewers' needs A belief that experimentation is dangerous A belief that to challenge the audience is to risk failure	

Figure 1.3 Elements of Interpersonal Communication and Mass Communication Compared.

interpersonal communication free communicators to gamble, to experiment with different approaches. Their knowledge of one another enables them to tailor their messages as narrowly as they wish. As a result, interpersonal communication is often personally relevant and possibly even adventurous and challenging. In contrast, the distance between participants in the mass communication process, imposed by the technology, creates a sort of “communication conservatism.” Feedback comes too late to enable corrections or alterations in communication that fails. The sheer number of people in many mass communication audiences makes personalization and specificity difficult. As a result, mass communication tends to be more constrained, less free. This does not mean, however, that it is less potent than interpersonal communication in shaping our understanding of ourselves and our world.

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

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

What Is Culture?

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

Culture is the learned, socially acquired traditions and lifestyles of the members of a society, including their patterned, repetitive ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. (Harris, 1983, p. 5)

Culture lends significance to human experience by selecting from and organizing it. It refers broadly to the forms through which people make sense of their lives, rather than more narrowly to the opera or art of museums. (Rosaldo, 1989, p. 26)

Culture is the medium evolved by humans to survive. Nothing is free from cultural influences. It is the keystone in civilization’s arch and is the medium through which all of life’s events must flow. We are culture. (Hall, 1976, p. 14)

Culture is an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbolic forms by means of which [people] communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life. (Geertz, as cited in Taylor, 1991, p. 91)

Culture as Socially Constructed Shared Meaning

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

Creation and maintenance of a more or less common culture occurs through communication, including mass communication. When we talk to our friends; when a parent raises a child; when religious leaders instruct their followers; when teachers teach;

when grandparents pass on recipes; when politicians campaign; when media professionals produce content that we read, listen to, or watch, meaning is being shared and culture is being constructed and maintained.

Functions and Effects of Culture

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

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

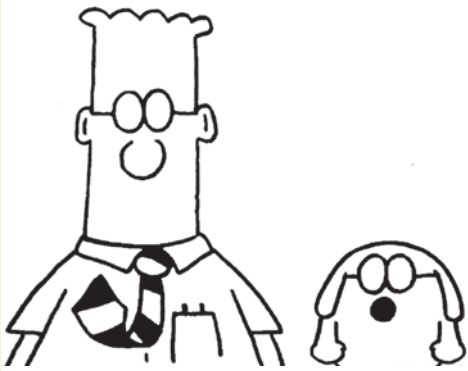
Obviously, through communication. Through a lifetime of communication we have learned just what our culture expects of us. The two examples given here are positive results of culture's limiting effects. But culture's limiting effects can be negative, such as when we are unwilling or unable to move past patterned, repetitive ways of thinking, feeling, and acting or when we entrust our "learning" to teachers whose interests are selfish, narrow, or otherwise not consistent with our own.

U.S. culture, for example, values thinness and beauty in women. How many women endure weeks of unhealthy diets and succumb to potentially dangerous surgical procedures in search of a body that for most is physically unattainable? How many men (and other women) never get to know, like, or even love those women who cannot meet our culture's standards of thinness and beauty? Why, by the time they enter *first grade*, do more than 40% of girls say they are happier when on a diet, and by their 17th birthdays do 78% say they hate their bodies (Miller, 2007)? Why do 91% of all college women report dieting, with 22% dieting "always" or "often"? Why do 7 million American girls and women suffer from clinically diagnosed eating disorders? Why do 90% of American high school girls think they are overweight, up from 34% in 1995 (Brubach, 2007)? Why, when the United States has the lowest rate of savings of any industrialized nation in the world, do Americans spend more than \$12 billion annually on cosmetic surgery (Moynihan, 2009)? Why has the need to surgically remake our bodies become so essential that chains of retail cosmetic procedure "convenience stores" with names like SleekMedSpa, Sona MedSpa International, and Pure Med Spa have opened more than 2,500 outlets in American shopping malls, up from 25 in 2002 (Morrissey, 2008)?

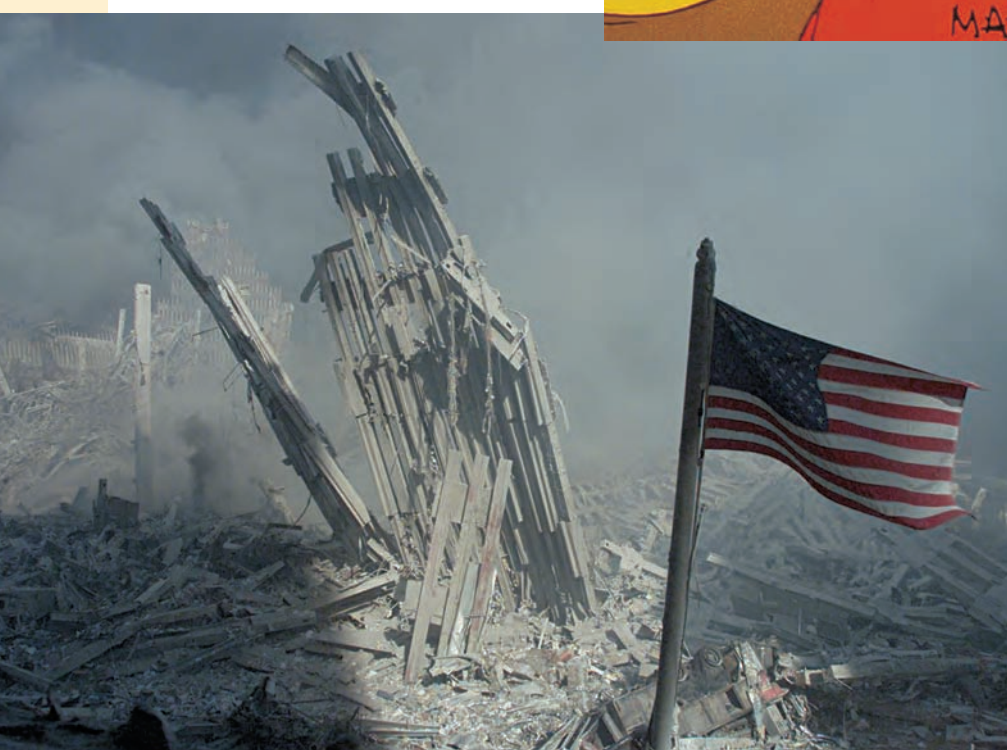
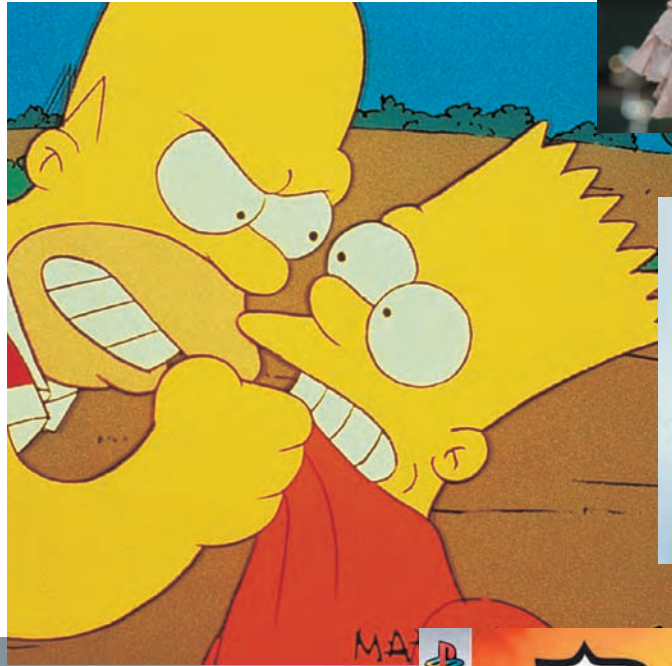
Now consider how this situation may have come about. Our mothers did not bounce us on their knees when we were babies, telling us that thin was good and fat was bad. Think back, though, to the stories you were told and the television shows and movies you watched growing up. The heroines (or, more often, the beautiful love interests of the heroes) were invariably tall, beautiful, and thin. The bad guys were usually mean and fat. From Disney's depictions of Snow White, Cinderella, Beauty, Tinker Bell, and Pocahontas to the impossible dimensions of most video-game heroines, the message is embedded in the conscious (and unconscious) mind of every girl and boy: You can't be too thin or too beautiful! Or as one 10-year-old girl explained to Courtney Martin (2007), author of *Perfect Girls, Starving Daughters*, "It is better to be pretty, which means thin and mean, than to be ugly, which means fat and nice. That's just how it is." And as one plastic surgeon who runs a number of mall-based cosmetic procedure outlets testified, "Virtually every office patient I see talks about the reality TV shows" like *Extreme Makeover* and VH1's *Remaking Vince Neil* (Morrissey, 2008, p. BU8).



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



Scott Adams/Dist. by United Feature Syndicate, Inc.





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

Culture need not only limit. That media representations of female beauty often meet with debate and disagreement points up the fact that culture can be liberating as well. This is so because cultural values can be contested.

Especially in a pluralistic, democratic society such as ours, the **dominant culture** (or, **mainstream culture**)—the one that seems to hold sway with the majority of people—is often openly challenged. People do meet, find attractive, like, and even love people who do not fit the standard image of beauty. In addition, media sometimes present images that suggest different ideals of beauty and success. Cooking impresario Rachael Ray; singer-actresses Queen Latifah, Jennifer Lopez, and Raven-Symoné Pearman; and talk show host and influential broadcasting executive Oprah Winfrey all represent alternatives to our culture's idealized standards of beauty, and all have undeniable appeal (and power) on the big and small screens. Liberation from the limitations imposed by culture resides in our ability and willingness to learn and use *new* patterned, repetitive ways of thinking, feeling, and acting; to challenge existing patterns; and to create our own.

Defining, Differentiating, Dividing, and Uniting Effects of Culture Have you ever made the mistake of calling a dolphin, porpoise, or even a whale a fish? Maybe you have heard others do it. This error occurs because when we think of fish, we think “lives in the water” and “swims.” Fish are defined by their “aquatic culture.” Because water-residing, swimming dolphins and porpoises share that culture, we sometimes forget that they are mammals, not fish.

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

Not only do media set standards of attractiveness, but they remind us that there is an easy way to meet them. Television shows like *Extreme Makeover* and *Dr. 90210* tell us that beauty is not something we live but a commodity that can be purchased.



For more on the topic of culture's defining effect, watch “Cartoon Controversy” on the book's Online Learning Center Web site.



Queen Latifah, Rachael Ray, and Jennifer Lopez are prominent women whose presentation in the media suggests different cultural ideals of beauty and success. Each represents an alternative to our culture's idealized standards of beauty. How attractive do you find each woman to be? What is it about each that appeals to you?

Within this large, national culture, however, there are many smaller, **bounded cultures** (or, **co-cultures**). For example, we speak comfortably of Italian neighborhoods, fraternity row, the South, and the suburbs. Because of our cultural understanding of these categories, each expression communicates something about our expectations of these places. We think we can predict with a good deal of certainty the types of restaurants and shops we will find in the Italian neighborhood, even the kind of music we will hear escaping from open windows. We can predict the kinds of clothes and cars we will see on fraternity row, the likely behavior of shop clerks in the South, and the political orientation of the suburb's residents. Moreover, the people within these cultures usually identify themselves as members of those bounded cultures. An individual may say, for example, "I am Italian American" or "I'm from the South." These smaller cultures unite groups of people and enable them to see themselves as different from other groups around them. Thus culture also serves to differentiate us from others.

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

Problems arise, however, when differentiation leads to division. All Americans were traumatized by the horrific events of September 11, 2001, but that tragedy was compounded for Muslim Americans whose patriotism was challenged simply because of membership in their particular bounded culture. The Council on American-Islamic Relations reported a 25% increase in complaints of anti-Muslim bias between 2005 and 2006, half-a-decade after 9/11 (Haynes, 2007). These included threats, beatings, arsons, shootings, and even murder. For these good Americans, regardless of what was in their hearts or minds, their religion, skin color, maybe even their clothing "communicated" disloyalty to the United States to many other Americans. Just as culture is constructed and maintained through communication, it is also communication (or miscommunication) that turns differentiation into division.



One Tree Hill, *CSI Miami*, and *Gossip Girl*—these three television programs are aimed at different audiences, yet in each the characters share certain traits that mark them as attractive. Must people in real life look like these performers to be considered attractive? Successful? Good? The 18 people shown are all slender, tall, and young. Yes, they are just make-believe television characters, but the producers of the shows on which they appear chose these people—as opposed to others—for a reason. What do you think it was? How well do you measure up to the cultural standard of beauty and attractiveness represented here? Do you ever wish that you could be just a bit more like these people? Why or why not?





What is it about Muslim Americans that “communicated disloyalty” to the United States in the wake of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on New York and Washington?

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

Defining Culture From this discussion of culture comes the definition of culture on which the remainder of this book is based:

Culture is the world made meaningful; it is socially constructed and maintained through communication. It limits as well as liberates us; it differentiates as well as unites us. It defines our realities and thereby shapes the ways we think, feel, and act.

Mass Communication and Culture

Because culture can limit and divide or liberate and unite, it offers us infinite opportunities to use communication for good—if we choose to do so. James Carey (1975) wrote,

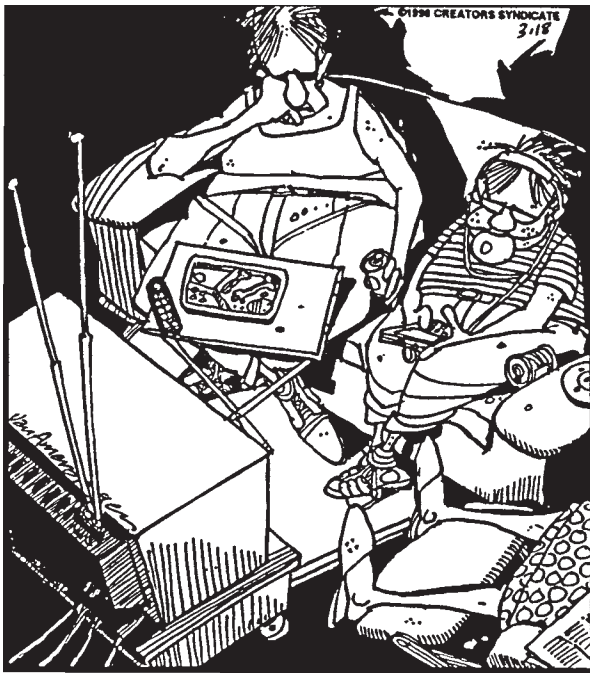
Because we have looked at each new advance in communication technology as opportunities for politics and economics, we have devoted them, almost exclusively, to government and trade. We have rarely seen them as opportunities to expand [our] powers to learn and exchange ideas and experience. (pp. 20–21)

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

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

Mass Media as Cultural Storytellers

A culture’s values and beliefs reside in the stories it tells. Who are the good guys? Who are the bad guys? How many of your childhood heroines were chubby? How many good guys dressed in black? How many heroines lived happily ever after without marrying Prince Charming? Probably not very many. Our stories help define our realities, shaping the ways we think, feel, and act. “Stories



There we are, huddled around the tribal campfire, telling and retelling the stories of our people.

Storytellers play an important role in helping us define ourselves. By permission of Jerry Van Amerongen and Creators Syndicate, Inc.

are sites of observations about self and society,” explains media theorist Hanno Hardt (2007). “These fictional accounts are the constitutive material signs of a shared conversation” (p. 476). Therefore, the “storytellers” have a responsibility to tell their stories in as professional and ethical a way as possible.

At the same time, we, the audience for these stories, also have opportunities and responsibilities. We use these stories not only to be entertained but to learn about the world around us, to understand the values, the way things work, and how the pieces fit together. We have a responsibility to question the tellers and their stories, to interpret the stories in ways consistent with larger or more important cultural values and truths, to be thoughtful, to reflect on the stories’ meanings and what they say about us and our culture. To do less is to miss an opportunity to construct our own meaning and, thereby, culture.

For example, as journalists tried to tell the story of the destruction wrought by Hurricane Katrina, they had a nearly infinite number of images and words available to craft their narratives. The wire-service photos and accompanying captions featured on this cover of *Extra!* were just two. They had appeared in newspapers around the world and in proximity to each other on Web portal Yahoo! News. The young African American man “walks through chest deep flood water after looting a grocery store.” The White couple, though, wades “through chest-deep water after finding bread and soda from a local grocery store.” The plot line is clear—the lazy Black man looted . . . naturally . . . while those hardworking White folks were fortunate enough to have found sustenance! Readers and Web surfers of all races, in an instantaneous (and angry) cultural conversation with newspapers and Yahoo!, rejected their offensive, racially simplistic, stories. The images and captions immediately disappeared from Yahoo! News. Yahoo! and many newspapers apologized (Bacon, 2005).

Mass Communication as Cultural Forum

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

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

Scope and Nature of Mass Media

No matter how we choose to view the process of mass communication, it is impossible to deny that an enormous portion of our lives is spent interacting with mass media. On a typical Sunday night, 37 million people in the United States will tune in to a prime-time



The events captured in these images sent globally by Yahoo! News were the same—people trying to survive the horrors of Hurricane Katrina. But as the race of the “characters” changed, so too did the stories. People complained. Yahoo! listened.

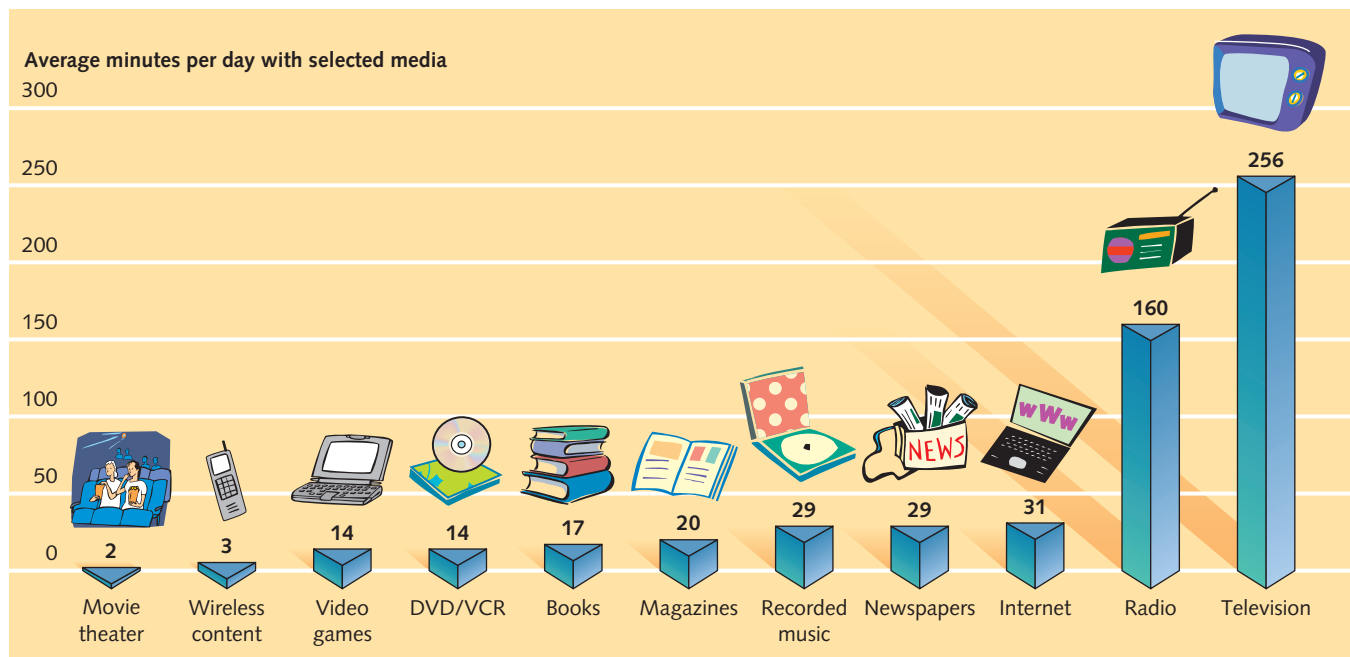
television show. Television sets are in over 98% of our homes, VCRs and DVDs in over 91%. Ninety-six percent of America's 223 million Internet users access their e-mail at least once a week; 71% log on weekly to surf the Net with no specific destination in mind (Digital Future Project, 2008). Social networking site Facebook has 200 million members across the globe, meeting in 40 languages (Stone, 2009). Teens and adults spend more than 8 hours a day watching television, going to the movies, surfing the Internet, listening to the radio, playing music, or reading books and newspapers. They average more than 2 months a year in front of the television, 41 days tuned to the radio, and a full week online. Nearly 80% of American parents consider watching television with their children "quality time" (Bulik, 2007). Fifty-one million of us buy a daily newspaper, and 124 million read one almost every day (Edmonds, 2007).

We spend \$10 billion a year going to the multiplex, buying more than 1.4 billion tickets, and another \$25 billion renting, buying, and downloading video versions of movies (Garrett, 2007). Ninety percent of U.S. kids and teens play video games, joined by two-thirds of the country's 18- to 34-year-olds (Birnbaum, 2007). Typical high school or college-aged Americans spend 42% of their leisure time watching television, 3% reading for fun, 11% playing video games, and 6% participating in sports and exercise ("How Americans," 2007). We Americans use 60% of our waking time consuming various forms of media content, and we spend more on entertainment media than we do on clothes and health care combined. Figure 1.4 provides data on a typical U.S. adult's media day.

Despite the pervasiveness of mass media in our lives, many of us are dissatisfied with or critical of the media industries' performance and much of the content provided. For example, a General Social Survey poll (Silver, 2009) reported that only 9% of Americans had a "great deal of confidence in the press." More than half felt American news outlets were politically biased, inaccurate, and did not care about the people they report on (AFP, 2007). One-third of U.S. adults report being overwhelmed by media and that they are "crowding out other important things in their lives" (Mandese, 2004).

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

Figure 1.4 Average Number of Minutes per Day a Typical Adult Spends With Selected Media, 2006. Source: Lindsay, 2006.



The Role of Technology

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

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

This disagreement about the power of technology is at the heart of the controversy surrounding the new communication technologies. Are we more or less powerless in the wake of advances such as the Internet, the World Wide Web, and instant global audio and visual communication? If we are at the mercy of technology, the culture that surrounds us will not be of our making, and the best we can hope to do is make our way reasonably well in a world outside our control. But if these technologies are indeed neutral and their power resides in *how* we choose to use them, we can utilize them responsibly and thoughtfully to construct and maintain whatever kind of culture we want. As film director and technophile Steven Spielberg explained, "Technology can be our best friend, and technology can also be the biggest party pooper of our lives. It interrupts our own story, interrupts our ability to have a thought or daydream, to imagine something wonderful because we're too busy bridging the walk from the cafeteria back to the office on the cell phone" (quoted in Kennedy, 2002, p. 109). Or, as Dr. Ian Malcolm (Jeff Goldblum) said in Spielberg's 1997 *The Lost World: Jurassic Park*, "Oooh! Ahhh! That's how it always starts. Then later there's running and screaming."

Technology does have an impact on communication. At the very least it changes the basic elements of communication (see Figure 1.3 on p. 7). What technology does not do is relieve us of our obligation to use mass communication responsibly and wisely.

The Role of Money

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

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

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

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

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Audience as Consumer or Audience as Product?

People base their judgments of media performance and content on the way they see themselves fitting into the economics of the media industry. Businesses operate to serve their consumers and make a profit. The consumer comes first, then, but who is the consumer in our mass media system? This is a much debated issue among media practitioners and media critics. Consider the following models.

	Producer	Product	Consumer
Basic U.S. Business Model	A manufacturer . . .	produces a product . . .	for consumers who choose to buy or not. The manufacturer must satisfy the consumer. Power resides here.
Basic U.S. Business Model for Cereal: Rice Krispies as Product, Public as Consumer	Kellogg's . . .	produces Rice Krispies . . .	for us, the consumers. If we buy Rice Krispies, Kellogg's makes a profit. Kellogg's must satisfy us. Power resides here.
Basic U.S. Business Model for Television (A): Audience as Product, Advertisers as Consumer	NBC . . .	produces audiences (using its programming) . . .	for advertisers. If they buy NBC's audiences, NBC makes a profit. NBC must satisfy its consumers, the advertisers. Power resides here.
Basic U.S. Business Model for Television (B): Programming as Product, Audience as Consumer	NBC . . .	produces (or distributes) programming . . .	for us, the audience. If we watch NBC's shows, NBC makes a profit. NBC must satisfy us. Power resides here.

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

the bait we put in the mousetrap” (in “Soundbites,” 2005, p. 2). Do you think Koppel is unnecessarily cynical or is he correct in his analysis of television?

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

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

Mass Communication, Culture, and Media Literacy

Culture and communication are inseparable, and mass communication, as we've seen, is a particularly powerful, pervasive, and complex form of communication. Our level of skill in the mass communication process is therefore of utmost importance. This skill is not necessarily a simple one to master (it is much more than booting up the computer, turning on the television set, or flipping the pages of your favorite magazine). But it is, indeed, a learnable skill, one that can be practiced. This skill is **media literacy**—the ability to

effectively and efficiently comprehend and use any form of mediated communication. But before we can fully understand *media* literacy, we must understand why literacy, in and of itself, is important.

Let's begin by looking at the development of writing and the formation of **literate culture**. An expanding literate population encouraged technological innovation; the printing press transformed the world. Other communication technology advances have also had a significant impact; however, these technologies cannot be separated from how people have used them. Technology can be used in ways beneficial and otherwise. The skilled, beneficial use of media technologies is the goal of media literacy.

Oral Culture

Oral or **preliterate cultures** are those without a written language. Virtually all communication must be face-to-face, and this fact helps define the culture, its structure, and its operation. Whether they existed thousands of years ago before writing was developed or still function today (for example, among certain Eskimo peoples and African tribes where **griots**, or “talking chiefs,” provide oral histories of their people going back hundreds of years), oral cultures are remarkably alike. They share these characteristics:

The meaning in language is specific and local. As a result, communities are closely knit, and their members are highly dependent on each other for all aspects of life.

Knowledge must be passed on orally. People must be *shown* and *told* how to do something. Therefore, skilled hunters, farmers, midwives, and the like hold a special status; they are the living embodiments of culture.

Memory is crucial. As repositories of cultural customs and traditions, elders are revered; they are responsible for passing knowledge on to the next generation.

Myth and history are intertwined. Storytellers are highly valued; they are the meaning makers, and, like the elders, they pass on what is important to the culture.

What does the resulting culture look like? People know each other intimately and rely on one another for survival. Roles are clearly defined. Stories teach important cultural lessons and preserve important cultural traditions and values. Control over communication is rarely necessary, but when it is, it is easily achieved through social sanctions.

The Invention of Writing

Writing, the first communication technology, complicated this simple picture. More than 5,000 years ago, alphabets were developed independently in several places around the world. **Ideogrammatic** (picture-based) **alphabets** appeared in Egypt (as hieroglyphics), Sumer (as cuneiform), and urban China.

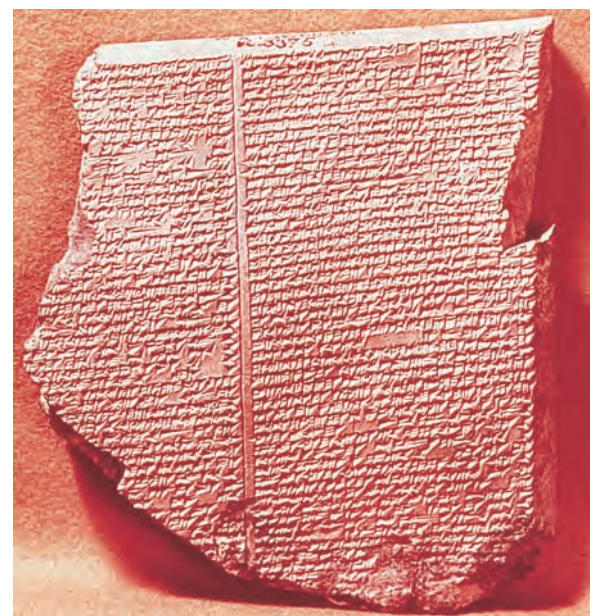
Ideogrammatic alphabets require a huge number of symbols to convey even the simplest idea. Their complexity meant that only a very select few, an intellectual elite, could read or write. For writing to truly serve as effective and efficient communication, one more advance was required.

The Sumerians were international traders, maintaining trade routes throughout known Europe, Africa, and Asia. The farther the Sumerian traders traveled, the less they could rely on face-to-face communication and the greater their need for a more precise writing form. Sumerian cuneiform slowly expanded, using symbols to represent sounds rather than objects and ideas. Appearing around 1800 B.C.E. these were the first elements of a **syllable alphabet**—an alphabet employing sequences of vowels and consonants, that is, words.

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This Sumerian cuneiform dates from 700 years before the birth of Christ.



The syllable alphabet as we know it today slowly developed, aided greatly by ancient Semitic cultures, and eventually flowered in Greece around 800 B.C.E. Like the Sumerians long before them, the Greeks perfected their easy alphabet of necessity. Having little in the way of natural resources, the Greek city-states depended and thrived on bustling trade routes all around the Aegean and Mediterranean seas. For orders to be placed, deals arranged, manifests compiled, and records kept, writing that was easy to learn, use, and understand was required.

A medium was necessary to carry this new form of communication. The Sumerians had used clay tablets, but the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans eventually employed **papyrus**, rolls of sliced strips of reed pressed together. Around 100 B.C.E. the Romans began using **parchment**, a writing material made from prepared animal skins, and in 105 C.E. midlevel Chinese bureaucrat Ts'ai Lun perfected a papermaking process employing a mixture of pressed mulberry tree bark, water, rags, and a sophisticated frame for drying and stretching the resulting sheets of paper. This technology made its way to Europe through various trade routes some 600 years later, and the importance of writing cannot be overemphasized. As explained by historian David Owen (2004), "It made ideas permanent, portable, and endlessly reproducible" (p. 91).

Literate Culture

But writing required **literacy**—the ability to effectively and efficiently comprehend and use written symbols. And with the coming of literacy the social and cultural rules and structures of preliterate times began to change. People could accumulate a permanent body of knowledge and transmit that knowledge from one generation to another. Among the changes that writing brought were these:

Meaning and language became more uniform. The words "a bolt of cloth" had to mean the same to a reader in Mesopotamia as they did to one in Sicily. Over time, communities became less closely knit and their members less dependent on one

This Egyptian funeral papyrus depicts the weighing of a heart when a person dies.



another. The definition of “community” expanded to include people outside the local area.

Communication could occur over long distances and long periods of time. With knowledge being transmitted in writing, power shifted from those who could show others their special talents to those who could write and read about them.

The culture’s memory, history, and myth could be recorded on paper. With written histories, elders and storytellers began to lose their status, and new elites developed. Homer (some historians believe he was actually several scribes), for example, compiled in written form several generations of oral stories and histories that we know as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

What did the resulting culture look like? It was no longer local. Its members could survive not only by hunting or farming together but by commercial, political, or military expansion. Empires replaced communities. There was more compartmentalization of people based on what they did to earn a living—bakers baked, herders herded, merchants sold goods. Yet, at the same time, role and status were less permanently fixed. Slaves who learned to read to serve their masters took on new duties for those masters and rose in status.

Power and influence now resided not in the strongest hunter, wisest elder, or most engaging storyteller but in those who could read and write; that is, power and influence now rested with those who were literate. They could best engage in widespread official communication, and they wrote the histories and passed on cultural values and lessons. With this change from preliterate to literate culture, the first stirrings of a new political philosophy were born. Reading and writing encouraged more open and robust debate, political exchange, and criticism of the powerful; in other words, it fostered democracy.

It is important to remember that in the newly literate cultures, communication was still quite limited. An orator could address at most a few hundred people at a time. Writers could reach only those literate few who held their handwritten scrolls or letters. The printing press would change this, making it possible to duplicate communication, thereby expanding our ability to communicate with one another.

The Gutenberg Revolution

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

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

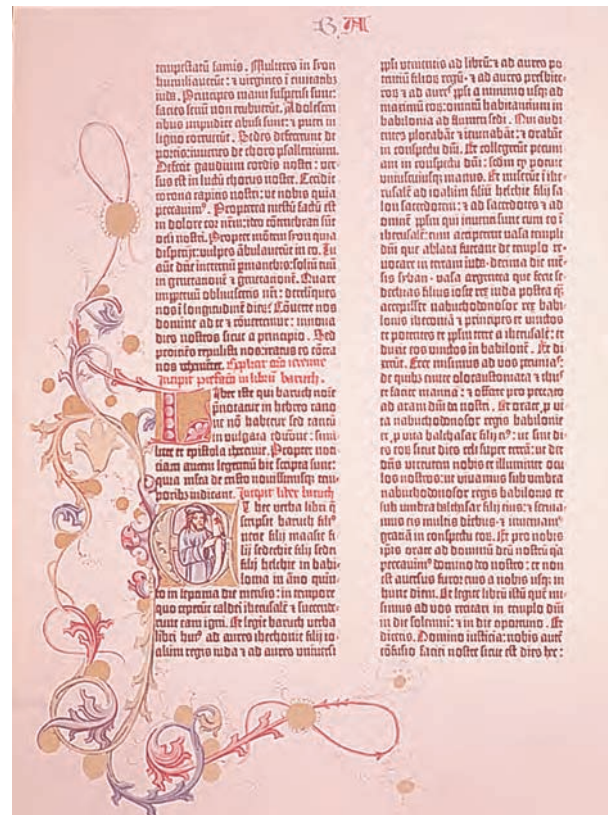
Marshall McLuhan expressed his admiration for Gutenberg’s innovation by calling his 1962 book *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. In it he argued that the advent of print is the key to our modern consciousness. Why was Gutenberg’s invention so important? Simply, because it allowed *mass* communication.

The Printing Press Printing and the printing press existed long before Gutenberg perfected his process in or around 1446. The Chinese were using wooden block presses as early as 600 C.E. and had movable clay type by 1000 C.E. A simple movable metal type was even in use in Korea in the 13th century. Gutenberg’s printing press was a significant leap forward, however, for two important reasons.

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More on Gutenberg
www.mainz.de/gutenberg/english/index.htm

This page from a Gutenberg Bible shows the exquisite care the printer used in creating his works. The artwork in the margins is handpainted, but the text is mechanically printed.



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

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

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

The Impact of Print Although Gutenberg developed his printing press with a limited use in mind, printing Bibles, the cultural effects of mass printing have been profound.

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

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

Johannes Gutenberg takes the first proof from his printing press.



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

In addition, duplication permitted standardization and preservation. Myth and superstition began to make way for standard, verifiable bodies of knowledge. History, economics, physics, and chemistry all became part of the culture’s intellectual life. Literate cultures were now on the road to modernization.

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

Nobel Laureate and former U.S. vice president Al Gore (2005) connected printing directly to the experiment in democracy that was to become the United States:

The values that Americans had brought from Europe to the New World had grown out of the sudden explosion of literacy and knowledge after Gutenberg’s disruptive invention broke up the stagnant medieval information monopoly and triggered the Reformation, Humanism, and the Enlightenment, and enshrined a new sovereign: the “Rule of Reason.”

The Industrial Revolution

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

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

Media Literacy

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

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

WWW

More on the Industrial
Revolution
[www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/
modsbook14.html](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/modsbook14.html)

WWW

Center for Media Literacy
www.medialit.org/

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

Hunter College media professor Stuart Ewen (2000) emphasized this point in comparing media literacy with traditional literacy. “Historically,” he wrote, “links between literacy and democracy are inseparable from the notion of an informed populace, conversant with the issues that touch upon their lives, enabled with tools that allow them to participate actively in public deliberation and social change. . . . Literacy was about crossing the lines that had historically separated men of ideas from ordinary people, about the enfranchisement of those who had been excluded from the compensations of citizenship” (p. 448). To Ewen, and others committed to media literacy, media literacy represents no less than the means to full participation in the culture.

Elements of Media Literacy

Media scholar Art Silverblatt (2001) identifies seven fundamental elements of media literacy. To these we will add an eighth. Media literacy includes these characteristics:

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

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

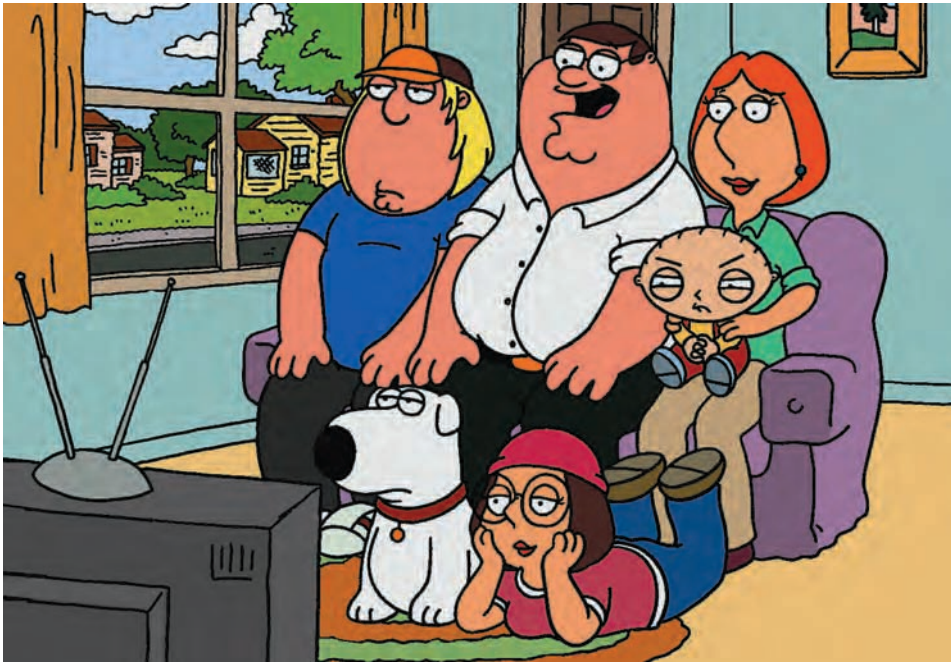
3. *An awareness of the impact of media on the individual and society.* Writing and the printing press helped change the world and the people in it. Mass media do the same. If we ignore the impact of media on our lives, we run the risk of being caught up and carried along by that change rather than controlling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

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

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

6. *The ability to enjoy, understand, and appreciate media content.* Media literacy does not mean living the life of a grump, liking nothing in the media, or always being suspicious of harmful effects and cultural degradation. We take high school and college classes to enhance our understanding and appreciation of novels; we can do the same for media texts.

Learning to enjoy, understand, and appreciate media content includes the ability to use **multiple points of access**—to approach media content from a variety of directions and derive from it many levels of meaning. Thus, we control meaning making for our own enjoyment or appreciation. For example, we can enjoy the 2008 fan and critic



The Family Guy is a cartoon about a typical suburban family. It has all the things you would expect from a television situation comedy—an inept dad, a precocious daughter, a slacker son, a solid wife, and zany situations. Yet it also offers an intellectual dog philosopher and a genius, scheming baby. Why do you think the producers have gone to the trouble to populate this show with the usual trappings of a sitcom but then added other, bizarre elements? And what's going on in *The Dark Knight*? Is it another special effects-laden, action-adventure summer blockbuster? A classic conflicted hero movie in the usual Batman mold? Commentary on the morality of torture and domestic surveillance? A parable for post-9/11 America? Or maybe just a cool way to spend a Saturday night, entertained by the same folks who created *Batman Begins* and *Insomnia*?

favorite *The Dark Knight* as an exciting, explosion-laden, action-adventure summer blockbuster, the second biggest moneymaker in cinematic history. But as movie buffs we might see it as a classic conflicted-hero movie. Batman fights evil while battling his own demons; “You complete me,” the Caped Crusader says to his arch nemesis, the Joker. Or we might read it as a commentary on the morality of torture and domestic surveillance, important issues of the day. Batman employs both with some success, but his assistant Lucius Fox, citing civil liberties, resists. Or is it a parable for Americans’ retreat into fear and passivity after 9/11? The people of Gotham respond to the Joker’s brutality, not with courage and resolve, but with acquiescence. Or maybe we enjoy it as a cool way to spend a Saturday night, entertained by the same folks who so delighted us with *Batman Begins* and *Insomnia*.

In fact, television programs such as *Desperate Housewives*, *The Daily Show*, *The Simpsons*, *Grey’s Anatomy*, and *The Family Guy* are specifically constructed to take advantage of the media literacy skills of sophisticated viewers while providing entertaining fare for less skilled consumers. The same is true for films such as *Kill Bill*, *I Am Legend*, *Jarhead*, and *Knocked Up*, magazines such as *Alarm*, and the best of jazz, rap, and rock. *Desperate Housewives* and *The Daily Show* are produced as television comedies, designed to make people laugh. But they are also intentionally produced to provide more sophisticated, media literate viewers with opportunities to make personally interesting or relevant meaning. Anyone can laugh while watching these programs, but some people can investigate hypocrisy in suburbia (*Housewives*), or they can examine the failings and foibles of contemporary journalism (*Daily Show*).

7. *Development of effective and responsible production skills.* Traditional literacy assumes that people who can read can also write. Media literacy also makes this assumption. Our definition of literacy (of either type) calls not only for effective and efficient comprehension of content but for its effective and efficient *use*. Therefore, media literate individuals should develop production skills that enable them to create useful media messages. If you have ever tried to make a narrative home video—one that tells a story—you know that producing content is much more difficult than consuming it. Even producing a telephone answering machine message that is not embarrassing is a daunting task for many people.

This element of media literacy may seem relatively unimportant at first glance. After all, if you choose a career in media production, you will get training in school and on the job. If you choose another calling, you may never be in the position of having to produce content. But most professions now employ some form of media to disseminate information: for use in training, to enhance presentations, or to keep in contact with clients and customers. The Internet and the World Wide Web, in particular, require effective production skills of their users—at home, school, and work—because online receivers can and do easily become online creators.

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

Media Literacy Skills

Consuming media content is simple. Push a button and you have television pictures or music on a radio. Come up with enough cash and you can see a movie or buy a magazine. Media literate consumption, however, requires a number of specific skills:

1. *The ability and willingness to make an effort to understand content, to pay attention, and to filter out noise.* As we saw earlier, anything that interferes with successful

WWW

National Association for Media
Literacy Education
www.aamlinfo.org

WWW

Media Education
www.mediaeducation.com

WWW

Association for Media Literacy
www.aaml.ca/home

communication is called noise, and much of the noise in the mass communication process results from our own consumption behavior. When we watch television, often we are also doing other things, such as eating, reading, or chatting on the phone. We drive while we listen to the radio. Obviously, the quality of our meaning making is related to the effort we give it.

2. *An understanding of and respect for the power of media messages.* The mass media have been around for more than a century and a half. Just about everybody can enjoy them. Their content is either free or relatively inexpensive. Much of the content is banal and a bit silly, so it is easy to dismiss media content as beneath serious consideration or too simple to have any influence.

We also disregard media's power through the **third-person effect**—the common attitude that others are influenced by media messages but that we are not. That is, we are media literate enough to understand the influence of mass communication on the attitudes, behaviors, and values of others but not self-aware or honest enough to see its influence on our lives.

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

4. *Development of heightened expectations of media content.* We all use media to tune out, waste a little time, and provide background noise. When we decide to watch television, we are more likely to turn on the set and flip channels until we find something passable than we are to read the listings to find a specific program to view. When we are at the video store, we often settle for anything because "It's just a rental." When we expect little from the content before us, we tend to give meaning making little effort and attention.

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

Knowledge of these conventions is important because they cue or direct our meaning making. For example, we know to accept the details in a documentary film about



The third-person effect makes it easy to dismiss media's influence on ourselves . . . only those other folks are affected! Media literate people know that not only is this not the case, but even if it were, we all live in a world where people are influenced by mass communication. © David Horsey, Seattle Post-Intelligencer. Used by permission.

WWW

Media Alliance
www.media-alliance.org

It is one thing to understand the importance of being a media literate individual, of knowing its fundamental elements and necessary skills. It is quite another to live a media literate life. This is not as difficult as it may seem at first. For one thing, we live lives that are virtually awash in media and their messages, so the opportunities to practice media literacy are always there. But we can (and should) do more. We can live a media literate life *and* make media literacy a living enterprise. We can encourage media literacy and even teach others its value.

The margins of this text are replete with URLs that connect us to educational, professional, scholarly, public interest, governmental, and industry groups that, either directly or indirectly, contribute to our ability to be media literate. This chapter alone offers links to a dozen sites specifically devoted to advancing the cause of media literacy. In addition, every state in the Union maintains standards for teaching media literacy in their schools (Tugend, 2003). Montana and Massachusetts are notable examples. Get a copy of the standards used where you live. Read them and, if need be, challenge them.

Look, too, at the media literacy efforts in other countries. Media literacy is a mandatory part of the school curriculum in Canada, Great Britain, and Australia. The Bertelsmann Foundation has long sponsored media education programs in Germany (and recently in the United States). The British Film Institute and CLEMI in France underwrite similar efforts in their respective countries. The Australian Teachers of Media encourage media education in Australia, New Zealand, and Southeast Asia.

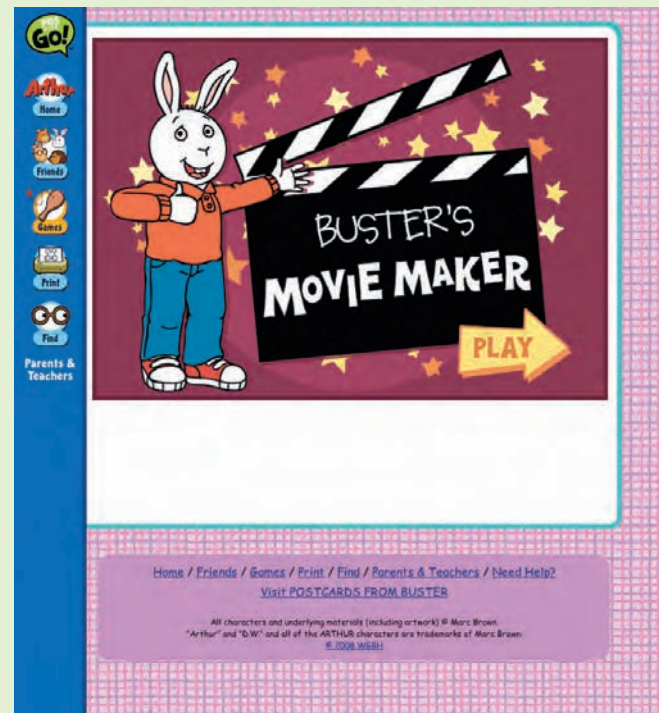
The American media industry, too, is committing itself to the effort. Many contemporary television programs, such as public broadcasting's adolescent reading show *Wishbone*, regularly close with a behind-the-scenes, how-did-we-produce-that-shot feature in an attempt to teach television "readers" the "grammar" of video narrative. Its kids' cartoon *Arthur* regularly features media literacy themes and even directs young viewers to the *Arthur* Web site where they can play video games designed to reinforce media literacy skills. The Discovery Channel offers *Assignment: Media Literacy*, separate kits for elementary, middle, and high school students designed to impart critical viewing skills for all electronic media. The cable industry, in conjunction with the national PTA, sponsors an annual nationwide media literacy event called *Take Charge of Your TV Week*, typically in October. Almost every newspaper of any size in America now produces a weekly "young person's section" to encourage boys and girls to read the paper and differentiate it from the other news media.

Again, there is no shortage of ways to improve your media literacy and to advance that of others. This text will help you get started. Each chapter ends with two sections. The first, *Developing Media Literacy Skills*, focuses on improving our personal media literacy. The second, *Living Media Literacy*, offers suggestions for using our media literacy skills in the larger culture.

We can live a media literate life *and* make media literacy a living enterprise. We can encourage media literacy and even teach others its value.

As you read these sections, consider these reminders of what you've learned in this chapter. They are drawn from the National Association for Media Literacy Education's (2007) *Core Principles*:

1. All media messages are "constructed."
2. Each medium has different characteristics, strengths, and a unique "language" construction.
3. Media messages are produced for particular purposes.
4. All media messages contain embedded values and points of view.
5. People use their individual skills, beliefs, and experiences to construct their own meanings from media messages.
6. Media and media messages can influence beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors, and the democratic process.



The PBS cartoon *Arthur* regularly includes media literacy themes, even directing young viewers to its Web site where kids can practice their media literacy skills.

the sinking of the *Titanic* as more credible than those found in a Hollywood movie about that disaster.

This skill is also important for another reason. Sometimes, in an effort to maximize audiences (and therefore profits) or for creative reasons, media content makers mix genre conventions. Are Oliver Stone's *Nixon* and *JFK* fact or fiction? Is Geraldo Rivera a journalist, a talk show host, or a showman? Is *Bratz* a kid's cartoon or a 30-minute commercial? *Extra!* and *E! News* look increasingly like *Dateline NBC* and the *CBS Evening News*. Reading media texts becomes more difficult as formats are co-opted.

6. *The ability to think critically about media messages, no matter how credible their sources.* It is crucial that media be credible in a democracy in which the people govern because the media are central to the governing process. This is why the news media are sometimes referred to as the fourth branch of government, complementing the executive, judicial, and legislative branches. This does not mean, however, that we should believe everything they report. But it is often difficult to arrive at the proper balance between wanting to believe and accepting what we see and hear unquestioningly, especially when frequently we are willing to suspend disbelief and are encouraged by the media themselves to see their content as real and credible.

Consider the *New York Times* motto "All the News That's Fit to Print" and the title "Eyewitness News." If it is all there, it must all be real, and who is more credible than an eyewitness? But if we examine these media, we would learn that the *Times* in actuality prints all the news that fits (in its pages) and that the news is, at best, a very selective eyewitness.

7. *A knowledge of the internal language of various media and the ability to understand its effects, no matter how complex.* Just as each media genre has its own distinctive style and conventions, each medium also has its own specific internal language. This language is expressed in **production values**—the choice of lighting, editing, special effects, music, camera angle, location on the page, and size and placement of headline. To be able to read a media text, you must understand its language. We learn the grammar of this language automatically from childhood—for example, we know that when the television image goes "all woosielike," the character is dreaming.

Let's consider two versions of the same movie scene. In the first, a man is driving a car. Cut to a woman lying tied up on a railroad track. What is the relationship between the man and the woman? Where is he going? With no more information than these two shots, you know automatically that he cares for her and is on his way to save her. Now, here is the second version. The man is driving the car. Fade to black. Fade back up to the woman on the tracks. Now what is the relationship between the man and the woman? Where is he going? It is less clear that these two people even have anything to do with each other. We construct completely different meanings from exactly the same two pictures because the punctuation (the quick cut/fade) differs.

Media texts tend to be more complicated than these two scenes. The better we can handle their grammar, the more we can understand and appreciate texts. The more we understand texts, the more we can be equal partners with media professionals in meaning making.



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

WWW

Online Kids' Media Literacy
pbskids.org

Resources for Review and Discussion

REVIEW POINTS

- Communication is the process of creating shared meaning.
- Culture is the world made meaningful. It resides all around us; it is socially constructed and maintained through communication. It limits as well as liberates us; it differentiates as well as unites us. It defines our realities and shapes the ways we think, feel, and act.
- Mass media are our culture's dominant storytellers and the forum in which we debate cultural meaning.
- Technological determinism argues that technology is the predominant agent of social and cultural change. But it is not technology that drives culture; it is *how people use* technology.
- With technology, money, too, shapes mass communication. Audiences can be either the consumer or the product in our mass media system.
- As oral, preliterate cultures gave way to literate cultures, literacy became the avenue to power and control over one's life.
- Media literacy, the ability to effectively and efficiently comprehend and use any form of mediated communication, consists of several components:
 - a. critical thinking skills enabling the development of independent judgments about media content
 - b. an understanding of the process of mass communication
 - c. an awareness of the impact of the media on individuals and society
 - d. strategies for analyzing and discussing media messages
 - e. an awareness of media content as a "text" providing insight into contemporary culture
 - f. a cultivation of enhanced enjoyment, understanding, and appreciation of media content
 - g. the development of effective and responsible production skills
 - h. the development of an understanding of the ethical and moral obligations of media practitioners
- Media literacy skills include
 - a. the ability and willingness to make an effort to understand content, to pay attention, and to filter out noise
 - b. an understanding of and respect for the power of media messages
 - c. the ability to distinguish emotional from reasoned reactions when responding to content and to act accordingly
 - d. the development of heightened expectations of media content
 - e. a knowledge of genre conventions and the recognition of their mixing
 - f. the ability to think critically about media messages
 - g. a knowledge of the internal language of various media and the ability to understand its effects

KEY TERMS



Use the text's Online Learning Center at www.mhhe.com/baran6e to further your understanding of the following terminology.

communication, 4	cultural definition of communication, 8	ideogrammatic alphabet, 19
feedback, 5	culture, 8	syllable alphabet, 19
interpersonal communication, 5	dominant culture (mainstream culture), 11	papyrus, 20
encoding, 5	bounded culture (co-culture), 12	parchment, 20
decoding, 5	technological determinism, 17	literacy, 20
noise, 5	media literacy, 18	multiple points of access, 24
medium (pl. media), 5	literate culture, 19	third-person effect, 27
mass medium, 5	oral (preliterate) culture, 19	genre, 27
mass communication, 6	griots, 19	conventions, 27
inferential feedback, 6		production values, 29

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW



Go to the self-quizzes on the Online Learning Center to test your knowledge.

1. What is culture? How does culture define people?
2. What is communication? What is mass communication?
3. What are encoding and decoding? How do they differ when technology enters the communication process?
4. What does it mean to say that communication is a reciprocal process?
5. What is James Carey's cultural definition of communication? How does it differ from other definitions of that process?
6. What do we mean by mass media as cultural storyteller?
7. What do we mean by mass communication as cultural forum?
8. Characterize the communication and organizational styles of preliterate cultures. Where does power reside in these cultures?
9. What social, cultural, and economic factors boosted the development and spread of writing?
10. How did literacy change communication and the organization of preliterate cultures? Characterize the newly literate cultures.

11. How did the printing press make possible mass communication?
12. What was the impact of printing on the culture of western Europe?
13. What was the role of the Industrial Revolution in furthering literacy? The development of the middle class? Democracy?
14. What is media literacy? What are its components?
15. What is meant by multiple points of access? What does it have to do with media literacy?
16. What are some specific media literacy skills?
17. What is the difference between genres and production conventions? What do these have to do with media literacy?

QUESTIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND DISCUSSION

1. Do you feel inhibited by your bounded culture? By the dominant culture? How so?
2. Have the events of September 11, 2001, caused you to look at your own culture differently? Amid all the flags and patriotism, are we, as Americans, undergoing a reassessment of the meaning of “American culture”? If so, can you predict the outcome of this reassessment? In addition, if you had no firsthand knowledge of “Muslim culture,” what did you know of it before that fateful day? Where did that knowledge come from? Now that there is more information about that culture available, how different is your understanding of it?
3. Who were your childhood heroes and heroines? Why did you choose them? What cultural lessons did you learn from them?
4. Critique the definition of culture given in this chapter. What would you personally add? Subtract?
5. Consider the changes brought about by the shift from oral to literate cultures. How similar or different do you think the changes will be as we move to a more fully computer literate culture?
6. The Gutenberg printing press had just the opposite effect from what was intended. What optimistic predictions for the cultural impact of the Internet and the World Wide Web do you think will prove as inaccurate as Gutenberg’s hopes for his innovation? What optimistic predictions do you think will be realized? Defend your answers.
7. How media literate do you think you are? What about those around you—your parents, for example, or your best friend? What are your weaknesses as a media literate person?
8. Can you take a piece of media content from your own experience and explain how you approach it from multiple points of access?
9. How do you choose which television programs you watch? How thoughtful are your choices? How do you choose videos? Movies? How thoughtful are you in choosing them?

IMPORTANT RESOURCES

 Go to the Online Learning Center for additional readings.

INTERNET RESOURCES

More on McLuhan	www.mcluhan.ca/
TV Critics Assn.	www.tvcritics.org/
More on Spielberg	www.filmmakers.com/artists/spielberg
More on Storytelling	www.storynet.org
More on Gutenberg	www.mainz.de/gutenberg/english/index.htm
More on the Industrial Revolution	www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/modsbook14.html
Center for Media Literacy	www.medialit.org
Media Education Foundation	www.mediaed.org
Cable in the Classroom	www.ciconline.org/home
Media Awareness Network	www.media-awareness.ca/english/index.cem
Issues in Information and Media Literacy	infoliteracy.ispress.org/
Media Literacy ClearingHouse	www.medialit.med.sc.edu
National Association for Media Literacy Education	www.amlainfo.org
Media Education	www.mediaeducation.com
Association for Media Literacy	www.aml.ca/home
Media Alliance	www.media-alliance.org
Online Kids’ Media Literacy	pbskids.org/



For \$1.99 you can watch *Lost* on your iPod video player. But do you want to?

The Evolving Mass Communication Process

2

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The offer comes in the mail, addressed to you by name. Even the letter and coupons inside address you personally. You are a trendsetter, an early adopter. Of course you'll want to get the latest, hippest new video technology. You read on, curious and excited. Cable movie channel Starz is offering you its Starz! Ticket video service. For a mere \$12.99 a month you can have "unlimited Starz movie downloads" to your computer or handheld device. Cool, you think. For only about \$160 a year you can have the very same movies you already pay for from your Starz cable provider (for somewhere near \$85 a month—more than \$1,000 a year), and you can watch them on your computer or on a 2-inch-by-3-inch cell phone screen. You wonder how *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, or the *Star Wars* series, or the *Chronicles of Narnia* will look all shrunk down. But surely there are other pieces of Starz content available to you as a hip, premium Starz! Ticket downloader. You scour the beautifully prepared fliers that came with the offer. Nope, if you can get it on Starz, you can pay extra to get it on Starz! Ticket. Maybe you have to think about this one a bit, even if you are a trendsetter, an early adopter. Maybe Apple's video iPod package would be better. You can get hit ABC television series like *Lost* and *Desperate Housewives* for only \$1.99 a download. Still the

The mass media system we have today has existed more or less as we know it ever since the 1830s. It is a system that has weathered repeated significant change with the coming of increasingly sophisticated technologies—the penny press newspaper was soon followed by mass market books and mass circulation magazines. As the 1800s became the 1900s, these popular media were joined by motion pictures, radio, and sound recording. A few decades later came television, combining news and entertainment, moving images and sound, all in the home and all, ostensibly, for free. The traditional media found new functions and prospered side by side with television. Then, more recently, came the Internet and World Wide Web. Now, because of the Net's impact, all the media industries are facing profound alterations in how they are structured and do business, the nature of their content, and how they interact with and respond to their audiences. Naturally, as these changes unfold, so too will the very nature of mass communication and our role in that process. After studying this chapter you should

- have a broad overview of current trends in mass media, especially concentration of ownership and conglomeration, globalization, audience fragmentation, hypercommercialization, and convergence.
- recognize how these trends promise to alter the content of the different media, their economics, and their industrial structures.
- be able to make reasoned predictions about the future of the media industries and technologies on which they rely.
- develop a sense of how the mass communication process itself will evolve as the role of the audience in this new media environment is altered.

little screen problem, but the price seems right . . . until a month's worth of viewing shows up on your credit card bill. A lot of \$1.99s can add up pretty quickly. Then there's AOL's In2TV; free shows, good ones like *Babylon 5* and *The Fugitive*, but you can't skip the commercials. You really need to think this through a bit. Anyway, it's 9:00 p.m., *American Idol*'s on. Time to grab a snack and watch the fun.

In this chapter we examine much more than downloadable television shows and video iPods. There is a seismic shift going on in the mass media—and therefore in mass communication—that dwarfs the changes to the media landscape wrought by television's assault in the 1950s and 1960s on the preeminence of radio and the movies. Encouraged by the Internet and digitization, new producers are finding new ways to deliver new content to new audiences. The media industries are in turmoil, and audience members, as they are confronted by a seemingly bewildering array of possibilities, are just now starting to come to terms with the new media future. Will you pay for movie downloads? How much? What will you pay for on-demand television programs? Will you be willing to view the commercials they contain if you could pay a bit less per show? Would you pay more or less for classic programming than for contemporary shows? Would you be willing to watch a movie or television show on a small screen? As *Advertising Age* editor Scott Donaton (2006) cautions, "A cell phone isn't a TV" (p. 18). But the future is here, laments NBC Universal CEO Bob Wright, "You can't fight technology. This [digital] technology is real. I don't think we really have a choice here" (in Lieberman, 2005, p. 1). NBC Television's Jeff Zucker offered his response to the upcoming upheaval, "The overall strategy is to make all our content available everywhere" (in Bing, 2006, p. 1). But will this strategy work? And remember, we're talking about *all* media. How will you listen to the radio—satellite radio or terrestrial radio or digital terrestrial radio or streamed Web radio? And what do you think of director Steven Soderbergh's decision to *simultaneously* release his 2006 film *Bubble* to movie houses, DVD, and cable television? Actor-director Ed Burns skipped the big screen, cable, and DVD altogether, releasing his 2007 indie film *Purple Violets* directly to the iTunes store. What do you make of cable giant Comcast's plans to offer downloads of Hollywood blockbusters to its subscribers on the same day those movies open in theaters? Would you pay the \$30 to \$50 the company intends to charge for a title like *Spider-Man* (Brodesser-Akner, 2007)? On which **platform** (the means of delivering a specific piece of media content) would you most enjoy watching these films? Can you still call it film? Would you be willing to pay more or less for the different platforms? These are precisely the kinds of questions that

Is the release of *Purple Violets* directly to download a one-time experiment or a sign of significant change in the way we interact with mass media?



audiences will be answering in the next several years. Media literate audiences will be better equipped to do so.

Industries in Turmoil

Media consumer “behavior is shifting,” media consultant Mike Vorhaus told industry executives at the 2009 Consumer Electronics Show, and that means media companies “have to do business differently, which is hard enough in normal times. But when you add in a deep cyclical economic situation, the result is a deep pain like they’ve never seen before” (in Winslow, 2009, p. 15). How much pain has been produced by the “perfect storm” of rapid technological change, shifting consumption behavior, and economic turmoil?

- Movie attendance in 2008 dropped 5.2% from 2007, the fifth annual decline in the last 6 years. In 2002, movie fans bought 1.61 billion tickets; in 2008, that number fell to 1.33 billion (White, 2009).
- Total album sales—physical and digital—plunged 8.5% from 2007 to 2008, dropping from 500.5 to 428.4 million units. Digital album sales increased by 32% to 65.8 million units, but were offset by a 20% fall in the number of physical albums, from 450.5 to 362.6 million units. In 2000 the 10 best-selling albums sold 60 million units; in 2008 that number was 18.8 million (Finn, 2009; Gerome, 2009).
- Fifteen years ago the four major broadcast networks commanded 61% of all television viewing. Today their share is 36%. The most popular program in 1985, *The Cosby Show*, drew 34% of all television homes; today’s most watched show, *CSI*, attracts 13% (Schneider, 2008).
- After years of explosive growth, sales of DVDs have leveled off. For example, between 2004 and 2005, sales rose 15%. From 2006 to 2007, however, sales fell 3.1%; from 2007 to 2008 sales declined another 11% (Garrett, 2009).
- In 2005, U.S. video-game-industry sales failed to show an annual increase for the first time in its history. In 2008, industry revenues were up 26% over the previous year, attributed primarily to the introduction of new hardware, specifically Nintendo’s Wii and games for this particular console (Van Zelfden, 2009).
- Daily and Sunday newspaper circulation has dropped every year since 1998, with the sharpest declines among young people under the age of 30. As a percentage of population, newspapers have fewer than half as many subscribers today as they did in 1946 (Alterman, 2009).
- Circulation revenues, the number of ad pages, and gross revenue growth for American consumer magazines have all been flat since 2002, with an 18% drop in the number of ad pages from 2008 to 2009 alone (Ives, 2009b).
- Listenership to American commercial radio stations had declined every year from 1998 to 2007. A small upturn in audience size in 2008, however, did not result in improved advertising revenues, as stations brought in about 9% less in that year than they did in 2007 (Sass, 2009b).

The Good News for Media Industries

Indeed, what this turmoil indicates is that the challenge facing the media industries today is how to capture a mass audience now fragmented into millions of niches. What has come about, according to *Variety*’s Jonathan Bing (2006), “is an unfamiliar new entertainment landscape, one in which the old rules of media consumption no longer apply” (pp. 1, 38). The “rules” of media consumption may have changed, but media consumption is at an all-time high.

To weather the upheaval of restructuring and redefining the modern media industries, CBS reinvented itself in 2006 as an entertainment, rather than a broadcasting, corporation.

NEW.
Announcing a brand-new content-rich broadcasting, narrowcasting, webcasting, publishing, production, syndication, interactive, out-of-home, away-from-home, in-home, world-class entertainment corporation.

CBS CORPORATION

Vertical list of logos:
CBS TELEVISION
CBS TELEVISION STATIONS
UPN
SHOWTIME
KING OF THE HILL
CBS DigitalMedia
CBS RADIO
NATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP
CBS OUTDOOR
Perennial Parties

WWW
More on Kids' Media Consumption
www.kaisernetwork.org

As we saw in Chapter 1, children 8 to 18 years old spend more than 8 hours and 33 minutes a day with media content, up by more than an hour from only 5 years ago. They amass such large amounts of consumption because they are adept at **media multitasking**, simultaneously consuming many different kinds of media (Rideout, Roberts, & Foehr, 2005). The average American adult spends 9 hours and 35 minutes a day, or 60% of his or her waking time, consuming all forms of media content (Lindsay, 2006). The Ball State University Middletown Studies report on media consumption puts the amount of media use even higher—30% of people's waking hours are spent using media "exclusively," and another 39% of their waking time is spent using media in combination with other activities such as making dinner (Lamb, 2005). Nielsen Media Research reports that the average American watches 142 hours of television a month; the average household watches 8 hours and 18 minutes a day. Both are all-time highs (Winslow, 2009). The number of homes with televisions continues to grow (up 1.5% from 2007 to 2008, to 114.5 million), as does the number of viewers (up 1.3% to 290 million; "Nielsen TV Homes Rise," 2008). Ninety-seven percent of kids 12 to 17 play games on computers, consoles, and handheld devices (Rich, 2008b). The average amount of time people spend with media they pay for directly (Internet, video games, and cable and satellite television) has increased nearly 20% since 2001 (Sutel, 2007). For media industries, these data offer good news—readers, viewers, and listeners are out there in ever-increasing numbers. These data also offer good news for literate media consumers—their consumption choices will shape the media landscape to come and, inevitably, the mass communication process itself.

Together, media industries and media consumers face a number of challenges. Beyond fragmenting audiences and the impact of new technologies (and the **convergence**—the erosion of traditional distinctions among media—they encourage), they must also deal with three other trends that promise to alter the nature of the media industries

as well as the relationship between those industries and the people with whom they interact: concentration of media ownership and conglomeration, rapid globalization, and hypercommercialization.

Changes

Concentration of Ownership and Conglomeration

Ownership of media companies is increasingly concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. Through mergers, acquisitions, buyouts, and hostile takeovers, a very small number of large conglomerates is coming to own more and more of the world's media outlets. Media observer Ben Bagdikian reported that in 1997 the number of media corporations with “dominant power in society” was 10. In 2004 columnist William Safire set the number at just 5: Comcast, Fox, Viacom, GE (NBC-Universal), and Time Warner (“Should Comcast,” 2004). Elsewhere, the conservative *New York Times* writer warned, “While political paranoids accuse each other of vast conspiracies, the truth is that media mergers have narrowed the range of information and entertainment available to people of all ideologies” (quoted in Plate, 2003, p. B4). Safire was correct; people of all ideologies feel the impact of **concentration of ownership**. FCC commissioner and Democrat Jonathan Adelstein argued, “The public has a right to be informed by a diversity of viewpoints so they can make up their own minds. Without a diverse, independent media, citizen access to information crumbles, along with political and social participation. For the sake of democracy, we should encourage the widest possible dissemination of free expression” through our media (quoted in Kennedy, 2004, p. 1). Adelstein was echoing Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black's eloquent defense of a vibrant media in his 1945 *Associated Press v. U.S.* decision: “The First Amendment rests on the assumption that the widest possible dissemination of information from diverse and antagonistic sources is essential to the welfare of the public, that a free press is a condition of a free society.”

Maurice Hinchey (2006), U.S. House of Representatives member from New York, explained this concentration's threat to our democratic process:

Changes in media ownership have been swift and staggering. Over the past two decades the number of major US media companies fell by more than one half; most of the survivors are controlled by fewer than ten huge media conglomerates. As media outlets continue to be gobbled up by these giants, the marketplace of ideas shrinks. New and independent voices are stifled. And the companies that remain are under little obligation to provide reliable, quality journalism. Stories that matter deeply to the country's well-being have been replaced by sensationalized murders and celebrity gossip. (p. 15)

We need look no further than the September 11 terrorist attacks for evidence of this misplacing of priorities, according to media critic Todd Gitlin (2004b), who wrote, “The machinery of truth-telling has broken down. . . . As murderous Islamism oozed out of Afghanistan and Pakistan, and Osama bin Laden fine-tuned his massacre machine, O. J. beckoned . . . and Whitewater . . . and Princess Diana. In 1998 and 1999, when Al-Qaeda was gathering force and bombing embassies, the obsession of America's media was . . . Monica Lewinsky” (p. 58). You can examine the concentration of media holdings of the world's largest media company, Time Warner, in Figure 2.1.

Closely related to concentration is **conglomeration**, the increase in the ownership of media outlets by larger, nonmedia companies. The threat is clear, wrote veteran journalist Bill Moyers (2008):

As conglomerates swallow up newspapers, magazines, publishing houses, and networks, and profit rather than product becomes the focus of corporate effort, news organizations—particularly in television—are folded into entertainment divisions.

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More on Concentration
www.cjr.org/owners

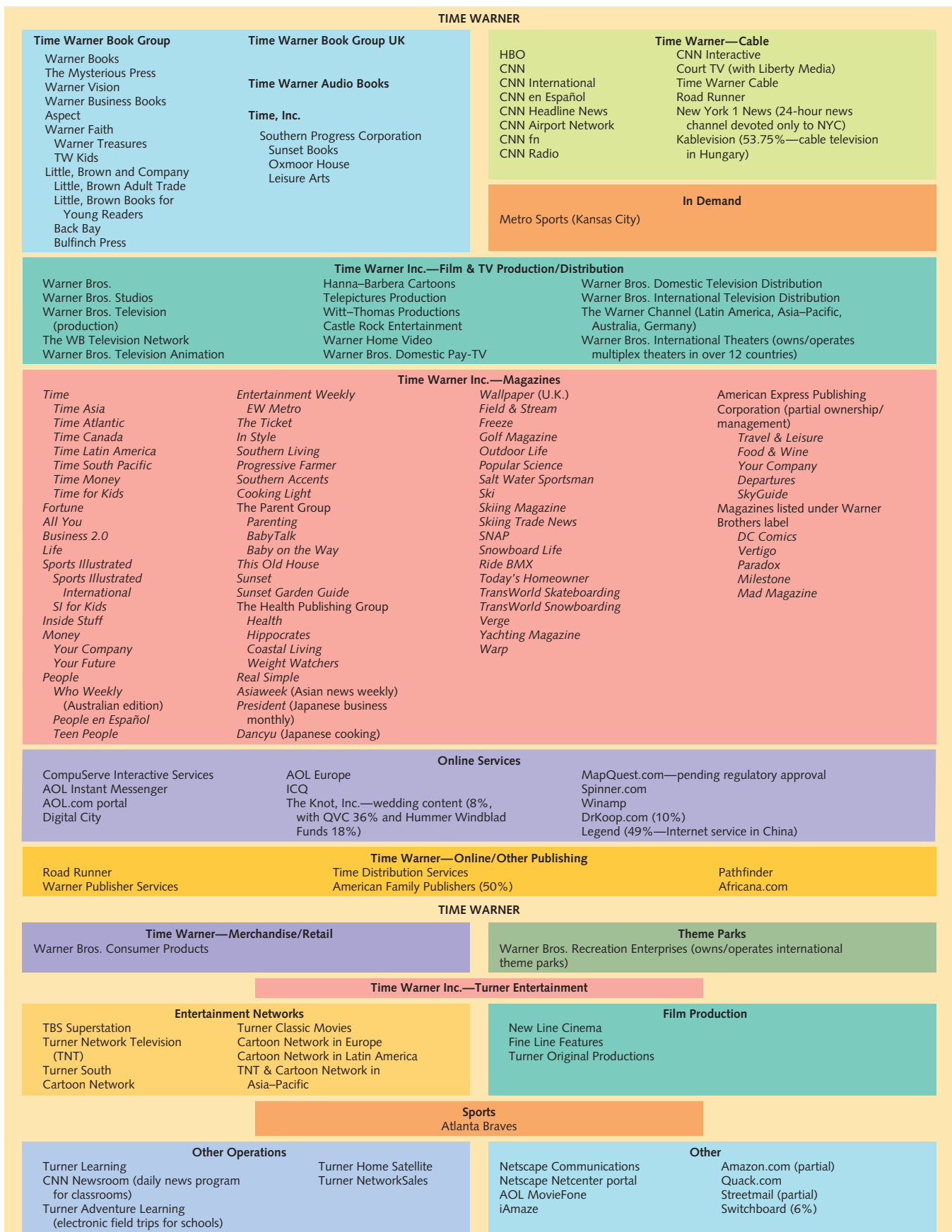


Figure 2.1 Concentration of Ownership: The Example of Time Warner.

The “news hole” in the print media shrinks to make room for advertisements, and stories needed by informed citizens working together are pulled in favor of the latest celebrity scandals because the media moguls have decided that uncovering the inner workings of public and private power is boring and will drive viewers and readers away to greener pastures of pabulum. Good reporters and editors confront walls of resistance in trying to place serious and informative reports over which they have long labored.

Elsewhere Moyers (2004) wrote, “Media owners have businesses to run, and these media-owning corporations have enormous interests of their own that impinge on an ever-widening swath of public policy—hugely important things, ranging from campaign finance reform (who ends up with those millions of dollars spent on advertising?) to broadcast deregulation and antitrust policy, to virtually everything related to the Internet, intellectual property, globalization and free trade, even to minimum wage, affirmative action, and environmental policy. . . . In this era, when its broader and broader economic entanglements make media more dependent on state largess, the news business finds itself at war with journalism” (p. 10).

It may matter little that Mike Barz, a correspondent for Disney-owned ABC Television, breathlessly begins his report from the 2005 opening of a new Disneyland in China this way: “Based on all the smiles on all the faces of the children . . . it looks like the magic of Disney is taking hold in China” (in Solomon, 2005). But are you as comfortable with General Electric’s ownership of the NBC television and CNBC cable networks? General Electric is a major defense contractor that did \$450 million in business in Iraq in 2003 and had commitments for \$3 billion more for the following few years. Additionally, more than one-half of Iraq’s power grid is composed of GE technology, and even before the shooting began in 2003, company CEO Jeffrey Immelt told an interviewer on his own CNBC network that war in Iraq was a business opportunity for his company: “We built about a billion-dollar security business [in Iraq] that’s going to be growing by 20% a year, so we’ve been able to play into that” (in Finke, 2004, p. 3). Does this constitute a possible conflict of interest for you?

But conflict of interest is only one presumed problem with conglomeration. The other is the dominance of a bottom-line mentality and its inevitable degradation of media content. *Variety*’s Peter Bart (2000) explained, “Hence atop every corporation there sits a functionary who is empowered to set a number for every unit of every company. That functionary may in fact have no knowledge whatsoever of the market conditions affecting that entity and no interest in the product it produces. Nonetheless, everyone dances to his tune” (p. 95). Bart was speaking of media in general. As for journalism, former CBS anchor Dan Rather added, “The larger the entities that own and control the news operations, the more distant they become” (quoted in Auletta, 2001, p. 60). New York University law professor Burt Neuborne warned:

The press has been subsumed into a market psychology, because they are now owned by large conglomerates, of which they are simply a piece. And they (news organizations) are expected to contribute their piece of the profit to the larger pie. You don’t have people controlling the press anymore with a fervent sense of responsibility to the First Amendment. Concentrating on who’s sleeping with whom, on sensationalism, is concentrating on essentially irrelevant issues. (as quoted in Konner, 1999, p. 6)

Evidence for Professor Neuborne’s appraisal abounds. The Project for Excellence in Journalism revealed that while the number of foreign reporters in Washington has grown 10 times over the last 20 years, the number of U.S. newspapers with reporters covering Congress has fallen by two-thirds. The number covering Washington at all has fallen by half. The number of local television and radio stations with access to their own news bureaus in the Capitol has fallen 37% in that time, to 92 stations (MacMillan, 2009). In 2001, U.S. newspapers had 21 full-time Pentagon reporters; in 2009, amidst two ongoing wars, there were 12, and no broadcast network had a full-time correspondent in either



War continued in Iraq; controversy over its conduct waged here at home, and coverage of former *Playboy* centerfold and B-list celebrity Anna Nicole Smith's death dominated our news.

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More on Media Reform
www.corporations.org/media

Iraq or Afghanistan (Wasserman, 2009). As for the impact of these cuts on content, a study by Harvard's Kennedy School of Government showed that from 1980 to 2000, the number of news stories in the country's major media having no connection to policy issues that directly affect Americans rose from under 35% of all reports to over 50% in 2000. In 1980, 25% of news stories contained a moderate-to-high level of sensationalism. In 2000, more than 40% did. According to the Project for Excellence in Journalism, in the 2 days after she died in February 2007, B-list celebrity Anna Nicole Smith's demise consumed 60% of the time on the major broadcast networks' morning news shows, 30 times the coverage of the Iraq War, and 55% of all cable news coverage. During the week she died, she received more coverage on the cable news networks than any other story (Alterman, 2007; Learmonth, 2007). The former *Playboy* centerfold's passing received more coverage on those news outlets than did the president's State of the Union Address and Congress's debate on withdrawal from Iraq *combined*. But perhaps this job opening ad, posted by CBS News, for an Internet reporter to cover the environment makes the point more clearly. Applicants, it read, must be "wicked smart, funny, irreverent and hip. . . . Knowledge of the enviro beat a big plus, but not a requirement" (in McCall, 2008, p. D7). As the editor of a major newspaper explained, in the current news environment, "if you argue about public trust today, you will be dismissed as an obstructionist and a romantic" (Project, 2006). You can read more about this issue in the box on pages 42–44 titled "Concentration, Conglomeration, and Serving Democracy."

There are, however, less dire observations on concentration and conglomeration. Many telecommunications professionals argue that concentration and conglomeration are not only inevitable but necessary in a telecommunications environment that is increasingly fragmented and internationalized; companies must maximize their number of outlets to reach as much of the divided and far-flung audience as possible. If they do not, they will become financially insecure, and that is an even greater threat to free and effective mediated communication because advertisers and other well-monied forces will have increased influence over them.

Another defense of concentration and conglomeration has to do with **economies of scale**; that is, bigger can in fact sometimes be better because the relative cost of an operation's output declines as the size of that endeavor grows. For example, the cost of collecting the news or producing a television program does not increase significantly when that news report or television program is distributed over 2 outlets, 20 outlets, or 100 outlets. The additional revenues from these other points of distribution can then be plowed back into even better news and programming. In the case of conglomeration, the parallel argument is that revenues from a conglomerate's nonmedia enterprises can be used to support quality work by its media companies.

The potential impact of this **oligopoly**—a concentration of media industries into an ever smaller number of companies—on the mass communication process is enormous. What becomes of shared meaning when the people running communication companies are more committed to the financial demands of their corporate offices than they are to their audiences, who are supposedly their partners in the communication process? What becomes of the process itself when media companies grow more removed from those with whom they communicate? And what becomes of the culture that is dependent on that process when concentration and conglomeration limit the diversity of perspective and information? Or are the critics making too much of the issue? Is Clear Channel (1,200 radio stations) founder Lowry Mays correct when he argues, "We're not in the business of providing news and information. We're simply in the business of selling our customers' products" (quoted in Hightower, 2004a, p. 1)?

Globalization

Closely related to the concentration of media ownership is **globalization**. It is primarily large, multinational conglomerates that are doing the lion's share of media acquisitions. The potential impact of globalization on the mass communication process speaks to the

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More on Globalization
www.unesco.org/

issue of diversity of expression. Will distant, anonymous, foreign corporations, each with vast holdings in a variety of nonmedia businesses, use their power to shape news and entertainment content to suit their own ends? Opinion is divided. Some observers feel that this concern is misplaced—the pursuit of profit will force these corporations to respect the values and customs of the nations and cultures in which they operate. Some observers have a less optimistic view, arguing that “respecting” local values and customs is shorthand for pursuing profits at all costs. They point to the recent controversy surrounding the decision of Internet giants Yahoo!, Cisco, Google, and Microsoft to “respect” the local values and customs of the world’s second-largest Internet population as well as its fastest growing consumer market—China. Microsoft spokesperson Brooke Richardson explained her company’s position, “Microsoft does business in many countries around the world. While different countries have different standards, Microsoft and other multinational companies have to ensure that our products and services comply with local laws, norms, and industry practices” (in Zeller, 2006, p. 4.4). Google attorney Andrew McLaughlin called it “responding to local conditions” (Bray, 2006, p. A10). But “local conditions” in this case meant censoring searches and keywords and shutting down Web sites on orders from China’s Communist leaders. Even more distressing to critics was Yahoo!’s decision to identify one of its customers, dissident Shi Tao, as author of e-mails the Chinese government found subversive. Mr. Shi was arrested and sentenced to 10 years in prison. Would we accept this behavior from any of these companies here in the United States? How much should we accept them elsewhere in the name of “globalization”? Several groups from across the political spectrum called for protests and boycotts against Google and other tech companies that in their view go too far in meeting “local conditions” (Bray, 2006). There is much more on this conflict between localism and globalization in Chapter 15.

Still, defenders of increased globalization point to the need to reach a fragmented and widespread audience—the same factor that fuels concentration—as encouraging this trend. They also cite the growing economic clout of emerging democracies (and the need to reach the people who live in them) and the increasing intertwining of the world’s economies as additional reasons globalization is necessary for the economic survival of media businesses.

Audience Fragmentation

The nature of the other partner in the mass communication process is changing too. The **audience** is becoming more **fragmented**, its segments more narrowly defined. It is becoming less of a mass audience.

Before the advent of television, radio and magazines were national media. Big national radio networks brought news and entertainment to the entire country. Magazines such as *Life*, *Look*, and the *Saturday Evening Post* once offered limited text and many pictures to a national audience. But television could do these things better. It was radio with pictures; it was magazines with motion. To survive, radio and magazines were forced to find new functions. No longer able to compete on a mass scale, these media targeted smaller audiences that were alike in some important characteristic and therefore more attractive to specific advertisers. So now we have magazines such as *Ski* and *Internet World*, and radio station formats such as Country, Urban, and Lithuanian. This phenomenon is known as **narrowcasting**, **niche marketing**, or **targeting**.

Technology has wrought the same effect on television. Before the advent of cable television, people could choose from among the three commercial broadcast networks—ABC, CBS, NBC—one noncommercial public broadcasting station, and, in larger markets, maybe an independent station or two. Now, with cable, satellite, and DVD, people have literally thousands of viewing options. The television audience has been fragmented. To attract advertisers, each channel now must find a more specific group of people to make up its viewership. Nickelodeon targets kids, for example; TV Land appeals to baby



For more information on these Internet companies’ difficulties in China, watch “Yahoo! Caught in the Web” on the book’s Online Learning Center Web site.

WWW

More on Yahoo! in China
www.booyahoo.blogspot.com

WWW

More on Improving Media
Performance
www.freepress.net

The horrific events of September 11, 2001, put concentration and conglomeration and their effect on news squarely in the public forum. Many observers in and out of the media identified corporate-mandated cost reductions and staff cuts as the primary reason so many Americans were caught off guard. *Philadelphia Inquirer* reporter Thomas Ginsberg (2002) explained:

From the early 1990s until September 11, 2001, the U.S. news media had subtly turned foreign news into a niche subject. By the end of the '90s, with cable TV and the Internet splintering audiences, and media conglomerates demanding news divisions make more money, broadcasters and some publications gradually changed formats to cover more scandal, lifestyle, personalities. There simply were fewer shows and pages where hard news, much less foreign news, could find a home. (p. 50)

"If we had paid more attention to Afghanistan in the '80s we might not have had 9-11," MSNBC reporter Ashleigh Banfield (2003) lectured students at Kansas State University (p. 6). "While we can debate whether this failure played a role in our national lack of preparedness, there is no question that we failed our readers," wrote *Manhattan (Kansas) Mercury* editor in chief Edward Seaton (quoted in Parks, 2002, pp. 52–53).

The war in Iraq added to the cultural debate. "We failed the American public by being insufficiently critical about elements of the Administration's plan to go to war," said the *New York Times*' John Burns (quoted in Rich, 2004, p. E1). "The credulous press corps, when confronted by an Administration intent on war, sank to new depths of obsequiousness and docility," wrote *The Nation*'s Scott Sherman (2004, p. 4). But in this renewed discussion, concentration's critics identified two problems in addition to cost cutting and the reductions in resources.

As in the abandonment of expensive foreign news, the first is also economic—media companies' quest for profits. "Investigative reports share three things: They are risky, they upset the wisdom of the established order, and they are expensive to produce. Do profit-conscious enterprises, whether media companies or widget firms, seek extra costs, extra risk, and the opportunity to be attacked? Not in any business text I've ever read," explained BBC journalist Greg Palast (2003, p. 1). In other words, it was easier, cheaper, and safer to repeat the government's explanations than it was to investigate them. For example, reporter Judith Miller explained her unwillingness to include the views of skeptical intelligence and scientific experts in her numerous government-sourced accounts of Iraq's weapons buildup: "My job isn't to assess the government's information and be an independent intelligence analyst myself. My job is to tell readers of the *New York Times* what the government thought of Iraq's arsenal" (quoted in Sherman, 2004, pp. 4–5). Rather than "aggressive digging for the dark facts of war," editorialized *Columbia Journalism Review*, the public was left with "passive transmission of the Pentagon line" ("CJR Comment," 2003, p. 7).

The second factor, one critics saw as more corrosive to the relationship between media and democracy, was corporate media shaping the news to serve their own political agendas. Specifically, media companies did not challenge the administration because during the run-up to war and in the year afterward, the government was considering legislation loosening restrictions on media concentration. This "uncritical coverage of the war," this "media conglomerate war cheerleading collusion" occurred, according to Jeffrey Chester (2003), executive editor of AlterNet.org, and Don Hazen, director of the Center for Digital Democracy, as media conglomerates were "heavily lobbying the Bush Administration for giveaways that will net them billions of dollars" (p. 2). Eli Pariser (2004), campaigns director for the MoveOn.org Voter Fund, explained that the media, broadcasters specifically, "simply would rather not risk offending powerful people in Washington who decide such critical regulatory matters" as ownership rules (p. 2).

"If we had paid more attention to Afghanistan in the '80s we might not have had 9-11."

Enter your voice in the cultural forum. Doesn't this seem a bit extreme, media companies shaping news and commentary to fit corporate, rather than journalistic, ends? Placing profit and self-interest over their traditional role of serving the public? Or do you agree with media legal scholar Charles Tillinghast (2000), who wrote, "One need not be a devotee of conspiracy theories to understand that journalists, like other human beings, can judge where their interests lie, and what risks are and are not prudent, given their desire to continue to eat and feed the family" (pp. 145–146)?

But have the media recommitted themselves to the service of democracy? As the press's credulity in the run-up to war became more obvious, especially with the failure to find weapons of mass destruction and an al-Qaeda-Iraq connection, media professionals underwent serious self-examination, as you might have suspected after reading the journalists' comments that opened this *Cultural Forum*. In addition, the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* offered searing and apologetic critiques of their own prewar reporting. Said *Times* public editor Daniel Okrent (2004), "Some of *The Times*'s coverage in the months leading up to the invasion of Iraq was credulous; much of it was inappropriately italicized by lavish front-page display and heavy-breathing-headlines; and several fine articles . . . that provided perspective or challenged information in the faulty stories were played as quietly as a lullaby" (p. 4.2). He later said, a "general rolling-over on the part of the American press allowed the war to happen. . . . I think that the press is extremely chastened by it—we all know how bad it was" (In Fact, 2006, p. 8). *Post* media critic Howard Kurtz (2004) added that his paper provided "coverage that, despite flashes of groundbreaking reporting, in hindsight looks strikingly one-sided. . . . Administration assertions were on the front page. Things that challenged the administration were on A18 on Sunday or A24 on Monday. There was

an attitude among editors: Look, we're going to war, why do we even worry about all this contrary stuff?" (p. A1). This reevaluation of their service to democracy at a most crucial time in the nation's history led media critic Todd Gitlin (2004b) to claim that "never before has American journalism been driven to correct itself so lavishly" (p. 58).

To many in and outside of journalism, that self-correction was short lived. Editorialized industry journal *Broadcasting & Cable*, "After 9/11, we were promised, the news media would toughen up, dig deeper, cover the world for us. What we seem to have gotten was softer coverage and a propensity to pull punches. How odd and dangerous it is that, in these most perilous times, the news business has rarely seemed more frivolous" ("Seriously," 2005, p. 50). Veteran *Washington Post* foreign correspondent Pamela Constable (2007) wrote of concentration and conglomeration's impact on the coverage of international news: "In the 1980s, American TV networks each maintained about 15 foreign bureaus; today they have six or fewer. ABC has shut down its offices in Moscow, Paris, and Tokyo; NBC closed bureaus in Beijing, Cairo, and Johannesburg. Aside from a one-person ABC bureau in Nairobi, there are no network bureaus left at all in Africa, India, or South America—regions that are home to more than 2 billion people." She

quoted legendary journalist Walter Cronkite, "In today's complicated world, the need for high-quality reporting is greater than ever. It's not just the journalist's job at risk here. It's American democracy" (p. B4).

Again, enter your voice. Media businesses are just that, businesses. They must make a profit. Challenging the powerful carries financial risk. Covering international news, especially in difficult places like Afghanistan and "the Arab or Muslim world," is costly. But what of the argument of the late Senator Paul Wellstone? He wrote, "The media are not just any ordinary industry. They are the lifeblood of American democracy. We depend on the media for the free flow of information that enables citizens to participate in the democratic process. As James Madison wrote in 1822, 'A popular government without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to a farce or a tragedy, or perhaps both.' That's why freedom of the press is enshrined in our Constitution. No other industry enjoys that kind of protection" (2002, p. 25). In other words, the media enjoy special protections because they serve a vital role in the conduct of democracy. Or, especially given the examples here, are these just the complaints of a group of disaffected liberals, opposed to the war in Iraq? But if this is the case, why do prominent conservatives also say that we



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(continued)

need to “reclaim the airwaves for our democracy” (Republican Senator John McCain, quoted in Nichols, 2003, p. 5) and that “no other decision [media concentration] made in Washington will more directly affect how you will be informed, persuaded, and entertained” (conservative columnist William Safire, quoted in Franklin, 2003, p. 1)?

Regardless of your own political orientation, enter your voice in the cultural forum through your reaction to this oddity of our democratic life offered by media historian and reformer Robert McChesney (2007). Imagine, he suggests, that

the federal government had issued an edict demanding that there be a sharp reduction in international journalism, or that local newsrooms be closed or their staffs and

budgets slashed. Imagine if a president had issued an order that news media concentrate upon celebrities and trivia, rather than rigorously investigate and pursue scandals and lawbreaking in the White House. Had that occurred, there would have been an outcry that would have made Watergate look like a day at the beach. It would have been second only to the Civil War as a threat to the Republic. . . . Entire universities would have shut down in protest. Yet, when quasi-monopolistic commercial interests effectively do pretty much the same thing, and leave our country as impoverished culturally as if it had been the result of a government fiat, it passes with only minor protest. (p. 213)

boomers; Cartoon Network’s late-night *Adult Swim* aims at older teens and young adults; and Bravo seeks upper-income older people.

The new digital technologies promise even more audience fragmentation, almost to the point of audiences of one. For example, 40,000 of *Reason* magazine’s 55,000 subscribers received individualized versions of the June 2007 issue. On the cover was an aerial photo of each reader’s house and neighborhood. Inside were data on things like the educational levels of their neighbors and how many of the children in their zip code were being raised by grandparents. Ads were personalized as well, with appeals from public interest groups containing information on how each reader’s congressperson voted on various pieces of legislation. We are living, said *Reason*’s editors approvingly, in a fragmented, *database nation* (Gillespie, 2007). Cable companies have the ability to send very specific commercials not only to specific neighborhoods but even to individual sets in individual homes. This technology is sufficiently sophisticated that by analyzing where viewers channel surf, it can determine the age, gender, and interests of those viewers. An airline, for example, might have a “cheap flights to Florida” spot that it wants embedded in a program sent to the home of an older adult, and a “cheap flights to Cancun” spot embedded in the very same show cablecast to a younger person’s home (Graves, 2006; Kiley, 2005).

Is this our fragmented future, rocking out passionately and alone?



But if these audience-fragmenting **addressable technologies**—technologies permitting the transmission of very specific content to equally specific audience members—are changing the nature of the mass media’s audiences, then the mass communication process itself must also change. What will happen as smaller, more specific audiences become better known to their partners in the process of making meaning? What will happen to the national culture that binds us as we become increasingly fragmented into demographically targeted **taste publics**—groups of people bound by little more than an interest in a given form of media content? Will there be a narrowing of our collective cultural experience, as media’s storytelling function (Chapter 1) is disrupted because we are each listening to stories we individually preselect or that are preselected for us? “Maybe one day,” wonders *Creativity* magazine editor Teresa Iezzi (2007), “you won’t be able to say anything to anyone because a common language or the ability to grapple with or laugh at

something outside of your comfort zone will have fallen away” (p. 11). *Time*’s James Poniewozik (2004) offered his vision of our fragmented future: “Through niche media, niche foods, and niche hobbies, we fashion niche lives. We are the America of the iPod ads—stark, black silhouettes tethered by our brilliant white earbuds, rocking out passionately alone. You make your choices, and I make mine. Yours, of course, are wrong. But what do I care?” (p. 84).

Hypercommercialism

The costs involved in acquiring numerous or large media outlets, domestic and international, and of reaching an increasingly fragmented audience must be recouped somehow. Selling more advertising on existing and new media and identifying additional ways to combine content and commercials are the two most common strategies. This leads to what media critic Robert McChesney calls **hypercommercialism**. McChesney (1999) explained, “Concentrated media control permits the largest media firms to increasingly commercialize their output with less and less fear of consumer reprisal” (pp. 34–35). The rise in the number of commercial minutes in a typical broadcast or cable show is evident to most viewers. When NBC’s *ER* premiered in 1994, for example, its producers were allotted 47 minutes and 30 seconds to tell their story. In *ER*’s last season, 2008–2009, they were limited to 43 minutes; in other words, 17 minutes of a 60-minute program were nonprogram time, that is, commercials (Lowry, 2008). *Boston Legal*’s creator, David E. Kelley, was so frustrated by ABC’s reduction of his program time that he threatened to leave commercial television altogether, “We’re reduced to writing 8 minute acts. It’s very difficult storytelling, especially for character scenes. An hour is now 41 minutes” (in Holloway, 2005, p. G9).

Advertising Age reported that overcommercialization on television has become such a problem that only 13% of the audience will “sit and watch the commercial,” while 53% report “getting annoyed,” 52% “talk to others without paying attention to the commercials,” 51% “get up and do something else” during commercial breaks, and 44% “switch to another channel” (Ives, 2008b). **Bugs** (less affectionately called **obnoxicons**), commercials that run across the bottom third of the screen on just about every television show, “insult both the viewers and the creators of whatever’s being televised,” argues public radio’s television critic David Bianculli (2008, p. 14).

The sheer growth in the amount of advertising is one troublesome aspect of hypercommercialism. But for many observers the increased mixing of commercial and non-commercial media content is even more troubling. For example, ABC writes Revlon cosmetics into the story line of its popular soap opera *All My Children*. On *Desperate Housewives* the female stars shop regularly at Macy’s. Musical artists, especially rap performers, frequently include brand names in their lyrics in exchange for cash (Kaufman, 2003). So ubiquitous has this **product placement**—the integration, for a fee, of specific branded products into media content—become, that the Writers Guild of America has petitioned the FCC to examine the practice at the same time it has demanded negotiations with television and film producers for additional compensation for writing what are, in effect, commercials (Cohn, 2005). The producers’ response is that product placement is not a commercial; rather, it represents a new form of content, **brand entertainment**—when brands are, in fact, part of and essential to the program. Pontiac’s Solstice is a “character” in episodes of *The Apprentice*, and the big-hearted workers of *Extreme Makeover—Home Edition* could not wield any tools other than those from Sears. In 2005, there were 108,000 instances of product placement in American television, up 30% from the previous year (Gettelman & Gilson, 2007). Some radio stations owned by media giant Clear Channel sell naming rights to their news operations. Listeners in Madison, Wisconsin, hear reports from the Amcore Bank News Center. Those in Milwaukee get their news from the PyraMax Bank News Center. At Phoenix’s KPHO-TV, Dunkin’ Donuts coffee mugs sit on the desks of the morning news set, but the anchors don’t use them for fear of spoiling the camera shot of the logo (Potter, 2006). Sony shares information about its PlayStation 3 and PlayStation Network players with ratings company A. C. Nielsen to better entice sponsors into placing ads in their games.

WWW

More on Hypercommercialism
www.commercialalert.org/

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More on Product Placement
www.brandchannel.com

The four original stars of *American Idol*—Simon Cowell, Paula Abdul, Randy Jackson, and Coke.



Sometimes hypercommercialism involves direct payments of cash rather than “mere” branding. An “oral mention” on *Martha Stewart Living* can be had for \$100,000. Gannett Broadcasting television stations in cities such as Atlanta, Cleveland, and Denver sell entire segments of their morning news and talk shows. For as little as \$2,500, sponsors (along with their products or services) can buy not only the exclusive rights to a portion of a show but the assurance that the programs’ hosts will conduct interviews with sponsors and demonstrations of their products as part of those segments (Klaassen, 2005a). A poll of 287 journalists in 2000 indicated that 41% censor themselves or otherwise reshape or soften stories rather than produce content that might offend advertisers because they “get signals from their bosses to avoid such stories or ignore them based on how they think their bosses would react” (Kohut, 2000, p. 43). Many radio stations now accept payment from record promoters to play their songs, an activity once illegal and called **payola**. It is now quite acceptable as long as the “sponsorship” is acknowledged on the air.

Again, as with globalization and concentration, where critics see damage to the integrity of the media themselves and disservice to their audiences, defenders of hypercommercialism argue that it is simply the economic reality of today’s media world.

Erosion of Distinctions Among Media: Convergence

Cable channel Comedy Central produces a six-show lineup exclusively for its Internet channel, *Motherload*. Movie studios make their titles available not only on DVD but for handheld video-game systems. The Internet’s AOL makes thousands of classic television shows (with commercials) available on the Web for free. Fellow Net giants Google, Microsoft, Intel, and Yahoo! sell downloads of classic and current television shows and movies from all the major broadcast and cable channels. Apple sells music videos, cable television shows,

and movies from studios like Pixar for home computers and its mobile iPod; the price—\$1.99. Cable giant Comcast sells computer downloads of current CBS television programs for 99 cents each. Satellite provider DirecTV does the same with shows from broadcasters NBC and Fox and cablecaster FX. ESPN provides sports programming not only to home computers but to Sprint cell phones. Phone company Verizon provides Fox and CBS television programming to its cell phone customers. Public television’s investigative reporting series, *Exposé*, appears online as many as 2 days before its scheduled network broadcast. You can subscribe to *National Geographic* and play its issue-matched video game online or on cell

Convergence in action. When you watch CNN on your cell phone, are you watching cable television, surfing wireless Internet, or using the telephone?



phone. There are tens of thousands of U.S. commercial and noncommercial and foreign radio stations delivering their broadcasts over the Web. *Pokémon* is as much a 30-minute TV commercial for licensed merchandise as it is a cartoon.

You can read the *New York Times* or *Time* magazine and hundreds of other newspapers and magazines on your computer screen. Cellular phones not only allow users to talk to other people; because they include digital camcorders, zoom and rotating lenses, and digital still cameras, complete with flash, they allow those same users to “broadcast” their “television programs” and photos. And what do “newspapers, magazines, and books,” “radio and recordings,” and “television and film” really mean (or more accurately, *really be*) now that people can access printed texts, audio, and moving images virtually anyplace, anytime via **Wi-Fi** (wireless Internet)? This erosion of distinctions among media is called *convergence*, and it is fueled, according to technology attorney Tony Kern (2005), by three elements that have come together “almost simultaneously. First is the digitization of nearly all information, which provides a common means to represent all forms of communication. Second is high-speed connectivity; networks are becoming faster and more pervasive—wired and wireless. And third is a seemingly endless advance in technology in which speed, memory, and power improvements allow a device to do more. That redefines the limits of what is possible” (p. 32). You can examine the likely explosive growth—the endless advance—of the digital platforms that are encouraging convergence in Figure 2.2, and you can make your own predictions of which you might prefer using ideas discussed in the box on p. 48, “The Fraction of Selection.”

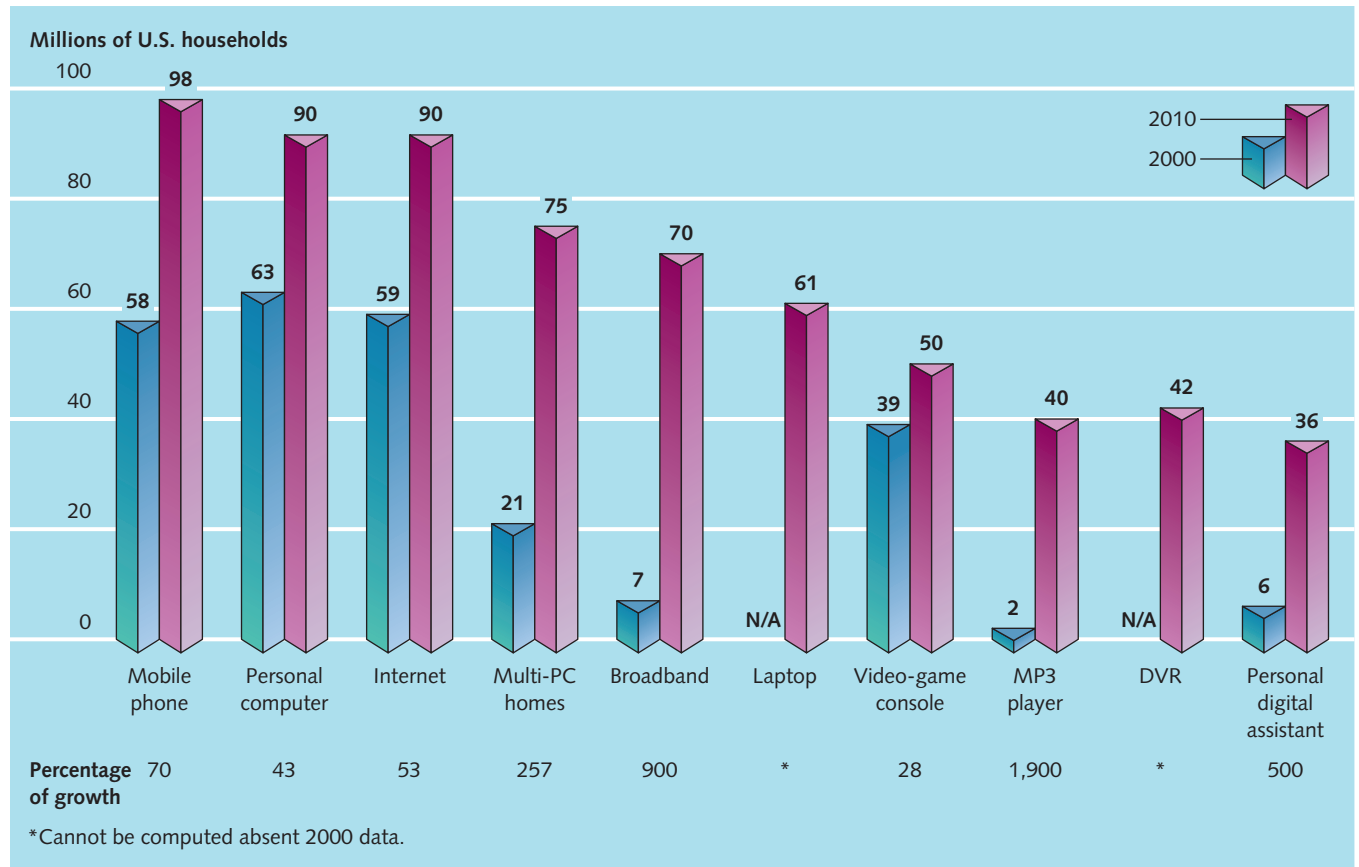
The traditional lines between media are disappearing. Concentration is one reason. If one company owns newspapers, an online service, television stations, book publishers, a magazine or two, and a film company, it has a strong incentive to get the greatest use from its content, whether news, education, or entertainment, by using as many channels of delivery as possible. The industry calls this **synergy**, and it is the driving force behind

WWW

Online Video
www.youtube.com

Figure 2.2 Encouraging Convergence: The Growth of Digital Platforms, 2000–2010.

Source: Adapted from Forrester Research in Atkinson, 2005.



Media history is repeating itself for today's media industries. They face challenges not unlike those that arose in the 1950s with the coming of television. By 1951, stations were broadcasting from cities all across America and the big television networks had the country wired from coast to coast. Television reshaped the media world of that time in no less a dramatic fashion than the digital technologies promise to reshape the one with which we are familiar today. Back then, movie attendance (and box office) dropped dramatically. Radio listenership—and advertising revenue—were in free fall. Readers and advertisers alike were abandoning newspapers and magazines. Revisit the

Audience members weigh the level of reward they expect from a given medium or piece of content against how much effort—in the broadest sense—they must make to secure that reward.

statistics on page 35. Today's "traditional" media are facing troubling declines. And just as it was in the 1950s, people inside and outside the media industries are struggling to determine which media people will choose for which content.

Pioneer mass communication researcher Wilbur Schramm offered a simple way to address this issue in 1954. His answer to the question "What determines which offerings of mass communication will be selected by a given individual?" was the **fraction of selection** (p. 19):

$$\frac{\text{Expectation of Reward}}{\text{Effort Required}}$$

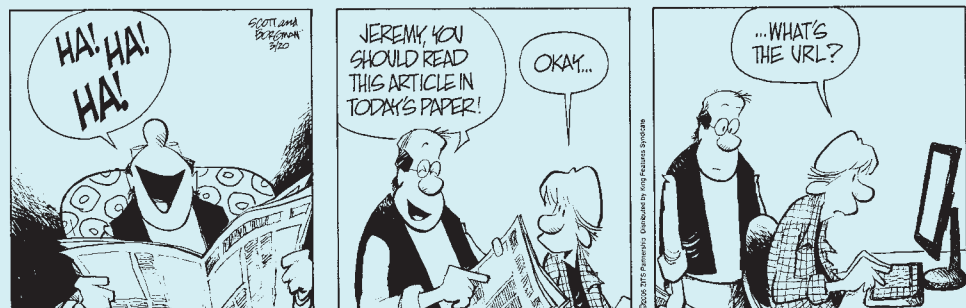
His argument was that audience members weigh the level of reward they expect from a given medium or piece of content against how much effort—in the broadest sense—they must make to secure that reward. Consider your own media consumption. For example, do you get most of your news from the Internet or from the daily newspaper? What factors might you include in the numerator of Schramm's equation

(Expectation of Reward) for news on the Net? Free. Continuously updated. Easily selectable and searchable. Links to related stories at your fingertips. Sound and video accompany the reports. You can read the news before you leave your room in the morning or in class while your professor thinks you're taking notes on your laptop. What factors might you put in the denominator (Effort Required)? You have to log on to your desktop or carry your computer. You have to click on your desired news site.

Now, what factors would you consider for the daily paper? *Expectation of reward:* You like the feel of the paper in your hands; its heft is comforting. You can cut out articles, cartoons, and recipes (but wait, you can print them out from the Web, so that's not much of a reward). *Effort required:* You have to go get it at a newsstand or at the end of your driveway. You have to pay for it. You pay for and sift through a lot of stories and features in which you have no interest. If you want to follow up on a particular story, you have to go somewhere else, more than likely the Web.

Certainly, you can add your own factors to any of these lists, but the odds are that you, like most college students, get most of your news from the Net rather than from the daily paper; and you can see why. Think about Steven Soderbergh's simultaneous release of the 2006 movie *Bubble* in theaters, on DVD, and on cable. Which platform was favored? Would it surprise you to learn that more people chose to see it on its opening weekend on cable than on DVD, and that more people chose to buy the DVD than see the movie at a theater (McBride, 2006)? Can you use the fraction of selection to explain why this might have happened? Which choice would you have made? Can you use the fraction of selection to explain your other media and content choices? For example, do you download tunes or do you buy CDs? Do you read books in hard copy or online? Do you wait for the latest blockbuster movie to "come to cable" or "come to DVD"? Will you *really* watch television shows and movies on a cell phone? Remember, media literacy demands critical thinking skills that enable you to develop your own independent judgments about media and content. The fraction of selection, more than a half century old, just might help.

What differences in the newspaper versus Internet fraction of selection might have surfaced for this father and son?



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several recent mergers and acquisitions in the media and telecommunications industries. In 1997, for example, computer software titan Microsoft paid \$1 billion for a 6% interest in cable television operation US West. Microsoft's goal in this and other similar purchases (it already owned part of cable giant Comsat Corporation and, at the time, was negotiating for a one-third stake in TCI Cable) is to make cable and the Internet indistinguishable. Similarly, media giant News Corp. paid well over a billion dollars in 2005 for social networking Web site MySpace.com and video-game maker IGN Entertainment in order to blend its existing broadcast, film, and print media with the Net and games. In that same year, the New York Times Company sought to converge its newspaper and television operations with the Web when it paid half-a-billion dollars for the popular site About.com.

Another reason for convergence is audience fragmentation. A mass communicator who finds it difficult to reach the whole audience can reach its component parts through various media. A third reason is the audience itself. We are becoming increasingly **platform agnostic**, having no preference for where we access our media content. Will this expansion and blurring of traditional media channels confuse audience members, further tilting the balance of power in the mass communication process toward the media industries? Or will it give audiences more power—power to choose, power to reject, and power to combine information and entertainment in individual ways?

Developing Media Literacy Skills

Reconsidering the Process of Mass Communication

One essential element of media literacy is *having an understanding of the process of mass communication*. As we saw in Chapter 1, understanding the process—how it functions, how its components relate to one another, how it limits or enhances messages, which forms of feedback are most effective and why—permits us to form expectations of how the media industries and the process itself can serve us. But throughout this chapter we have seen that the process of mass communication is undergoing fundamental change. Media literate individuals must understand why and how this evolution is occurring. We can do this by reconsidering its elements as described in Figure 1.3 on page 7.

Interpreter A—The Content Producer

Traditionally, the content producer, the source, in the mass communication process is a large, hierarchically structured organization, for example, Pixar Studios, the *Philadelphia Enquirer*, CBS Television. And as we saw, the typical consequence of this organizational structure is scant room for individual vision or experimentation. But in the age of the Internet, with its proliferation of **blogs** (regularly updated online journals that comment on just about everything), social-networking sites such as MySpace.com where users post all variety of free, personal content, and other Web sites, the distinction between content consumer and content provider disappears. Now, Interpreter A can be an independent musician self-releasing her music online, a lone blogger, a solitary online scrapbooker, or two pals who create digital video movies for distribution on Current TV (www.current.tv) where people vote for the best content, which is then redistributed over cable television on the Current TV channel. Twelve million Americans produce their own blogs which are read by 57 million other Americans (Digital Marketing & Media, 2007). Major television networks such as CNN (with *News to Me*) and ABC (with *i-Caught*) air viewer-created news reports. Internet domain company Go Daddy traditionally airs a viewer-created commercial during the Super Bowl. Tens of millions of producers, big and small, distribute their video fare on the Internet. Sites like Vuze, On Networks, Joost, and Blip Networks strike financial deals with producers, again big and small, for content for their own sites and for syndication to others. YouTube adds over 9,200 hours of user-produced video every day (Waxman, 2009). The National Academy of Arts and Sciences announced in 2005 a new category of Emmy award to accompany the usual Best Comedy and Best

WWW

Broadcasting & Cable
www.broadcastingcable.com

Variety
www.variety.com

Editor & Publisher
www.editorandpublisher.com

Advertising Age
www.adage.com

WWW

Current TV
www.current.tv



Blip Network offerings like *Goodnight Burbank* have redefined the nature of “The Content Producer” in the mass communication process.

Drama winners: Outstanding Content Distributed via Nontraditional Delivery Platforms.

In the newly evolving mass communication, content providers are just as likely to be individuals who believe in something or who have something to say as they are big media companies in search of audiences and profits. What are the likely consequences of this change? Will the proliferation of content sources help mitigate the effects of concentration and conglomeration in the traditional media industries? Will the cultural forum be less of a lecture and more of a conversation? Will new and different and challenging storytellers find an audience for their narratives? Does journalist William Greider (2005), speaking specifically of the news, overstate when he says, “The centralized institutions of press and broadcasting are being challenged and steadily eroded

by widening circles of unlicensed ‘news’ agents—from talk-radio hosts to Internet bloggers and others—who compete with the official press to be believed. These interlopers speak in a different language and from many different angles of vision. Less authoritative, but more democratic” (p. 31)?

The Message

The message in the traditional mass communication process is typically many identical messages, mechanically produced, simultaneously sent, inflexible, and unalterable. Once Fox airs tonight’s episode of *24*, it has aired tonight’s episode of *24*. The consequence? Audiences either like it or don’t like it. The program either succeeds or fails. But we’ve already seen that different commercial spots can be inserted into programs sent into specific homes and that thousands of issues of the same magazine can be personalized inside and on the cover. You can buy only four downloaded cuts of an artist’s latest CD, add three more from an earlier release, and listen to a completely new, personally created CD. **RSS**, for **really simple syndication**, are aggregators allowing Web users to create their own content assembled from the Internet’s limitless supply of material. Some of the most popular are MyTimes, Blogline, Newsgator, and My Yahoo. Users tell the aggregator what sites to collect, or their issues of interest, or even their favorite writers. As soon as any new content in their preselected categories appears on the Net it is automatically brought to their RSS file. In this way, according to journalist Robert Kuttner (2007), users can “pre-assemble an all-star Webpaper [or Webcast or Webmagazine] that no single newspaper [or radio station, cable network, television station, or magazine] can possibly duplicate” (p. 26). In other words, each RSS “message” is infinitely alterable, completely unique, and thoroughly idiosyncratic. Alternate-ending DVDs permitting viewers to “re-edit” an existing movie at home are old hat by now. But what do you think of director Steven Soderbergh’s vision for a digital movie future? He said that in 5 or 10 years, when theaters convert more fully from film to digital projection (Chapter 6), he plans to exhibit multiple, different versions of the same film. “I think it would be very interesting to have a movie out in release,” he said, “and then, just a few weeks later say, ‘Here’s version 2.0, recut, rescored.’ The other version is still out there—people can see either or both” (in Jardin, 2005b, p. 257).

What will be the impact on the mass communication process when content producers no longer have to amass as large an audience as possible with a single, simultaneously distributed piece of content? When a producer can sell very specific, very idiosyncratic, constantly changing content to very specific, very idiosyncratic, constantly changing consumers, will profitability and popularity no longer be so closely linked? What will “popular” and “profitable” messages really mean when audience members can create infinitely “alterable” messages? What will happen when the mass communication process, long dependent on **appointment consumption** (audiences consume content at a time predetermined by the producer and distributor; for example, a movie time at a theater, your

Read “the Trades”

Media literacy champion Art Silverblatt (2001) identified several goals that media literate people can set for themselves to improve their critical awareness of the media. Three, in particular, suggest one way to make your media literacy a living enterprise:

- Develop an awareness of programming trends as a way of learning about changes in the culture.

- Keep abreast of patterns in ownership and government regulations that affect the media industries.
- Promote discussions about media programming and issues with friends and colleagues. (pp. 405–406)

An efficient and possibly fun way to accomplish these goals is to start a media issues discussion group centered on what industry pros call “the trades.” Identify three friends with an



Keeping up with “the trades” not only improves your media literacy, but can enhance your career possibilities.

(continued)

interest in the mass media and agree to a regular schedule of meetings (every few weeks, every month). Each of you takes on the responsibility of reading one of the Big Four media industry trade magazines, that is, the trades: *Broadcasting & Cable*, *Variety*, *Editor & Publisher*, and *Advertising Age*. Because they

Each of you takes on the responsibility of reading one of the big four media industry trade magazines, that is, the trades: *Broadcasting & Cable*, *Variety*, *Editor & Publisher*, and *Advertising Age*.

are very influential and popular periodicals, they are available at almost every campus library and at many municipal libraries as well. *Broadcasting & Cable* not only reports on radio, television, and cable but offers extensive coverage of the Internet and satellite distribution of content. *Variety* covers all media, with a special eye toward the movies and television networks. But it

does not ignore the recording, magazine, and book publishing industries. *Editor & Publisher* is the bible of the newspaper industry. The special virtue of *Advertising Age* is that it not only covers the ad industry, but because advertising people need to know where to put their dollars, of necessity it offers quite realistic views of the state of every medium that relies on advertising for income.

At each session, each individual’s task is to report on the most important stories that have appeared in his or her assigned trade since the previous get-together. You can agree to focus on ownership, regulations, and programming, as Silverblatt suggests, or you can let your group interests and conversations suggest different topics. Remember to rotate the titles among yourselves so everyone can become familiar with all four sources. These media chat sessions should improve media literacy and can be fun and informative. There is no better way to predict the future of the media industries—and possibly just as important to you, the career opportunities in them—than by reading the trades.

favorite television show at 9:00 on Tuesdays, news at the top of the hour), evolves more completely to **consumption-on-demand** (the ability to consume any content, anytime, anywhere)?

Feedback and Interpreter B—The Audience

In the traditional model of the mass communication process, feedback is inferential and delayed—what is a newspaper’s circulation, what were this weekend’s box office numbers for that movie, what are that program’s ratings? Likewise, the audience is typically seen as large and heterogeneous, known to content producers and distributors in a relatively rudimentary way, little more than basic demographics. But digital media have changed what content creators and distributors know about their audiences (Interpreter B) because they have changed how audiences talk back to those sources (feedback). Silicon Valley marketing consultant Richard Yankowitch explains, “The Internet is the most ubiquitous experimental lab in history, built on two-way, real-time interactions with millions of consumers whose individual consumption patterns can for the first time be infinitesimally measured, monitored, and molded.” Adds Google advertising executive Tim Armstrong, “Traditionally, the focus has been on the outbound message. But we think the information coming back in is as important or more important than the messages going out. For years, demographics has been a religion among advertisers because it was the only information they had” (both in Streisand & Newman, 2005, p. 60).

In today’s mass communication, every visit to a specific Web address (and every click of a mouse once there), every download of a piece of content, and every product bought online provide feedback to someone. But it isn’t just the Internet—every selection of a channel on cable or satellite, every rental or purchase by credit card of a CD, DVD, video game, or movie ticket, and every consumer product scanned at the checkout counter is recorded and stored in order to better identify us to Interpreter A, whoever that might be. But this raises the question, Who is that? It might be content providers who want to serve us more effectively because they know us so much more thoroughly than they once did when relying solely on demographics. Or it could be those who would

make less honorable use of the feedback we so willingly provide, for example, identity thieves or insurance companies that would deny us coverage because of our eating and viewing habits.

The Result

How will we use the new communication technologies? What will be our role in the new, emerging mass communication process? The world of content creators and distributors is now more democratic. Audiences, even though they may be fragmented into groups as small as one person or as large as 100 million, are better known to those who produce and distribute content and they can talk back more directly and with more immediacy. Content, the message, is now more flexible, infinitely alterable, unbound by time and space. Clearly, for content producers there is more room for experimentation in content creation and consumption. There is less risk, and possibly even great reward, in challenging audiences. The evolving mass communication process promises not only efficiency but great joy, boundless choice, and limitless access to information for all its partners. But as you might remember from Chapter 1, the technologies that help provide these gifts are in fact double-edged swords; they cut both ways, good and bad. Media literate people, because they understand the mass communication process through which they operate, are positioned to best decide how to benefit from their potential and limit their peril.

Resources for Review and Discussion

REVIEW POINTS

- Encouraged by the Internet and other digital technologies, content producers are finding new ways to deliver content to audiences.
- All of the traditional media have begun to see either flattening or declines in audience, yet overall consumption of media is at all-time highs.
- Five trends are abetting this situation—convergence, audience fragmentation, concentration of ownership and conglomeration, globalization, and hypercommercialism.
- Convergence is fueled by three elements—digitization of nearly all information, high-speed connectivity, and advances in technology’s speed, memory, and power.
- As a result of all this change, traditional conceptions of the mass communication process and its elements must be reconsidered:
 - a. Content providers can now be lone individuals.
 - b. Messages can now be quite varied, idiosyncratic, and freed of the producers’ time demands.
 - c. Feedback can now be instantaneous and direct, and, as a result, audiences, very small or very large, can be quite well known to content producers and distributors.

KEY TERMS



Use the text’s Online Learning Center at www.mhhe.com/baran6e to further your understanding of the following terminology.

platform, 34
media multitasking, 36
convergence, 36
concentration of ownership, 37
conglomeration, 37
economies of scale, 40
oligopoly, 40
globalization, 40
audience fragmentation, 41

narrowcasting, 41
niche marketing, 41
targeting, 41
addressable technologies, 44
taste publics, 44
hypercommercialism, 45
bugs (obnoxious), 45
product placement, 45
brand entertainment, 45

payola, 46
Wi-Fi, 47
synergy, 47
fraction of selection, 48
platform agnostic, 49
blog, 49
RSS, 50
appointment consumption, 50
consumption-on-demand, 52

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

 Go to the self-quizzes on the Online Learning Center to test your knowledge.

1. What is a platform?
2. Can you describe recent changes in audience size for movies, recorded music, network television, DVD, radio, newspapers, and video games?
3. How would you describe contemporary levels of overall media consumption?
4. What is convergence?
5. What is media multitasking?
6. Differentiate between concentration of media ownership and conglomeration.
7. What is globalization?
8. What is hypercommercialism?
9. What is audience fragmentation?
10. What is addressable technology?
11. What are economies of scale and oligopoly? How are they related?
12. What are the two major concerns of globalization's critics?
13. What are product placement and branded content?
14. What three elements are fueling today's rampant media convergence?
15. Differentiate between notions of content producers, audiences, messages, and feedback in the traditional view of the mass communication process and more contemporary understandings of these elements of the process.
16. What is RSS?
17. Differentiate between appointment consumption and consumption-on-demand.

QUESTIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND DISCUSSION

1. Where NBC executive Bob Wright warns, "You can't fight technology," *Advertising Age's* Scott Donaton (2006) cautions, "A cellphone isn't a TV" (p. 18). What is the concern behind each comment? Is one more correct than the other? With whom would you side in a debate, and why?
2. Many industry insiders attribute the recent falloff in audiences for movies, recorded music, network television, DVD, radio, newspapers, and video games to changes in technology; people are finding new ways to access content. And while this is certainly true to a degree, others say that in this age of concentrated and hypercommercialized media, audiences are simply being turned off. Would you agree with the critics? Why? Can you give examples from your own media consumption?
3. Critics of concentration of media ownership and conglomeration argue that they are a threat to democracy. What is the thrust of their concern? Do you share it? Why or why not?
4. Before reading this chapter, had you noticed in your own media consumption the ascendance of celebrity news over serious coverage? If not, why not? If so, did it raise concern in your mind? Did it alter in any way your choice of news sources?
5. Weigh in on the issue of large, U.S.-based Internet corporations' willingness to sacrifice a bit of the Web's freedom for access to China's large population. How far should a company go to "respond to local conditions"?
6. Do you find product placement and branded content as troublesome as do its critics? Why or why not? Are you sympathetic to those writers who want to be paid extra for inserting "commercials" into their scripts? Why or why not?
7. A close reading of how the mass communication process is evolving has led some observers to argue that it is becoming less "mass" and more akin to interpersonal communication. Revisit Figure 1.3 on page 7. Can you make the argument that the "result" of the process has the potential to be more "flexible, personally relevant, possibly adventurous, challenging, or experimental"?

IMPORTANT RESOURCES

 Go to the Online Learning Center for additional readings.

INTERNET RESOURCES

More on Kids' Media Consumption

www.kaisernetwork.org


More on Concentration

www.cjr.org/owners

More on Media Reform

www.corporations.org/media

More on Globalization	www.unesco.org
More on Yahoo! in China	www.booyahoo.blogspot.com
More on Improving Media Performance	www.freepress.net
More on Hypercommercialism	www.commercialalert.org
More on Product Placement	www.brandchannel.com
Online Video	www.youtube.com
<i>Broadcasting & Cable</i>	www.broadcastingcable.com
<i>Variety</i>	www.variety.com
<i>Editor & Publisher</i>	www.editorandpublisher.com
<i>Advertising Age</i>	www.adage.com
Current TV	www.current.tv



VOLUME

2

GREENWOOD ICONS



BOB GULLA

ICONS

OF

R&B
AND SOUL

AN ENCYCLOPEDIA
OF THE ARTISTS WHO
REVOLUTIONIZED
RHYTHM

Have a question about the Godfather of Soul, James Brown? Read this book.

Books

3

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The video began when you hit the play button on the remote control. But the folks who rented the movie before you failed to rewind. So there you were, watching an arresting scene from François Truffaut's 1967 adaptation of Ray Bradbury's (1953/1981) science fiction classic *Fahrenheit 451*.

At first you couldn't make out what was happening. A group of people were wandering about, and each person was talking to him- or herself. You recognized actress Julie Christie, but the other performers and what they were saying were completely unfamiliar. You stayed with the scene. The trees were bare. Snow was falling, covering everything. Puffs of steam floated from people's mouths as they spoke, seemingly to no one. As you watched a bit more, you began to recognize some familiar phrases. These people were reciting passages from famous books! Before you could figure out why they were doing this, the film ended.

So you rewound and watched the entire video, discovering that these people *were* the books they had memorized. In this near-future society, all books had been banned by the authorities, forcing these people—book lovers all—into hiding. They hold the books in their heads because to hold them in their hands is a crime. If discovered with books, people are jailed and the books are set afire—Fahrenheit 451 is the temperature at which book paper burns.

Moved by the film, you go to the library the next day and check out the book itself. Bradbury's (1981) main character, Guy Montag, a fireman who until this moment had been an official book burner himself, speaks a line that stays with you, even today. After he watches an old woman burn to death with her forbidden volumes, he implores his

Books were the first mass medium and are, in many ways, the most personal. They inform and entertain. They are repositories of our pasts and agents of personal development and social change. Like all media, they mirror the culture. After studying this chapter you should

- be familiar with the history and development of the publishing industry and the book itself as a medium.
- recognize the cultural value of books and the implications of censorship for democracy.
- understand how the organizational and economic nature of the contemporary book industry shapes the content of books.
- be a more media literate consumer of books, especially in recognizing their uniqueness in an increasingly mass-mediated world.

WWW

More on Ray Bradbury
www.raybradbury.com

A horizontal timeline with a green background and white text. The timeline is marked with years: 1456, 1600, 1638, 1644, 1700, 1732, 1765, and 1774. Each year is connected to a specific event by a vertical line. The events are: 1456: First Gutenberg Bible (with an illustration of Gutenberg); 1638: First printing press in the Colonies; 1644: *The Whole Booke of Psalms*, first book printed in the Colonies; 1732: *Poor Richard's Almanack* (with an illustration of the almanack cover); 1765: Stamp Act (with an illustration of a man carrying a box); 1774: Thomas Paine writes *Common Sense*.

1456
First Gutenberg Bible



1638
First printing press
in the Colonies

1644
The Whole Booke of Psalms,
first book printed in the Colonies

1732
Poor Richard's
Almanack



1765
Stamp Act



1774
Thomas Paine writes
Common Sense

ice-cold, drugged, and television-deadened wife to understand what he is only then realizing. He pleads with her to see: “There must be something in books, things we can’t imagine, to make a woman stay in a burning house; there must be something there” (pp. 49–50).

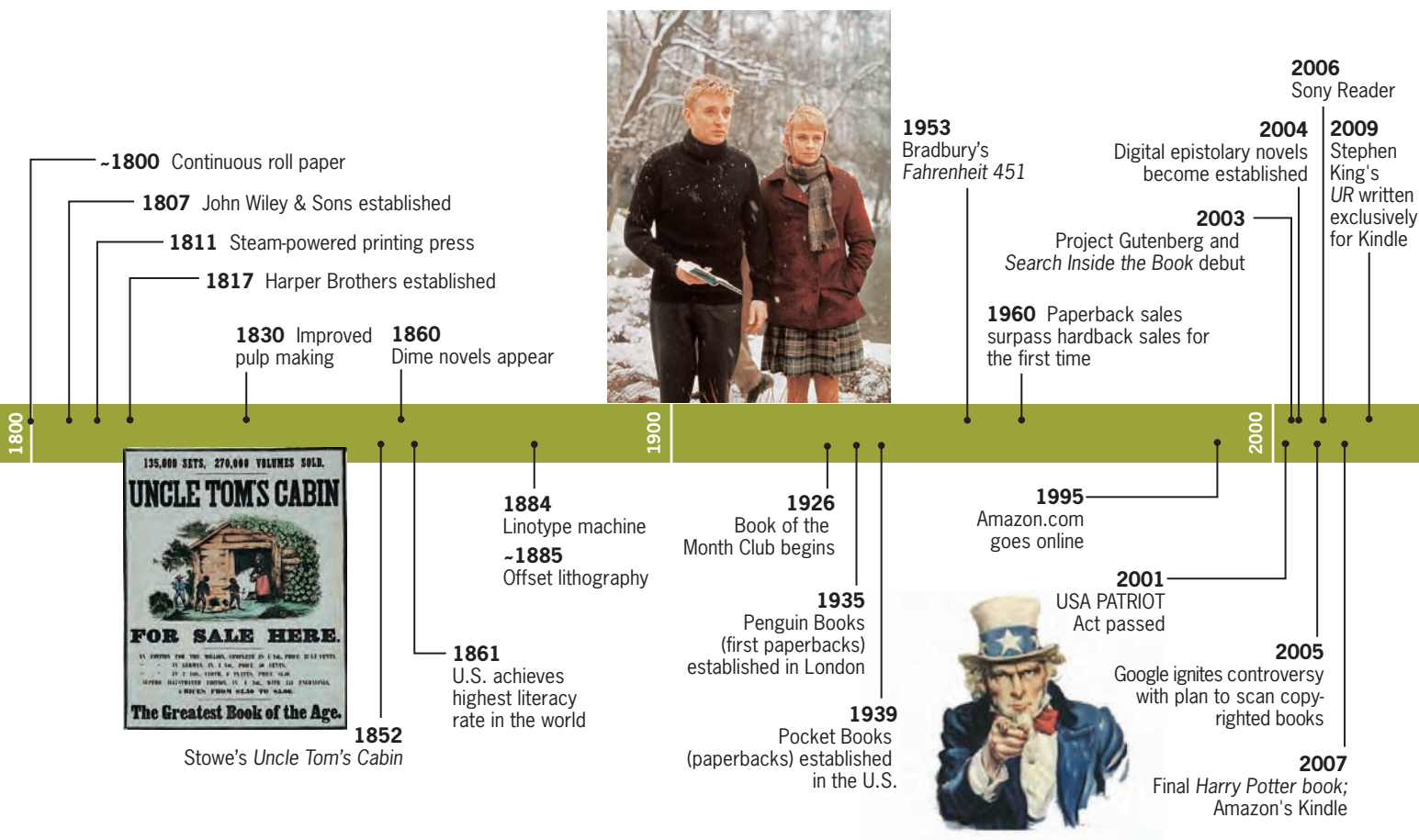
In this chapter we examine the history of books, especially in terms of their role in the development of the United States. We discuss the importance that has traditionally been ascribed to books, as well as the scope and nature of the book industry. We address the various factors that shape the contemporary economics and structures of the book industry, examining at some length the impact of convergence, concentration, and hyper-commercialism on the book industry and its relationship with its readers. Finally, we discuss the media literacy issues inherent in the wild success of the Harry Potter books.

A Short History of Books

As we saw in Chapter 1, use of Gutenberg’s printing press spread rapidly throughout Europe in the last half of the 15th century. But the technological advances and the social, cultural, and economic conditions necessary for books to become a major mass medium were three centuries away. As a result, it was a printing press and a world of books not unlike that in Gutenberg’s time that first came to the New World in the 17th century.

Books Come to Colonial North America

The earliest colonists came to America primarily for two reasons—to escape religious persecution and to find economic opportunities unavailable to them in Europe. Most of the books they carried with them to the New World were religiously oriented. Moreover, they brought very few books at all. Better-educated, wealthier Europeans were secure at



home. Those willing to make the dangerous journey tended to be poor, uneducated, and largely illiterate.

There were other reasons early settlers did not find books central to their lives. One was the simple fight for survival. In the brutal and hostile land to which they had come, leisure for reading books was a luxury for which they had little time. People worked from sunrise to sunset just to live. If there was to be reading, it would have to be at night, and it was folly to waste precious candles on something as unnecessary to survival as reading. In addition, books and reading were regarded as symbols of wealth and status and therefore not priorities for people who considered themselves to be pioneers, servants of the Lord, or anti-English colonists. The final reason the earliest settlers were not active readers was the lack of portability of books. Books were heavy, and few were carried across the ocean. Those volumes that did make it to North America were extremely expensive and not available to most people.

The first printing press arrived on North American shores in 1638, only 18 years after the Plymouth Rock landing. It was operated by a company called Cambridge Press. Printing was limited to religious and government documents. The first book printed in the Colonies appeared in 1644—*The Whole Booke of Psalms*, sometimes referred to as the *Bay Psalm Book*. Among the very few secular titles were those printed by Benjamin Franklin 90 years later. *Poor Richard's Almanack*, which first appeared in 1732, sold 10,000 copies annually. The *Almanack* contained short stories, poetry, weather predictions, and other facts and figures useful to a population more in command of its environment than those first settlers. As the Colonies grew in wealth and sophistication, leisure time increased, as did affluence and education. Franklin also published the first true novel printed in North America, *Pamela*, written by English author Samuel Richardson. Still, by and large, books were religiously oriented or pertained to official government activities such as tax rolls and the pronouncements of various commissions.

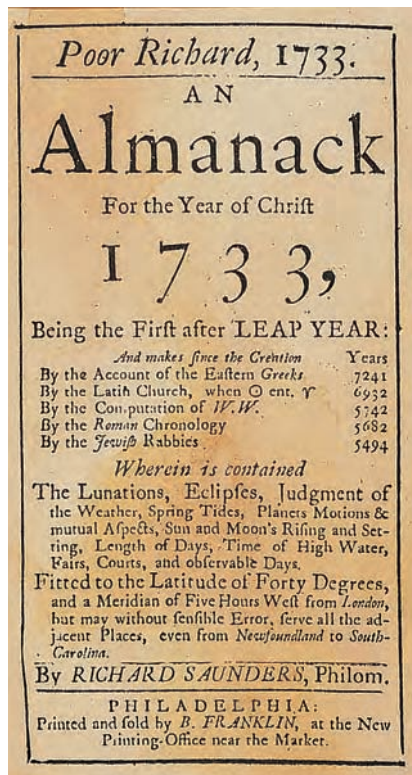
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More on Ben Franklin
www.english.udel.edu/lemay/franklin

In the now not-so-distant future of *Fahrenheit 451*, people must memorize the content of books because to own a book is illegal.



First published in 1732, Benjamin Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanack* offered readers a wealth of information for the upcoming year.



The primary reason for this lack of variety was the requirement that all printing be done with the permission of the colonial governors. Because these men were invariably loyal to King George II, secular printing and criticism of the British Crown or even of local authorities was never authorized, and publication of such writing meant jail. Many printers were imprisoned—including Franklin's brother James—for publishing what they believed to be the truth.

The printers went into open revolt against official control in March 1765 after passage of the Stamp Act. Designed by England to recoup money it spent waging the French and Indian War, the Stamp Act mandated that all printing—legal documents, books, magazines, and newspapers—be done on paper stamped with the government's seal. Its additional purpose was to control and limit expression in the increasingly restless Colonies. This affront to their freedom, and the steep cost of the tax—sometimes doubling the price of a publication—was simply too much for the colonists. The printers used their presses to run accounts of antitax protests, demonstrations, riots, sermons, boycotts, and other antiauthority activities, further fueling revolutionary and secessionist sympathies. In November 1765—when the tax was to take effect—the authorities were so cowed by the reaction of the colonists that they were unwilling to enforce it.

Anti-British sentiment reached its climax in the mid-1770s, and books were at its core. Short books, or pamphlets, motivated and coalesced political dissent. In 1774 England's right to govern the Colonies was openly challenged by James Wilson's *Considerations on the Nature and Extent of the Legislative Authority of the British Parliament*, John Adams's *Novanglus Papers*, and Thomas Jefferson's *A Summary*

View of the Rights of British America. Most famous of all was Thomas Paine's 47-page *Common Sense*. It sold 120,000 copies in the first 3 months after its release to a total population of 400,000 adults. Between 1776 and 1783 Paine also wrote a series of pamphlets called *The American Crisis*. *Common Sense* and *The American Crisis* made Paine the most widely read colonial author during the American Revolution.

The Early Book Industry After the War of Independence, printing became even more central to political, intellectual, and cultural life in major cities like Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. To survive financially, printers also operated as booksellers, book publishers, and sometimes as postmasters who sold stationery and even groceries. A coffee-house or tavern often was attached to the print shop. The era was alive with political change, and printer/bookshops became clearinghouses for the collection, exchange, and dissemination of information.

The U.S. newspaper industry grew rapidly from this mix, as we will see in Chapter 4. The book industry, however, was slower to develop. Books were still expensive, often costing the equivalent of a working person's weekly pay, and literacy remained a luxury. However, due in large measure to a movement begun before the Civil War, compulsory education had come to most states by 1900. This swelled the number of readers, which increased demand for books. This increased demand, coupled with a number of important technological advances, brought the price of books within reach of most people. In 1861 the United States had the highest literacy rate of any country in the world (58%), and 40 years later at the start of the 20th century, 9 out of every 10 U.S. citizens could read. Today, America's literacy rate stands at 95% ("U.S. Adult," 2005).

Improving Printing The 1800s saw a series of important refinements to the process of printing. Continuous roll paper, which permitted rapid printing of large numbers of identical, standardized pages, was invented in France at the very beginning of the century. Soon after, in 1811, German inventor Friedrich Koenig converted the printing press from muscle to steam power, speeding production of printed material and reducing its cost. In 1830 Americans Thomas Gilpin and James Ames perfected a wood-grinding machine that produced enough pulp to make 24 miles of paper daily, further lowering the cost of printing. The final pieces of this era's rapid production-cost reduction puzzle were fit in the later part of the century. German immigrant Ottmar Mergenthaler introduced his **linotype** machine in the United States in 1884. Employing a typewriter-like keyboard, the linotype enabled printers to set type mechanically rather than manually. Near the same time, **offset lithography** was developed. This advance made possible printing from photographic plates rather than from heavy and relatively fragile metal casts.

British-born writer, patriot, and revolutionary leader Thomas Paine wrote *Common Sense* and *The American Crisis* to rally his colonial compatriots in their struggle against the British.

The Flowering of the Novel The combination of technically improved, lower-cost printing (and therefore lower-cost publications) and widespread literacy produced the flowering of the novel in the 1800s. Major U.S. book publishers Harper Brothers and John Wiley & Sons—both in business today—were established in New York in 1817 and 1807, respectively. And books such as Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851), and Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* (1884) were considered by their readers to be equal to or better than the works of famous European authors such as Jane Austen, the Brontës, and Charles Dickens.

The growing popularity of books was noticed by brothers Irwin and Erastus Beadle. In 1860 they began publishing novels that sold for 10 cents. These **dime novels** were inexpensive, and because they concentrated on frontier and adventure stories, they



attracted growing numbers of readers. Within 5 years of their start, Beadle & Company had produced over 4 million volumes of what were also sometimes called **pulp novels** (Tebbel, 1987). Advertising titles like *Malaeska: Indian Wife of the White Hunter* with the slogan “Dollar Books for a Dime!” the Beadles democratized books and turned them into a mass medium.

The Coming of Paperback Books Dime novels were “paperback books” because they were produced with paper covers. But publisher Allen Lane invented what we now recognize as the paperback in the midst of the Great Depression in London when he founded Penguin Books in 1935. Four years later, publisher Robert de Graff introduced the idea to the United States. His Pocket Books were small, inexpensive (25 cents) reissues of books that had already become successful as hardcovers. They were sold just about everywhere—newsstands, bookstores, train stations, shipping terminals, and drug and department stores. Within weeks of their introduction, de Graff was fielding orders of up to 15,000 copies a day (Tebbel, 1987). Soon, new and existing publishers joined the paperback boom. Traditionalists had some concern about the “cheapening of the book,” but that was more than offset by the huge popularity of paperbacks and the willingness of publishers to take chances. For example, in the 1950s and ‘60s, African American writers such as Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison were published, as were controversial works such as *Catcher in the Rye*. Eventually, paperback books became the norm, surpassing hardcover book sales for the first time in 1960. Today, more than 60% of all books sold in the United States are paperbacks.

Paperbacks are no longer limited to reprints of successful hardbacks. Many books now begin life as paperbacks. The John Jakes books *The Americans* and *The Titans*, for example, were issued initially as paperbacks and later reissued in hardcover. Paperback sales today top 1 million volumes a day, and bookstores generate half their revenue from these sales.

Books and Their Audiences

The book is the least “mass” of our mass media in audience reach and in the magnitude of the industry itself, and this fact shapes the nature of the relationship between medium and audience. Publishing houses, both large and small, produce narrowly or broadly aimed titles for readers, who buy and carry away individual units. This more direct relationship between publishers and readers renders books fundamentally different from other mass media. For example, because books are less dependent than other mass media on attracting the largest possible audience, books are more able and more likely to incubate new, challenging, or unpopular ideas. As the medium least dependent on advertiser support, books can be aimed at extremely small groups of readers, challenging them and their imaginations in ways that many sponsors would find unacceptable in advertising-based mass media. Because books are produced and sold as individual units—as opposed to a single television program simultaneously distributed to millions of viewers or a single edition of a mass circulation newspaper—more “voices” can enter and survive in the industry. This medium can sustain more voices in the cultural forum than can other traditional mass media. As former head of the New York Public Library, Vartan Gregorian, explained to journalist Bill Moyers (2007), when among books, “Suddenly you feel humble. The whole world of humanity is in front of you. . . . Here it is, the human endeavor, human aspiration, human agony, human ecstasy, human bravura, human failures—all before you.”

The Cultural Value of the Book

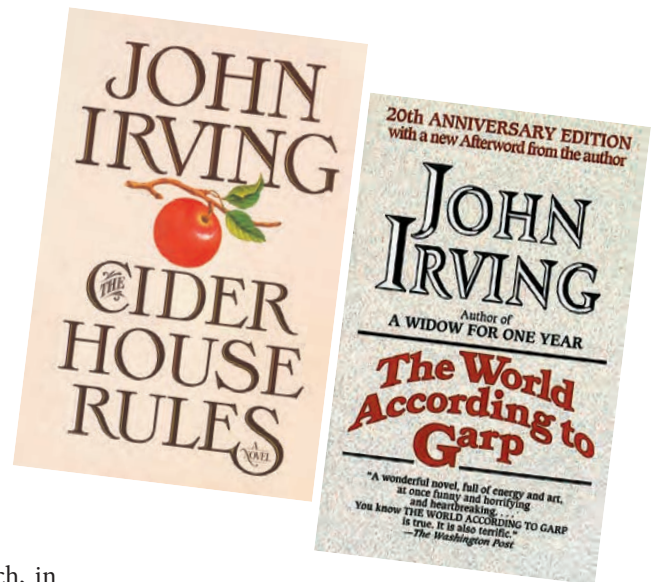
The book industry is bound by many of the same financial and industrial pressures that constrain other media, but books, more than the others, are in a position to transcend those constraints. In *Fahrenheit 451* Montag’s boss, Captain Beatty, explains why all

books must be burned. “Once,” he tells his troubled subordinate, “books appealed to a few people, here, there, everywhere. They could afford to be different. The world was roomy. But then the world got full of eyes and elbows and mouths” (Bradbury, 1981, p. 53). Bradbury’s firemen of the future destroy books precisely because they *are* different. It is their difference from other mass media that makes books unique in our culture. Although all media serve the following cultural functions to some degree (for example, people use self-help videos for personal development and popular music is sometimes an agent of social change), books traditionally have been seen as a powerful cultural force for these reasons:

- *Books are agents of social and cultural change.* Free of the need to generate mass circulation for advertisers, offbeat, controversial, even revolutionary ideas can reach the public. For example, Andrew MacDonald’s *Turner Diaries* is the ideological and how-to bible of the antigovernment militia movement in the United States. Nonetheless, this radical, revolutionary book is openly published, purchased, and discussed. For a look at the role of other books in social movements, see the box “The Role of Books in Social Movements.”
- *Books are an important cultural repository.* Want to definitively win an argument? Look it up. We often turn to books for certainty and truth about the world in which we live and the ones about which we want to know. Which countries border Chile? Find the atlas. James Brown’s sax player? Look in Bob Gulla’s *Icons of R & B and Soul*.
- *Books are our windows on the past.* What was the United States like in the 19th century? Read Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*. England in the early 1800s? Read Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. Written in the times they reflect, these books are more accurate representations than are available in the modern electronic media.
- *Books are important sources of personal development.* The obvious forms are self-help and personal improvement volumes. But books also speak to us more individually than advertiser-supported media because of their small, focused target markets. For example, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, introduced by the Boston Women’s Health Book Collective in the very earliest days of the modern feminist movement, is still published today. (For more on this influential book, see the “Our Bodies, Ourselves” box.) *Dr. Spock’s Baby and Child Care* has sold more than 30 million copies. J. D. Salinger’s *Catcher in the Rye* was the literary anthem for the baby boomers in their teen years, as is William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* for many of today’s cyberyouth. It is unlikely that any of these voices would have found their initial articulation in commercially sponsored media.
- *Books are wonderful sources of entertainment, escape, and personal reflection.* Arthur C. Clarke, John Grisham, Judith Krantz, and Stephen King all specialize in writing highly entertaining and imaginative novels. The enjoyment found in the works of writers Joyce Carol Oates (*On Boxing, We Were the Mulvaneys*), John Irving (*The World According to Garp, Hotel New Hampshire, A Prayer for Owen Meany*), Pat Conroy (*The Prince of Tides, Beach Music*), and J. K. Rowling (the *Harry Potter* series) is undeniable.
- *The purchase and reading of a book is a much more individual, personal activity than consuming advertiser-supported (television, radio, newspapers, and magazines) or heavily promoted (popular music and movies) media.* As such, books tend to encourage personal reflection to a greater degree than these other media. We are alone when we read a book; we are part of the tribe, as McLuhan would say, when we engage other media. As such, in

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More on Our Bodies, Ourselves
www.ourbodiesourselves.org



The Role of Books in Social Movements

In the 15th and 16th centuries, reformers used one book—the Bible—to create one of history’s most important revolutions, the Protestant Reformation. Of course, the reformers did not write this book, but their insistence that it be available to people was a direct challenge to the ruling powers of the time. Englishman John Wycliffe was persecuted and burned at the stake in the mid-1300s for translating the Bible into English. Two hundred years later, another Englishman, William Tyndale, so angered Church leaders with his insistence on printing and distributing English-language Bibles that the Church had him strangled and burned at the stake.

Before printed Bibles became generally available in the 16th and 17th centuries, Bibles and other religious tracts were typically chained to some unmovable piece of the church. Church leaders said this was done because people desperate for the Word of God would steal them, denying others access. If this was true, why were Wycliffe and Tyndale persecuted for trying to *expand* access? Many historians, both secular and religious, now believe that the reason **chained Bibles** existed was to ensure that reading and interpreting their contents could be supervised and controlled. The established elites feared the power of the printed word.

This was also the case during the American Revolution, as we have seen in this chapter, as well as when the country rejected a 200-year evil, slavery. Harriet Beecher Stowe published the realistically painful story of slavery in America in 1852. Her *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* had first appeared in two parts

The reason chained Bibles existed was to ensure that reading and interpreting their contents could be supervised and controlled. The established elites feared the power of the printed word.

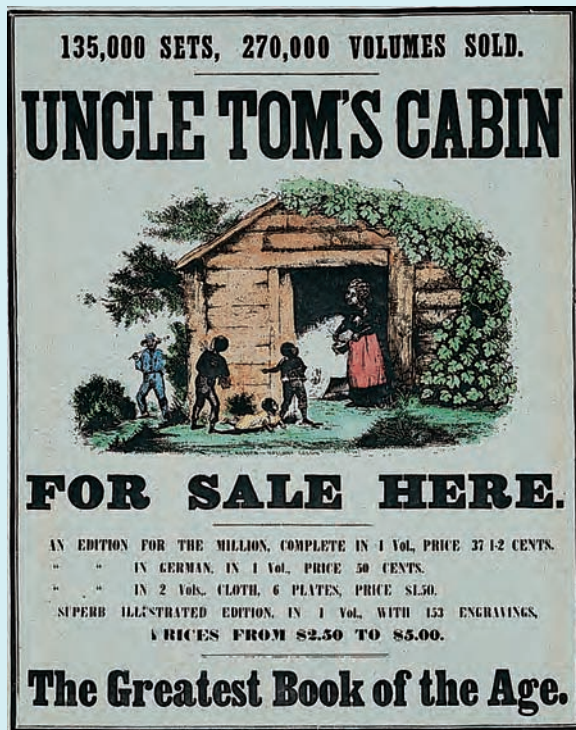


Chained Bibles and other handprinted books in England’s Hereford Cathedral.

the words of author Julius Lester (2002) (*Look Out, Whitey! Black Power’s Gon’ Get Your Mama!; Why Heaven Is Far Away*):

The mystery and miracle of a book is found in the fact that it is a solitary voice penetrating time and space to go beyond time and space, and to alight for a moment in that place within each of us which is also beyond time and space. . . . Books are the royal road that enable us to enter the realm of the imaginative. Books enable us to experience what it is to be someone else. Through books we experience other modes of being. Through books we recognize who we are and who we might become. . . . Books invite us into realms of the soul by asking us to imagine that we are someone other than who we are. Books require that we temporarily put our egos in a box by the door and take on the spirit of others. . . . This is what a book, any book, offers us the opportunity to do: confess and recognize ourselves. To confess and recognize our fantasies, our joys, and griefs, our aspirations and failures, our hopes and our fears. Deep within the solitary wonder in which we sit alone with a book, we confess and recognize what we would be too ashamed to tell another—and sometimes we are as ashamed of joy and delight and success as we are of embarrassment and failure. (pp. 26–29)

- *Books are mirrors of culture.* Books, along with other mass media, reflect the culture that produces and consumes them.



This promotional flier calls *Uncle Tom's Cabin* "the greatest book of the age," a fair assessment, given its impact on the times and U.S. history.

in an antislavery magazine, but its greatest impact was as a book hungrily read by a startled public. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* sold 20,000 copies in its first 3 weeks on the market, and 300,000 copies in its first year, eventually reaching sales of 7 million.

It was the tale of a kind, literate slave, Uncle Tom. Tom's reward for his intelligence and his goodness was death at the hands of evil slave owner Simon Legree. A fine work of literature, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* galvanized public feelings against slavery. Abolitionist sentiment was no longer the domain of the intellectual, social, and religious elite. Everyday people were repulsed by the horrors of slavery. One of Stowe's most ardent readers was Abraham Lincoln, who, as president, abolished slavery.

Books have traditionally been at the center of social change in the United States. Horatio Alger's rags-to-riches stories excited westward migration in the 1800s. Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* and other muckraking books brought about significant health and labor legislation in the early 1900s. John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* took up the cause of migrant farmers in the post-Depression 1930s. Alex Haley's *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* were literary mainstays of the 1960s Civil Rights era, as was Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* for the women's movement. In the 1970s, the paperback publication of *The Pentagon Papers* hastened the end of the Vietnam War.

The role of books in important social movements will be repeated, as you'll read in Chapter 5's discussion of magazine muckrakers.

Censorship

Because of their influence as cultural repositories and agents of social change, books have often been targeted for censorship. A book is censored when someone in authority limits publication of or access to it. Censorship can and does occur in many situations and in all media (more on this in Chapter 14). But because of the respect our culture traditionally holds for books, book banning takes on a particularly poisonous connotation in the United States.

Reacting to censorship presents a dilemma for book publishers. Publishers have an obligation to their owners and stockholders to make a profit. Yet, if responsible people in positions of authority deem a certain book unsuitable for readers, shouldn't publishers do the right thing for the larger society and comply with demands to cease its publication? This was the argument presented by morals crusader Anthony Comstock in 1873 when he established the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice. It was the argument used on the evening of May 10, 1933, in Berlin when Nazi propaganda chief Joseph Goebbels put a torch to a bonfire that consumed 20,000 books. It was the argument made in 1953 when U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy demanded the removal of more than 100 books from U.S. diplomatic libraries because of their "procommunist" slant. (Among them was Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*.) It is the argument made today by people like Alabama State Representative Gerald Allen when he explained his 2005 bill to ban from his state's elementary and high schools all books either written by homosexual authors or

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American Library Association
www.ala.org

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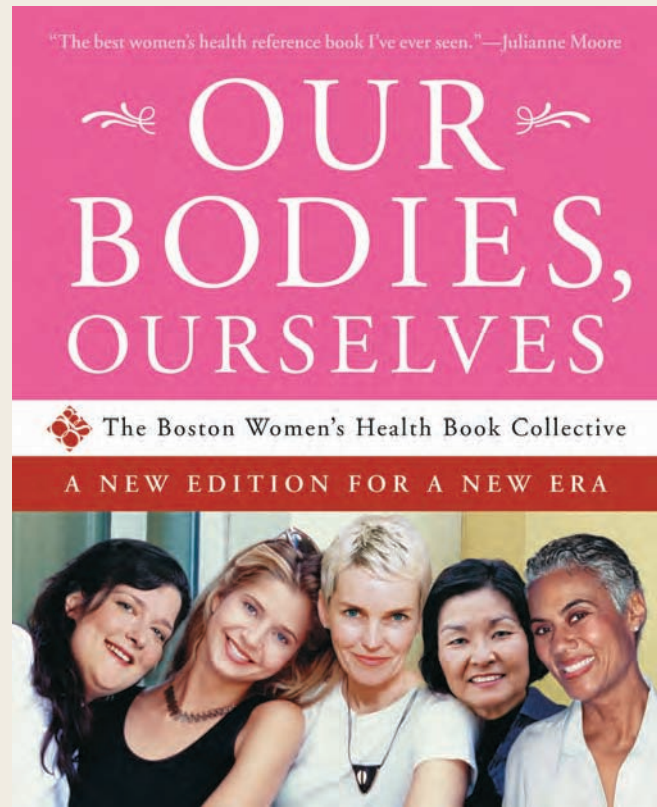
American Booksellers
Foundation for Free Expression
www.abffe.org

Our Bodies, Ourselves

Books have been central to many of the most important social and political movements in our nation's history. *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, a book for and about women, is credited with beginning the women's health movement. The profits this book generates—some 40 years after its first appearance—continue to support what has become a worldwide undertaking. How did this influential book, with more than 4 million copies sold in 18 different languages, come into being, and how does it continue to be so influential?

The story of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* begins in 1969. That year several women, aged 23 to 39, were attending a workshop on "Women and Their Bodies" at a women's liberation conference in Boston. They began exchanging "doctor stories." They readily came to the conclusion that most women were relatively ignorant about their bodies (and by extension, their sexuality) and that the male-dominated medical profession was not particularly receptive to their needs. So they gave themselves a "summer project." As explained by the women, who began identifying themselves as the Boston Women's Health Book Collective (Norsigian et al., 1999):

We would research our questions, share what we learned in our group, and then present the information in the fall as a course "by and for women." We envisioned an ongoing process that would involve other women who would go on to teach such a course in other settings. In creating the course, we learned that we were capable of collecting, understanding, and evaluating medical information; that we could open up to one another and find strength and comfort through sharing some of our most private experiences; that what we learned from one another was every bit as important as what we read in medical texts; and that our experience contradicted medical pronouncements. Over time these facts, feelings, and controversies were intertwined in the various editions of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*.



Those various editions offered a woman's perspective on issues such as reproductive health, sexuality, environmental and occupational health, menopause and aging, poverty, racism, hunger, homelessness, and the overmedicalization of "women's lives that turn normal events such as childbearing and menopause

containing gay characters. Prohibited would be classics such as *The Color Purple* and all works by Tennessee Williams, Truman Capote, and Gore Vidal. "I don't look at it as censorship," he explained. "I look at it as protecting the hearts and souls and minds of our children" (CBS News, 2005, p. 1).

According to the American Library Association Office of Intellectual Freedom and the American Civil Liberties Union, among the library and school books most frequently targeted by modern censors are the *Harry Potter* series, Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, the *Goosebumps* series, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, and children's favorite *In the Night Kitchen* by Maurice Sendak. The 50 most frequently banned books in the United States are shown in Figure 3.1. With how many are you familiar? Which ones have you read? What is it about each of these books that might have brought it to the censors' attention?

Book publishers can confront censorship by recognizing that their obligations to their industry and to themselves demand that they resist censorship. The book publishing industry and the publisher's role in it is fundamental to the operation and maintenance

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American Civil Liberties Union
www.aclu.org

into disabling conditions requiring medical intervention” (Norsigian et al., 1999).

Profits from *Our Bodies, Ourselves* were used to create the Women’s Health Information Center and to fund numerous local, national, and international women’s health advocacy groups and movements. Among the achievements of the resulting women’s health movement that the Women’s Health Information Center lists are women’s ability to obtain more

Books have been central to many of the most important social and political movements in our nation’s history.

and better information about oral contraceptives and other drugs, the eradication of forced sterilization for poor women, improved treatment of breast cancer and increased awareness of nonsurgical treatments for this disease, the growth of women-controlled health centers, and the reinforcement of women’s reproductive rights in the form of access to safe and legal abortion.

How does *Our Bodies, Ourselves* continue to make a difference? One of the original Boston Women’s Health Book Collective members, Jane Pincus, explains in her introduction to the 1998 edition:

Unlike most health books on the market, *Our Bodies, Ourselves for the New Century* is unique in many respects: It is based on, and has grown out of, hundreds of women’s experiences. It questions the medicalization of women’s bodies and lives, and highlights holistic knowledge along with conventional biomedical information. It places women’s experiences within the social, political, and economic forces that determine all of our lives, thus going beyond individualistic, narrow, “self-care” and self-help approaches, and views health in the

context of the sexist, racist, and financial pressures that affect far too many girls, women, and families adversely. It condemns medical corporate misbehavior driven by “bottom-line” management philosophy and the profit motive. Most of all, *Our Bodies, Ourselves* encourages you to value and share your own insights and experiences, and to use its information to question the assumptions underlying the care we all receive so that we can deal effectively with the medical system and organize for better care. . . .

We have listed and critiqued online health resources for women. The chapters “Body Image” and “Sexuality” deal for the first time with issues of racism. We emphasize overwork, violence, and girls’ increasing use of tobacco as major threats to women’s health, and we highlight more than ever the importance of good food and exercise. We explore the new issues that arise as more lesbians choose to have children. We include transgender and transsexual issues, and discuss women living with HIV as well as the most recent safer sex advice. We explore more extensively the connections between race, class, and gender-based oppressions as they affect the health of women. We offer tools for negotiating the complex and often unregulated “managed care” system, which affects women’s lives much more profoundly than men’s, and discuss its advantages and disadvantages. Most important, we advocate for an equitable, single-payer national health care system. (p. 21)

You may disagree with some (or all) of the philosophy and goals of the Boston Women’s Health Book Collective, but there is no argument that its book, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, has made—and continues to make—a difference in the health of women around the world. The latest edition, *Our Bodies, Ourselves: A New Edition for a New Era*, was published in 2005.

of our democratic society. Rather than accepting the censor’s argument that certain voices require silencing for the good of the culture, publishers in a democracy have an obligation to make the stronger argument that free speech be protected and encouraged. The short list of frequently censored titles in the previous paragraph should immediately make it evident why the power of ideas is worth fighting for. You can read why some people feel the need to censor in Figure 3.2, and the box titled “Is Google Making Us Stupid, or R U Reading?” on page 80 examines the issue of whether we need a new definition or *reading* itself.

Aliteracy as Self-Censorship

Censors ban and burn books because books are repositories of ideas, ideas that can be read and considered with limited outside influence or official supervision. But what kind of culture develops when, by our own refusal to read books, we figuratively save the censors the trouble of striking the match? **Aliteracy**, wherein people possess the ability to read but are unwilling to do so, amounts to doing the censors’ work for them. Over a hundred years ago American novelist and social critic Mark Twain explained the problem

BANNED BOOKS

- *Harry Potter* (series), by J. K. Rowling
- *Of Mice and Men*, by John Steinbeck
- *The Catcher in the Rye*, by J. D. Salinger
- *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, by Mark Twain
- *The Chocolate War*, by Robert Cormier
- *Bridge to Terabithia*, by Katherine Paterson
- *Scary Stories in the Dark*, by Alvin Schwartz
- *More Scary Stories in the Dark*, by Alvin Schwartz
- *Scary Stories 3: More Tales to Chill Your Bones*, by Alvin Schwartz
- *The Witches*, by Roald Dahl
- *Daddy's Roommate*, by Michael Willhoite
- *A Wrinkle in Time*, by Madeleine L'Engle
- *Forever*, by Judy Blume
- *Blubber*, by Judy Blume
- *Deenie*, by Judy Blume
- *The Giver*, by Lois Lowry
- *Anastasia Krupnik* (series), by Lois Lowry
- *Halloween ABC*, by Eve Merriam
- *A Day No Pigs Would Die*, by Robert Peck
- *Heather Has Two Mommies*, by Leslea Newman
- *It's Perfectly Normal*, by Robbie Harris
- *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, by Maya Angelou
- *Fallen Angels*, by Walter Myers
- *Goosebumps* (series), by R. L. Stine

- *Sex*, by Madonna
- *Go Ask Alice*, by Anonymous
- *The Stupids* (series), by Harry Allard
- *Bumps in the Night*, by Harry Allard
- *My House*, by Nikki Giovanni
- *The New Joy of Gay Sex*, by Charles Silverstein
- *The Goats*, by Brock Cole
- *The Color Purple*, by Alice Walker
- *Kaffir Boy*, by Mark Mathabane
- *Killing Mr. Griffin*, by Lois Duncan
- *We All Fall Down*, by Robert Cormier
- *Final Exit*, by Derek Humphry
- *My Brother Sam Is Dead*, by James Lincoln Collier and Christopher Collier
- *Julie of the Wolves*, by Jean Craighead George
- *The Bluest Eye*, by Toni Morrison
- *Beloved*, by Toni Morrison
- *The Great Gilly Hopkins*, by Katherine Paterson
- *What's Happening to My Body?* by Lynda Madaras
- *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee
- *In the Night Kitchen*, by Maurice Sendak
- *The Outsiders*, by S. E. Hinton
- *Annie on My Mind*, by Nancy Garden
- *The Pigman*, by Paul Zindel
- *Flowers for Algernon*, by Daniel Keyes
- *The Handmaid's Tale*, by Margaret Atwood
- *The Boy Who Lost His Face*, by Louis Sachar



Figure 3.1 Most Frequently Banned Books, 1990–2000. Shown here are the 50 books most frequently challenged in U.S. schools and public libraries during that decade.

of illiteracy this way: “The man who *doesn't* read good books has no advantage over the man who *can't* read them.”

In 2007 the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) released its distillation of several government and foundation studies of Americans' reading habits. To counter criticism that in the past the NEA defined “reading” solely as “reading literature,” this report looked at all kinds of reading, including online.

To Read or Not to Read indicated that we are reading less and our reading proficiency is declining at troubling rates. These trends are particularly strong among older teens and young adults. For example, only 30% of 13-year-olds read almost every day. Fifteen-to-24-year-olds spend only 7 to 10 minutes a day reading anything at all, but 2½ hours a day watching television. Almost half of Americans between 18 and 24 never read books for pleasure. Forty percent of first-year college students (and 35% of seniors) read nothing

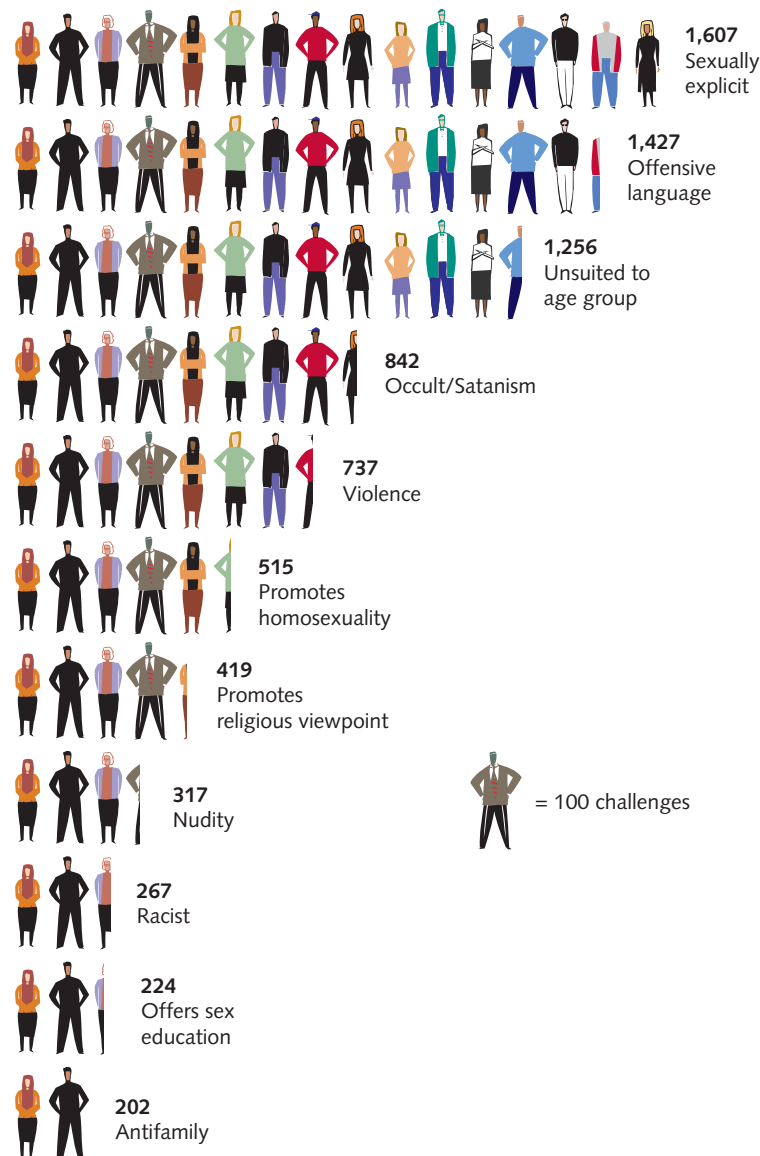


Figure 3.2 Reasons for Banning Books. The American Library Association Office for Intellectual Freedom tallied the reasons that specific books were banned from 1990 to 2000 in America's schools and libraries. Of the 6,364 challenges reported to its offices during that decade, these were the reasons given. The number of reasons exceeds 6,364 because books were often challenged for more than one reason. *Source:* American Library Association Office for Intellectual Freedom (www.ala.org/bbooks/bbwdatabase.html).

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Banned Books
www.ala.org/bbooks

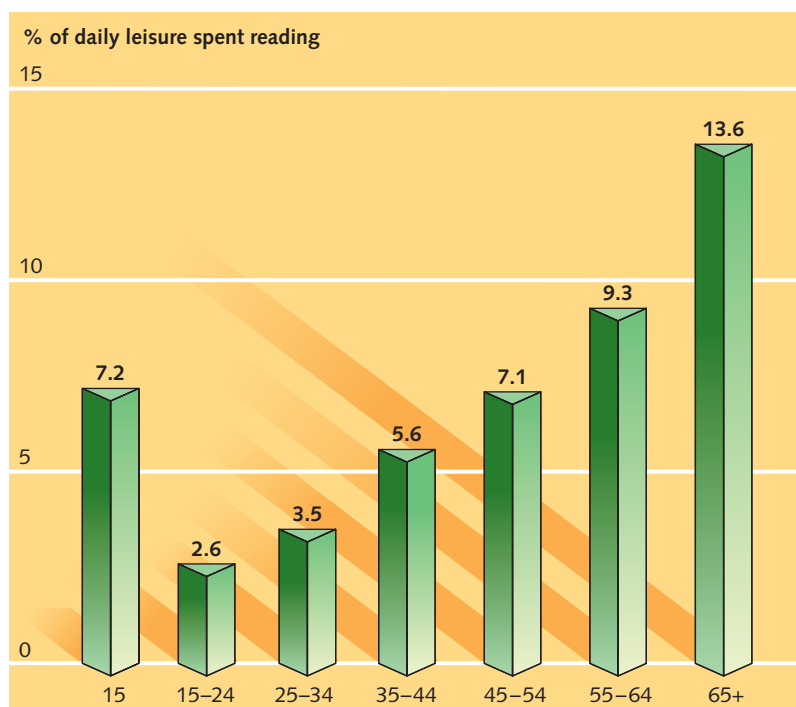


For more information on censorship, watch "You Can't Tell a Book by Its Cover: Textbooks and Hate" on the book's Online Learning Center Web site.

at all for pleasure, while another 26% (and 28% of seniors) read for pleasure less than 1 hour a week (Italie, 2007; Thompson, 2007).

NEA chair Dana Gioia summed up the report's findings in four sentences: "We are doing a better job of teaching kids to read in elementary school. But once they enter adolescence, they fall victim to a general culture which does not encourage or reinforce reading. Because these people then read less, they read less well. Because they read less well, they do more poorly in school, in the job market, and in civic life." More than any other, it is the issue of quality of civic life that gives the study its subtitle, *A Question of National Consequence*. Regardless of income, reading correlates closely with quality of social life, voting, political activism, participation in culture and fine arts, volunteerism, charity work, and exercise. Gioia explained, "The habit of regular reading awakens something inside a person that makes him or her take their own life more seriously and at the same time develops the sense that other people's lives are real." Added Timothy Shanahan, past president of the International Reading Association, "If you're low in reading ability . . . you're less likely to take part in activities like sports or church. Being low in literacy is self-isolating, tends to push you out of culture altogether" (all quoted in Thompson, 2007, p. C1).

Figure 3.3 Percentage of Leisure Time Americans Spend Reading. Source: “How Americans Use Their Leisure Time,” *Advertising Age*, January 1, 2007.



You can see what percentage of their leisure time Americans of different ages spend reading in Figure 3.3. What explanations can you offer for why younger people spend a smaller proportion of their free time reading than do older folks? Do you agree with the NEA that this lack of reading for leisure has consequences for our country?

Scope and Structure of the Book Industry

More than 275,000 new titles and editions are published in the United States each year (Greenberg, 2008). Each American spends, on average, just under \$100 a year buying and 17 minutes a day reading books (Lindsay, 2006). Total U.S. book sales in 2007 amounted to \$55.6 billion (Plunkett Research, 2008), but there is industry concern that this seemingly robust dollar figure is an illusion because, according to the Book Industry Study Group, annual average household spending on books, adjusted for inflation, is “near its twenty-year low,” even as the price of books has increased. In 2001, sales represented 8.27 books per person. Today, the rate is 7.93 per person (Crain, 2007).

Categories of Books

The Association of American Publishers divides books into several sales categories:

- *Book club editions* are books sold and distributed (sometimes even published) by book clubs. There are currently more than 300 book clubs in the United States. These organizations offer trade, professional, and more specialized titles, for example, books for aviation aficionados and expensive republications of classic works. The Book of the Month Club, started in 1926, is the best known; the Literary Guild and the Reader’s Digest Book Club are also popular.
- *El-hi* are textbooks produced for elementary and high schools.
- *Higher education* are textbooks produced for colleges and universities.

WWW
 Association of American Publishers
www.publishers.org

WWW
 International Reading Association
www.reading.org

- *Mail-order books*, such as those advertised on television by Time-Life Books, are delivered by mail and usually are specialized series (*The War Ships*) or elaborately bound special editions of classic novels.
- *Mass market paperbacks* are typically published only as paperbacks and are designed to appeal to a broad readership; many romance novels, diet books, and self-help books are in this category.
- *Professional books* are reference and educational volumes designed specifically for professionals such as doctors, engineers, lawyers, scientists, and managers.
- *Religious books* are volumes such as Bibles, catechisms, and hymnals.
- *Standardized tests* are guide and practice books designed to prepare readers for various examinations such as the SAT or the bar exam.
- *Subscription reference books* are publications such as the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, atlases, and dictionaries bought directly from the publisher rather than purchased in a retail setting.
- *Trade books* can be hard- or softcover and include not only fiction and most nonfiction but also cookbooks, biographies, art books, coffee-table books, and how-to books.
- *University press books* come from publishing houses associated with and often underwritten by universities. They typically publish serious nonfiction and scholarly books. The University of Chicago Press and the University of California Press are two of the better-known university presses, and the Oxford University Press is the oldest publisher in the world.

From Idea to Publication

The ideas that ultimately become the books that fit these different categories reach publishers in a number of ways. Sometimes they reach an **acquisitions editor** (the person charged with determining which books a publisher will publish) unsolicited. This means that ideas are mailed or phoned directly to the acquisitions editor by the author. Many of the larger and better publishers will not accept unsolicited ideas from aspiring writers unless they first secure the services of an agent, an intermediary between publisher and writer. Increasingly, acquisitions editors are determining what books *they* think will do well and seeking out writers who can meet their needs.

At some publishing houses, acquisitions editors have the power to say “Yes” or “No” based on their own judgment of the value and profitability of an idea. At many others, these editors must prepare a case for the projects they want to take on and have them reviewed and approved by a review or proposal committee. These committees typically include not only “book people” but marketing, financial, production, and administrative professionals who judge the merit of the idea from their own perspectives. Once the acquisitions editor says “Yes,” or is given permission by the committee to do so, the author and the publisher sign a contract.

Now the book must be written (if it is not already completed). An editor (sometimes the acquiring editor, sometimes not) is assigned to assist the author in producing a quality manuscript. Some combination of the publisher’s marketing, promotions, and publicity departments plans the advertising campaign for the book. When available, review copies are sent to appropriate reviewers in other media. Book tours and signings are planned and scheduled. Copy for sales catalogs is written to aid salespeople in their attempts to place the book in bookstores.

All this effort is usually aimed at the first few months of a book’s release. The publisher will determine in this time if the book will succeed or fail with readers. If the book appears to be a success, additional printings will be ordered. If the book has generated little interest from buyers, no additional copies are printed. Bookstores will eventually return unsold copies to the publisher to be sold at great discount as **remainders**, often as many as one-third of all copies in the case of hardcover books.

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American Booksellers
Association
www.ambook.org

Trends and Convergence in Book Publishing

This description of how a book reaches publication might better have been labeled “how a book *traditionally* travels from idea to publication.” Because like all the media with which we are familiar, convergence is changing the nature of the book industry. In addition to convergence, contemporary publishing and its relationship with its readers are being reshaped by conglomeration, hypercommercialism and demand for profits, the growth of small presses, restructuring of retailing, and changes in readership.

Convergence

Convergence is altering almost all aspects of the book industry. Most obviously, the Internet is changing the way books are distributed and sold. But this new technology, in the form of **e-publishing**, the publication of books initially or exclusively online, offers a new way for writers’ ideas to be published. Even the physical form of books is changing—many of today’s “books” are no longer composed of paper pages snug between two covers. As former Random House editor Peter Osnos (2009) explained, “Unlike other printed media, books do not have advertising, so there is none to lose. They don’t have subscribers, so holding on to them is not an issue either. The main challenge is to manage inventory, making books available where, when, and how readers want them. And on that score, the advances in gadgetry and the changes in popular [reading] habits over the past decade . . . have produced a major advance” (p. 38). By gadgetry Osnos means primarily e-books and print on demand (POD).

E-books Manu Herbstein could not find a publisher for his book *Ama: A Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade*. In fact, several houses had rejected it. But he did find an outlet in the e-publisher E-Reads. In April 2002 his **e-book**, a book downloaded in electronic form from the Internet to a computer or handheld PDA device such as a Palm Pilot, won the prestigious Commonwealth Prize in the category of best first book from the African region. The better-known Stephen King sold 400,000 digital copies (at \$2.50 each) of his novella *Riding the Bullet* in 24 hours on Amazon.com’s e-book service. When television host Oprah Winfrey announced that viewers could download for free the e-book version of best-selling financial writer Suze Orman’s *Women & Money* for a 33-hour period of time in February 2008, 1.1 million English-language and 19,000 Spanish-language readers did just that.

Despite the presence of heavyweights like King and Orman, many book industry observers feel that e-publishing will have its greatest impact with the Herbsteins, rather than the Kings, of the literary world. Because anyone with a computer and a novel to sell can bypass the traditional book publishers, first-time authors or writers of small, niche books now have an outlet for their work. An additional advantage of e-publishing, especially for new or small-market authors, is that e-books can be published almost instantly.

Stephen King has made enough money selling his books that he can wait the 1 to 2 years it typically takes for a traditional novel to be produced once it is in the publisher’s hands. Rarely can new authors afford this luxury.

Another advantage is financial. Even though many e-publishers require payment of as much as \$300 or \$400 to carry the work of new or unproven novelists, authors who distribute their work through an established e-publisher usually get royalties of 40% to 70%, compared to the 5% to 10% offered by traditional publishers. Traditional publishers say that the difference is due to the absence of services, such as editorial assistance and marketing, that authors face when using an e-publisher. And while this may have been true in e-publishing’s early days, most digital publishers now provide a full range of services—copyediting, publishing, securing or commissioning artwork, jacket design, promotion, and in some cases, even hard-copy distribution to brick-and-mortar bookstores—based on a variable royalty or fee arrangement.

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DiskUs Publishing
www.diskuspublishing.com

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E-Reads
www.ereads.com

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Xlibris
www.xlibris.com

The Sony Reader, the iPod for books. Will it succeed?



Print on demand (POD) is another form of e-publishing. Companies such as Xlibris, AuthorHouse, Toby Press, and iUniverse are POD publishers. They store works digitally and, once ordered, a book can be instantly printed, bound, and sent. Alternatively, once ordered, that book can be printed and bound at a bookstore that has the proper technology. The advantage for publisher and reader is financial. POD books require no warehouse for storage, there are no remainders to eat into profits, and the production costs, in both personnel and equipment, are tiny when compared to traditional publishing. These factors not only produce less expensive books for readers but greatly expand the variety of books that can and will be published. And although a large publisher like Oxford University Press produces more than 100,000 POD volumes a year (Carnevale, 2005), smaller POD operations can make a profit on as few as 100 orders. Large commercial publishers have also found a place for POD in their business, using the technology to rush hot, headline-inspired books to readers. For example, Pocket Books produced a POD version of *Knockdown*, Martin Dugard's account of the tragic 1998 Sydney-to-Hobart boat race, getting it into the hands of readers months before the paper version became available. Industry insiders believe POD is here to stay. After all, it reduces production and distribution costs, and it gets more books to readers faster and cheaper than can the current publishing business model.

Convergence is reshaping reading in other interesting ways. Several Web sites—www.fictionwise.com, www.gutenberg.org, and www.memoware.com, for example—offer e-books specifically for PDAs, cell phones, and **e-readers**, digital books with the appearance of traditional books but content that is digitally stored and accessed. Previous attempts at producing e-readers have failed, but the 2006 unveiling of the Sony Reader, dubbed the iBook after its sibling the iPod, has proven initially successful. Its screen is easily readable, it is as slim and light as a paperback, and it has a long-lasting battery. Only its high cost and the unavailability of titles are hindering greater acceptance among readers. Amazon introduced its Kindle in 2007 attempting to overcome these problems. Through the free wireless service Whispernet, Kindle readers can connect to Amazon's e-bookstore containing over 230,000 titles, 310 blogs, 11 newspapers, and 8 magazines. New titles on Kindle typically cost \$9.99; older titles cost \$7.99. Stephen King's *UR*, written exclusively for Kindle delivery and intended to coincide with the 2009 release of Kindle 2, cost \$2.99. The iPhone's Stanza application also emerged as a popular e-reader, with users downloading for free as many as 50,000 classic novels a day (Savikas, 2009). E-mail and cell phones are also being utilized for the sending and reading of serialized novels. **Digital epistolary novel (DEN)** readers not only read the story as it unfolds but also interact with its characters and visit its locations. DEN first appeared in the United States in 2004, but they have become more popular in Japan, where 5 of that country's 10 best-selling novels for 2007 were DEN republished in book form (Onishi, 2008).

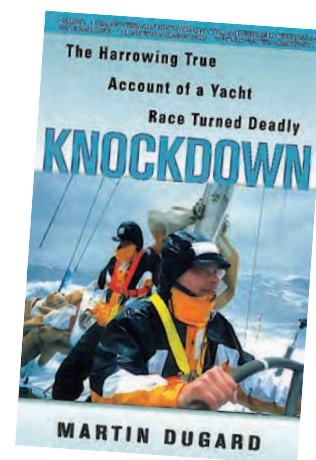
For readers in search of almost every book ever written or for those who want to search the contents of almost every book ever written (say, for references to the Civil War even though "Civil War" does not appear in the title), there are several developments. Online bookseller Amazon.com has scanned every page of every in-print book into its Search Inside the Book. That means anyone registered (it's free, but readers must provide a credit card number) can eventually search millions (according to Amazon) of books for just about any topic or idea. The pages cannot be downloaded, and there is a limit to how much searching a given reader can do in a specified period of time. Of course, Amazon's goal is to sell more books (you just might want to order one of the books your search has uncovered), but it is developing its own POD service that will provide, instantly, any book searched and requested. Several nonprofit organizations are also making searchable and downloadable books available online. Project Gutenberg will offer 1 million noncopyrighted classics; the Million Book Project has set as its goal 1 million government and older titles; the Open Content Alliance seeks to digitize the holdings of its many member libraries; and the International Children's Digital Library and the Rosetta Project hope to make downloadable tens of thousands of current and antique children's books from around the world.

Whereas these efforts at digitizing books have been generally well regarded, the same cannot be said for Google Print. Internet giant Google announced in late 2005 its intention

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AuthorHouse
www.authorhouse.com

Knockdown is a POD success and *Women & Money* was downloaded more than 1 million times in 33 hours.



to make available online 15 million books from the New York Public Library and the libraries of the University of Michigan, Stanford University, Harvard University, and Oxford University. The vast majority, 90%, would be out-of-print books not bound by copyright (see Chapter 14). The problem, however, is Google's plan to hold the entire text of all works, in and out of print, on its servers, making only small, fair-use portions of copyrighted works available to Web users. Initially, many publishers agreed to participate if the complete text of their copyrighted works could be stored on *their* servers, but Google refused. A series of lawsuits from the Author's Guild and five major publishers followed despite Google's insistence that it would protect the interests of authors and publishers as it strives to "organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful," in the words of the company itself (Toobin, 2007, p. 30). In October 2008, the parties reached an agreement in which Google set aside \$34.5 million to establish a "Books Rights Registry" to ensure that authors are compensated for the use of their work, including payment from income earned by Google ads placed next to their writing.

Conglomeration

More than any other medium, the book industry was dominated by relatively small operations. Publishing houses were traditionally staffed by fewer than 20 people, the large majority by fewer than 10. Today, however, although more than 81,000 businesses call themselves book publishers, only a very small percentage produces four or more titles a year (Teague, 2005). The industry is dominated now by a few giants: Hearst Books; the Penguin Group; Bantam Doubleday Dell; Time Warner Publishing; Farrar, Straus & Giroux; Harcourt General; HarperCollins; and Simon & Schuster. Each of these giants was once, sometimes with another name, an independent book publisher. All are now part of large national or international corporate conglomerates. These major publishers control more than 80% of all U.S. book sales. Even e-publishing, heralded by some as the future of book publishing, is dominated by the big companies. Not only do all the major houses and booksellers maintain e-publishing units, but even POD sites such as Xlibris (Random House) and iUniverse (Barnes & Noble) are wholly or partly owned by these giants.

Opinion is divided on the benefit of corporate ownership. The positive view is that the rich parent company can infuse the publishing house with necessary capital, enabling it to attract better authors or to take gambles on new writers that would, in the past, have been impossible. Another plus is that the corporate parent's other media holdings can be used to promote and repackage the books for greater profitability. Neither of these benefits is insignificant, argue many industry insiders, because book publishing is more like gambling than business. Literary agent Eric Simonoff says the industry is "unpredictable . . . the profit margins are so small, the cycles (from contract to publication) are so incredibly long" and there is an "almost total lack of market research" quoted in Boss, 2007, p. 3.6). Elie Wiesel's Holocaust memoir *Night*, for example, was rejected by 15 publishers before the small firm Hill & Wang accepted it in 1959. Since then it has sold over 10 million copies, 3 million in 2006 alone (Donadio, 2008). "It's guesswork," says Doubleday editor in chief Bill Thomas. "The whole thing is educated guesswork, but guesswork nonetheless. You just try to make sure your upside mistakes make up for your downside mistakes" (quoted in Boss, 2007, p. 3.6).

The negative view is that as publishing houses become just one in the parent company's long list of enterprises, product quality suffers as important editing and production steps are eliminated to maximize profits. Before conglomeration, publishing was often described as a **cottage industry**; that is, publishing houses were small operations, closely identified with their personnel—both their own small staffs and their authors. The cottage imagery, however, extends beyond smallness of size. There was a quaintness and charm associated with publishing houses—their attention to detail, their devotion to tradition, the care they gave to their façades (their reputations). The world of corporate conglomerates has little room for such niceties, as profit dominates all other considerations. Critics of corporate ownership saw profits-over-quality at play in 2007 when Simon & Schuster,

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iUniverse
www.iUniverse.com

WWW

Toby Press
www.tobypress.com

owned by broadcast conglomerate CBS, announced its partnership with MediaPredict, a data collection Web site that uses readers' "collective judgment" to determine which book ideas to sign. Asking readers to "vote" on a proposed book's likelihood of success, they argued, is akin to the *American Idolization* of the publishing industry and a guarantee of mediocrity.

Demand for Profits and Hypercommercialism

The threat from conglomeration is seen in the parent company's overemphasis on the bottom line—that is, profitability at all costs. Unlike in the days when G. P. Putnam's sons and the Schuster family actually ran the houses that carried their names, critics fear that now little pride is taken in the content of books and that risk taking (tackling controversial issues, experimenting with new styles, finding and nurturing unknown authors) is becoming rarer and rarer.

Chairperson of the Writing Seminars at Johns Hopkins University, Mark Miller (1997), wrote, "This is the all important difference between then and now: As book lovers and businessmen, [publishers] did the high-yield trash so as to subsidize the books they loved (although those books might also sell). No longer meant to help some finer things grow, the crap today is not a means but (as it were) the end" (p. 14). Jason Epstein, longtime editor at Random House and founder of Anchor Books, writes that his is an "increasingly distressed industry" mired in "severe structural problems." Among them are the chain-driven bookselling system that favors "brand name" authors and "a bestseller-driven system of high royalty advances." He says that contemporary publishing is "over-concentrated," "undifferentiated," and "fatally rigid" (quoted in Feldman, 2001, p. 35). To Miller, Epstein, and other critics of conglomeration, the industry seems overwhelmed by a blockbuster mentality—lust for the biggest-selling authors and titles possible, sometimes with little consideration for literary merit. Recently, Justin Timberlake, formerly of the pop group 'N Sync, received a seven-figure advance for his first novel, *Crossover Dribble*. Michael Crichton got \$40 million for a two-book deal from HarperCollins; Tom Clancy, \$45 million for two books from Penguin Putnam; Mary Higgins Clark, \$64 million for five books from Simon & Schuster; and in 2007 Little, Brown gave Rolling Stones guitarist Keith Richards \$7.3 million for his autobiography and HarperCollins paid Jerry Hall, ex-wife of Stones lead singer Mick Jagger, \$2 million for her life story. "Gossipy, inbred, lunch-dependent, and about two years behind the rest of the nation, corporate publishing is now in the business of sabotaging the very system it's supposed to keep vital," wrote Pat Holt, editor of industry Web site Holt Unlimited. Instead of "selecting good books" and finding a "creative, devoted, and adventurous way to sell them, the big houses continually peddle bland products that are gradually driving readers away" (quoted in "The Crisis," 2003, p. 22). As the resources and energies of publishing houses are committed to a small number of superstar writers and blockbuster books, smaller, more interesting, possibly more serious or important books do not get published. If these books cannot get published, they will not be written. We will be denied their ideas in the cultural forum. We will see, but as we read earlier in this chapter, it is converged technologies like POD and e-books that may well be the vehicle to ensure those ideas access to the forum and us to them.

Publishers attempt to offset the large investments they do make through the sale of **subsidiary rights**, that is, the sale of the book, its contents, and even its characters to filmmakers, paperback publishers, book clubs, foreign publishers, and product producers like T-shirt, poster, coffee cup, and greeting card manufacturers. Frazier's one-page proposal for his second novel, for example, earned his publisher \$3 million for the film rights alone from Paramount Pictures. The industry itself estimates that many publishers would go out of business if it were not for the sale of these rights. Writers such as Michael Crichton (*Jurassic Park*), John Grisham (*The Client*), and Gay Talese (*Thy Neighbor's Wife*) can command as much as \$2.5 million for the film rights to their books. Although this is good for the profitability of the publishers and the superstar authors, critics fear that those books with the greatest subsidiary sales value will receive the most publisher attention.

WWW

PDA and Cell Phone Books
www.fictionwise.com
gutenberg.org
memoware.com



"We have a calendar based on the book, stationery based on the book, an audiotape of the book, and a videotape of the movie based on the book, but we don't have the book."

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Powell's Books
www.powells.com

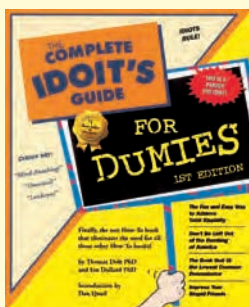

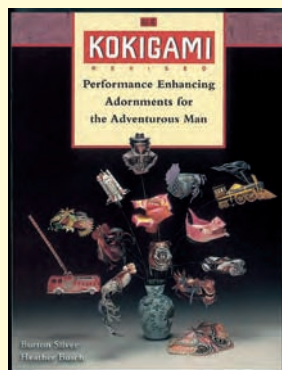
Typical of thousands of small publishing houses, Ten Speed Press offers an array of interesting, odd, or otherwise "small" books that larger publishers may ignore.

As greater and greater sums are tied up in blockbusters, and as subsidiary rights therefore grow in importance, the marketing, promotion, and public relations surrounding a book become crucial. This leads to the additional fear that only the most promotable books will be published—the stores are flooded with Martha Stewart books, celebrity picture books, unauthorized biographies of celebrities, and tell-all autobiographies from the children of famous people.

The importance of promotion and publicity has led to an increase in the release of **instant books**. What better way to unleash millions of dollars of free publicity for a book than to base it on an event currently on the front page and the television screen? Publishers see these opportunities and then initiate the projects. O. J. Simpson's many courtroom trials have been fodder for several instant books, as have the legal travails of Kobe Bryant and other celebrities. *Joe the Plumber: Fighting for the American Dream* was in bookstores 49 days after Samuel (aka Joe the Plumber) Wurzelbacher's chance Ohio meeting with candidate Barack Obama

during the 2008 election. Lost in the wake of instant books, easily promotable authors and titles, and blockbusters, critics argue, are books of merit, books of substance, and books that make a difference.

Several other recent events suggest that the demand for profits is bringing even more hypercommercialism to the book business. One trend is the "Hollywoodization" of books. Potential synergies between books, television, and movies have spurred big media companies such as Viacom, Time Warner, and News Corp. to invest heavily in publishing, buying up houses big and small. Some movie studios are striking "exclusive" deals with publishers—for example, Walden Media teams with Penguin Young Readers, Focus Films with Random House, and Paramount with Simon & Schuster. In addition, in 2005 ReganBooks

<p>FRONTLIST</p>  <p>THE COMPLETE IDIOT'S GUIDE FOR DUMMIES The Fun and Easy Way to Achieve Total Stupidity by Thomas Dolt and Ian Dullard</p>	 <p>WHO CUT THE CHEESE? A Cultural History of the Fart by Jim Dawson</p>	 <p>KOKIGAMI Performance Enhancing Adornments for the Adventurous Man by Burton Silver and Heather Busch</p>
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(owned by HarperCollins, which, in turn, is owned by News Corp.) moved its offices from New York to Los Angeles to be in a better position to develop material that has both book and film potential. In that same year, studios Warner Brothers, Columbia, Paramount, DreamWorks, Fox, New Line, Imagine, Tribeca, and Revolution Films set up operations in New York City to find books and “mine magazine articles, theater, and other properties” that can be converted to screen fare (Fleming, 2005, p. 3). In 2007 Random House and Focus Features announced that they would begin coproducing feature films based on the former’s titles. Critics fear that only those books with the most synergistic potential will be signed and published. Advocates argue just the opposite—a work that might have had limited profit potential as a “mere” book, and therefore gone unpublished, just might find a home across several mutually promoting platforms. They point to *Sideways*, a small-selling book that became a best-selling book after the movie it inspired became a hit.

Another trend that has created much angst among book traditionalists is the paid product placement. Movies and television have long accepted payments from product manufacturers to feature their brands in their content, but it was not until May 2000 that the first paid-for placement appeared in a fiction novel. Bill Fitzhugh’s *Cross Dressing*, published by Avon, contains what are purchased commercials for Seagram liquor. Fay Weldon followed suit in 2001, even titling her book *The Bulgari Connection*, after her sponsor, a jewelry company by the same name. *Cathy’s Book*, from Perseus/Running Press, pushed Cover Girl cosmetics, but public criticism from several sources, including Consumer Alert and the *New York Times* editorial board, led the publisher to abandon product placement when the title went to paperback in 2008. As with other media that accept product placements, critics fear that content will be bent to satisfy sponsors rather than serve the quality of the work itself. For example, on contract with car-maker Ford, Carole Matthews, British writer of “edgy romantic comedy [novels] aimed at young contemporary women,” penned a scene in which her heroine is “whizzing around Buckinghamshire in Imogene, my rather snazzy Ford Fiesta complete with six-CD changer, air-conditioning, and thoroughly comfy seats.” Said Matthews, “I’ve been very pleased with Ford in that they haven’t put any constraints on my writing at all.” But, asks author and social critic Jim Hightower (2004b), how free was she to write something akin to “whizzing around Buckinghamshire, my snazzy Ford Fiesta sputtered and died on me again, just as the six-CD changer went on the fritz and spewed blue smoke in my face” (p. 3)?

Growth of Small Presses

The overcommercialization of the book industry is mitigated somewhat by the rise in the number of smaller publishing houses. Although these smaller operations are large in number, they account for a very small proportion of books sold. Nonetheless, as recently as 7 years ago there were 20,000 U.S. book publishers. Today there are more than 81,000, the vast majority being small presses. They cannot compete in the blockbuster world. By definition *alternative*, they specialize in specific areas such as the environment, feminism, gay issues, and how-to. They can also publish writing otherwise uninteresting to bigger houses, such as poetry and literary commentary. Relying on specialization and narrowly targeted marketing, books such as Ralph Nader and Clarence Ditlow’s *The Lemon Book*, published by Moyer Bell, Claudette McShane’s *Warning! Dating May Be Hazardous to Your Health*, published by Mother Courage Press, and *Split Verse*, a book of poems about divorce published by Midmarch Arts, can not only earn healthy sales but also make a difference in their readers’ lives. And what



Was it a gamble or good business to pay Rolling Stones guitarist Keith Richards \$7.3 million for his autobiography?

WWW

Bookwire
www.bookwire.com

WWW

Project Gutenberg
www.promo.net/pg/

may seem surprising, it is the Internet, specifically Amazon, that is boosting the fortunes of these smaller houses. Because it compiles data on customer preferences (books bought, browsed, recommended to others, or wished for), it can make recommendations to potential buyers, and, quite often, those recommendations are from small publishers that the buyer might never have considered (or never have seen at a brick-and-mortar retailer). In other words, Amazon levels the book industry playing field. As Kent Sturgis, president of the Independent Book Publishers Association, explained, "All publishers are basically equal, because just about all publishers' titles are on Amazon and can be delivered to your door in a couple of days" (Gillespie, 2005, p. B2). Amazon even set up a special program in 1998, Advantage, to help smaller publishers with payment and shipping.

Restructuring of Book Retailing

There are approximately 20,000 bookstores in the United States, but the number is dwindling as small, independent operations find it increasingly difficult to compete with such chains as Barnes & Noble, Borders, and Books-A-Million. These larger operations are typically located in malls that have heavy pedestrian traffic. Barnes & Noble and Borders alone control 2,000 stores and account for 20% of all books sold in this country. Borders claims 30 million walk-in customers a year. Barnes & Noble says it annually serves 400 million customers, and it is the second-largest (after Starbucks) coffee retailer in America. Together the two big chains sell more than \$10 billion worth of books and merchandise a year (Learmonth, 2005).

The big booksellers' size enables them to purchase inventory cheaply and then offer discounts to shoppers. Because their location attracts shoppers, they can also profitably stock nonbook merchandise such as audio-and videotapes, CDs, computer games, calendars, magazines, and greeting cards for the drop-in trade. But high-volume, high-traffic operations tend to deal in high-volume books. To book traditionalists, this only encourages the industry's blockbuster mentality. When the largest bookstores in the country order only the biggest sellers, the small books get lost. When floor space is given over to Garfield coffee mugs and pop star calendars, there is even less room for small but potentially interesting books. Although big book-selling chains have their critics, they also have their defenders. At least the big titles, CDs, and cheap prices get people into bookstores, the argument goes. Once folks begin reading, even if it is trashy stuff, they might move on to better material. People who never buy books will never read books.

In 1995 there were 9,496 independent bookstores. Today there are 1,600, and although their share of total U.S. retail sales fell from about 33% in the early 1990s to about 10% today, many continue to prosper (Frazier, 2007a). Using their size and independence to their advantage, they counter the chains with expert, personalized service provided by a reading-loving staff, coffee and snack bars, cushioned chairs and sofas for slow browsing, and intimate readings by favorite authors. In fact, so successful have these devices been that the big stores now are copying them. Barnes & Noble, for example, sponsors a program it calls Discover to promote notable first novels, and Borders does the same with Original Voices. Not only do these efforts emulate services more commonly associated with smaller independents, but they also help blunt some of the criticism suffered by the chains, specifically that they ignore new and smaller-selling books. Still, the

WWW

Rosetta Project
www.rosettaproject.org

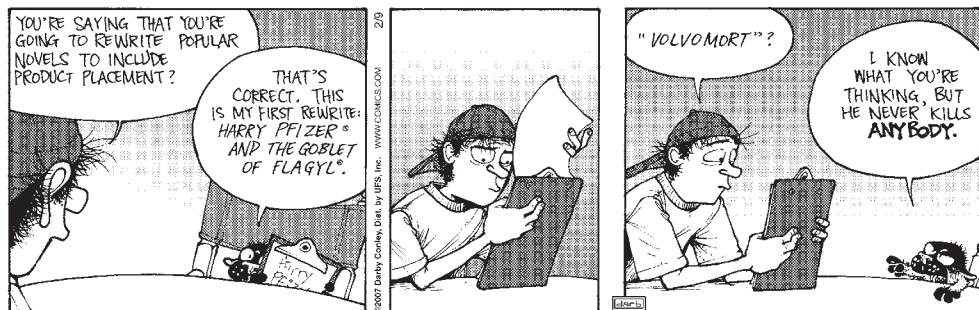
WWW

Amazon.com
www.amazon.com

WWW

Books.com
www.books.com

Most of us at least tolerate product placement in our media. Will we draw the line at product placement in novels?

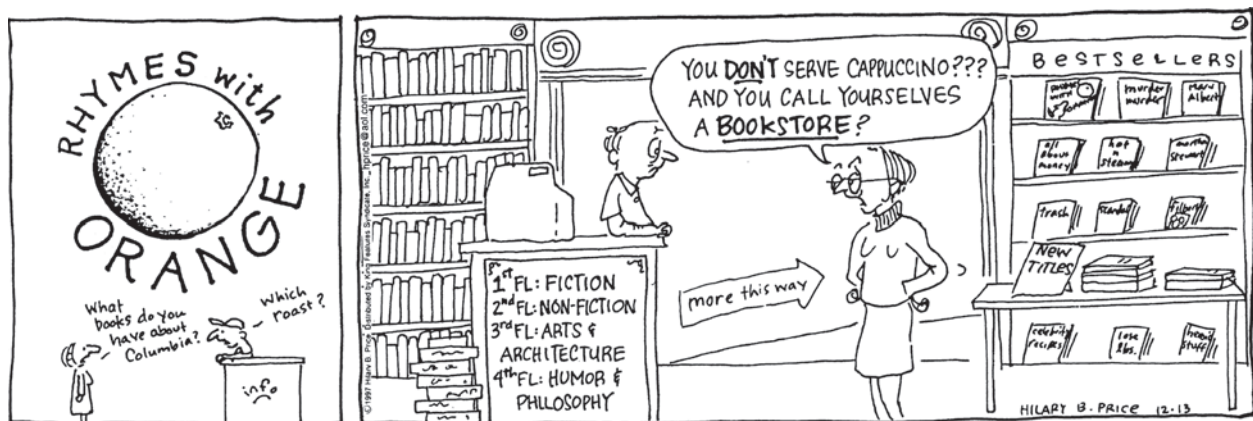




Many major chain bookstores now emulate the comfort and charm of an independent store. Barnes & Noble, the country's second-largest coffee retailer, also offers customers a clean, well-lighted place to peruse their products and sip a latté.

big operations cannot or will not emulate some strategies. Specialization is one. Religious, feminist, and animal-lover bookstores exist. The in-store book club for children or poetry fans, for example, is another small-store strategy.

Another alternative to the big mall chain store is buying books online. Amazon.com of Seattle is the best known of the online book sales services. Thorough, fast (it guarantees 2-day delivery), and well stocked (its motto is "Every Book Under the Sun"), Amazon boasts low overhead, and that means better prices for readers. In addition, its Web site offers book buyers large amounts of potentially valuable information. Once online, customers can identify the books that interest them, read synopses, check reviews from multiple sources, and read comments not only from other readers but sometimes from the authors and publishers as well. Of course, they can also order books. Some other popular online bookstores can be found at www.powells.com and www.books.com, and almost all publishers of all sizes now sell their own titles online.



Innovations originally instituted by independent booksellers have redefined "the bookstore."

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Three events, all occurring as 2008 became 2009, thrust *reading*—specifically, “What is reading?”—into the cultural forum. The first event was the publication of a controversial *Atlantic Monthly* article titled “Is Google Making Us Stupid?”, in which technology writer Nicholas Carr (2008) argued, “It is clear that users are not reading online in the traditional sense; indeed there are signs that new forms of ‘reading’ are emerging as users ‘power browse’ horizontally through titles, contents pages, and abstracts going for quick wins. It almost seems that they go online to avoid reading in the traditional sense” (p. 57).

Interviewing psychologists, neurologists, and educators, Carr (2008) offered the thesis that we are not only *what* we read; we are *how* we read. “The kind of deep reading that a sequence of printed pages promotes is valuable not just for the knowledge we acquire from the author’s words but for the intellectual vibrations those words set off within our own minds. In the quiet spaces opened up by the sustained, undistracted reading of a book, or by any other act of contemplation, for that matter, we make our own associations, draw our own inferences and analogies, foster our own ideas. Deep reading . . . is indistinguishable from deep thinking” (p. 62).

Online reading promotes efficiency, immediacy, and interaction, Carr (2008) wrote, but “our ability to interpret text, to make the rich mental connections that form when we read deeply and without distraction, remains largely disengaged” (p. 58). As a result, the brains of online readers develop differently than those of more traditional readers. Net readers develop neural circuits more attuned to decoding information than to making rich mental connections essential to critical analysis and thinking. “Studies show that reading develops imagination, induction, reflection, and critical thinking, as well as vocabulary,” said psychologist Patricia Greenfield. “Reading for pleasure is the key to developing these skills” (in “Is Technology Producing a Decline,” 2009). Cognitive neuroscientist Ken Pugh concurred, writing, “Reading a book and taking the time to ruminate and make inferences and engage in imaginal processing is more cognitively enriching, without a doubt, than the short little bits that you get if you’re into the 30-second digital mode” (in Rich, 2008a, p. 14). Unlike book readers, Web readers take little time for contemplation and see ambiguity not as an opportunity for reflection but a problem to be overcome.

The second event was the publication of another NEA report on Americans’ reading behavior, a follow-up to the gloomy analysis discussed on page 68. Undertaken in response to that 2007 report which showed precipitous declines in reading rates, this second study included online as well as traditional reading in its analysis in order to counter criticisms that the NEA had been defining *reading* too narrowly. “Reading on the Rise” documented “astonishing” increases in amounts of reading across all ages, genders, races, and educational levels

(“Government Study,” 2009). All we needed for an upbeat picture of Americans’ reading habits was a new definition of *reading*.

The argument in defense of this new definition was not that book reading was dead; traditional reading was already being taught in school. On the Internet, however, students were developing new and different reading skills. Young readers “aren’t as troubled as some of us older folks are by reading that doesn’t go in a line,” offered educational psychologist Rand J. Spiro. “That’s a good thing because the world doesn’t go in a line, and the world isn’t organized into separate compartments or

We say we are “music lovers,” not MP3 player lovers or CD lovers. We enjoy the content held by these technologies, not the technologies themselves. But we do say we are “book lovers.”

chapters.” Reading five Web sites, a newspaper article, and several blogs, he argued, is a more enriching reading experience than reading one book. “It takes a long time to read a 400-page book,” he explained. “In a tenth of the time the Internet allows a reader to cover a lot more of the topic from different points of view” (in Rich, 2008a, p. 14). Added Donna Alvermann, a language and literacy expert, “Kids are using sound and images so they have a world of ideas to put together that aren’t necessarily language oriented. Books aren’t out of the picture, but they’re only one way of experiencing information in the world today” (in Rich, 2008a, p. 15). In this view, Web reading is a new literacy; it promotes active, even interactive involvement with texts. Web readers create meaning in conjunction with the authors they encounter.

Technology writer Christine Rosen (2008), however, countered with a more traditional view. “Enthusiasts and self-appointed experts assure us that this new digital literacy represents an advance for mankind; the book is evolving, progressing, improving, they argue, and every improvement demands an uneasy period of adjustment,” she wrote. “Sophisticated forms of collaborative ‘information foraging’ will replace solitary deep reading; the connected screen will replace the disconnected book. What is ‘reading’ anyway, they ask, in a multimedia world like ours? We are increasingly distractible, impatient, and convenience-obsessed—and the paper book just can’t keep up. Shouldn’t we simply acknowledge that we are becoming people of the screen, not people of the book?” (p. 20).

But maybe we *are* people of the book. We say we are “music lovers,” not MP3 player lovers or CD lovers. We enjoy the content held by these technologies, not the technologies themselves. But we do say we are “book lovers.” There is indeed something we hold dear about the book that goes beyond the mere content it holds—we aren’t text lovers. Rosen (2008) offered her thoughts on the value of this technology that “just

Two-time Pulitzer Prize–winning novelist John Updike.



can't keep up." With a novel, she wrote, "You must first submit yourself to the process of reading it—which means accepting, at some level, the author's authority to tell you the story. You enter the author's world on his terms, and in so doing get away from yourself. Yes, you are powerless to change the narrative or the characters, but you become more open to the experiences of others and, importantly, open to the notion that you are not always in control. In the process, you might even become more attuned to the complexities of family life, the vicissitudes of social institutions, and the lasting truths of human nature. The screen, by contrast, tends in the opposite direction. Instead of a reader, you become a user; instead of submitting to an author, you become the master. The screen promotes invulnerability . . . not a lesson in richer human understanding" (p. 30).

The third event thrusting the meaning of *reading* into the cultural forum was the January 2009 passing of two-time Pulitzer Prize–winning novelist John Updike. Creator of critically acclaimed and best-selling works such as *Rabbit Run*, *Couples*, *The Witches of Eastwick*, and *A Month of Sundays*, Updike was not part of the what-is-reading debate, but the death of this beloved American author brought renewed heat to the cultural discussion. Defenders of traditional reading made good use of Updike's many testimonials to its importance. "Books are intrinsic to our human identity," he told listeners at a 2006 book convention. In a 2008 interview with online magazine *Salon* he lamented,

When I was a boy, the bestselling books were often the books that were on your piano teacher's shelf. I mean,

Steinbeck, Hemingway, some Faulkner. Faulkner actually had, considering how hard he is to read and how drastic the experiments are, quite a middle-class readership. But certainly someone like Steinbeck was a bestseller as well as a Nobel Prize–winning author of high intent. You don't feel that now. I don't feel that we have the merger of serious and pop—it's gone, dissolving. Tastes have coarsened. People read less; they're less comfortable with the written word. They're less comfortable with novels. They don't have a backward frame of reference that would enable them to appreciate things like irony and allusions. It's sad. . . . And who's to blame? Well, everything's to blame. Movies are to blame. . . . Television is to blame. . . . Now we have these cultural developments on the Internet, and online, and the computer offering itself as a cultural tool, as a tool of distributing not just information but arts—and who knows what inroads will be made into the world of the book. ("Famed Author," 2009)

Enter your voice. What will become of the book? Should schools rethink the meaning and teaching of *reading*? Had you heard of John Updike or any of his books? Do you care? Should you? Does he represent some older definition of reading, one that you no longer subscribe to? Have you read Steinbeck, Hemingway, or Faulkner? Are you missing something if you haven't? When you are looking for a book, is your first question "How long is it?" rather than "Will I enjoy it?" If so, what do you think this says about your personal definition of *reading*, if anything?

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 More about Harry
www.mugglenet.com

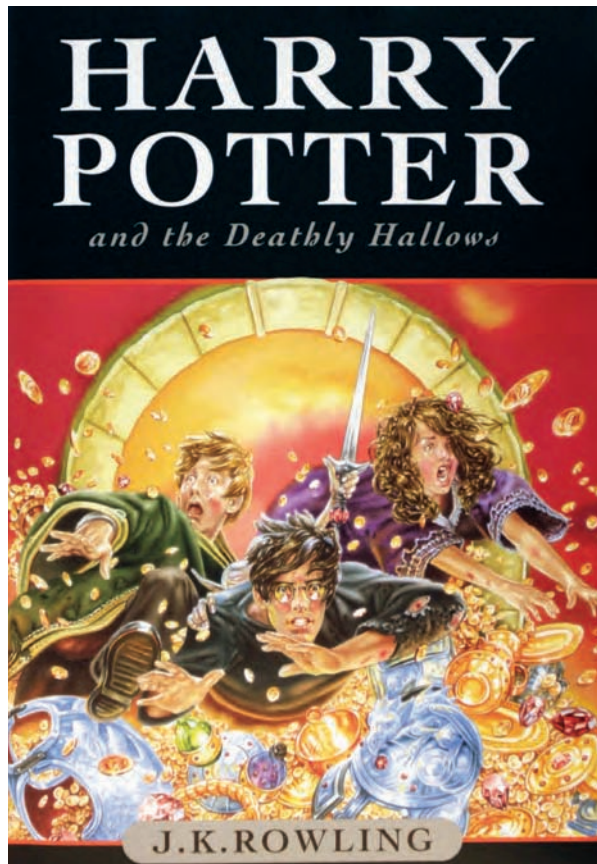
Developing Media Literacy Skills The Lessons of Harry Potter

The excitement surrounding the release in July 2007 of the seventh and final installment of J. K. Rowling's series on youthful British sorcerer Harry Potter offers several important

lessons for the media literate person. Publication of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* highlighted several elements of media literacy and called into play a number of media literacy skills. For example, its huge appeal to young people can be used to examine one element of media literacy, understanding content as a text providing insight into our culture and lives. Just why have these books resonated so strongly with young readers? The controversy surrounding the numerous efforts to have the series banned from schools and libraries as antireligious and anti-Christian and its status as the “most challenged” (censored) children’s literature in the United States call into play the particular media literacy skill of developing the ability and willingness to effectively and meaningfully understand content.

The publishing industry classifies the Harry Potter books as children’s literature. But their phenomenal reception by readers of all ages suggests these works not only have broader appeal but are in themselves something very special. The initial U.S. printing of a Harry Potter book is about 14 million copies—100 times that of a normal best seller. Although *Deathly Hallows* was not available for sale until July 21, 2007, by the first week of February—23 weeks before its release—it reached the Number 1 spot on Amazon’s best-seller list. The seven *Harry Potters* combined have sold more than 400 million copies worldwide, and two-thirds of all American children have read at least one edition. The *Potter* series has been published in over 66 languages (including Greek, Latin, and “Americanized English”) in more than 200 countries. Potter books occupy spots 1, 2, 3, and 4 on the all-time fastest-selling booklist.

What has been Harry Potter’s impact on reading? In 1963 the Gallup polling organization found that fewer than half of all Americans said they had read a book all the way through in the



Harry Potter, the little wizard who launched a million readers.

Start a Citywide (or Campuswide) Book Conversation

You can help fight aliteracy, find new works, and maybe even meet some interesting people by involving yourself in one of the many citywide book-reading clubs that now exist. The movement, begun in 1998 by Nancy Pearl of Seattle's Washington Center for the Book, calls on reading groups in a city to choose one book to be read by everyone in that town. The idea, naturally,

You can help fight aliteracy, find new works, and maybe even meet some interesting people by involving yourself in one of the many citywide book-reading clubs that now exist.

is to encourage reading, but also to get people talking about books and the ideas they hold (Angell, 2002).

These readings are organized in Chicago by One Book One Chicago and in New York City by Literary New York. Other

towns with established programs are San Francisco, Los Angeles, Palm Beach, Cleveland, Colorado Springs, and Valparaiso, Indiana. Check with your local library to see who in your area is running a similar program. If no one is, begin one yourself. The Washington Center for the Book has a how-to Web page. Go to www.spl.org and scroll down to "bookclubs." You can access the Live Literature Network (www.liveliterature.net) to see where there might be a live author's reading near you and tie your selection to that event. Another possibility is to involve one or more area schools in a school-system-wide rather than citywide reading. National Children's Book Week in November is a good time to do it if you choose this path. The Children's Book Council (www.cbcbooks.org) can help. But even more logically, you can start a campuswide or dormwide book-reading club.

previous year. But soon after the release of *The Prisoner of Azkaban* in 1999, that number was 84% (Quindlen, 2000). Nobody would claim that Harry alone was responsible, but *Newsweek's* Anna Quindlen speculated that he had helped "create a new generation of inveterate readers" (p. 64). Fright master Stephen King agreed, writing, "If these millions of readers are awakened to the wonders and rewards of fantasy at 11 or 12 . . . well, when they get to age 16 or so, there's this guy named King" (as quoted in Garchik, 2000, p. D10). Caroline Ward, president of the American Library Association's Services to Children, said, "It's hard to believe that one series of books could almost turn an entire nation back to reading, but that is not an exaggeration," and Diane Roback, children's book editor at *Publishers Weekly*, cited "'the Harry Potter halo effect,' in which children come into stores and libraries asking for books that resemble the Rowling series" (*USA Today*, 2000, p. E4). A Scholastic Books survey of 500 Harry Potter readers aged 5 to 7 indicated that 51% said they did not read books for fun until they started reading the series. Three-quarters said Harry had made them interested in reading other books (Rich, 2007).

One element of media literacy is the development of an awareness of the impact of media, and the *Harry Potter* series has amply demonstrated its influence. But its wild success was used by many media critics to castigate both media professionals who underestimate their audiences *and* audience members who encourage that underestimation. In other words, the success (and profitability) of this well-written, thoughtful, high-quality content stood in stark contrast to what critics contend is a steady decline in quality in other media, particularly advertiser-supported media such as radio and television. The argument is simple: Broadcasters, especially the major national television networks, respond to falling viewership not by improving content but by lowering its intelligence and worth. Whereas the *Harry Potter* books get better (and longer; *Deathly Hallows* fills 759 pages) in response to reader enthusiasm, network television dumbs down, giving its audience *Fear Factor*, *Flavor of Love*, and other so-called reality programming.

And radio, as you will see in Chapter 6, has responded to 10 years of declining levels of listenership and the loss of interest among its young core audience not with new, imaginative programming but with more homogenization, automation, and the disappearance of local programming and news. The pressures on advertiser-supported media are somewhat different

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International Children's
Digital Library
www.icdlbooks.org

WWW

Children's Book Council
www.cbcbooks.org

from those on books and film; with the latter two, readers and moviegoers express their desires and tastes directly through the purchase of content (the books themselves and tickets, respectively). But media literate people must ask why their exodus from a particular medium is not more often met with the presentation of better fare. *Harry Potter* shows that an audience that develops heightened expectations can and will have those expectations met.

Resources for Review and Discussion

REVIEW POINTS

- Although the first printing press came to the Colonies in 1638, books were not central to early colonial life; but books and pamphlets were at the heart of the colonists' revolt against England in the 1770s.
- Developments in the 18th and 19th centuries, such as improvements in printing, the flowering of the American novel, and the introduction of the paperback, helped make books a mass medium.
- Books have cultural value because they are agents of social and cultural change; important cultural repositories; windows on the past; important sources of personal development; sources of entertainment, escape, and personal reflection; mirrors of culture; and the purchase and reading of a book is a much more individual, personal activity than consuming advertiser-supported or heavily promoted media.
- Censorship threatens these values, as well as democracy itself.
- Convergence is reshaping the book industry as well as the reading experience itself through advances such as e-publishing, POD, e-books, e-readers, and several different efforts to digitize most of the world's books.
- Conglomeration affects the publishing industry as it has all media, expressing itself through trends such as demand for profit and hypercommercialization.
- Demand for profit and hypercommercialization manifest themselves in the increased importance placed on subsidiary rights, instant books, "Hollywoodization," and product placement.
- Book retailing is undergoing change. Large chains dominate the business but continue to be challenged by imaginative, high-quality independent booksellers. Much book buying has also gravitated to the Internet.
- The wild success of the *Harry Potter* series holds several lessons for media literate readers.

KEY TERMS

 Use the text's Online Learning Center at www.mhhe.com/baran6e to further your understanding of the following terminology.

linotype, 61	trade books, 71	e-reader, 73
offset lithography, 61	acquisitions editor, 71	digital epistolary novel (DEN), 73
dime novels, 61	remainders, 71	cottage industry, 74
pulp novels, 62	e-publishing, 72	subsidiary rights, 75
chained Bibles, 64	e-book, 72	instant book, 76
aliteracy, 67	print on demand (POD), 73	

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

 Go to the self-quizzes on the Online Learning Center to test your knowledge.

1. What were the major developments in the modernization of the printing press?
2. Why were the early colonists not a book-reading population?
3. What was the Stamp Act? Why did colonial printers object to it?
4. What factors allowed the flowering of the American novel, as well as the expansion of the book industry, in the 1800s?
5. Who developed the paperback in England? In the United States?
6. Name six reasons books are an important cultural resource.
7. What are the major categories of books?
8. What is the impact of conglomeration on the book industry?
9. What are the products of increasing hypercommercialism and demands for profit in the book industry?
10. What are e-books, e-readers, and e-publishing?
11. What particular cultural values are served by independent booksellers?
12. What is product placement?

QUESTIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND DISCUSSION

1. Do you envision books ever again having the power to move the nation as they did in Revolutionary or antislavery times? Why or why not?
2. How familiar are you with the early great American writers such as Hawthorne, Cooper, and Thoreau? What have you learned from these writers?
3. Are you proud of your book-reading habits? Why or why not? This chapter mentioned someone named Mark Twain. Who is this?
4. Where do you stand in the debate on the overcommercialization of the book? To what lengths should publishers and booksellers go to get people to read?
5. Under what circumstances is censorship permissible? Whom do you trust to make the right decision about what you should and should not read? If you were a librarian, under what circumstances would you pull a book?

IMPORTANT RESOURCES



Go to the Online Learning Center for additional readings.

INTERNET RESOURCES

More on Ray Bradbury

More on Ben Franklin

Campaign for Reader Privacy

More on Our Bodies, Ourselves

American Library Association

American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression

American Civil Liberties Union

Banned Books

Association of American Publishers

International Reading Association

American Booksellers Association

DiskUs Publishing

E-Reads

Xlibris

AuthorHouse

iUniverse

Toby Press

PDA and Cell Phone Books

Powell's Books

Bookwire

Project Gutenberg

Rosetta Project

Amazon.com

Books.com

More about Harry

International Children's Digital Library

Children's Book Council

www.raybradbury.com

www.english.udel.edu/lemay/franklin

www.readerprivacy.com

www.ourbodiesourselves.org

www.ala.org

www.abffe.org

www.aclu.org

www.ala.org/bbooks

www.publishers.org

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www.ambook.org

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www.authorhouse.com

www.iUniverse.com

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www.fictionwise.com

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www.memoware.com

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www.bookwire.com

www.promo.net/pg/

www.rosettaproject.org

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www.mugglenet.com

www.icdlbooks.org

www.cbcbooks.org