Understanding Media and Culture

UNDERSTANDING MEDIA AND CULTURE

Mass Media in a Free Society

[AUTHOR REMOVED AT REQUEST OF ORIGINAL PUBLISHER]

North Idaho College, 2026. Adapted from a 2016 edition that based its work on a 2010 book whose publisher requested that it not receive attribution.

Coeur d'Alene, Idaho



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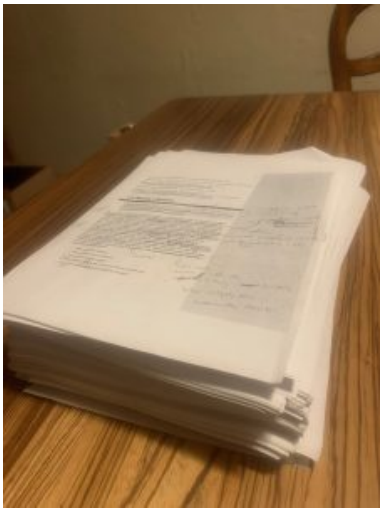
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A NOTE ABOUT THIS EDITION

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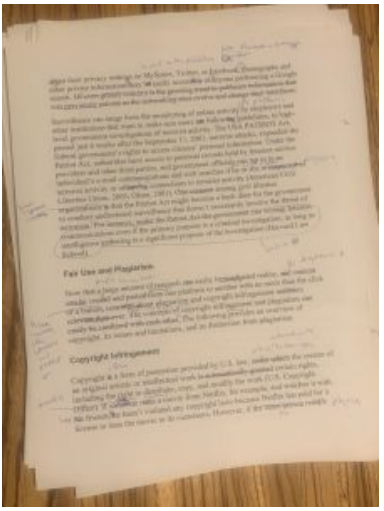
The editor first printed out the 2016 edition to aid copyediting. **Source**: Geoff Carr, photo, CC BY 4.0.

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North Idaho College produced this edition through the Project Z Initiative. This adapted edition used the original text and sections of the book as a springboard to construct an updated version. The editor diligently spent the summers of 2024-2026 adapting the text for audiences by removing obsolete material and updating the textbook to reflect current trends and modern practices (despite the temptations of his local environment). After printing the original addition and compiling plans for revision, he applied the changes in Pressbooks. After completing this phase, he had Google Gemini review all content for factual inconsistencies and suggest additional topics for exploration.

This book was designed to be read on a tablet or personal computer. The large amount of graphical content may obscure words when read on a phone. Sorry about that.

The editor decided to remove academic references and instead use hyperlinks to connect to all source material and supplemental information. All hyperlinks are voluntary, not mandatory. Some



Example page of notes. **Source**: Geoff Carr, photo, CC BY 4.0.

hyperlinked material requires a subscription to access, while others might link to PDF files that do not conform to web accessibility guidelines.

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For questions, corrections, or comments about this textbook, please get in touch with oer@nic.edu.

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- [Insert name here after full publication 12/24)

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CHANGELOG

The editor of this book intends to revise and amend the book throughout its use. He will note all changes, inclusions, and deletions in this section.

Date of last hyperlink check: 8/12/2026

CHAPTER 1: MEDIA AND CULTURE



Source: geralt. woman-burnout-multitasking-face-1733881. CC0.

- **1.1** Media and Culture
- **1.2** Intersection of American Media and Culture
- **1.3** The Evolution of Media
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- **1.6** Cultural Periods
- **1.7** Mass Media and Popular Culture
- **1.8** Media Literacy

1.1 MEDIA AND CULTURE

In 1850, an epidemic swept America—but instead of leaving victims sick with fever or flu, it was a rabid



A portrait of Jenny Lind, whom P.T. Barnum helped make a star in the United States. Enthusiasts could purchase Jenny Lind hats, chairs, boots, opera glasses, decorative pieces, and even pianos. **Source**: Eduard Magnes, Jenny Lind-detail, public domain.

craze for the music of Swedish soprano Jenny Lind. American showman P. T. Barnum (who would later go on to found the circus now known as Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey), a shrewd marketer and self-made millionaire, receives credit for

spreading "Lindomania" through a series of astute show-business moves. Barnum promised Lind an unprecedented $1,000-a-night fee for her entire 93-performance tour of the United States (more than $42,000 adjusted for inflation). Ever the savvy self-promoter, Barnum turned his huge investment to his advantage by using it to create publicity.

His plan worked. When the Swedish soprano's ship docked on U.S. shores, she was greeted by 40,000 ardent fans; another 20,000 swarmed her hotel. Congress adjourned specifically for Lind's visit to Washington, DC, where the National Theatre had to be enlarged to accommodate her audiences. A town in California and an island in Canada were named in her honor. Barnum's marketing expertise made Lind a household name and created an overwhelming demand for a singer previously unknown to American audiences.



The Beatles arrive in New York City in 1964. The BBC publicized the Beatlemania trend and perhaps added to it by highlighting the paraphernalia for fans to spend their money on: "T-shirts, sweatshirts, turtleneck sweaters, tight-legged trousers, night shirts, scarves, and jewelry" inspired by the Beatles were all available, as were Beatles-style mop-top wigs. **Source**: United Press International, photographer unknown, The Beatles arrive at JFK Airport, public domain.

The "Jenny rage" that the savvy Barnum created was not a unique phenomenon; however, a little more than a century later, a new craze transformed some American teenagers into screaming, fainting "Beatlemaniacs." Though other performers like Frank Sinatra and Elvis Presley could generate manic crowds, the Beatles attracted unprecedented attention when they first arrived in the United States. When the British

foursome touched down at New York's Kennedy Airport in 1964, they were met by more than 3,000 fans. Their performance on *The Ed Sullivan Show* was seen by 73 million people, or nearly 40 percent of the U.S. population. The crime rate dropped that night to its lowest level in 50 years. Beatlemania was at such a fever pitch that Life magazine cautioned that "a Beatle who ventures out unguarded into the streets runs the very real peril of being dismembered or crushed to death by his fans."

In the 21st century, rabid fans could turn their attention to a whole swath of pop stars in the making when the reality TV program *American Idol* hit the airwaves in 2002. The show was the only television program ever to have snagged the top spot in the Nielsen ratings for six seasons in a row, often averaging more than 30 million nightly viewers. Rival television network executives were alarmed, deeming the pop giant "the ultimate schoolyard bully," "the Death Star," or even "the most impactful show in the history of television," according to former NBC Universal CEO Jeff Zucker. The emerging popularity of cell phone technologies enabled viewers to have a direct role in the program's star-making enterprise through casting votes, signing up for text alerts, or playing trivia games on their phones. In 2009, AT&T estimated that *Idol*-related text traffic amounted to 178 million messages, though the program's influence has dwindled over the years.



The Fyre Festival organizers, Billy McFarland and rapper Ja Rule, faced severe backlash after the event's cancellation. **Source**: Web Summit, Web Summit 2016 – MusicNotes – Nov 10 – Day 3 DSC0839 (30810709661) , cropped, CC BY 2.0.

Sometimes the systems of mass communication create crazes that impact culture for all the wrong reasons. The Fyre Festival, scheduled for May 2017 in the Bahamas, was heavily promoted on Instagram by influencers such as Kendall Jenner, Emily Ratajkowski, Hailey Bieber, Bella Hadid, and Elsa Hosk . The festival's marketing promised luxurious accommodations and a high-status experience for everyday people. Thousands bought into the hype, but when the first wave of attendees arrived, they discovered that the advertised amenities were far from reality. Instead of luxury, they faced inadequate shelter and poor conditions. The festival was ultimately canceled. Organizer Billy McFarland served prison time for wire fraud while facing $26 million in forfeitures. Furthermore, many celebrity

endorsers failed to disclose paid promotions, prompting the Federal Trade Commission to revise its endorsement guidelines for social media influencers.

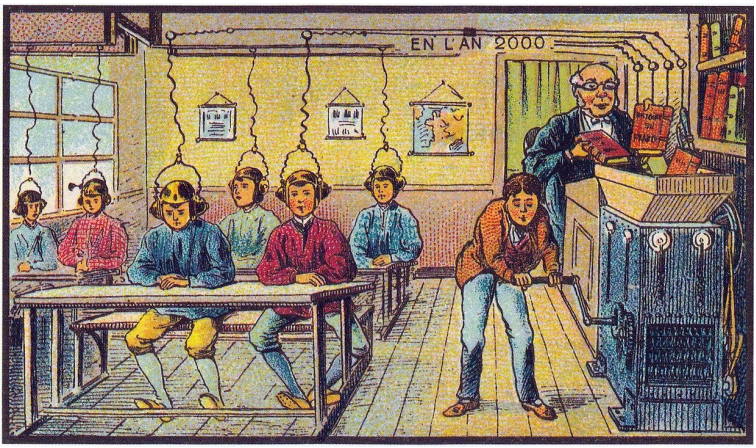
In the generative artificial intelligence era, mass media systems have evolved from distributing human talent to creating synthetic cultural phenomena entirely from algorithms. In 2023, an anonymous creator named Ghostwriter released "Heart on My Sleeve," a viral song featuring AI-generated vocal clones mimicking music superstars Drake and The Weeknd. Within days, the track racked up millions of streams on TikTok, Spotify, and YouTube before copyright takedown requests forced its removal. Despite lacking input from the actual recording artists, the song triggered global debates among fans , record labels, and lawmakers regarding copyright ownership, vocal rights, and the nature of artistic authenticity. Synthetic pop stars, automated influencers, and AI-generated music demonstrate that modern media tastemakers are no longer solely human publicists—they are complex algorithms capable of engineering viral cultural moments from synthetic data.

The various forms of mass media help create excitement in society. Whether through 19th-century newspaper advertisements, 20th-century live television broadcasts, integrated internet marketing, or AI-driven social algorithms, media industry tastemakers help shape what people care about. For as long as mass media have existed in the United States, they've helped to create and fuel mass crazes and pop-culture

manias of all kinds. Even in an era of seemingly limitless entertainment options, mass media outlets produce hits (and, in the case of the Fyre Festival, misses) that dominate the public's attention. This textbook explores different kinds of mass media and how they have been changed by—and are changing—the modern world.

1.2 INTERSECTION OF AMERICAN MEDIA AND CULTURE

Pop culture and American media are inextricably linked. Consider that Jenny Lind, the Beatles, American Idol, the Fyre Festival, and viral AI tracks like "Heart on My Sleeve" were each promoted using a then-new technology: lithography and early daguerreotype photography for Lind, broadcast television for the Beatles, interactive text messaging for *American Idol*, social media networks for Fyre Festival, and generative algorithms for synthetic AI music. Today, generative artificial intelligence and algorithmic recommendation engines represent the latest media technologies reshaping how cultural phenomena are produced, shared, and monetized.



A Jean Marc Côté illustration from circa 1900 imagining school in the year 2000. It uncannily mirrors modern society, where audiobooks, podcasts, and digital media stream information directly to students' headphones. **Source**: Jean Marc Côté (if 1901) or Villemard (if 1910) http://publicdomainreview.org/2012/06/30/france-in-the-year-2000-1899-1910/ , France in XXI Century. School, cropped, CC0 1.0.

Mass Communication, Mass Media, and Culture

This book provides an in-depth examination of various media types, the ways media trends influence the United States' cultural landscape, and how that culture, in turn, shapes media. These topics will be explored by examining both the past and present of mass media and mass communication,

culminating in speculation about how they will continue to evolve.

First, it is important to distinguish between mass communication and mass media before defining culture. **Mass communication** refers to the process of transmitting messages to large, diverse segments of the population. **Mass media** specifically refers to the technological tools and channels designed to deliver those messages to a broad audience. For example, a public health department engaging in crisis communication represents mass communication, whereas the specific channels used to deliver that warning—such as broadcast television networks, news apps, podcasts, and emergency mobile alerts—are the mass media

Although this book primarily focuses on mass communication, it may be valuable to describe other types of communication briefly for comparison's sake.

Intrapersonal communication occurs internally, as individuals' unspoken thoughts. In contrast, **interpersonal communication** requires two people to participate, using language, technology, or

nonverbal methods to convey a message and receive feedback.

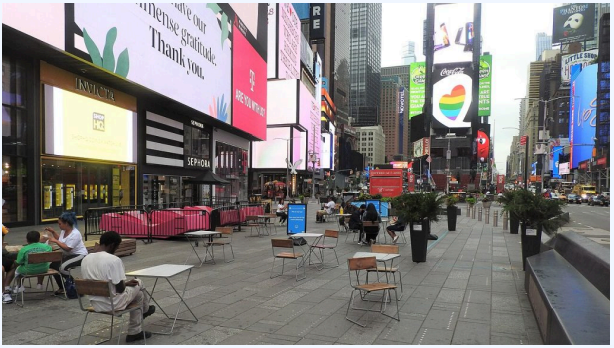
Group communication requires an individual or party to serve as a leader for public communication, with limited opportunities for feedback.

platforms. A single mass communication campaign often spans multiple mass media forms simultaneously. **Culture** generally refers to the shared values, attitudes, beliefs, and practices that characterize a social group, organization, or institution. Just as it is difficult to develop an all-encompassing definition of culture, drawing rigid boundaries around cultures is challenging because they are fluid, diverse, and constantly overlapping.

Throughout U.S. history, evolving media technologies have changed how people relate socially, economically, and politically. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram , and TikTok have transformed how people interact with friends, family, and the broader public. Online communities dedicated to niche hobbies, such as disc golf or board games , allow members to connect over shared interests across vast geographic distances. Dating applications like Tinder and Bumble have redefined how individuals seek personal relationships and romantic partners. Economically, e-

commerce giants like Amazon have challenged traditional brick-and-mortar retailers like Macy's. At the same time, gig-economy applications like Uber and DoorDash allow individuals to deliver food or drive passengers as flexible labor. Politically, leaders across the ideological spectrum use direct digital channels and social media to bypass legacy newsrooms and communicate directly with voter bases.

In today's digital world of smartphones, algorithmic feeds , and AI-generated media, public expectations of leaders, celebrities, educators, and personal identity have undergone drastic shifts. While digital channels democratize content creation and allow marginalized voices to reach global audiences, they also introduce challenges such as hyper-partisanship, echo chambers, and algorithmic bias. This textbook provides readers with the context, tools, and theoretical frameworks to analyze the world of mass media—examining the history, industry structures, and cultural effects that shape modern society.



The COVID-19 pandemic impacted all walks of society, including the often-bustling Times Square, whose empty streets came to symbolize global lockdowns. **Source**: Jim.henderson, TSQ 2020-07 jeh, CC BY-SA 4.0.

The Great Media Reset: How a Global Crisis Permanently Rewired Media Consumption

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted global society, accelerating long-term structural changes across mass communication systems. While coverage of the virus had circulated for months, the sudden halt of live broadcasts—symbolized when the NCAA

halted the Big East Conference championship tournament midgame and canceled its March Madness basketball tournament, costing networks an estimated $800 million in advertising—marked an unprecedented turning point for the media industry.

For legacy media, the crisis exacerbated existing financial vulnerabilities. Print newspapers experienced rapid drops in physical circulation while independent bookstores struggled through prolonged closures. Television and film studios had to halt or delay production, and Hollywood had to postpone the theatrical releases of its planned blockbusters, including *Black Widow*, *Mulan*, and *No Time to Die*—a devastating move for already struggling movie theaters suffering from declining box office revenues. At the same time, digital channels faced severe information pollution, as false claims about the pandemic and hyper-partisan rumors spread rapidly across social platforms.

Conversely, digital-first media expanded at record pace. Demand for streaming audiobooks and podcasts surged, producing breakout hits like *Nice White Parents* and *Call Her Daddy*. The video game industry experienced unprecedented engagement,

with titles like *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* and *Among Us* becoming global cultural touchstones. Video conferencing tools like Zoom and Microsoft Teams evolved overnight from workplace utilities into primary infrastructure for education, socializing, and corporate operations, while e-commerce permanently altered retail habits.

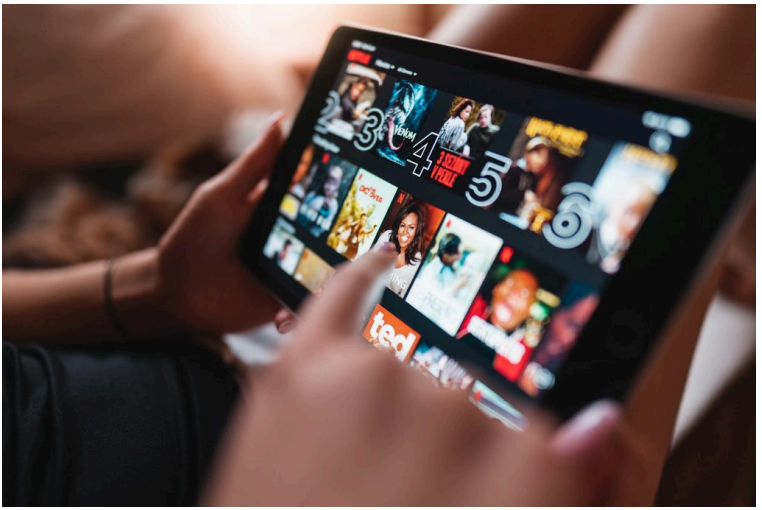
Ultimately, the pandemic served as a permanent catalyst for new media business models. Legacy print outlets tightened paywalls and shifted toward reader-funded subscriptions, while public radio doubled down on localized, community-focused reporting. In Hollywood, the crisis permanently altered film distribution. After Scarlett Johansson sued Disney over the simultaneous streaming and theatrical release of *Black Widow*—a dispute over box-office backend compensation that was ultimately settled—studios restructured talent contracts. They established shorter, flexible theatrical windows before moving films to streaming platforms like Disney+ and Netflix. Rather than a temporary detour, the pandemic reset consumer expectations and established the digital-first media baseline that defines modern society today.

1.3 THE EVOLUTION OF MEDIA

Today, Americans can turn on a television or open an app on their phone and instantly access 24-hour global news feeds, music videos, niche documentaries, and reality shows covering everything from home renovation to competitive cooking. That is not to mention feature films available on demand, live-streamed gaming, and millions of user-generated videos available at a tap.

Traditional print media has struggled to adapt to this constant stream of digital content. In 2022, U.S. daily newspaper circulation fell to approximately 20.9 million, down dramatically from 60.7 million in 1991 at the dawn of the public internet age. At the same time, the sheer volume of consumed information expanded exponentially. A landmark University of California, San Diego study estimated that U.S. households consumed 3.6 zettabytes of information in 2008—the digital equivalent of a 7-foot-high stack of books covering the entire United States. By the mid-2020s, annual U.S. mobile wireless data traffic routinely surpassed tens of trillions of megabytes as 5G networks, high-definition streaming, and algorithmic feeds became ubiquitous. Americans expose themselves to media continuously across

daily life—in taxicabs, buses, classrooms, waiting rooms, highways, and airplanes. Individuals can begin to orient themselves in this vast information cloud by examining the roles media play in society, their history, and how technological innovations shape modern culture.



Source: Image by yousafbhutta from Pixabay.

What Does Media Do for Us?

The media fulfills several fundamental roles in society. One prominent role is entertainment. Media can act as a springboard for human imagination, a source of fantasy, and an outlet for escapism. In the 19th century, Victorian readers disillusioned by the grim realities of the Industrial Revolution found themselves drawn into fantastic fictional worlds. In the

early 21st century, audiences could stream a wide spectrum of storytelling: watching a young genius come of age in *Young Sheldon*, witnessing political machinations in *Game of Thrones*, following an optimistic American coach in *Ted Lasso*, or contemplating dystopian authority in *The Handmaid's Tale*. By providing audiences with diverse narratives, media allows people to escape the monotony or stress of everyday life temporarily.



For generations of college students, Wikipedia has served as the ultimate academic gateway drug—an ill-advised shortcut they can use to start an essay at 2:00 a.m. **Source**: Version 1 by Nohat (concept by Paullusmagnus); Wikimedia., Wikipedia-logo-v2, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Media also provides information and education, though distinguishing objective information from pure entertainment can be challenging. Today, news organizations utilize mass communication networks to transmit stories instantly from across the globe, enabling a reader in London to view live video from Tokyo or Buenos Aires. Books and digital periodicals offer in-depth examinations of complex topics. Open-access encyclopedias like Wikipedia democratize general knowledge by featuring articles on a wide range of topics, from presidential nicknames to

child prodigies and tongue twisters. Major universities, including the Massachusetts Institute of Technology through its OpenCourseWare initiative, host free lecture notes, exams, and video recordings online, allowing anyone with an internet connection access to higher education materials.

Another vital aspect of media is serving as a public forum for discussing important issues. Long before the internet, newspapers published letters to the editor, allowing readers to respond to journalists and voice opinions on civic matters. These letters were an essential element of early American broadsheets and served as a primary venue for public discourse. Today, digital platforms allow virtually anyone with internet access to publish commentary, debate policy, or share personal experiences, transforming public discussion into a multi-directional, continuous global conversation.

Furthermore, citizens rely on media as a watchdog to monitor government institutions, corporations, and powerful leaders. More than a century ago, Upton Sinclair's 1906 novel *The Jungle* exposed dangerous working conditions and corruption in the meatpacking industry. In the 1970s, *Washington Post* reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein investigated the Watergate break-in and subsequent cover-up, leading to the resignation of President Richard Nixon. However, news outlets are not entirely neutral arbiters; political slants, corporate ownership, advertising pressures, and ideological

biases can constrain their willingness or ability to act as independent watchdogs.

To synthesize these functions, media scholars generally categorize the primary agendas of mass media into four core purposes:

1. Entertaining and providing an imaginative outlet
2. Educating and informing the public
3. Serving as a public forum for civic debate
4. Acting as an independent watchdog over institutional power.

In the digital age, a fifth function has emerged: acting as a personalized curation engine that uses algorithms to filter, recommend, and tailor information to individual user preferences.

Not all media formats fulfill these roles in the same way. Books possess durability and depth, making them ideal for long-form analysis, though they are slow and expensive to produce. Newspapers are cheaper and quicker to publish, making them better suited for rapid daily updates. Television delivers dynamic visual information and live communal experiences—such as the State of the Union address or global sporting events—that radio and print cannot match. However, traditional broadcasting remains largely a one-way medium. Conversely, internet platforms encourage interactive user participation, but because digital spaces are broadly

unmoderated, users must evaluate sources carefully to separate quality reporting from amateur speculation and deliberate misinformation.

In the 1960s, media theorist Marshall McLuhan took these observations a step further by coining the phrase "the medium is the message." McLuhan argued that the delivery channel itself profoundly shapes how audiences interpret content. A news story broadcast on television or clipped into a 15-second social



Marshall McLuhan said that the medium of transmission fundamentally shapes both the content and its presentation, even if it's the same message. For instance, many people can point to a book that they love turned into a film they dislike. **Source**: Gotfryd, Bernard, photographer, Marshall McLuhan with and on television (cropped), public domain.

media video delivers rapid visual emotional cues. In contrast, the same story published in an investigative magazine provides textual nuance, historical context, and structural analysis. Computer scientist Alan Kay echoed this in 1994, saying that "each medium has a special way of representing ideas that emphasize particular ways of thinking and de-emphasize others." Critics like writer David Foster Wallace scoffed at the reactionaries who regard "TV as some malignancy visited on an innocent populace, sapping IQs and compromising SAT scores while we all sit there on ever fatter bottoms with little mesmerized spirals revolving in our eyes.... Treating television as evil is just as reductive and silly as treating it like a toaster with pictures." Nonetheless, it remains clear that communication channels shape public perception in subtle, powerful ways.

A Brief History of Mass Media and Culture

Until Johannes Gutenberg invented the movable-type printing press in 15th-century Europe, books were painstakingly hand-copied, making them rare and costly. Gutenberg's press enabled mass production, drastically lowering production costs and allowing written ideas to spread rapidly. This technological leap helped fuel major historical shifts, including the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation.

In 1810, German printer Friedrich Koenig linked the steam engine to the printing press, industrializing print production. Where a manual press produced roughly 480 pages per hour in 1800, steam-powered presses quickly doubled that rate, eventually enabling 20th-century industrial presses to print thousands of pages an hour.



The penny press appealed to readers' desires for lurid tales of murder and scandal.
Source: Chicago Tribune, Chicago Tribune, Nov 5, 1893, front page , public domain.

This production efficiency coincided with the rapid urbanization of the 19th century. Daily newspapers became essential for urban residents who could no longer rely on local word-of-mouth for information. Media theorist Benedict Anderson noted that newspapers also helped forge a national identity by uniting readers across vast distances into a single reading public. By the 1830s, the emergence of the penny press—inexpensive broadsheets sold on the street—democratized news access. By emphasizing crime, human-interest drama, and sensational local news over

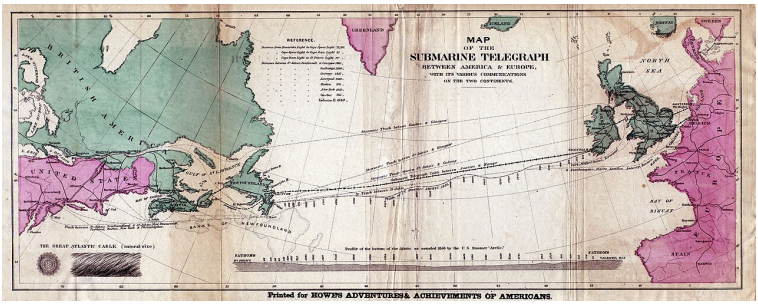
dry political essays, the penny press expanded working-class literacy and laid the groundwork for modern popular journalism and gossip-hungry tabloids.

In the early 20th century, radio emerged as the first major non-print mass medium. By the 1920s, affordable radio receivers allowed millions of families to listen to live national broadcasts simultaneously in their living rooms. In 1924, President Calvin Coolidge's pre-election address reached over 20 million listeners. Advertisers seized on radio's direct access to household audiences, using commercial sponsorship to promote consumer goods. Radio broadcasts helped bridge regional culture, fostering a shared national consumer lifestyle centered around manufactured products, home appliances, and popular music.

Following World War II, broadcast television transformed American domestic life. In 1946, roughly 17,000 television sets existed in the United States; within seven years, two-thirds of American households owned a set. Major broadcast networks—NBC, CBS, and ABC—dominated airwaves, commanding over 90 percent of the prime-time audience through the 1960s and 1970s. While social critics argued that network television promoted cultural homogeneity, the medium also brought urgent national crises into American living rooms, such as civil rights demonstrations and live coverage of the Vietnam War, shaping public debate in real time.

The media landscape diversified significantly during the

1980s and 1990s with the expansion of cable television, which broke the network monopoly by offering specialized channels tailored explicitly to those who wanted to watch only golf , classic films, sermons, shark videos, cartoons, and more. Legislative changes, such as the Telecommunications Act of 1996 and subsequent Federal Communications Commission rule updates, deregulated ownership limits, leading to widespread corporate consolidation across print, radio, and television holdings.



The transatlantic telegraph cable made nearly instantaneous communication between the United States and Europe possible for the first time in 1858. **Source**: Howe's Adventures & Achievements of Americans, Transatlantic submarine cable map, public domain.

Every breakthrough in media technology—from Samuel Morse's telegraph in 1837 to early photography, cinema, radio, television, and personal computing—collapsed geographic boundaries and accelerated information exchange. As media historians Asa Briggs and Peter Burke note, every crucial invention came with "a change in historical

perspectives." Electricity altered the way people thought about time. Work and play no longer depended on the daily rhythms of sunrise and sunset. Since then, wireless communication has collapsed distance, while the Internet has revolutionized the way humanity stores and retrieves information. As random-access memory (RAM) chips and microprocessors developed in the late 20th century, digital storage allowed text, audio, images, and video to merge into a single digital code. This process, known as **media convergence**, established the foundation for today's internet ecosystem, where previously distinct media industries operate on unified digital networks.

1.4 MEDIA CONVERGENCE

Implementing new technologies does not mean older ones vanish into dusty museums. Today's media consumers still watch television, listen to radio broadcasts, read newspapers, and become immersed in movies. The difference is that it is now possible to do all of those things through a single device—such as a smartphone or personal computer—connected to the internet. These actions are enabled by **media convergence**, the process through which previously distinct analog technologies come to share tasks, infrastructure, and resources. A modern smartphone perfectly demonstrates technological convergence by combining a digital camera, a high-definition video recorder, a music player, a GPS navigation unit, and a cellular telephone into a single handheld interface.



Source: Image by Gerd Altmann from Pixabay

The Five Dimensions of Convergence

Media theorist Henry Jenkins argues that convergence is not merely a technological endpoint, but an ongoing process that fundamentally alters how media messages are produced, distributed, and consumed. Jenkins breaks this phenomenon down into five distinct categories: economic, organic, cultural, global, and technological convergence.

1. **Economic convergence** occurs when a single parent company controls multiple products, services, or distribution channels within the entertainment and information industries. For example, a single conglomerate may own book publishers, newspaper outlets, sports networks, and movie studios. Rupert Murdoch's News Corp historically exemplified

this by spanning publishing through HarperCollins, journalism through *The Wall Street Journal*, and broadcast television through FOX. Modern entertainment conglomerates like The Walt Disney Company or Warner Bros. Discovery demonstrate economic convergence on a massive scale, leveraging single intellectual properties across film, streaming services, news networks, and theme parks.

2. **Organic convergence** describes how individuals naturally interact with multiple media stimuli simultaneously. For instance, a student might watch a video on YouTube or Twitch while exchanging text messages with a friend, running a background music playlist on Spotify, and skimming an article for a class assignment.
3. **Cultural convergence** operates in multiple ways. One major aspect is narrative flow across platforms, where stories transition seamlessly from one medium to another. Graphic novels adapt into prestige television series like *The Sandman*, video games evolve into critically acclaimed dramas like *The Last of Us*, and theme park attractions turn into blockbuster film franchises like *Pirates of the Caribbean*. Another crucial element of cultural convergence is participatory culture—the power consumers now possess to annotate, comment on, remix, and shape media culture in unprecedented ways. Video-sharing platforms like

YouTube and TikTok allow anyone with a smartphone and an internet connection to communicate with a global audience, directly influencing trends rather than passively receiving broadcast programming.



Nigeria's Nollywood produces more films annually than any other country besides India. **Source**: MediaMOF, Nollywood BTS 140, cropped, CC BY-SA 4.0.

4. **Global convergence** represents the process by which geographically distant cultures influence one another despite physical separation. Nigeria's film industry, nicknamed Nollywood, draws narrative inspiration from India's Bollywood, which in turn draws structural cues from Hollywood. American animation like *Tom and Jerry* remains widely popular on Arab satellite networks, while Japanese intellectual properties like

Pokémon and *Dragon Ball* have shaped global pop culture for generations. Similarly, South Korean media—from K-pop group performances to award-winning television and film—has become a dominant global force. While global convergence offers unprecedented access to diverse perspectives, critics like Herbert Schiller warn of cultural imperialism, where dominant Western media corporations potentially homogenize local traditions and values in developing nations.

5. **Technological convergence** describes the merging of distinct technologies into unified platforms, such as streaming television programming on Hulu or playing complex video games on an iPhone. As analog media formats are converted into digital bits, Henry Jenkins notes that society expands the potential relationships between different media types, enabling content to flow fluidly across platforms.

Social and Cognitive Effects of Convergence

Jenkins's concept of organic convergence is perhaps the most revealing for daily life. To individuals who grew up in a world dominated by **legacy media**—traditional print, radio, and broadcast television—today's hyper-connected environment

can feel overwhelming. As a *New York Times editorial once observed*, "Few objects on the planet are farther removed from nature—less, say, like a rock or an insect—than a glass and stainless-steel smartphone." Yet modern culture is deeply plugged in, and younger generations have never known a world without ubiquitous internet access.



Today's teenagers don't passively sit in front of screens, quietly absorbing information. Instead, they text their friends in Messenger, post short videos on TikTok, send Snaps on Snapchat, comment on YouTube videos, write reviews of television episodes to post online, and generally engage with the culture they consume.
Source: Image by Mircea Iancu from Pixabay

This cultural shift has widened the generational divide regarding media habits. Research by Common Sense Media indicates that daily screen media use among teenagers averages over eight hours per day, while tweens average over five hours. These statistics highlight two central pillars of the digital media model: constant participation and continuous multitasking.

However, researchers and cultural critics remain divided on how media convergence and immersion affect human cognition and society. In his book *Everything Bad Is Good for You*, Steven Johnson argues that modern multi-threaded television shows and interactive video games are mentally stimulating, forcing audiences to engage in active problem-solving and complex narrative mapping.

Poking fun at alarmists who claim new technologies erode intelligence, Johnson playfully imagines how critics might warn against the dangers of book reading: It "chronically understimulates the senses" and is "tragically isolating." Even worse, books "follow a fixed linear path. You can't control their narratives in any fashion—you sit back and have the story dictated to you.... This risks instilling a general passivity in our children, making them feel as though they're powerless to change their circumstances. Reading is not an active, participatory process; it's a submissive one."

Conversely, Nicholas Carr offers a far more cautious perspective in *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*. Carr argues that the endless web of hyperlinks, notifications, and short-form content erodes attention spans, leaving contemporary minds distracted and less capable of deep, sustained contemplation. "Once I was a scuba diver in a sea of words," Carr reflects ruefully. "Now I zip along the surface like a guy on a Jet Ski." Citing neuroscientific studies on cognitive load, Carr emphasizes that when individuals attempt to multitask across hyper-connected channels, they pay less attention to each task and perform them more carelessly.

THE ANALOG COMEBACK: NICHE RESURGENCE IN A DIGITAL AGE



Could you operate this rotary phone? **Source**: Uberprutser, FTTR RTT56B Telephone, CC BY-SA 3.0

When was the last time you searched a library card catalog, used a street-side pay phone, or looked up a factual detail in a multi-volume physical encyclopedia? All of these once-essential daily habits have been rendered functionally obsolete by digital convergence.

Yet convergence has not destroyed older media; instead, it has redefined their cultural roles. Physical formats like

cassette tapes, instant film, and vinyl records have experienced remarkable resurgences. Polaroid Corporation was driven out of business by digital photography in 2008, only to be revived as a thriving brand catering to users seeking tangible, unpredictable photographic prints. Similarly, vinyl record sales have experienced multi-decade highs, as music lovers seek physical ownership, album artwork, and warm analog sound in an era of ephemeral streaming files.



Could you use a card catalog to find the specific information you seek? **Source**: Saifunny, Library catalog the National Library of Israel , CC BY-SA 4.0

Analog artifacts thrive in niche markets both despite and because of digital culture. Physical media offer a tactile, human experience that digital files cannot replicate. As cassette label founder Brad Rose observed, "I think there's a group of people—fans and artists alike—out there to whom music is more than just a file on your computer, more than just a folder of MP3s." The imperfections of analog formats—the crackle of a record needle, the distinctive chemical color shift of an instant photo—are embraced as marks of authenticity. Convergence has fundamentally altered who uses these

legacy platforms and why, proving that old media rarely die; they find new purpose.

1.5 THE ROLE OF SOCIAL VALUES IN COMMUNICATION

In a 1995 *Wired* magazine essay titled "The Age of Paine," media critic Jon Katz suggested that Revolutionary War pamphleteer Thomas Paine should be considered "the moral father of the internet." Katz argued that the emerging digital network offered exactly what Paine and his 18th-century colleagues envisioned: a vast, diverse, passionate means of transmitting ideas and opening minds. In fact, Katz noted that the interactive web was closer in spirit to the raucous, opinionated press of the 1700s than to the sanitized, one-way broadcast media of the 20th century. In Paine's era, ordinary citizens with no special wealth or political power could publish a political tract, reach a broad audience, and even spark a revolution. Katz's defense of Paine's fierce independence illustrates how social values and communication tools shape



Thomas Paine is regarded by some as the "moral father of the Internet" because his independent spirit is reflected in the democratization of mass communication via the platform. **Source:** Marion Doss – Thomas Paine, Engraving – CC BY-SA 2.0.

the adoption of media technologies. How do societal values dictate what gets published, and how does mass communication, in turn, reshape what society values?

Free Speech and Its Legal Limitations

Mass communication expanded rapidly in the United States because the value of free speech was embedded in the nation's constitutional foundation. The First Amendment guarantees freedom of speech and the press, granting Americans some of the broadest legal protections for expression of any industrialized nation. However, these protections are not absolute; legal limits have continually shifted to reflect evolving social attitudes.

Interpretations of obscenity—speech not protected by the First Amendment—offer a clear example of how legal boundaries change alongside cultural norms. James Joyce's *Ulysses*, now widely considered a landmark of 20th-century literature, was banned in the United States between 1922 and 1934 because federal courts declared its sexual content obscene. By 1954, the Supreme Court case *Roth v. United States* narrowed the definition of obscenity, introducing the concept of "contemporary community standards." The sexual revolution and social changes of the 1960s made defining a single community

standard increasingly difficult, leaving the boundaries of legal obscenity in perpetual flux.



Artist Shepard Fairey, creator of the iconic Obama HOPE image, was sued by the Associated Press for copyright infringement; Fairey argued that the fair use exception protected his work. **Source**: Hrag Vartanian – Shepard Fairey with his Obama Icon – CC BY-ND 2.0.

Copyright law represents another significant limitation on free speech. Intellectual property law was originally designed to protect a creator's economic and moral rights, preventing unauthorized copying or commercial exploitation of their work. While the first U.S. copyright statute in 1790 granted a maximum protection term of 14 years, subsequent legislative extensions have expanded copyright terms significantly, in some cases protecting works for up to 120 years. In the digital age, remix culture—characterized by mash-ups, file sharing,

video game streaming, and video parodies—frequently tests the boundaries of the fair use doctrine, continually forcing courts to re-evaluate where protection ends and creative transformation begins.

The Unscripted Screen: Reaction Videos, Fair Use, and Copyright



Video game streamer. **Source**: Lattensep, Papaplatte reaction, CC BY 3.0.

Reaction videos on platforms like YouTube and Twitch showcase the tension between digital creator culture and traditional copyright law. These videos feature creators offering spontaneous responses to popular media, ranging from Childish Gambino's music video "This Is America" to classic comedy routines, political debates, or gameplay in indie video games. Their popularity stems from their informal, communal nature, allowing

audiences to feel as though they are sharing an emotional experience with the host.

However, these videos routinely navigate murky legal waters regarding fair use. The legal conflict was highlighted when attorney and creator Devin Stone, known online as LegalEagle, publicly criticized high-profile streamer xQc and others for broadcasting entire copyrighted videos while offering minimal commentary. Stone argued that simply sitting in silence while playing someone else's work constitutes content theft rather than transformative expression. As Stone observed, the concept of transformative use remains one of the most widely misunderstood areas of online law.

Reaction content is not inherently illegal, but its protection under fair use depends entirely on transformation. Responsible creators pause the source material to add critical commentary, educational context, or substantive analysis, thereby creating a new work with distinct value. Conversely, when creators play extensive portions of copyrighted material without meaningful addition, they risk undercutting the market for the original creator's work. In legal disputes, courts evaluate whether the new creation alters the original with new expression, meaning, or message, rather than merely substituting for the original product.

Propaganda and Persuasive Intent

Social values are also overtly expressed through strategic media messages. Content creators and media organizations often hold specific ideological or commercial goals, leading them to promote certain viewpoints actively. At its most intense, this manifests as propaganda—communication intentionally designed to persuade an audience toward a specific political, ideological, or commercial outcome.



World War I propaganda posters were sometimes styled to resemble movie posters to glamorize the war effort. **Source**: TOGETHER WE CAN DO IT – KEEP `EM FIRING – NARA – 515856 , public domain.

Propaganda frequently relies on selective facts, emotional manipulation, or caricatures of opponents. During wartime, governments use mass media to build public resolve and demonize enemies. During World War I, the U.S. government established the Committee on Public Information, known as the Creel Commission, to mobilize domestic support for the war effort. Using news releases, film reels, posters, and public speakers, the commission mounted a massive national campaign. While Chairman George Creel resisted calling the effort propaganda—arguing that the word had become associated with foreign deceit—he acknowledged it was a vast enterprise in emotional salesmanship.

> In no degree was the Committee an agency of censorship, a machinery of concealment or repression.... In all things, from first to last, without halt or change, it was a plain publicity proposition, a vast enterprise in salesmanship, the

> world's most incredible adventures in advertising.... We did not call it propaganda, for that word, in German hands, had come to be associated with deceit and corruption. Our effort was educational and informative throughout, as we had such confidence in our case that we felt no other argument was needed than the simple, straightforward presentation of the facts.

In peacetime, persuasive techniques remain central to public relations, political advertising, and partisan news commentary. While traditional public relations generally focuses on presenting a client's best perspective, propaganda seeks to alter the audience's perception of reality itself. Today, explicit political slants in news outlets—ranging from cable networks like Fox News and MS Now to digital sites and political podcasts—demonstrate how media organizations align their coverage with the specific social and political values of their target audiences.

Gatekeepers: From Editorial Boards to Algorithms



Edward Bernays, a member of the Creel Commission, was later deemed the father of public relations and authored a book titled *Propaganda*. **Source**: Bain News Service, Edward Bernays cropped, public domain.

In 1960, journalist A. J. Liebling famously wrote that "freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one." Liebling was pointing to the power of media **gatekeepers**—the editors, publishers, and producers who historically decided which stories reached the public and which were ignored. In deciding what was newsworthy, gatekeepers effectively signaled to society what was important.The historical power of gatekeeping is starkly illustrated by international news coverage of the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Media scholars note that major Western news organizations largely overlooked the early weeks of the slaughter, keeping foreign correspondents stationed elsewhere while domestic news broadcasts focused heavily on

celebrity trials and national scandals. Richard Dowden, Africa editor for the British newspaper *The Independent* during the Rwandan genocide, bluntly explained the news media's larger reluctance to focus on African issues: "Africa was simply not important. It didn't sell newspapers. Newspapers have to make a profit. So it wasn't important." Because news gatekeepers deemed the region low priority, the global public remained largely uninformed, contributing to a disastrous lack of international political intervention.

In the pre-internet era, physical constraints enforced strict gatekeeping: a newspaper had a fixed number of pages, and a broadcast had a set duration. The internet removed these physical space limitations, enabling an infinite volume of publishing. Social media platforms also introduced participatory feedback, allowing users to upvote, share, or downvote content directly. A dramatic example occurred on Reddit when video game publisher EA Sports attempted to defend a controversial monetization mechanic in *Star Wars: Battlefront II*; user outrage resulted in the most downvoted comment in the platform's history, earning it a 2020 Guinness World Record and forcing the company to alter its game design.

Yet the digital age has not eliminated gatekeepers; it has automated them. Today, algorithmic systems deployed by platforms like TikTok, YouTube, X, and Google act as powerful, invisible gatekeepers. These algorithms analyze user

behavior to prioritize content that maximizes engagement, emotional reaction, and watch time. Unlike traditional newspaper editors, algorithmic gatekeepers operate without public bylines or clear editorial standards, making it far more challenging for citizens to determine how their information ecosystem is being curated and controlled.

1.6 CULTURAL PERIODS

Modern Era	*Early Modern Period* (late 1400s–1700s)	This period began with Johannes Gutenberg's invention of the movable-type printing press. Historians characterize this era as one of improved transportation, educational reform, and scientific inquiry.
	Late Modern Period (1700s–1900s)	Sparked by the Industrial Revolution, this period is characterized by technical innovations, increasingly secular politics, and urbanization.
Postmodern Age	(1950s-present)	This period is marked by skepticism, self-consciousness, celebration of differences, and the digitalization of culture.

To study mass media and culture effectively, it is helpful to examine historical eras through the lens of **cultural periods**. A cultural period refers to an era defined by a distinct way of understanding reality through available technology, social structures, and dominant philosophies. Shifts between cultural periods occur when fundamental changes alter how societies perceive truth and human experience. In the Middle Ages, truth was largely dictated by centralized

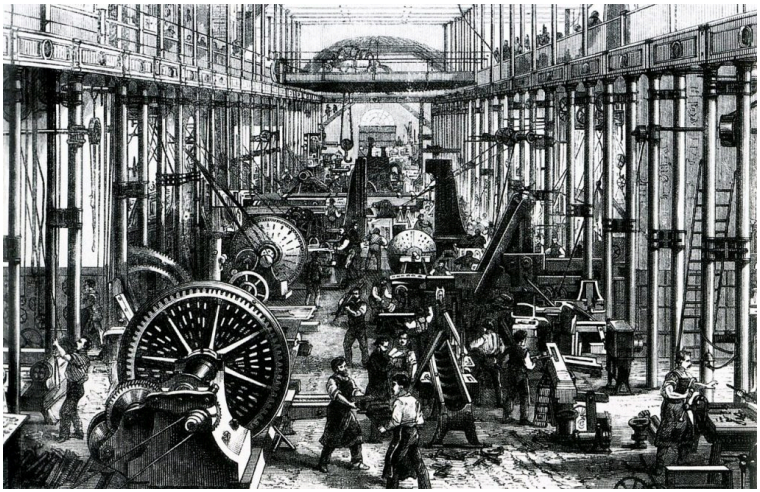
authorities such as monarchs and religious institutions. During the Renaissance, truth shifted toward empirical observation and the scientific method driven by human reason. By the early 21st century, digital platforms and search engines transformed access to information so radically that technology critics like *Wired* magazine's editor-in-chief began questioning whether algorithmic data retrieval would replace traditional scientific inquiry altogether. In each epoch, the fundamental nature of reality did not change, but the tools and frameworks humans used to navigate the world evolved dramatically. To analyze modern media, the post-Gutenberg modern and postmodern ages serve as the primary foundations.

The Modern Age

The Modern Age, or **modernity**, spans the post-medieval era and is characterized by rapid technological innovation, urbanization, scientific discovery, and global expansion. Historians generally divide modernity into two distinct phases: the early modern period and the late modern period.

The early modern period began in the mid-15th century with Johannes Gutenberg's invention of the movable-type printing press and extended through the late 18th century. Gutenberg's press caused literacy rates across Europe to rise, sparking widespread educational reform and facilitating the

rapid spread of revolutionary ideas during the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation. Transportation infrastructure expanded, political structures became increasingly secularized, capitalism took root, and nation-states consolidated power. Enlightenment ideals of rationalism, individual liberty, and empirical science gradually eclipsed the absolute authority previously held by feudal lords and religious institutions.



The Industrial Revolution transformed the world.
Source:Unknown authorUnknown author, Hartmann Maschinenhalle 1868 (01), public domain.

Massive political, economic, and social upheaval marked the transition into the late modern period during the late 18th century. The Industrial Revolution in Britain, combined with the democratic shifts of the American Revolution in 1776 and the French Revolution in 1789, fundamentally reshaped

global society. The American and French revolutions rejected hereditary monarchies in favor of national sovereignty and constitutional governance, cementing a secular political model well suited to an era driven by reason and individual rights.

The Industrial Revolution altered society just as radically by changing how human labor was organized. Inventions like the steam engine, railways, and mechanized factories transformed agrarian societies into industrial economies. As manufacturing replaced farming as the primary economic engine, millions of workers migrated from rural villages to dense urban centers. Newly urbanized factory laborers could no longer produce their own food, clothing, or household goods, transforming them into wage earners and consumer buyers. While mass production generated immense national wealth, it also introduced sharp class divides and severe income inequality.

These socio-economic changes directly fueled the growth of mass media. The coupling of steam power with printing presses enabled the mass printing of affordable daily newspapers and popular books. Urbanization concentrated large audiences in cities where high literacy rates and rising wages created a huge market for news and entertainment. Media consumption became a shared public experience, forging a cohesive mass culture that bridged regional dialects and local traditions.



Painting by Pablo Picasso. **Source**: Gandalf's Gallery. Pablo Picasso – Art Dealer Clovis Sagot [1909] . CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

It is essential to distinguish the broad socio-economic epoch of modernity from modernism, the artistic and literary movement that emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Modernity represents the era of industrialization and rational progress, whereas modernism was a creative reaction against those forces. Modernist artists questioned the Enlightenment's uncritical faith in continuous human progress. Fleeing traditional artistic conventions, modernists embraced abstraction, experimentalism, and psychological interiority to reflect a fragmented world. Prominent examples include James Joyce's stream-of-consciousness prose, Pablo Picasso's cubist paintings, Arnold Schoenberg's atonal musical compositions, and Luigi Pirandello's absurdist theater.

The Postmodern Age

Modernism served as a bridge between the modern era and the Postmodern Age. While scholars debate exact historical boundaries, a consensus places the start of postmodernity in the second half of the 20th century. Where modernity valued order, rationalism, absolute truth, and industrial efficiency, the Postmodern Age embraced skepticism, self-awareness, cultural diversity, and the questioning of established systems. The rise of the internet, the anxieties of the Cold War, and the explosion of consumer advertising all fueled this cultural transition.

A defining characteristic of postmodern thought is the rejection of absolute, objective truth. Postmodern theorists drew inspiration from concepts in modern physics, such as Erwin Schrödinger's famous quantum thought experiment featuring a cat sealed in a box with a radioactive mechanism. Until the box is opened, Schrödinger posited, the cat exists in a state of simultaneous life and death, with both possibilities existing at once. Postmodernists adopted this concept of radical uncertainty, arguing that reality is not an absolute truth waiting to be uncovered by neutral science, but is instead relative, contingent, and heavily dependent on the perspective of the observer.



Bob Dylan sits beside poet Allen Ginsberg. **Source**: Elsa Dorfman creator QS:P170,Q5367400, Allen Ginsberg and Bob Dylan by Elsa Dorfman, CC BY-SA 3.0.

This emphasis on subjective interpretation led to literary movements like deconstruction. Rather than attempting to create a seamless illusion of objective reality, postmodern authors constantly reminded audiences of a text's artificial construction. Meaning was no longer seen as something fixed by an all-knowing author, but as something actively constructed by the reader. The poetry of Allen Ginsberg and Sylvia Plath reflected this shift, using raw, personal expression to force readers to actively confront complex issues surrounding mental health, sexuality, and social conformity.

Postmodernism is also defined by its profound distrust of what philosopher Jean-François Lyotard termed "grand

narratives"—overarching political, scientific, or philosophical theories that claim to explain the entire human experience, such as Marxism, capitalism, Freudianism, or absolute religious dogma. The horrific human cost of 20th-century totalitarian regimes like Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union shattered faith in grand utopian visions. In their place, Lyotard argued, postmodern culture relies on "micronarratives"—localized, diverse, and personal understandings of the world, none of which can claim universal authority. An older man in Kenya, for example, does not view the world in the same way as a young woman from New York. Even people from the same cultural backgrounds have different views of the world. How many teenagers live in a world where their parents shape their understanding of the world? The diversity of human experience is a marked feature of the postmodern world. As Lyotard noted, "Eclecticism is the degree zero of contemporary general culture; one listens to reggae, watches a Western, eats McDonald's food for lunch and local cuisine for dinner, wears Paris perfume in Tokyo and retro clothes in Hong Kong; knowledge is a matter for TV games."



Art by Barbara Kruger. **Source**: anokarina. "Untitled" (You Rule by Pathetic Display) —by Barbara Kruger, offset lithograph and silkscreen, 1982 . CC BY-SA 2.0.

Postmodern creators also abandoned strict concepts of artistic originality, freely borrowing, mixing, and reinterpreting existing cultural materials. Author William S. Burroughs famously encouraged creators to raid the "museums, libraries, architectural monuments, concert halls, bookstores, recording studios and film studios of the world. Everything belongs to the inspired and dedicated thief." Many creators took this call to arms to heart. Artist Barbara Kruger repurposed vintage magazine advertisements with bold political text, while post-punk and hip-hop musicians built entirely new tracks using sampled audio clips from older recordings. Reusing, parodying, and breaking down boundaries between high art and pop culture became defining traits of the era.

From the early modern printing press to the postmodern digital network, each cultural period has reshaped how human

beings make sense of their world. As media consumption continues to evolve through interactive networks and automated content streams, recognizing these historical frameworks allows audiences to understand better how contemporary media reflects the values, anxieties, and technologies of its time.

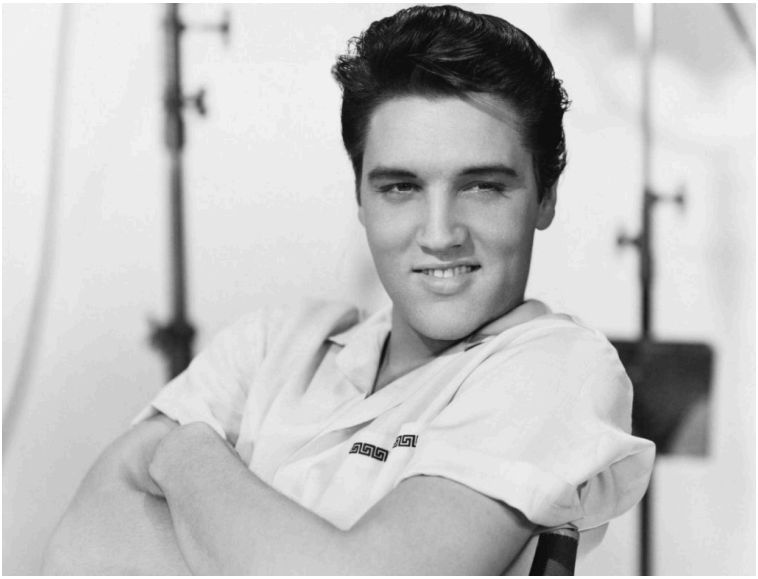
1.7 MASS MEDIA AND POPULAR CULTURE

Burroughs's call to bring art out of the closet and into public spaces spoke directly to postmodernism's willingness to blur the lines between high culture and low culture. Although the Postmodern Age specifically embraced popular culture, mass media and pop culture have been intertwined since their origins. Mass media does not merely report on popular culture—it frequently dictates what enters the public consciousness in the first place.

Tastemakers and the Traditional Media Model

Historically, mass pop culture was cultivated by concentrated media channels that introduced and popularized specific trends. While tastemakers share similarities with traditional media gatekeepers, tastemakers exert their greatest influence when a small number of dominant outlets control media distribution. When only a few television networks, national magazines, or daily newspapers reach tens of millions of

people, the editors, producers, and critics behind them become immensely powerful. *The New York Times*'s restaurant reviews used to have the power to make or break a restaurant's success through granting (or withdrawing) its rating.



For Elvis Presley's third appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, he was shown only from the waist up; Sullivan considered his dancing too scandalous for family viewing. **Source**: Unknown author, Elvis Presley in 1958, public domain.

The legendary variety broadcast *The Ed Sullivan Show*, which ran from 1948 to 1971, serves as a classic example of traditional tastemaking. Sullivan hosted musical acts, comedians, actors, and dancers, possessing an uncanny ability to transform rising

performers into household names. The Beatles' iconic 1964 appearance on his show drew an unprecedented television audience, launching the British Invasion in American pop culture. Comedian Jackie Mason compared appearing on *The Ed Sullivan Show* to "an opera singer being at the Met. Or if a guy is an architect who made the Empire State Building. This was the biggest."



Oprah Winfrey. **Source**: photo by Alan Light, Oprah Winfrey (2004), cropped, CC BY 2.0.

Similarly, Oprah Winfrey demonstrated extraordinary tastemaking authority through Oprah's Book Club. A single recommendation from Winfrey routinely sent obscure contemporary novels and heavy literary classics like Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* soaring to the top of national best-seller lists, proving that a trusted cultural guide could mobilize massive consumer demand.

Tastemaking extends beyond entertainment into commercial product creation. Companies frequently rely on promotional campaigns to build consumer demand for products people did not know they needed. In the 1880s, when George Eastman developed the Kodak camera for

personal use, photography was a specialized craft practiced primarily by professionals. "Though the Kodak was relatively cheap and easy to use, most Americans didn't see the need for a camera; they had no sense that there was any value in visually documenting their lives," noted *New Yorker* writer James Surowiecki. Kodak succeeded not simply by manufacturing hardware, but by selling the public on the core concept of personal memory preservation. Decades later, tech giants like Apple mastered a similar strategy, building immense public anticipation for new product categories through carefully managed product unveils and curated media leaks.

Traditional tastemakers kept culture dynamic by introducing novel ideas, music, and products. However, this system also favored heavily funded commercial projects. Major media corporations allocated substantial promotional budgets to back their preferred releases, ensuring "the next big thing" received maximum airplay while niche or independent artists struggled to gain visibility.

The Internet Age and the Decentralization of Taste

The 20th century marked the golden era of centralized tastemaking, where critics and network executives communicated with vast, captive audiences. By the turn of

the 21st century, the expansion of cable television and the rise of digital networks began fragmenting that audience. While *The Ed Sullivan Show* regularly reached 50 million viewers in the 1960s, top-rated modern network programming attracts a fraction of that audience, despite a significantly larger national population. The sheer volume of competing channels, streaming services, and digital platforms ensures that no single broadcast can command absolute national attention.

Viewings of Popular Television Broadcasts

Show/Episode	Number of Viewers	Percent of Households	Year
The Ed Sullivan Show / *The Beatles' first appearance*	73 million	45.1%	1964
The Ed Sullivan Show / *Elvis Presley's first appearance*	60 million	82.6%	1956
I Love Lucy / "*Lucy Goes to the Hospital*"	44 million	71.7%	1953
*M*A*S*H* / *Series finale*	106 million	60.2%	1983
Seinfeld / *Series finale*	76 million	41.3%	1998
American Idol / *Season 5 finale*	36 million	17%	2006



A screenshot from what has to be one of the world's most famous low-tech videos to achieve YouTube acclaim, "Charlie bit my finger," which had amassed almost 900 million views before the family sold the 2007 video as a non-fungible token in 2022 for just under $761,000.

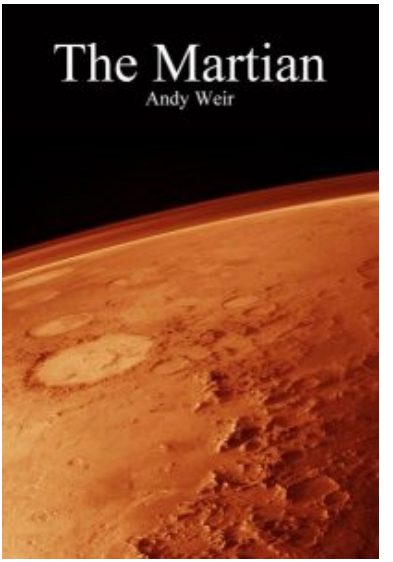
Simultaneously, user-generated digital content demonstrated that viral phenomena could emerge entirely outside traditional institutional channels. A simple home video of a child recovering from dental surgery ("David After Dentist") amassed over 37 million YouTube views within its first year, eventually crossing 140 million views. Legacy media outlets lost their exclusive monopoly over cultural trends as information began spreading peer-to-peer across global networks.

Niche digital publications, music review hubs like Pitchfork and Stereogum, and review aggregators like Rotten Tomatoes enabled audiences to evaluate content using hundreds of professional and amateur perspectives at once. Early digital commentators built massive followings independently; gossip blogger Perez Hilton amassed millions of monthly readers without traditional newsroom backing. Social media networks further accelerated real-time news distribution, as seen in 2009

when breaking news of Michael Jackson's passing trended across social platforms well before legacy news outlets broadcast the official announcement.

These shifts gave birth to social media influencers and creator-driven trends. However, legacy media companies continue to play a major role by absorbing internet talent. Viral creators on platforms like YouTube, TikTok, or the now-defunct Vine—ranging from pop star Justin Bieber to media personalities like Chrissy Teigen—frequently transition into traditional record deals, network television shows, and studio film releases. Legacy media often uses digital platforms as a talent incubator, signing creators who have already built a proven, self-sustaining audience.

Bypassing the Gatekeepers

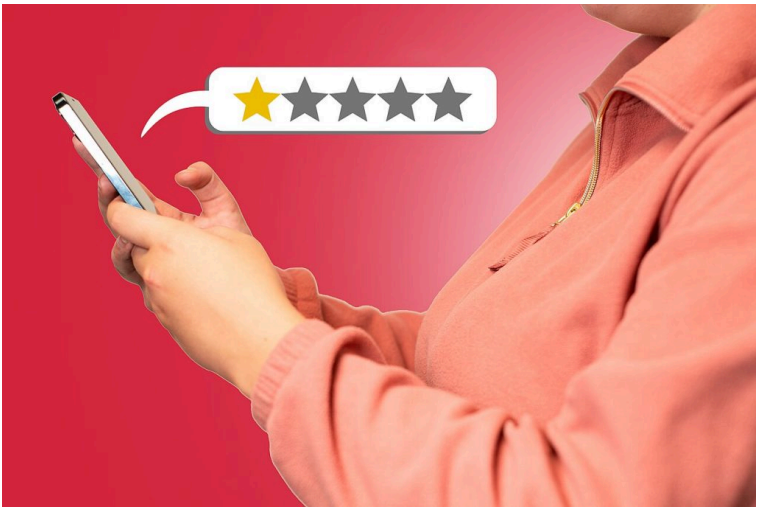


Andy Weir originally published his novel *The Martian* on his personal blog. **Source**: Andy Weir, The Martian (Weir novel), public domain.

Direct-to-consumer digital platforms allow creators to bypass traditional publishing gatekeepers altogether. Projects rejected by conventional media companies can find new life through self-publishing and independent distribution. Author Andy Weir famously posted *The Martian* chapter-by-chapter on his personal blog and Amazon before traditional publishers picked up the print rights, leading to a blockbuster film adaptation. Digital publishing platforms operated by Amazon, Apple, and other retailers allow authors to upload works directly, turning manuscripts into digital e-books and print-on-demand physical copies in minutes.

While direct publishing empowers creators, it creates a new challenge for audiences: discovery. With millions of self-

published titles, indie songs, and video streams released annually, consumers face overwhelming choice paralysis. The central debate of the digital age is whether mass culture will continue fragmenting into highly specialized subcultures, or whether new digital tastemakers—such as prominent creators, online communities, and platform algorithms—will replace the traditional critics of the past.



Crowdsourcing provides the means for everyone to share their critical reviews of products and services. **Source**: Zuko.io Images, Reviews of a Negative Customer Experience, CC BY 2.0.

Democratized Reviews and Algorithmic Curation

In 1993, *New York Times* food critic Ruth Reichl published a famous review detailing the stark contrast between the dismissive service she received at a high-end restaurant when disguised as an ordinary diner, and the lavish treatment she received once the staff recognized her as a professional reviewer. Her experience highlighted the concentrated authority held by traditional critics.

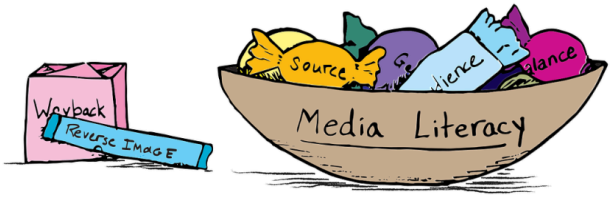
The growth of crowdsourced platforms like Yelp, TripAdvisor, and Amazon democratized this process by transforming everyday consumers into active reviewers. By harnessing **crowdsourcing**—collecting feedback from large online communities—these platforms aimed to deliver a broader, more authentic evaluation of products and services. Instead of relying on a single authoritative voice, consumers could consult hundreds of peer reviews.

However, crowdsourced tastemaking introduced its own structural flaws. Online reviews tend to skew toward emotional extremes, written mostly by customers who are either thrilled or furious, while moderately satisfied consumers rarely leave feedback. Unlike professional journalists bound by editorial ethics, anonymous reviewers face no institutional accountability. Business owners have been caught posting fake positive reviews for themselves or

spamming competitors with negative ratings. Furthermore, wading through dozens of amateur reviews often yields unhelpful critiques. Consider these user reviews on Amazon of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: "There is really no point and it's really long," "I really didn't enjoy reading this book and I wish that our English teacher wouldn't force my class to read this play," and "don't know what Willy Shakespeare was thinking when he wrote this one play tragedy, but I thought this sure was boring! Hamlet does too much talking and not enough stuff." While some may argue that these are valid criticisms of the play, these comments are certainly a far cry from the thoughtful critique of a professional literary critic.

These limitations highlight the ongoing value of professional critique. A seasoned critic approaches a work or service with deep contextual knowledge, rigorous methodology, and professional independence. *The New York Times* noted that one of the site's elite reviewers had completed more than 300 reviews in three years. The article noted that "by contrast, a *New York Times* restaurant critic might take six years to amass 300 reviews. The critic visits a restaurant several times, strives for anonymity, and tries to sample every dish on the menu." While crowdsourced reviews and algorithmic recommendation systems have permanently altered how society discovers content, expert analysis and democratic consensus continue to coexist, offering complementary ways to navigate modern culture.

1.8 MEDIA LITERACY



Source: Image by tiday at Pixabay.

In Johannes Gutenberg's era and the centuries that followed, achieving an informed and enlightened public faced one primary obstacle: basic functional literacy. Educators, reformers, and philosophers argued that a population capable of reading and writing could seek out news, weigh competing ideas, and participate responsibly in civic life. Yet as global literacy rates climbed dramatically over the 20th century, basic reading skills proved insufficient on their own. In an environment saturated with broadcast signals and digital networks, individuals must constantly decode, analyze, and filter complex media messages. In the late 20th century, the capacity to process and evaluate these multi-layered symbols became known as **media literacy**. As the National Association for Media Literacy Education defines it, a media-literate individual possesses the ability to access,

analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication. Media scholar John Culkin once remarked that modern mass media constitute new languages whose grammar must be deliberately learned.

Media-literate consumers of information ask themselves the following questions when analyzing mass communication messages:

1. ***Who created the message?***
2. ***What are the author's credentials?***
3. ***Why was the message created?***
4. ***Does the message try to get me to act or think in a certain way?***
5. ***Who profits from this message?***
6. ***Who is the message's intended audience?***
7. ***Can I verify the accuracy of the information?***

Benefits of Improving Media Literacy Skills

Culkin dubbed the pervasiveness of media " the unnoticed fact of our present," calling the omnipresence of media information easy to overlook as the air people breathe (and, he noted, "some would add that it is just as polluted"). Children and adults alike spend hours each day consuming media messages, prompting public health organizations like the American Academy of Pediatrics to recommend strict limits on screen time for young children. Yet media literacy is not merely a concern for parents or educators; it is a vital life skill for citizens of all ages. Because modern audiences receive most of their news and worldview from commercial and digital platforms, learning to examine mass communication messages with constructive skepticism protects individuals from manipulation.

Commercial Advertising and Psychological Persuasion

A significant portion of daily media consumption is directly underwritten by commercial interests, with marketing analysts estimating that the

average individual encounters thousands of promotional messages daily

. Media consumers face constant, often contradictory commercial appeals. For instance, news reports detailing public health concerns regarding obesity routinely run alongside vibrant advertisements promoting sugary beverages and fast food. Public health experts argue that advertising targeted at young children is "inherently deceptive" because younger audiences lack the cognitive development needed to distinguish between entertainment programming and persuasive commercial intent. Advertisers rely on sophisticated psychological appeals, tapping into personal insecurities, desires for social status, fear, vanity, or impulses for adventure. For instance, anti-smoking public service announcements may rely on disgusting images of blackened lungs to shock viewers into foregoing the habit. Media literacy equips consumers to recognize these persuasive strategies, enabling them to evaluate product claims and promotional messages critically.

Bias, Spin, and Misinformation

Beyond commercial advertising, mass communication messages carry explicit and implicit political agendas. Politicians craft media campaigns to persuade voters, while news organizations may allow political leanings to shape editorial choices subtly. Commercial considerations can also influence coverage, leading journalists to avoid criticizing

major advertisers or to sensationalize headlines to increase audience engagement. Because every media message is constructed by individuals holding specific values and priorities, accepting media messages at face value creates confusion, particularly when public sources present conflicting claims on major societal issues. For example, even though
97% of scientists believe humans have caused climate change, conflicting narratives that populate online forums can overwhelm the scientific consensus.



While Donald Trump touted Operation Warp Speed during the 2020 presidential campaign, Joe Biden said he felt that Trump might rush a vaccine for political gain before the election. **Source**: The White House from Washington, DC, Operation Warp Speed Vaccine Event (50705630873) (cropped)
, public domain.

During political campaigns, opposing candidates routinely offer starkly contradictory narratives regarding economic conditions or government responses to national crises. For instance, both major candidates in the 2020 U.S. presidential election saturated the airwaves with conflicting information about how to handle the COVID-19 pandemic. Trump's campaign highlighted his administration's efforts to rapidly develop and distribute vaccines, touting Operation Warp Speed as a major success. Biden, however, accused Trump's administration of failing to address the crisis adequately and of underestimating its severity

. Voters could find such contradictory information confusing. Media literacy involves educating people to look critically at media messages. The challenge becomes sifting through daily mass media messages and making sense of the conflicting information.

New Skills for an AI-Driven World



This realistic-looking AI photo of the Pope wearing a puffer jacket demonstrates the difficulty of identifying authentic content. **Source**: Midjourney institution QS:P195,Q113070628Unknown author, Pope Francis in puffy winter jacket, public domain.

Historically, formal education focused on the accumulation of static knowledge—memorizing historical dates, geographical boundaries, and literary texts. Today, digital technology provides instant access to global repositories of information, fundamentally altering educational needs. As communication scholar David Berlo foresaw, modern education must shift away from the mere accumulation of data toward the effective handling and evaluation of data.

The evolution of online reference platforms illustrates this shift. When open-editing encyclopedias like Wikipedia emerged, academic institutions debated whether to restrict their use, pointing out that user-edited platforms allow both genuine expertise and unverified opinion to coexist . Incidents involving political staffers or corporate representatives secretly editing Wikipedia articles highlighted the potential for subtle information manipulation. Today, the rise of generative artificial intelligence presents an even more complex challenge. Platforms capable of generating realistic synthetic text, voice clones, deepfake videos, and hyper-realistic AI imagery require consumers to adopt advanced verification habits, such as cross-referencing claims across independent outlets and examining provenance before sharing digital content.

Individual Accountability and Evaluating Media Messages

Ultimately, media literacy emphasizes that mass media messages are deliberate constructs created for specific purposes, placing the responsibility on the individual to interpret them critically. Personal background, education, and life experience influence how each viewer interprets a media message, meaning no single interpretation is absolute. However, developing media literacy skills allows individuals to

navigate complex media environments as informed democratic participants, smart shoppers, and thoughtful consumers. When analyzing media messages, consider the following:

1. **Author:** Consider who presents the information. Does it come from a news organization, a corporation, or an individual? What links or references do they have to the information they have provided?
2. **Format:** Television and print media frequently utilize images to capture people's attention. Do the visuals only present one side of the story? Does the footage contain overly graphic imagery designed to provoke a specific reaction? Which celebrities or professionals



Source: Author IFLA By IFLA (http://www.ifla.org/publications/node/11174) [CC BY 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0)], via Wikimedia Commons, Infographic How to spot fake news published by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions , CC BY-SA 4.0.

endorse this message?

3. **Audience:** Consider the viewpoints of others. Would someone of the opposite gender feel the same way about this message? How might someone of a different race or nationality feel? How might an older or younger person interpret the information differently? Was this message made to appeal to a specific audience?
4. **Content:** Even content providers who attempt to present information objectively can inadvertently exhibit unconscious bias. Analyze who presents the message. Do they have any clear political affiliations? Has this person received compensation for their speaking engagements?
5. **Purpose:** All mass media messages have a reason for transmission. What reaction does the message try to provoke? Does the speaker attempt to influence the audience to feel or act in a certain way? Please review the information carefully and look for any potential hidden agendas.

By considering these viewpoints, people can ensure that they stay informed about the origin of their information and why they received it, which are crucial steps in enhancing any media literacy education.

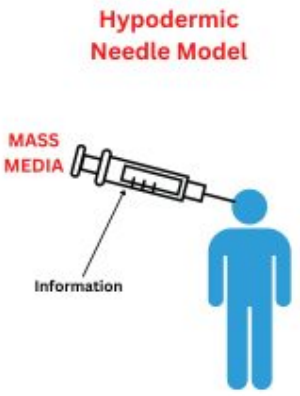
CHAPTER 2: MEDIA EFFECTS



Source: Moody College of Communication from Austin, USA, McGovern Lecture 2016 (24879845223), CC BY-SA 2.0.

- 2.1 The Evolution of Mass Communication Studies
- 2.2 Mass Media and Its Messages
- 2.3 Media Effects Theories
- 2.4 Methods of Researching Media Effects
- 2.5 Media Studies Controversies

2.1 THE EVOLUTION OF MASS COMMUNICATION STUDIES



Have you ever heard someone claim that a violent television program/video game will make you violent? People who make such claims base their reasoning on the Magic Bullet Theory, also known as the Hypodermic Needle Theory, which has been discredited for overlooking the impact of socialization. **Source**: Iti Dewangan, Model of Hypodermic Needle Theory, CC BY-SA 4.0

The systematic study of mass communication evolved over centuries, transforming from foundational philosophical debates about rhetoric into a rigorous academic discipline. Ancient Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle were among the first to analyze the power of persuasive speech and its capacity to influence public opinion. However, formal sociological inquiry into mass media's societal impact did not take off until the late 19th century. French sociologist Gabriel Tarde pioneered this shift by examining how daily newspapers created a shared public consciousness

, demonstrating how media-driven imitation and opinion formation shaped modern social life.

During the 1920s and 1930s, the rapid adoption of radio, film, and national print campaigns—combined with intense wartime propaganda—fueled widespread anxiety about media power. Later scholars described these early fears through the concept of the Magic Bullet Theory (also called the Hypodermic Needle Theory). This model assumed that mass media messages acted like direct injections, exerting powerful, immediate, and uniform effects on passive, defenseless audiences.

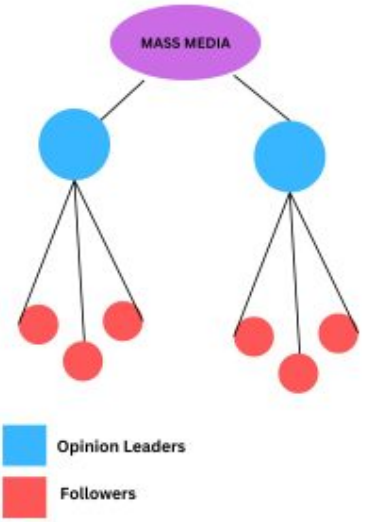
While popular culture often treated audiences as helpless targets, early empirical researchers quickly realized this model was overly simplistic. It failed to account for individual psychology, prior beliefs, social relationships, and the diverse ways people interpret the same message.

Throughout the mid-20th century, mass communication studies formalized into an established academic discipline. Scholars developed structured frameworks to measure how media actually operates within society:

Wilbur Schramm, widely considered the founder of modern communication studies, established the first university communication research institutes and academic degree programs. His seminal 1954 textbook, *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication*, created a standardized framework for analyzing how messages are encoded, transmitted, received, and decoded.

Harold Lasswell adapted Emile Durkheim's sociological framework of functional analysis to create one of the most famous models in media history. Lasswell distilled communication analysis into five fundamental questions: "Who says what, in which channel, to whom, with what effect?" His model established clear sub-fields of research, separating the study of communicators, message content, media channels, target audiences, and measurable outcomes.

Paul Lazarsfeld revolutionized the field by introducing empirical, quantitative research methods. In his landmark 1940 presidential election study, published as *The People's Choice*, Lazarsfeld discovered that mass media rarely converted voters directly. Instead, media messages primarily influenced local "opinion leaders"—trusted community members who followed the news closely—who then interpreted and re-transmitted information to their personal networks. This discovery, known as the Two-Step Flow Theory, demonstrated that social relationships mediate media influence. This dynamic remains central today in how social media influencers and online communities filter information for their followers.



An illustration of the Two-Step Flow Theory, which postulates that the media does not directly influence its audience members; rather, it influences opinion leaders who pass along its messages. **Source**: Iti Dewangan, Two-Step Flow Model, CC BY-SA 4.0

Kurt Lewin, a pioneer in social psychology, introduced the concept of gatekeeping through his research on group

decision-making and information flow. Lewin illustrated how information must pass through specific checkpoints or "gates" before reaching the public. While early gatekeeping research focused on wire-service editors selecting newspaper stories, the concept has proven essential for understanding how human newsroom decisions have transitioned into algorithmic curation on modern digital platforms.

These foundational scholars shifted communication study from speculative panic over media influence to empirical analysis of complex social processes. By combining empirical research, sociological theory, and psychological insights, they laid the groundwork for contemporary media effects research.

2.2 MASS MEDIA AND ITS MESSAGES

When media consumers think of media messages, they often think of explicit examples: a televised public service announcement warning about school shootings or a political advertisement urging a vote for a candidate. However, media messages range from overt, direct statements to subtle, abstract expressions of underlying cultural values.

Disagreements over content are central to media studies. Allegations of political bias, agenda-driven reporting, and commercial persuasion are constant fixtures of public discourse. As media saturation increases, these debates intensify. Modern persuasive techniques stem from a long history of media used for both social mobilization and corporate persuasion.

Propaganda and Persuasion

Encyclopædia Britannica defines propaganda as the "manipulation of information to influence public opinion." In *The Creation of the Media*, historian Paul Starr notes that the United States favored an independent, commercial press

over state-controlled media, placing the press in an inherently political position and giving private entities wide latitude to use tools of persuasion.



Benjamin Franklin employed a powerful image of a severed snake to emphasize the importance of the colonies uniting during the American Revolution. **Source**: Benjamin Franklin, Franklin join or die2, public domain.

Propaganda itself is not inherently good or bad; its ethical status depends on the intent and methods behind its deployment. Persuasive campaigns have driven historical movements ranging from the American Revolution to 20th-century public health initiatives. During the American Revolution, pamphlets and illustrations—such as Benjamin Franklin's famous "Join, or Die" snake woodcut—served as early American print propaganda designed to build colonial unity.

By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, mass-circulation newspapers demonstrated unprecedented persuasive power. During the lead-up to the Spanish-American War in 1898, sensationalist yellow journalism exaggerated Spanish atrocities . It blamed Spain for the sinking of the *USS Maine* in Havana, fueling public pressure for war.

The modern negative connotation of propaganda took root during World War I, when governments established formal agencies to mobilize civilian populations and soldiers. As explored in Chapter 12, wartime propaganda campaigns validated persuasive communication techniques for corporate leaders, fueling the rapid expansion of the modern advertising industry in the 1920s. Today, governments, corporations, political campaigns, nonprofit organizations, and advocacy groups utilize integrated multimedia strategies to influence public thought and behavior.

Media and Behavior

Beyond intentional persuasion, mass media conveys messages that shape audience behavior, particularly among youth. Researchers frequently examine how media consumption intersects with violence, sexual behavior, and social norms.

Violence and the Media

Following high-profile tragedies like the 1999 Columbine High School shooting, public debate focused intensely on whether violent video games (such as *Doom*) or action movies (such as *The Matrix*) caused youth violence. In the decades since, extensive empirical research has shown that the relationship between media violence and real-world behavior is highly complex.



The 1999 Columbine High School shooting led to greater debate and criticism over violent video games. **Source**: Mentat Kilbernes – Columbine Massacre RPG – CC BY-NC 2.0.

Some meta-analyses suggest a correlation between heavy exposure to violent media and increased aggressive thoughts or short-term desensitization, particularly in children. Longitudinal studies have demonstrated that

exposure to violent media in early childhood can predict aggressive and antisocial behavior later in life. Some researchers have used neuroimaging to reveal that exposure to violent media can activate regions in the brain associated with aggression and desensitize individuals to violence.

However, other scholars, including psychologist Christopher Ferguson, argue that media violence has a negligible impact on societal violent crime when controlling for family environment, mental health, and genetics. Studies by neuroscientist Simone Kühn similarly found no evidence that long-term video game playing alters brain structure or causes violent behavioral shifts. Major professional organizations, including the American Psychological Association, emphasize that media consumption alone is rarely a direct cause of criminal violence , though it remains a powerful emotional medium.

Sex and the Media

Mass media serves as a major source of sexual socialization for adolescents. Researchers describe the media as a "super peer "—an influential authority that provides information about relationships, body image, and sexual norms when parents or schools remain hesitant to discuss them. Studies from the University of North Carolina found that heavy exposure to sexually explicit content in popular culture

predicts earlier sexual initiation among teenagers. As media consumption shifts toward short-form video platforms like TikTok and Instagram, questions surrounding digital media's impact on adolescent self-image and relationship expectations continue to evolve.

Cultural Messages and the Media



Tonto from *The Lone Ranger* reinforced cultural stereotypes about Native Americans. **Source**: ABC Television, Lone Ranger and Tonto with Silver 1960, public domain.

Media messages frequently reinforce or challenge core societal values, often mediated through celebrity culture. Mid-20th-century icons like John Wayne and Marilyn Monroe embodied rigid cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity, while figures like Bob Dylan represented countercultural rebellion. Modern public figures, athletes, and digital creators similarly project curated values of achievement, identity, or political activism.

Historically, media portrayals have also

reinforced harmful social stereotypes. Early-to-mid-20th-century television, print ads, and films frequently depicted women in submissive domestic roles and marginalized racial minorities through tropes—such as commercial mascots like Aunt Jemima or caricatured film roles like Mickey Rooney's portrayal of Mr. Yunioshi in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. While contemporary media offers broader representation, media analysis remains essential for identifying how visual culture reflects and shapes societal biases.

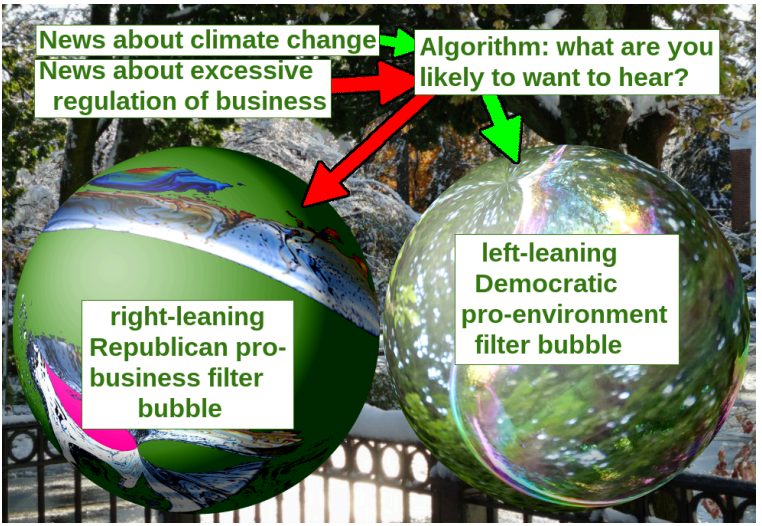
New Media, Information, and Society

The transition to digital media has transformed how information is produced, distributed, and processed. In *A Better Pencil*, scholar Dennis Baron notes:

> For Plato, only speech, not writing, can produce the kind of back-and-forth—the dialogue—that's needed to get at the truth...the text, orphaned by its author once it's on the page, cannot defend itself against misreading.... These are strong arguments, but even in Plato's day, they had been rendered moot by the success of the written word. Although the literacy rate in classical Greece was well below 10 percent, writing had become a vital component of the culture. People had learned to trust and use certain kinds of writing—legal texts, public inscriptions, business

> documents, personal letters, and even literature—and as they did so, they realized that writing, on closer examination, turned out to be neither more nor less reliable or ambiguous than the spoken word. It was just as real.

Modern digital media represents a similar structural shift.



Source: Tomwsulcer, Filter bubble illustration, CC0 1.0.

Information Processing and Filter Bubbles

Traditional media habits favored linear, contextual consumption—reading a newspaper cover-to-cover or watching an entire nightly news broadcast. Digital media encourages non-linear, fragmented consumption, where users

consume individual snippets of information detached from their original context.

This abundance of choice allows audiences to curate their news environments. Analysts use the term **filter bubbles** to describe how online algorithms and personalized feeds isolate users within information silos that reinforce existing beliefs while excluding opposing viewpoints. This fragmentation presents a major challenge to civic discourse, as public debate relies on a shared baseline of agreed-upon facts.

Literacy and Digital News Velocity

The growth of the Internet as the primary source of information exposes the public to more text, thereby improving overall literacy. Indeed, written text provides essential benefits to the Internet experience: Web content remains overwhelmingly text-based, and successful participation in Internet culture through the usage of its tools like blogs, social media platforms, forums, or personal websites requires a degree of textual literacy that exceeds the necessary skills to engage with television, music, or movies.

Critics of Internet literacy, however, describe the majority of forum and blog posts as subliterate, arguing that the Internet has replaced the printed newspapers and books that raised literacy standards. A nuanced examination of the Internet's impact on how a culture processes and perceives information

suggests that literacy will not simply increase or decrease but will change qualitatively. Perhaps the standards for literacy will shift to emphasize simplicity and directness rather than elaborate language.

Literacy and Digital News Velocity

Digital media demands higher textual and visual literacy than passive media like traditional television. However, the



Kristi Noem. **Source**: Gage Skidmore from Surprise, AZ, United States of America, Kristi Noem (53807779437) (cropped), CC BY-SA 2.0.

nature of literacy is changing: online environments reward conciseness, visual clarity, and rapid evaluation of source

credibility. The primary literacy challenge today is not basic reading ability, but critical evaluation—distinguishing verified reporting from clickbait, satire, sponsored content, or synthetic AI-generated media.

The speed of digital news also creates intense pressure on media outlets to publish rapidly. In April 2024, when South Dakota Governor Kristi Noem published a book containing a controversial anecdote about shooting her family dog, the story spread globally across social media within hours, generating hundreds of thousands of search queries and dominating late-night commentary. Internet users clamored for information about the scandal; Noem's name became one of only two politically themed searches that exceeded 200,000 queries on Google in April of that year. Digital platforms accelerate news cycles, turning local stories into national cultural debates almost instantaneously.

The Epic Exception: When YouTube Goes Long and Wins Big

Researchers have increasingly suggested a link between humans' declining attention spans and the ubiquity of social media use. This hypothesis posits that the constant stream of bite-sized content on platforms like TikTok and YouTube has conditioned users to prefer quick, digestible information. These platforms, in turn, have



Harry Brewis, aka hbomberguy. **Source**: Novara Media, Hbomberguy 2019 1, CC BY 3.0.

smartly capitalized on this shift by incentivizing creators to produce short-form videos, which, due to their rapid consumption and high volume, can often generate more advertising revenue than their longer-form counterparts. This feedback loop creates an environment where brevity is often rewarded, seemingly reinforcing the notion that modern audiences cannot sit still for extended periods.

Despite this pervasive trend towards conciseness, a fascinating counter-narrative has emerged within the digital landscape. Some intrepid content creators have defied expectations, delivering videos with run times that shockingly exceed the length of cinematic epics like *Avengers: Endgame*. Yet, through compelling storytelling and deep dives, these creators continue to draw millions of viewers and earn significant media recognition for their thorough, enjoyable work. This phenomenon challenges the prevailing wisdom about attention spans, suggesting that quality and depth can still captivate audiences, even in an era of rapid-fire content.

YouTube content creators Harry Brewis (hbomberguy) and Jenny Nicholson serve as two notable examples that have unequivocally proved quantity can indeed equal quality in the digital realm. Brewis's nearly four-hour magnum opus, "Plagiarism and You(Tube)," is a

meticulously researched and engaging exposé that has soared past 42 million views. Its impact was so significant that it even caught the attention of mainstream outlets like NBC News, a rare feat for a video of such length. Similarly, Jenny Nicholson captivated audiences with "
The Spectacular Failure of the Star Wars Hotel," a sprawling recollection of a visit to the
now-defunct Disney attraction. The video spans more than four hours and garnered over 16 million views on YouTube, earning
high praise from publications such as the *New York Times*
for its detailed narrative and sharp wit. These creators excel not by sacrificing depth for brevity, but by offering a rich, immersive experience that rewards viewer investment. These successes prove that while digital media encourages quick skimming, audience demand for deep, structured narrative analysis remains strong.

Convergence Culture and Media Participation

In

Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide, Henry Jenkins offers a useful definition of convergence as it applies to new media:

> By convergence, I mean the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want.

Modern media is inherently participatory. Audiences no longer consume messages; they react, remix, and redistribute them across networks. Programs like *American Idol* pioneered this by combining broadcast television with live viewer voting and online fan commentary. Today, **user-generated content**, reaction videos, and interactive live streams blur the line between media producers and media consumers.

WHEN BERT MET BIN LADEN: A VIRAL TALE OF MEDIA MIGRATION



Jughead – evil Bert – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

In 2001, high school student Dino Ignacio created a satirical photo collage placing the *Sesame Street* character Bert alongside terrorist Osama bin Laden for his website, "Bert Is Evil."

A publisher in Bangladesh downloaded the image from the web and printed it on anti-American protest posters, unaware of the character's origin.

CNN subsequently broadcast footage of the protests, bringing the image back into mainstream news and driving massive web traffic back to Ignacio's original site. This classic case of content migration illustrates how digital

media crosses geographic, cultural, and institutional boundaries, turning obscure user-generated content into global news events. While most media content will not repeat this exact cycle, the possibility of such a phenomenon illustrates the new directions media can go.

2.3 MEDIA EFFECTS THEORIES

Early media research focused heavily on persuasion and political propaganda. Over time, scholars turned to behavioral and social sciences to understand the deeper mechanisms of media influence. Modern media effects research recognizes that media messages do not impact everyone identically; instead, effects range from short-term information learning to long-term cognitive, emotional, and behavioral shifts.

Historically, communication theories evolved across three broad eras: direct effects models (assuming strong, immediate impacts), limited effects models (emphasizing audience agency and social mediation), and cumulative or cognitive effects models (focusing on how long-term exposure shapes perception, framing, and public priority).

The Direct Effects Model and Its Limits



Actor Orson Welles explains the radio broadcast of H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* to reporters after it caused widespread panic. **Source**: Acme News Photos, Orson Welles' War of the Worlds (1938), public domain.

The **direct effects model**—often associated with early 20th-century fears of mass propaganda—assumed that audiences passively accepted media messages and reacted in uniform, predictable ways. The classic example cited by early scholars was the 1938 radio broadcast of Orson Welles's *War of the Worlds*. The fictional news report caused panic among a minority of listeners who believed an actual alien invasion was underway.

However, empirical research quickly challenged this simplistic model. Paul Lazarsfeld's landmark 1940 *People's Choice Study* tracked voter behavior during the presidential campaign and revealed that political coverage rarely converted voters directly. Voters who consumed the most media had already made up their minds, while undecided voters relied heavily on trusted community members (

opinion leaders) to interpret political news. This discovery discredited the direct effects model and established the limited effects paradigm, proving that interpersonal relationships, personal values, and selective perception mediate media influence.

Marshall McLuhan's Influence on Media Studies

In the 1960s, Canadian literary scholar Marshall McLuhan shifted media analysis from message content to the technology itself. In landmark books like *The Gutenberg Galaxy* and *Understanding Media*, McLuhan argued that media technologies act as extensions of human senses, fundamentally changing how societies think and organize.

McLuhan coined the famous phrase "the medium is the message" to explain that the form of a medium embeds itself in any message it transmits, creating a symbiotic relationship that influences how the message is perceived. For example, reading a printed book encourages linear, individual, and reflective thinking, whereas watching live television or scrolling digital feeds encourages rapid, visual, and simultaneous processing.

His bold statements about media garnered McLuhan considerable attention, as both his supporters and critics responded to his utopian views on how media could transform 20th-century life. McLuhan spoke of a media-inspired "global village," predicting that electronic media would collapse space

and time, interconnecting the world's population into a single, continuous social system. He did this at a time when Cold War paranoia reigned, and the Vietnam War sparked heated debates. Although 1960s-era utopians received these statements positively, social realists found them cause for scorn. Despite—or perhaps because of—these controversies, McLuhan became a pop culture icon, frequently mentioned on the television sketch-comedy program *Laugh-In* and appearing as himself in Woody Allen's film *Annie Hall*.

While criticized by some contemporaries for lacking rigid empirical methodology, McLuhan's insights laid the groundwork for modern media ecology and anticipated the interconnected nature of the digital internet.

Core Media Effects Theories

Media scholars rely on several established theoretical frameworks to evaluate how media shapes public thought, social structures, and individual behavior.



Through a variety of anti-smoking campaigns, the health risks of smoking became a public agenda. **Source**: Quinn Dombrowski – Weapons of mass destruction – CC BY-SA 2.0.

Agenda-Setting Theory

Developed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in their 1972 study of Chapel Hill voters, **agenda-setting theory** posits that mass media may not tell people *what to think*, but it tells them *what to think about*. By choosing which stories to feature prominently and which to ignore, media outlets determine the salience (relative importance) of public issues.

When the news media heavily covers an issue—such as public health crises, economic inflation, or natural disasters—public concern and political debate align around that topic.

Conversely, uncovered issues remain marginalized in the public consciousness. In the modern digital era, traditional journalistic agenda-setting operates alongside algorithmic agenda-setting, where personal recommendation engines and viral engagement metrics shape the priorities of online subcultures. Agenda-setting research traces public policy from its roots as an agenda item through its promotion in the mass media to its final form as a law or policy.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

Unlike theories that view audiences as passive recipients, the **uses and gratifications theory** approaches audiences as active consumers who intentionally select specific media to fulfill distinct psychological or social needs.

Scholars categorize these motivations into primary drivers: information seeking, personal identity construction, social integration, and entertainment/escape. For instance, a student might watch a reality show like *Bridgerton* while simultaneously participating in real-time commentary on social media platform X. This dual consumption serves two distinct gratifications: entertainment and social connection. Understanding user motivations helps explain why specific media platforms gain rapid popularity and how digital habits satisfy distinct emotional needs.



What perceptions would you have about a person driving this car? How much money do they make? How much power do they have? Advertisers strive to imbue certain products with a shared cultural meaning, making them more desirable. This example demonstrates symbolic interactionism. **Source**: Image by VariousPhotography at Pixabay.

Symbolic Interactionism



To demonstrate the power of symbolic interactionism, consider Colin Kaepernick's decision to kneel during the playing of the Star-Spangled Banner in a 2016 match. He wished to protest racial injustice and police brutality against Black Americans. He said he did not wish to "show pride in a flag" that oppressed people of color. The move received backlash from some groups, particularly military veterans, who felt that it disrespected the American flag. In this case, a person's reaction to Kaepernick's decision would likely depend on that person's feelings about the flag. **Source**: Mike Morbeck,

Originating in sociology through George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer, **symbolic interactionism** suggests that individuals develop a sense of self and construct social reality through shared symbols. Mass media play a dominant role in creating, circulating, and updating these

.

Advertisers frequently leverage symbolic interactionism by imbuing commercial products with cultural meanings. Owning a luxury automobile or using an Apple device is designed to symbolize status, innovation, or lifestyle choices, sending deliberate messages about the consumer's identity. Noncommercial symbols—such as national flags, religious icons, or

Colin Kaepernick – San Francisco vs Green Bay 2012, CC BY-SA 2.0.

celebrity images—similarly derive widespread cultural meaning through media portrayal.

Spiral of Silence

Formulated by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, the **spiral of silence theory** explains how media fosters public consensus by tapping into the human fear of social isolation. The theory posits that individuals monitor their social environment (often via media) to gauge prevailing public opinion. For example, before and during World War II, many Germans opposed Adolf Hitler and his policies; however, they kept their opposition silent out of fear of isolation and stigma.

When individuals perceive that their personal views represent a minority position, they tend to remain silent to avoid judgment or ostracization. As minority voices self-silence, the majority perspective appears overwhelming, creating a self-reinforcing loop where the perceived popular view dominates public space. In digital environments, public downvoting, comment moderation, dogpiling, and viral backlash can accelerate this spiral, silencing dissenting viewpoints within online networks.



Could you identify the genre of this program just by observing the set? Media Logic Theory suggests that the visual cues will help you determine the genre without prior knowledge of the program. **Source**: Chad Mosher, Double Dare Live in Cleveland, cropped, CC BY-SA 4.0.

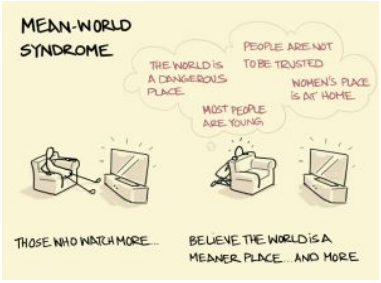
Media Logic

Pioneered by David Altheide and Robert Snow, **media logic theory** suggests that standard media formats, styles, and production routines serve as a primary lens through which society interprets reality. Over time, public institutions adapt their operations to conform to the dominant media format of the era.

For example, political campaigns altered their strategies to match television's visual demands, prioritizing sound bites, physical appearance, and staged press conferences. In contemporary culture, political discourse, journalism, and

public events are increasingly shaped by digital media logic—prioritizing brevity, emotional intensity, outrage, and shareability to match the structural demands of feed-based social networks.

Cultivation Analysis



Source: Jono Hey. Mean-World Syndrome. CC BY-NC 4.0.

Developed by George Gerbner in the 1970s, **cultivation analysis** examines the long-term, cumulative effects of media consumption on how people view the world. Gerbner discovered that heavy television viewers were significantly more likely than light viewers to perceive the world as dangerous, untrustworthy, and violent—a phenomenon he termed the Mean World Syndrome.

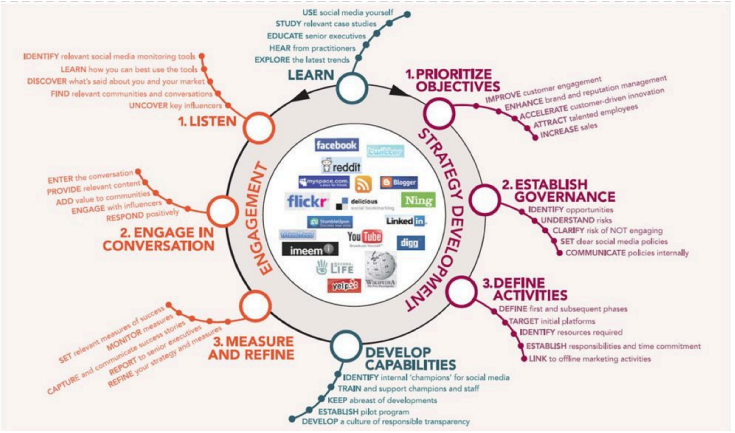
While crime rates may fall statistically, heavy consumers of crime news, dramatic television, or true-crime streaming series consistently overestimate their personal risk of falling victim to crime. Modern cultivation research applies this framework to digital environments, analyzing how continuous doomscrolling and algorithmic amplification of

extreme content shape users' perceptions of social stability and safety.

Functional Analysis

Rooted in classic sociology, **functional analysis** evaluates how mass media contributes to the stability, continuity, and integration of society. Harold Lasswell identified three primary functions of communication: surveillance (monitoring the environment for news and threats), correlation (interpreting events and providing context), and transmission of culture (passing societal norms and values across generations). Charles Wright later added a fourth core function: entertainment.

Functional analysis evaluates both manifest functions (intended impacts, such as news outlets providing severe weather alerts) and latent functions (unintended impacts, such as media coverage reinforcing existing socio-economic hierarchies). It also identifies dysfunctions, where media coverage causes negative social outcomes, such as spreading misinformation, inducing panic, or heightening societal polarization.



Social Learning Strategy Framework. **Source**: Ross Dawson . Social Learning Strategy Framework. CC BY 2.0.

Social Learning Theory

Albert Bandura's **social learning theory** posits that people learn behaviors by observing others, particularly through media. This theory challenges the notion that learning occurs only through direct experience. In mass communication, social learning theory suggests that media portrayals of behaviors, especially those conducted by attractive or high-status models, can influence viewers to adopt those behaviors.

Key concepts include:

- **Observational learning:** A person can learn something by watching others engage in a particular action.

- **Modeling:** The person then imitates the observed behaviors.
- **Vicarious reinforcement:** The person observes the consequences of imitating this behavior and adjusts their behavior accordingly.

Social learning theory advocates often research the impact of violent media content. Studies have shown that exposure to violent media can increase aggressive thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, especially in children. However, the theory also applies to positive behaviors. Media can promote prosocial behaviors, such as cooperation and empathy, by showcasing positive role models. Social learning theory emphasizes the significant impact of media on behavior, underscoring the importance of producing responsible media content.

Frame Theory

Frame theory suggests that how the media presents information (or how they "frame" it) influences how audiences understand and interpret it. Frames indicate mental structures that shape perceptions of reality by selectively highlighting certain aspects of a situation, making them more salient. In mass communication, media use frames to shape public opinion and discourse.

The media can create frames through various techniques, including:

- **Selection:** Choosing which information to include or exclude.
- **Emphasis:** Highlighting certain aspects of a story.
- **Presentation:** Using specific language, images, and other cues.

For example, a media outlet can frame a news story about immigration as a national security threat (emphasizing potential risks) or as a humanitarian crisis (emphasizing the plight of refugees). These different frames can lead to vastly different public perceptions and policy preferences.

Think about the difference between the following phrases:

- Tax cuts **or** tax relief
- Drilling for oil **or** exploring for energy
- Gay marriage **or** same-sex marriage
- Undocumented workers **or** illegal immigrants
- Terrorists **or** rebels

Shanto Iyengar demonstrated the power of a single word to influence the audience's perception of an issue by citing a scenario created by Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky about the outbreak of a disease expected to kill 600 people and two programs to combat it. One group received information that adopting Program A would save 200 people. In contrast, Program B offered a one-third probability of saving 600 people

and a two-thirds probability of saving no one. They told a second group that 400 people would die with the adoption of Program A, and that Program B promised a one-third probability that no one would die and a two-thirds probability that all 600 people would die.

Even though both groups received the same information, the group that heard the scenario framed with the word "save" voted for Program A 72% of the time, whereas the group that listened to the scenario framed with the word "dies" chose Program B 78% of the time. Frame theory emphasizes the active role of media in shaping public discourse and understanding. It highlights the importance of critically analyzing media messages to understand how they are being framed and what potential biases they might contain.

2.4 METHODS OF RESEARCHING MEDIA EFFECTS

Media theories provide the necessary conceptual framework for posing questions about media influence, ranging from how elementary school children process interactive advertisements to how social media algorithms impact political polarization. Once researchers establish a theoretical lens, they must choose specific empirical or qualitative research methods to conduct their study. Contemporary media research methods span a wide continuum, from analyzing historical archives to conducting controlled laboratory experiments and digital ethnographies.

Research Techniques

How do researchers test their ideas? They often employ the

research technique that best suits their purpose. Research techniques can be categorized into two main camps. **Quantitative** researchers may conduct experiments, content analyses, surveys, or statistical analyses to prove or disprove their hypotheses. Given their reliance on the scientific method, theories derived from quantitative research tend to command the highest regard for their factual accuracy within the academic community.

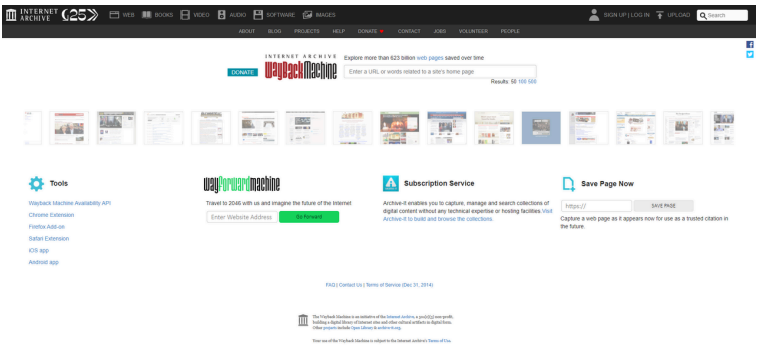
Researchers may also explore a different facet of truth using a **qualitative** research method. These methods rarely make predictions about human behavior; instead, they use description to help audiences gain a clearer understanding of the subject matter. This more general approach relies on in-depth interviews, focus groups, or immersion in a particular culture to make observations about it (an approach referred to as ethnography). Both methods provide tremendous insight into how the human psyche and the world operate.

Content Analysis

Content analysis involves systematically analyzing the content of various media forms to identify patterns, themes, or structural elements. Through content analysis, researchers seek to understand both the intent of content creators and

the potential exposure patterns of audiences. Because content analysis evaluates existing media artifacts rather than live human subjects, it does not typically require complex experimental setups or human subjects institutional reviews. This makes it an accessible, cost-effective research method.

Content analysis requires researchers to establish clear operational parameters before beginning their evaluation. Researchers studying media violence, for example, must specify which platforms and genres to evaluate, such as streaming television, video games, or short-form video. They must also define specific variables and coding schemes, classifying violent acts by the relationship between characters (strangers, family members, or authority figures), the nature of the act (slapstick, graphic, or self-inflicted), or the contextual justification (revenge, self-defense, or unprovoked aggression).



This OER textbook would not exist in this form without the Internet Archive and the Wayback Machine archives.
Source: Zio27. Wayback Machine screenshot.
Apache License, 2.0.

Archival Research

Any study assessing historical media trends or long-term cultural shifts relies on archival research, which involves reviewing historical documents, past broadcasts, and printed press records. While local libraries and university archives historically provided access to physical newspapers and microfilm, modern archival research relies heavily on digitized databases such as Chronicling America from the Library of Congress, ProQuest, and commercial news archives.

Digital archives have fundamentally transformed the study of online communication. Organizations like the Internet Archive operate the Wayback Machine, an indispensable tool for capturing, indexing, and preserving altered or deleted web pages. Digital archival research enables scholars to conduct retrospective content analyses on political campaigns, website redesigns, and early internet subcultures that would otherwise be permanently lost to public record.

Surveys

Survey questionnaires collect quantitative and qualitative data across diverse populations regarding media habits, attitudes, and behaviors. Media surveys generally fall into two primary categories. A **descriptive survey** aims to document the

current state of affairs, public opinion, or consumer preferences, such as Nielsen ratings establishing television and streaming audience sizes. An **analytical survey** seeks to understand why a particular situation exists by posing hypotheses about media consumption and testing how those habits correlate with personal values, political orientations, or lifestyle choices.

Surveys utilize both open-ended and closed-ended questions depending on the desired outcome. **Open-ended questions** require participants to generate responses in their own words, yielding rich qualitative data that can reveal unanticipated insights. **Closed-ended questions** force participants to select from a predetermined list of options, such as multiple-choice items or Likert rating scales. While open-ended questions provide greater depth, closed-ended questions yield standardized quantitative data that is significantly easier to tabulate, analyze, and compare across large sample sizes.

Social Role Analysis

As part of childhood socialization, parents and educators teach young people about social roles and behavioral expectations. A child learns the specific expectations of being a student, which distinctively shapes how they navigate the school environment compared to home. Adults continuously balance multiple

roles as they move between responsibilities as employees, parents, friends, and active citizens.

Social role analysis in mass media examines how media portrayals depict individuals and represent specific social categories. Researchers evaluate how media representations reinforce or challenge cultural expectations surrounding gender, race, age, socioeconomic status, and occupational roles. For example, comparing how adolescents are portrayed in scripted sitcoms versus evening news coverage can reveal broader societal assumptions about youth culture. Analyzing these media roles enables scholars to gain a deeper understanding of the subtle cultural messages conveyed by mass communication.



Depth interviews provide valuable insights to researchers.
Source: Sgt. 1st Class Darrin McDufford, 2015 Combined TEC Best Warrior Competition 150429-A-SN704-034, cropped, CC0 1.0.

Depth Interviews

The **depth interview** is a qualitative research tool adapted from anthropology and sociology that allows media scholars to explore the nuanced experiences, interpretations, and motivations of media creators and consumers. Depth interviews take traditional surveys a step further by using semi-structured, open-ended questioning to probe deeply into individual perspectives.

Scholars frequently employ depth interviews to study complex media phenomena that quantitative surveys cannot fully capture. Research projects have used depth interviews to follow investigative journalists to understand their personal motivations for covering specific stories, or to explore the complex psychological and emotional gratifications readers derive from romance novels. Depth interviews provide essential qualitative context regarding how specific groups integrate media into their daily lives.

Rhetorical Analysis

Rhetorical analysis involves examining the stylistic, structural, and persuasive elements of media messages to uncover how they construct meaning and influence public thought. Media styles encompass visual composition, narrative structure, tonal presentation, framing language, and strategic reasoning.

Rhetorical analysis reveals implicit messages, cultural values, and persuasive techniques that are not apparent through a superficial reading of the content.

Studies utilizing rhetorical analysis frequently focus on persuasive formats like commercial advertising, public relations materials, and political communication. By analyzing specific stylistic devices and visual metaphors, researchers gain a clearer understanding of how media messages subtly guide audience interpretation
and shape public discourse.

Focus Groups



Focus groups are an effective way to obtain a group opinion on the media.
Source: NSaad (WMF), Christ University focus group 6
, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Like depth interviews, **focus groups** enable researchers to gain a deeper qualitative understanding of public responses to media. Unlike individual interviews, however, a focus group brings together a small group of participants—typically six to ten people—to establish a collaborative dynamic that

more closely mirrors real-world media consumption and conversation.

In media studies, researchers use focus groups to evaluate audience reactions to pilot television episodes, media campaigns, political debates, or controversial news coverage. Observing how participants discuss, debate, and build upon one another's opinions provides valuable insights into why audiences choose specific media and how group norms influence individual interpretation. Modern focus group research frequently incorporates virtual focus panels, allowing researchers to gather geographically diverse audiences.

Experiments

To establish direct cause-and-effect relationships between media exposure and audience behavior, researchers conduct controlled laboratory experiments. An experimental design exposes a test group to a specific media stimulus and measures its immediate effects, then compares those results against a control group where the key stimulus was modified or completely removed.

For example, researchers might show one group of children a cartoon containing three specific incidents of physical violence, while showing a control group of similar children the same cartoon edited to remove the violent acts. By asking

both groups identical post-exposure questions or observing their play behavior, researchers can isolate the variable of media violence and evaluate its direct impact on viewer attitudes and actions.

Participant Observation

Participant observation is an ethnographic research method where researchers immerse themselves directly in the social setting or community under study. Although traditionally associated with anthropology—where researchers live within a community to understand its culture from the inside—media scholars frequently employ participant observation to study how media functions in shared social environments.

Because media consumption is often a collective experience, participant observation offers unique insights into real-world behavior. Families gather around television screens, friends host sports viewing parties, and children watch media together in peer groups. A researcher might join a dedicated fan group throughout an entire season to observe how media consumption shapes group identity and social bonding.

Researchers also use participant observation to study online communities, competitive gaming spaces, and virtual worlds. In online environments like multiplayer role-playing games, social media subreddits, or Discord communities, users build intricate social structures and unwritten behavioral rules

without sharing physical space. In the book *Digital Culture, Play, and Identity: A World of Warcraft Reader*, a group of researchers discussed the results of their participant observation studies. The studies reveal the surprising depth of culture and unwritten rules within the *World of Warcraft* universe, providing essential insights into why players pursue the game with such dedication. By actively participating in these digital spaces, researchers uncover the rich cultural norms and shared values that drive dedicated user engagement.

2.5 MEDIA STUDIES CONTROVERSIES

Essential debates over media theory have questioned the foundations and, hence, the results of media research. Within academia, theories and research can represent an individual's life's work and livelihood. As a result, issues of tenure, funding, and academic standing, rather than pure issues of truth and objectivity, can sometimes fuel discussions over theories and research methods.



Video games like *Overwatch 2* get accused of inspiring violent behavior despite the complexity of determining the root cause of violence. **Source**: XboxBR, Overwatch 2 – Bastion gameplay, CC BY 3.0.

Problems With Methodology and Theory

Although advanced methodologies can resolve many of the questions raised about various theories, these theories in public debate generally follow a broader, oversimplified understanding. For example, if a hypothetical study found that convicted violent offenders experienced heightened aggressive feelings after playing the video game *Overwatch 2*, many commentators would take this as definitive proof that video games directly cause violent acts, ignoring underlying variables such as environment, personality traits, or socio-economic background. Often, the methodological nuances, limitations, and specific contexts of academic studies get lost when research enters the public arena.

Active versus Passive Audience

Media studies theorists remain divided over whether audiences act passively or actively when receiving mass media messages. In the most extreme statement of this position, a passive audience accepts the messages the media sends it. An active audience, on the other hand, is fully aware of the complexity of media messages and makes informed decisions about how to process and interact with them. Recent trends in media studies have sought to develop a more nuanced view of media

audiences than the active-versus-passive debate allows. Still, in the public sphere, this opposition often frames many debates about media influence.

Arguments against Agenda-Setting Theory

Many criticisms have been leveled at agenda-setting theory, primarily regarding the challenge of proving direct cause and effect. Critics argue that studies dedicated to the theory have struggled to prove definitively that the media agenda sets the public agenda, rather than the media simply reflecting topics the public already cares about. An agenda-setting study might examine the correlation between the prevalence of a topic in news coverage and subsequent changes in public policy or public opinion polls. While researchers might conclude that news outlets set the public agenda, alternative explanations exist. Policymakers, public relations firms, and advocacy groups actively conduct promotional campaigns to encourage coverage of specific issues. Additionally, organic public concern over an issue often drives news organizations to increase coverage, making it difficult to isolate whether the media is leading public debate or responding to audience demand.

Arguments Against Uses and Gratifications Theory

The core assumptions of uses and gratifications theory have also faced significant criticism. By assuming that individuals actively select media to fulfill specific functional or psychological needs, the theory implicitly justifies and reaffirms the primary role of media in daily life. Furthermore, because it focuses heavily on individual choices and psychological motivations, the theory often fails to critique how media institutions or commercial structures impose themselves on society. While studies employing uses and gratifications theory often utilize sound qualitative and quantitative methodologies, critics argue that the framework's baseline assumption—that audience selection is entirely autonomous and functional—remains largely unquestioned.

Arguments Against the Spiral of Silence Theory

Although many scholars regard the spiral of silence theory as a helpful framework at a broad societal level, it appears weaker when applied to specific groups or individual behaviors. The spiral of silence is most evident among individuals who have a strong fear of social isolation. Those who are less concerned with social approval or isolation are far

less likely to remain silent when public opinion turns against their viewpoint. Nonconformists, activists, and ideologues frequently contradict the theory's core predictions.

Critics also point out that the spiral of silence relies heavily on the specific cultural values and reference groups of individual citizens. A broad trend in public opinion in favor of gun control, for instance, may not silence dissenting views within a local Second Amendment advocacy group or a rural hunting community. Individuals consider themselves part of specific subcultures and social networks. Even if their beliefs differ from dominant national media narratives, individuals do not fear social isolation within their immediate, supportive peer groups.

Arguments Against Cultivation Analysis Theory

Critics have faulted cultivation analysis theory for relying too heavily on broad, standardized definitions of media content, particularly regarding television violence. Detractors argue that because media consumers define and interpret violence differently based on personal background, age, and culture, assuming an entire audience uniformly internalizes acts of violence in the same way is flawed. This critique extends to other applications of cultivation analysis. Because diverse audience segments interpret media messages in varying ways, making sweeping claims about long-term cultural saturation

can lead to overgeneralization. While cultivation analysis remains a foundational concept in media studies, scholars continue to question its unqualified application across modern, fragmented media environments

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Media theories and empirical studies afford a variety of analytical perspectives. However, when proponents of a specific political or social viewpoint selectively apply these studies, they often reduce complex findings to oversimplified claims. This dynamic frequently occurs when politicians, advocacy groups, and commentators invoke media research to validate predetermined political perspectives.

Politics and Media Studies



The controversy surrounding the 2020 U.S. presidential election and claims of widespread voter fraud demonstrates how oversimplified political communication can lead to confusion. Politicians like U.S. House of Representatives member Paul Gosar and media figures cited select studies and media reports to argue that media coverage was biased or manipulated to favor one candidate, their candidate of choice. Despite numerous legal challenges, critics of that year's election have not uncovered any voter fraud that would have swayed the outcome.
Source: Paul Gosar, 2020 Election Fraud Tweet, public domain.

Media theories and studies afford a variety of perspectives. When proponents of a particular view employ those theories and studies, however, they often make oversimplified claims, which can result in contradictions. This

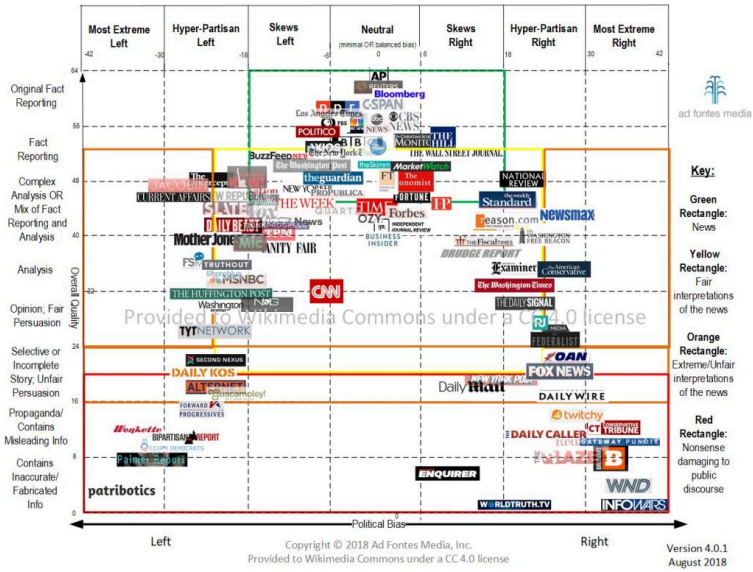
is often the case when politicians and others use media studies to validate a political perspective.

Media Bias

Media coverage can significantly shape public perception of political issues, sparking ongoing debates over media bias. A foundational 1985 study found that journalists were statistically more likely to hold liberal social and political views than the general public, a finding frequently cited to argue that news organizations carry an inherent liberal bias. However, historical analyses of political coverage present a more complicated picture. For example, research evaluating presidential candidate endorsements between 1948 and 1990 revealed that Republican candidates received 78 percent of all newspaper endorsements.

Allegations of media favoritism re-emerged as a major political issue during the 2024 U.S. presidential campaign. An October 2024 survey indicated that over one-third of respondents believed mainstream news coverage was unfairly biased in favor of Kamala Harris, while 15 percent felt coverage favored Donald Trump. While claims of favorable coverage for Harris reinforced long-standing arguments regarding liberal media bias in conservative circles, academic studies suggest that positive news coverage often follows a candidate's rise in public opinion polls rather than creating it. Similar media patterns were observed during Barack Obama's 2008 presidential

campaign, where surge coverage occurred primarily after his polling numbers increased, suggesting news outlets were reacting to shifting public sentiment rather than driving it.



Allegations of media bias occur frequently in political debates. Ad Fontes Media has developed an Interactive Media Bias chart to help people determine the bias of their preferred news sources. **Source**: Vanessa Otero, Media-Bias-Chart 4.0.1 WikiMedia Commons Copy, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Media Decency

Decency and community standards in media continue to evolve in complex ways. James Joyce's novel *Ulysses*,

once legally banned in the United States on charges of obscenity, is now widely considered a masterpiece of modern literature. Conversely, Mark Twain's classic novel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* has been removed from various school curricula due to its use of racial slurs. Because government regulatory bodies like the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) hold authority over public broadcast channels, decency standards remain inherently tied to political and legal processes.

As media research has matured, empirical findings have increasingly been introduced into legal and regulatory debates surrounding decency. While social science research cannot define what is inherently offensive or indecent, it can evaluate the potential psychological or behavioral impacts of controversial content on specific audiences.

Advocacy organizations and special interest groups frequently utilize media research to advance specific policy goals. For instance, the Parents Television Council published a report citing a content analysis study that tracked the frequency of comments regarding nonmarital sex versus marital sex during prime-time broadcasting hours. While the underlying content analysis provided raw frequency counts of specific references, the advocacy group used those figures to support a broader ideological claim that television networks were actively denigrating the institution of marriage. Because basic content analysis merely tallies occurrences without evaluating audience reception, narrative context, or viewer

interpretation, using raw counts to prove broad societal harm represents an unwarranted extrapolation of the research data.

Research examining media violence, sexually explicit material, and profanity frequently attracts the attention of lawmakers seeking regulatory action. In 2001, a proposed federal bill addressing internet decency lacked broad legislative support until a sponsoring senator displayed a binder of explicit online images on the Senate floor during debate. Following the visual presentation, the measure passed the Senate by an 84-to-16 vote, highlighting how emotional appeals can overshadow methodical research in policy decisions.



Jack Thompson. **Source**: GuardianV, JackThompsonAttorney, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Weaponizing Research: The Misuse of Media Studies in Public Debate

The misuse of media studies to bolster pre-existing political or cultural agendas is a pervasive issue that often obscures genuine understanding of media effects.

Pundits, social reformers, and public officials frequently cherry-pick isolated findings or misinterpret research limitations to support predetermined narratives.

This practice is particularly common during public debates over evolving communication technologies. Following high-profile incidents of real-world violence, political commentators often cite studies linking violent video games to aggressive behavior, treating correlational findings as definitive proof of direct causation while ignoring small effect sizes and confounding variables like mental health, domestic environment, or firearm access.

A prominent example of this dynamic occurred when former attorney Jack Thompson asserted in news interviews that hundreds of scientific studies conclusively proved a direct causal link between violent video games and real-world mass violence, citing general crime statistics as evidence. Thompson's claims fabricated the actual consensus of video game research, making sweeping assertions that media scholars consistently reject. Thompson filed numerous frivolous lawsuits against interactive entertainment companies like Take-Two Interactive, ultimately leading to the revocation of his law license in Alabama

in 2005 and permanent disbarment by the Florida Supreme Court in 2008.

Similarly, political figures sometimes invoke studies on digital echo chambers to advocate for sweeping content moderation policies, glossing over research suggesting that online polarization is driven by broader political dynamics rather than algorithms alone. While social reformers may be well-intentioned, selectively citing research to force quick policy changes undermines the integrity of academic scholarship and misinforms public debate.

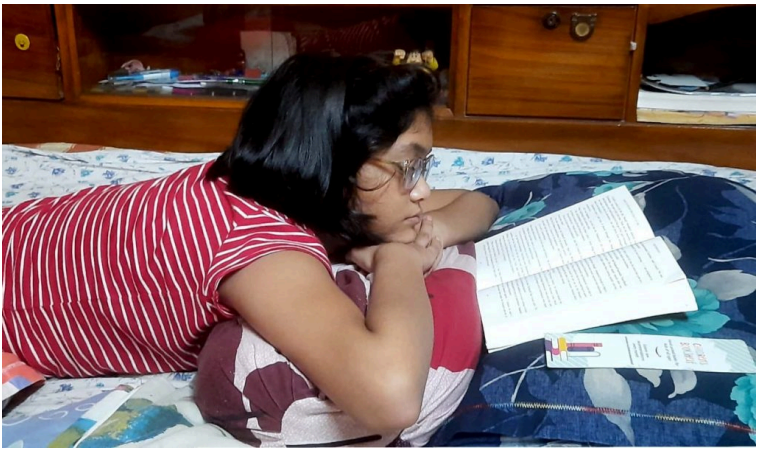
Media Consolidation

Media consolidation occurs when large corporate entities acquire smaller media outlets, concentrating ownership within a decreasing number of parent companies. Although federal regulations historically restricted cross-ownership to preserve local market diversity, the Federal Communications Commission has systematically relaxed ownership caps since the 1980s.

Empirical media studies play a critical role in policy decisions regarding regulatory caps and market consolidation. Researchers evaluate how corporate consolidation influences local news coverage, editorial independence, and media

diversity by comparing independent local outlets with conglomerate-owned stations. However, regulatory agencies do not always align their decisions with empirical findings. In 2003, the FCC voted to relax local media ownership rules , citing agency-sponsored research. Subsequent Congressional inquiries in 2006 revealed that the agency had suppressed an internal research study showing that locally owned television stations produced significantly more local news programming than corporate-owned outlets, raising ongoing questions about how regulatory bodies utilize media research.

CHAPTER 3: BOOKS



Source: Auli Raha (অলি রাহা),
Gunjari Kar, A teenager is reading book (cropped),
CC BY-SA 4.0.

- 3.1 Books
- 3.2 History of Books
- 3.3 Books and the Development of U.S. Popular Culture
- 3.4 Major Book Formats
- 3.5 Current Publishing Trends
- 3.6 The Influence of New Technology

3.1 BOOKS



In 1982, young adults (people aged 18–34) comprised the audience most likely to engage in literary reading; by 2002, they ranked the least likely group. **Source**: Image by delo from Pixabay

Over two decades ago, a landmark report by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) warned that a steady decline in reading for pleasure represented a growing national crisis. That initial survey, Reading at Risk, sounded an alarm over dwindling literary engagement, particularly among young adults. Federal data from the NEA's Survey of Public Participation in the Arts shows that leisure

reading continues to face steep challenges in the digital age. In recent assessments, fewer than half of American adults reported reading a book for pleasure over the course of a year, with adult novel and short story reading dropping to historical lows. National time-use studies reveal that daily reading for personal interest competes directly with streaming video, social media, and interactive digital entertainment.

Despite concerns over declining reader numbers, the book publishing industry itself remains robust and financially dynamic. Total U.S. publishing industry revenues surpass $32 billion annually, driven by print sales alongside dramatic surges in digital audiobooks and e-books. Far from rendering physical texts obsolete, digital technology has diversified how stories reach audiences. Print formats continue to generate over half of overall trade revenues, demonstrating remarkable resilience as readers frequently balance traditional paperbacks, dedicated e-readers, and digital audio platforms.

To counter falling literacy rates and foster civic dialogue, the NEA launched its Big Read program. This nationwide initiative provides funding and resources to rally entire communities around a single book. By hosting author visits, community discussions, and youth workshops, local Big Read programs demonstrate how shared reading experiences can spark vital conversations on social issues, historical memory, and community justice. These public programs illustrate that reading remains a powerful tool for civic bonding and personal growth even in an increasingly screen-dominated culture.

A complex tension between fragmented attention spans and innovative avenues for literary engagement marks the contemporary landscape of books. While formal assessments tracking time spent reading show ongoing declines, digital subcultures on social media platforms have mobilized millions of young readers
, generating unexpected bestsellers and revitalizing backlist titles. To understand the significance of books in today's ecosystem of audiobooks, digital subscription services, and online communities, it is helpful to examine how books functioned in the past and consider how they continue to evolve as a foundational medium.

The Common Read at North Idaho College



Mónica Guzmán. Monica Guzman BAC23 1370 web , CC BY-SA 4.0

Did you know that North Idaho College hosts a Common Read annually? Cardinal Reads exists to "create a shared experience by engaging students, staff, faculty, and the greater community in a discourse on a shared topic" concerning a topic of great importance.

Every two years, the Cardinal Reads committee chooses a work or works that exemplify a common theme. For 2025-2027, North Idaho College selected *I Never Thought of It That Way: How to Have Fearlessly Curious Conversations in Dangerously Divided Times* by Mónica Guzmán. The North Idaho College community is encouraged to read the book and

participate in the numerous events devoted to discussing it.

3.2 HISTORY OF BOOKS

Ancient Books

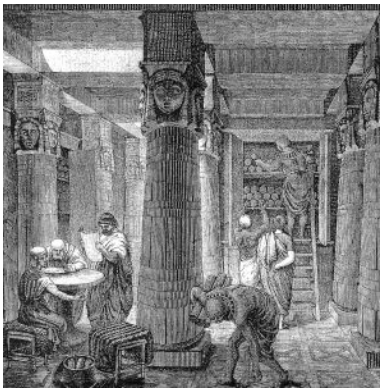
While spoken language has existed in some form for over 50,000 years, writing was invented more than 5,500 years ago in Mesopotamia and has taken many forms since then. Sumerians would press cuneiform marks into wet clay tablets, foreshadowing the power to preserve stories and information for generations. That being said, it would take several centuries before anyone, except highly educated scribes, could create or decipher the various forms of written communication that would evolve from cuneiform marks. These forms included **pictographs**, which usually



Woodblock printing played a crucial role in the production of some of the earliest known printed books. **Source**: vlasta2 – Korean Wood Block – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

resembled the concepts they depicted, and **ideographs**, which used abstract symbols to represent objects or ideas. The complexity of such systems meant that scribes held significant influence and power until the invention of the alphabet. This far simpler system, which used letters to represent individual sounds, developed between 1700 BC and 1500 BC.

Most historians trace the origins of the book back to the ancient Egyptians, whose **papyrus** scrolls bore a distinct resemblance to modern books. From the time they first developed a written script, around 3000 BCE, the Egyptians wrote on various surfaces, including metal, leather, clay, stone, and bone. Most prominent, though, was their practice of using reed pens to write on papyrus scrolls. In many ways, papyrus was an ideal material for the Egyptians. They could make it using the tall reeds that grew plentifully in the Nile Valley. They either glued or sewed papyrus sheets together to make scrolls. A standard scroll measured around 30 feet long and 7 to 10 inches wide, while the longest Egyptian scroll ever found stretched more than 133 feet, making it almost as long as the Statue of Liberty from end to end.



The Royal Library of Alexandria boasted a collection of around half a million scrolls; some scholars claim that this represented between 30 and 70 percent of all books in existence at the time. **Source**: O. Von Corven, Ancientlibraryalex, public domain.

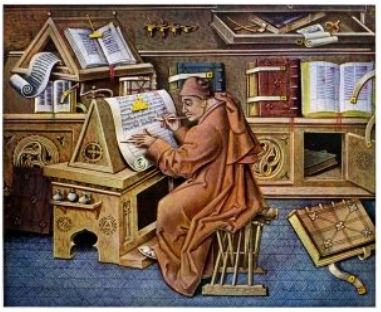
By the sixth century BCE, papyrus served as the most common writing surface throughout the Mediterranean. It was used by the Greeks and Romans (with Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* among the oldest surviving written works). Because papyrus grew in Egypt, the Egyptians had a virtual monopoly over the papyrus trade. Many ancient civilizations housed their scrolls in large libraries, which acted as both repositories of knowledge and displays of political and economic power. Powerful entities in the ancient world grew tired of the Egyptians' monopoly over the papyrus trade and sought alternative methods for recording information on a physical medium.

Made from treated animal skins scraped thin to create a flexible, even surface, **parchment** had several advantages over papyrus: it was more durable, could be written on both sides of the sheet, and Egypt did not monopolize its production. Its spread coincided with another crucial development in the

history of the book. Between the second and fourth centuries, the Romans began sewing folded sheets of papyrus or parchment together and binding them between wooden covers. This form, known as the codex, has essentially the same structure as modern books. The **codex** provided a much more user-friendly experience than the papyrus scroll. Written records became more portable, easier to store and handle, and less expensive to produce. It also allowed readers to flip between sections quickly. Reading a scroll required two hands, whereas readers could open a codex in front of them and take notes. Traditions changed slowly in the ancient world, however, and the scroll remained the dominant form for secular works for several centuries. The codex became the preferred form for transmitting early Christian texts, and the spread of Christianity eventually led to its dominance; by the 6th century CE, it had almost entirely replaced the scroll.

The next major innovation in the history of books, the use of block printing on paper, began in Tang Dynasty China around 700 CE, though it wouldn't arrive in Europe for nearly 800 years. The first known examples of text printed on paper appeared in tiny, 2.5-inch-wide scrolls of Buddhist prayers commissioned by Japan's Empress Shōtoku in 764 CE. The Buddhist text Diamond Sutra (868 CE) represents the earliest example of a dated, printed book. Woodblock printers had to meticulously carve an entire page of text onto a wooden block, then ink and press it to print. The complexity of Chinese and

Korean ideographs meant that this form of printing did not provide a practical means of achieving mass communication.



The largest monasteries had rooms called scriptoria where monks copied, decorated, and preserved both religious and secular volumes. **Source**: Jean Le Tavernier artist QS:P170,Q734843, The Scribe at Work, public domain.

In medieval Europe, however, scribes still laboriously copied texts by hand. Monasteries dominated book culture in the Middle Ages, which made them centers of intellectual life. Many of the classical texts still in existence owe their preservation to diligent medieval monks, who regarded scholarship, including the study of secular and pre–Christian writers, as a means to draw closer to God. These hand-copied illuminated manuscripts featured painted embellishments that complemented the handwritten text. The word "illuminate" comes from the Latin "illuminare," which means to light up, and monks designed some medieval books to shine through the application of gold or silver decorations. Other ornate additions included illustrations, decorative capital letters, and intricately drawn borders. The degree of embellishment depended on the book's intended use and the wealth of its owner. The aristocracy valued medieval manuscripts so highly

that some scribes placed so-called book curses at the front of their manuscripts, warning that anyone who stole or defaced the copy would face ill fortune. A copy of the Vulgate Bible, for example, warned: "Whoever steals this book let him die the death; let be him be frizzled in a pan; may the falling sickness rage within him; may he be broken on the wheel and be hanged."



The hand-copied books produced in the Middle Ages demonstrated a much more ornate quality than the mass-produced books of today. **Source**: Frater Rufillus (wohl tätig im Weißenauer Skriptorium), Codex Bodmer 127 244r detail Rufillus, public domain.

Though illuminated books were highly prized, they were also expensive and labor-intensive to create. By the end of the Middle Ages, the papal library in Avignon, France, held only a few thousand manuscripts, compared with the nearly half-million texts at the Library of Alexandria in ancient

times. Bookmaking in the Western world became less expensive when paper emerged as the primary writing surface. Making paper from rags and other fibers, a technique that originated in China during the second century, reached the Islamic world in the eighth century and led to a flourishing of book culture in the region. By the 12th century, accounts claim that Marrakesh, in modern-day Morocco, had a street lined with a hundred booksellers. It would take another two centuries before paper manufacturing began in earnest in Europe.

Gutenberg's Industry-Changing Invention

Papermaking coincided with another crucial step forward in the history of books: Johannes Gutenberg's invention of **mechanical movable type** in 1448. The Biography Channel and A&E both named Gutenberg as the single most influential person of the second millennium, ahead of Shakespeare, Galileo, and Columbus. Time magazine cited movable type as the single most important invention of the past 1,000 years. Through his invention, Gutenberg indisputably changed the world.

Much of Gutenberg's life remains shrouded in mystery. He lived as a German goldsmith and book printer. He spent the 1440s raising investors for a mysterious project—an invention that combined existing technologies, such as the screw press, already a valuable tool for papermaking, with his innovation: individual metal letters and punctuation marks that he could rearrange independently. This process would revolutionize the book production industry. Though Gutenberg probably printed other, earlier materials, the Bible he printed in 1455 brought him great renown. In his small print shop in his hometown of Mainz, Germany, Gutenberg used his movable type press to print 158-180 copies of the Bible, 135 on paper



A page from the Gutenberg Bible. Although the simple act of crafting small, movable letters may seem mundane in the contemporary world of digital devices and microchips, few historical events rival the significance of Johannes Gutenberg's invention and its profound impact on the earth. **Source**: Original by Johannes Gutenberg (printer), Scan by Jossi, Gutenberg Bible B42 Genesis, public domain.

and 45 on vellum. This book, commonly known as the Gutenberg Bible, ushered in Europe's so-called Gutenberg Revolution and paved the way for the commercial mass production of books. In 1978, the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center of the University of Texas at Austin purchased a complete copy of the Gutenberg Bible for $2.2 million.

Over the next few centuries, the printing press transformed nearly every aspect of books: their production, distribution, and composition all underwent significant changes. Printing provided a much swifter system for producing books than handwriting did, and paper's low cost made it a preferred medium to parchment. Before the printing press, patrons would commission a book, and monks would begin copying the text. The printing press enabled printers to create multiple identical editions of the same book in a relatively short time. Meanwhile, it probably would've taken a scribe at least a year to handwrite a single Bible. As Gutenberg's invention led to the proliferation of printing shops across Europe, the very concept of what a book looked like also began to evolve. In medieval times, the scarcity of books made them valuable and rare, since they required hundreds (if not thousands) of hours of work. After Gutenberg, books became standardized, plentiful, and relatively cheap to produce and disseminate (which had a profound impact on language). Early publishers attempted to replicate the appearance of illuminated manuscripts in their printed books, complete with hand-

drawn decorations. However, they soon realized the economic potential of producing multiple identical copies of a single text, and book printing soon became a speculative business, with printers trying to estimate how many copies a particular book would sell. By the end of the 15th century, 50 years after Gutenberg's invention of movable type, printing shops had sprung up throughout Europe, with an estimated 300 in Germany alone. Gutenberg's invention proved a resounding success, and the printing and selling of books boomed. The Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center estimates that, before the invention of the printing press, the total number of books in all of Europe was approximately 30,000. By 1500 CE, the number of books in Europe had grown to more than nine million. Early printers faced the challenge of crafting all the characters of a typeface in a particular size and style, or font, to create any printed message, although they could purchase mass-produced type by the 1600s.

Effects of the Mass Production of Books

The advent of the printed book revolutionized the post–Gutenberg world. As the world around it changed, the book's form did not change substantially. Despite minor tweaks and alterations, the ancient form of the codex remained

relatively intact. What changed? The production and distribution of books revolutionized the way information circulated throughout the world.



Books like Galileo's *Dialogo sopra I due Massimi Sistemi del Mondo Tolemaico, e Copernicano* helped scientific ideas reach larger audiences. **Caption**: Galileo Galilei, Galileo-2, public domain.

Simply put, the mechanical reproduction of books meant that more books became available at lower cost, and the growth of international trade allowed these books to reach a wider audience. The desire for knowledge among the growing middle class, combined with the newfound availability of classical texts from ancient Greece and Rome, helped fuel the Renaissance, a period marked by a celebration of the individual and a shift toward humanism. For the first time, the barrier to the dissemination of texts disappeared, allowing political, intellectual, religious, and cultural ideas to spread widely. In addition, many people could read the same books and be exposed to the same ideas simultaneously, giving rise to mass media and mass culture. The concept of individual learning evolved as the written word enabled new ideas to permeate

previously closed communities. Published writing revolutionized the scientific disciplines. For example, standardized, widely distributed texts meant that scientists in Italy were exposed to the theories and discoveries of scientists in England. Due to improved communication, technological and intellectual ideas spread more quickly, allowing scientists from diverse fields to build upon the breakthroughs and successes of others more easily.

As the Renaissance progressed, the size of the middle class expanded, along with literacy rates. Rather than a few hundred precious volumes housed in monasteries or university libraries, book availability to people outside these settings increased substantially, meaning women had greater exposure to written texts for the first time in many societies. In effect, the mass production of books helped to democratize knowledge. However, this spread of information didn't proceed without resistance. Thanks in part to the spread of dissenting ideas, the Roman Catholic Church, the dominant institution of medieval Europe, found its control slipping. In 1487, only a few decades after Gutenberg first printed his Bible, Pope Innocent VIII insisted that church authorities prescreen all books before publication. Ironically, the church banned the Bible if the publisher printed it in any language other than Latin—a language that few people outside of clerical or scholarly circles understood. In 1517, Martin Luther instigated the Protestant Reformation. He challenged the church's authority by insisting that people had

the right to read the Bible in their language. The church rightly feared the spread of vernacular Bibles; the more people had access to the text, the less control it could exert over its interpretation. Since the church's interpretation of the Bible, in no small part, dictated how many people lived their lives, the church's sway over the hearts and minds of the faithful was severely undermined by accessible printed Bibles and the wave of Protestantism they encouraged. The Catholic Church's attempt to control the printing industry proved unsustainable. Over the next few centuries, the church would see its power decline significantly, as it no longer served as the sole keeper of religious knowledge as it had throughout the Middle Ages.



The small and cheaply printed chapbooks often included popular ballads, humorous stories, or religious tracts. **Source**: Chapbook Jack the Giant Killer, public domain.

This instance with the Bible illustrates a trend during the infancy of publishing. The Renaissance saw a growing interest in texts published in the vernacular, the speech of the "common people." As books became more accessible to the middle class, people began to read books written in their native language. Early well-known works in the vernacular included Dante's *Divine Comedy* (first printed in Italian in 1472) and Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (published in Middle English in the 15th century). Genres with widespread appeal, such as plays and poetry, gained increasing popularity. In the 16th and 17th centuries, inexpensive chapbooks (the name derives, appropriately enough, from the term "cheap books") became popular. The proliferation of chapbooks showed just how much the Gutenberg Revolution had transformed the written word. In just a few hundred years, many people had

access to reading material, and books lost their status as sacred objects.

Due to the high value placed on human knowledge during the Renaissance, libraries experienced significant growth. Much like their ancient Egyptian counterparts, libraries once again served as institutions that could display national power and wealth. The German State Library in Berlin was founded in 1661, and other European centers soon followed, such as the National Library of Spain in Madrid (established in 1711) and the British Library (the world's largest) in London (established in 1759). Universities, clubs, and museums also began building libraries; however, the public often lacked access to these resources. The United Kingdom's Public Libraries Act of 1850 fostered the development of free, public lending libraries. After the American Civil War, public libraries flourished in the newly reunified United States, thanks in part to fundraising and lobbying efforts by women's clubs. Philanthropist Andrew Carnegie helped bring Renaissance ideals of artistic patronage and democratized knowledge into the 20th century by establishing more than 1,680 public libraries between 1881 and 1919.

History of Document Control

While Gutenberg's invention of the printing press ushered in

an age of democratized knowledge and incipient mass culture, it also transformed the act of authorship, making writing a potentially profitable enterprise. Before the mass production of books, authorship had few financial rewards unless a generous patron got involved. As a consequence, pre-Renaissance texts were often collaborative, and many books didn't even list an author. The earliest concept of copyright, dating to the scriptoria era, defined who had the right to copy a book by hand. The printed book, however, offered the potential for a speculative commercial enterprise, because businesses could now sell large numbers of identical copies. The explosive growth of the European printing industry meant that authors could profit from their books if an agency recognized their legal rights. In contemporary terms, copyright grants a person the exclusive right to prevent others from copying, distributing, or selling a work. The creator of a work usually exercises this right, though they may also sell or transfer the copyright. Works not covered by copyright or for which the copyright has expired become part of the public domain, which means anyone in the public may freely use the content without seeking permission or making royalty payments.

The origins of contemporary copyright law usually trace back to the Statute of Queen Anne. This law, enacted in England in 1710, first recognized the legal rights of authors, though in an incomplete manner. It granted a book's publisher 14 years of exclusive rights and legal protection, renewable for another 14-year term if the author still lived. Anyone who

infringed on a copyrighted work paid a fine, half of which went to the author and half to the government. Early copyright law aimed to limit monopolistic practices and opportunities for censorship, provide stability for authors, and promote learning by ensuring broad access to documents.

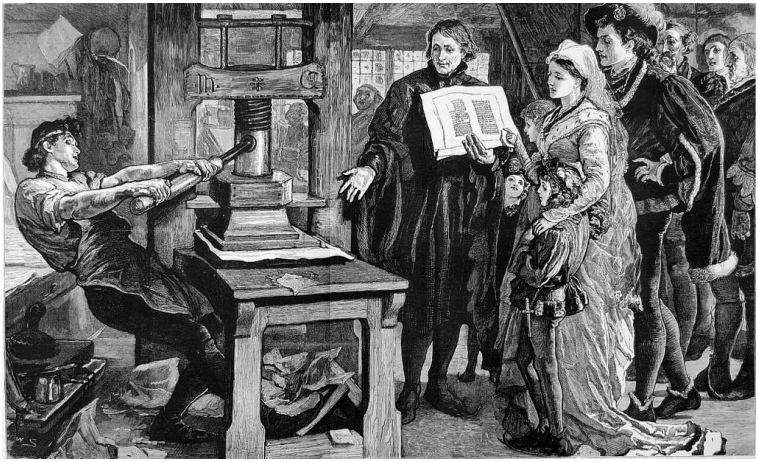
The United States established its first copyright law not long after the Declaration of Independence. The U.S. Constitution granted Congress the power "to promote the progress of science and useful arts, by securing for limited times to authors and inventors the exclusive right to their respective writings and discoveries" in Article I, Section 8, Clause 8. The first federal copyright law, the Copyright Law of 1790, modeled its exclusive rights clause on the Statute of Queen Anne by granting exclusive rights to creators for 14 years, at which point the author could renew those rights for another 14 years if they still lived at the first term's conclusion.

The "limited times" mentioned in the Constitution have steadily increased in duration since the 18th century. The Copyright Act of 1909 provided an initial 28-year term of copyright, with one additional 28-year renewal term. The Copyright Act of 1976, which preempted the 1909 act, extended copyright protection to "a term consisting of the life of the author and 50 years after the author's death," a period substantially longer than the original law's potential 56-year term. In 1998, the government extended the copyright law to 70 years after the author's death. The 1998 law, called the Copyright Term Extension Act, also added a 20-year extension

to all works currently copyrighted. This automatic extension meant that no new works would enter the public domain until 2019 at the earliest. Critics of the Copyright Term Extension Act referred to it as the "Mickey Mouse Protection Act" because the Walt Disney Company had lobbied for the law. Due to the 20-year copyright extension, Mickey Mouse and other Disney characters remained out of the public domain, meaning they were still the exclusive property of Disney. This changed in 2022 when Winnie the Pooh and other titles entered the public domain, followed by the *Steamboat Willie* version of Mickey Mouse in 2024. It did not take long for horror films, commercial brands, and satirical news programs to start integrating the once-protected icons into public discourse.

The 1976 law also codified the fair use doctrine for the first time. Fair-use law specifies the ways someone other than the copyright holder may legally use a work (or parts of a work) under copyright. Using content for "purposes such as criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching (including multiple copies for classroom use), scholarship, or research, is not an infringement of copyright." A book review quoting snippets of a book or a researcher citing someone else's work does not constitute copyright infringement. In a modern digital landscape shaped by artificial intelligence, remixes, linking, and generative tools, the boundaries of fair use and copyright protection continue to evolve. Recent legal precedents reaffirm that human authorship remains a core

requirement for copyright protection, even as creators navigate new technological media. As such, nonprofit organizations like Creative Commons offer copyright licenses that allow creators to share their work publicly while providing flexibility in how it can be used, distributed, and modified by others.



Source: William Small artist QS:P170,Q19999567 The Graphic, The Caxton Celebration – William Caxton showing specimens of his printing to King Edward IV and his Queen , public domain.

History of the Book-Publishing Industry

Except for self-published works, the author does not take charge of producing or distributing the book. These days, the

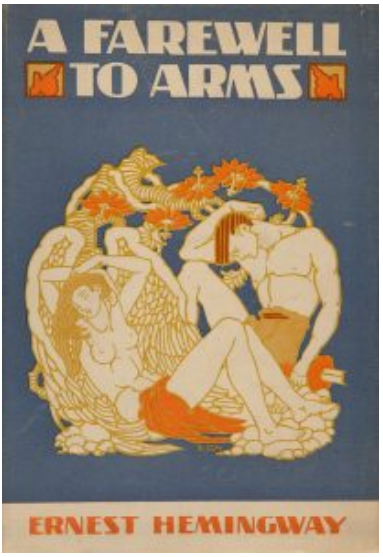
tasks of editing, designing, printing, promoting, and distributing a book generally fall to the book's publisher. Although authors usually have their names prominently displayed on the spine, a published book results from the product of many different kinds of labor by many other people.

Early book printers often acted as publishers, producing pages and selling them commercially. In England, the Stationers' Company, which essentially operated as a printer's guild, had a monopoly over the printing industry and maintained the authority to censor texts. The Statute of Queen Anne, the 1710 copyright law, was partially a result of some early publishers overstepping their bounds.

In the 19th-century United States, the Northeast emerged as the nation's publishing epicenter, with hotspots in Philadelphia, New York, and Boston. During the 1800s, the U.S. book industry experienced rapid expansion. In 1820, the books manufactured and sold in the United States totaled approximately $2.5 million; by 1850, despite a substantial drop in book prices, sales figures had quintupled. Technological advances in the 19th century, including the development of machine-made paper and the Linotype typesetting machine, simplified and increased the profitability of book publishing. Many of today's large publishing companies originated in the 19th century; for example, Houghton Mifflin was founded in 1832, Little, Brown &

Company was formed in 1837, and Macmillan debuted in Scotland in 1843, opening its U.S. branch in 1869. By the turn of the century, New York became the epicenter of publishing in the United States.

The rapid growth of the publishing industry and evolving intellectual property laws meant that authors could make money from their writing during this period. Not surprisingly, the first literary agents also emerged in the late 19th century. Literary agents act as intermediaries between the author and the publisher, negotiating contracts and parsing difficult legal language. The world's first literary agent, A. P. Watt, worked in London in 1881 and essentially defined the role of the contemporary literary agent—he got paid to negotiate on behalf of the author. A former advertising agent, Watt decided to charge on commission, meaning he would take a set percentage of his client's earnings. Watt set his fee as 10 percent, the standard rate today.



Source: Cleo Damianakes artist QS:P170,Q63532975, A Farewell to Arms (1929) cover, public domain.

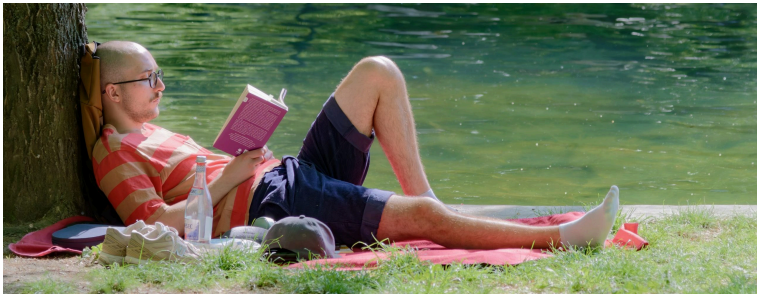
Paperback books gained immense popularity in the first half of the 20th century. Books covered in less expensive, less durable paper have existed since the Renaissance chapbooks, but they usually featured crude printed works meant only as passing entertainment. In 1935, the publishing industry underwent a significant transformation when Penguin Books Ltd., a paperback publisher, launched in England, ushering in the so-called paperback revolution. Instead of being crude and cheaply made, Penguin titles were simple but well-designed. Though Penguin sold paperbacks for only 25¢, they avoided crude material and concentrated on providing works of literary

merit, thus fundamentally changing the way quality reading material was presented. Some early Penguin titles included Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* and Dashiell Hammett's *The Thin Man*. In the decades that followed, more and more people launched paperback publishing companies hoping to capitalize on Penguin's success. The first U.S.-based paperback company, Pocket Books, started in 1939. By 1960, paperback books outsold hardbacks in the United States.

Publishing underwent significant changes in the second half of the 20th century, marked by the consolidation of the U.S. book-publishing industry, which mirrored the broader trend toward media consolidation. Between 1960 and 1989, approximately 578 mergers and acquisitions took place in the U.S. book industry; between 1990 and 1995, 300 occurred; and between 1996 and 2000, nearly 380 occurred. This represents part of the broader international trend toward media consolidation, in which large international media empires have acquired smaller companies across various industries. For example, the German media company Bertelsmann AG acquired Random House and merged it with Penguin in 2013 to form Penguin Random House. The AOL Time Warner merger, which included Warner Books, led to Warner Books being rebranded and eventually acquired by Hachette Book Group. Little, Brown and Company, also part of Time Warner, is now under Hachette Book Group. Because publicly traded companies have obligations to their shareholders, the publishing industry found itself under

pressure to generate increasingly high profits. Today, roughly 60-70 percent of all trade books sold in the United States are published by the major corporate publishing houses, widely known as the Big Five: **Penguin Random House** (wholly owned by Bertelsmann), **HarperCollins** (owned by News Corp), **Simon & Schuster** (acquired by private equity firm KKR), **Hachette Book Group**, and **Macmillan**. In the 21st century, book publishing remains an increasingly centralized and commercialized industry.

3.3 BOOKS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF U.S. POPULAR CULTURE

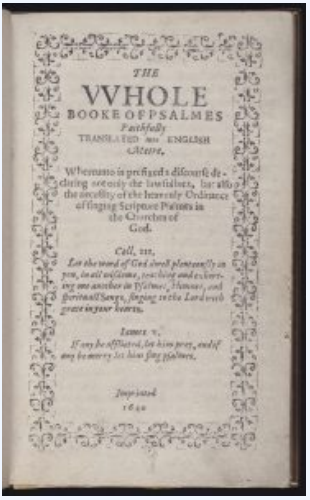


Source: Cropped Image by Surprising_Media on Pixabay.

At the turn of the 18th century, the American colonies could only claim about 250 published books. In 2025, the industry published approximately 4.2 million new titles, which include 3.5 million self-published books. As the United States has grown and developed, books have evolved and developed alongside it. Sometimes books have highlighted differences within the nation, while at other times their authors have sought to proclaim a distinctive American style. Sometimes, authors have tried to expose hypocrisies in government and society, and at different times, they have celebrated America's

multifaceted population. The First Amendment of the United States Constitution protects such voices. Throughout the history of the United States, books have both influenced and been influenced by American popular culture.

The First Book Published in the Colonies


THE
VVHOLE
BOOKE OFPSALMES
Faithfully
TRANSLATED into ENGLISH
Meeter,
Whereunto is prefixed a discourse declaring not only the lawfulnes, but also the necessity of the heavenly Ordinance of singing Scripture Psalmes in the Churches of God.
Coll. iii.
Let the word of God dwell plentifully in you, in all wisdome, teaching and exhorting one another in Psalmes, Himnes, and spirituall Songs, singing to the Lord with grace in your hearts.
Iames v.
If any be afflicted, let him pray, and if any be merry, let him sing Psalmes.
Imprinted
1640

Source: Stephen Day (dated 1640), Bay Psalm Book title page, public domain.

The Whole Booke of Psalmes Faithfully Translated into English Meter, more commonly known as the *Bay Psalm Book*, was printed in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1640 and holds immense historical significance as the first book printed in the British colonies of North America. Created by Puritan ministers seeking a more accurate

translation of the Hebrew Psalms than existing versions, such as the popular Sternhold and Hopkins Psalter, it reflected the colonists' desire for religious autonomy and self-determination.

The book's straightforward typography and plain style mirrored the Puritans' emphasis on direct engagement with scripture and their rejection of ornate or embellished religious practices. While not considered a literary masterpiece, it is important for its cultural and historical context. The *Bay Psalm Book* symbolizes the establishment of printing and intellectual life in the colonies, marking a crucial step in the development of American literature and a distinct cultural identity separate from England.

In the years leading up to the American Revolution, radicals could quickly print newspapers and pamphlets to circulate brief political news amid rapid change. Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, first published anonymously in 1776, might represent America's first bestseller. As literacy rates soared in post-independence America and the nation became more stable, the market for longer books increased. William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy: or, The Triumph of Nature*, published in 1789, earned the distinction of becoming the first American

novel. Brown's epistolary novel, which unfolds through letters of correspondence, warns about the dangers of seduction. Brown's novel shares features with a book published two years later, Susannah Rowson's *Charlotte Temple*, another cautionary tale about a woman falling prey to seduction.

Though women often found themselves the subjects of popular novels, they increasingly became the audience as well. Eighteenth-century Americans drew inspiration from Enlightenment values, which held that a strong nation required an educated and moral population. Although men dominated the public realm of education, employment, and politics, women controlled the domestic sphere and the education of the next generation. The 18th-century idea that American women should educate their children for the good of the emerging nation, sometimes referred to as republican motherhood, helped to legitimize, expand, and improve women's education. Women's literacy rates rose sharply during this period, and more and more books tailored to women's interests became available, as women tended to have more leisure time for reading. Authors such as Frances Burney and Mary Wollstonecraft wrote about the issues facing women of their period and openly criticized the traditional role of females in society.

However, in these early years of the American novel, some people found the form potentially dangerous and subversive because it proved too entertaining and appealed to people's imaginations, especially women's. A character in

The Boarding School by Hannah Webster Foster, a popular writer of the period, espouses this particular viewpoint:

> Novels are the favorite and the most dangerous kind of reading, now adopted by the generality of young ladies.... Their romantic pictures of love, beauty, and magnificence, fill the imagination with ideas which lead to impure desires, a vanity of exterior charms, and a fondness for show and dissipation, by no means consistent with that simplicity, modesty, and chastity, which should be the constant inmates of the female breast.

Part of the perceived threat of novels was their widespread popularity among diverse groups of people. An early biography of Susannah Rowson characterized the broad readership of her book:

> It has stolen its way alike into the study of the divine and the workshop of the mechanic, into the parlor of the accomplished lady and the bed-chamber of her waiting maid, into the log-hut on the extreme border of modern civilization and the forecastle of the whale ship on the lonely ocean. It has been read by the grey bearded professor after his 'divine Plato'; by the beardless clerk after balancing his accounts at night, by the traveler waiting for the next conveyance at the village inn; by the school girl stealthfully in her seat at school.

These popular 18th-century novels aimed to provide moral guidance and cautionary tales to the citizens of the newly formed United States. Questions of freedom and

responsibility became paramount as the emerging nation attempted to establish a uniquely American literature.

Books in the 1800s—How *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Helped Start a War



Before strict copyright law, many different versions of Stowe's novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, proliferated the market. **Source**: Harriet Beecher Stowe creator QS:P170,Q102513 George Cruikshank creator QS:P170,Q360466, UTC-1852 edition, public domain.

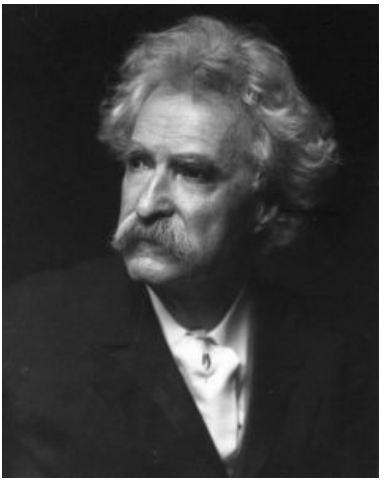
Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* became

the most popular book in the 1800s until the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Written by abolitionist and preacher Harriet Beecher Stowe in 1852—nine years before the beginning of the Civil War—*Uncle Tom's Cabin* offered an impassioned critique of slavery that tugged on readers' emotions. The smash hit novel sold 300,000 copies in its first year and became the century's second-best-selling book after the Bible. Stowe's novel is credited with heightening tensions between the North and the South. The novel sold well both internationally and domestically. The first London edition sold 200,000 copies in a year, and the book also became the first American novel to be translated into Chinese. The absence of international copyright law meant that Stowe did not receive compensation for most of these translations. Many unauthorized stage versions of the play also exist, leading historians to theorize that more people saw theatrical adaptations than read the book. As with today's stage and film adaptations of books, some of these versions of Stowe's story remained faithful to the novel, while others changed the story's ending or even twisted the story to make it pro-slavery. In the early 1900s, nine silent film versions of the novel were released, making *Uncle Tom's Cabin* the most-filmed tale of the silent film era. With her book, Stowe helped establish the political novel as a significant touchstone in American literature.

Other 19th-century writers in the United States focused on developing a uniquely American style—a mode of self-

expression distinct from European models. James Fenimore Cooper, author of *The Last of the Mohicans*, wrote adventure stories that celebrated the American frontier, championing a theme that would intrigue U.S. writers for centuries to come. Poet Walt Whitman wrote *Leaves of Grass*, a collection of poems that shocked readers with its frank sexuality and fresh use of language. In contrast to most other English-language poets of his time, Whitman wrote in free verse, mimicking the rhythms of actual speech. He was purposefully informal; he valued everyday speech; he spoke openly about sexual themes; and he played a crucial role in establishing an American idiom that remained open, informal, and centered on the experiences of ordinary people. Washington Irving, author of the now-iconic short stories "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," helped establish satire and wit as essential elements of the emerging American literary style.

Mark Twain famously used humor in his many works of journalism, travel writing, and fiction. Twain's characters express funny and irreverent ideas while speaking with off-the-wall idioms and odd regional coinages. The following passage, from the first chapter of



Mark Twain. **Source**: not listed, Mark Twain life 1900s, public domain.

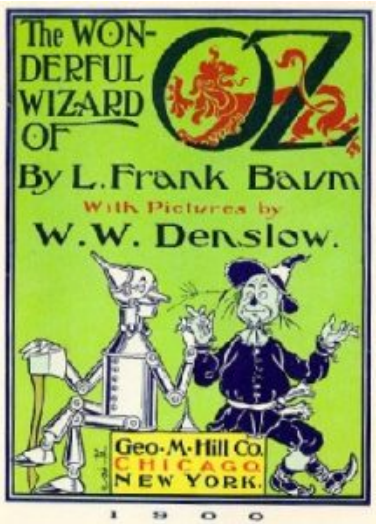
The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, shows Twain's use of distinctively American speech patterns: "The Widow Douglas she took me for her son, and allowed she would sivilize me; but it was rough living in the house all the time, considering how dismal regular and decent the widow was in all her ways; and so when I couldn't stand it no longer I lit out." Twain had the benefit of becoming one of the first writers to use a then-newfangled invention—the typewriter.

Edgar Allan Poe became famous for writing macabre stories and poems like "The Raven," "The Cask of Amontillado," and "The Tell-Tale Heart." A master of the Gothic genre, Poe also wrote the first detective story, 1841's " The Murders in the Rue Morgue." (Some people also credit Poe with the invention of the horror story and the science

fiction story.) In this and other stories, Poe established many of the classic features of detective stories, including Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes tales: a brilliant, crime-solving detective who works outside the standard police system; the detective's assistant or friend, who serves as narrator; and an emphasis on analysis and solving a crime through reason. Poe had such a substantial effect on the mystery genre that the Mystery Writers of America annually gives out the Edgar Awards, named in honor of Poe.

At the end of the 1800s, American literature fell into several broad categories. They include reflecting an interest in the natural landscape, a preoccupation with questions of identity (both individual and national), a fascination with humor or satire, a pride in everyday speech, and an interest in politics. An emerging interest in genre fiction began to manifest and would develop into a fully fledged movement as the 20th century progressed.

Twentieth Century and Beyond



L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* provided the basis for the famous 1939 movie *The Wizard of Oz*. **Source**: William Wallace Denslow creator QS:P170,Q1364808, The Wonderful Wizard of Oz, 006, public domain.

The production of books in the 1900s became cheaper than ever due to technological advances. The 20th century witnessed a proliferation of genres that more accurately reflected the diversity of experiences and interests in the United States. Furthermore, the paperback revolution eroded the distinction between high and low art. By the end of the century, however, books faced competition for attention from films, television, video games, and the Internet.

In 1900, L. Frank Baum published *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, a novel set in the fantastical world of Oz. It became the best-selling children's book for the next two years and went on to spawn 13 sequels. Baum's book

debuted during the so-called golden age of children's literature, which began with Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and ended with A. A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* books. Along with children's literature, other kinds of genre fiction saw their birth or growth in the 20th century. Owen Wister's *The Virginian* and Zane Grey's *Riders of the Purple Sage* established the Western as a uniquely American genre that would influence the popular Wild West films of the 1920s and beyond. Other genres, including science fiction, horror, mystery, and romance, emerged from the late-19th- and early-20th-century dime novels, which were named for their low cost and were known for their sensational, hastily written stories.

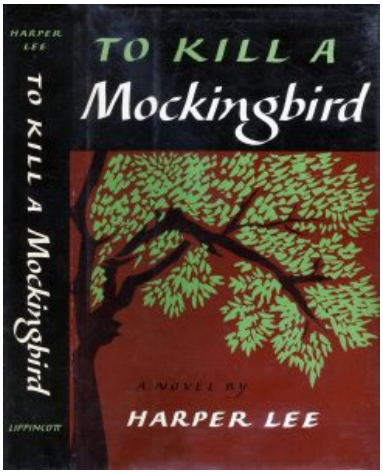


Pulp publications captured the attention of readers with their lurid, colorful covers. **Source**: Will Hart – 077 Spicy Mystery Stories 1976 Odyssey Publications Includes Tailor Made Dummy by E. Hoffman Price – CC BY 2.0.

The dime novel gave way to the even cheaper pulp magazines and books, inexpensive publications named for their use of cheap pulp. Pulp stories offered generally sensational accounts and featured sordid tales of murder, prostitution, and gangster violence; others told fantastical stories of aliens or monsters. The pulps gleefully represented low-culture ideals and enjoyed popularity among readers. Conan the Barbarian, Tarzan, Zorro, and The Shadow all made their first appearances as characters in early pulps. The paperback revolution of the 1930s, 40s, and 50s gave genre stories a broader reach in a more durable format.

While many 19th-century U.S. writers worked to create a distinctive American style, some 20th-century writers aimed to debunk American myths. After World War II, the United States emerged as a dominant world power. Some writers became preoccupied with critiquing American society and

government. Dissatisfied with the widespread 1950s ideals of conformity and homogeneity, Beat Generation authors wrote in a freewheeling, informal style and proudly described their drug use and sexual exploits. Touchstone works of the Beat Generation include Allen Ginsberg's *Howl and Other Poems* , Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, and William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*. These books celebrated road trips, drug trips, spiritual yearning, distrust of the mass media, and gleeful obscenity, and they helped pave the way for the hippie movement of the 1960s.



In 2018, PBS hosted a mini-series titled *The Great American Read*. PBS and the producers of the program worked with the public opinion polling service "YouGov" to conduct a demographically and statistically representative survey to ask Americans to name their most-loved novel. Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* was chosen as the winning novel. **Source**: To Kill a Mockingbird (first edition cover), public domain.

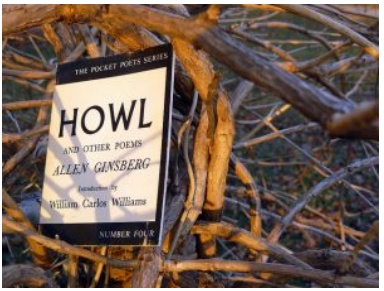
Following the end of the Cold War in 1991, American literature experienced a surge in books that reflected the diversity of voices and experiences in late-20th-century America. Jhumpa Lahiri and Amy Tan wrote about the immigrant experience; Sherman Alexie and Louise Erdrich penned acclaimed novels about Native American life; and Toni Morrison explored the political and historical dimensions of slavery and race in the United States. Sometimes called multicultural literature, these and other books were celebrated as a way to promote cross-cultural understanding by examining the different value systems, histories, traditions, and speech patterns of people in America.

The United States Government disseminates a large amount

of information through published works, making it one of the nation's largest book publishers. Although it offers only a large portion of its titles in electronic formats, significant reports like the *Mueller Report*, the *Select January 6th Committee Final Report*, the *9/11 Commission Report*, and *The Pentagon Papers* sometimes crack the bestseller list.

In the 21st century, the book market has been significantly influenced by a range of immensely popular novel franchises. Iconic series such as J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*, Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight Saga*, and Dan Brown's *Robert Langdon series*—including *The Da Vinci Code*—have achieved remarkable sales, with each series collectively selling hundreds of millions of copies. Additionally, franchises like Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* and J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* adaptations have continued to shape literary trends and achieve substantial commercial success, reflecting ongoing shifts in reader preferences and the expanding influence of cross-media adaptations. These titles haven't only dominated the best-selling lists; they've also spawned equally lucrative films and merchandise tie-ins. In some ways, such novel franchises harken back to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the 19th century, which was a multiplatform success popular on the page, stage, and screen.

Defining Obscenity: "Howl" Goes on Trial



"Howl" marked a turning point in United States obscenity laws. **Source**: Maddie Keating – two – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Allen Ginsberg's poem "Howl" met with strong reactions, both positive and negative, when City Lights Books released it in 1956. Ginsberg's poem became instantly notorious for its descriptions of sexual acts, both heterosexual and homosexual, drug use, mental hospitals, and anti-establishment conspiracies. Ginsberg's words shocked many readers; however, he intended to do this. He once described "Howl" as "an emotional time bomb that would continue exploding in U.S. consciousness in case our military-industrial-nationalist complex solidified." In 1957, U.S. customs officials seized a shipment of the book on the grounds of obscenity, but soon dropped their charges. However, the poem's legal struggles did not end; that same year, the California police sent plainclothes officers to City Lights Bookstore to buy a copy, then promptly arrested the sales clerk and the store owner on obscenity charges.

The "Howl" trial came in the same year as several other

landmark Supreme Court cases that liberalized the legal definition of obscenity in the United States. Before 1957, a stricter definition described obscenity as any material with a possible immoral influence. This stance led to a ban on works by authors such as James Joyce and D. H. Lawrence. Under the new law, material would be judged by "community standards" and could only be found obscene if its "dominant theme taken as a whole appeals to the prurient interest." In other words, books could no longer be deemed obscene based on the use of a single four-letter word. It also meant that the poem's obscenity would have to be judged against the relatively liberal standards of San Francisco, where the police sting operation had taken place.

The American Civil Liberties Union leaped to City Lights' defense, and the presiding judge overturned the obscenity charge, citing the poem's "redeeming social importance." In hindsight, the judge seems undoubtedly correct about the poem's social importance. "Howl" and the obscenity rulings of 1957 marked a crucial bridge between the post–World War II years of enthusiastic patriotism and social conformity and the 1960s ethos of free love and anti-government sentiment. By the time of Ginsberg's death in 1997, *Howl and Other Poems* had sold more than 800,000 copies.

Censorship in the United States

Censorship, which involves suppressing information deemed objectionable, takes many forms, ranging from government restrictions to self-censorship. While historically prevalent in the United States, modern trends focus on challenging books in schools and libraries, often targeting content with sexual themes, offensive language, violence, religious or political viewpoints, or LGBTQ+ themes. Significant challenges have been leveled against classics like *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Fahrenheit 451*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, and *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

During the 1950s, a moral panic emerged around comic books, fueled by Dr. Fredric Wertham's influential and controversial book, *Seduction of the Innocent*. This book led to the establishment of the Comics Code Authority, which mandated that comic books bear a seal of approval on their covers. Stores would not sell books without the seal, and many graphic horror books, such as *Tales from the Crypt*, *The Haunt of Fear*, and *Vault of Horror*, went out of business.



Stores would not sell comic books without this stamp from the Comics Code Authority. **Source**: Comics Code Authority, Approved by the Comics Code Authority, public domain.

A landmark case in censorship involves Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. Following its publication in 1988, Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran issued a fatwa calling for Rushdie's death the following year, sparking global protests and attacks on those associated with the book (in 2022, Rushdie was stabbed at a speaking engagement). This case highlights the

ongoing tension between freedom of expression and religious or cultural sensitivities.

Efforts to ban books have persisted in modern times, particularly in schools and community libraries. For instance, Utah enacted House Bill 29, a 2024 law establishing a system where a book is banned statewide if it is pulled by at least three school districts or two districts and five charter schools. The legislation aims to eliminate "objectively sensitive material" from public schools by targeting content deemed pornographic or indecent. Under this sweeping mandate, initial removals included high-profile titles like Sarah J. Maas's *A Court of Thorns and Roses* and Judy Blume's *Forever*, alongside later additions such as Stephen King's *Different Seasons*. The ACLU sued the state in 2026 for violating the First and 14th Amendments. Similarly, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit ruled in January 2026 that a 2024 book ban of "harmful" material in Idaho resulting from House Bill 710 was likely unconstitutional and overbroad.

3.4 MAJOR BOOK FORMATS

From ancient Egyptian papyrus scrolls to scrollable 21st-century e-books, a book can come in many different formats. However, in some ways, the more things change, the more they stay the same. In the same way that early printed books were painstakingly illuminated to look more like medieval books, today's e-books use e-paper technology to mimic the look of a printed page. Even modern hardcover books are direct descendants of the ancient codex.

Hardcover

While the first codices enclosed bound papers between wooden covers (the word "codex" means "block of wood" in Latin), contemporary hardcover book covers are usually made with cardboard sheathed in cloth, paper, or leather. Publishers either sew or glue the printed pages of the book to the cover. Until the early 1800s, most books lacked bindings. A buyer would purchase a sheet of printed paper that the bookseller or a commissioned bindery would bind. British publisher William Pickering began to issue books in uniform cloth

bindings in 1820. About a decade later, dust jackets—the detachable outer covers that sheathe most hardback books today—started adorning books. Publishers initially produced dust jackets to provide books with a protective covering for the binding. Still, soon they became a platform where designers could create colorful and distinctive covers to attract attention to the book.



Book collectors find original dust jackets especially enticing—a first edition of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* without the dust jacket sells for around $3000; with the dust jacket intact, it can go for more than $300,000. **Source**: yoppy – The Great Gatsby – CC BY 2.0.

The durability of hardcover books makes them attractive to both authors and book purchasers. However, the competitive economics of today's publishing industry mean that some books never get issued in hardcover. Because hardcover books incur more expenses to produce and almost always cost more than their paperback equivalents, publishers tend to reserve the format for books that they expect will sell well.

Based on projected sales, publishers must decide the size of a print run to order for a new hardcover book. A book's print run refers to the total number of copies produced during a single setup of the printing apparatus. A failed book may

have only one printing, while a successful book may have 50 or more printings. Determining how many copies of a book to print can be quite challenging, as publishers must estimate how well a book will sell. No standards exist to determine a size for a print run. The U.K. edition of the first *Harry Potter* book had an initial print run of only 500 copies, whereas the U.S. print run of the seventh and final book in the series consisted of a record-breaking 12 million copies. When an initial print run sells out, the book either gets reprinted (these copies constitute the book's second printing) or goes out of print. The contemporary publishing industry often issues a first-run hardcover edition, followed by subsequent paperback editions.

However, the rise of digital print-on-demand technology and self-publishing platforms like Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing and IngramSpark has altered traditional print run dynamics. Print-on-demand allows books to be printed individually as orders are placed, eliminating the high upfront costs and inventory risks associated with traditional print runs. This innovation has enabled independent authors and niche academic presses to keep hardcover and paperback editions perpetually available without risking large inventory losses.

Paperback

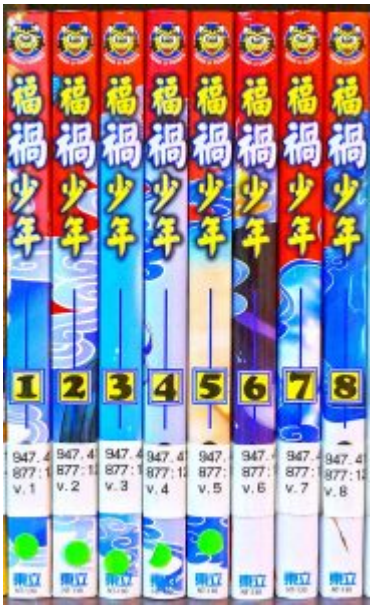
Inexpensive paper-bound books have existed for centuries in

various formats, including the chapbook, the British penny dreadful, and the American dime novel. However, the hardcover book, whether in its ancient codex form or its contemporary equivalent, has stood as the dominant format in the book world for thousands of years. The introduction of the paperback in the 1930s challenged this dynamic. The so-called paperback revolution began during the Great Depression when publishers marketed paperbacks as inexpensive alternatives to hardcover editions. Penguin Books, Ltd., the first majorly successful paperback publishing company, kept prices low by ordering large print runs and selling books in nontraditional retailers, such as Woolworth's drugstores. Penguin also broke the traditional paperback mold by avoiding pulp fiction and entertainment novels, instead printing inexpensive books focused on intellectually stimulating subjects and themes. Pocket Books editor Donald Porter Geddes spelled out this new approach to bookselling in 1944: "The best books have the greatest appeal to the greatest number of people...the larger American public need no longer suffer from the delusion that it is intellectually inferior, or, from a literary point of view, lacking in any aspect in good taste, judgment, and appetite." By 1960, when paperback books first outsold hardcovers, history proved the claims of these early paperback innovators right.

While paperback publishing initially focused exclusively on reprinting hardcover books, paperback originals—books that debuted as paperback editions—emerged in the 1950s.

Paperback originals also helped to remove the stigma associated with the paperback format. In 2000, Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Interpreter of Maladies* became the first (and still only) paperback original to win the Pulitzer Prize for fiction.

Today's publishers divide paperback books into two broad categories: mass-market paperbacks and trade paperbacks. Mass-market paperbacks are small, inexpensive editions that are sometimes issued after the release of a hardcover edition. However, many genre novels are released only in mass-market paperback editions. Trade paperbacks resemble their hardcover counterparts and offer larger size and higher quality. If the trade paperback follows a hardcover release, it will replicate the hardcover's dimensions and use the same pagination and page layout.



The popularity of manga trade paperback editions has grown in recent years. **Source**: Solomon203, ROC-NCL-AAC Fu Huo Shao Nian tankobon 20190504, cropped, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Trade paperbacks have also driven the explosive expansion of graphic novels, manga, and illustrated non-fiction. Once relegated to specialized comic shops, graphic novels and visual narratives published in trade paperback format now represent one of the fastest-growing print categories in physical bookstores and libraries. Their popularity, especially among younger demographic groups, demonstrates how physical print formats adapt to incorporate visual storytelling techniques alongside traditional prose.

Traditionally, hardcover books were often perceived as more prestigious than paperbacks. However, this distinction has become less pronounced in recent years, as readers increasingly value convenience and affordability. While hardcover editions may still be preferred for specific genres, such as literary fiction or coffee-table books, the popularity of paperbacks and digital formats has increased significantly. Some publishers of literary

fiction have reported high return rates for hardcover books, indicating a shift in reader preferences.

In response, certain publishers opted to release books with uncertain sales potential as trade paperbacks, thereby bypassing the hardcover format entirely. "Getting somebody to spend $30 on a hardcover by an author whom they've never heard of is hard, but getting them to spend $18 on a trade paperback is much easier," Random House's Jane von Mehren told *The New York Times*. Some publishers expressed concern that book reviewers don't take trade paperback editions as seriously.



Source: controlleddigitallending, CDLmain, CC BY 4.0.

E-Books

Physical books, regardless of the format, face stiff competition from digital formats. According to recent data from the Association of American Publishers, physical formats

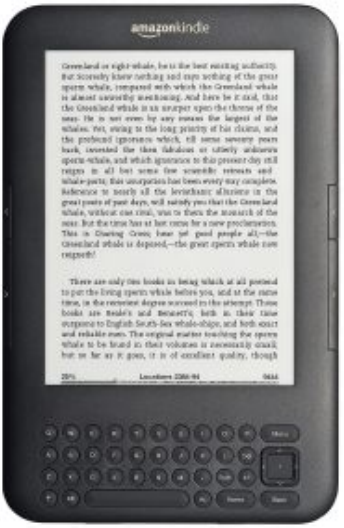
continue to dominate traditional trade book revenue, with hardcovers and trade paperbacks accounting for about 70% of industry sales
. However, the growth of digital formats has fundamentally reshaped the publishing landscape. Today, e-books and digital audiobooks represent major market segments that provide flexible alternatives to physical print. While paperback books disrupted the traditional concept of books by making them cheaper and more portable, e-books, also known as electronic or digital books, have transformed the world's first mass communication tool by allowing users to read books on the screen of an electronic device, whether a smartphone, personal computer, or dedicated e-reader.

E-books differ from their print equivalents in many significant ways. For one, the physical production cost gets eliminated, which means that e-books generally cost less than traditional books. The cost of storing or transporting e-books also disappears. Because an e-book's publisher doesn't need to order a set print run, a text issued as an e-book doesn't ever have to go out of print. E-books also appeal to readers who want instant gratification. Instead of having to travel to a brick-and-mortar bookstore or wait for a delivery, a reader can download an e-book almost instantly.

Early e-books mostly consisted of technical manuals or digitized versions of works in the public domain. As the Internet took off and electronic devices became increasingly mobile, book publishers began issuing digital editions of their

works. In the first decade of the 21st century, various companies started issuing software and hardware platforms for electronic books, each competing for dominance in this emerging market.

Today, e-books maintain a stable and significant market footprint, representing



E-book readers like the Amazon Kindle have revolutionized reading. **Source**: NotFromUtrecht, Amazon Kindle 3, CC BY-SA 3.0.

roughly 11% to 15% of traditional publisher revenues and an even higher portion of overall sales when accounting for self-published digital titles and subscription platforms like Kindle Unlimited. Major releases now launch simultaneously across print, e-book, and audiobook formats to capture immediate reader demand. However, e-book distribution

continues to face challenges from digital piracy and unauthorized distribution network shares. Some authors and publishers express concern that Internet users expect free content and will find ways to avoid paying for e-books. American novelist Sherman Alexie echoed some of these anxieties when he said, "With the open-source culture on the Internet, the idea of ownership—of artistic ownership—goes away." Other prominent authors have reacted to the e-book in various ways.

E-books have a unique concern: the possibility of digital decay and software obsolescence. The rapid turnover of digital devices and platform ecosystems raises questions about long-term access, as digital rights management changes or proprietary file formats can leave an e-book purchased on a device today unreadable on hardware a decade later.

While e-books initially experienced rapid early expansion, their market share has since normalized into a steady coexistence alongside physical print. Beyond direct purchasing, the distribution of e-books has evolved through subscription models and public library access. Services like Kindle Unlimited operate on a subscription access model, while mobile apps such as Libby and OverDrive allow readers to borrow digital editions directly from public libraries. These services have transformed digital reading into an access-based ecosystem rather than one built solely on individual ownership.

Today, digital formats represent an essential pillar of the book publishing industry. Enhanced e-reader features—such as adjustable typography, cloud synchronization across devices, interactive media, and integrated audio—continue to refine the digital reading experience. As technology advances, the e-book market continues to evolve, working alongside physical print and audiobooks to reshape how people access and engage with written literature.

Audiobooks

While spoken-word recordings existed for decades on vinyl, cassette, and compact disc formats, the transition to downloadable audio files and mobile streaming apps transformed audiobooks into the fastest-growing sector of trade publishing. Advances in smartphone technology and modern auto audio systems integrated spoken-word content seamlessly into daily routines like commutes and multitasking, fueling double-digit annual revenue growth across the publishing industry.



Audiobooks often get recorded in sophisticated recording studios. **Source**: Jagseer S Sidhu, Punjabi Audiobooks Workshop 2 – 13, cropped, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Unlike print books or e-books that require visual attention, digital audiobooks rely on voice performance and sound production to deliver literary content. Modern audiobook production has become a distinct industry branch, utilizing professional voice actors, specialized recording studios, and occasionally full ensemble casts or immersive sound design. This performative aspect has created a secondary star system within publishing, where popular narrators attract dedicated followings independent of the authors whose works they perform.

Audiobooks also represent a significant shift in accessibility and literary consumption. They provide an essential entryway for readers with visual impairments or learning disabilities while expanding access for multitasking consumers. Distributed primarily through digital subscription services such as Audible, Apple Books, and library streaming platforms, audiobooks demonstrate how modern publishing

continues to redefine what it means to read a book in the 21st century.

3.5 CURRENT PUBLISHING TRENDS

The last few decades have seen a sharp rise in electronic entertainment. The rise of digital platforms and the increasing diversity of media content have led to a more fragmented media consumption landscape. Video game and digital entertainment consumption has continued its upward trend. Time spent playing video games or using a computer for leisure averages over 30 minutes per day across all age groups, frequently outpacing traditional reading. In a world full of entertainment options, each clamoring for people's time, the publishing industry means to do everything it can to capture readers' attention.

Amazon dominates the industry.



Amazon has become the most dominant force in the book publishing world. Fun fact: its logo subconsciously suggests it offers everything from A to Z. **Source**: Mylink.receh the Amazon logo. CB635397845, CC BY-SA 4.0

Amazon's rise to dominance in the book industry is a story of strategic innovation, relentless customer focus, and a willingness to disrupt traditional models. It's a journey that began with humble origins and evolved into a behemoth that reshaped how books are bought, sold, and even read.

Jeff Bezos founded Amazon in 1994 as an online bookstore that operated out of his garage. The early internet was like the Wild West, and Bezos saw an opportunity to leverage the nascent technology to offer a wider selection of books than any physical store could hold. Amazon focused on providing people with convenience and choice. Customers could browse a vast catalog from the comfort of their own homes and have books delivered to their doorstep. Amazon designed features like personalized recommendations,

customer reviews, and one-click ordering to make buying books as easy and enjoyable as possible. This focus on customer satisfaction helped build brand loyalty and fueled word-of-mouth marketing.

Amazon operated on thin margins, often selling books at a loss to attract customers and gain market share. This aggressive pricing strategy, coupled with frequent discounts and promotions, undercut traditional brick-and-mortar bookstores, making Amazon the go-to destination for price-conscious readers.

As it grew, Amazon continually invested in technology to improve its operations and enhance the customer experience. This included developing sophisticated warehousing and logistics systems to ensure fast, efficient delivery, as well as creating innovative features such as the "Look Inside" program, which allowed customers to preview books before purchasing.

Although Amazon initially focused exclusively on selling books, it quickly expanded into other product categories through Amazon Marketplace, becoming a one-stop shop for a wide range of products, from electronics to clothing. This diversification strategy increased revenue and drew more customers to the platform, further solidifying its dominance.



A Kindle e-reader. **Source**: Charlie Sorrell. Photo of a Kindle (cropped). CC BY-NC-SA 3.0.

The launch of the Kindle e-reader in 2007 not only popularized e-books but also provided Amazon with a direct channel to sell digital content, thereby bypassing traditional publishers and retailers. The Kindle ecosystem, with its vast library of e-books and user-friendly interface, further strengthened Amazon's grip on the book market.

Amazon's rise has had a profound impact on the book industry. Many independent bookstores and chains struggled to compete on price and convenience, leading to widespread closures. The American Booksellers Association reported a 43% drop in bookstores five years after Amazon's first year in

business. Publishers have had to adapt to Amazon's growing power, often negotiating less favorable terms and facing pressure to lower prices. Amazon's Kindle Direct Publishing platform empowered authors to self-publish their work, creating a new avenue to reach readers and bypass traditional gatekeepers. Finally, the popularity of the Kindle and e-books accelerated the shift towards digital consumption, changing reading habits and forcing publishers to adapt.

Amazon's dominance has not been without controversy. The company has faced criticism on many fronts. Some authors argue that Amazon's policies and practices, such as demanding deep discounts and promoting self-published works over traditionally published ones, have negatively affected their earnings. Amazon has been criticized for its labor practices, including allegations of harsh working conditions and low wages in its warehouses and fulfillment centers. Concerns have also been raised about Amazon's market dominance and its potential to stifle competition in the book industry.

Despite the controversies, Amazon's dominance in the book industry shows no signs of waning, with its total corporate market valuation expanding well past $2 trillion. The company continues to innovate, expand its offerings, and leverage its vast resources to maintain its position as the market leader. As the book industry continues to evolve in the digital age, Amazon's influence will likely remain a significant force shaping the future of reading.

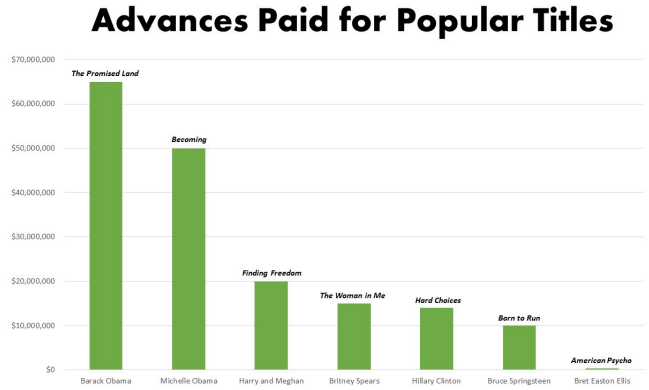
Blockbuster Syndrome

Imagine this scenario: A young author has spent the last few years working on a novel, rewriting and revising until the whole thing feels polished, exciting, and fresh. They send out their manuscript and luckily find a literary agent eager to support their work. The agent sells the book to a publisher, netting the author a decent advance; the book goes on to garner great reviews, win some awards, and sell 20,000 copies. To most people, this situation sounds like a dream come true. But in an increasingly commercialized publishing industry that focuses on finding the next blockbuster, this burgeoning author could find it difficult to get their contract renewed.

In an industry increasingly dominated by large media corporations and the "Big Five" trade publishers (Penguin Random House, HarperCollins, Simon & Schuster, Hachette, and Macmillan), which have obligations to stockholders, publishers feel pressured to turn a profit. As a result, they tend to bank on surefire bestsellers, books they expect to sell millions (or tens of millions) of copies, regardless of literary merit. The industry's growing focus on a few best-selling authors, known as blockbuster syndrome, often means less support and fewer opportunities for the vast majority of writers who don't sell millions of copies.

Authors receive an **advance**, a sum of money paid in expectation of future **royalties**, a percentage of the book's sale price. So if a publisher gives an author a $10,000 advance,

the author has immediate access to that money, but the first $10,000 worth of royalties goes to the publisher. After that, the author accumulates royalties for every book sold. In this way, an advance operates like a cross between a loan and a gamble. If the book doesn't sell well, the author doesn't have to repay the advance; however, they won't earn any additional money from royalties. However, as many as three-quarters of books don't earn back their advances, meaning that their authors don't make any additional money from sales at all.



Publishers and writers generally do not publicly discuss the actual advance amounts. A *New York Times* article estimated the average advance at around $30,000, though exact figures vary widely depending on the author's track record. These days, most of the media attention remains focused on the few books each year that earn their authors huge advances and go on to sell massive numbers of copies—the blockbusters. But the focus on blockbusters can have a damaging effect on

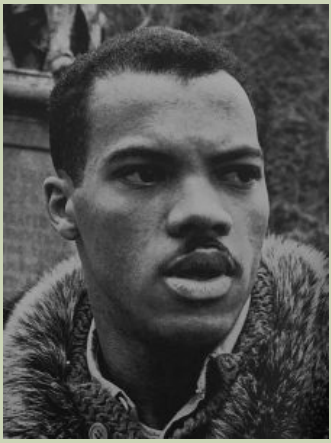
emerging writers. Many books by emerging authors get lost in the shuffle. "It used to be that the first book earned a modest advance, then you would build an audience over time and break even on the third or fourth book," Morgan Entrekin, the publisher of Grove/Atlantic, told *The New York Times*. "Now the first book is expected to land a huge advance and huge sales.... Now we see a novelist selling 9,000 hardcovers and 15,000 paperbacks, and they see themselves as a failure."

Potential blockbusters come at a high price for the publisher as well. They threaten to eat up publicity budgets and dominate publishers' attention. A huge advance will only pay off if a large number of copies are sold, which makes publishing houses less likely to gamble on unconventional books. This can also lead publishers to produce a glut of similar books. After Suzanne Collins' huge success with *The Hunger Games*, publishers released a flood of similar dystopian and post-apocalyptic stories, such as *Divergent* by Veronica Roth and *The Maze Runner* by James Dashner. While some of these succeeded, many others failed to capture the same level of reader interest, resulting in a glut of dystopian fiction on the market.

The dominance of a few heavily promoted blockbusters continues. Still, the market remains competitive across formats. To a certain extent, focusing on blockbusters has worked for the publishing industry. Today's best sellers sell more copies than best sellers did decades ago and make up a

larger share of traditional market revenue. However, overall book sales have remained relatively steady. A few heavily promoted blockbusters account for a disproportionate share of sales. The blockbuster syndrome threatens to damage the industry in other ways. In a best-seller-driven system, literature risks becoming a commodity, with less value placed on a book's artistic merit. Instead, the primary concern becomes whether the book will sell.

BEYOND THE BLOCKBUSTER: HOW WRITERS ARE REWRITING PUBLISHING RULES



John Edgar Wideman.
Source: Jim Hansen, John Edgar Wideman (1963), public domain.

Discontented with the industry's focus on blockbusters at the expense of other books, some authors have taken control of publishing their materials. John Edgar Wideman, a finalist for the National Book Award, a recipient of the MacArthur Genius Award, and the only writer to have won the International PEN/Faulkner Award twice, published more than 20 books through the traditional publishing system. But when it came time to publish his collection of short stories, Briefs: Stories for the Palm of the Mind, he decided to try something new. "The blockbuster syndrome is a feature of our social landscape that has gotten out of hand," Wideman said. "Unless you become a blockbuster, your book disappears quickly. It becomes not only publish or perish, but sell or perish."

Wideman eventually decided to team up with an independent self-publishing platform, which meant that he gave up a traditional contract and advance payment in favor of greater control and a higher percentage of royalties.

Other authors have turned away from the Big Five publishers and sought out independent publishing houses, which often offer more favorable payment structures. McSweeney's offers low advances and splits profits evenly with the author. Nontraditional systems offer authors greater flexibility at a time when the publishing industry is facing rapid change. As Wideman puts it, "I like the idea of being in charge. I have more control over what happens to my book. And I have more control over whom I reach."

Rise (and Fall and Rebound) of Book Retailers



Barnes & Noble is the largest book-selling chain in America. **Source**: Artaxerxes, Barnes & Noble Enfield Commons 25 Hazard Avenue Enfield CT December 2025 01 , cropped, CC BY 4.0.

In the late 20th century, a new group of colossal bookstores reshaped book retail sales in the United States. Two of the most well-known and prevalent book retailers, Barnes & Noble and Borders (the largest and second-largest book retailers in the United States, respectively), expanded extensively by building book superstores in the late 1980s and early 1990s. These large retail outlets differed from traditional, smaller bookstores in several ways. They often sold a variety of products, including books, calendars, paper goods, and gifts. Many also had in-store cafes, allowing patrons to browse books and sip lattes under the same roof. Occupying large physical spaces, such as megastores, Borders drew customers with its wide selection and ability to offer books at deeply discounted prices. Borders went out of business in 2011 because the company failed to adapt to digital platforms like

Barnes & Noble, which had released its Nook e-reader in 2009. Barnes & Noble later stabilized its physical footprint by changing its retail strategy to give individual store managers creative control over localized curation and community-focused store layouts.

Many independent bookstores originally couldn't compete with the large chains' discounts, wide selection, and upscale atmosphere. According to *Publishers Weekly*, independent booksellers' share of the book market fell from 58 percent in 1972 to 15.2 percent in 1999. The American Booksellers Association, a trade association of independent bookstores, notes that its membership peaked at 5,200 in 1991; by 2009, that number had declined sharply. However, independent bookstores have staged a remarkable rebound in recent years. Membership in the American Booksellers Association has risen past 2,400 independent organizations representing over 3,300 store locations, driven by a consumer desire for curated local experiences, community events, and physical browsing space.

The historical decline of independent bookstores coincided with the consolidation of the publishing industry, and some supporters of independent bookselling see a link between the two. Richard Howorth—owner of Square Books, an independent bookstore in Oxford, Mississippi—told *Mother Jones* magazine that "when the independent bookselling market was thriving in the '70s and '80s, more

books were being published, more people were reading books, the sales of books were higher, and publishers' profit margins were much greater. With the rise of the corporate retailing powers and the consolidation in publishing, all of those things have declined." Book superstores historically emphasized high turnover and high-volume sales, placing a greater emphasis on bestsellers and returning unsold inventory to publishers quickly.



Independent bookstores, such as The Well-Read Moose in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, build community by selecting titles that appeal to their local audiences. **Source**: Geoff Carr – CC by 4.0.

Although the initial expansion of book superstores has slowed, physical retail continues to adjust to competition from online marketplaces and big-box discount chains. While discount warehouses provided convenient access for casual readers, changes in big-box operations have altered print availability. For example, Costco

shifted away from maintaining year-round, full-service book sections in most warehouse locations, focusing instead on seasonal or limited-run bestseller promotions. Meanwhile, online giant Amazon accounts for over 40 percent of physical book sales and more than 80 percent of e-book sales in the United States.

The shift away from independent bookstores and toward larger online or big-box retailers has benefited the industry in some ways, most notably by making books cheaper and more widely available. Mega best sellers, such as the *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* series, set sales records at least in part because consumers could purchase the books in malls, supermarkets, and online apps. However, overall book reading volume has not expanded proportionally. Although consumers may pay less for the books they purchase through these retailers, they may also lose something in return. Jonathan Burnham, a publisher from HarperCollins, discussed the value of independent bookstores with *The New Yorker*, noting how they are similar to community centers: "There's a serendipitous element involved in browsing.... We walk in and know the people who work there and like to hear their reading recommendations."

Price Wars and Pricing Models

Part of the reason superstores and online retailers succeeded in crowding out smaller, independent retailers lay in their ability to offer significant discounts on a book's cover price. Because high-volume sellers purchase massive quantities of books, they can negotiate better deals with publishers and pass discounts to their customers. Independent bookstores buying books at standard wholesale rates (usually 40 to 50 percent off list price) operate at a disadvantage; they cannot afford to routinely sell below cover price without eroding their operating margins.

To protect physical booksellers and literary ecology, several foreign markets enforce statutory price controls or Fixed Book Price laws. In France, for example, the Lang Law strictly limits retail discounts on print books to no more than 5 percent below list price, preventing major corporations from undercutting independent shops on new releases. In contrast, the United States market operates without fixed retail pricing rules, allowing major retailers to engage in aggressive price competition.

The battle over book pricing intensified dramatically during the rise of e-books. In the early digital era, online retailers priced popular e-books as loss-leaders at $9.99—selling them below wholesale cost to boost e-reader device sales. In response to concerns that this practice devalued literature and

threatened traditional publishing, major publishers instituted the agency pricing model. Under agency pricing, the publisher sets the final retail price of the digital book, and the retailer receives a fixed commission (typically 30 percent) on each sale, preventing third-party retailers from arbitrarily discounting e-books below cost.

Author David Baldacci has argued that a book industry based solely on extreme price discounting isn't sustainable, noting that if retailers eliminate profitability across the supply chain, "there won't be anyone selling [books] anymore because you just can't make any money." While lower prices benefit consumers in the short term, structural price wars put immense pressure on mid-list authors, small presses, and independent physical retailers.

Diversification and Inclusion

In recent years, the publishing industry has experienced a sustained push toward diversity, equity, and inclusion across all levels of the business. Readers have actively sought out works by authors from historically underrepresented backgrounds, including writers of color, LGBTQ+ authors, neurodivergent writers, and authors from the Global South. In response, publishers have expanded acquisition mandates, created imprint lines dedicated to diverse voices, and increasingly utilized sensitivity readers and specialized editors

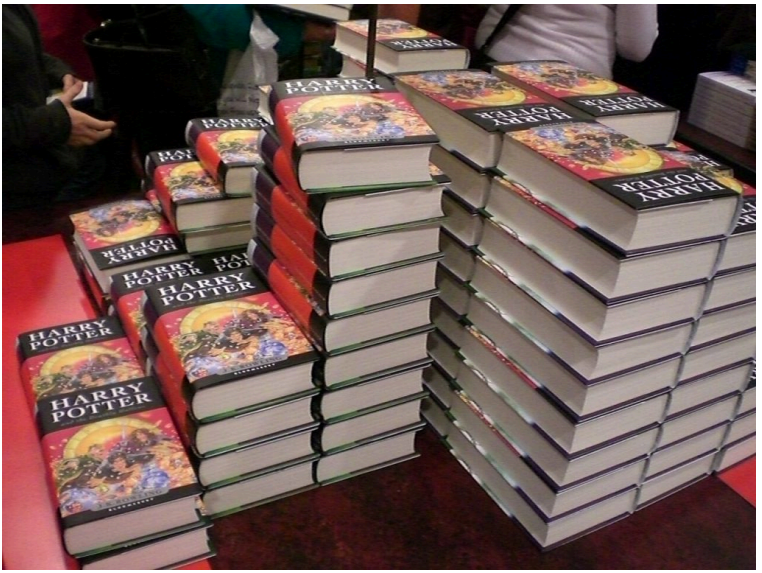
to ensure authentic representations. However, critics note that structural disparities remain within trade publishing, particularly regarding executive leadership representation, publicity budget distribution, and author advance equity.

College Textbooks and Open-Educational Resources

In a significant departure from the trade book market, instructors select higher education textbooks rather than end users—the students. This unique dynamic plays out against a backdrop where college students annually spend hundreds of dollars on textbooks and course materials. Traditional higher education publishers historically maintained high prices by releasing frequent new editions, bundling digital access codes, and restricting the resale of used physical books.

In response to rising course material costs, the higher education landscape has seen a major push toward Open Educational Resources (OER). OER texts are openly licensed, peer-reviewed educational materials available digitally at no cost to students, allowing faculty to adapt, edit, and redistribute content to fit specific course outcomes. Additionally, many universities have adopted inclusive access programs that provide digital course materials at negotiated

group rates, shifting textbook delivery from traditional physical purchases to digital subscription models.



The *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling is the best-selling book series in history, with over 600 million copies sold worldwide. **Source**: User:Xabier Cid, LibrosdeHarryPotter, public domain.

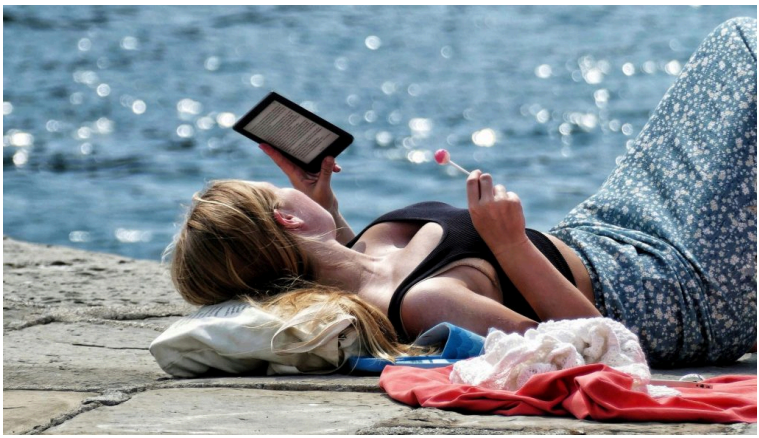
Print Books Remain Relevant

Despite decades of predictions that digital formats would render physical print obsolete, print books maintain enduring popularity. Many readers express a strong preference for the tactile experience of reading a physical book, appreciating print for its lack of screen fatigue, aesthetic qualities, and longevity as a collectible or gift. In response, publishers have invested in

high-quality print design, utilizing deckle edges, special cover foils, sprayed page edges, and illustrated collector's editions to cater to print enthusiasts and preserve the physical book as a lasting cultural artifact.

3.6 THE INFLUENCE OF NEW TECHNOLOGY

The book industry has undergone significant changes since its inception. From the invention of the papyrus scroll to the introduction of the e-book, new technologies have continually influenced how people perceive and engage with literature. With the advent of digital media, traditional media industries, such as the book industry, must adapt. Some fear that this new technology will destroy the industry, while others maintain that it works to the industry's advantage. No one seems to disagree—digital technology promises to reshape the publishing industry as we know it.



Source: Cropped image by MAILAI on Pixabay.

E-Books

Early e-book readers struggled to gain traction with the broader population due to minimal battery life and screens that were difficult to read. Throughout the 2000s, technological advances enabled the development of smaller, sleeker models, and smartphones and tablets helped make readers comfortable consuming long-form text on digital screens. Dedicated e-readers quickly found an audience, and e-book sales grew rapidly as digital reading became accessible to mainstream consumers. The introduction of multifunction tablets further expanded the market, demonstrating that millions of readers were eager to download and read books digitally.

E-books now account for a substantial portion of the overall book market, generally holding around 15% to 20% of total trade publisher revenues, with even higher shares in genres like romance, thriller, and science fiction. Amazon, as the leading e-book retailer, offers a vast catalog of titles, with millions of books available for Kindle devices and other compatible platforms via the Kindle app. With access to a dazzling array of books just a few clicks away, contemporary consumers seem enamored with e-books. An e-book reader or mobile app can store thousands of titles in a device smaller and lighter than the average hardcover novel. Although dedicated devices involve an initial investment, e-books frequently offer cheaper reading material than their hardcopy equivalents;

sometimes, they are even free. Thanks to public domain initiatives like the Gutenberg Project and Google Books, millions of out-of-copyright titles are now available as free e-books.

Anything that gets people excited about books and reading should benefit the publishing industry, right? Unfortunately for U.S. publishers, it does not always work that way. Some publishers worry that e-book sales may ultimately harm their bottom lines. During the Kindle's early growth, Amazon essentially set the standard price for bestselling or new-release e-books at $9.99. Since Amazon acted as a wholesaler and bought these books at half the publisher's list price—generally around $25 for a new hardcover—the company sold them at a loss. However, for Amazon, a short-term loss had long-term payoffs by locking in market dominance. In recent years, Amazon has maintained a commanding position in the e-book market. This dominance has raised concerns among traditional publishers about its potential impact on hardcover and trade paperback sales, as consumers accustomed to lower digital prices may be less willing to pay higher prices for physical copies.

The conflict between Amazon and Macmillan, one of the "Big Five" publishers, marked a pivotal moment in the evolving relationship between publishers and retailers in the digital age. Macmillan proposed an **agency model** for e-book sales, which shifted pricing power to the publisher, who would set the retail price and receive 70% of the revenue, with the

retailer receiving a 30% commission. This contrasted sharply with Amazon's existing wholesale model, in which they purchased books at half the hardcover list price and set retail prices, often selling e-books at a loss to drive device adoption. Macmillan's leverage lay in its ability to withhold e-book editions for several months after the hardcover release if Amazon refused to adopt the agency model. Amazon initially retaliated by removing "buy" buttons from all Macmillan titles, both print and digital. This standoff, however, was short-lived. After a few days, Amazon relented, agreeing to Macmillan's terms. In issuing a public statement criticizing the resulting higher e-book prices, Amazon signaled a significant shift in power dynamics.

This event led to a general increase in e-book prices for new releases, typically ranging from $12.99 to $14.99, though prices continue to fluctuate. Since the introduction of the agency model, the market has continued to evolve into dynamic pricing strategies based on publisher, genre, and release date. Furthermore, the emergence of subscription services like Amazon's Kindle Unlimited (KU) has added another layer of complexity to the author-publisher-retailer dynamic. KU offers readers access to a vast library of e-books for a monthly fee, further altering reading habits and purchasing behaviors. For independent authors, KU presents a significant revenue stream through a per-page-read royalty model, though it requires exclusive digital distribution through Amazon. Traditional publishers

navigate a complex relationship with subscription models, balancing the potential for wider audience reach against concerns about devaluing front-list titles.

The debate around e-book pricing strategies continues to evolve. While publishers initially resisted lower price points for new releases, the rise of free e-books and subscription services has introduced new complexities. Free e-books, including public-domain classics and promotional giveaways from contemporary authors, raise concerns about devaluing books in consumers' eyes. Some argue that offering free content undermines the perceived value of books, making it harder to justify charging for new releases. However, others see free e-books as a valuable promotional tool, driving discovery of new authors and building readership through word-of-mouth marketing. This tension underscores the ongoing challenge for publishers in navigating the digital landscape, balancing the desire to maintain revenue streams with the need to adapt to shifting consumer expectations and adopt new content distribution models.

New technologies have profoundly reshaped the book industry, impacting how books are created, distributed, and consumed. The rise of e-books and digital reading, spearheaded by dedicated devices like the Kindle, Nook, and Kobo, alongside smartphone apps, has significantly altered reading habits, offering portability, affordability, and accessibility, while also raising concerns about screen fatigue and the loss of the tactile experience associated with print. Standardized e-book formats like EPUB and PDF present distinct implications for accessibility, particularly regarding features like text-to-speech, screen-reader compatibility, and adjustable font sizes. Digital library platforms such as Libby and Hoopla have further expanded access to e-books, creating both opportunities and challenges for publishers and public libraries as they negotiate licensing models.



Most e-readers adopt the size and shape of one hardcover book. **Source**: Tsgreer at English Wikipedia, AmazonKindleUser2, public domain.

While the e-book market experienced explosive growth in its infancy, the pace of expansion has stabilized into a mature coexistence with physical print. Factors such as economic

shifts, screen fatigue, and reader preference for physical artifacts continue to shape the industry. While some predicted that digital formats would destroy physical books or elevate short fiction to dominant market status, print books have shown remarkable resilience. Whatever the future of books looks like, everything—from the production of books to the way people read them—continues to evolve rapidly because of new technologies.

Digitizing Libraries



A librarian digitizes a book by scanning the pages of the original. **Source**: Wikilover90 , Municipal Library Patiala Staff Member digitizing the book , cropped, CC BY-SA 4.0.

The idea of a digitized library has gained weight since the early years of the Internet. A digital library stores its materials in digital format, accessible to computers either locally or remotely via a computer network. Michael Hart founded Project Gutenberg, the oldest digital library, in 1971, three years before the Internet went live. Hart was inspired to make thousands of the most-consulted books publicly available and free by the end of the century. The forward-thinking Hart named his project after the inventor of movable-type printing, perhaps realizing that book digitization had the potential to revolutionize how humans produce and read books, just as Gutenberg's invention had centuries earlier. Initially, Hart and his fellow book-digitizing volunteers found the process slow because they had to copy the text manually until scanners and

optical character recognition software allowed them to automate the process in later decades.

Today, Project Gutenberg's free online library boasts more than 70,000 public domain works available for free download. Academic institutions and tech companies utilize high-speed, robotic page-turning scanners to digitize thousands of pages per hour. A primary driver in digital library production is Google Books, which has scanned over 40 million books since its inception in 2004. Other international digital library initiatives and archival projects continue to digitize millions of regional and historical texts. With tens of millions of distinct book titles published throughout human history, ongoing digitization efforts make it increasingly possible that a vast majority of recorded human literature will eventually be accessible in digital formats.

Some liken the prospect of widely accessible and easily searchable free libraries to the proliferation of brick-and-mortar libraries in the 19th century, which led to a surge in literacy rates. One of Project Gutenberg's stated goals is "to break down the bars of ignorance and illiteracy" through its library of digitized books. Digital libraries provide a vast selection of texts to people with Internet access, offering them the potential to democratize knowledge. Modern digital archives mean that readers who lack access to large physical bookstores or well-stocked municipal libraries can instantly access historical and educational works. The most dramatic effect of digital libraries is felt by millions worldwide who were

historically underserved by ordinary paper books. Furthermore, digitized libraries can make fragile or ancient historical materials available to browsers without damaging the originals, allowing academic libraries to share rare primary sources globally without physical transport.

One of the largest online repositories is Google Books. The bulk of free digital books available from Google Books or elsewhere come from the public domain, which constitutes a significant portion of historic literary output. Google Books has made millions of these titles fully searchable and freely downloadable. Other works in the Google Books digital library include in-print texts whose publishers have partnered with Google. Some of these titles have their full text available online; other sites allow only a limited number of page previews. As part of its partnership with publishers, a Google Books search result will often provide direct links to the publisher's website and commercial booksellers.

Google Books encountered trouble, however, when it began digitizing millions of books with unclear legal status, such as out-of-print works that had not yet entered the public domain. Many of these titles are considered orphan works, meaning no one knows who owns the copyright. When Google announced plans to scan these texts and make them searchable using short sentence snippets, copyright holders pushed back. Google claimed that this digitization plan would benefit authors, whose books would no longer linger in out-of-print limbo, while helping researchers discover obscure works.

Publishers and authors disagreed with Google's decision to scan copyrighted material before obtaining explicit permission. In 2005, the Authors Guild of America and the Association of American Publishers sued Google for copyright infringement. Google argued that it was building the digital equivalent of a library card catalog, whereas plaintiffs alleged that Google was commercializing copyrighted text. Following a decade of litigation, a United States appeals court ruled in 2015 that Google's effort to build a digital library and show limited snippets constituted "fair use" under copyright law, as it provided a transformative public search function without replacing the market for the original works.

Despite legal resolutions, digital libraries must continually address the problem of digital decay and media obsolescence. File formats become unsupported, physical storage drives degrade, and link rot threatens online citations. While significant advancements have been made in cloud infrastructure and digital preservation technologies, the challenge of digital decay remains a pressing concern for libraries, archives, and institutions that manage digital collections. Factors such as technological obsolescence, data corruption, and the long-term viability of storage media continue to pose risks to the preservation of digital content.

To address these challenges, organizations have adopted comprehensive preservation strategies, including routine data

migration, redundant geographical backups, and open-source file standards. However, the evolving nature of digital technologies and the constant emergence of new software environments make it difficult to guarantee the long-term preservation of all digital materials. Ongoing research, institutional collaboration, and shared preservation networks are crucial for developing sustainable digital preservation methods to safeguard cultural heritage.



A European Books on Demand printing center. **Source**: BoD – Books on Demand, BoD Produktion, cropped, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Print-on-Demand and Self-Publishing

Gutenberg's printing press revolutionized the world by enabling the mass production of books. In medieval times, readers often commissioned a scribe to copy a text by hand,

a process that could take months or even years to complete. However, despite their many conveniences, printed books also carry risks for authors and publishers. Producing books in bulk means that publishers take a calculated risk, attempting to publish enough books to meet demand without making so many that unwanted copies linger unsold in warehouses. When a book doesn't sell as much as expected, the publisher may end up taking a loss if the costs of publishing the book exceed the revenue from its sale. Modern technology has made it feasible for authors and publishers to adopt an updated version of the medieval model of producing books on demand for specific customers, allowing them to avoid the risk of carrying a large inventory that may or may not sell. Print-on-demand, a system in which publishers print a book only after receiving an order, along with the steady rise of self-publishing, continues to reshape the industry.

Self-publishing—a system in which an author, rather than a third-party company, takes charge of producing and publishing a work—did not originate with digital formats. Many authors, including Virginia Woolf and Oscar Wilde, self-published works during their lifetimes. Popular modern books like *Fifty Shades of Grey* and *The Martian* had their origins in self-publishing before being picked up by major publishers. Many authors also self-publish when they are unable to find initial support from traditional publishers. Dozens of agents rejected Daniel Suarez's techno-thriller *Daemon* before he opted for self-publishing. After building an audience through

tech blogs, Suarez eventually secured a traditional multi-book deal with Dutton, an imprint of Penguin Random House. Additionally, self-publishing offers an attractive option for authors who want to retain full creative control over their content, including editing, cover design, pricing, and marketing.

Authors who choose to strike out on their own have historically worked to overcome the stigma attached to self-published books. In the past, most self-published authors went through vanity presses, which charged writers high upfront fees for published physical copies of their books. As the name implies, these types of self-publishing ventures often exploited writers' desire to see their work in print, requiring large minimum press runs of 1,000 or more copies. Unless authors found an audience on their own, they had little hope of selling their inventory. Because vanity presses exercised no editorial quality control, readers and traditional booksellers grew skeptical of self-published material, leaving authors to sell copies in person or via mail order.

The advent of modern digital publishing transformed this dynamic completely. Free professional design software, desktop typesetting tools, and accessible image editors enable writers to format interior pages and covers that rival traditionally published books. The Internet has revolutionized marketing and distribution, enabling authors of niche subjects to reach global audiences directly. A wide variety of web-based self-publishing platforms have emerged to serve independent

writers. Platforms such as Kindle Direct Publishing and Lulu offer accessible, low-cost self-publishing options. In contrast, platforms like IngramSpark provide extensive print-on-demand distribution networks that make self-published titles orderable through brick-and-mortar bookstores and libraries. Other services, including BookBaby and Draft2Digital, streamline distribution across multiple digital storefronts simultaneously.

With print-on-demand technology, files are stored digitally, and books are printed only when a customer places an order, which significantly reduces the financial risk for self-publishers and small presses. Print-on-demand works exceptionally well for books with a specialized or niche audience. Both small presses and academic publishers use the technology to keep backlist titles available indefinitely. With print-on-demand, books that sell only a few dozen copies a year can remain in print without requiring warehouse storage for unsold inventory.

Although some self-published authors manage to find massive commercial success, most publish for smaller, dedicated audiences. Online self-publishing platforms disrupt the traditional notion of the publishing house as a mandatory gatekeeper for the book industry. In the world of self-publishing, anyone with a properly formatted digital file can offer a professional paperback or e-book for sale worldwide in a short time. This has democratized the industry, allowing writers who received rejection notices from traditional

publishers to find readers on their own terms, while also increasing the sheer volume of published material on the market. While making a full-time living strictly through self-publishing remains challenging for many writers, hybrid publishing models have also emerged, blending elements of traditional editorial support with self-publishing distribution options. Additionally, platforms like Kickstarter allow authors to crowdfund production costs directly from readers before printing, further expanding the paths available to contemporary writers.

The Rise of Audiobooks



Source: Image by PetraSolajova on Pixabay.

The audiobook revolution has dramatically reshaped the book industry, fueled by advancements in digital audio formats, smartphone streaming apps, improved production quality, and the rise of skilled voice actors and multi-cast performances. This surge in popularity is not merely a fleeting trend; audiobooks offer unparalleled convenience and accessibility, catering to modern lifestyles and diverse needs. For individuals with visual impairments, learning disabilities, or those who struggle with traditional reading, audiobooks unlock a world of literary experiences. Commuters, busy parents, and multitaskers can "read" while driving, exercising, or completing chores, transforming previously unproductive time into opportunities for intellectual and entertainment engagement. Contemporary industry data indicates that audiobook revenues continue to experience steady double-

digit annual percentage growth, representing a multi-billion-dollar market segment.

Beyond convenience, audiobooks have influenced how readers consume and appreciate stories. Skilled narrators breathe life into characters and narratives, adding emotional depth and interpretive nuance to the written word. This immersive experience can enhance comprehension, spark imagination, and foster a deeper connection with the text. The rise of audiobooks has also created new revenue streams for authors and expanded career opportunities for voice performers. Subscription services such as Audible, along with streaming platforms like Spotify integrating audiobooks into their catalogs, have normalized digital audio consumption on a global scale. As audio technologies continue to evolve, audiobooks remain one of the fastest-growing sectors in the publishing landscape.

Changing Retail Landscapes and Discovery



Comedian Sarah Silverman and other authors sued Meta for using their books to train its artificial intelligence technology. Meta would eventually win the suit. **Source**: Ali Shaker/VOA, Sarah Silverman DNC July 2016 , public domain.

While online giants like Amazon maintain a massive market share in both physical print and digital distribution, independent bookstores have experienced a notable resurgence. By positioning themselves as community hubs, hosting author events, and offering hand-curated selections, independent booksellers provide personalized experiences that algorithms cannot fully replicate. At the same time, publishers and authors have increasingly turned to direct-to-consumer marketing strategies to engage readers without relying solely on third-party retailers. Through email newsletters, personal websites, virtual book launches, and data

analytics, publishers gain direct insight into reader preferences and build lasting relationships with target audiences.

Social media and internet communities have revolutionized how readers discover books. Platforms like Goodreads, along with online book communities across social media—most notably BookTok on TikTok and BookStagram on Instagram—play a vital role in driving backlist sales and launching debut novels to bestseller lists. Viral recommendations from readers within these communities have shown a remarkable ability to shift print sales, highlighting the power of peer-to-peer word-of-mouth marketing in the digital age.

Emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence and machine learning, are also beginning to influence the publishing lifecycle. AI tools are being explored for backend operations such as automated copyediting assistance, translation, audio narration generation, market data analysis, and metadata optimization for search engines. In contrast, AI-driven recommendation engines personalize store suggestions for readers. Further on the horizon, interactive storytelling formats, augmented reality, and immersive digital environments offer experimental avenues for reinventing what a book can be. Together, these technological developments continue to redefine the roles of authors, publishers, and retailers, democratizing access while transforming how stories are told, shared, and preserved.

CHAPTER 4: NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES



Source: Roman Kraft romankraft, Person reading a newspaper (Unsplash) (cropped), CC0 1.0

- 4.1 Newspapers and Magazines
- 4.2 History of Newspapers and Magazines
- 4.3 Different Styles and Models of Print Media
- 4.4 How the Print Industry Impacts the Public's Access to Information

- 4.5 Popular Publications and Trends in Print Media
- 4.6 The Digital Landscape's Impact on the Print Industry

4.1 NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES



The print industry faces a dwindling audience for its products. Studies demonstrate that the younger the audience, the less likely they are to have read a newspaper recently. **Source**: Image by wal_172619 from Pixabay.

Print media has struggled in recent years. Since the invention of radio, newspapers have worried about their future, but

never to the extent seen in recent years. The past decade has been particularly tumultuous for the newspaper industry, marked by a relentless struggle for survival amid digital disruption. Although readership has declined since the 1950s, the explosion of the Internet and the resulting accessibility of online news have led to a significant drop in subscriptions since the beginning of the 21st century, as audiences migrate to online sources for news. This shift has decimated print advertising revenue, the traditional lifeblood of newspapers, forcing widespread layoffs, closures, and consolidations. Case in point: the revenue of newspaper publishers in the US dropped by 52% between 2002 and 2020, from $46 million to $22 million.

Many legacy publications have struggled to adapt to the digital landscape, experimenting with paywalls, online subscriptions, and new content formats to generate revenue. While some have found modest success, the digital advertising market is dominated by tech giants such as Google and Facebook, leaving news organizations struggling to compete for a shrinking share of the market.

The rise of social media has further complicated the landscape, with platforms like Bluesky and X (formerly Twitter) becoming primary sources of news for many, often bypassing traditional news outlets altogether. This has raised concerns about the spread of misinformation and the erosion of trust in established journalism.

Despite these challenges, the core mission of newspapers

remains vital. Investigative journalism, local news coverage, and holding power to account are essential functions in a democratic society. While the future of the industry remains uncertain, newspapers continue to adapt, innovate, and seek new models for sustainable journalism in the digital age. Some publications have reinvented their style to appeal to new audiences, while others have closed their doors.

Magazine publishers have also struggled with competing for advertising dollars for years. Although the news appears grim for an industry that has survived since the 17th century, magazines may not be truly obsolete. Many analysts are hopeful that the magazine industry, with its long and complex past, has experienced a temporary slump. The magazine industry is likely to undergo significant changes over the next several years. Several variables, including the Internet, a new generation of readers, and fluctuations in advertising costs, will likely affect this evolution. Questions remain about whether the magazine industry can reestablish itself as a dominant force in American culture amid these changes.

This chapter provides the historical context of the newspaper and magazine industries. It offers an in-depth examination of journalistic styles and trends to illuminate the mounting challenges faced by the news industry today.

4.2 HISTORY OF NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES

Over its long and complex history, the print industry has undergone many transformations. Examining the historical roots of newspapers and magazines can help shed light on how and why they have evolved into a multifaceted medium.

Scholars commonly credit the ancient Romans with publishing the first newspaper-like product, *the Acta Diurna,* or "daily doings," in 59 BCE. Carved on stone or metal and presented on message boards in public places, such as the Roman Forum, these records, historians speculate, were used by the Romans to publish chronicles of events, assemblies, births, deaths, and daily gossip.

In 1566, another ancestor of the modern newspaper appeared in Venice, Italy. These handwritten *avisi*, or gazettes, focused on politics and military conflicts. However, the absence of printing press technology greatly limited the circulation of the *Acta Diurna* and the Venetian papers.



Johannes Gutenberg's printing press exponentially increased the rate at which publishers could reproduce printed materials. **Source**: dirrgang – Printing press – CC BY 2.0.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Johannes Gutenberg's printing press drastically changed the face of publishing. In 1440, Gutenberg invented a movable-type press that enabled the high-quality reproduction of printed materials at nearly 4,000 pages per day, or 1,000 times as much as a scribe could complete by hand. This innovation drove down the price of printed materials and, for the first time, made them accessible to a mass market. Overnight, the new printing press transformed the scope and reach of the newspaper, paving the way for modern-day journalism.

European Roots

The first weekly newspapers to employ Gutenberg's press emerged in 1609. Although the papers—*Relations: Aller Furnemmen*, printed by Johann Carolus, and *Aviso Relations over Zeitung*, printed by Lucas Schulte—did not name their cities of publication to avoid government persecution, their use of German helped identify their approximate locations. Despite these concerns over persecution, the papers proved successful, and newspapers quickly spread throughout Central Europe. Over the next five years, weeklies popped up in Basel, Frankfurt, Vienna, Hamburg, Berlin, and Amsterdam. In 1621, England printed its first paper under the title

Corante, or weekely newes from Italy, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Bohemia, France and the Low Countreys



Newspapers descended from Dutch corantos and the German pamphlets of the 1600s, also referred to as broadsides. **Source**: POP – Ms. foliation? and pamphlet number – CC BY 2.0.

. By 1641, almost every country in Europe had a newspaper, as the printing press had spread to France, Italy, and Spain.

These early newspapers followed one of two major formats. The Dutch-style *corantos* densely packed reading material into a two- to four-page paper, while the German-style pamphlet (or broadside) offered a more expansive eight- to 24-page paper. Many publishers began printing in the Dutch format, but as their popularity grew, they changed to the larger German broadside style.

Forerunners of the familiar modern magazine first appeared in the 17th century as brochures, pamphlets, and almanacs. Soon, publishers realized that irregular publication schedules required too much time and energy. A gradual shift then occurred as publishers sought regular readers with specific interests. However, the early magazine differed from previous publications. It did not provide a variety of news stories like a newspaper, but it also lacked the characteristics of pleasure reading. Instead, early magazines occupied the middle ground between the two.


The Athenian Mercury:

Early magazines in the 1600s, such as *The Athenian Mercury*, often resembled newspapers before the advent of a more sophisticated graphical interface. **Source**: The Athenian Society, Athenian Mercury Feb 28 1693, public domain.

German theologian and poet Johann Rist published the first actual magazine between 1663 and 1668. Titled *Erbauliche Monaths-Unterredungen*, or *Edifying Monthly Discussions*, Rist's publication inspired several others to begin printing literary journals across Europe: Denis de Sallo's French *Journal des Sçavans*, the Royal Society's English *Philosophical Transactions*, and Francesco Nazzari's Italian *Giornale de'letterati*. In 1684, the exiled Frenchman Pierre Bayle published *Novelles de la République des Lettres* in the Netherlands to escape French censorship. Profoundly influenced by the general revival of learning during the 1600s, these publications inspired enthusiasm for education.

Another Frenchman, Jean Donneau de Vizé, published the

first "periodical of amusement," *Le Mercure Galant* (later renamed *Mercure de France*), in 1672, which contained news, short stories, and poetry. This combination of news and pleasurable reading became incredibly popular, causing other publications to imitate the magazine. This lighter magazine catered to a different reader than did the other, more intellectual publications of the day, offering articles for entertainment and enjoyment rather than for education.

With the arrival of the 18th century came an increase in literacy. Women, who enjoyed a considerable rise in literacy rates, began reading in record numbers. This growth had a profound impact on the literary world as a whole, inspiring many female writers to publish novels specifically for female readers. This influx of female readers also helped magazines flourish, as more women sought them out for knowledge and entertainment. Many magazines seized the opportunity to target women. The *Athenian Mercury*, the first magazine written specifically for women, appeared in 1693.

Early British Magazines

Much as in newspaper publication, Great Britain closely followed continental Europe's lead in producing magazines. During the early 18th century, three major influential

magazines were published regularly in Great Britain: Daniel Defoe's *The Review*, Sir Richard Steele's *The Tatler*, and Joseph Addison and Steele's *The Spectator*.

All three of these publications reached their audiences daily or several times a week. While they reached readers as frequently as newspapers, their content differed. The *Review* focused primarily on domestic and foreign affairs, featuring opinion-based political articles. The *Spectator* replaced the *Tatler*, which was published from 1709 to 1711. Both *Tatler* and *Spectator* emphasized living and culture, frequently using humor to promote virtuous behavior. *Tatler* and *Spectator*, in particular, drew a large number of female readers, and both magazines eventually introduced female-targeted publications: the *Female Tatler* in 1709 and the *Female Spectator* in 1744.

In the bustling intellectual landscape of 18th-century London, a quiet revolution was brewing, spearheaded by Edward Cave. His brainchild, *The Gentleman's Magazine*, wasn't just another publication; it was a pioneering endeavor that forever changed the way information was disseminated.



Edward Cave is credited with associating the word magazine with the periodical format. **Source**: Edward Scriven creator QS:P170,Q5345263, after Francis Kyte (fl. 1710-1744), Edward Cave, public domain.

Cave, a printer and editor with an astute eye for innovation, sought a new way to consolidate the diverse array of news, essays, poems, and debates that typically circulated in individual pamphlets and newspapers. He envisioned a single, comprehensive repository for all this disparate content, a veritable "storehouse of knowledge." It was this very concept that led him to christen his publication a "magazine."

At the time, the word magazine held a more literal meaning,

rooted in its French and Arabic origins: a physical place where goods, provisions, or military supplies were stored or sold. Think of a well-stocked armory or a bustling mercantile warehouse – a place where one could find a variety of essential items. Cave ingeniously repurposed this term, applying it metaphorically to his printed collection. *The Gentleman's Magazine* was, in essence, a literary emporium, a place where readers could find a curated selection of intellectual provisions, all conveniently gathered under one cover.

Thus, with its inaugural issue in 1731, *The Gentleman's Magazine* not only offered a groundbreaking format for information, but it also cemented a new meaning for an old word, forever linking the word magazine with the vibrant, eclectic world of periodicals known today.

Government Control and Freedom of the Press

Because the government regulated many of these early publications, they did not report on local news or events. However, civil war broke out in England in 1641. As Oliver Cromwell and Parliament threatened and eventually overthrew King Charles I, citizens turned to local papers for coverage of these major events. In November 1641, a weekly paper titled *The Heads of Severall Proceedings in This Present Parliament*

began focusing on domestic news. The paper fueled a discussion of freedom of the press that John Milton later articulated in his 1644 treatise *Areopagitica*.



THE LONDON GAZETTE.

Published by Authority.

From Monday, Septemb 3. to Monday, Septemp 10. 1666.

The first newspaper published in English was the *London Gazette*, which began as the *Oxford Gazette* when Charles II and his royal court fled London to escape the plague. **Source**: London Gazette, London-gazette, public domain.

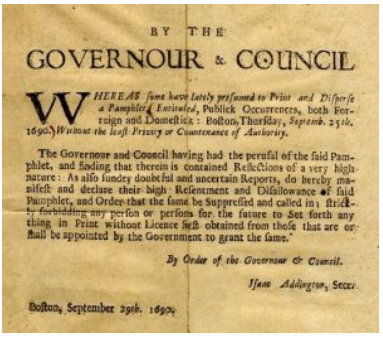
Although the arguments in *Areopagitica* focused primarily on Parliament's ban on certain books, it also addressed newspapers. Milton criticized the tight regulations on their content by stating, "Who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's image; but he who destroys a good book, kills reason itself, kills the image of God, as it were in the eye." Despite Milton's emphasis on

texts rather than on newspapers, the treatise had a major effect on printing regulations. In England, newspapers were freed from government control, and people began to understand the power of a free press.

Papers took advantage of this newfound freedom and began publishing more frequently. With biweekly publications, papers had additional space to run advertisements and market reports. This changed the role of journalists from simple observers to active players in commerce, as business owners and investors grew to rely on the papers to market their products and predict business developments. Once publishers noticed the growing popularity and profit potential of newspapers, they founded daily publications. In 1650, a German publisher began printing the world's oldest daily paper, *Einkommende Zeitungen*, and an English publisher followed suit in 1702 with London's *Daily Courant*. Such daily publications, which employed the relatively new format of headlines and embellished illustrations, turned papers into vital fixtures in the everyday lives of citizens.

Printing in Colonial America

Newspapers did not come to the American colonies until September 25, 1690, when Benjamin Harris printed *Publick Occurrences, Both FORREIGN and DOMESTICK*.



BY THE

GOVERNOUR & COUNCIL

WHEREAS some have lately presumed to Print and Disperse a Pamphlet Entituled, Publick Occurrences, both Forreign and Domestick: Boston, Thursday, Septemb. 25th, 1690. Without the least Privity or Countenance of Authority.

The Governour and Council having had the perusal of the said Pamphlet, and finding that therein is contained Reflections of a very high nature: As also sundry doubtful and uncertain Reports, do hereby manifest and declare their high Resentment and Disallowance of said Pamphlet, and Order that the same be Suppressed and called in; strictly forbidding any person or persons for the future to Set forth any thing in Print without Licence first obtained from those that are or shall be appointed by the Government to grant the same.

By Order of the Governour & Council.

Isaac Addington, Secr.

Boston, September 29th. 1690.

Benjamin Harris was jailed after producing one issue of *Publick Occurrences, Both FORREIGN and DOMESTICK*. The above order by the governor and his council established that all printed newspapers must obtain a license from the government before publication. **Source**: Order of the governor and council, 1690 (British government in colonial America), Order of the governor and council, 1690, public domain.

Harris had worked as a newspaper editor in England before fleeing to America after he published an article about a purported Catholic plot against England. The first article printed in his new colonial paper stated, "The

Christianized Indians in some parts of Plimouth, have newly appointed a day of thanksgiving to God for his Mercy." The other articles in *Publick Occurrences*, however, shared similarities with Harris's previously more controversial style (for instance, he suggested King William "used to lie with the Son's Wife"). The publication folded after just one issue, and the government ordered all copies to be destroyed.

Fourteen years passed before the next American newspaper, *The Boston News-Letter*, was launched. Fifteen years after that, *the Boston Gazette* began publication, followed immediately by the *American Weekly Mercury* in Philadelphia. Trying to avoid following in Harris's footsteps, these early papers carefully eschewed political discussion to avoid offending colonial authorities. After a lengthy absence, politics reentered American papers in 1721, when James Franklin published a criticism of smallpox inoculations in the *New England Courant*

. The following year, the paper accused the colonial government of failing to protect its citizens from pirates, which resulted in Franklin's imprisonment.

After Franklin offended authorities once again for mocking religion, a court dictated that he could no longer "print or publish *The New England Courant*, or any other Pamphlet or Paper of the like Nature, except it be first Supervised by the Secretary of this Province." Immediately following this order, Franklin turned over the paper to his younger brother, Benjamin. Benjamin Franklin, who went on to become a

renowned statesman and played a pivotal role in the American Revolution, also had a substantial impact on the printing industry as the publisher of *The Pennsylvania Gazette* and the creator of subscription libraries.

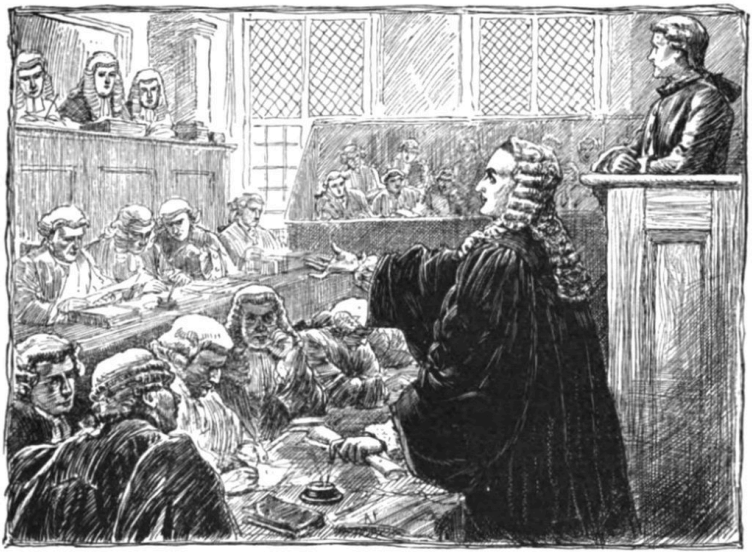
Journalism and news reporting during the colonial period in American history differed significantly from modern practices. Early newspapers were primarily concentrated in port cities like Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston, serving as vital sources of information for merchants and the business community. These publications typically prioritized business news, shipping reports, and advertisements, reflecting the colonies' economic focus. However, the number of newspapers was limited in the early colonial period, and many struggled to survive financially due to high production costs, limited distribution networks, government censorship, and intensifying competition.

The newspapers of the time did not resemble their modern counterparts

. Objective coverage was rare, and many publications openly expressed partisan viewpoints, which could be considered libelous by today's standards. Colonial papers sometimes included satire, literary excerpts, poetry, and even serialized fiction. They often focused on stories that concerned trade, British politics, and European affairs, though as the colonies matured, local news became more prevalent. While newspapers were more accessible to wealthier and more educated colonists, they were also read by a broader segment of

society, including merchants, clergy, and some artisans and tradespeople; however, limited literacy and high costs restricted their wider circulation.

As the American Revolution drew near, newspapers became increasingly partisan, serving as vital tools for disseminating political ideologies. Patriot publications, such as Isaiah Thomas's *The Massachusetts Spy* and the *Journal of Occurrences*, helped inform colonists about perceived British misdeeds and rallied support for resistance, often aligning with the activities of groups like the Sons of Liberty. On the Loyalist (Tory) side, newspapers such as James Rivington's *Royal Gazette* defended British policies and the authority of the Crown. While some colonists initially sought reconciliation and greater representation within the existing British system, this position became increasingly untenable as tensions escalated. As the revolution drew closer, Loyalist papers faced growing hostility, threats, and even violence
, leading to the closure of some publications. At the same time, Patriot newspapers gained significant influence and fueled the revolutionary movement.



The New York Weekly Journal's founder, John Peter Zenger, brought controversial political discussion to the New York press. **Source**: Martha J. Lamb, 29-THE FAMOUS ZENGER TRIAL, public domain.

The Trial of John Peter Zenger

Political discussions began to appear in other newspapers around the colonies. In 1733, John Peter Zenger founded *The New York Weekly Journal*. Zenger's paper soon began criticizing the newly appointed colonial governor, William Cosby, who had replaced members of the New York Supreme Court when he could not control them. In late 1734, Cosby had Zenger arrested, claiming that his paper contained "divers scandalous, virulent, false and seditious reflections."

Eight months later, prominent Philadelphia lawyer Andrew Hamilton defended Zenger in a groundbreaking trial. Hamilton compelled the jury to consider the truth and determine whether Zenger had printed factual statements. Ignoring the judge's disapproval of Zenger and his actions, the jury returned a not-guilty verdict after only a short deliberation. Zenger's trial resulted in two significant developments in the march toward press freedom. First, the prosecution demonstrated to the papers that they could potentially print honest criticism of the government without fear of retribution. Second, the British became afraid that an American jury would never convict an American journalist.

With Zenger's verdict providing more freedom to the press, some began to call for emancipation from England, and newspapers became their conduit for political discussion.

The Birth of American Magazines

The first American magazines debuted in 1741, when Andrew Bradford's *American Magazine* and Benjamin Franklin's *General Magazine* began publication in Philadelphia, a mere three days apart from each other. Neither magazine lasted long, however; *American Magazine* folded after only three months and *General Magazine* after six. The short-lived nature of the publications likely had less to do with the outlets themselves and more to do with the fact that they

faced "too few readers with leisure time to read, high costs of publishing, and expensive distribution systems." Despite this early setback, magazines began to flourish during the latter half of the 18th century, and by the end of the 1700s, more than 100 magazines had emerged in the nascent United States. Despite this prominent publication status, typical colonial magazines still recorded low circulation, and audiences considered the available material highbrow.

Freedom of the Press in the Early United States

The Stamp Act of 1765, which imposed a tax on various paper goods, including newsprint, created significant economic hardship for colonial newspapers. While the British government claimed to tax the physical paper rather than the ideas it contained, the act was widely seen as an attempt to suppress dissent. Some newspapers temporarily suspended publication in protest, while others continued to publish, sometimes defying the tax outright.

In 1791, the nascent United States of America adopted the First Amendment as part of the Bill of Rights. This act states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition

the government for a redress of grievances." In this one sentence, U.S. law formally guaranteed freedom of the press. The Stamp Act's impact on the Founding Fathers in creating this legislation cannot be overstated. It solidified the notion that a free press is essential for a functioning democracy and catalyzed the American Revolution.

However, as a reaction to harsh partisan writing, Congress passed the Alien and Sedition Act in 1798, which declared that "writing, printing, uttering, or publishing any false, scandalous and malicious writing or writings against the government of the United States" was punishable by fine and imprisonment. When Thomas Jefferson won the presidency in 1800, he allowed the Sedition Act to lapse, claiming the country would undergo "a great experiment...to demonstrate the falsehood of the pretext that freedom of the press is incompatible with orderly government." This free press experiment has continued to the present day.



Following the American Revolution, newspapers remained highly partisan, reflecting the intense political debates between the Federalists and the Democratic-Republicans. The vitriolic rhetoric in the press often spilled over into real-world consequences, with the duel between Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton fueled in part by controversies generated in newspaper pages. However, by the 1830s, the intensely partisan press of the early Republic had begun to decline. This was due in part to concerns among political leaders about unrest and disunity, the rise of the Penny Press, a changing political landscape, and the broader democratization of politics during the Jacksonian era. **Source**: Illustrator not identified. From a painting by J. Mund., Hamilton-burr-duel, public domain.

As late as the early 1800s, newspapers still incurred substantial printing costs. Although daily papers had become more common and provided merchants with up-to-date, vital trading information, most cost about 6 cents per copy, well

above what artisans and other working-class citizens could afford. As such, newspaper readership did not extend beyond the elite.



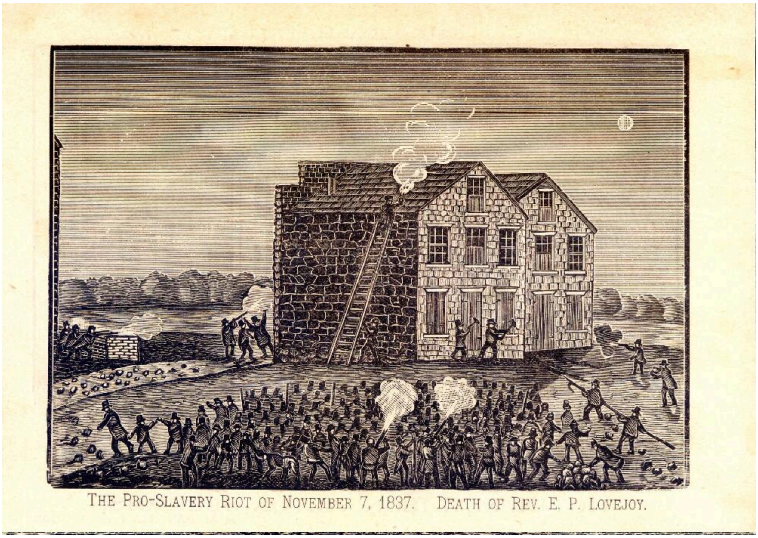
An edition of Benjamin Day's The Sun, the first penny paper. The emergence of the penny press helped turn newspapers into a true mass medium. **Source**: it:Benjamin Day, The Sun (New York) N.1, public domain.

All that changed in September 1833 when Benjamin Day created *The Sun*. Printed on small, letter-sized pages, *The Sun* sold for just a penny. With the Industrial Revolution in full swing, Day employed the new steam-driven, two-cylinder press to print *The Sun*. While the old printing press could print approximately 125 newspapers per hour, this improved version could print approximately 18,000 copies per hour. As he reached out to new readers, Day knew he wanted to alter the concept of news, which had featured heavily inflammatory partisan commentary up to that point. He printed the paper's motto at the top of every front page of *The Sun*: "The object of this paper is to lay before the public, at a price within the means of every one, all the news of the day, and at

the same time offer an advantageous medium for advertisements."

The *Sun* sought out stories that would appeal to the new mainstream consumer. As such, the paper primarily published human-interest stories and police reports. Additionally, Day left ample room for advertisements. Day's adoption of this new format and industrialized method of printing proved highly successful. The *Sun* became the first paper of what became known as the penny press. Before the emergence of the penny press, the most popular paper, New York City's *Courier and Enquirer*, had sold 4,500 copies per day. By 1835, *The Sun* sold 15,000 copies per day.

The Sun would eventually compete with another early successful penny paper, James Gordon Bennett's *New York Morning Herald*, which debuted in 1835. Bennett made his mark on the publishing industry by offering nonpartisan political reporting. He also introduced more aggressive methods for gathering news, hiring both interviewers and foreign correspondents. His paper became the first to send a reporter to a crime scene to witness an investigation. In the 1860s, Bennett hired 63 war reporters to cover the U.S. Civil War. Although the *Herald* initially emphasized sensational news, it later became one of the country's most respected papers for its accurate reporting.



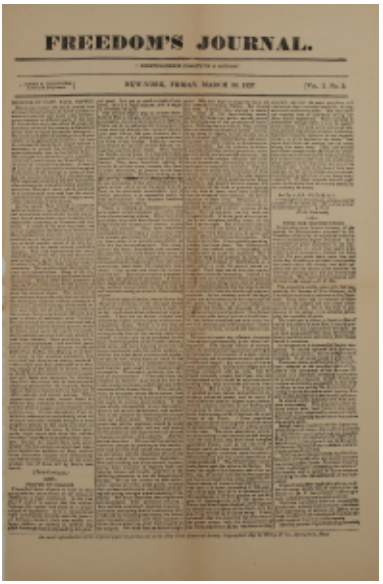
The Rev. Elijah Lovejoy lost his life and his press for printing the *Alton Observer*, which called for the abolition of slavery. **Source**: Unknown author, "The Pro-Slavery Riot on November 7, 1837. Death of Rev. E. P. Lovejoy." , public domain.

The abolitionist press played a vital role in the anti-slavery movement in the United States from the 1830s to the Civil War. It served as a crucial platform for disseminating anti-slavery ideas, mobilizing public opinion, and organizing abolitionist activities. Unlike the mainstream press of the time, which often ignored or even supported slavery, the abolitionist press provided a powerful counter-narrative, exposing the horrors of slavery and advocating for its immediate abolition.

The abolitionist press attempted to appeal to the public's conscience by highlighting the moral and religious wrongness

of slavery. They published narratives of enslaved people, accounts of the brutality of slavery, and arguments grounded in spiritual and ethical principles across a wide range of publications, from weekly newspapers to pamphlets and books. It included voices from both Black and white abolitionists, as well as men and women. Compared to more moderate anti-slavery efforts, the abolitionist press often took a radical stance, demanding immediate and unconditional emancipation. This radicalism usually put them at odds with both pro-slavery forces and more gradualist anti-slavery advocates.

Freedom's Journal, founded in New York City by John Russwurm and Samuel Cornish, is considered



Freedom's Journal, the first African American-owned and operated newspaper. **Source**: Unknown authorUnknown author, Freedom's Journal, Vol. 1 No. 3, front page , public domain.

the first African American-owned and operated newspaper in the United States. It addressed issues of slavery and racial discrimination, providing a platform for Black voices and perspectives. Though short-lived, it set a precedent for future Black-owned newspapers and played a crucial role in early Black activism.

William Lloyd Garrison's *The Liberator*, published in Boston, became

one of the most influential and uncompromising voices in the abolitionist movement

. Garrison's advocacy for immediate emancipation made him a controversial figure, but his newspaper played a pivotal role in galvanizing the abolitionist cause. Frederick Douglass, a formerly enslaved man and powerful orator, established *The North Star* in Rochester, New York. His newspaper provided a crucial platform for Black perspectives on slavery and other social issues. Douglass's eloquent writing and powerful arguments made *The North Star* a leading voice in the abolitionist movement.

Abolitionist publishers faced significant challenges, including financial difficulties, censorship, and violent attacks. Presbyterian minister Elijah Lovejoy published the *Alton Observer* in Alton, Illinois, a border state with strong pro-slavery sentiment. Lovejoy's outspoken condemnation of slavery made him a target of pro-slavery mobs. He lost his life in 1837 while defending his printing press from an angry mob, becoming a martyr for the abolitionist cause and freedom of the press.

Despite such setbacks, the Abolitionist Press laid the groundwork for the Civil War and demonstrated the power of the press to challenge injustice and advocate for social change.

Growth of Wire Services and Printing Capacity

Another major historical technological breakthrough for newspapers came when Samuel Morse helped improve the electric telegraph in 1837. Newspapers turned to emerging telegraph companies to receive up-to-date news briefs from cities across the globe. The significant expense of this service led to the formation of the Associated Press (AP) in 1846 as a cooperative arrangement of five major New York papers: the *New York Sun*, the *Journal of Commerce*, the *Courier and Enquirer*, the *New York Herald*, and the *Express*. The success of the Associated Press led to the development of wire services between major cities. According to the AP, this meant that editors were able to "actively collect news as it breaks, rather than gather already published news." This collaboration between papers allowed for more reliable reporting, and the increased breadth of subject matter lent subscribing newspapers mass appeal for not only upper- but also middle- and working-class readers.

The invention of the steam-powered printing press in the early 19th century revolutionized the newspaper industry, drastically increasing production speed and lowering costs. Before this innovation, printing relied on hand-operated presses, a slow, laborious process that limited the circulation

and availability of newspapers. The steam press, pioneered by figures like Friedrich Koenig, automated the printing process, allowing hundreds, and eventually thousands, of pages to be printed per hour.

This technological leap had profound consequences for journalism. Increased printing speed enabled newspapers to reach a much wider audience, leading to the rise of mass-circulation newspapers and the emergence of the Penny Press. Lower production costs made newspapers more affordable, expanding readership beyond the elite and fostering greater public access to information. This broader dissemination of news contributed to higher literacy rates and a more informed public discourse. The steam press also enabled newspapers to include more content, leading to larger and more comprehensive publications. With the growth of railroads and steamboats, news could now travel more quickly than ever.

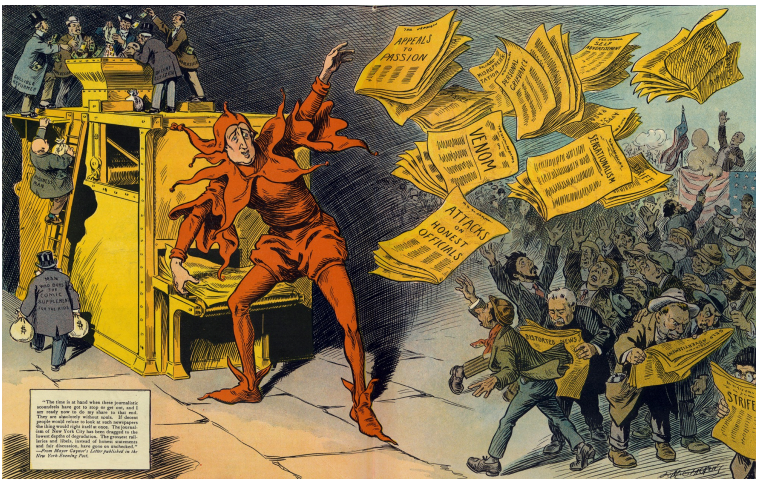


Illustration depicting William Randolph Hearst as a jester tossing newspapers with headlines such as "Appeals to Passion, Venom, Sensationalism, Attacks on Honest Officials, Strife, Distorted News, Personal Grievance, [and] Misrepresentation" to a crowd of eager readers, among them an anarchist assassinating a politician speaking from a platform draped with American flags. **Source**: L. M. Glackens , creator QS:P170,Q6687255, The Yellow Press by L.M. Glackens, public domain.

Yellow Journalism

In the late 1800s, Joseph Pulitzer, publisher of the *New York World*, developed a new journalistic style that relied on intensified **sensationalism**—stories focused on crime, violence, emotion, and sex. Although he made major strides in the newspaper industry by creating an expanded section focusing on women and pioneering the use of advertisements

as news, Pulitzer relied primarily on violence and sex in his headlines to sell more copies. Ironically, journalism named its most prestigious award after him. His *New York World* became famous for such headlines as "Baptized in Blood" and "Little Lotta's Lovers." This sensationalist style served as the forerunner for today's tabloids. Editors relied on shocking headlines to sell their papers, and although investigative journalism filled their pages, they often took liberties in how they told the story. Newspapers usually printed an editor's interpretation of the story without maintaining objectivity.

At the same time Pulitzer had established the *New York World*, William Randolph Hearst—an admirer and principal competitor of Pulitzer—took over the *New York Journal*. The battle between these two major New York newspapers escalated as Pulitzer and Hearst attempted to outdo one another. The papers slashed their prices back down to a penny, stole editors and reporters from each other, and filled their papers with outrageous, sensationalist headlines. Both shared a passion for motivating the United States to go to war with Spain, and they succeeded with the declaration of the Spanish-American War. Both Hearst and Pulitzer filled their papers with huge front-page headlines and gave bloody—if sometimes inaccurate—accounts of the war. As historian Richard K. Hines writes, "The American Press, especially 'yellow presses' such as William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal* [and] Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World*

... sensationalized the brutality of the reconcentrado and the threat to American business interests. Journalists frequently embellished Spanish atrocities and invented others." Hearst's life partially inspired the 1941 classic film *Citizen Kane*.

Kid Blink's Uprising: How Newsies Took on Giants



National Photo Company Collection, Newsboy, public domain.

Newsies were a ubiquitous presence in American cities during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These young children, primarily boys, hawked newspapers on street corners, shouting headlines and vying for the attention of passersby. They played a vital part in distributing newspapers, particularly

for evening editions, and their cries were a familiar soundtrack of urban life.

Life as a **newsie** was far from glamorous. The children worked long hours, often in harsh weather conditions, for meager earnings. Newsies typically purchased newspapers from publishers at wholesale and then resold them for a small profit. This meant they bore the risk of unsold papers, which cut into their already slim earnings.

In 1899, this precarious existence led to the Newsboys Strike in New York City. Led by Kid Blink (Louis Baletti), a charismatic young newsie with a legendary eye patch, the strike was sparked by a price increase imposed by influential publishers Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst. Pulitzer's *New York World* and Hearst's *New York Journal* had been engaged in a fierce circulation war, driving down newspaper prices to attract readers. However, when the Spanish-American War ended, they colluded to raise the price they charged newsies, squeezing their already tight margins.

The newsies, many of whom were impoverished and homeless, organized a strike, refusing to sell the *World* and *Journal*. They formed a union, held rallies, and even disrupted the publishers' distribution efforts. The

strike garnered public sympathy and media attention, putting pressure on the publishers to negotiate.

After two weeks, the strike ended in a partial victory for the newsies. While they didn't achieve a complete rollback of the price increase, they won a significant concession: the right to return unsold papers for a refund. This reduced their financial risk and improved their working conditions.

The Newsboys Strike of 1899 is a remarkable example of child labor activism and the power of collective action. It highlights the struggles faced by working children in the Industrial Age and their ability to organize and fight for their rights. The strike also highlights the role of newspapers in shaping public discourse and the power of public opinion to influence even the most powerful media moguls.



THE AMATEUR DIME MUSEUM IN HOGAN'S ALLEY.

R. F. Outcault's popular character, the Yellow Kid, debuted in the comic strip *Hogan's Alley* in Joseph Pulitzer's *The World*. William Randolph Hearst decided to hire the comic's artist away from Pulitzer shortly after its debut, an event that would fuel the pair's bitter rivalry. **Source**: Richard F. Outcault creator QS:P170,Q737068, The Amateur Dime Museum in Hogan's Alley, public domain.

Comics and Stunt Journalism

As the publishers vied for readership, newspapers introduced an entertaining new element to their pages: the comic strip. In 1896, Hearst's *New York Journal* published R. F. Outcault's *The Yellow Kid* in an attempt to "attract immigrant readers who otherwise might not have bought an English-language paper." Readers rushed to buy papers featuring the successful, yellow nightshirt-wearing character. The cartoon "provoked a wave of 'gentle hysteria,' and soon began to appear on buttons, cracker tins, cigarette packs, and ladies' fans—and even as a character in a Broadway play." The cartoon's popularity gave rise to the term *yellow journalism* to



Inspired by the popular Jules Verne novel *Around the World in 80 Days*, Bly decided to attempt the feat herself and write about her experiences along the way. This included a stop in France, where she met and charmed the author of the book, Verne. Bly's newspaper, the *New York Journal*, hosted a contest that permitted readers to guess

describe the types of papers in which it appeared.

Pulitzer responded to the success of the *Yellow Kid* by introducing a new form of journalism, known as stunt journalism. The publisher hired journalist Elizabeth Cochrane, who wrote under the name Nellie Bly, to report on aspects of life that the publishing industry had previously ignored. Her first article focused on the New York City Lunatic Asylum on Blackwell Island. Bly feigned insanity and had herself committed to the infamous asylum. She recounted her experience in her first article, "Ten Days in a Madhouse." "It was a brilliant move. Her madhouse performance inaugurated the performative tactic that would become her trademark reporting style."

the exact moment she would return. She met a large and enthusiastic crowd when she arrived home 72 days, six hours, and 11 minutes after departing. **Source**: Nellie Bly, The New York correspondent, public domain.

Such articles brought Bly much notoriety and fame, and she became known as the first stunt journalist. Some considered her stunts lowbrow entertainment, and more traditional journalists often criticized female stunt reporters. Regardless, Pulitzer's decision to hire Bly represented a huge step for women in the newspaper business. Bly and her fellow stunt reporters "were the first newspaperwomen to move, as a group, from the women's pages to the front page, from society news into political and criminal news."

Despite the sometimes questionable tactics of both Hearst and Pulitzer, each made significant contributions to the growing journalism industry. By 1922, Hearst, a ruthless publisher, had created the country's largest media holding company. At that time, he owned 20 daily papers, 11 Sunday papers, two wire services, six magazines, and a newsreel company. Likewise, toward the end of his life, Pulitzer turned his focus to establishing a school of journalism. In 1912, a year after his death and 10 years after Pulitzer had initiated his educational campaign, classes were established at the Columbia University School of Journalism. At the time of its opening, the school had approximately 100 students from 21 countries. Additionally, in 1917, the Pulitzer Prize awarded its first accolades for excellence in journalism.

Mass-Appeal Magazines

Magazines gained popularity in the United States in the 1830s, when publishers took advantage of a general decline in printing and mailing costs and began producing less expensive magazines aimed at a wider target audience. Magazine style also transformed. While early magazines focused on improvement and reason, later versions shifted their focus to amusement. Magazines no longer focused on the elite class. Publishers took advantage of their newly expanded audience by offering family, children's, and women's magazines.

Women's publications again proved especially lucrative. *Godey's Lady's Book*, a Philadelphia-based monthly published between 1830 and 1898, reached out to female readers by employing nearly 150 women.

Muckraking



McClure's Magazine featured some of the most groundbreaking muckraking journalism of the 19th and 20th centuries. **Source**: McClure's Magazine, McClure's magazine cover, May 1923, public domain.

Born of the tumultuous late 19th and early 20th centuries, muckraking emerged as a distinctive and potent force in American journalism, spanning roughly from the 1870s to the 1920s. This American-English term, famously coined in 1906 by President Theodore Roosevelt—who drew

inspiration from a character in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*—referred to those intrepid investigators who delved into and exposed the insidious roots of corruption in society.

Muckraking wasn't merely about reporting facts. Publications would embark on ambitious "crusades" to eradicate pressing social problems. This journalistic offensive typically followed a three-step process: first, discovering a pressing social ill; second, writing about it repeatedly and relentlessly, shining a persistent light on the issue; and finally, through this sustained public pressure, forcing the government to intervene and implement solutions.

Among the most formidable figures of this era was Samuel McClure, whose *McClure's Magazine* became a prominent platform for articles dissecting the shadowy dealings of the insurance industry, the monopolistic practices of railroads, and the pervasive rot of government corruption. One of *McClure's* most celebrated contributors was Ida May Tarbell, whose groundbreaking investigation into the monolithic Standard Oil Company trust remains a landmark of investigative journalism.

Lincoln Steffens, who began his career at the *New York Sun*, was another titan of muckraking. Working the police beat, he witnessed firsthand the brutal realities of officer misconduct, fueling his outrage. His most renowned work, *The Shame of the Cities*, unflinchingly exposed the deep-seated problems plaguing numerous American urban centers and the

rampant corruption among elected officials. Upton Sinclair, a prolific writer with over 80 books to his name, penned the iconic novel *The Jungle*, which graphically depicted the horrific conditions in the meatpacking industry, and also delved into the intricacies of the oil and coal industries.

Beyond the written word, the visual medium also served as a powerful tool for muckraking. Cartoonist Thomas Nast stands out, celebrated for two enduring legacies: his definition of the



A *Harper's Weekly* cover illustration from Thomas Nast that depicts one of his popular topics: the corrupt Boss Tweed. **Source**: Thomas Nast artist QS:P170,Q214957 Harper's Weekly artist QS:P170,Q3127693, "What are You Laughing at? To the Victor Belong the Spoils" (from Harper's Weekly) MET DP809648 , CC0 1.0

modern image of Santa Claus and his scathing political cartoons targeting the notoriously corrupt New York Democratic Party leader, Boss Tweed, and his Tammany Hall machine. So impactful were Nast's visual indictments that President Grant, in 1869, famously declared, "Two things elected me. The sword of Sheridan and the pencil of Nast." Boss Tweed, whose reign of corruption in 1871 is estimated to have siphoned between $25 million and $45 million (and potentially as high as $200 million, or $5 billion in 2023 dollars) from New York City taxpayers, was eventually brought to justice, a testament to the power of such relentless scrutiny.

The popularity of muckraking was deeply rooted in the socio-economic conditions of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The 1890s saw a significant decline in average American incomes and an increase in unemployment. The average work week stretched to a grueling 60 hours, while typical weekly salaries hovered between a meager $6 and $10. Industrialization, while bringing progress, also fostered the rise of powerful trusts that ruthlessly cornered markets and inflated prices, further squeezing the working class. This era was also characterized by a relatively weak federal government, with a line of presidents from Lincoln to Roosevelt often limiting intervention in the affairs of big business, leaving a void that muckrakers were eager to fill by holding power accountable through the unflinching gaze of their investigations.

The Saturday Evening Post



The Saturday Evening Post popularized the use of artwork on its cover, setting a standard for other publications to follow. **Source**: The Saturday Evening Post, SaturdayEveningPost2May1925, public domain.

The Saturday Evening Post became the first truly successful mass-circulation magazine in the United States. This weekly magazine first began printing in 1821 and remained in regular print production until 1969, when it briefly ceased circulation. However, in 1971, a new owner remodeled the magazine to focus on health and medical breakthroughs. From its first

publication in the early 1800s, *The Saturday Evening Post* quickly gained popularity; by 1855, it had a circulation of 90,000 copies per year. Widely recognized for transforming the magazine's look, the publication became the first to use artwork on its cover, a decision that *The Saturday Evening Post* has said "connected readers intimately with the magazine as a whole." Indeed, *the Saturday Evening Post* took advantage of the format by featuring the work of famous artists such as Norman Rockwell. Using such recognizable artists boosted circulation as "Rockwell's illustrations thrived in popularity, growing out from basic themes of a simpler time. His art looked up to an ideal: the perfect everyday lives Americans wished they could live."

But *The Saturday Evening Post* did not only feature famous artists; it also published works by well-known authors, including F. Scott Fitzgerald, Sinclair Lewis, and Ring Lardner. The popularity of these writers contributed to the magazine's continued success.

Youth's Companion

The *Youth's Companion* represents another early U.S. mass magazine, published between 1827 and 1929, until it merged with *The American Boy*. Based in Boston, Massachusetts, this periodical featured fairly religious content and developed a reputation as a wholesome magazine that encouraged young readers to lead virtuous and pious lives. Eventually, the

magazine sought to reach a larger, adult audience by including tame entertainment pieces. Nevertheless, the magazine, as its circulation increased, began featuring the work of prominent writers for both children and adults, including Louisa May Alcott, Emily Dickinson, Mark Twain, Helen Keller, and Theodore Roosevelt.

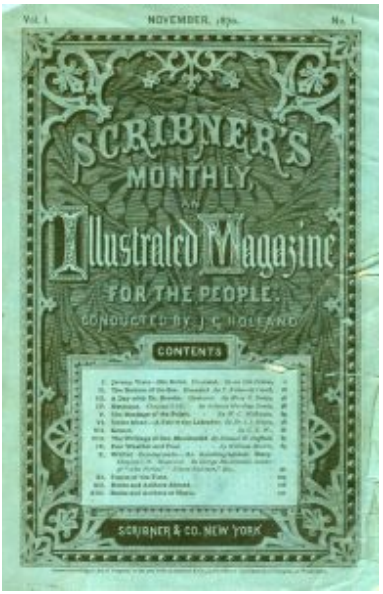
Price Decreases Attract Larger Audiences

While magazines such as *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Youth's Companion* proved pretty popular, the industry still struggled to achieve widespread circulation. Most publications cost the then-hefty sum of 25 or 35 cents per issue, limiting readership to the relatively few who could afford them. This all changed in 1893 when Samuel Sidney McClure began selling *McClure's Magazine*, originally a literary and political magazine, at the bargain price of only 15 cents per issue. The trend caught on. Soon, *Cosmopolitan* began selling for 12.5 cents, while *Munsey Magazine* sold for only 10 cents. All three of these periodicals enjoyed wide success. Frank A. Munsey, owner of *Munsey Magazine*, estimated that between 1893 and 1899 "the ten-cent magazine increased the magazine-buying public from 250,000 to 750,000 persons." For the first time, magazines could sell for less than they cost to produce. Due to increased circulation, publications could charge higher advertising rates while lowering costs to customers.

By 1900, advertising had become a crucial component of the magazine business. In the early days of the industry, many publications attempted to exclude advertisements from their issues due to publishers' natural fondness for literature and writing. However, once circulation increased, advertisers sought out space in magazines to reach a larger audience. Magazines responded by raising advertising rates, ultimately increasing their profitability. By the turn of the 20th century, advertising became the primary source of income for most magazines. This trend becomes particularly noticeable in some women's magazines, where advertisements account for nearly half of all content.

Due to the significant costs associated with printing and mailing publications, magazines initially targeted only regional audiences, thereby limiting their ability to influence broader audiences. Not until these expenses declined and advertising revenues increased could magazine owners justify the cost of mass circulation.

Advertising for a National Market



Magazines like *Scribner's Monthly* helped introduce national trends through the advertisements they featured. **Source**: anonymous, Scribner's Monthly, public domain.

The late 19th century witnessed a surge in mass circulation for the U.S. magazine industry. This meant that magazines that had once targeted only a small part of the country suddenly began reaching a nationwide audience. In addition to the apparent benefit of increased magazine revenue, this shift to broad circulation led to an interesting phenomenon: the emergence of national trends. For the first time in U.S. history, mass circulation enabled the widespread diffusion and advertisement of news, stories, consumer goods, and fashions to audiences, rather than just regional ones. The mass circulation of magazines

united the country, as geographically diverse consumers read the same stories and saw the same advertisements.

Due to this growth in readership, advertisements became increasingly vital to the magazine industry. Advertisers sought to reach a large audience, and magazines willingly afforded them that opportunity, selling advertising space at higher rates. One business manager of *Scribner's Monthly*, an early popular magazine,
solicited advertisements by discussing the readership boom:

> The publishers of *Scribner's Monthly* will insert in each number of the magazine certain pages devoted to advertisements of a character likely to interest magazine readers. These will not increase the postage, while significantly enhancing the publishers' ability to make their magazines readable and attractive. The pressure of advertisements in our first number shows how quickly the business public recognizes the claims of the new magazine. Our edition will be huge, and it will have a national circulation. It is now well understood that a first-class popular magazine furnishes to all men who seek a national market the very best medium for advertising that exists.

For the first time, publishers and advertisers could access a national market. By the 1930s, market research had become the norm for periodicals, as magazines and advertisers sought to better understand what readers wanted in their publications. However, market research has its limits; many publishers instead embraced magazines' potential to tell people what they want or need, thus solidifying magazines' role as

drivers of popular culture. As one editor of *Vogue* articulated: "If we find out what people want, it's already too late."

Popular Literature in Magazines



THE MURDERS IN THE RUE MORGUE.

BY EDGAR A. POE.

Classic stories like Edgar Allan Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" first debuted in magazines, as seen in this 1841 edition of *Graham's Magazine*. **Source**: Edgar Allan Poe, Murders-in-the-Rue-Morgue-1841, public domain.

Magazines offered a place not only for advertisers but also for authors and poets to reach a large audience. Several publications regularly hired both new and established authors to write stories. As circulation increased, so did the desire for these authors to publish their work.

Literary magazines enjoyed a boom during the 19th century, publishing some of the period's most important fiction. At some point, nearly every important American writer contributed to literary magazines; for example,

Edgar Allan Poe, Mark Twain, Walt Whitman, and Ernest Hemingway all published in periodicals throughout their careers. Even writers working outside the country, such as Ezra Pound and James Joyce, sought out U.S. magazines to publish works that faced censorship in their native countries.

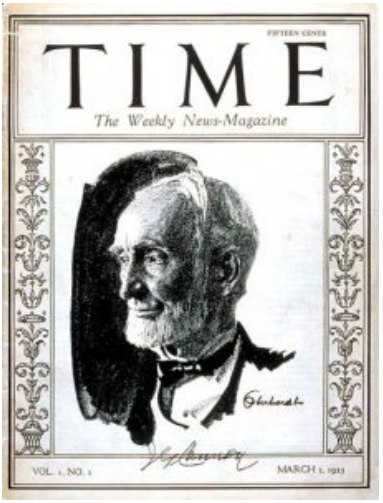
Just as magazines offered authors a chance to display their writing to a large audience, they also allowed readers a taste of available literature. Even today, magazines often print excerpts from books, providing readers with a preview of the complete text. Portions of literary classics, including *Uncle Tom's Cabin* , *Walden*, *Moby-Dick*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and *Ulysses*, debuted in magazines. Some novels—such as Edgar Rice Burroughs's *Tarzan of the Apes*, John Hersey's *Hiroshima*, and Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*—even appeared in magazines in full before publication in book form. The opportunity to publish in magazines has provided invaluable opportunities for authors, but literary publications have also proved essential for the development of American culture. In publishing literary texts, journals have promoted now-classic stories, such as the previously mentioned examples, that have defined American literary history and shaped the U.S. narrative.

Early 20th-Century Developments

The arrival of the 20th century brought with it new types of magazines, including news, business, and picture magazines. In time, these types of publications came to dominate the industry and attract vast readerships.

Newsmagazines

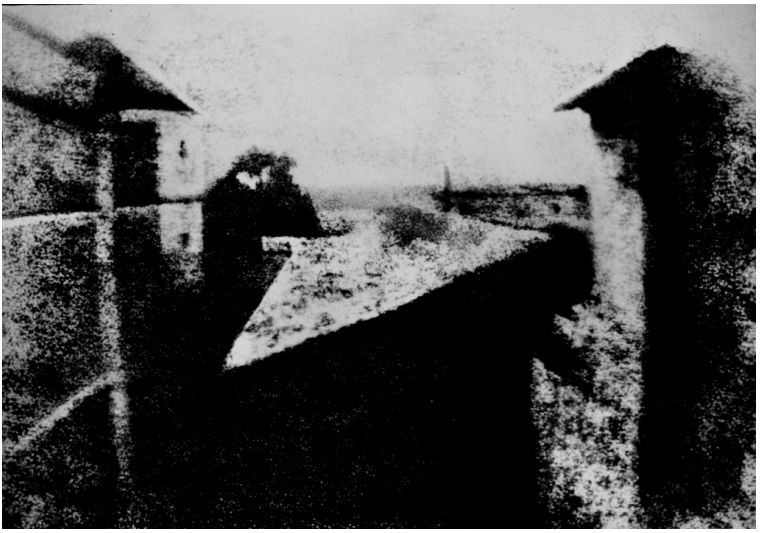
As publishers became interested in succinctly presenting the rapid increase in worldwide information made available by technology during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, they designed the news magazine. In 1923, *Time* became the first news magazine to focus on world news. *Time* first began publication with the proposition that "people are uninformed because no publication has adapted itself to the time which busy men are able to spend simply keeping informed." Although the periodical struggled during its early years, *Time* hit its stride in 1928, and its readership grew. The magazine's signature style, characterized by well-researched



The first edition of *Time Magazine* featured the image of Speaker of the House Joseph Gurney Cannon on its cover. **Source**: Cover credit: William Oberhardt (1882-1958), Time Magazine – first cover, public domain.

news presented succinctly, contributed significantly to its eventual success.

Several other news magazines entered the market during this era as well. *Business Week* debuted in 1929, focusing on the global market. *Forbes*, currently one of the most popular financial magazines, began printing in 1917 as a biweekly publication. In 1933, a former *Time* foreign editor founded *Newsweek*. Today, *Newsweek* and *Time* continue to compete, furthering a trend that began in Newsweek's early years.



The oldest surviving photograph was taken by Joseph Nicéphore Niépce in 1826. **Source**: Joseph Nicéphore Niépce, View from the Window at Le Gras, Joseph Nicéphore Niépce, uncompressed UMN source , public domain.

Picture Magazines

Photojournalism, the art of telling stories through photography, also gained popularity during the early 20th century. Joseph Nicéphore Niépce ignited the nascent spark of photojournalism in 1826 by capturing the world's first photograph. Yet, for decades, images such as these remained largely absent from the daily news, their widespread integration into newspapers awaiting the tumultuous conclusion of a conflict that would forever alter the American landscape.

As the drums of the Civil War began to beat, a voracious public demand for timely battle news emerged, and pictorial weekly newspapers rose to the occasion. These publications, a precursor to modern news magazines, became windows into the conflict, their pages often adorned with gory illustrations. These weren't artistic interpretations; they were stark, visceral depictions, usually based directly on the photographs emerging from the front lines.



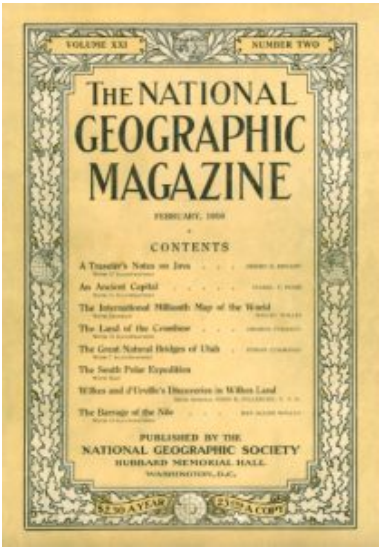
Matthew Brady is credited with conceiving the concept of photojournalism, driven by his ambition to document and preserve history as it unfolded during the American Civil War. **Source**: Brady, Matthew, The American Civil War, 1861 – 1865 Q44183, public domain.

At the heart of this visual revolution stood Matthew Brady, a figure often credited with giving birth to photojournalism. His ambition was monumental: to document and preserve the unfolding history through the lens of his camera. However, history's judgment of Brady is not without its shadows. He is frequently criticized for staging his subjects, even going so far as to arrange the corpses of fallen soldiers to achieve a more dramatic composition. Furthermore, while he spearheaded a team of talented photographers, individual credit was often subsumed under his studio's umbrella, a practice that blurs the lines of authorship even today.

The Civil War era itself was a crucible for journalistic

innovation. Paper shortages, particularly in the beleaguered South, forced ingenuity. The conflict also saw the unprecedented formation of press pools and the issuance of press credentials, signaling a growing recognition of the media's role in shaping public opinion. For the first time, war correspondents were specifically hired, their daring exploits on the front lines transforming them into heroes, often referred to as "specials." The burgeoning reliance on the telegraph, a technological marvel of its time, ensured that these dispatches were not only timely but also factual and concise, their brevity dictated by the cost of transmission.

While Brady laid the groundwork, the true democratization of photographs in newspapers awaited the 1880s and the advent of the halftone process. This revolutionary technique enabled photographs to be broken down into a series of dots, appearing in various shades of gray, and, crucially, allowed for the direct mechanical replication of images onto newsprint. No longer reliant on laborious engravings, newspapers and magazines could now integrate photographs swiftly and affordably.


VOLUME XXI NUMBER TWO

THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY, 1910

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The Great Natural Bridges of Utah

The South Polar Expedition

Wilkes and d'Urville's Discoveries in Wilkes Land

The Barrage of the Nile

PUBLISHED BY THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY HUBBARD MEMORIAL HALL WASHINGTON, D.C.

$2.50 A YEAR 25 CTS A COPY

An early edition of *The National Geographic Magazine* features the first depiction of the yellow oak leaf border illustration. Except for a few changes to background color and font, this would be the primary design through June of 1959. **Source**: Jake Jakubowski, The National Geographic Magaine – February 1910 Volume 21 Number 2, public domain.

The visual landscape of journalism continued to evolve. In 1888, *National Geographic* debuted, destined to become a global arbiter of visual storytelling. And in a further leap forward, the magazine introduced color plates in 1906, ushering in an era in which the world could be presented not

just in shades of gray but in the full, vibrant spectrum of reality.

As photography grew in popularity, so did picture magazines. The most influential picture magazine was Henry Luce's *Life*, which was regularly published between 1936 and 1972. Within weeks of its initial publication, *Life* had a circulation of 1 million. In Luce's words, the publication aimed "to see life; to see the world; to witness great events; to watch the faces of the poor and the gestures of the proud; to see strange things." It did not disappoint. Widely credited with establishing photojournalism, *Life* captured the attention of many upon its first publication. With 96 large-format glossy pages, even the inaugural issue sold out. The opening photograph depicted an obstetrician holding a newborn baby, accompanied by the caption "Life begins."

While *Life* was the most influential picture magazine, it had competition. The popular biweekly picture magazine *Look* was published between 1937 and 1971, claiming to compete with Life by reaching a larger audience. Although *Look* offered *Life* stiff competition during their almost identical print runs, the latter magazine has left a greater legacy. Several other photo magazines—including *Focus*, *Peek*, *Foto*, *Pic*, and *Click*—also took their inspiration from *Life*.

Framing History: How Bourke-White Defined *Life*'s Legacy



Margaret Bourke-White's favorite self-portrait, made with the U.S. 8th Air Force in 1943. **Source**: US Air Force, Margaret Bourke-White with the U.S. 8th Air Force , public domain.

In the annals of photojournalism, few names resonate with the same pioneering spirit and enduring impact as Margaret Bourke-White. Her significance is inextricably linked to the birth and meteoric rise of *Life* magazine, a publication that fundamentally redefined how news was consumed, presenting the world through the compelling narrative of photographs.

Bourke-White was not merely a contributor to *Life*; she was a foundational pillar of the magazine. Her arresting

image of the Fort Peck Dam graced the cover of *Life's* inaugural issue in 1936, immediately signaling the magazine's commitment to visual storytelling and establishing her as a leading voice in this burgeoning field. She was one of the magazine's first four staff photographers and the only woman among them, a testament to her undeniable talent and tenacious spirit in a male-dominated profession.

Her career with *Life* spanned decades and took her to the heart of the 20th century's most pivotal moments. From documenting the grim realities of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl to becoming the first Western photographer permitted to capture the industrialization of the Soviet Union, Bourke-White's lens offered unprecedented access and insight. She was truly "Maggie the Indestructible," a moniker her colleagues gave her for her unwavering resolve in the face of danger. She became the first accredited female war correspondent, flying on bombing missions during World War II and bearing witness to the horrors of liberated concentration camps like Buchenwald, her photographs profoundly shaping public understanding of the conflict. Later, her work illuminated the complexities of India's partition and the nascent struggles against apartheid in South Africa. Throughout her *Life*, Margaret Bourke-White didn't

just take pictures; she crafted visual essays that brought distant events and human stories directly into American homes. Her work underscored the immense power of photography not only to document history but also to provoke empathy, challenge perceptions, and ultimately force a reckoning with the world's most pressing issues.

Her legacy is thus intertwined with *Life's* mission: to present the news not just through words, but through the evocative, immediate, and unforgettable language of the photograph.

Into the 21st Century

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the advent of online technology began to significantly affect the print media industry. Publishers have had to rethink their business models to reach an increasingly online audience, as explored in later sections of this chapter.

4.3 DIFFERENT STYLES AND MODELS OF PRINT MEDIA

Location, readership, political climate, and competition all contribute to the rapid transformation of journalistic models and writing styles. Over time, certain styles—such as 19th-century sensationalism—evolved into modern digital clickbait, while traditional news outlets established standards centered on objectivity, interpretation, and narrative storytelling. This section explores the nuanced differences among the primary models of journalism across print and digital media.

Objective versus Story-Driven Journalism

In the late 1800s, most newspaper publishers believed they could maximize profits by catering to specific political parties. Major publications employed an openly partisan approach, using news columns to sway public opinion and reward political allies. This dominant paradigm began to shift in 1896

when *The New York Times* adopted an approach centered on impartiality to attract a broader, more affluent readership.

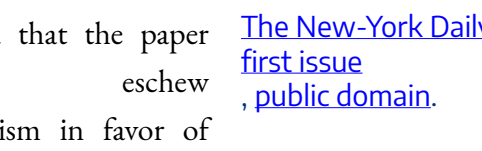
The Rise of Objective Journalism

At the end of the 19th century, *The New York Times* faced intense competition from the sensationalist yellow journalism papers of Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst. The paper's publishers discovered the near-impossibility of staying afloat without resorting to the sensationalist headlines popularized by its competitors. Although *The New York Times* publishers raised prices to pay the bills, the higher charge led to declining readership, and soon the paper went bankrupt. Adolph Ochs, owner of the once-failing *Chattanooga Times*, took a gamble and bought *The New York Times* in 1896. Shortly into his tenure, Ochs made a bold move and


New-York Daily Times.

The New York Times debuted as *The New York Daily Times* in 1851. One of its early slogans was "Will Not Soil the Breakfast Table," an attack on the sensationalism prevalent in most newspapers of the time. Editor Henry Raymond insisted on maintaining accuracy and covering events objectively. Despite this, the newspaper did not initially enjoy the success it does today. **Source**: The New York Times Company

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The New-York Daily Times first issue, public domain.

announced that the paper would eschew sensationalism in favor of news that was "clean, dignified, trustworthy and impartial."

To compete with cheaper sensationalist rivals, Ochs made the strategic move in 1898 to drop the paper's price from three cents to one cent. This drastic change proved successful. *The New York Times* became the first of many papers to demonstrate that the press could be "economically as well as ethically successful." Under managing editor Carr Van Anda, *The New York Times* established a benchmark for objective journalism. Today, while the industry actively debates whether true objectivity is possible or even desirable—with many modern journalists advocating for transparency, moral clarity, and context over detached neutrality—impartial reporting remains a foundational standard for mainstream news organizations.

The Inverted Pyramid Style

Modern journalists frequently employ the inverted pyramid structure when writing hard news. This format places the most critical information—the who, what, when, where, why, and how—in the opening paragraph (the lead), followed by supporting details and background context in descending order of importance. The style originated with the invention of the telegraph during the 19th century and

the American Civil War. Because telegraph connections were unreliable and frequently failed mid-transmission, reporters learned to transmit the most essential facts first. Editors also relied on the structure to trim articles quickly from the bottom up to fit rigid print layout constraints.



Journalists often use the inverted pyramid to structure their stories. They organize information from most to least important, starting with a summary lead that outlines the story's main details. This differs from a chronological retelling of the event. For instance, a sports story about a baseball game between the Mariners and Yankees would immediately reveal which team won, rather than what happened in the first inning and beyond.

In contemporary journalism, the inverted pyramid remains essential for three reasons. First, it allows journalists to draft concise reports rapidly under tight deadlines. Second, it enables editors to edit stories quickly across print and digital platforms by cutting the story from the bottom without losing vital information. Third, it aligns with modern reading habits: whether scanning a print front page or scrolling on a mobile device, audience members can digest core facts instantly.

Interpretive Journalism

During the 1920s, objective journalism came under scrutiny as the world became increasingly complex. Even though *The New York Times* continued to thrive, readers craved more than dry, objective stories. In 1923, *Time* magazine launched as the first major publication to depart from simple objectivity, aiming to provide readers with a more nuanced and analytical interpretation of the news. As *Time* grew, newspapers began introducing weekend news syntheses, analytical columns, and specialized beat reporting. This approach became known as **interpretive journalism**.

As media scholar Stephen J. A. Ward notes in his article, "Journalism Ethics," interpretive reporting "supplemented objective reporting with an informed interpretation of world events." Brant Houston, a veteran investigative journalism professor and co-founder of the Institute for Nonprofit News, said an interpretive journalist "goes beyond the basic facts of an event or topic to provide context, analysis, and possible consequences." In modern newsrooms, interpretive techniques are vital for explaining intricate issues such as global supply chains, economic policy, and technological shifts. However, news organizations must clearly distinguish analytical reporting from opinion content.



This 1928 photo shows the newsroom of the *Post-Intelligencer* Building during Seattle's first live radio broadcast of election returns. **Source**: English: Staff PhotographerEnglish: Seattle Post-Intelligencer, Live radio broadcast of election returns, November 5, 1928 (MOHAI 6589) , public domain.

Competition From Broadcasting

The 1930s saw the rapid growth of broadcasting as radio sets became standard features in American households and sound newsreels became a fixture in movie theaters. This broadcast

revolution introduced new dimensions to journalism, transforming how audiences received news. Media scholar Michael Schudson observed that broadcast news reflected "a new journalistic reality. The journalist, no longer merely the relayer of documents and messages, has become the interpreter of the news."

While radio accelerated the rise of interpretive journalism, it simultaneously posed a direct financial threat to print media. For the first time, free over-the-air broadcasts competed directly with paid newspaper subscriptions. Media scholar Robert W. McChesney notes that during the 1930s, "many elements of the newspaper industry opposed commercial broadcasting, often out of fear of losing ad revenues and circulation to the broadcasters."

This tension erupted into a media war. Newspaper publishers accused radio stations of copying stories straight from print editions without permission and pressured wire services like the Associated Press to restrict content sent to broadcasters. Broadcasters pushed back, asserting their right to cover public events and positioning their medium alongside print as an essential component of press freedom.

By the 1950s, the widespread adoption of television added a powerful visual element to news, competing even more aggressively for audience time and advertising revenue. To differentiate themselves from immediate TV news bulletins, newspapers leaned heavily into analysis, perspective, and commentary. Publications increased their run of signed

opinion columns, culminating in the 1970s with the standardization of dedicated "op-ed" pages (short for "opposite the editorial page") featuring diverse, non-editorial staff contributors.

By the late 1960s, interpretive reporting and commentary had largely displaced pure descriptive summary in major newspapers. This pivot laid the groundwork for today's hybrid media environment, where news organizations use specialized newsletters, podcasts, and opinion verticals to provide the depth and distinct voice that general broadcast and digital headlines cannot match.

Literary Journalism

Stemming from the growth of interpretive reporting, **literary journalism** emerged in the 1960s as a major movement in American writing. Often referred to as New Journalism, this style applies literary and narrative techniques—such as scene-by-scene reconstruction, extended dialogue, character development, and vivid detail—to factual reporting. Crucially, literary journalism does not invent facts; rather, it uses the immersive storytelling tools of fiction to present real-world events with dramatic resonance and emotional depth.

Important Literary Journalists

Tom Wolfe became a central figure in literary journalism in 1963 during a New York newspaper strike. Assigned by *Esquire* to write about customized car culture, Wolfe struggled to fit his extensive research into traditional journalistic formulas. At the suggestion of managing editor Byron Dobell, Wolfe typed up a 49-page informal memo detailing his observations. Dobell removed the "Dear Byron" opening and published the text as "There Goes (Varoom! Varoom!) That Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby." The piece demonstrated how a reporter could fuse meticulous reporting with an expressive, personal voice. When he later returned to work at *The New York Herald Tribune* after the strike, Wolfe brought with him this new style, "fusing the stylistic features of fiction and the reportorial obligations of journalism."

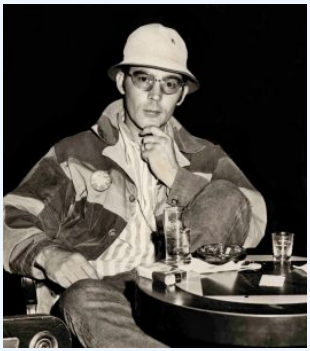


The works of Tom Wolfe, including "The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby" and *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, are among the best examples of literary journalism from the 1960s. **Source**: erin williamson – tom wolfe – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

In 1966, Truman Capote responded to Wolfe's new style by writing *In Cold Blood*, which Capote termed a "nonfiction novel." The tale of an actual murder that had taken place on a Kansas farm some years earlier, Capote based the novel on numerous interviews and painstaking research. Capote claimed that he wrote the book because he wanted to exchange his "self-creative world...for the everyday objective world we all inhabit." Critics praised the book for its straightforward, journalistic style. *New York Times* writer George Plimpton claimed that the book "is remarkable for its objectivity—nowhere, despite his involvement, does the author intrude." After *In Cold Blood* was finished, Capote criticized Wolfe's style in an interview, commenting that Wolfe has "nothing to do with creative journalism" by claiming that Wolfe did not have the appropriate fiction-writing expertise
. Despite the tension between these two writers, they are now remembered for inspiring a similar style in various genres.

Other key figures of this movement included Joan Didion , Hunter S. Thompson (see below), Gay Talese, and Norman Mailer.

When the going gets weird, the weird go pro: New Journalism vs. Hunter S. Thompson's Gonzo Journalism



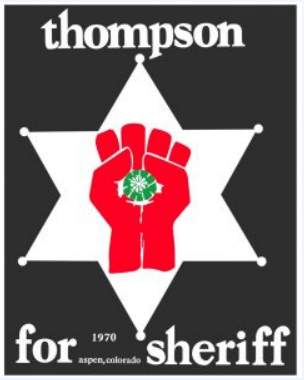
Source: English: Photograph credited to "Cashman Photo Enterprises, Inc." Published by Random House., Hunter S. Thompson, Las Vegas 1971 , public domain.

One of the most eccentric figures in 20th-century American media, Hunter S. Thompson created a radical offshoot of New Journalism known as Gonzo journalism. This style pushed subjectivity to its absolute limit, placing the writer directly at the center of the story as both participant and primary narrative filter. Characterized by a highly stylized first-person voice,

hyperbole, stream-of-consciousness prose, and sharp social critique, Gonzo journalism abandoned traditional distance to capture an impressionistic, unfiltered reality.

Born in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1937, Thompson honed a rebellious writing style early in his career. His breakout book, *Hell's Angels: The Strange and Terrible Saga of the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs*, resulted from a year spent living and riding with the group. Rather than reporting from a detached perspective, Thompson documented the experience from the inside. He fully solidified the Gonzo style with his landmark 1970 article for *Scanlan's Monthly*, "The Kentucky Derby Is Decadent and Depraved," illustrated by artist Ralph Steadman, whose distorted drawings matched Thompson's frantic prose.

Thompson's 1971 masterpiece,



Source: English: Illustrated and printed by Thomas W. Benton (1930–2007). Distributed in and around Aspen, Colorado by Benton, Thompson, and other "Freaks", Thompson for the 1970 Aspen, Colorado Sheriff poster, public domain.

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream, cemented his legacy. Chronicling a drug-fueled trip to cover a desert motorcycle race and a district attorneys' conference, the work blended immersive reportage, political satire, and hallucinatory prose to critique American culture at the close of the countercultural era. Thompson's public persona—complete with aviator sunglasses, cigarette holder,

and his near-successful 1970 campaign for sheriff of Pitkin County, Colorado, on the "Freak Power" ticket—turned him into a cultural icon.

While both New Journalism and Gonzo journalism emerged in the 1960s to challenge rigid objectivity, key distinctions separate them. Traditional New Journalists like Tom Wolfe or Gay Talese used novelistic techniques—such as scene building and dialogue—to portray third-party subjects neutrally or critically. In contrast, Gonzo journalists become the central character of the story, using extreme first-person participation, humor, and satire to process events.

Though personal struggles and a tragic end marked Thompson's life, his Gonzo legacy persists across first-person video journalism, immersive documentaries, and participatory digital channels where the creator's subjective experience serves as the lens through which audiences understand the world.

The Legacy and Evolution of Literary Journalism



The first edition of *The New Yorker*. **Source**: Rea Irvin creator QS:P170,Q7300143, Original New Yorker cover, public domain.

Literary journalism found its primary home in magazines like *Esquire*, *The New Yorker*, and *Harper's Magazine*, where longer deadlines and flexible word counts allowed writers to develop complex stories. Over time, the approach fundamentally expanded the boundaries of journalism, demonstrating that factual reporting could offer deep psychological and social insight beyond the constraints of the inverted pyramid. Many literary journalists believed that objectivity limited their ability to critique a story or a writer. Some claim that objective writing remains impossible, as all journalists have their personal histories that may sway their coverage. Still others, including Wolfe, argued that objective journalism conveyed a "limited conception of the 'facts,'" which "often effected an inaccurate, incomplete story that precluded readers from exercising informed judgment."

Today, literary or creative nonfiction reporting remains vibrant across both print and digital media. Authors such as David Grann (*Killers of the Flower Moon*), Susan Orlean, and Ta-Nehisi Coates continue this tradition in books and digital magazines. Furthermore, the storytelling conventions of literary journalism have heavily influenced modern narrative audio podcasts (such as *Serial*and *This American Life*) and long-form investigative digital outlets like *ProPublica* and *The Atavist*, proving that character-driven narrative remains one of the most effective ways to engage audiences with complex real-world issues.

Advocacy Journalism and Precision Journalism

In contrast to the rigid neutrality of objective reporting, two distinct models emerged in the late 20th century to address different limitations of traditional newsgathering: advocacy journalism and precision journalism.

Advocacy journalism promotes a particular cause and intentionally adopts a biased, nonobjective viewpoint to do so effectively. However, serious advocate journalists adhere to strict guidelines, as "an advocate journalist is not the same as being an activist," according to journalist Sue Careless. In an article on advocacy journalism, Careless contrasted the role of an advocate journalist with that of an activist. She

encourages future advocate journalists by saying the following :

> A journalist writing for the advocacy press should practice the same skills as any journalist. You don't fabricate or falsify. If you do you will destroy the credibility of both yourself as a working journalist and the cause you care so much about. News should never be propaganda. You don't fudge or suppress vital facts or present half-truths.

Today, advocacy and solutions journalism have expanded through specialized, mission-driven publications and investigative verticals. Outlets like *Inside Climate News*, *The Marshall Project* (focusing on criminal justice reform), and various nonprofit newsrooms practice transparent, value-driven journalism. These organizations do not hide their focus on specific societal issues, but they build credibility by grounding their advocacy in rigorous, verifiable reporting.

Data journalism emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s. Philip Meyer, commonly acknowledged as the father of precision journalism, says that he intended to " encourage my colleagues in journalism to apply the principles of scientific method
to their tasks of gathering and presenting the news." Following the 1967 Detroit riots, Meyer used mainframe computers and survey research to analyze the underlying social causes of the unrest. His analysis helped pave the way for journalism to move beyond anecdotal claims toward empirical proof.

Over the past four decades, precision journalism evolved into computer-assisted reporting in the 1980s and 1990s, and ultimately into modern **data journalism**. Rather than relying solely on official statements or isolated interviews, contemporary data journalists analyze massive databases, conduct algorithmic audits, build interactive maps, and evaluate statistical models. Outlets such as *ProPublica*, *FiveThirtyEight*, and *The New York Times Upshot* represent the modern fulfillment of precision journalism, using empirical data to hold institutions accountable and make complex global trends understandable.

Niche, Alternative, and Community Media

Rather than attempting to serve a broad general audience, many print and digital publications focus exclusively on specific demographic, geographic, or cultural groups. As media educator Robert Courtemanche notes, the legacy model where a single paper tries to be "everything to every reader" has largely been replaced by audience segmentation, where readers seek out specialized, expert content tailored to their specific identities and interests.

Ethnic and Multicultural Media

Ethnic, immigrant, and language-specific publications represent some of the most vital niche media in North America. In major urban centers, papers and digital outlets catering to Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Arabic, and Haitian Creole-speaking communities provide essential local coverage, immigration guidance, and community news ignored by mainstream outlets. LGBTQ+ publications—such as *The Advocate* (founded in 1967 as a print newspaper and now operating as a major digital platform with a bi-monthly print edition)—and faith-based media like *The Christian Science Monitor* (which shifted from a daily newspaper to a web-first publication and weekly magazine) serve similar specialized roles.

The Alternative and Underground Press



The influential alternative newspaper *The Village Voice* stopped publication in 2018, only to be revived as a quarterly publication in 2020. **Source**: The Village Voice, The Village Voice, CC BY-SA 4.0.

The **alternative press** developed to provide platforms for political, social, and cultural perspectives marginalized by mainstream commercial media. Unlike general-interest newspapers driven by advertiser appeal to broad audiences, alternative publications historically prioritized counter-cultural commentary, investigative journalism, and local arts criticism.

During the late 19th century, political movements like the Populist Party—facing a near-total blackout from major daily newspapers—established over 100 independent journals to communicate directly with farmers and workers and share its platform and concerns. In 1955, *The Village Voice* launched in New York City, pioneering the modern alt-weekly format with passionate,

subjective, and no-holds-barred cultural reporting. Though *The Village Voice* ended its weekly print edition in 2017 amid broader industry decline, its investigative and cultural legacy established a template for city weeklies nationwide.

During the 1960s and 1970s, a distinct subgenre known as the **underground press** flourished around college campuses, major cities, and military bases. Publications like the *Los Angeles Free Press*, *The Berkeley Barb*, and *Chicago Seed* operated on shoestring budgets and adopted explicit anti-establishment stances. They covered the anti-Vietnam War movement, civil rights, radical politics, countercultural art, and drug culture.

Because these publications actively challenged government policy and societal norms, they faced significant hostility—including federal surveillance under the FBI's COINTELPRO program aimed at suppressing political dissent. Despite constant financial and legal pressure, the underground press fundamentally altered American journalism by proving that independent, grassroots publications could shape public discourse and give voice to marginalized communities. Today, that radical spirit persists in worker-owned media cooperatives, independent digital publications, and grassroots newsletters.

The Evolution of Magazines

Over the last century, magazines transformed from broad, general-interest publications into highly specialized, niche media. This evolution began in the mid-20th century as television displaced magazines as the primary medium for mass entertainment and national advertising. To survive, magazine publishers pivoted away from trying to appeal to everyone and instead
targeted specific demographic, professional, and cultural niches
.

Advertisers embraced this shift, recognizing that specialized magazines allowed them to reach highly targeted audiences based on age, profession, hobbies, and lifestyle preferences. In the digital age, this trend toward specialization has only intensified, with print magazines functioning as premium, targeted products alongside digital verticals, email newsletters, and specialized online communities. As writer Jennifer Hess notes, "Market fragmentation has and probably will continue to proliferate. Customization and individualization will probably be the continuing trend."

Professional Trade Publications



Trade magazines target very specific audiences. For instance, *Business Goa* commenced in July 2009 as a 40-page publication dedicated to trade and commerce in Goa, and to showcase Goa's entrepreneurial talent for industrialists and business enthusiasts alike. **Source**: Cover, of the *Business Goa* magazine . Frederick Noronha. CC BY-SA 2.0.

Nearly every industry produces specialized trade publications tailored to its workforce and leadership. These periodicals—ranging from *Nation's Restaurant News* to *Architectural Record*—focus on industry trends, regulatory changes, and technical innovations. Major institutions, such as the National Agricultural Library in Maryland, archive vast collections of these trade publications, which remain essential

resources for professional research and vertical business-to-business advertising.

Scholarly Publications

Academic journals have provided peer-reviewed research since the 17th century, when the *Universal Historical Bibliothèque* became the first journal to invite scholarly contributions. Today, thousands of scholarly journals exist across every academic discipline, including *The American Economic Review* and *The New England Journal of Medicine*.

Scholarly journals rely on a rigorous peer-review process, where panels of expert scholars evaluate anonymous submissions for accuracy, methodology, and original contribution before publication. While historically accessed via physical university library stacks, scholarly publishing has shifted dramatically toward digital databases (such as JSTOR and EBSCO) and open-access digital repositories.

Religious Magazines

Religious publications offer dedicated commentary and community news for faith traditions worldwide. Outlets like *Christianity Today*, *Catholic Digest*, *Hadassah Magazine* (serving Jewish readers), and *Lion's Roar* (Buddhist) provide platforms for faith-based dialogue. Multi-faith journals, such

as *CrossCurrents*, bridge intellectual inquiry and diverse religious traditions, catering to specific theological and ethical discussions.

Political Magazines

Political periodicals have long served as ideological flagships. Outlets like *The National Review* (conservative) and *The American Prospect* or *The Nation* (progressive) provide in-depth commentary and policy analysis that shape partisan discourse. In the modern media landscape, these traditional print journals maintain vibrant digital platforms and podcast networks to engage politically active audiences.



Although pulp magazines first began publishing in 1896, they truly gained popularity during the early 20th century. **Source**: Michael Vance1 – 1932 Pulps – CC BY-NC-SA 2.0 .

Pulp and Genre Fiction Magazines

In the late 19th century, publisher



Asimov's Science Fiction came about because "one of science fiction's most influential and prolific writers, Isaac Asimov, wanted to provide a home for new SF (science fiction) writers." **Source**: Tim Cox – Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine – CC BY-NC 2.0.

Frank Munsey popularized **pulp magazines**—low-cost fiction periodicals printed on cheap wood-pulp paper. Suddenly, individuals had the opportunity to read popular

genre fiction in a low-cost magazine format, such as *Adventure* , *Horror Stories*, *Startling Stories*, and *Weird Tales*.

The pulps got their start as adventure magazines, but they eventually diversified into several categories, including love, detective, and western. Although intended for children, the violent, horror-soaked comics drew a large adult audience. However, the graphic content of the pulp strips caused a stir, with the public divided on the nature of this new medium. Just as legislators struggle today with debates over censorship of TV, music, and the Internet, they did so with pulp comics as well. Child psychologist Fredric Wertham, who alleged that comics led children into lives of crime, encouraged negative backlash against pulp comics. In response to the controversy, the Association of Comics Magazine Publishers established a Code of Practice in 1948 to regulate the content of pulp comics. Due to lax enforcement, many publishers chose to ignore the code, and thus the controversy continued to rage. When Senate hearings raised the threat of government regulation in 1954, the pulp comics industry opted for self-censorship. As a result, it established the Comics Code Authority to regulate the material reaching consumers.

While mass-market pulps declined mid-century, specialized genre magazines continue to foster literary talent. Legacy titles such as *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* and

Asimov's Science Fiction continue to publish print and digital editions, serving as vital gateways for emerging fiction writers.

Entertainment and Fan Magazines



Ava Gardner appears on the cover of *Movieland*, an early entertainment magazine. **Source**: Bruce Bailey, Ava Gardner by Bruce Bailey, Movieland February 1949, public domain.

Early 20th-century fan magazines like *Photoplay* offered behind-the-scenes glimpses of Hollywood stars. As television and music expanded, magazines like *TV Guide* and *Rolling Stone* became dominant cultural forces. Today, general entertainment reporting has largely migrated online to social media and digital platforms. Publications that survived this shift—such as *Entertainment Weekly*—have adapted by transitioning from weekly print issues to digital-first coverage with specialized print collector's editions.

Teen and Youth Magazines

Pioneered in the 1940s with titles like *Seventeen*, youth magazines historically targeted teens with fashion, pop culture, and lifestyle advice. However, this sector underwent radical digital disruption. Print mainstays like *YM* and *Teen People* ceased publication. At the same time, *Teen Vogue* famously eliminated its print edition in 2017 to become a web-first publication focused on youth activism, culture, and politics, demonstrating how print brands must reinvent themselves to reach younger digital natives.

Celebrity Magazines

Popularized in the 1970s, celebrity newsweeklies expanded coverage of public figures and entertainment culture. (Note: Because celebrity magazines represent a major commercial sector of print and digital media, their business models, coverage tactics, and circulation trends are analyzed in detail later in this chapter.)

Hobby, Interest, and Lifestyle Magazines

Special-interest magazines cover virtually every personal passion, including sports (*Sports Illustrated*), culinary arts (

Bon Appétit), home design (*Architectural Digest*), and fashion (*Vogue*).

While niche magazines typically have smaller circulations than old mass-market periodicals, their highly dedicated readerships make them valuable to targeted advertisers. Furthermore, many hobbyists prefer tactile, high-production print magazines over digital screens, driving a resurgence in premium, independent print quarterlies focused on art, slow journalism, and specialized crafts.

4.4 HOW THE PRINT INDUSTRY IMPACTS THE PUBLIC'S ACCESS TO INFORMATION


"All the News That's Fit to Print."

The New York Times.

EXTRA

Partly cloudy and somewhat warmer today. Tomorrow generally fair with moderate temperature.

VOL. LXXXVIII...No. 29,855. NEW YORK, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 1939. THREE CENTS

Source: Unknown authorUnknown author, The New York Times on September 1, 1939 headline, cropped, CC0 1.0.

Since 1896, *The New York Times* has printed its famous masthead motto, "All the News That's Fit to Print." While the phrase suggests a commitment to comprehensive coverage, it highlights a central phenomenon in news publishing: editorial gatekeeping. Media organizations select, filter, and frame which stories reach the public. While audiences frequently debate how news is chosen and presented, traditional print outlets continue to exert significant influence over public agenda-setting.

"All the News That's Fit to Print"

In 1997, *The New York Times* publicly claimed itself as "an independent newspaper, entirely fearless, free of ulterior influence and unselfishly devoted to the public welfare." Despite this public proclamation of objectivity, editorial independence often intersects with commercial interest. In reaction to that statement, media scholar and co-developer of the Propaganda Model of communication Edward S. Herman wrote that this causes an issue because *The New York Times* "defines public welfare in a manner acceptable to their elite audience and advertisers." For example, during major policy debates such as trade agreements or corporate regulation, news coverage can reflect the economic outlook of a publication's ownership and major revenue providers, demonstrating how institutional priorities shape information flow.

However, many other news organizations besides *The New York Times* face accusations of controlling which stories to cover. In his review of *Read All About It: The Corporate Takeover of America's Newspapers*, Steve Hoenisch, editor of *Criticism.com*, offers these harsh words about what drives the stories printed in today's newspapers:

> I've always thought of daily newspapers as the guardians of our—meaning the public's—right to know. The guardians

> of truth, justice, and public welfare, and all that. But who am I fooling? America's daily newspapers don't belong to us. Nor, for that matter, do they even seek to serve us any longer. They have more important concerns now: appeasing advertisers and enriching stockholders.

As readership declines, newspapers are increasingly compelled to answer to advertisers and shareholders as they decide which stories to cover. Commercial consolidation has deepened these gatekeeping concerns. As print advertising revenues shifted to digital platforms, many legacy newspapers were acquired by private equity firms and media conglomerates, leading to newsroom downsizing and increased pressure to generate subscription revenue or viral engagement. Media critics argue that when financial survival depends on cost-cutting or shareholder returns, news organizations risk prioritizing low-cost coverage over resource-intensive investigative journalism, ultimately altering the public's access to vital local information.

Beyond deciding *which* stories to cover, journalists and editors exercise control over *how* news is framed. Gatekeeping theory emphasizes that journalists select specific sources, angles, and language, which shapes how audiences interpret complex events. Because democratic societies rely on news organizations for accurate information, readers expect journalists to maintain high standards of accuracy, objectivity, and ethical conduct.

Maintaining public trust requires strict adherence to ethical

standards, particularly regarding accuracy and transparency. High-profile cases of ethical breaches—such as Jayson Blair's fabrication and plagiarism at *The New York Times* in 2003 or Stephen Glass's invented stories at *The New Republic* in 1998—demonstrate how severe the consequences are when journalists betray audience trust. When fabrications occur, they damage not only the reporter's career but also the credibility of the entire publishing institution.

Despite systemic economic pressures and occasional ethical failures, professional newsrooms maintain rigorous verification processes. Editors, fact-checkers, and reporters work together to cross-reference sources, verify documentation, and correct mistakes publicly when they occur. Ultimately, while gatekeeping involves power and selection, professional editorial standards serve a protective function: ensuring that information delivered to the public meets baseline criteria for truth, context, and reliability.

THE GRAY LADY'S REPENTANCE: WHEN *THE NEW YORK TIMES* APOLOGIZED



Source: en:New York Times , New York Times French Kill Moors, Taking Casablanca 01 , cropped, CC0 1.0.

Print journalism's role as an information gatekeeper carries substantial public responsibility. When major news outlets publish unverified claims on critical issues, the political and social consequences can be profound. Despite its reputation as America's traditional paper of record, *The New York Times* provided a notable example of newsroom correction in May 2004 when it published an unprecedented editor's note acknowledging

severe reporting failures in its coverage leading up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

In the months surrounding the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, *The New York Times* published multiple front-page stories asserting that Iraq possessed active biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons programs. Many of these reports relied heavily on Iraqi political exiles bent on regime change, such as Ahmad Chalabi, as well as high-ranking Bush administration officials who used the paper's reporting to validate their policy decisions. Dissenting intelligence sources who questioned these claims were often ignored, and follow-up articles pointing out factual flaws were routinely buried deep inside the paper.

On May 26, 2004, after search teams failed to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, the editors published an extraordinary 1,200-word mea culpa titled "The Times and Iraq." Addressing their readers directly, the editors wrote:

> We have found a number of instances of coverage that was not as rigorous as it should have been. In some cases, information that was controversial then, and seems questionable now, was insufficiently qualified or allowed to stand unchallenged. Looking back, we wish we had been more aggressive in re-examining the claims as new evidence emerged—or failed to emerge.

While critics noted that the admission came after the war was already underway, the event remains a

vital journalism case study. It illustrates how competition for front-page scoops, over-reliance on official sources, and a lack of editorial skepticism can compromise media objectivity. By publicly dissecting its structural mistakes, *The New York Times* underscored both the severe consequences of gatekeeping failures and the ongoing necessity of ethical accountability in mainstream reporting.



Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalists Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein discussed the role news has played in our history in fostering democracy. **Source**: LBJLibraryNow, LBJ Foundation and More Perfect conference called Trust News Democracy, at the LBJ Presidential Library in Austin, Texas on 9 April 2024 – 9 , public domain.

Watchdog Journalism and Public Accountability

Watchdog journalism represents one of the foundational responsibilities of the free press in a democratic society. Functioning as a check on institutional power, watchdog reporters investigate government entities, corporations, and public figures to hold them accountable to ethical and legal standards. Media scholars W. Lance Bennett and William Serrin define watchdog journalism as:

> (1) independent scrutiny by the press of the activities of government, business, and other public institutions, with an aim toward (2) documenting, questioning, and investigating those activities, to (3) provide publics and officials with timely information on issues of public concern.



Reporting by Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein eventually led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon. **Source**: Ollie Atkins; cropped by Beyond My Ken, Nixon-depart crop, public domain.

The historic investigation into the 1972 Watergate break-in by Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein of *The Washington Post* remains the classic textbook example of watchdog reporting. Their sustained reporting uncovered illegal activities and cover-ups within the executive branch, ultimately contributing to the resignation of President Richard Nixon. This landmark case illustrated how deep investigative reporting, backed by committed newsroom leadership, can expose systemic abuse of power at the highest levels of leadership.

Despite its critical democratic function, conducting effective watchdog journalism presents immense practical challenges. Investigative reporting requires significant resources, specialized skills, access to public records, and

months of painstaking labor. In an era dominated by rapid 24-hour news cycles and reduced newsroom staffing, reporters often
struggle to find the time necessary for deep investigations. Furthermore, watchdog reporters must navigate legal hurdles, pressure from powerful interests, and public pushback when bringing uncomfortable truths to light.

As traditional print outlets faced severe financial contractions over the past two decades, dedicated investigative desks were frequently reduced. To fill this gap, the media ecosystem saw the rise of non-profit newsrooms—such as *ProPublica* and regional investigative reporting centers—supported by reader donations and philanthropic grants. These organizations partner with traditional newspapers and digital publishers to pool resources and preserve high-impact investigative reporting.

Ultimately, watchdog journalism relies on mutual support between journalists, news organizations, and the communities they serve. When news organizations prioritize investigative resources and audiences actively support independent news outlets, watchdog reporting fulfills its primary democratic purpose: empowering citizens with the factual evidence needed to participate meaningfully in public life. As Bennet and Serrin observed, "Not surprisingly, watchdog journalism functions best when reporters understand it and news organizations and their audiences support it."

Impact of Television and the Internet on Newspaper Style and Presentation

Newspapers historically controlled both the selection and presentation of news. However, as broadcast television grew in the mid-20th century and digital media expanded in the 1990s and 2000s, print publishing underwent structural transformations. To remain competitive against visual and immediate platforms, newspapers adapted their reporting styles, visual design, and storytelling formats to match evolving audience habits.



President Trump holds up a print edition of *USA Today* during the 2020 National Prayer Breakfast. **Source**: The White House from Washington, DC, President Trump at the National Prayer Breakfast (49498390272) , public domain.

Case Study: *USA Today*



USA Today achieved its peak circulation and market dominance around 2000–2001, **Source**: Twzink, USA Today Newspaper Vending Machine, cropped, CC0 1.0.

Founded by Gannett in 1982, *USA Today* pioneered a dramatic shift in print presentation designed to compete directly with television. Unlike traditional papers that prioritized long-form, dense text blocks, *USA Today* emphasized visual storytelling. The publication introduced short, scannable articles, full-color printing, prominent infographics, and a modular layout that mimicked television's quick pacing. Though initially criticized by traditionalists who labeled it "McPaper," the publication demonstrated that visual presentation could successfully attract audiences accustomed to broadcast news.

USA Today's commitment to visual medium crossover extended to broadcast experimentation. From 1988 to 1990, the outlet produced *USA Today on TV*, a syndicated television news program designed to translate the newspaper's concise, colorful style back onto television screens. While the show enjoyed a short run, the experiment

underscored how news organizations sought transmedia synergy long before the digital age.

Broadcast television also influenced news writing style, particularly regarding pacing and immediacy. Television journalism relies on present-tense narration to convey events as they unfold live. While traditional newspaper reporting maintains past-tense attribution for completed events, modern print and digital outlets increasingly adopt conversational tones and present-tense headlines to match the immediacy expected by contemporary readers.

In the digital era, the design choices pioneered by *USA Today* proved prescient. The paper's emphasis on infographics, concise summaries, and scannable visual blocks anticipated the user experience demands of digital news applications, social media feeds, and mobile devices. Today, as parent company Gannett shifts *USA Today* toward digital subscriptions and multiplatform reporting, the publication remains an influential example of how print media adapts its visual and editorial identity to survive shifts in technology and audience attention.

How Magazines Shape and Inform Audiences

While newspapers historically focused on daily breaking news, magazines regulate access to information through depth,

curated formatting, and specialized editorial framing. Like newspapers, magazine editors dictate which stories reach the public and how those narratives are presented. However, the distinct structural features of the magazine industry—including publishing frequency, longer word counts, and heavy reliance on niche advertising—create different editorial dynamics.

Format and Longform Storytelling

The magazine format allows for significantly deeper exploration of topics than the space constraints of daily newspapers typically permit. While traditional daily newspaper articles frequently capped coverage under 1,000 words, magazines routinely publish longform journalism exceeding 2,000 to 5,000 words. This expanded length enables journalists to construct narrative scenes, provide extensive background context, and examine complex socio-political issues.



A study of 1,104 Gulf War photos in *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News & World Report* concluded that "remarkably little of the photojournalistic coverage ... depicts actual combat activity of any kind". **Source**: Jeremiah Johnson, US Army soldier hands out a newspaper to a local Aug 2004 , public domain.

A classic 2003 study analyzing magazine coverage during the early weeks of the Iraq War illustrated these structural differences across national newsmagazines. Researchers found that coverage of the conflict accounted for 22 percent of all published stories and 32 percent of total page space across major titles. However, individual publications allocated their space differently: *Time* dedicated 37 percent of its issue space to the war with multiple 2,000-plus-word feature stories, while *Newsweek* allocated 34 percent and *U.S. News & World Report* allocated 24 percent.

These variations demonstrate how editorial choices dictate the depth of information readers receive during major global events.

The Decision to Publish and Content Transitions

Editorial boards continuously adjust their coverage based on cultural shifts, economic demands, and audience interest. In the late 20th century, leading weekly newsmagazines underwent significant content pivots. Between the 1970s and 1990s, major publications reduced their coverage of domestic and international government affairs, reallocating page space toward health, science, lifestyle, and entertainment coverage. These editorial shifts reflected broader commercial pressures to maintain subscriber engagement in an increasingly entertainment-driven media market.

Commercial Pressures and Advertiser Influence



Magazines have historically relied on advertisements to generate revenue, like this one from a 1920 edition of *Motion Picture Magazine*. **Source**: unknown ad agency, Shampoo ad with stars – Apr May 1920 MP , public domain.

Because magazines historically derived roughly half or more of their revenue from advertising, commercial sponsors have exerted substantial indirect influence over editorial content. Publishers often exercise caution to avoid publishing controversial material

that might alienate major corporate advertisers. In notable historical instances, large corporations issued explicit directives requiring magazine ad sales departments to give advance notice if an upcoming issue contained political, sexual, or socially controversial content.

In severe cases, corporate advertisers leveraged contract promises to encourage favorable industry coverage. In the modern digital era, this commercial pressure has evolved from traditional display print ads to native advertising and sponsored content, where commercial messaging is styled to resemble independent editorial reporting. Balancing editorial integrity against advertiser expectations remains one of the most delicate ethical challenges in magazine publishing.

Editorial Slant and the Shift to Digital Platforms

Each magazine establishes a distinct editorial identity designed to appeal to its target demographic. Historical content analyses revealed clear differences among newsmagazines: *U.S. News & World Report* prioritized straightforward, neutral reporting laden with policy data; *Newsweek* leaned into human-interest framing, lifestyle topics, and emotional narratives; and *Time* maintained a hybrid approach combining data-driven reporting with lifestyle covers.

The business model of weekly newsmagazines shifted radically in the 21st century as print advertising migrated to

online search engines and social platforms. *U.S. News & World Report* ceased its print edition in 2010 to become a digital consumer-ranking platform. *Newsweek* ended its original print run in 2012 before pivoting to a digital-first publishing model, and *Time* significantly reduced its print frequency. Understanding these editorial slants and business realities helps media consumers critically evaluate how economic models shape the information provided within both legacy print pages and contemporary digital verticals.



Source: Störm, Slate new logo, CC BY-SA 4.0.

The Rise of Online News Sources and the Digital Transformation

The expansion of the internet fundamentally altered how the public accesses news and reduced the traditional gatekeeping authority of print magazines and daily newspapers. Today, digital-only publications, independent newsletters, and web

verticals provide instant news coverage, investigative features, and cultural commentary, challenging the historical reliance on physical print distribution.

Pledged to digital-first publishing in the mid-1990s, pioneering web magazines such as *Slate* and *Salon* demonstrated that digital platforms could deliver the depth of longform magazine journalism without the printing and distribution overhead of physical media. By eliminating print deadlines and physical page limits, online publications introduced continuous publishing cycles, interactive media features, and immediate hyperlinking to primary source documents.

Digital publishing also transformed the economic relationship between advertisers, publishers, and content choices. Rather than relying on high-cost print display advertisements negotiated months in advance, online news sources operate across a hybrid mix of programmatic digital advertising, digital paywalls, reader memberships, and affiliate marketing.

While low overhead costs initially allowed digital outlets greater editorial flexibility, new commercial pressures emerged. Rather than pleasing a small group of corporate print advertisers, online publications must navigate algorithmic distribution on social media platforms, search engine optimization metrics, and reader click-through rates. To maintain financial viability, many digital publications adopted paywall tiers or membership models—such as *Slate Plus*—to

cultivate direct reader revenue while keeping baseline news accessible to broader audiences.

Ultimately, the shift toward online news sources has decentralized control over information. While digital platforms democratized public access to diverse viewpoints and reduced traditional publishing barriers, they also forced editorial newsrooms to balance journalistic depth against the rapid demands of real-time digital engagement.

4.5 POPULAR PUBLICATIONS AND TRENDS IN PRINT MEDIA

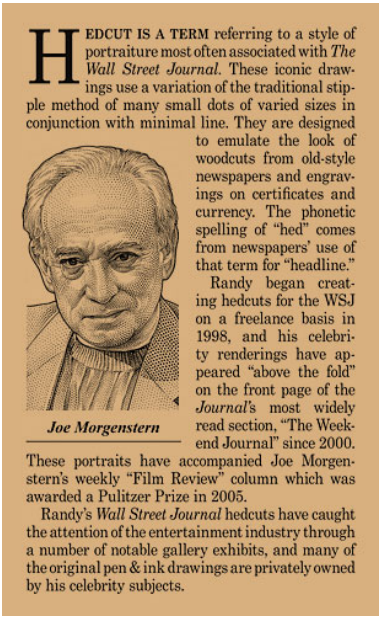
Modern digital platforms, television networks, and streaming media have permanently reshaped print journalism. To evaluate the trajectory of the news industry, scholars must examine the operational models, ownership structures, and audience strategies of major legacy publications.

Major Publications in the U.S. Newspaper Industry

While thousands of community newspapers exist across the United States, a small tier of elite national publications dominates circulation, dictates coverage trends, and exerts substantial influence over the national news agenda. Each title relies on distinct editorial strategies and visual formats to maintain financial viability across print and digital platforms.

The Wall Street Journal

Established in 1889, *The Wall Street Journal* remains the premier business and financial daily in the United States. While historically known for a text-dense, multi-column print broadsheet with minimal photography, the *Journal* modernized its layout by adding front-page advertising, integrating full-color graphics, and reducing physical page dimensions to lower printing costs. The *Journal* led the industry in monetizing online news, becoming an early pioneer of digital paywalls in the late 1990s. Today, while maintaining the nation's largest remaining print subscriber base at roughly 400,000 copies, the paper has transformed into



HEDCUT IS A TERM referring to a style of portraiture most often associated with *The Wall Street Journal*. These iconic drawings use a variation of the traditional stipple method of many small dots of varied sizes in conjunction with minimal line. They are designed to emulate the look of woodcuts from old-style newspapers and engravings on certificates and currency. The phonetic spelling of "hed" comes from newspapers' use of that term for "headline."

Randy began creating hedcuts for the WSJ on a freelance basis in 1998, and his celebrity renderings have appeared "above the fold" on the front page of the *Journal*'s most widely read section, "The Weekend Journal" since 2000.

Joe Morgenstern

These portraits have accompanied Joe Morgenstern's weekly "Film Review" column which was awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 2005.

Randy's *Wall Street Journal* hedcuts have caught the attention of the entertainment industry through a number of notable gallery exhibits, and many of the original pen & ink drawings are privately owned by his celebrity subjects.

The Wall Street Journal was one of the last newspapers to embrace color printing. Instead, it relied on detailed "hedcuts" that looked like sophisticated engraved woodcuts. **Source**: randyglass, Wsj-image-main, CC BY-SA 4.0.

a digital powerhouse with more than 4 million digital-only subscribers.

USA Today

Launched in 1982 by Gannett, *USA Today* revolutionized print layout through full-color printing, brief informational summaries, infographics, and distinct color-coded sections for news, business, sports, and life. Designed to serve mobile readers and business travelers, the paper historically relied on bulk hotel distribution. As print circulation declined sharply across the industry, parent company Gannett pivoted *USA Today* toward a digital syndication model, integrating its reporting across hundreds of local Gannett-owned newspapers nationwide while building out paid digital app subscriptions.

The New York Times

Founded in 1881, *The New York Times* serves as the traditional American newspaper of record. Its flagship paper balances narrative depth with high-resolution photography and analytical feature sections, including Metro, Arts, and International coverage. Facing the digital transition, *The New York Times Company* successfully pioneered a scalable subscriber-first digital model. Beyond its core reporting, the company expanded its audience reach by

acquiring digital verticals, lifestyle products, audio podcasts, and interactive media platforms such as Wordle and NYT Games, pushing its total subscriber base past 13 million.

Los Angeles Times

First published in 1881, the *Los Angeles Times* remains the dominant West Coast daily paper and a recipient of more than 50 Pulitzer Prizes. The paper established signature features like Column One—a dedicated front-page space for deeply reported human-interest narrative journalism. In 2018, biotech billionaire Patrick Soon-Shiong purchased the publication to return it to local California ownership. However, like many regional metro papers, the *Times* has faced ongoing financial challenges, leading to significant newsroom restructuring, editorial realignments, and major layoffs as it struggles to replace lost print advertising with digital subscription revenue.

The Washington Post



Source: Jack Weir (1928-2005), Land on the Moon 7 21 1969-repair, public domain.

Founded in 1877, *The Washington Post* earned international acclaim for its investigative political coverage, most famously exemplified by its reporting on the Watergate scandal during the Nixon administration. Amazon founder Jeff Bezos purchased the paper in 2013, investing heavily in modern publishing software and expanding the paper's national digital audience.

In 2025, *The Washington Post* underwent a major structural shift in its opinion desk when Bezos announced that the paper's editorial pages would explicitly advocate for personal liberties and free markets, directing that opposing viewpoints on those core tenets would no longer be published by the paper. This policy shift—alongside earlier

decisions to end presidential political endorsements—highlighted growing debate over how billionaire ownership impacts editorial independence and traditional newsroom gatekeeping.

Major Publications in the Magazine Industry

Since their emergence in the 18th century, magazines have played a vital role in shaping American popular culture, political discourse, visual aesthetics, and literary trends. Unlike daily newspapers that focus primarily on breaking geographical news, magazines developed as medium-form and long-form publications centered on curated themes, specialized lifestyle interests, and deep thematic reporting.

The primary strength of the magazine industry lies in niche segmentation. Rather than seeking a universal mass audience, magazine publishers identify and cultivate highly specific reader demographics—ranging from political observers and literary enthusiasts to fashion followers, sports fans, and hobbyists. This demographic precision allowed magazines to offer advertisers highly targeted consumer audiences, establishing a business model that sustained print publishing for over a century.

As digital media transformed reading habits, the magazine industry evolved from a high-volume print model to a

multiplatform publishing strategy. Leading contemporary titles now operate as holistic lifestyle brands, combining reduced-frequency print issues with digital paywalls, investigative video channels, newsletter subscriptions, and high-profile live events. The following case studies examine key landmark periodicals across news, fashion, sports, and culture, highlighting how individual publications adapted their editorial identities to remain relevant in a changing media landscape.

High-Circulation Magazines

The top highest-circulating periodicals in the United States differ significantly in style, business models, and audience focus. From organizational membership publications like *AARP The Magazine* to retail corporate custom publications like *The Costco Connection* and long-standing consumer titles like *Better Homes & Gardens* and *National Geographic*, the circulation leaderboards showcase the diverse interests drawn to print and digital media.

Furthermore, the volatility of these rankings reflects the broader economic shifts in print media. Longtime staples of American households have faced major restructuring. For example, *Family Circle*, founded in 1932 as a supermarket checkout circular and long considered one of the essential women's service magazines, permanently ceased publication in

December 2019 after nearly nine decades in print. This section explores the structural dynamics and distinct editorial models behind high-volume leaders like *AARP The Magazine*, *AARP Bulletin*, and *Reader's Digest*.



The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) produces two of the most popular magazines in America: *AARP The Magazine* and *AARP Bulletin*. **Source**: US Department of Labor, L-15-04-28-D.021 (17275892516), public domain.

AARP The Magazine and *AARP Bulletin*

Consumers cannot purchase the two highest-circulating periodicals in the United States on standard newsstands: *AARP The Magazine* and *AARP Bulletin*. Published by the

nonprofit organization AARP (formerly the American Association of Retired Persons), both publications are sent automatically to the organization's more than 38 million members.

A bimonthly publication geared exclusively toward Americans aged 50 and older seeking to enhance their quality of life as they age, *AARP The Magazine* focuses on lifestyle reporting. It includes regular sections dedicated to personal finance, preventive health, career shifts, relationships, and travel. To maintain direct relevance across its broad membership, the magazine publishes three tailored editorial editions targeting distinct life stages: ages 50 to 59, 60 to 69, and 70 and older. Through strong service journalism, investigative health reports, and celebrity cover profiles, the magazine offers actionable advice framed in an engaging, accessible format.

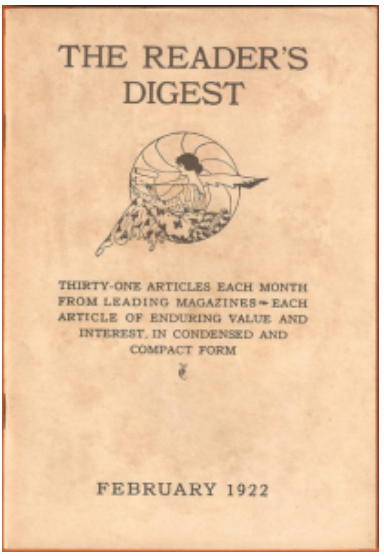
In tandem with its lifestyle publication, the organization publishes *AARP Bulletin*, a news publication designed for influential consumers and public policy leaders. Rather than presenting feature entertainment or personal lifestyle pieces, the *Bulletin* functions as a hard-news outlet focusing on legislative, financial, and healthcare policy. The publication chronicles critical social issues affecting older Americans, offering news analysis on Medicare, Social Security, retirement security, and consumer fraud protection to encourage readers to participate in public policy discussions.

The Costco Connection

Joining *AARP The Magazine* and *AARP Bulletin* near the top of U.S. circulation rankings is *The Costco Connection*, a monthly publication distributed directly to executive members of the retail warehouse chain. Boasting a print circulation of over 15 million copies per issue, the title serves as a primary example of corporate custom publishing. In this model, branded content is funded directly by a parent company rather than relying on traditional newsstand sales. *The Costco Connection* blends general lifestyle features, health advice, and travel profiles alongside product showcases and merchant recommendations. By offering editorial content alongside consumer products available in its warehouses, the publication strengthens brand loyalty while generating advertising revenue from suppliers eager to reach a high-volume audience.

Reader's Digest

First published in 1922 as a pocket-sized digest of condensed articles curated from other national periodicals, *Reader's Digest* remains one of the most durable brands in global publishing history. Co-founders DeWitt and Lila Bell Wallace initially produced the journal on a minimal budget after receiving rejections from multiple traditional magazine publishers who doubted an aggregated digest model would sell.



The cover for the first edition of *Reader's Digest*, which had a circulation exceeding 17 million at the peak of its popularity in 1984. **Source**: Reader's Digest, First issue of the Reader's Digest, February 1922, public domain.

The founders proved the industry wrong, turning *Reader's Digest* into an immediate commercial success driven by a

direct-mail subscription model. Although modern press shifts have reduced its print footprint from historic peaks to roughly 1.6 million copies per issue, *Reader's Digest* continues to maintain a global audience. The publication focuses on uplifting human-interest narratives, health tips, humor columns, and condensed book excerpts. It seeks to "create products that inform, enrich, entertain and inspire people of all ages and cultures around the world."

News Magazines

News magazines became major cultural forces during the 1920s, shaping how readers consumed weekly national and international coverage. Today, news magazines account for a significant share of overall media consumption. However, the transition from print-heavy revenue models to digital publishing platforms has transformed how these traditional outlets operate. Long-established titles like *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News & World Report* demonstrate how print news outlets have adapted to changing digital habits.

Newsweek



Newsweek ran a controversial image of Sarah Palin on its cover in November 2009, which drew considerable criticism of the magazine. **Source**: FairbanksMike – Saying Goodbye – CC BY 2.0.

Newsweek debuted in February 1933 under the title *News-Week*, featuring seven photographs from the week's news stories across its front cover. The publication built an international reputation by offering broad coverage of world events through a global network of correspondents covering politics, foreign affairs, business, science, technology, and culture. A distinct feature of the magazine was its long-running reader-penned essay section, "My Turn," which gave everyday citizens a platform to address national issues. Over its history, *Newsweek* earned numerous National Magazine Awards for its reporting.

Like many national news outlets, the magazine faced editorial controversies alongside its critical acclaim. In November 2009, *Newsweek* published a cover story discussing former vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin's memoir. The

cover featured an out-of-context photograph of Palin in athletic attire originally shot for *Runner's World*, overlaid with the headline "How Do You Solve a Problem Like Sarah?" The cover prompted public criticism regarding gender bias in political journalism. The editorial team later addressed the coverage by publishing a photo of President Barack Obama in recreational attire inside a subsequent issue.

As advertising revenue shifted toward digital platforms in the 2010s, *Newsweek* underwent several ownership changes and restructuring efforts. After temporarily suspending its print edition in late 2012 to go all-digital, the brand returned to a hybrid print-and-digital model under new ownership, publishing targeted weekly print editions alongside a continuous digital news operation.

Time



A 2017 cover for *Time*. **Source**: Time Magazine, Time Magazine cover April 3, 2017 , public domain.

Founded in 1923, *Time* remains one of the most influential titles in mass media history. Today, the publication focuses its coverage on global leaders, innovators, and cultural figures driving social impact. The editorial content is generally organized into four core zones: Briefing, featuring concise overviews of major breaking developments; The Well, containing deep investigative features and cover stories; Life, dedicated to developments in health, science, and technology; and Arts, focusing on critical reviews of film, literature, music, and architecture.

To navigate declining print subscriptions across the magazine industry, *Time* systematically altered its publication frequency, transitioning from a strict weekly delivery schedule to biweekly double-issues while expanding its digital ecosystem, video content, and live event franchises like the TIME100 summit.

U.S. News & World Report

Created through the merger of two distinct publications, *U.S. News & World Report* established a distinct niche by concentrating heavily on domestic policy, consumer economic analysis, healthcare developments, and higher education. In 1933, journalist David Lawrence founded a weekly newspaper titled *United States News*, followed by a separate weekly magazine named *World Report* six years later. The two entities merged in 1948 to create *U.S. News & World Report*.

Based in Washington, D.C., the publication prioritized functional political analysis over soft lifestyle stories. However, facing market pressures early in the digital era, the publication initiated a permanent structural shift. After reducing its print frequency to biweekly and then monthly schedules in 2008, *U.S. News & World Report* completely ceased regular print magazine production in December 2010.

Today, *U.S. News & World Report* operates as a digital-first publisher best known for its consumer rankings and data-driven guidebooks, particularly its influential "Best Colleges" and "Best Hospitals" lists. Originally launched in 1983 as a print issue feature, these rankings expanded into standalone digital portals and special edition guidebooks that serve as primary resource guides for prospective students and consumers nationwide.



Women's magazines typically cover a blend of lifestyle topics, including fashion, beauty, relationships, health, career guidance, and personal wellness. **Source**: jessica mullen, Des- sort of digging the design of this women's health magazine. Nice paper, size, & consistent spreads, CC BY 2.0.

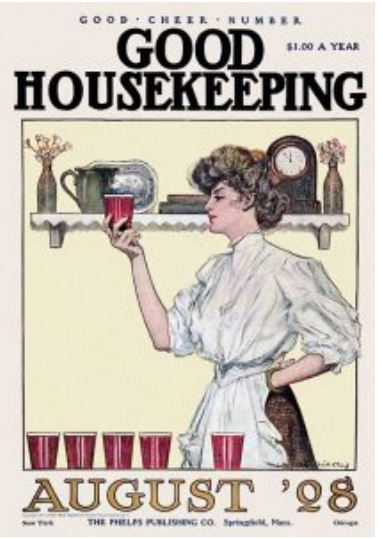
Women's Magazines and the Evolution of Domestic and Lifestyle Media

Female readers have provided a vital economic foundation for the magazine industry since the early 19th century. Early publishing houses recognized women as a distinct target

demographic, initially producing periodicals centered on domestic management, literature, and family health. Over time, women's magazines grew into one of the most profitable sectors in publishing. Within this market, a group of high-circulation publications known historically as the "Seven Sisters"—which included *Good Housekeeping*, *Better Homes & Gardens*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *McCall's*, *Redbook*, *Woman's Day*, and *Family Circle*—dominated household media consumption for generations. While digital disruption forced several of these legacy titles to close or pivot to digital-only formats, surviving publications adapted by expanding their service journalism into digital verticals and brand licensing.

Good Housekeeping

Founded in May 1885, *Good Housekeeping* began publishing with a mission to provide practical advice on home management, literary pieces, and consumer guidance. In 1900, the magazine established the



Source: John Cecil Clay creator QS:P170,Q6225600, Good housekeeping 1908 08 a , public domain.

Good Housekeeping Institute, featuring a dedicated product-evaluation laboratory where engineers, scientists, nutritionists, and consumer researchers rigorously tested household goods. Products meeting these safety and quality standards were awarded the "Good Housekeeping Seal," a trust mark that became a powerful marketing tool for manufacturers and a point of credibility for readers.

Today, published by Hearst, *Good Housekeeping* maintains its focus on food, health, home maintenance, parenting, and

financial management. To remain profitable in a digital-first era, the publication leveraged the Good Housekeeping Institute's testing lab to drive e-commerce affiliate marketing online, transforming its traditional product-testing legacy into a lucrative digital revenue stream alongside its print edition.

Better Homes and Gardens

Making its print debut in 1922, *Better Homes & Gardens* entered the industry as a service publication centered on interior design, gardening, home improvement, and culinary arts. Framing the home as the emotional center of family life, the publication positioned itself around approachable, budget-conscious editorial advice designed to help readers translate design ideas into practical home projects. The magazine's monthly print content is organized across six primary sections: Food and Nutrition, Home, Health, Family, Gardening, and Lifestyle.

Owned by People Inc., *Better Homes & Gardens* successfully transitioned into a multiplatform lifestyle brand. In addition to maintaining strong print readership, the brand expanded into retail licensing partnerships—most notably producing extensive home goods and outdoor furniture lines sold at major retailers nationwide—demonstrating how legacy print titles use brand equity to diversify income beyond traditional print advertising.

Cosmopolitan



Newspaper mogul William Randolph Hearst once owned *Cosmopolitan*. The magazine transformed under the leadership of Helen Gurley Brown during the 1960s. **Source**: Cosmopolitan Magazine, CosmopolitanMagazineDecember1924, public domain.

First published in 1886 as a general-interest family periodical featuring fiction, household tips, and children's departments, *Cosmopolitan* underwent one of the most dramatic editorial transformations in media history. In the first issue, the editor told readers that "there will be a department devoted exclusively to the interests of women, with articles on fashions, on household decoration, on

cooking, and the care and management of children, etc., also a department for the younger members of the family." Just two years later, however, the original publishing company went out of business, and after several publisher changes, newspaper mogul William Randolph Hearst eventually purchased *Cosmopolitan* in 1905.

Its defining cultural shift occurred in 1965 when editor Helen Gurley Brown assumed leadership and "transformed an antiquated general-interest mag called *Cosmopolitan* into the must-read for young, sexy single chicks." Brown retooled the publication for young, financially independent, and sexually liberated women, shifting the magazine's focus toward dating, careers, fashion, and personal empowerment. The magazine described the transformation, saying:

> Over the years, *Cosmo* has not only become the number-one-selling monthly magazine on the newsstand, but it has also served as an agent for social change, encouraging women everywhere to go after what they want (whether it be in the boardroom or the bedroom).

The revamped publication proved immediately popular while generating significant cultural debate. Conservatives criticized its frank discussions of sexuality and birth control as provocative. At the same time, some second-wave feminists argued that its heavy focus on personal appearance and relationships reinforced traditional gender dynamics. Brown argued that "*Cosmo* is feminist in that we believe women are just as smart and capable as men are and can achieve

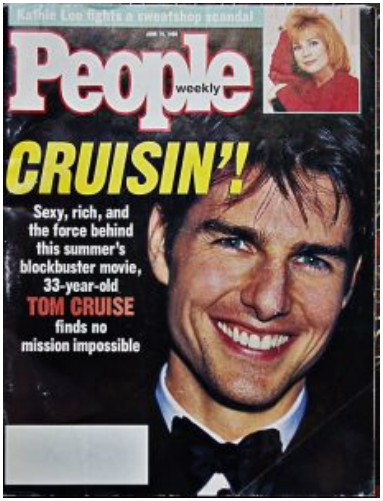
anything men can. But it also acknowledges that while work is important, men are too. The *Cosmo* girl absolutely loves men!"

Today, *Cosmopolitan* operates as a massive global franchise under Hearst, publishing international editions in dozens of languages. While maintaining its signature coverage of relationships, health, and style, contemporary *Cosmopolitan* expanded its editorial portfolio to address career development, inclusive beauty, social justice issues, and mental health across digital platforms, mobile apps, and video streaming channels.

Celebrity Magazines and Pop-Culture Journalism

Frequently scrutinized for their reliance on paparazzi photography and personal gossip, celebrity magazines generate substantial revenue while shaping American popular culture. These publications capitalize on public interest in the personal lives, relationships, and daily routines of public figures. Traditional titles such as *People*, *OK!*, and *Us Weekly* demonstrate how celebrity media evolved from traditional print weeklies into multiplatform digital networks.

People



Source: Ron Frazier. Highlight of a chapter in our lives . CC BY 2.0.

First published in 1974 as a spin-off of *Time* magazine's "People" section, *People* established a unique positioning strategy that distinguished it from supermarket tabloids. The publication balances celebrity profiles with human-interest stories about everyday individuals facing extraordinary circumstances. The editorial staff maintains strict verification standards, refusing to publish unverified rumors. This policy enabled the magazine to build professional relationships with talent publicists, securing exclusive wedding photos, birth announcements, and personal interviews.

People maintains one of the largest readerships of any American consumer magazine. The brand successfully extended its franchise into special annual print editions, such as "The Sexiest Man Alive" and "The Beautiful Issue," alongside digital video networks, daily news podcasts, and e-commerce product recommendation hubs.

OK!

Originating in the United Kingdom in 1993, *OK!* established a global presence by offering readers access to celebrity events through authorized interviews and photo coverage. The magazine originally operated under an editorial policy of publishing exclusively positive celebrity profiles. However, the publication abandoned this rigid framework in 2007 following an unpredictable interview with pop artist Britney Spears, choosing to publish the unedited account to highlight the realities of high-profile fame. The next year, Spears agreed to a second interview with the publication, in which she discussed her past behavior, resulting in a more positive profile of the singer.

In the North American market, *OK!* underwent significant structural changes as newsstand sales declined industry-wide. Under its licensing parent company McClatchy Media, the U.S. edition shifted its operational focus toward digital distribution, operating primarily as a web publication and social media news outlet while maintaining regional print editions internationally.

Us Weekly

Founded in 1977 by New York Times Company and later

acquired by Wenner Media, *Us Weekly* published as a general entertainment review magazine before converting to a weekly format in 2000. The publication positions itself as a "pop-culture bible, building authority through the decades with smart, irreverent coverage of the entertainment industry." Under editor Bonnie Fuller, the magazine overhauled its format to pioneer modern pop-culture photojournalism, introducing candid paparazzi photography and candid observational features such as "Stars — They're Just Like Us!"

Now owned by McClatchy Media, *Us Weekly* relies heavily on style and visual commentary. Iconic recurring segments like "Who Wore It Best?" set a standard for fashion comparison features. At the same time, the "Fashion Police" format—which originated as a humorous commentary column reviewing red-carpet attire—helped inspire the long-running television show hosted by comedian Joan Rivers . Today, *Us Weekly* operates as a hybrid print-and-digital brand, delivering breaking celebrity coverage across print issues, social media feeds, and digital video channels.

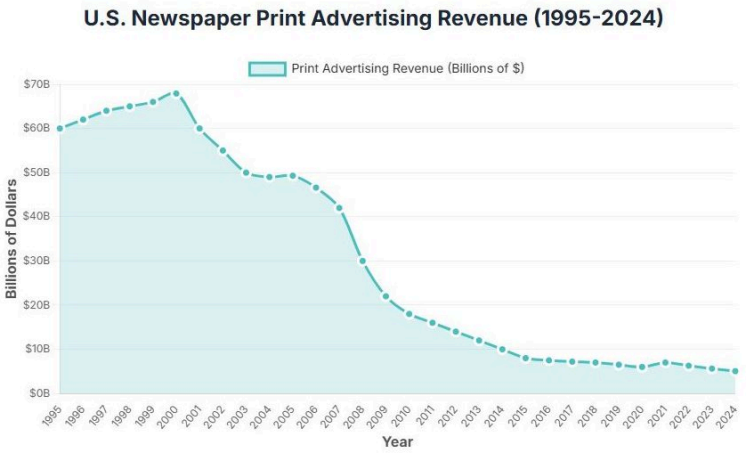


Source: Billie Grace Ward. Old News. CC BY 2.0.

Declining Readership and Decreasing Revenues in the Newspaper Industry

Despite the historical reach of major metropolitan newspapers, the print newspaper industry has experienced a severe decline in subscribers, overall readership, and advertising revenue over the past several decades. High-profile closures highlight this ongoing crisis. On February 27, 2009, Denver's *Rocky Mountain News* published its final issue after nearly 150 years in print. The front-page headline "Goodbye, Colorado"

marked the end of an era for local reporting in Denver, reflecting a broader trend that soon affected newspapers across the country. In response to soaring production costs and dropping print circulation, major regional dailies altered their publishing schedules. Papers like *The Modesto Bee* reduced print delivery to three days a week, while *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* limited its print offerings primarily to Sunday, directing daily readers to digital editions. Publishers such as *The Seattle Times* and *The Denver Post* similarly scaled back physical distribution to focus resources on digital platforms.



American news organizations have lost significant portions of their audiences to online media and have suffered billions in advertising revenue.

Readership Decline, the Expansion of News Deserts, and Pink-Slime Journalism

The closure of the *Rocky Mountain News* presaged a wider structural collapse across local news ecosystems. Concerns over the future of print media emerged in the 1940s with the rise of commercial radio and television. The total number of U.S. daily newspapers has dropped steadily from 1,611 in 1990 to 1,437 in 2006. Now, it's estimated that there are fewer than 1,000 daily newspapers in the United States. Research from Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism reveals that since 2005, the United States has lost almost 40% of its newspapers.

While total population growth temporarily masked readership declines during the mid-20th century, structural demographic shifts accelerated the drop in print circulation by the late 1980s and 1990s—the widespread adoption of television news and the emergence of the commercial internet altered media habits. Newer generations developed different expectations regarding news access, favoring immediate, digital delivery over daily print subscriptions. Pew Research Center surveys document this ongoing decline: while 43 percent of Americans reported reading a print or digital newspaper daily in 2006, that figure fell dramatically to 12% in subsequent decades. Younger demographics rely almost entirely on digital

platforms and social media for breaking news, leaving printed papers dependent on an aging core audience.

This disappearance of local news has given rise to **news deserts**—geographic regions with limited or no access to regular local reporting. Hundreds of U.S. counties now lack a local newspaper entirely, leaving millions of residents without dedicated reporters to cover municipal government, school board meetings, local elections, or community health issues.

Equally concerning is the proliferation of **ghost newspapers**—publications that remain in print or online but have had their newsrooms stripped of reporting staff. Operated by centralized corporate management, ghost newspapers rely almost entirely on regional wire syndication, automated press releases, and recycled lifestyle content. While the masthead on the front page may suggest a functioning local newspaper, the publication no longer conducts original investigative or accountability reporting in the community it purports to serve.

The civic consequences of news deserts and ghost newspapers are severe. Academic studies demonstrate that when a community loses its local newspaper, municipal borrowing costs rise, local government expenditures become less efficient, political polarization increases, and voter turnout in local elections drops significantly. Without independent reporters serving as

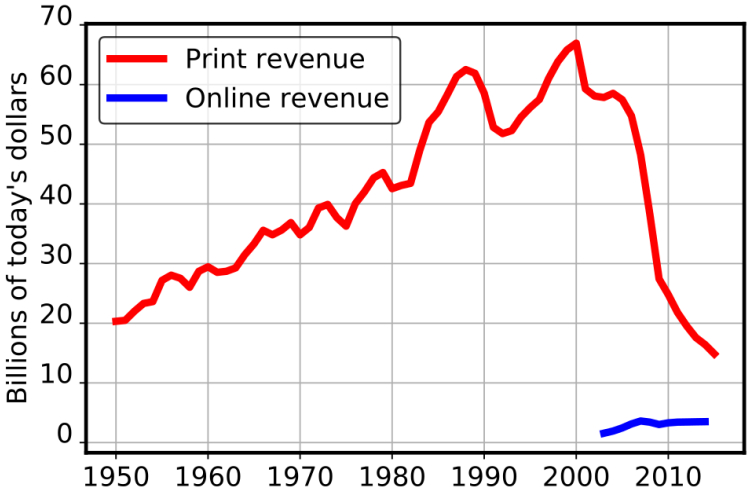
public watchdogs, local institutions operate with reduced oversight and public accountability.

As legitimate local newsrooms closed or shrank into ghost newspapers, political actors and PR firms moved to fill the local information vacuum. This trend led to the emergence of **pink-slime journalism**—networks of hundreds of automated or semi-automated websites disguised as traditional, neutral local newspapers

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Organizations operating behind these networks, such as Metric Media and Locality Labs, deploy automated algorithms and low-cost freelance writers to generate thousands of localized articles across hundreds of domain names. While these sites feature benign local interest items, their primary purpose is to publish partisan political spin, dark-money advocacy pieces, and corporate press releases presented as objective local reporting.

The proliferation of pink slime journalism presents a major challenge to public media literacy. By mimicking the visual design, naming conventions, and layout of trusted community newspapers, these automated networks exploit the credibility of local journalism to influence voters and spread partisan messaging. Teaching students to identify the funding structures, editorial disclosures, and sourcing practices behind pink slime outlets has become an essential component of modern media literacy education.



Print advertising revenue crashed heavily in the 2000s and is not expected to recover. **Source**: Dave Farrance, Naa newspaper ad revenue, CC0 1.0.

The Decline of Print Advertising and the Digital Shift

The financial decline of newspapers stems largely from the collapse of print advertising revenue, which historically subsidized local journalism. The migration of classified advertising to online marketplaces like Craigslist, combined with direct-to-consumer digital marketing, stripped newspapers of crucial income streams. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau indicates that total revenue for print publishers fell by more than 50 percent between 2002 and 2020.

Crucially, the growth of online news audiences failed to

compensate for the loss of print advertising. Tech platforms and programmatic ad networks captured the vast majority of digital advertising dollars, leaving news organizations with a fraction of their historical ad earnings. This shift fundamentally altered the newspaper business model: by 2020, subscription and paywall revenue surpassed total advertising revenue industry-wide for the first time. To survive, legacy publications have had to implement digital paywalls, seek philanthropic support, convert to non-profit status, or target niche digital audiences.



Newspaper Chains and Corporate Media Consolidation

As newspapers faced persistent financial pressure and falling revenues over recent decades, ownership in the industry consolidated rapidly. Independent and family-owned newspapers increasingly sold to regional networks, national corporate chains, or private equity firms to remain operational.

Research from Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism shows that more than one-third of all U.S. newspapers have shut down entirely since 2005. While family-owned outlets accounted for a significant portion of recent paper closures due to rising production costs, the newspapers that survived were systematically folded into larger corporate networks.

The concentration of newspaper ownership expanded markedly during the late 20th and early 21st centuries. In 2002, the 22 largest newspaper chains owned 39 percent of all papers in the United States, yet those publications accounted for 70 percent of daily circulation and 73 percent of Sunday circulation. As chain owners acquired competing dailies, they centralized management, shared editorial content across regional papers, and consolidated printing operations to achieve economies of scale.

By the 2020s, ownership of the newspaper publishing industry concentrated among a small group of large corporate entities and investment funds. Industry data indicates that the 10 largest newspaper companies control roughly one-quarter of all remaining U.S. newspapers and approximately 60 percent of all daily publications. Conversely, fewer than 15 percent of daily newspapers in the United States remain under independent, non-chain ownership.

Four major publishing groups dominate this consolidated landscape: Gannett (which expanded significantly after

merging with GateHouse Media), MediaNews Group (operated by hedge fund Alden Global Capital following its acquisition of Tribune Publishing), Adams Publishing Group , and Lee Enterprises. While consolidation allowed some publications to lower operating costs, media scholars and civic leaders express ongoing concern that corporate ownership often leads to newsroom downsizing, reduced local news coverage, and a diminished diversity of editorial voices in local communities.

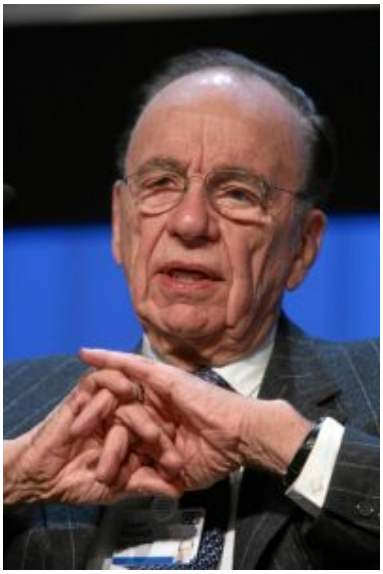
Unlike traditional family publishers who viewed newspapers as long-term civic institutions, private equity firms often operated with short-term financial horizons, extracting cash flow and profit margins from declining publications through steep operational cuts. While this strategy generated short-term returns for investors, it accelerated the decline of local news coverage and compromised the long-term viability of historic news institutions.

Alternative Ownership Models and Billionaire Benefactors in Modern Journalism

As financial pressures decimated print advertising revenue, legacy news outlets sought new business structures to

maintain operations. As one article in the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* puts it, "It may be time for a more radical reinvention of the daily newspaper. The answer for some newspapers may be to adopt a nonprofit ownership structure that will enable them to seek philanthropic contributions and benefit from tax exemptions." In several high-profile cases, newspapers transitioned from public media corporations to individual billionaire ownership.

In 2007, Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation acquired *The Wall Street Journal* for $5 billion, investing heavily in its digital infrastructure and building one of the industry's most successful paid subscription paywalls. In 2009, he published an article in *The Wall Street Journal* assuring his



Rupert Murdoch. **Source**: worldeconomicforum at https://www.flickr.com., Rupert Murdoch – WEF Davos 2007 , CC BY-SA 2.0.

readers that "the future of journalism is more promising than ever—limited only by editors and producers unwilling to fight for their readers and viewers, or government using its heavy hand either to overregulate or subsidize us." Other wealthy figures followed similar paths, positioning themselves as civic patrons. Amazon founder Jeff Bezos purchased *The Washington Post* in 2013, Boston Red Sox owner John Henry bought *The Boston Globe* in 2013, biotech entrepreneur Dr. Patrick Soon-Shiong acquired the *Los Angeles Times* in 2018, and casino magnate Sheldon Adelson owned the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* until he died in 2021.

While billionaire capital initially stabilized several prominent newsrooms, the benefactor model faced significant long-term hurdles. In subsequent years, many billionaire-owned publications confronted renewed budget deficits, executive turnover, and public debates over owner interference in editorial decisions. These challenges demonstrated that private wealth alone could not fully insulate traditional newsrooms from broader economic realities.

Workplace contractions continued to affect newsroom employment nationwide. Employment tracking by outplacement firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas recorded thousands of media industry job cuts annually, building on major reductions during the 2018–2020 economic disruptions , which prompted journalists and civic leaders to turn to radical organizational reinvention.

Non-profit news models emerged as one of the most viable alternatives for sustaining local reporting. In 2019, *The Salt Lake Tribune* made media history by becoming the first legacy daily newspaper in the United States to obtain 501(c)(3) non-profit status from the Internal Revenue Service. This structural shift allowed the publication to accept tax-deductible donations and foundation grants alongside traditional reader subscriptions. Inspired by this playbook, digital-native non-profits like the *Baltimore Banner* and *The Spokesman-Review*, plus multi-funder philanthropic initiatives such as Press Forward, poured hundreds of millions of dollars into regional news ecosystems.

To support this expanding sector, philanthropic coalitions stepped forward to build sustainable infrastructure for local news. For instance, programs like *Report for America* placed early-career journalists in under-reported newsrooms to cover local beats. Despite challenges related to donor fatigue and foundation grant cycles, nonprofit journalism has become a central pillar of 21st-century civic reporting. These hybrid, donor- and reader-supported newsrooms represent an evolving framework for public-service journalism in the modern media landscape.

4.6 THE DIGITAL LANDSCAPE'S IMPACT ON THE PRINT INDUSTRY

The rapid expansion of digital communication transformed the fundamental economics and delivery of news, presenting print publications with intense competition for consumer attention. As readers migrated online for immediate, zero-cost coverage, legacy newspapers struggled to maintain traditional print circulation and advertising revenues. However, the influence of the internet extended far beyond providing free content; it restructured how news was gathered, produced, published, and monetized across the media landscape.

The Evolution of Blogging and Speed Advantages Over Print



The Drudge Report creator Matt Drudge made a name for himself when he scooped *Newsweek*. **Source**: John Mathew Smith & www.celebrity-photos.com from Laurel Maryland, USA, Matt Drudge 1996 (cropped), CC BY-SA 2.0.

In the early days of the commercial web, weblogs—or blogs—introduced a decentralized model of reporting and commentary. Traditional journalists initially viewed blogging with skepticism due to its variable sourcing standards and lack of institutional editorial oversight. As journalism scholar Jay Rosen noted, "Bloggers are speakers and writers of their own invention, at large in the public square. They're *participating* in the great game of influence called public opinion." Print reporter and blogger Gina Chen

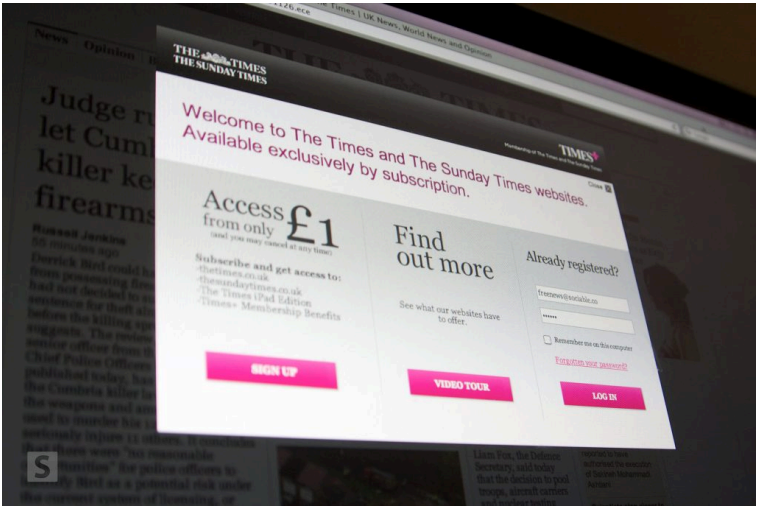
summarized this dynamic by observing, "Blogging has changed journalism, but it is not journalism."

Despite early concerns regarding verification, digital publishing possessed structural advantages over print media—most notably speed and unlimited space. While traditional newspapers were bound by fixed page counts and once-a-day printing schedules, online outlets could break news instantaneously. A defining moment occurred in January 1998 when *The Drudge Report*, an online news aggregator, broke the story of the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal after *Newsweek* delayed publication. This event demonstrated the internet's capacity to bypass legacy editorial timelines and influence national discourse. Furthermore, digital platforms freed journalists from print layout constraints, allowing for longer investigative pieces, complete interview transcripts, and extensive source material.

The Shift to Online Dailies and Digital-Only Transitions

As print readership declined, major publications established online versions of their papers to retain audiences. By 2010, online sources surpassed print newspapers as a primary news destination for a majority of Americans. For competitive metropolitan markets, the financial strain led publishers to abandon print entirely, though the transition to digital-only operations exposed the economic trade-offs of online

publishing. In 2009, Seattle's *Post-Intelligencer* stopped printing, "leaving the rival *Seattle Times* as the only big daily in town." As Steve Swartz, president of Hearst Newspapers and owner of the *Post-Intelligencer*, commented about the move to online-only printing, "Being the second newspaper in Seattle didn't work. We are very enthusiastic, however, about this experiment to create a digital-only business in Seattle with a robust community website at its core." When the *Post-Intelligencer* shifted away from print, its newsroom workforce dropped from 135 journalists to just 24. Furthermore, news organizations discovered that digital reader behavior differed markedly from print habits; web visitors consumed articles in brief, targeted sessions via search engines and social links rather than reading an entire issue front-to-back. As Swartz articulated, "Very few people come to our website and try to re-create the experience of reading a newspaper—in other words, spending a half-hour to 45 minutes and reading most of the articles. We don't find people do that on the Web." To adapt, digital newsrooms introduced beatblogs and crowdsourced reporting, encouraging readers to submit tips, data, and commentary directly to journalists.



Publications like *The Times* have instituted paywalls. Source: The Sociable. The Times paywall. CC BY-SA 2.0.

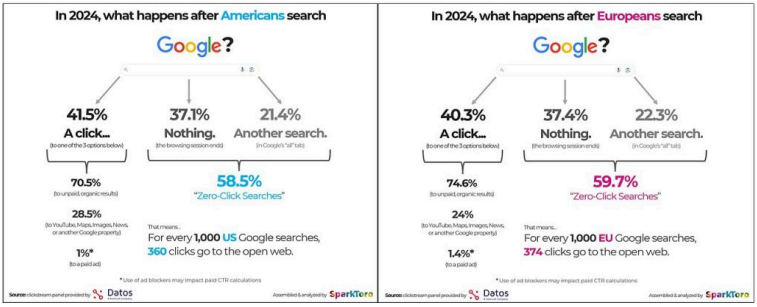
Business Model Evolution: Paywalls, Social Discovery, and Generative AI

The fundamental challenge facing digital news organizations has been monetizing online readership. Early digital strategies focused on maximizing page views to build digital advertising revenue. For example, in 2006, GateHouse Media experimented with Creative Commons licensing to encourage bloggers to copy and link back to local newspaper articles, hoping to drive traffic and ad impressions. GateHouse later merged with Gannett in 2019 to form the largest newspaper

chain in the United States, but digital advertising alone proved insufficient to sustain large-scale reporting.

Because digital ad rates paid a fraction of traditional print advertising yields—and because ad-tech giants like Google and Meta captured the majority of digital ad spending—news publishers altered their business strategies. Most major outlets moved away from fully free models toward metered paywalls, dynamic subscription tiers, and freemium structures. Leading publications such as *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Financial Times* successfully built multi-million-subscriber digital models, demonstrating that readers would pay for premium, trusted journalism.

Simultaneously, audience discovery shifted dramatically. Historically, print publishers controlled their own distribution channels through home delivery networks, newsstands, and mail subscriptions. In the digital landscape, however, news organizations became deeply dependent on third-party tech intermediaries—primarily social media networks and search engines—to distribute their content and reach audiences.



Zero-click searches have risen in recent years due to Google's use of AI-generated summaries. **Source**: Datos, Zero click turundus, CC BY 4.0.

This platform dependency created severe economic vulnerability for digital publishers. Throughout the 2010s, outlets tailored their editorial strategies to optimize for social media algorithms and search engine queries. However, when major tech companies altered their algorithms—such as social networks deprioritizing news links in user feeds, or search engines introducing zero-click AI-generated summaries that answer queries directly without referring users to publisher websites—news organizations experienced sudden, catastrophic drops in web traffic and ad revenue.

To insulate themselves from platform volatility, modern publishers have pivoted toward direct audience relationships. Newsrooms increasingly prioritize email newsletter subscriptions, custom mobile applications, direct subscriber memberships, and private community hubs. By establishing direct communication

channels with readers, publishers aim to bypass algorithmic gatekeepers and build sustainable reader revenue models.

The Internet's Influence on the Magazine Industry

In March of 2010, *The Consumerist* published a story titled "Print edition of *TV Guide* tells me to go online to read most of the cover story." According to the article, *TV Guide* printed a story listing "TV's Top 50 Families," but shocked readers by including only the top 20 families in its print version. To discover the rest of the list, readers needed to go online. As dismayed as some readers find themselves, this story reflects an ongoing trend in magazine journalism: the move toward online reporting.

Just like their newspaper cousins, magazines have felt the impact and influence of the Internet. With so much information available online, advertisers and readers have increasingly turned to the Internet, resulting in declines in both revenue and readership. However, these changes have not spelled the end for print magazines. Instead, they have forced magazines to adapt to an increasingly online market, demonstrating their resilience and ability to evolve.

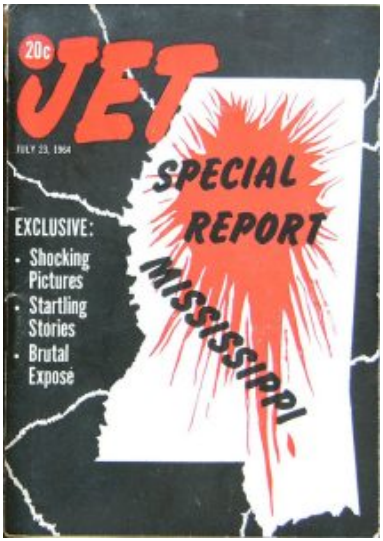
Like newspapers, consumer magazines experienced significant disruptions due to the rise of the internet. The rapid expansion of free online content, specialized blogs, and

social media platforms fractured reader attention and drew advertisers away from traditional print display ads. Single-copy newsstand sales fell steadily over two decades, prompting major media conglomerates like Dotdash Meredith (now People Inc.) and Hearst to reduce print frequencies—turning monthly titles into bi-monthly or quarterly editions—and pivot toward digital-first publishing.

Despite substantial financial contraction, the internet did not bring about the end of the magazine industry. Instead, magazine publishers adapted by leveraging their established brand authority to diversify revenue streams. Leading publications developed online subscription paywalls, specialized newsletter verticals, and e-commerce affiliate networks, earning commissions when readers purchased products reviewed by editorial staff.

Furthermore, niche publications catering to passionate, specific audiences—such as literary journals, high-end design magazines, and specialized hobbyist titles—demonstrated remarkable resilience. While mass-market newsweeklies struggled to compete with the immediacy of digital news feeds, tactile high-quality print magazines repositioned themselves as premium physical products. By combining targeted print editions with interactive digital content, the magazine industry restructured its operations to survive in a digital-first media ecosystem.

Online-Only Magazines and the Transition to Digital Formats



A 1954 edition of *Jet* magazine, which focused on news, culture, and entertainment relevant to the African-American community. It ceased publication in 2014 and now exists exclusively online. **Source**: Vieilles Annonces, Special Report on Freedom Summer – Mississippi – Jet Magazine, July 23, 1964 , CC BY-NC 2.0.

In 1995, *Salon* launched as one of the first major digital-native magazines on the internet, establishing a model for web-based journalism focused on politics, culture, and social critique. The

award-winning news and entertainment website boasts that it is a "spirited home for journalism that takes a critical look at current events, seeks alternatives to the status quo, engages with big ideas and holds power to account." The following year, Microsoft launched *Slate* as a general-interest web magazine that billed itself as "a daily magazine on the Web" by providing a "general interest publication offering analysis and commentary about politics, news, and culture." Unbound by print deadlines or page limitations, these pioneering digital magazines demonstrated that compelling, long-form editorial content could thrive online without an associated physical print product.

While *Salon* and *Slate* began as web-native titles, established print publications increasingly abandoned physical manufacturing to become digital-only operations. In late 2008, *PC Magazine*—which had published print issues since 1982—announced that it would publish its final print issue in January 2009 and transition to a 100% digital format. Jason Young, chief executive of parent company Ziff Davis Media, acknowledged at the time that the economic viability of print publishing had evaporated due to escalating printing and distribution overhead combined with shrinking newsstand advertising.

In the years following *PC Magazine*'s departure from newsstands, the print-to-digital shift accelerated across consumer and trade media. Iconic magazines such as *Jet*, *Computerworld*, *Teen Vogue*, *Glamour*, *ESPN The Magazine*,

Entertainment Weekly, and *InStyle* eventually shuttered their regular physical editions to focus exclusively on web, social, and mobile app platforms. Soaring paper prices, rising postage costs, and changes in consumer reading habits forced publishers to treat physical printing as a luxury format rather than a default distribution method.

As the digital landscape expanded, online-only magazines faced the limits of relying strictly on programmatic digital banner ads, which paid significantly lower rates than historic print advertisements. To achieve long-term sustainability, digital magazines diversified their business models through paid subscriber tiers, sponsored content studios, targeted affiliate marketing, and live events.

A particularly successful adaptation for digital-native magazines was early investment in podcast production and original audio journalism. *Slate*, for instance, built a major audio network around popular political podcasts and acclaimed narrative series like *Slow Burn*, converting podcast listeners into paying digital subscribers through premium memberships like *Slate Plus*. By combining web reporting, video series, and audio storytelling, online-only magazines expanded beyond static web pages to become multi-format media brands capable of engaging digital audiences across diverse platforms.



Magazine-Like Websites

In addition to digital transitions made by established print publications, web-native platforms emerged that operated like traditional magazines without ever publishing a physical print edition. Pitchfork launched in the mid-1990s as an online-only music journalism publication. The site provided readers with album reviews, cultural commentary, and artist interviews, structuring its editorial voice around the format of classical music and entertainment magazines.

However, web-native publications quickly built advantages over print predecessors by utilizing multimedia integrations. Sites like Pitchfork complemented long-form writing with embedded audio tracks, streaming playlists, video interviews, and original mini-documentaries. This hybrid approach—combining traditional magazine criticism with interactive digital media—demonstrated how online publications could create richer, multi-sensory experiences for audiences.

The influence of magazine-like websites eventually caught the attention of traditional media conglomerates seeking to build their digital presence. In 2015, publishing titan

Condé Nast—owner of legacy print titles like *Vogue*, *The New Yorker*, and *Vanity Fair*—acquired Pitchfork. This purchase underscored a broader industry trend of legacy publishing companies buying established web brands to capture younger, digital-first audiences.

Nevertheless, digital-native outlets remained susceptible to shifting web economics, advertising fluctuations, and audience fragmentation. In early 2024, Condé Nast restructured Pitchfork by merging its editorial team into the organization of its men's fashion and lifestyle magazine, *GQ*. This consolidation reflected ongoing volatility in digital media. It demonstrated how the boundaries between traditional print brands and web-born publications continue to blur as media companies seek sustainable business models in an evolving digital landscape.



Many magazines now produce digital versions of their content. **Source**: Brian Ferencz.
Digital version of accelerate magazine. CC BY-NC-ND 3.0.

Print Magazines With Online Presences

To retain audiences and expand brand reach, virtually every surviving print magazine maintains an active digital footprint. However, publishers quickly discovered that online readers interact with media differently than physical magazine subscribers. Writer Bernadette Geyer discussed the practical contrasts between online and print journals, saying:

> I will read a print journal cover to cover because I can bookmark where I left off. Simply taking all the content

> from what would have been a print issue and putting it online, along with links from a Table of Contents, is all well and good in theory. Still, how many people sit and read all the contents of an online journal that publishes several authors and genres per issue?

Web readers typically arrive at individual articles via search engines, social media feeds, or targeted links, consuming single pieces of content rather than browsing an entire digital edition. In response to these shifting consumption habits, print magazines adapted their websites to offer dynamic, daily-updated content. Publications regularly produce web-exclusive reporting, daily newsletters, podcasts, video series, and interactive features that cannot exist in static print issues, catering to digital audiences seeking timely updates between published issues.

Another significant advantage print magazines offer online is access to searchable digital archives. Converting decades of physical issues into searchable databases allows magazines to monetize back-catalog content. For instance, *Cook's Illustrated* gates its vast database of tested recipes and equipment reviews behind a paid digital membership, turning past culinary research into ongoing subscription revenue.

Similarly, publications like *Time* and *The New Yorker* offer subscribers complete access to every cover and article published since their founding in the 1920s. These deep archives serve a dual purpose: they act as primary research tools for scholars and readers while providing publications with a

durable asset that digital-native competitors cannot replicate. By pairing physical print editions with web-exclusive daily coverage and searchable historical archives, legacy magazines continue to refine their hybrid publishing models.

Is Print Dead?

The question "Is print dead?" has driven discourse across the media ecosystem for over two decades. Media critic David Carr framed the central paradox of modern journalism in *The New York Times*: traditional publications do not suffer from a lack of readers, but from a broken business model. Millions of readers consume articles online daily, yet free web access and low digital advertising leave newsrooms stripped of the revenue needed to support large editorial staffs.

This financial friction sparked intense debate over the physical medium's future. Media strategist Jeff Jarvis famously argued that digital platforms offered superior immediacy and interactive reach, framing print as an outdated constraint while debating John Griffin, the president of the *National Geographic Society*'s magazine group at the time. Jarvis claimed, "Print is not dead. Print is where words go to die." But Griffin countered, "Actually, print is where words go to live—we're still reading the ancient Greeks."

Conversely, publishing executives countered that tactile print publications provide focused, immersive reading experiences that digital feeds cannot replicate, offering permanent cultural documentation rather than ephemeral web streams.



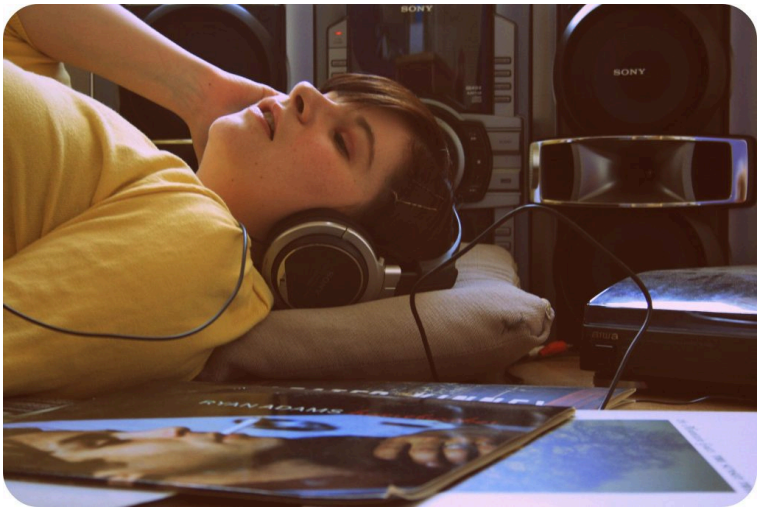
Rolling Stone published an AI-generated review of Lil Yachty's album *Let's Start Here* and provided a critique of the process. **Source**: The 85 South Comedy Show, Lil Yachty 2021, CC BY 3.0.

As technology evolved, media outlets faced new structural disruptions beyond platform shifts. *Rolling Stone* magazine delved into the controversial realm of AI-generated criticism by allowing an artificial intelligence to review Lil Yachty's album, *Let's Start Here*. Other major outlets have also experimented with artificial intelligence tools for research,

automated summaries, and experimental critique. These technological shifts underscored the fragile position of traditional media, forcing newsrooms to balance automated software against the indispensable value of human reporting, critical nuance, and artistic interpretation.

While print no longer serves as the primary distribution channel for daily news or breaking commentary, physical publishing has not vanished. Instead, print transformed into a specialized, high-end medium. Daily breaking reporting migrated almost entirely to web pages, mobile apps, and social feeds. At the same time, physical magazines and journals pivoted toward curated, tactile formats—offering long-form essays, rich photojournalism, and collectible design. The media-industry career platform Mediabistro once posted, "No one is saying magazines will fade into complete oblivion even as they restructure and find new legs... 'traditional media' are not going away. There's something special and unique, even luxurious, about reading a big, glossy magazine...Or, in the words of *Marie Claire* editor Joanna Coles, 'As long as people take baths, there will always be a monthly magazine.'" While print may no longer be the dominant medium, it continues to serve a distinct cultural function alongside its digital counterpart.

CHAPTER 5: MUSIC



Source: Lis Ferla. 213. Steal My Records. CC BY-NC 2.0.

- 5.1 Music
- 5.2 The Evolution of Popular Music
- 5.3 The Reciprocal Nature of Music and Culture
- 5.4 Current Popular Trends in the Music Industry
- 5.5 Influence of New Technology

5.1 MUSIC



Regarded by various publications as the "biggest girl group in the world", BLACKPINK is recognized as a leading force of the "girl crush" concept in K-pop, which explores themes of self-confidence and female empowerment. **Source**: TV10 (티비텐), Blackpink Pink Carpet Event 4, CC BY 3.0.

The democratization of music began long before the internet, with technological innovations consistently shifting the industry's power dynamics. For instance, the launch of MTV on August 1, 1981, marked a seismic shift. Music was no longer solely an auditory experience; it became a visual spectacle. Artists gained unprecedented platforms to showcase not only their sound but also their entire persona,

influencing fashion, trends, and youth culture globally. MTV's "heavy rotation" could make or break a career, fundamentally changing how music was marketed and consumed and ushering in an era where image was as crucial as audio.

Because of the Internet, the sheer volume of new music available to consumers is staggering. Consider the global phenomenon known as K-pop. Originating in South Korea, K-pop has experienced explosive growth in popularity, leveraging social media and digital platforms to cultivate massive, highly engaged fan bases worldwide. Its distinctive blend of catchy melodies, intricate choreography, polished production, and vibrant aesthetics has resonated with audiences across cultures. K-pop groups often incorporate multilingual lyrics, particularly English, further expanding their international appeal and contributing to a translanguage and transculture trend among fans. The industry's use of teasers, concept trailers, interactive content like fancams, and direct artist-to-fan communication creates a deeply immersive experience for listeners, strengthening their connection.

This global expansion is evident in the remarkable financial growth of the K-pop industry, which has expanded into a multi-billion-dollar global market with annual physical album exports alone exceeding hundreds of millions of dollars. While established acts like the boy band BTS and girl group BLACKPINK continue to dominate charts and sell out stadium tours worldwide, a dynamic wave of newer groups

continuously emerges to drive the genre's expansion. Popular current K-pop boy groups include BTS, Stray Kids, Tomorrow X Together (TXT), and EXO. For girl groups, major contenders include BLACKPINK, TWICE, NewJeans , IVE, LE SSERAFIM, and aespa. This vibrant and constantly evolving scene offers consumers an ever-increasing array of choices, reflecting a music landscape where geographical boundaries and traditional genre classifications are increasingly blurred, and where fans have more power than ever to discover and support artists from every corner of the globe.

Aspiring artists now have unprecedented access to global audiences. Platforms like Spotify, Apple Music, and YouTube have democratized music distribution, enabling artists to bypass traditional record labels and connect directly with fans. Social media platforms, including Instagram, TikTok, and X , alongside short-form video ecosystems like YouTube Shorts and Instagram Reels, have become powerful tools for building followings, engaging with fans, and promoting music. Furthermore, emerging generative AI tools and algorithm-driven discovery engines have altered how music is produced, curated, and pushed to viral status

.

While the potential for viral success remains, the competition is fierce. Artists must consistently create high-quality content, engage authentically with their audience,

cultivate direct community spaces on platforms like Discord or Patreon, and leverage data analytics to understand their fan base. While social networking sites and streaming platforms have empowered artists, they haven't eliminated the need for professional guidance and support. Many successful musicians still rely on managers, agents, and other industry professionals to navigate the complexities of the modern music business.

Of course, for every major music megastar like Taylor Swift , Drake, or Bad Bunny, thousands of unknown singers and bands try to promote their music online with little or no success. Despite this, the industry recognizes that social networking sites and digital streaming algorithms have taken some control away from record labels and placed it directly in artists' hands. Social networking sites have arrived as just the latest technological development in the music business. An in-depth examination of the history and evolution of popular music over the last century will help explain some of the current processes and trends in the industry.

5.2 THE EVOLUTION OF POPULAR MUSIC

The first stirrings of popular or pop music—any music genre that appeals to a broad audience or subculture—began in the late 19th century, with discoveries by Thomas Edison and Emile Berliner. In 1877, Edison discovered that he could reproduce sound using



For most of the 20th century, audiences have turned to gramophone records for commercial music more than any other medium. **Source**: Amitbalani, Antique HMV gramophone-phonograph- record player , CC0 1.0.

a strip of tinfoil wrapped around a rotating metal cylinder. Edison's **phonograph** provided ideas and inspiration for Berliner's gramophone, which used flat discs to record sound. The flat discs offered several advantages over the cylinders, enabling the mass production of sound recordings. This would have a significant impact on the popular music industry. Members of the middle class could now purchase technology that was previously available exclusively to an elite few. Berliner founded the Berliner Gramophone Company to manufacture his discs, and he encouraged popular operatic singers such as Enrico Caruso and Dame Nellie Melba to record their music using his system. Opera singers had enormous clout during the 19th century, and their music generated the most sheet music sales in the United States. Although the gramophone promised an exciting new development, disc recordings would take 20 years to rival sheet music in commercial importance.

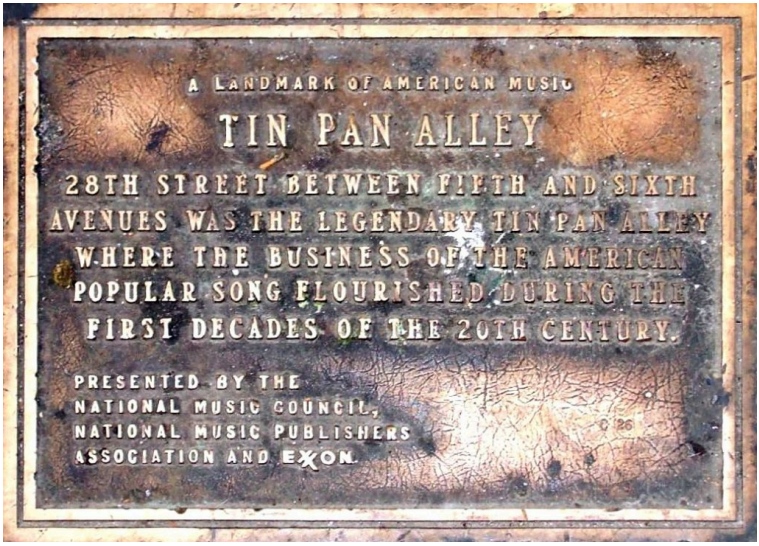
In the late 19th century, the United States strengthened its lax copyright laws, which provided an opportunity for composers, singers, and publishers to collaborate and earn money by producing a large volume of music. Numerous publishers began to emerge in an area of New York that became known as **Tin Pan Alley**. Allegedly named because the cacophony of many pianos played simultaneously in the publishers' demo rooms sounded like people pounding on tin pans, Tin Pan Alley soon became a prolific source of popular music, with its publishers mass-producing sheet music to satisfy the demands of a growing middle class.



Irving Berlin. **Source**: Life magazine images, Irving Berlin 1906, cropped, CC0 1.0.

Whereas audiences exalted classical artists for their individuality and expected them to differ stylistically from one another, popular artists garnered acclaim for conforming to the tastes of their intended audience. Popular genres expanded from opera to include vaudeville—a form of variety entertainment featuring short acts by singers, dancers, magicians, and comedians—and ragtime, a style of piano music characterized by syncopated melodies.

The Tin Pan Alley tradition of song publishing continued throughout the first half of the 20th century, with the show tunes and soothing ballads of Irving Berlin, Cole Porter, and George Gershwin, as well as the songwriting teams of the early 1950s, such as Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller. By hiring songwriters to compose music based on public demand and mainstream tastes, the Tin Pan Alley publishers introduced the concept of popular music as we know it today, establishing a commercial production model that prioritized broad market appeal.



Source: Ben Sutherland; cropped by Beyond My Ken, Tin Pan Alley plaque crop, CC BY 2.0.

The Roaring 1920s: Radio versus Records

In the 1920s, Tin Pan Alley's dominance of the popular music industry was threatened by two technological developments: the advent of electrical recording and the rapid growth of radio.

During the early days of its development, people viewed the gramophone as a scientific novelty that posed little threat to sheet music because of its poor sound quality. However, as inventors improved various aspects of the device, the sales of gramophone records began to affect sheet music sales.

The Copyright Act of 1911 had imposed a royalty on all records of copyrighted musical works to compensate for the loss in revenue to composers and authors. This loss became even more pronounced in the mid-1920s, when improvements in electrical recording drastically increased sales of gramophones and records. The greater range and sensitivity of the electrical broadcasting microphone revolutionized gramophone recording to the point that sheet music sales plummeted. From the very beginning, the record industry faced challenges from new technology.

Composers and publishers could deal with the losses caused by an increase in gramophone sales because of the provisions made in the Copyright Act. However, when radio broadcasting emerged in the early 1920s, both gramophone sales and sheet music sales began to suffer. Radio, as a medium, enabled listeners to experience events as they unfolded at an affordable price. Better yet, it offered a wide range of free music that required none of the musical skills, expensive instruments, or sheet music needed to create one's own music at home, nor the expense of purchasing records to play on the gramophone. This development threatened the entire recording industry, which ultimately earned the right to collect license fees from broadcasters. With the license fees in place, the recording industry eventually began to profit from the new technology, establishing an early precedent for performance royalties.

The 1930s: The Rise of Jazz and Blues



Poster advertising a performance by King Oliver. **Source**: Uncredited, King Oliver at Boyd's Studio Madison Wisc 1924, public domain.

The ascendance of Tin Pan Alley coincided with the emergence of **jazz** in New Orleans. An improvisational form of music primarily driven by instrumentals, jazz incorporates a variety of styles, including African rhythms, gospel, and blues. Established by New Orleans musicians such as King Oliver and his protégé, Louis Armstrong, who many rank as one of the most outstanding jazz soloists in history, jazz spread along the Mississippi River through bands that traveled up and down the river, playing on steamboats. During the Prohibition era in the 1920s and early 1930s, some jazz bands played in illegal speakeasies, which helped generate the genre's reputation as immoral and threatening to the country's cultural values. However, jazz became a legitimate form of entertainment during the 1930s, when orchestras led by White

musicians began incorporating it into their repertoire. During this time, jazz music began to adopt a big band style, combining elements of ragtime, Black spirituals, blues, and European music. Key figures in the development of the big jazz band included bandleaders Duke Ellington, Coleman Hawkins, and Glenn Miller. These big band orchestras used an arranger to limit improvisation by assigning parts of a piece of music to various band members. Although musicians could still improvise during solo performances, the format became more structured, leading to the emergence of the swing style of jazz that became popular in the 1930s. As the decade progressed, social attitudes toward racial segregation relaxed slightly in entertainment spaces, and big bands became increasingly racially integrated.

Former enslaved Africans and their descendants adapted their musical heritage, infusing it with jazz to create the **blues**. Dealing with themes of personal adversity, hard luck, and other emotional turmoil, the blues uses a 12-bar form with a call-and-response between the singer and his guitar. Originating in the Mississippi Delta, just upriver from New Orleans, blues music gained influence through the music stylings of W. C. Handy, Ma Rainey , Robert Johnson, and Lead Belly, among others. Unlike jazz, the blues did not spread significantly to the Northern states until the late 1930s and 1940s. Once Southern migrants introduced the blues to urban Northern cities, the music developed into distinctive regional styles, ranging from the jazz-oriented Kansas City blues to the swing-based West Coast blues. Chicago blues musicians, such as Muddy Waters, are credited with being the first to electrify the



Chicago blues, characterized by the use of electric guitar and harmonica, provided the foundation for rock and roll. Muddy Waters was one of the most famous Chicago blues musicians. **Source**: Lionel Decoster, Muddy Waters 1976, CC BY-SA 4.0.

blues by using electric guitars and to blend urban style with classic Southern blues. The electric guitar, first produced by Adolph Rickenbacker in 1931, changed music by amplifying sound and producing a louder volume that could cut through the noise in crowded bars and nightclubs. By focusing less on vocal projection, singers could convey more subtle emotion and intimacy in their performances. This electrified form of blues provided the essential structural and sonic foundations of rock and roll.

The golden age of radio started in the 1920s and lasted through the 1950s. During this period, the number of licensed radio stations in the United States increased dramatically, from five in 1921 to more than 600 by 1925. The introduction of radio broadcasting provided a valuable cultural link between urban city centers and small, rural towns. Able to transmit music nationwide, rural radio stations broadcast local music genres that soon gained widespread popularity across the country.

The 1940s: Technology Progresses



Reel-to-reel tape recorders and magnetic tape not only helped artists experiment with overdubbing but also provided a compact method for reproducing and preserving audio. **Source**: Stuart Blacklock – Leevers Rich series D2B – CC BY-ND 2.0.

Technological advances during the 1940s made it even easier for people to listen to their favorite music and for artists to record it. The introduction of the reel-to-reel tape recorder paved the way for several innovations that would transform the music industry. The first commercially available tape recorders were monophonic, meaning they had only one track on which to record sound onto magnetic tape. This may seem limiting today, but at the time, it enabled exciting creative innovations. During the 1940s and 1950s, some musicians—most notably guitarist Les Paul, with his song "Lover (When You're Near Me)"—began to experiment with overdubbing, in which they played back a previously recorded tape through a mixer, blended it with a live performance, and recorded the composite signal onto a second tape recorder. By the time four-track and eight-track recorders

became readily available in the 1960s, musicians no longer had to play together in the same room; they could record each part separately and combine them into a finished recording—a technological breakthrough that laid the groundwork for modern studio production and digital audio editing.

Families listening to music at home would also notice innovations in sound technology. The recording industry had produced discs that rotated at 78 revolutions per minute (rpm) for many years, despite the need to change the disc every 5 minutes. In 1948, Columbia Records perfected the 12-inch 33 rpm long-playing (LP) disc, which could play



Ella Fitzgerald. **Source**: William P. Gottlieb creator QS:P170,Q622278 William P. Gottlieb, Ella Fitzgerald (Gottlieb 02871) b , public domain.

up to 25 minutes per side and had lower surface noise than the earlier (and highly breakable) shellac discs. The 33 rpm discs became the standard format for full albums and would dominate the recorded music industry until the advent of the compact disc.

During the 1940s, a mutually beneficial alliance existed between sound recording and radio. Artists such as Frank Sinatra and Ella Fitzgerald profited immensely from radio exposure. Until this time, the industry primarily provided music that appealed to adults, but the popularity of Sinatra and his contemporaries revealed an entirely untapped market: teenagers. The postwar economic boom offered many teenagers the disposable income to buy records. Radio airplay helped to promote and sell records and the recording artists themselves, which in turn stabilized the recording industry. The near-riots caused by the appearance of New Jersey crooner Frank Sinatra in concert paved the way for the youth-driven mass hysteria later inspired by Elvis Presley and Beatles fans during the rock and roll era.



Bill Haley & His Comets recorded "(We're Gonna) Rock Around the Clock," which became the first rock and roll song to reach number one on the US Billboard pop charts. **Source**: Magnussen, Friedrich (1914-1987), Rocksänger Bill Haley and The Comets (Kiel 40.440), CC BY-SA 3.0 DE.

The 1950s: The Advent of Rock and Roll

New technology continued to develop in the 1950s with the introduction of television. The new medium spread rapidly, primarily due to cheaper mass-production costs and technological advancements resulting from the war. In 1948, only 1 percent of America's households owned a television; by 1953, this figure had risen to nearly 50 percent, and by 1978,

almost every home in the United States owned a television. The introduction of television into people's homes threatened the radio industry's existence. The radio industry adapted by focusing on music, forming alliances with the recording industry to ensure its survival. To do so, radio became an essential promotional tool. Stations became increasingly dependent on recorded music to fill airtime, and in 1955, the Top 40 format debuted. Radio stations would generate playlists based on popularity (referencing the Billboard Top 40 singles chart), and a popular song might get played as many as 30 or 40 times a day. Radio stations began to heavily influence record sales, leading to intense competition for spots on their playlists. This ultimately resulted in **payola**—the illegal practice of receiving payment from a record company for broadcasting a particular song on the radio. The payola scandal came to a head in the 1960s when the government accused DJ Alan Freed and eight other disc jockeys of accepting money in exchange for airplay. Following Freed's trial, the U.S. passed an anti-payola statute, making payola a misdemeanor and establishing strict broadcasting boundaries that continue to inform discussions of promotional influence in digital streaming today.



Chuck Berry's electrifying guitar riffs, witty lyrics, and dynamic showmanship virtually codified the sound and style of early rock and roll. Songs like "Maybellene," "Roll Over Beethoven," and " Johnny B. Goode" became anthems, showcasing his distinctive guitar solos and narrative storytelling.
Source: Universal Attractions (management), Chuck Berry 1957 (square crop) , public domain.

As technologies evolved, so too did music during the 1950s. The urban Chicago blues, typified by artists such as Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, and B.B. King, surged in popularity among both White and Black teenagers. Marketed under the name rhythm and blues, or **R&B**, songs such as "Sexy Ways" and "Sixty Minute Man" featured suggestive lyrics, and the electrified guitar and wailing harmonica sounds appealed to energetic young listeners. At the time, the industry classified R&B records as "race music," and they segregated their sales from the White music records tracked on the pop charts. Nonetheless, a considerable amount of crossover existed among audiences. In 1952, the Dolphins of Hollywood record store in Los Angeles, which specialized in R&B music, noted that 40 percent of its sales went to White individuals.

Although banned from some stations, the popular new music was embraced by others. In 1951, Freed started a late-night R&B show called *The Moondog Rock & Roll House Party* and began referring to the music he played as rock and roll. Taking its name from a blues slang term, the music obtained instant notoriety, gaining widespread support among teenage music fans and widespread disapproval among the older generation. Frenetic showmen Little Richard and Chuck Berry pioneered early rock and roll, and their energetic stage performances became characteristic of the genre.

While primarily known for his original rock and roll compositions, Chuck Berry, like many artists of his era, sometimes incorporated existing musical forms into his repertoire. In particular, he would occasionally cover "hillbilly" or country songs, infusing them with his signature rock-and-roll energy. This practice was not uncommon during a time when genre lines were still somewhat fluid, and artists often drew inspiration from various American musical traditions. By taking these country-flavored tunes and infusing them with his rhythm-and-blues sensibility, Berry further cemented the interconnectedness of different musical styles that would eventually converge to form the diverse landscape of popular music we know today. His ability to adapt and transform these influences into something entirely new solidified his status as a true pioneer and a foundational architect of rock and roll. As the integration of White and

Black individuals progressed in the 1950s, with the repeal of legal segregation laws and the emergence of the civil rights movement,
aspects of Black culture, including music, became more widely accepted
among mainstream audiences.

However, the introduction of a White artist who sang songs written by Black musicians helped rock and roll spread rapidly across state and racial lines. Elvis Presley, a singer and guitarist dubbed the "King of Rock and Roll," further helped make



Elvis Presley. **Source**: CBS Television, Elvis Presley first national television appearance 1956, public domain.

music written by Black individuals acceptable to mainstream White audiences while popularizing rockabilly—a blend of rock and country music—among diverse audiences during the mid-1950s. Heavily influenced by his rural Southern roots, Presley combined the R&B music of bluesmen B. B. King, John Lee Hooker, and Howlin' Wolf with the country-western

tradition of Roy Acuff, Ernest Tubb, and Jimmie Rodgers, while adding elements of gospel. The intense reaction Presley inspired among hordes of adolescent fans—screaming, crying, and crowding venues—solidified his reputation as the first authentic rock-and-roll icon, with hits like "Heartbreak Hotel," "Hound Dog," and "All Shook Up" enjoying heavy radio rotation.



While the press framed the Rolling Stones (pictured above) and the Beatles as bitter enemies—pitting London's gritty "bad boys" against Liverpool's polished pop innovators—the two groups were actually close friends who frequently collaborated. **Source**: Ben Merk (ANEFO), Rolling Stones 1967, CC0 1.0.

The 1960s: Rock and Roll Branches Out From R&B

Before 1964, rock and roll was primarily composed of American acts. Although U.S. artists frequently reached the top of the charts overseas, few European artists achieved success on this side of the Atlantic. This situation changed almost overnight with the arrival of British pop phenomenon the Beatles. Combining elements of skiffle—a type of music played on rudimentary instruments, such as banjos, guitars, or homemade instruments—doo-wop , and soul, the four mop-haired musicians from Liverpool, England, created a genre of music known as Merseybeat, named after the River Mersey. The Beatles' genial personalities and catchy pop tunes made them an instant success in the United States, and their popularity heightened with several appearances on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. When the Beatles arrived in New York in 1964, hundreds of reporters, police officers, and thousands of fans met them at the airport. Their appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show* a few days later resulted in the largest audience for an American television program at the time, with approximately one in three Americans (74 million) tuning in. **Beatlemania**—the term coined to describe fans' wildly enthusiastic reaction to the band—extended to other British bands, and by the mid-1960s, the Kinks, the Zombies,

the Animals, Herman's Hermits, the Who, and the Rolling Stones all had made appearances on the U.S. charts. The Rolling Stones' urban rock sound steered away from pop music and remained more true to the bluesy, R&B roots of rock and roll. The British Invasion transformed rock and roll into the all-encompassing genre of rock, sending future performers in two different directions: the melodic, poppy sounds of the Beatles, on the one hand, and the gritty, high-volume power rock of the Stones, on the other.

The branching out of rock and roll continued in several other directions throughout the 1960s. Surf music, embodied by artists such as the Beach Boys, Jan and Dean, and Dick Dale, celebrated aspects of youth culture in California. With their twanging electric guitars and glossy harmonies, the surf groups sang of girls, beaches, and convertible cars cruising along the West Coast. In Detroit, some Black performers developed a sound that would have massive crossover appeal with both Black and White audiences. Combining R&B, pop, gospel, and blues into a genre known as soul, vocalists such as James Brown, Aretha Franklin, Otis Redding, and Wilson Pickett sang about the lives and experiences of Black Americans. Producer and songwriter Berry Gordy Jr.



After the Rolling Stones' first appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, host Ed Sullivan apologized to the viewing audience for the band's lewd behavior (although he privately acknowledged that the band had received the most enthusiastic applause he had ever seen). **Source**: Maurice Carnes LaClaire, Ed Sullivan, public domain.

developed soul music commercially through the creation of his Motown label, which would become one of the most successful Black-owned businesses in American history. Capitalizing on the 1960s girl-group craze, Gordy produced hits by the Marvelettes, Martha and the Vandellas, and, most successfully, Diana Ross and the Supremes. For his bands, he created a slick, polished image designed to appeal broadly to the American mainstream.

In the late 1960s, supporters of the civil rights movement, along with feminists, environmentalists, and Vietnam War protesters, gravitated toward folk music, which became the soundtrack of social activism. Broadly speaking, folk music, passed down orally through generations, retained an unpolished, accessible quality that inspired audience participation and social awareness. Carrying on the legacy of 1930s labor activist Woody Guthrie, singer-songwriters such as Joan Baez, Peter, Paul, and Mary, and Bob Dylan sang social protest songs about civil rights, discrimination against Black Americans, and the Cuban Missile Crisis. Having earned himself a reputation as a political spokesperson, Dylan found himself lambasted by traditional folk fans for playing an electric guitar at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival. However, his decision to go electric inspired the folk rock genre, pioneered by the Los Angeles band the Byrds. Even though many fans questioned his move, Dylan's poetic and politically charged lyrics deeply influenced

future artists, inspiring groups like the Beatles and the Animals. Protest music in the 1960s became closely aligned with counterculture movements, in which some viewed personal expression and artistic experimentation as forms of social commentary. Artists such as Jimi Hendrix, Jefferson Airplane, the Grateful Dead, and the Doors pushed sonic boundaries during this era. This spirit of freedom and protest culminated in the landmark Woodstock festival in the summer of 1969. However, the subsequent deaths of several prominent stars cast a shadow over the era's music scene as the decade drew to a close.



John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, and Ringo Starr changed the face of rock and roll when they forsook touring to spend more time recording their albums in the studio. **Source**: United Press International (UPI Telephoto) Cropping and retouching: User:Indopug and User:Misterweiss, The Beatles members in New York City in 1964, public domain.

From Stage to *Sgt. Pepper's*: The Beatles' Recording Revolution

The Beatles stand as an unparalleled phenomenon in the history of popular music, fundamentally altering its trajectory in the 1960s. While their electrifying live performances initially propelled their fame, it was their groundbreaking approach to recorded music that truly cemented their legacy. Unlike many artists who viewed recordings primarily as a means of promoting live shows, The Beatles began to see the studio as an instrument in itself, a place where they could craft

intricate sonic landscapes that were impossible to replicate on stage. Early in their career, their live concerts were often overwhelmed by the sheer enthusiasm of screaming girls, a testament to their unparalleled charisma and the burgeoning Beatlemania. This intense fan reaction, while exhilarating, eventually made live performance creatively stifling, prompting the band to focus more intently on studio innovation.

This shift in focus culminated in the creation of the **concept album**, a revolutionary idea that transformed how albums were perceived. Before this, LPs were often collections of disparate singles and filler tracks. A concept album, however, presents a unified artistic statement, a group of related songs that explore common themes, narratives, or moods, designed to be listened to as a cohesive work rather than individual tracks. This innovative format allowed artists to delve deeper into complex ideas and expand the storytelling capabilities of popular music.

The album widely credited as the first true concept album is The Beatles' 1967 masterpiece, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. From its iconic cover art to its meticulously arranged tracks, *Sgt. Pepper's* was explicitly designed to be played from beginning to end, with seamless transitions and recurring motifs creating an immersive auditory

experience. Its diverse musical styles, experimental production techniques, and often philosophical lyrics showcased the band's unparalleled creative ambition. The immense critical and commercial success of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* dramatically elevated the album's status, firmly establishing the LP as the primary format in rock music, effectively replacing the single as the primary artistic statement and commercial vehicle for many artists. This pivot encouraged a new era of creative freedom and innovation, inspiring countless musicians to explore the album format as a canvas for their most ambitious and interconnected musical visions.



Although critics severely criticized the Sex Pistols in the 1970s, their music went on to inspire countless acts. It helped develop the underground music scene in both the United Kingdom and the United States. **Source**: Photograph: Koen Suyk. In: Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Rijksfotoarchief: Fotocollectie Algemeen Nederlands Fotopersbureau (ANEFO), 1945-1989 – negatiefstroken zwart/wit, nummer toegang 2.24.01.05, bestanddeelnummer 928-9665, Sex Pistols in Paradiso, CC0 1.0.

The 1970s: From Glam Rock to Punk



The Bee Gees. **Source**: NBC Television, Bee Gees 1977, public domain.

After the Vietnam War ended, college students began to settle down and focus on careers and families. For some, individualistic views took the place of concern with broad social issues and political activism, causing writer Tom Wolfe to label the 1970s the "me" decade. Musically, this ideological shift gave rise to glam rock, an extravagant and visually theatrical form of rock that incorporated flamboyant costumes, heavy makeup, and elements of hard rock and pop. Glam rock, a primarily British phenomenon, was popularized by acts such as Slade, David Bowie, the Sweet, Elton John, and Gary Glitter. It served as a precursor for the punk movement in the late 1970s. Equally flamboyant, but emerging from a more electronic sound, disco also gained massive popularity in the 1970s. Popular disco artists included

KC and the Sunshine Band, Gloria Gaynor, the Bee Gees, and Donna Summer, who helped to pioneer its electronic, studio-driven sound. Boosted by the success of the 1977 film *Saturday Night Fever*, disco's popularity spread rapidly across the country as record companies produced dance tracks that dominated nightclubs and pop charts.

Reacting against the commercialism of disco and corporate rock, punk artists created a minimalist, aggressive form of rock that returned to the basics of rock and roll: simple chord structures, energetic tempos, and politically motivated lyrics. Like the skiffle bands of the 1950s, some found punk rock appealing because anyone with basic musical skills could participate. The punk rock movement emerged out of CBGB , a small bar in New York City that featured bands such as Television, Blondie, and the Ramones. Never a massive commercial success on mainstream U.S. radio at the time, punk rock gained immense popularity in the United Kingdom, where high unemployment rates and class divisions had created an angry, disenfranchised youth population. The Sex Pistols, fronted by Johnny Rotten, developed an aggressive, raw sound that appealed to a rebellious generation of listeners, although many critics disparaged the band at the time. In 1976, British music paper *Melody Maker complained* that "the Sex Pistols do as much for music as World War II did for the cause of peace." Punk bands began to evolve their sound in the late 1970s as the punk style was assimilated into the mainstream of rock and post-punk subgenres.



Early hip-hop artists, such as Run-D.M.C., opposed the clean-cut, polished world of soul and pop by embracing lyrics that reflected everyday life and political themes. **Source**: Jeff Pinilla, Run DMC (cropped), CC BY 3.0.

The 1980s: The Hip-Hop Generation

Whereas many British youths expressed their displeasure through punk music, many disenfranchised Black American youths in the late 1970s and 1980s turned to hip-hop. This term encompasses the urban culture of break dancing, graffiti art, and the musical techniques of rapping, sampling, and scratching records. Reacting against the extravagance of disco, many urban artists developed their own street culture by adopting a casual image consisting of sportswear, creating a language that reflected the everyday concerns of people in low-

income urban communities, and embracing the low-budget visual art form of graffiti. They described their new culture as hip-hop, after a common phrase chanted at dance parties in New York's Bronx borough.

The hip-hop genre first became popular among Black youths in the late 1970s, when



Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five. **Source**: Sugar Hill Records, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five (1982 Sugar Hill Press Photo), public domain.

record spinners in the Bronx and Harlem began playing short, looped fragments of songs rather than entire tracks (a practice known as sampling). Early hip-hop artists sampled a wide range of music, including funk, soul, and jazz, adding special effects to the samples and experimenting with techniques such as rotating or scratching records to create intricate rhythmic patterns. For example, Kool Moe Dee's track "How Ya Like Me Now" includes samples from James

Brown's classic funk song "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag." The DJs would often add short raps to their sets to inform audiences who was playing the records, a trend that grew more elaborate over time and eventually evolved into full spoken verses. Artists such as Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five incorporated sharp political and social commentary on the realities of life in low-income urban areas—a trend that would continue with later artists, including Public Enemy and Ice-T , establishing hip-hop as a powerful medium for social journalism.

In the early 1980s, a second wave of rap artists introduced inner-city rap to broader American audiences by blending it with hard rock guitar sounds. Pioneered by groups such as Run-D.M.C. and the Beastie Boys, the new music appealed widely across diverse youth demographics. A prominent subgenre of hip-hop, epitomized by West Coast rappers such as Ice Cube and Tupac Shakur, emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s: gangsta rap. Highlighting local violence and urban hardship, gangsta rappers faced media scrutiny and accusations that their lyrics glorified violence—an argument that gained momentum during the East Coast–West Coast hip-hop rivalries of the 1990s. As sampling techniques grew more sophisticated, legal battles over copyright clearance in the late 1980s transformed intellectual property law within the music business.



Nirvana signed with DGC Records because it had also signed the highly influential 1980s band Sonic Youth, shown above promoting their album *Sister*. **Source**: English: Photograph by Monica Dee. Distributed by SST Records., Sonic Youth (1987 Monica Dee portrait), public domain.

Beyond the Big Hair: Unearthing the '80s Indie

Underground

Think you know the '80s sound? Did it sound like synthesizer-driven pop anthems and

hair-band power ballads, or was it more aligned with the raw energy of punk rock and the emerging sounds of hip-hop? While the mainstream airwaves of the 1980s were dominated by glossy pop, new wave, and arena rock, beneath the surface, America's underground music scene was brewing. This vibrant, often rebellious counterculture fostered a diverse array of sounds that deliberately stood apart from commercial music giants.

One of the most comprehensive and influential accounts of this pivotal era is Michael Azerrad's 2001 book, *Our Band Could Be Your Life: Scenes from the American Indie Underground 1981-1991*. Azerrad's work meticulously chronicles the struggles, triumphs, and unique philosophies of thirteen seminal bands that defined the 1980s indie scene, capturing their DIY ethos and the often arduous realities of life on the road. The book delves into the individual stories of these groups, highlighting their regional differences, musical innovations, and the interconnected community they built largely outside the mainstream music industry.

Among the bands featured are Black Flag, pioneers of Southern California hardcore and a blueprint for independent touring; Minutemen, known for their

unique blend of punk, funk, and jazz; Boston's post-punk innovators Mission of Burma; Washington D.C.'s straight edge flagbearers Minor Threat; Minneapolis's melodic punk trailblazers Hüsker Dü and the notoriously chaotic The Replacements; New York's experimental noise-rockers Sonic Youth; the irreverent and challenging Butthole Surfers; the abrasive and influential Big Black; the melodic and impactful Dinosaur Jr.; the fiercely independent and ethical Fugazi; Seattle's grunge progenitors Mudhoney; and Olympia, Washington's twee-pop pioneers Beat Happening. *Our Band Could Be Your Life* paints a vivid picture of a time when passion, artistic integrity, and a fierce commitment to independence often took precedence over commercial success, laying the essential groundwork for the alternative music boom of the 1990s.

MTV Enters the Picture



Source: MTV Networks, MTV 1981 logo (no outline), public domain.

The launch of MTV on August 1, 1981, marked a revolutionary moment in media history, fundamentally reshaping not only the music industry but also youth culture itself. By blending music with visual storytelling, MTV transformed songs into immersive experiences, creating global superstars and influencing fashion, dance, and social trends. For a generation of young viewers, MTV became a primary source of entertainment and a powerful arbiter of cool, offering a constant stream of music videos, VJs (video jockeys), and special programming that spoke directly to their interests and aspirations. The channel's pervasive presence in homes enabled unprecedented visual access to artists and their carefully crafted images, establishing a new paradigm in which visual presentation became as crucial as audio quality in defining an artist's appeal and marketability.

However, MTV's profound influence was not without its controversies, particularly concerning the content of the music videos it aired. Over time, critics observed a significant increase in sexually suggestive and violent imagery within these visual

narratives. Studies and analyses, including some estimating that anywhere from 40 to 75 percent of music videos contain sexual imagery, fueled concerns about the potential impact on impressionable young viewers. A particularly persistent criticism focused on the portrayal of violence against women, with arguments suggesting that repeated exposure to such imagery, often glamorized or normalized within a popular cultural context, could lead to desensitization. Critics worried that this desensitization might diminish empathy and reinforce harmful stereotypes, contributing to a broader societal acceptance of violence against women. These debates highlighted the complex relationship among media content, youth development, and societal values, underscoring MTV's powerful role in shaping perceptions and behaviors during its peak influence.



A mural commemorating Tupac Shakur. His death, along with that of the Notorious B.I.G., caused a shift in the hip-hop industry toward less violent music.

The 1990s: New Developments in Hip-Hop, Rock, and Pop

Hip-hop and gangsta rap maintained their popularity in the early 1990s with artists such as Tupac Shakur, the Notorious B.I.G., Dr. Dre, Eazy-E, Ice Cube, and Snoop Dogg at the top of the charts. West Coast rappers, such as Tupac Shakur and Snoop Dogg, favored gangsta rap, while East Coast rappers, like the Notorious B.I.G. and Sean Combs, adhered to a

traditional hip-hop style. The rivalry culminated with the murders of Shakur in 1996 and B.I.G. in 1997.

Along with hip-hop and gangsta rap, alternative rock emerged as a prominent genre in the 1990s, spearheaded by the **grunge** movement. The grunge scene appeared in the mid-1980s in the Seattle area of Washington State. Inspired by hardcore punk and heavy metal, this subgenre of rock earned its moniker due to its messy, sludgy, and distorted guitar sound, the disheveled appearance of its pioneers, and the disaffected nature of its artists. Initially achieving limited success with Seattle bands Soundgarden and Mudhoney, the Seattle independent label Sub Pop gained more prominence when it signed another local band, Nirvana. Fronted by vocalist and guitarist Kurt Cobain, Nirvana came to be identified with Generation X—the post-baby boom generation, many of whom came from broken families and experienced violence both on television and in real life. Nirvana's angst-filled lyrics spoke to many members of Generation X, launching the band into the mainstream. Ironically, Cobain felt uncomfortable and miserable, and he would eventually commit suicide in 1994. Nirvana's success paved the way for other alternative rock bands, including Green Day, Pearl Jam, and Nine Inch Nails. Due to the ambiguous nature of the term "alternative," the genre is further fragmented into more specific subgenres.

By the end of the 1990s, mainstream tastes leaned toward pop music. A plethora of boy bands, girl bands, and pop starlets emerged, sometimes evolving from gospel choir groups but more often created by talent scouts. The groups were aggressively marketed to teen audiences. Popular bands included the Backstreet Boys, 'N Sync, and the Spice Girls. Meanwhile, individual pop acts from the MTV generation, such as Madonna, Michael Jackson, and Prince, continued to generate hits.



Britney Spears helped drive the teen-pop phenomenon of the late 1990s, paving the way for pop stars Christina Aguilera and Pink. **Source**: hnkkk, Britney Spears – Femme Fatale Tour (Toronto) (cropped), CC BY-SA 2.0.

The 2000s: Pop Stays Strong as Hip-Hop Overtakes Rock in Popularity

The 2000s began right where the 1990s left off, with young

singers such as Christina Aguilera and Destiny's Child ruling the pop charts. Pop music remained strong throughout the decade, with artists such as Gwen Stefani, Mariah Carey, Beyoncé, Katy Perry, and Lady Gaga achieving mainstream success. By the end of the decade, country artists such as Carrie Underwood and Taylor Swift had transitioned from country stars to bona fide pop stars. While rock music started the decade strong, by the end of the 2000s, rock's presence in mainstream music had waned, with a few exceptions such as Nickelback, Linkin Park, and Green Day.

Unlike rock music, hip-hop has maintained its popularity, with more commercially successful and polished artists, such as Kanye West, Jay-Z, Lupe Fiasco, and OutKast, achieving enormous success. While some gangsta rappers from the 1990s—like Dr. Dre and Snoop Dogg—softened their images and expanded into mainstream media platforms, other rappers—such as 50 Cent and Eminem—continued to project a tough image and to use violent lyrics. An alternative style of hip-hop expanded in the 2000s, building upon early conscious rap roots by infusing positive messages and explicit social commentary into mainstream releases. Artists such as Common, Mos Def (now Yasiin Bey), and the Black Eyed Peas achieved commercial success despite not conforming to traditional gangsta rap stereotypes.



In a historic and groundbreaking moment for hip-hop, Kendrick Lamar was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Music in 2018 for his critically acclaimed album, *DAMN.* This marked the first time the prestigious award, traditionally reserved for classical and jazz compositions, was given to a musical work outside of those genres. The Pulitzer board recognized *DAMN.* as "a virtuosic song collection unified by its vernacular authenticity and rhythmic dynamism that offers affecting vignettes capturing the complexity of modern African-American life." Lamar's win was widely celebrated as a significant validation of hip-hop's artistic merit, lyrical depth, and cultural impact, challenging long-standing notions of what constitutes "serious" music and cementing his place as a visionary artist who transcends traditional boundaries. **Source**: Julio Enriquez from Denver,CO, USA, KENDRICK LAMAR Grandoozy 2018 (44346900965), CC BY 2.0.

The 2010s: Streaming Reigns Supreme as Hip-Hop Diversifies and Pop Evolves

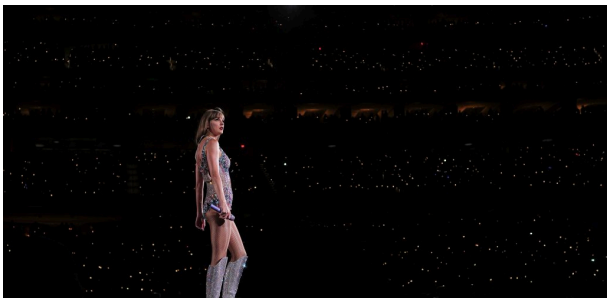


Ariana Grande. **Source**: Melissa Rose, ArianaGrandeDecember2013 , CC BY 2.0.

The 2010s were marked by a seismic shift to music streaming, which fundamentally altered consumption habits and democratized access to vast catalogs of music. Platforms like Spotify and Apple Music have become the dominant forces, enabling artists and listeners alike to achieve unprecedented global reach. Pop music maintained its strong chart presence, evolving to incorporate elements of electronic dance music (EDM) and a more globalized sound. Artists like Taylor Swift, Justin Bieber, Ariana Grande, and Ed Sheeran consistently topped the charts, showcasing a blend of

traditional pop songwriting with contemporary production. The decade also saw the massive mainstream explosion of EDM, with producers such as Avicii, Calvin Harris, and David Guetta becoming household names and influencing the sonic landscape of pop music.

Hip-hop maintained and even solidified its position as a dominant genre, expanding into diverse subgenres and pushing lyrical boundaries. Artists like Kendrick Lamar, Drake, and J. Cole brought introspective lyrics and diverse production styles to the forefront. At the same time, subgenres such as trap music, mumble rap, and emo hip-hop gained significant traction. Collaborations across genres became increasingly common, blurring traditional lines and producing unexpected but successful fusions. The latter half of the decade also witnessed the significant global rise of K-pop, with groups like BTS breaking cultural and language barriers to achieve massive international success, signaling a new era of diverse global influences on the Western music market. Social media platforms, particularly Instagram and later TikTok, emerged as crucial tools for music discovery and promotion, further empowering artists and giving rise to viral hits.



Beyond a concert, Taylor Swift's Eras Tour was a groundbreaking cultural phenomenon that redefined the scale and impact of live music. Traversing multiple continents, it became the highest-earning tour of all time, earning more than $2 billion and demonstrating unprecedented fan

demand and economic influence. A wildly successful film version brought the concert experience to theaters, cementing its status as a singular moment in music history and showcasing Swift's unparalleled connection with her global fan base, while setting new benchma

The 2020s: TikTok, Genre Blurring, and the Nostalgia Cycle



Bad Bunny. **Source**: Toglenn. Bad Bunny 2019 by Glenn Francis cropped. CC BY-SA 4.0.

The 2020s have accelerated many of the trends from the previous decade, most notably

rks for artistry, productio n, and fan engagem ent. **Source**: Paolo V, Taylor Swift The Eras Tour Lover Set (531088173 42) , CC BY 2.0

TikTok's influence on music discovery and virality. A short, catchy snippet on the platform can propel an unknown artist to global fame overnight, leading to a new emphasis on clipability in songwriting. This has further fragmented the music landscape, with individual songs or even specific moments within songs gaining massive traction, sometimes overshadowing entire albums. Pop music remains a powerhouse, but a fluid, genre-bending approach increasingly characterizes it. Artists like Dua Lipa, Olivia Rodrigo, and Billie Eilish have spearheaded various pop revivals, from disco-infused dance-pop to pop-punk and indie-infused sounds, often channeling raw, angry expressions and personal vulnerability.

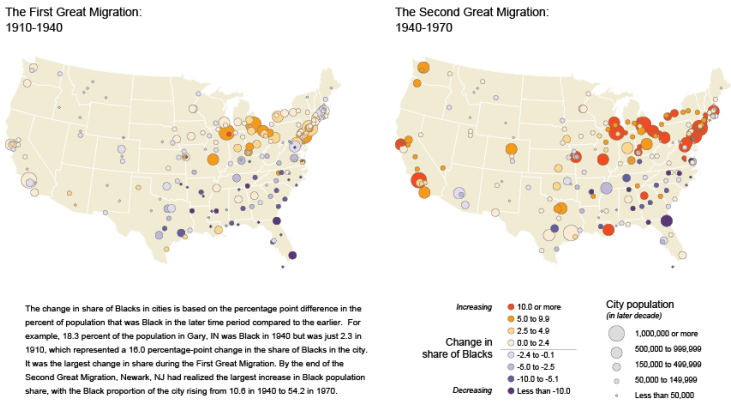
Hip-hop remains incredibly popular, but has experienced some stagnation in mainstream innovation compared to its

explosive growth in the 2010s. However, vibrant underground scenes and new waves of female artists continue to emerge and define the genre's edge. Latin music, particularly reggaeton and regional Mexican genres, continues its massive global expansion, achieving significant streaming numbers and infiltrating diverse mainstream spaces, culminating in Bad Bunny's performance at the Super Bowl. The 2020s have also been marked by a strong sense of nostalgia, with artists frequently drawing inspiration from the 1970s, 80s, and 90s. The Weeknd's '80s synth-pop sound, for example, dominated charts and inspired a wave of similar retro-infused tracks. Country music has experienced a notable resurgence, with both traditional and genre-blending artists gaining immense mainstream popularity. Overall, the current decade is characterized by unprecedented genre fluidity, rapid trend cycles driven by social media algorithms, and the constant reinterpretation of past musical eras, providing listeners with an incredibly diverse and ever-evolving auditory experience.

5.3 THE RECIPROCAL NATURE OF MUSIC AND CULTURE

Cultural Influences on Music

A myriad of cultural influences shaped the evolution of popular music in the United States in the 20th century. Rapidly shifting demographics brought previously independent cultures into contact, creating new cultures and subcultures, and music evolved to reflect these changes. Migration, the evolution of youth culture, and racial integration exemplify the most important cultural influences on music.



During the Great Migration, the population of the United States underwent a great transformation. **Source**: US Census Bureau, GreatMigration1910to1970-UrbanPopulation, public domain.

Migration

Migration has been a significant cultural influence on the popular music industry over the past century. In 1910, 89 percent of Black Americans still lived in the South, most of them in rural farming areas. Three years later, a series of disastrous events devastated the cotton industry. World cotton prices plummeted, a boll weevil infestation destroyed large areas of crops, and in 1915, flooding destroyed many farmers' houses and crops along the Mississippi River.

Already suffering from the restrictive Jim Crow laws that

segregated schools, restaurants, hotels, and hospitals, Black sharecroppers began to look to the North for a more prosperous lifestyle. An economic boom in the Northern states resulted from increased demand for industrial goods due to the war in Europe. These states needed labor because the war had slowed the rate of foreign immigration to Northern cities. Between 1915 and 1920, as many as 1 million Black individuals migrated to Northern cities in search of employment, followed by another million throughout the subsequent decade. The mass exodus of Black farmers from the South became known as the **Great Migration**, and by 1960, 75 percent of all Black Americans lived in cities. The Great Migration had a significant impact on political, economic, and cultural life in the North, and popular music reflected these changes.



Delta blues legend Robert Johnson recorded only 29 songs in his short life, yet his pioneering guitar technique and haunting songwriting profoundly shaped the foundation of modern rock and roll. **Source**: TomWilson-Wiki, 080 – 2017-1 – Robert Johnson illustration copyright © Thomas Wilson, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Some of the Black individuals who moved to Northern cities came from the Mississippi Delta, home of the blues. Many of these individuals ended their journey in Chicago. Delta-born pianist Eddie Boyd later told *Living Blues* magazine, "I thought of coming to Chicago where I could get away from some of that racism and where I would have an opportunity to, well, do something with my talent.... It wasn't peaches and cream, man, but it was a hell of a lot better than down there where I was born." At first, the migrants brought their country blues style to the city. Characterized by the guitar and the harmonica, the Delta blues employed a rhythmic structure and strong vocals heavily influenced by musicians such as Charley Patton and legendary guitarist Robert Johnson. However, as the urban setting began to affect the migrants' style, they started to record a hybrid of blues, vaudeville, and swing, incorporating boogie-woogie and

rolling bass piano. Mississippi-born guitarist Muddy Waters , who moved to Chicago in the early 1940s, revolutionized the blues by combining his Delta roots with an electric guitar and amplifier. He did so partly out of necessity since he could barely make himself heard in crowded Chicago clubs with an acoustic guitar. Waters played a peppier and more buoyant style than the sullen country blues. His plugged-in electric blues became the hallmark of the Chicago blues style, influencing countless other musicians and laying the groundwork for rock and roll. Other migrant bluesmen contributed to the creation of regional variations of the blues throughout the country, including John Lee Hooker in Detroit, Michigan, and T-Bone Walker in Los Angeles, California.



The popularity of *American Bandstand* made host Dick Clark an influential tastemaker in pop music. **Source**: ABCTelevision. Dick Clark Myrna Horowitz American Bandstand 17th Anniverary 1970 , public domain.

Youth Culture



Poster for a concert featuring acts put together by influential DJ Alan Freed. **Source**: Printed by Smith & Setron, Moondog poster, public domain.

Before 1945, most music was created with adults in mind, and the industry barely considered teenage musical tastes. Young adults had few freedoms—most males had to choose between joining the military or getting a job to support their fledgling families. At the same time, society expected most females to marry young and have children. Few young adults attended college, and opportunities to express personal freedom were limited. Following World War II, this situation changed drastically. A booming economy helped create the American middle class, which in turn created an opening for a youth consumer culture. Unpleasant memories of the war discouraged some parents from pressuring their children to join the military, and many emphasized the importance of enjoying life and having fun. As a result, teenagers found they had a lot more freedom. This new liberalized culture allowed

teenagers to make decisions for themselves, and, for the first time, many had the financial means to do so. Whereas many adults enjoyed the traditional sounds of Tin Pan Alley, teens began to listen to rhythm-and-blues songs played by radio disc jockeys such as Alan Freed. Increased racial integration within the younger generation made them more accepting of Black musicians and their music, which their peers considered "cool." It provided a welcome escape from the daunting political and social tensions of Cold War anxieties. The widespread availability of radios, jukeboxes, and 45-rpm records exposed this new style of rock and roll to a broad teenage audience.



Music studios shaped teen heartthrob Fabian to cater to teenage musical tastes. **Source**: Otto Caldwell – Fabian Forte – CC BY-NC 2.0.

Once teenagers had the buying power to influence record sales, record companies began to notice. Between 1950 and 1959, record sales in the United States skyrocketed from $189 million to nearly $600 million. The 45-rpm vinyl records introduced in the late 1940s offered an affordable option for teens with allowances. Dick Clark, a radio presenter in Philadelphia, soon tuned in to teenagers' new tastes. Sensing an opportunity to tap into a potentially lucrative market, he secured sufficient advertising support to transform the local hit music telecast *Bandstand* into a national television phenomenon. This resulted in the 1957 launch of *American Bandstand*, a music TV show that featured a group of teenagers dancing to current hit records.

The show's popularity prompted record producers to create a legion of rock-and-roll acts specifically designed to appeal to a teenage audience, including Fabian and Frankie Avalon. During its nearly 40-year run, *American Bandstand* had a profound influence on teenage fashion and musical tastes, and in turn, reflected contemporary youth culture.

Racial Integration

Following the Great Migration, racial tensions increased in Northern cities. Many Northerners found themselves confronted with the very real issue of having to compete for jobs with Black migrant workers and reacted with and without violence. Black workers found themselves pushed into undesirable neighborhoods, often living in crowded, unsanitary slums where their landlords charged exorbitant rates. During the 1940s, racial tensions boiled over into race riots, most notably in Detroit. The city's 1943 riot caused the deaths of 34 people, 25 of whom were Black.

Frustrated with inequalities in the legal system that distinguished Black and White individuals, members of the civil rights movement pushed for racial equality. In 1948, an executive order granted by President Harry Truman integrated the military. The movement toward equality gained further momentum in 1954 with the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in the landmark case

Brown v. Board of Education, which ended segregation in public schools. The civil rights movement escalated throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s, aided by highly publicized events such as Rosa Parks's refusal to give up her seat on a bus to a White passenger in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955. In 1964, Congress passed the most sweeping civil rights legislation since the Reconstruction Era, prohibiting discrimination in public accommodations and authorizing federal aid to facilitate school desegregation.



The commercial success of Motown girl group the Supremes reflected changing attitudes toward race in the United States. **Source**: GAC-General Artists Corporation-IMTI-International Talent Management Inc., The Supremes 1967, public domain.

Although racist attitudes did not change overnight, the cultural changes brought on by the civil rights movement laid the groundwork for the creation of an integrated society. The Motown sound developed by Berry Gordy Jr. in the 1960s both reflected and furthered this change. Gordy believed that by coaching talented but unpolished Black artists, he could help them become more acceptable to mainstream culture. He hired a professional to head an in-house finishing school, teaching his acts how to move gracefully, speak politely, and use proper posture. Gordy's commercial success with gospel-based pop acts such as the Supremes, the Temptations, the Four Tops, and Martha and the Vandellas reflected the extent of racial integration in the mainstream music industry. Gordy's most successful act, the Supremes, achieved 12 No. 1 singles on the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart.

Musical Influences on Culture

Although pop music is often characterized as a predominantly negative influence on society, particularly on youth culture, it also has positive cultural effects. Many artists in the 1950s and 1960s pushed the boundaries of socially acceptable behavior with sexually charged movements and androgynous appearances. Without these precedents, acts like the Rolling Stones or David Bowie might never have made the transition into mainstream success.



David Bowie performing as Ziggy Stardust. **Source**: Boris Yaro creator QS:P170,Q55220020, David Bowie, as Ziggy Stardust, performing at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium , CC BY 4.0.

On the other hand, for decades, critics have blamed rock and roll for juvenile delinquency, heavy metal for increased teenage aggression, and gangsta rap for a rise in gang warfare among young urban males. Media researchers have frequently examined how exposure to sexually explicit or violent content shapes youth behavior. One influential study

claimed that youths who listen to music with sexually explicit lyrics are more likely to have sex at an early age, stating that exposure to lots of sexually degrading music gives teens "a specific message about sex." In the modern digital era, these concerns have shifted toward streaming video platforms, short-form video algorithms, and viral music videos, where graphic content can reach young audiences almost instantaneously. In addition to its effects on youth culture, popular music has continuously contributed to shifting cultural values regarding race, morality, and gender.

Race



Pat Boone achieved major commercial success in the 1950s by recording sanitized cover versions of R&B hits by Black artists, which introduced rock-and-roll songs to mainstream pop radio while fueling ongoing debates about racial appropriation in the music industry. **Source**: Unknown author, Pat Boone 50's, CC BY-SA 2.0.

As the music of Chuck Berry and Little Richard gained popularity among White teens in the United States during the 1950s, most new rock acts were signed to independent labels, and larger companies such as RCA began losing market share. To capitalize on the public's enthusiasm for rock and roll and prevent further loss of potential profits, major record companies signed White artists to cover Black artists' songs. The companies often censored the songs for the mainstream market by removing any lyrics that referenced sex, alcohol, or drugs. Pat Boone gained popularity by releasing songs originally sung by artists such as Fats Domino, the El Dorados, Little Richard, and

Big Joe Turner. Releasing a cover of a Black performer's song by a White performer became known as **hijacking** a hit, and this practice often left Black artists signed to independent labels struggling financially. Because large companies such as RCA could widely promote and distribute their records, six of Boone's recordings reached No. 1 on the Billboard chart; they frequently outsold the original versions. Many White artists and producers would also take writing credit for the songs they covered and would buy the rights to songs from Black writers without giving them royalties or songwriting credit. This practice fueled racism within the music industry. Independent record producer Danny Kessler of Okeh Records said, "The odds for a black record to crack through were slim. If the black record began to happen, the chances were that a white artist would cover it—and the big stations would play the white version.... There was a color line, and it wasn't easy to cross."

Although cover artists profited from the work of Black R&B singers, they also occasionally helped promote the original recordings. Many teenagers who heard covers on mainstream radio stations sought out the original artists' versions, increasing sales and prompting Little Richard to refer to Pat Boone as "the man who made me a millionaire." Benefiting from covers also worked both ways. In 1962, soul singer Ray Charles covered Don Gibson's hit "I Just Can't Stop Loving You," which became a hit on country-and-western charts and furthered

mainstream acceptance of Black musicians. Other Black artists to cover hits by White performers included Otis Redding, who performed the Rolling Stones' hit "Satisfaction," and Jimi Hendrix, who covered Bob Dylan's "All Along the Watchtower." In contemporary music, Black artists continue to challenge historical genre boundaries and reclaim ownership over genres built on Black foundations; for instance, Beyoncé's exploration of house music on *Renaissance* and country music on *Cowboy Carter* highlights the ongoing reciprocal dialogue between racial history, genre evolution, and mainstream media.

STOLEN RHYTHMS: HOW MAJOR LABELS SILENCED BLACK ARTISTS' SUCCESS



LaVern Baker. **Source**: Atlantic Records, LaVern Baker 1956, public domain.

Releasing cover versions of hit songs became a fairly standard practice before the 1950s, as songwriters and producers found it advantageous to have as many artists as possible record their songs to maximize royalties. Several versions of the same song often appeared in the music charts at the same time. However, the practice acquired racial connotations during the 1950s

when larger music labels hijacked R&B hits, using their financial strength to promote the cover version at the expense of the original recording, which often exploited Black talent. As a result, many 1950s R&B artists lost out on royalties.

Two contemporary Black performers who fell victim to this practice were R&B singer LaVern Baker and blues singer Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup. The pop singer Baker had signed with the small-time label Atlantic Records. Because her songs appealed to mainstream audiences, the industry giant Mercury Records took full advantage. When Baker released her 1955 hit "Tweedle Dee," Mercury immediately put out its version, a note-for-note cover sung by White pop singer Georgia Gibbs. Atlantic could not match Mercury's marketing budget, and Gibbs's version outsold Baker's recording, causing her to lose an estimated $15,000 in royalties. Baker filed a lawsuit to revise the Copyright Act of 1909, making it illegal to copy an arrangement verbatim without permission. The lawsuit was unsuccessful, and Gibbs continued to cover Baker's songs.

Around the same time, Arthur Crudup produced hits such as "So Glad You're Mine," "Who's Been Foolin' You," "That's All Right," and "My Baby Left Me," which were all subsequently released by performers such as Elvis Presley, Creedence Clearwater Revival, and Rod Stewart for huge

financial gain. Crudup's songs made everybody rich—except him. This realization caused him to quit playing altogether in the late 1950s. A later attempt to collect back royalties proved unsuccessful.



Elvis Presley immediately gained a fan base among teenage audiences, particularly adolescent girls, who frequently broke into hysterics at his concerts. **Source**: Uncredited, Elvis Presley – TV Radio Mirror, March 1957 01, public domain.

Morality

Elvis Presley burst onto the rock and roll scene in the mid-1950s, alarming many conservative parents of teenagers across the United States. With his gyrating hips and sexually suggestive body movements, they viewed Presley as a threat to the moral well-being of young

women. Television critics denounced his performances as vulgar, and on a 1956 appearance on the *Ed Sullivan Show*, cameras filmed him only from the waist up. One critic for the *New York Daily News* wrote that popular music "has reached its lowest depths in the 'grunt and groin' antics of one Elvis Presley." Rather than tone down his act to appease his critics, Presley defended his movements as manifestations of the music's rhythm and beat and continued to gyrate on stage. Liberated from the constraints imposed by morality watchdogs, Presley set a precedent for future rock and roll performers and marked a major transition in popular culture.



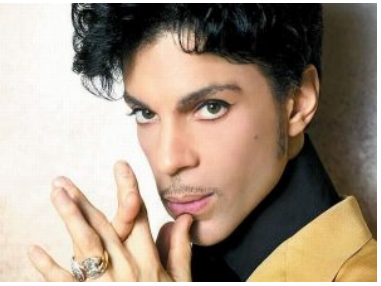
Little Richard. **Source**: Okeh Records, LittleRichard1960s, marked as public domain, public domain.

In addition to decrying raunchy onstage performances by rock and roll artists, moralists in the conservative Eisenhower era objected to the sexually suggestive lyrics found in original rock and roll songs. Big Joe Turner's version of "Shake, Rattle, and Roll" used sexual phrases and referred to the bedroom, while Little Richard's original version of "Tutti Frutti" contained the phrase "tutti frutti, loose booty."

Although many of these lyrics later became sanitized for the cover versions rereleased to mainstream White audiences, many people still thought that rock and roll threatened the morality of the country.

Ironically, many of the controversial key figures in the rock and roll era came from extremely religious backgrounds. Presley was a member of the evangelical First Assembly of God Church, where he developed his love of gospel music. Similarly, Ray Charles absorbed gospel influences from his local Baptist church. Jerry Lee Lewis came from a strict Christian background and often struggled to reconcile his religious beliefs with the moral implications of his music. During a recording session in 1957, Lewis argued with manager Sam Phillips that the hit song "Great Balls of Fire" sounded too "sinful" for him to record. The religious backgrounds of the rock and roll pioneers both influenced and challenged moral norms. When Ray Charles recorded "I Got a Woman" in 1955, he reworded the gospel tune "Jesus Is All the World to Me," drawing criticism that he had made a sacrilegious song. Despite the objections, Charles's style caught on with other musicians, and his experimentation with merging gospel and R&B gave rise to soul music.

Gender



Gender-bending performers such as Prince helped to change social attitudes toward androgyny. **Source**: World's Direction. Prince. CC0 1.0.

While Presley revolutionized people's notions of sexual freedom and expression, other performers began changing cultural norms regarding gender identity. Dressed in flamboyant clothing with a pompadour hairstyle and makeup, Little Richard delivered an exotic, androgynous performance that blurred traditional gender boundaries and shocked 1950s audiences with his blatant campiness. Between his wild onstage antics, bisexual tendencies, and love of post-concert orgies , the self-proclaimed "King and Queen of Rock and Roll" challenged many social conventions of the time. Little Richard's flamboyant, gender-bending appearance challenged norms to such outrageous extremes that 1950s audiences did not take him seriously. They considered him an entertainer whose androgynous look was irrelevant to the real world. However, Richard paved the way for future entertainers to shift cultural perceptions of gender.

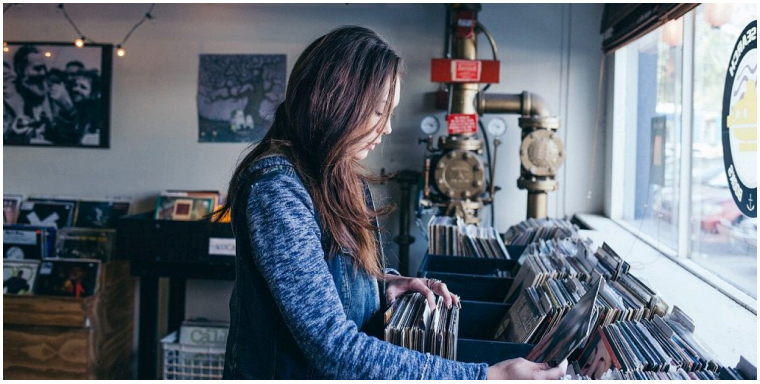


Harry Styles. **Source**: Lily Redman, Harry Styles Wembley June 2022 (cropped), CC BY 2.0.

Later musicians such as David Bowie, Prince, and Boy George adopted his outrageous style, frequently appearing on stage wearing glittery costumes and heavy makeup. The popularity of these 1970s and 1980s pop idols, along with other gender-bending performers such as Annie Lennox and Michael Jackson, helped make androgyny more acceptable in mainstream society. This trajectory continues in contemporary popular culture, where artists like Harry Styles, Lil Nas X, and Bad Bunny use fashion, visual media, and genre fluidity to challenge rigid gender norms and redefine modern masculinity for global digital audiences. In the digital era, social media platforms and viral visual media have further amplified these expressions, allowing modern artists to normalize fluid identities for global audiences and prove that popular music remains one of our most potent catalysts for cultural change.

5.4 CURRENT POPULAR TRENDS IN THE MUSIC INDUSTRY

In Weezer's 2008 song "Pork and Beans," vocalist Rivers Cuomo sings, "Timbaland knows the way to reach the top of the charts/Maybe if I work with him I can perfect the art." The lyrics, a reference to hip-hop producer Timbaland's multiple high-profile collaborations, refer to a tense meeting between Cuomo and record executives at the band's Geffen label. During the meeting, the executives informed the band members that they needed to write more commercially oriented material, prompting a defiant (though commercially successful) response. The incident reflects the balance between commercial success and artistic expression in the music industry. Record labels need artists who inspire the record-buying public, while artists need the financial backing and expertise of record labels and their marketing teams. Tensions between artists and their labels remain heightened by evolving distribution models, streaming royalty payout structures, and disputes over master recording ownership.



Most people who purchase records will likely choose ones made by one of the Big Three music labels. **Source**: Seth Doyle sethdoylee, Buying Old Records (Unsplash) cropped, CC0 1.0.

The Influence of Major Record Labels

During the 1990s, the record industry experienced a boom. Music lovers replaced their cassette tapes and vinyl records with CDs, and sales numbers skyrocketed. In 1999, total revenue from U.S. music sales reached a peak of $14.6 billion. Over the next decade, however, revenue plunged to $6.3 billion as digital music distribution disrupted traditional business models. Initially driven by unmonetized peer-to-peer file sharing—the process of swapping media files over the Internet—such as

the Napster service, this shift forced the industry to overhaul its operations completely. In the decades following that crash, streaming services like Spotify, Apple Music, and Amazon Music transformed the marketplace again, returning total industry revenues to historic highs while fundamentally altering how music is monetized, promoted, and consumed.

Despite dramatic changes in delivery formats over the past few decades, the global music business still comprises a powerful **oligopoly**—a market condition in which a few firms dominate most of an industry's production and distribution. The international reach of these few companies means that they have the promotion and marketing muscle to determine which types of music reach listeners' ears and which become obsolete. Each of the major record labels has a strong infrastructure that oversees every aspect of the music business, from production and digital distribution to marketing, sync licensing, and global playlist placement.

Between 1950 and 1980, many major record labels and numerous independent labels competed for a share of the musical pie. Gradually, the larger labels began buying up the independent labels, and then started trying to acquire one another. By the late 1990s, only six major labels remained: Warner, Universal, Sony, BMG, EMI, and Polygram. In 1998, Universal acquired Polygram, and six years later, Sony and BMG merged. Sony later acquired BMG to gain sole ownership of the company. Today, the music industry is dominated by the so-called **Big Three**:

Sony Music Entertainment, Universal Music Group, and Warner Music Group—which collectively control the vast majority of the global recorded music market.



Source: ™/®Universal Music Group N.V., Universal Music Group logo, public domain.

Universal Music Group

Universal Music Group is the world's largest music company, operating across a rapidly evolving media landscape. The company's modern structure traces back to the 1998 merger of PolyGram and Universal. Since then, Universal Music Group has continued to expand its reach through acquisitions, partnerships, and strategic investments, housing iconic

subsidiary labels such as Capitol, Def Jam, Island, Geffen, Interscope, and Virgin.

Today, Universal Music Group represents a diverse roster of global artists across virtually every genre and market. The company's catalog includes some of the most influential and commercially successful recordings in media history. Notable artists signed to or distributed through Universal Music Group include Taylor Swift, Drake, Billie Eilish, Post Malone, Olivia Rodrigo, Kendrick Lamar, and Luke Bryan.

EMI Group

EMI's rich history dates back to its formation in 1931. Known for its iconic artists and groundbreaking contributions to the music industry, EMI played a pivotal role in shaping popular culture, most notably through the discovery and development of The Beatles. The band's massive global success propelled EMI to international prominence, cementing the company's reputation as a music industry powerhouse.

Over the decades, EMI represented a diverse roster of influential artists across various genres, including Pink Floyd , Queen, Coldplay, and Lily Allen. In 2012, Universal Music Group acquired EMI's recorded music operations
, absorbing its extensive catalog and further strengthening Universal's position in the global music market.



Source: Song, Sony Music Group logo 2023, public domain.

Sony Music Entertainment

Sony Music Entertainment is a global powerhouse in the music industry. The company's modern presence grew significantly following the 2004 merger of Sony Music Entertainment and BMG Entertainment, which initially formed Sony BMG before Sony acquired full ownership. Sony Music Entertainment continues to expand its catalog and reach through global distribution network deals, label acquisitions, and technology partnerships.

Today, Sony Music Entertainment represents a diverse roster of artists spanning pop, hip-hop, Latin, and global genres. The company's prominent subsidiary labels include Arista, Columbia, Epic, RCA, Legacy Recordings, and Provident Label Group. Notable artists signed to Sony Music Entertainment include Beyoncé, Harry Styles, Doja Cat, SZA, Lil Nas X, Travis Scott, and Tyla.



WARNER MUSIC GROUP

Source: Warner Music Group, Warner Music Group 2013 logo, public domain.

Warner Music Group

Warner Music Group is a leading global music company with a rich history dating back to its founding as Warner Bros. Records in 1958. Known for its iconic artists and groundbreaking contributions to popular culture, Warner Music Group has maintained a vital role in developing mainstream musical trends.

Over the years, Warner Music Group has represented a diverse roster of artists across generations, from legacy acts like Led Zeppelin and Madonna to modern hitmakers like Green Day, Bruno Mars, Ed Sheeran, Dua Lipa, and Charli XCX. In 2011, Access Industries acquired Warner Music Group, providing private investment backing as the company navigated the

transition to streaming dominance and direct-to-fan digital distribution.

Independent Record Labels: A Smaller Share of the Pie

In addition to the three major record labels, independent production companies, also known as indie record labels, operate without the direct ownership of one of the Big Three (although in recent years, the definition has shifted to include indies that a major label partially owns or distributes). Ranging from small grassroots or garage labels to large, profitable businesses, indie labels typically produce less commercially formulaic and more eclectic music than legacy media corporations.

Indie Origins



Johnny Cash launched his career at Sam Phillips' independent Sun Records in the 1950s, and decades later achieved a late-career revival on Rick Rubin's independent label, American Recordings. **Source**: Dillan Stradlin, JC1970 , CC BY-SA 4.0.

Independent labels have played a small but significant role in the music industry for as long as people have purchased recorded music. When patents held on sound recording technologies entered the public market in the 1920s, opportunities arose for small recording companies to enter the business. To avoid competing with larger firms such as RCA and Edison, the new independent companies focused on neglected areas of the music industry, such as folk, gospel, and rural blues. When the major labels decided during World War II to abandon then-unprofitable recordings by Black artists, independent labels quickly rushed in to fill the void, enjoying a boom during the rock and roll era as R&B music soared in popularity. Between 1955 and 1959, the U.S. market share of major companies dropped from 78 percent to

44 percent, while the market share of independent companies rose from 22 percent to 56 percent. Sun Records played a particularly important role in the development of both rock and roll and country music by releasing records by artists such as Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Johnny Cash, and Roy Orbison.

During the 1970s punk era, indie labels profited from the anti-mainstream, anti-corporate attitude of many punk rock bands, which dissociated themselves from the major labels. The indie-rock movement grew throughout the 1980s and 1990s, with labels such as Matador Records, I.R.S., and Epitaph, and epitomized by the music of the Smiths, the Stone Roses, R.E.M., and the Jesus and Mary Chain. This movement, sometimes referred to as underground or college rock, would later become reclassified as alternative music. However, as alternative rock grew in popularity, grunge bands such as Nirvana, Soundgarden, and Pearl Jam broke into the mainstream. This attracted the attention of major record labels, which began to view the music from a commercially oriented perspective. Many artists found themselves facing a dilemma: stay true to their indie roots or "sell out" to a major record label in hopes of financial gain.

FROM GARAGE TO GOLD: NIRVANA'S LEAP AND SUB POP'S RECKONING

Seattle grunge band Nirvana began to achieve success in the late 1980s when they



Nirvana performs at the 1992 MTV Music Awards. Cobain dismissed the network's advice to play one of their hits by briefly launching into their song "Rape Me," though he would eventually start playing the band's third single from their landmark album *Nevermind*, "Lithium." **Source**: P.B. Rage from USA, Nirvana around 1992 (cropped), CC BY-SA 2.0.

signed to independent label Sub Pop. Popular among college students, the band's 1989 album *Bleach* sold well enough for the band to consider moving to a bigger label. Amid rumors that Sub Pop planned to sign as a subsidiary of a major record company due to financial difficulties, the

band decided to cut out the middleman and seek a new contract directly. Nirvana had options, but in the end, chose to sign with DGC Records (an imprint of Geffen) because the company signed the respected underground band Sonic Youth. Nirvana released *Nevermind* in 1991 and found itself thrust into the mainstream. Within 9 months of its release, the album had sold more than 4 million copies (compared to 30,000 copies of *Bleach*), knocked Michael Jackson's *Dangerous* from the top of the Billboard chart, and placed Nirvana at the forefront of public attention.

For Sub Pop, Nirvana's success was both a blessing and a curse. Under severe financial stress, the label began layoffs in the spring of 1991, reducing its staff of 25 to a core group of five employees. With the royalties it received from *Nevermind*, along with the buyout from Nirvana's contract, and potential royalties from any future albums, Sub Pop got pulled back from the brink of collapse. However, the carefully crafted niche that Sub Pop had found in the music industry vanished. Eager to discover the next big thing in grunge, major labels began scouting out Seattle bands, offering them considerable advances that the smaller independent companies could not match. Sub Pop chief Bruce Pavitt said of one band, "Our head A&R agent told me that they would be happy with a $5,000 advance. Two months later, we were giving them a check for $150,000." In 1995, the company sold 49 percent

of its shares to Warner Bros in exchange for financial backing, but it later bought back this stake in 2000, regaining complete independence.

Nirvana had equally ambivalent feelings about the transition from a small independent label to a major record company. At a concert shortly after the band signed their deal with DGC, lead singer Kurt Cobain declared to the crowd, "Hello, we're major-label corporate rock sellouts." Having spent several years among the anticommercial, do-it-yourself grunge crowd in Seattle, the band's members became uncomfortable with their new position as wealthy rock stars.

Advantages of Indie Labels



Death Cab for Cutie switched from the independent label Barsuk Records to Atlantic Records mid-career before returning to the independent ANTI-Records in 2026. **Source**: David Lee, Nick Harmer and Ben Gibbard at Barsuk Records's 15th Anniversary Concert , CC BY 2.0.

Although they frequently lose talent to industry heavyweights, indie labels hold several advantages over major record companies. They generally run smaller operations, enabling them to respond to changing popular musical tastes more quickly than large companies with more cumbersome processes and procedures. This allows them to identify emerging trends and bring them to market quickly. Although unable to compete with the distribution and promotional power of the major labels, indie labels can focus on niche markets and tap into regional trends. For example, hip-hop's initial commercial successes in the late 1970s and early 1980s were achieved through small, independent labels such as Tommy Boy and Sugar Hill. Realizing that record executives would find the raw street version of hip-hop unworkable, the labels came up with the idea of using house

bands to play with emcees to improve the genre's commercial viability, a process the Sugarhill Gang used for "Rapper's Delight," which would become a worldwide hit. The independent production process may also be an advantage. A shorter path from music creation to distribution and promotion makes it easier to maintain the artist's original vision. For this reason, many artists prefer to work with independent labels or set up their own independent imprints. Fans of independent labels, who trust companies that focus on distinct artistic aesthetics, often find that these labels provide more authentic musical experiences.

Mashups

Mash-up artists represent a fascinating and often contentious frontier in contemporary music, creating entirely new works by seamlessly blending, or "mashing up," samples from two or more pre-existing musical sources. This creative process involves meticulously isolating vocals from one track and instrumental elements from another, or even layering multiple sonic textures, to construct a novel composition. The resulting tracks can be surprisingly innovative, often revealing unexpected harmonies or rhythmic dialogues between disparate genres and artists. This form of digital collage requires significant technical skill and a deep understanding of musical structure and production.



Musician and producer Danger Mouse first gained notoriety for *The Grey Album* before forming the acclaimed duo Gnarls Barkley and producing music with artists ranging from Gorillaz to Adele. **Source**: Matt Billings, Danger mouse blue (cropped), CC BY 4.0.

However, the very nature of mash-up creation often places artists in a legally precarious position. Because these new works are built upon pre-existing copyrighted material, the vast majority of mash-ups are created without explicit licenses or permission from the original rights holders. This lack of authorization means that mash-ups frequently operate in a legal gray area, potentially infringing on copyright laws and exposing creators to legal challenges. A prominent example of this legal tension was Danger Mouse's *The Grey Album*, released in 2004, which famously combined the vocals from Jay-Z's *The Black Album* with instrumentals sampled from The Beatles' *The White Album*. The album gained massive critical acclaim but was quickly hit with cease-and-desist orders from EMI, The Beatles' rights holder, sparking a significant debate about fair use, creative reuse, and the future of copyright in the digital age. Despite the legal risks,

accessible digital audio tools, mobile editing apps, and user-generated social platforms continue to fuel mash-up culture. Today, viral remixes, sped-up tracks, and fan-created audio mashups regularly trend across social networks, illustrating how modern digital distribution continues to challenge traditional notions of music ownership and intellectual property.

Harmonizing Herstory: How Women Are Remaking the Music Industry

Women have consistently been a driving force in the music industry, not just as performers but as innovators, business leaders, and cultural shapers, continually dismantling barriers and redefining norms. From the early blues and jazz queens like Bessie Smith and Ella Fitzgerald, who commanded stages despite rampant discrimination, to rock and roll trailblazers like Sister Rosetta Tharpe, and the commanding voices of soul and R&B such as Aretha Franklin and Tina Turner, women have always pushed boundaries with their artistry and resilience. Their



Beyoncé Knowles-Carter famously pioneered the visual album and the surprise drop, completely reshaping how artists release and promote their music. Beyond her record-breaking sales and iconic performances, Beyoncé consistently challenges genre boundaries and uses her platform to celebrate Black culture and empower women, cementing her legacy as one of the most influential artists of the 21st century**.** **Source**: Raph_PH, Beyoncé – Tottenham Hotspur Stadium – 1st June 2023 (10 of 118) (52946364598) (best crop) , CC BY 2.0

powerful voices and compelling narratives paved the way for future generations, asserting their creative and commercial power in a historically male-dominated field.

In contemporary music, this transformative power is vividly exemplified by artists like Taylor Swift and Beyoncé, who have not only achieved unprecedented global success but have also fundamentally altered industry practices. Taylor Swift's decision to re-record her entire back catalog and release "Taylor's Version" albums was a revolutionary move. This bold initiative was a direct response to a dispute over the ownership of her master recordings, empowering artists worldwide to demand greater control over their intellectual property and revenue streams. Her Eras Tour, a meticulously crafted journey through her discography, became the highest-grossing tour of all time, generating billions in economic activity and showcasing an unparalleled connection with her fanbase, further amplified by its highly successful film version.

Beyoncé, another titan of the industry, continues to push artistic and commercial boundaries with her extravagant, meticulously produced concerts and groundbreaking albums. Her foray into country music with *Cowboy Carter* wasn't just a genre crossover; it was

a powerful statement that challenged the genre's traditional, often exclusionary boundaries and reclaimed its Black American roots. Beyoncé's tours are renowned for their elaborate choreography, stunning visuals, and powerful social commentary, setting new benchmarks for live performance and demonstrating the immense scale an artist can achieve when fully in command of their creative vision and business strategy.

Beyond these megastars, women across all genres are making indelible marks. Artists like Billie Eilish, Adele, Olivia Rodrigo, and Dua Lipa consistently dominate charts and critical discourse, while female rappers like Cardi B, Megan Thee Stallion, and Ice Spice are constantly expanding hip-hop's lyrical and stylistic frontiers. Producers and engineers like Emily Lazar and Sylvia Rhone (the first woman to head a major record label) are steadily increasing female representation behind the scenes, ensuring that women's influence is felt at every level of music creation and business. These myriad contributions underscore how women are not just participating in the music industry but actively leading its evolution, fostering greater diversity, equity, and artistic innovation.



Source: SCA Svenska Cellulosa Aktiebolaget, Teens sharing a song, CC BY 2.0.

Fears over the effect of music on young people

The pervasive influence of music on young people has long been a subject of intense societal scrutiny, particularly concerning the potential effects of lyrical content. Throughout history, each new popular music genre, from rock and roll to heavy metal, has faced moral panic and accusations of corrupting youth. However, few genres have attracted as much controversy and sustained criticism for their lyrics as hip-hop. Its raw, often

explicit depictions of urban life, violence, drug use, and sexuality

, along with language perceived as misogynistic or glorifying crime, have frequently ignited heated debates among parents, educators, and community leaders.

Much of this concern, historically, has originated from middle-class white parents who expressed anxieties about the perceived effects of "Black music" on their children. This demographic often viewed hip-hop as a foreign, even threatening, cultural force, fearing that its themes and aesthetics could lead their children astray or expose them to undesirable behaviors and values. Critics argued that impressionable young listeners might mimic the aggressive or explicit content, leading to a breakdown of moral standards or increased delinquency. These anxieties often underscored deeper societal discomforts surrounding race, class, and youth rebellion, projecting fears onto a musical form that challenged established norms.

Adding another layer of apprehension, the late 20th century saw the emergence of "backmasking" fears, where concerns arose about hidden or subliminal messages

embedded in songs. This phenomenon, which gained traction primarily through religious groups, suggested that artists were intentionally placing reversed lyrics within their tracks, purportedly to transmit satanic or otherwise harmful messages to listeners, particularly young people. While largely debunked by audio experts and psychologists, these fears contributed to

an atmosphere of suspicion surrounding certain music genres and their perceived negative influence, highlighting the persistent belief that music could exert a powerful, often insidious control over the minds of its young audience.

5.5 INFLUENCE OF NEW TECHNOLOGY



At its peak, CD music sales reached $13.3 billion in 2000.
Source: Jberkel, CD player with open tray, CC BY-SA 4.0.

In the mid-1990s, CD sales reached record heights. Their boom made cassette tapes all but obsolete, and record companies reaped the benefits of selling to consumers who wanted their music collections in the latest technological format. This boom mirrored a familiar step in the evolution of technology. In past decades, records seemed to have an ironclad lock on sales, but cassette tape sales eventually surpassed them.

Cassettes, as previously mentioned, then experienced a decline in sales as CD sales rose. However, despite a few advantages in quality and convenience, CDs had disadvantages. Consumers had to pay high prices to purchase an entire album, even if they were only interested in one or two songs, because every album came as a complete package (except for CD singles).

At the height of the CD revolution, computer scientists developed new digital technologies that would eliminate these disadvantages and revolutionize digital music storage. In 1989, the German company Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft discovered a method to compress digital audio to approximately one-tenth the size of the original audio with almost no discernible loss in quality to the average listener, which they called MP3 (the MP stands for Moving Pictures Experts Group, which is the group that sets the standard for audio and video compression and transmission, and the 3 refers to the most popular layer or scheme with the standard). Due to MP3's small file sizes, modems could easily transmit the sound files to a website or an FTP site in a relatively short time. Initially done only by a tech-savvy elite, the process of downloading and sharing audio files was time-consuming and required precision because MP3 files were not stored in a centralized location. Peer-to-peer file sharing—the process in which two or more computer systems connect over the Internet to share files—became a worldwide phenomenon in 1999 with the development of the centralized online file-sharing system Napster.



Napster founder Shawn Fanning sits behind a computer.
Source: Joi, Shawn Fanning, cropped, CC BY 2.0.

File Sharing: From Illegal Downloading to Digital Music Stores

In 1999, Northeastern University student Shawn Fanning dropped out of school to complete a software project that would simplify the process of finding and downloading MP3 files on the Internet. This resulted in a free downloadable Napster program that transformed PCs into servers for exchanging music files over the Internet. The program also sported a chat room feature that served a community of music fans eager to discuss their favorite bands. Originally an experiment between Fanning and his friends, the program's popularity spread through word of mouth. By

the end of the first week, 15,000 people had downloaded the program.

Although their newfound ability to download free songs (albeit illegally) thrilled music fans, the record industry did not share their enthusiasm. In December 1999, all four major record labels, together with the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), launched a series of lawsuits against Fanning and his site for copyright infringement. Citing nonpayment of royalties and revenue losses from CD sales, the RIAA also claimed that artists would no longer want to create new songs now that their audiences could obtain them for free. In response, Napster argued that it merely provided software for people to share music files and that no copyrighted material appeared on the site itself. In addition, Fanning claimed that the site encouraged people to purchase CDs because of the exposure artists received on Napster.

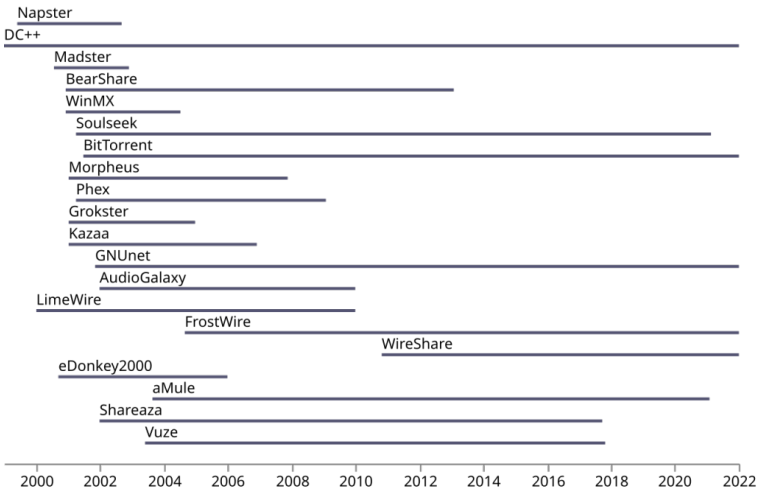


Radiohead embraced Napster, releasing its album *Kid A* on the platform before its debut. **Source**: Tim Cochrane, Radiohead, CC BY 2.0.

As the number of Napster program users grew, the lawsuit began to garner publicity. Some Napster supporters, many of whom were college students, viewed the legal battle as a David-versus-Goliath situation and rooted for Fanning to defeat the corporate music giants. Most recording artists sided with the record labels, with heavy metal group Metallica and rap artist Dr. Dre filing separate lawsuits against Napster in April 2000. However, some bands discovered a way to use the site to their advantage. Alternative rock group Radiohead promoted its album *Kid A* by secretly releasing it on Napster three weeks before its street release, creating a wave of publicity that propelled the album to No. 1 on the Billboard 200 chart in October 2000. Reggae-rock band Dispatch released free recordings on the site, growing its fan base to the point that it sold out multiple nights at Madison Square Garden in early

2007. Dispatch bassist Pete Heimbold said, "What we found was it didn't deter kids from coming to shows and buying CDs. I think it had the opposite effect—people heard songs off Napster and had a lot of merchandise and CDs."

Despite the Napster program's many advantages, including a built-in user base of 26.4 million people, the major record labels were unable to reach a deal with the site to create a fee-based service. In 2007, former EMI Executive Ted Cohen said , "The record labels had an opportunity to create a digital ecosystem and infrastructure to sell music online, but they kept looking at the small picture instead of the big one. They wouldn't let go of CDs." A court injunction in 2000 ordered Napster to remove all copyrighted material from its servers , and within two days, the website effectively shut down. Following a bankruptcy liquidation, the Napster program reinvented itself as a paid subscription service in 2003. After facing legal challenges and subsequent bankruptcy, Napster pivoted to a subscription-based model in 2003. This new approach required users to pay a monthly fee for unlimited access to a vast library of music. Tech company Infinite Reality purchased the service in 2025 for $207 million, hoping to transform Napster from merely a streaming service into a more social-first music platform where fans can engage more directly with music and artists.



Timeline of peer-to-peer software. **Source**: Frap, Timeline of peer-to-peer software, public domain.

The Post-Napster Universe: Gnutella and Kazaa

Napster's initial success resulted in a wave of similar sites emerging throughout 2000. The creators of these new services recognized that Napster's legal problems resulted from maintaining a central file server. By maintaining a list of all users on the network, Napster could control users' activities by blocking illegal downloads. When the court ordered the service to halt illicit downloading, the absence of a central database destroyed the entire Napster network.

To avoid a similar fate, new peer-to-peer (P2P) systems adopted two different approaches. The Gnutella network,

which serves clients such as LimeWire, BearShare, and WinMX, did not maintain a central database. Instead, it disseminated information about file locations across computer "nodes" worldwide. Users could find each other to share files, but the service could not disclaim responsibility for preventing copyright infringements. The lack of a centralized server and multiple client bases meant that, unlike Napster, the music industry would find it impossible to shut down the entire Gnutella network through a simple court order. Courts would need to block all Gnutella network traffic at the Internet service provider (ISP) level, a far trickier prospect than simply shutting down a central database.

In addition to the lack of a central database, some P2P providers set up offshore to take advantage of less restrictive copyright laws and weaker enforcement. Kazaa initially based itself in the Pacific island nation of Vanuatu and operated out of Australia. However, the company's offshore location did not protect it from copyright infringement laws. Following legal challenges and a significant court ruling in Australia in 2005, Kazaa faced substantial fines and was required to modify its software. As a result, the platform pivoted to a legal music download service in 2006.

Not content to pursue providers of illegal music downloads, the RIAA also took legal action against users of sites such as LimeWire and Kazaa. In 2003, the recording industry sued 261 American music fans for sharing songs illegally on peer-to-peer (P2P) networks. Although fines under U.S.

copyright law can reach up to $150,000 per illegally downloaded track, most of the defendants settled for significantly less. As of 2008, the RIAA had sued or threatened to sue more than 30,000 individuals for copyright infringement.

THE MILLION-DOLLAR DOWNLOAD: JAMMIE THOMAS VS. THE RIAA



Source: Kazaa, Kazaa (logo), public domain.

In an ongoing legal battle with the RIAA, Minnesota woman Jammie Thomas was found guilty of copyright infringement for a second time in 2009 and fined $1.92 million for illegally downloading 24 songs via the file-sharing site Kazaa. First fined $222,000 for using the Kazaa

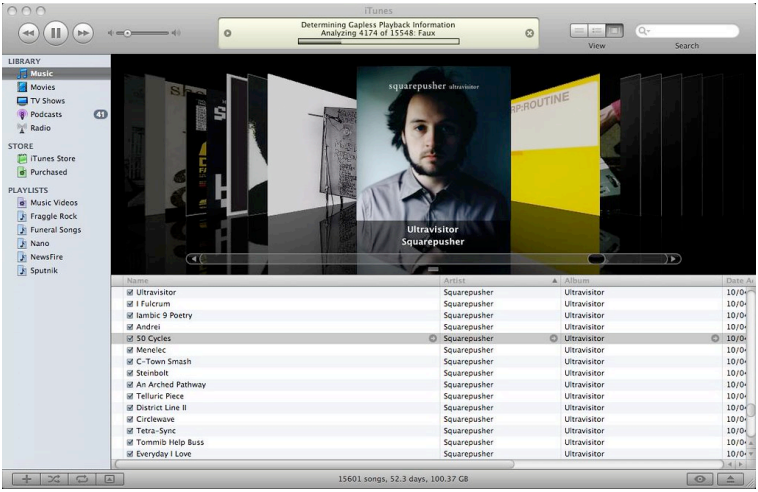
service, the 30-year-old single mother of four refused to settle with the recording industry out of court. Thomas claimed her innocence, maintaining that she was not the Kazaa service user whose files had been detected by RIAA investigators.

The case became the first of its kind to go before a jury in 2007, and Thomas faced fines ranging from $18,000 to $3.6 million under the Copyright Act of 1976. After deliberating for 5 hours, a jury found her guilty of copyright infringement and awarded the RIAA $222,000 in damages. The verdict was thrown out a year later when a federal judge declared a mistrial. However, jurors in Thomas's second trial found her guilty again, upping the fine to $1.92 million. A federal judge later reduced the damages to $50,000. In January 2010, the RIAA offered to close the case for $25,000, but Thomas continued to refuse to pay.

Thomas's case has provoked strong reactions on both sides of the debate. RIAA spokeswoman Cara Duckwork said, "It is a shame that Ms. Thomas-Rasset continues to deny any responsibility for her actions rather than accept a reasonable settlement offer and put this case behind her." Joe Sibley, one of Thomas's lawyers, argued, "They want to use this case as a bogeyman to scare people into doing what they want, to pay exorbitant damages." The RIAA is

currently winding down its six-year campaign against illegal downloaders, which has involved approximately 30,000 lawsuits. Instead, the RIAA is focusing on developing a program with Internet providers to terminate service to users who repeatedly violate copyright laws online.

Despite the large penalty, Thomas never paid the RIAA. Since the debt was considered an unsecured, nonpriority claim,
she could file for personal bankruptcy to avoid paying. The RIAA would discontinue seeking large settlements against individuals, since it would be highly unlikely that a guilty party would choose to pay the fine rather than declare bankruptcy. They shifted their policy to punish repeat offenders by denying them access to the Internet.



Recognizing that most people wanted a safe and trusted place to purchase digital music, Steve Jobs convinced the music industry to sell their songs on iTunes. **Source**: Andy Field. iTunes 7 with coverflow. CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

The Advent of Digital Music Stores



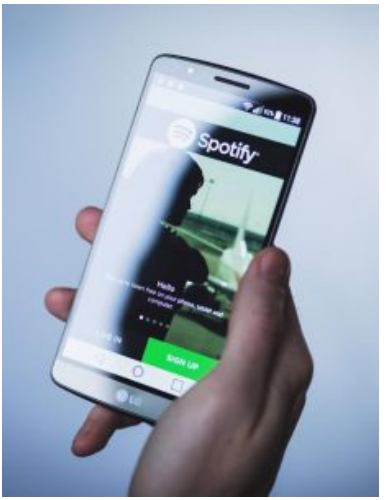
MP3 players like the iPod jumpstarted the conversion from physical to digital media. **Source**: Zxb., Ipod backlight, CC BY-SA 2.0 AT.

With the closure of the Napster program and the crackdown on illegal downloading, a void opened in the music distribution market. Almost immediately, fee-based online music providers filled the void, with Apple leading the way. They launched iTunes—a free application for the Mac that converted audio CDs into digital music files, organized digital music collections, and played Internet radio—and the iPod—a portable media player compatible with the iTunes software—in 2001. In 2003, the company signed deals with all of the major record labels and launched the iTunes Store, a virtual store that enabled people to buy and download digital music on demand. Initially featuring 200,000 songs for $0.99 each, the store quickly revolutionized the digital music industry. Within a week, iTunes Store customers purchased 1

million songs (Apple). Six months later, Apple convinced the record labels to expand the service to users of the Microsoft Windows operating system. By the following year, the iTunes Store had gone international. Within five years of its launch, the iTunes Store sold more music than any other retailer in the United States, and in February 2010, Apple celebrated its 10 billionth download. However, in recent years, Apple has transitioned away from iTunes, gradually phasing it out and replacing it with Apple Music, a subscription-based streaming service.

While competitors like Amazon and Napster attempted to challenge iTunes with downloadable music stores, streaming services such as Spotify and Apple Music ultimately became the dominant forces in digital music consumption.

The Impact of Digital Music Technology



Spotify revolutionized the music industry by pioneering the freemium streaming model, eventually becoming the world's leading audio platform with more than 760 million monthly active users. **Source**: Freestocks.org, Hand holding phone with Spotify on screen cropped, CC0 1.0.

Once digital music technology entered the world, it dominated the music industry almost instantaneously. MP3 players have several key advantages over CD players. Their smaller size made them more portable, eliminating the need to lug around bulky CD-carrying cases. Whereas CDs can hold only a relatively small amount of data, MP3 players can store thousands of songs on a single device. The lack of moving parts means users can take MP3 players jogging or cycling without the risk of a song skipping every time they hit a bumpy patch of road. Users are also no longer obligated to buy entire albums;

instead, they can pick and choose their favorite songs from an online music catalog. The iPod, launched in 2001, revolutionized the digital music industry. However, with the rise of smartphones and their integrated music capabilities, the iPod's dominance waned, leading to its discontinuation in May 2022. While digital licensing fees for ringtones, internet radio, and music videos were once significant, the rise of streaming services has altered the landscape. Streaming platforms like Spotify and Apple Music now dominate these areas, offering artists and labels new opportunities for revenue generation.

Social Media Changes the Face of Music

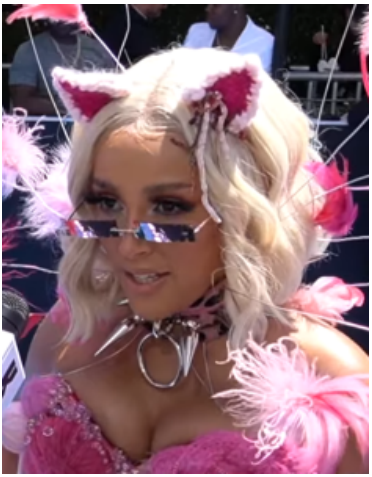


Lil Nas X gained renown by leveraging his Twitter fanbase, using TikTok to propel "Old Town Road" to success. **Source**: Raph_PH, Glasto2023 (348 of 468) (53009419903) (cropped), CC BY 2.0.

Social media has profoundly reshaped the music industry, democratizing access and fundamentally altering how music is created, discovered, and consumed. Platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube have emerged as powerful launchpads for both established and independent artists, allowing them to bypass traditional gatekeepers such as record labels and radio stations and connect directly with a global audience. For instance, Lil Nas X's "Old Town Road" exploded into a global phenomenon, driven primarily by its virality on TikTok, showcasing how a catchy snippet can propel an unknown song to international fame overnight. Similarly, artists like Doja Cat have masterfully leveraged

platforms like TikTok for song promotion and fan engagement, using trends and challenges to amplify their reach, demonstrating the immense power of user-generated content in driving music trends and chart success. This direct line of communication also fosters deeper fan engagement, enabling artists to share behind-the-scenes glimpses, respond to comments, and build loyal communities around their music, as seen with the highly interactive fan bases of K-pop groups on platforms like X. Furthermore, these interactive environments empower fans to co-create a song's cultural narrative, turning listeners into active promoters whose creative reinterpretations can extend a track's lifecycle far beyond traditional promotion.

However, this new landscape also presents significant challenges. The



Doja Cat has masterfully used TikTok to grow an audience. **Source**: The Knockturnal, Doja Cat 2019 BET Awards2 (cropped), CC BY 3.0.

sheer volume of music being released daily means artists face intense competition and the constant pressure to create viral content, sometimes prioritizing short-form, algorithm-friendly snippets over artistic depth. The need to maintain an active and engaging online presence can lead to burnout for artists, who often feel compelled to be "always on" and share personal aspects of their lives to feed the content machine. While social media offers unprecedented opportunities for self-promotion and audience building, artists must navigate the delicate balance between authenticity, consistent content creation, and the potential for fleeting virality, ensuring their

long-term artistic integrity in an ever-evolving digital ecosystem. Additionally, algorithm changes can suddenly reduce an artist's reach, leaving them reliant on platform policies beyond their control to connect with their audience.

Utilizing the Internet: A New Level of Indie

Over the past few years, the Internet has begun to level the proverbial playing field between major and independent record labels. By latching onto trends more quickly than the Big Three, indies have effectively leveraged new technologies, including blogging, online video sites, and social networking platforms, to promote their music. In contrast, the major labels have fallen behind the curve. With social networking sites enabling artists to communicate directly with their fans, the need for extensive financial backing or an industry middleman has vanished. Now, artists can upload their music onto a social networking site for free and generate record sales purely through word of mouth.

Although a few indie artists have become household names entirely through the buzz generated on social networking sites, many others find that they need some guidance. The direct-to-fan business model has created opportunities for web-based companies such as ReverbNation, which provides software that enables independent artists and record labels to market

their music online, track sales, build demand, and communicate with fans. The companies offer social networking applications that enable fans to purchase music directly from the artists, rather than redirecting them to a third-party website. Other advantages for bands include automatic updates to fans across various social media sites, digital distribution through music platforms and other online stores, and real-time sales updates.



After severing ties with major record labels, Trent Reznor pioneered the direct-to-fan distribution model by releasing Nine Inch Nails' albums *Ghosts I–IV* and *The Slip* independently online, offering tiered pricing, Creative Commons licensing, and even completely free downloads directly to his audience. **Source**: Rik Goldman, Trent Reznor Lollapalooza 1991, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Many established artists have also embraced the direct-to-fan business model. In 2007, Nine Inch Nails frontman Trent Reznor announced that the band had severed its contractual obligations to Universal Music Group, opting to distribute its subsequent albums independently. Well known for his vocal distaste of major record labels and their profiteering, Reznor encouraged fans in Australia to download his album *Year Zero* for free because he believed it was priced too highly there. Commenting on the state of the music industry in a 2007 interview he said, "I've got a battle where I'm trying to put out quality material that matters and I've got fans that feel it's their right to steal it and I've got a company that's so bureaucratic and clumsy and ignorant and behind the times they don't know what to do, so

they rip the people off." Following the band's split with Universal, they released the studio album *The Slip* as a free digital download in 2008. Reznor stated, "This one's on me" on his website, thanking fans for their loyalty. Fans downloaded the album 1.4 million times within the first six weeks of its release. A similar technique used by tech-savvy alternative band Radiohead reaped even higher rewards in 2007, when its retail release of *In Rainbows* entered the album chart at No. 1 even though they had offered the digital version online at a price of the customer's choosing several months earlier. The web-based direct release model enables bands like Radiohead and Nine Inch Nails to gather vital information about their fan bases—including email addresses—that they can utilize for future promotions. The traditional music industry model has shifted as new technology makes it easier for artists to communicate directly with their fans.

Generative AI and the Next Frontier of Music Rights

In the 2020s, the emergence of generative artificial intelligence introduced a technological disruption to the music industry matching the magnitude of the MP3 revolution. Tools like Suno, Udio, and various open-source audio synthesis models enabled users to generate complete, studio-quality

songs—including lyrics, vocals, and instrumentation—from simple text prompts within seconds. This sudden shift democratized music creation even further than digital audio workstations had in previous decades, but it also triggered massive legal and economic upheaval. Much like the peer-to-peer file-sharing battles of the early 2000s, the rise of generative music sparked immediate tension between technological innovation and traditional copyright enforcement.

The central conflict of the AI music era revolves around training data and creative ownership. AI developers argue that using copyrighted sound recordings to train algorithms falls under fair use, framing the process as a technological parallel to how human musicians learn by listening to existing music. Major record labels and artist advocacy groups counter that training models on proprietary catalogs without consent or compensation constitutes large-scale intellectual property theft. In 2024, the



Source: Easy-Peasy.AI, Music created by humans and artificial intelligence. A human devised the lyrics, while artificial intelligence crafted the melody and song, CC BY 4.0.

RIAA, representing major labels, filed landmark copyright infringement lawsuits against leading AI music generators, alleging the unauthorized scraping of millions of copyrighted recordings to build commercial products. The lawsuits have resulted in major corporate settlements and ongoing legal battles rather than a single final court verdict. Major labels split paths, opting for business partnerships over pure litigation.

Voice cloning technology presented another immediate challenge, blurring the boundaries between influence, parody, and identity theft. In 2023, an anonymous creator using the pseudonym Ghostwriter released "Heart on My Sleeve," a track featuring AI-generated vocals seamlessly mimicking hip-hop stars Drake and The Weeknd. The song went viral across social media and streaming platforms before being pulled down over copyright and trademark claims. The incident highlighted critical gaps in existing legal protections regarding an artist's voice, style, and likeness—assets that standard copyright law had not explicitly covered. In response, lawmakers introduced legislation like the federal NO FAKES Act, seeking to establish a clear property right over an individual's voice and image to protect performers from unauthorized digital replicas.

For independent musicians and industry professionals, generative AI operates as both a competitive threat and an empowering tool. On one hand, streaming services faced an

unprecedented flood of synthetic content and generic background tracks

, threatening to dilute royalty pools already stretched thin. On the other hand, independent artists increasingly adopted assistive AI tools for stem separation, rapid prototyping, mixing, and audio mastering

, streamlining production pipelines without surrendering human agency. As regulatory frameworks evolve and tech companies begin negotiating licensing deals with rights holders, the industry continues to grapple with fundamental questions of artistic attribution, compensation, and the definition of creative authorship in an algorithmically driven ecosystem.

CHAPTER 6: RADIO



Source: Unsplash. Person Laying Next to Radio on Floor. CC0.

- 6.1 Radio
- 6.2 Evolution of Radio Broadcasting
- 6.3 Radio Station Formats
- 6.4 Radio's Impact on Culture
- 6.5 Radio's New Future

6.1 RADIO



Source: EClark1417, WOXY-97X-studio, cropped, CC BY-SA 4.0.

In 1983, radio station WOXY's new owners bought the station and changed its format from Top 40 to the up-and-coming modern rock format, kicking off with U2's "Sunday Bloody Sunday." Then, in the basement of a fast-food restaurant in Ohio, the station proved risky for its owners, a husband-and-wife team who took a chance by switching to a relatively new format. Their investment paid off with the station's success. By 1990, WOXY had gained enough prestige to be named by Rolling Stone magazine as "the last great independent" radio station in the country, possibly aided by a reference in the 1988 film *Rain Man*. In 1998, the station launched a webcast. When the station's owners decided to retire and sell the frequency allocation in 2004, they hoped

to find investors to continue the station's online streaming service. After several months of unsuccessful searching, however, the station went off the air entirely—only to find a last-minute investor willing to fund an Internet version of the station.

The station's online version struggled to make ends meet until the online music firm Lala purchased it. The now-defunct Lala sold WOXY to music company Future Sounds Inc., which moved the station and staff from Ohio to Austin, Texas. In March 2010, citing "current economic realities and the lack of ongoing funding," WOXY.com went off the air with only a day's notice.

Taken in the context of the modern Internet revolution and the subsequent faltering of legacy institutions such as newspapers and book publishers, the rise and fall of WOXY may bode ill for the general fate of traditional broadcasting. However, taken in the larger context of radio's history, this story of the Internet's effect on radio could prove to be merely another leap in a long line of radio revolutions. From the shutdown of all broadcasts during World War I to the eclipse of radio by television during the 1950s, many arbiters of culture and business have prophesied the demise of radio for decades. Yet this chapter will demonstrate how the medium's inherent flexibility and intimacy have enabled it to adapt to new market trends and remain relevant as a form of mass communication.

WOXY's early experimentation with online streaming

foreshadowed the rise of modern radio stations, digital satellite broadcasting, and podcasts. Today, terrestrial radio stations have adapted by expanding to cross-platform streaming apps, HD digital subchannels, and smart speaker networks, offering listeners a wider range of content and on-demand access. Independent online radio stations like NTS Radio, listener-supported global streams like KEXP, and curated streaming shows have also emerged as powerful alternatives, providing niche programming and direct connections with listeners worldwide. Just as WOXY pioneered the internet radio landscape, these modern digital formats continue to push the boundaries of audio content in an interconnected media ecosystem.

6.2 EVOLUTION OF RADIO BROADCASTING

At its most basic level, radio transmits communication using radio waves. This includes both radio used for person-to-person communication and radio used for mass communication. Although most people associate the term "radio" with radio stations that broadcast to the general public, everything from television to cell phones uses radio-wave technology, making it a primary conduit for person-to-person communication.

The Invention of Radio



Some historians speculate that Nathan B. Stufflefield should be credited for the discovery of wireless communication. **Source**: Commercial publication, 1902 Stubblefield wireless telephone test , public domain.

Nathan B. Stubblefield is often cited as an overlooked pioneer in wireless communication, having publicly demonstrated a wireless telephone in 1892 in Murray, Kentucky. Though he never called his invention a radio, his innovative, albeit short-range, technology relied on inductive and conductive methods to transmit voice without wires. While his early work was groundbreaking, his association with the Wireless Telephone Company of America, formed in 1898, proved to be a significant setback. This company was widely regarded as a fraudulent scheme that exploited Stubblefield's demonstrations to attract investors without delivering a commercially viable product.

Despite his early innovations and securing several patents

for his wireless communication apparatuses, Stubblefield struggled to achieve widespread recognition or financial success for his inventions. He ultimately died in poverty in 1928 in a primitive dwelling in Kentucky. Although the scientific consensus generally credits others for the development of modern radio based on electromagnetic waves, Stubblefield's early and compelling demonstrations have led some, particularly in his home state, to advocate for him as the true inventor of radio, highlighting his significant, albeit distinct, contributions to early wireless technology.

Guglielmo Marconi is often credited with inventing the method to harness radio communication. As a young man living in Italy, Marconi read a biography of Heinrich Hertz, who had written and experimented with early forms of wireless transmission. Marconi then duplicated Hertz's experiments in his own home,



Guglielmo Marconi developed an early version of the wireless radio. **Source**: Pach Brothers creator QS:P170,Q2045337, Guglielmo Marconi, public domain.

successfully sending transmissions from one side of his attic to the other

. He saw the technology's potential and approached the Italian government for support. When the government showed no interest in his ideas, Marconi moved to England and obtained a patent for his device in 1896. Rather than inventing radio from scratch, however, Marconi essentially combined others' ideas and experiments to create a valuable communications tool.

Long-distance electronic communication has existed since the mid-19th century. The telegraph communicated messages through a series of long and short clicks. Cables across the Atlantic Ocean connected even the far-distant United States and England using this technology. By the 1870s, Alexander Graham Bell had used telegraph technology to develop the telephone, which could transmit an individual's voice over the same cables used by its predecessor.

When Marconi popularized wireless technology, contemporaries initially viewed it as a means to enable telegraphy in inaccessible places that cables could not reach. Early radios were used by naval ships to communicate with other boats and land stations; users overlooked purposes beyond person-to-person communication. However, the potential for broadcasting—sending messages to a large group of potential listeners—did not develop until later in the medium's history.

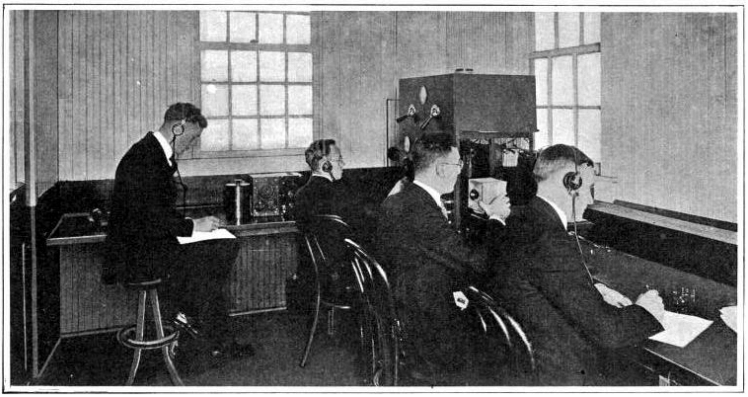
Broadcasting Arrives

The relatively simple technology required to build a radio transmitter and receiver soon became accessible to the public. Amateur radio operators quickly crowded the airwaves, broadcasting messages to anyone within range. By 1912, they had faced government regulatory measures requiring licenses and limiting broadcast ranges for radio operations. This regulation also gave the president the power to shut down all stations, a power notably exercised in 1917 upon the United States' entry into World War I, to prevent amateur radio operators from interfering with the military's use of radio waves
for the duration of the war.

Wireless technology made radio as audiences know it today possible, but earlier technologies occasionally managed to replicate its modern, practical function as a mass communication medium. As early as the 1880s, people relied on telephones to transmit news, music, church sermons, and weather reports. In Budapest, Hungary, for example, a subscription service allowed individuals to listen to news reports and fictional stories on their telephones. Around this time, telephones also transmitted opera performances from Paris to London. In 1909, this innovation emerged in the United States as a pay-per-play phonograph service in Wilmington, Delaware.

This service allowed subscribers to listen to specific music recordings on their telephones.

In 1906, Massachusetts resident Reginald Fessenden transmitted his voice over the radio; however, his efforts did not lead to a practical application. Ten years later, Lee de Forest used radio in a more modern sense by establishing an experimental radio station, 2XG, in New York City. De Forest broadcast music and news nightly until World War I halted all transmissions to private citizens.



KDKA in Pittsburgh became the first commercial radio station in the United States in 1921. **Source**: Austin C. Lescarboura, KDKA – Early studio – circa 1921, public domain .

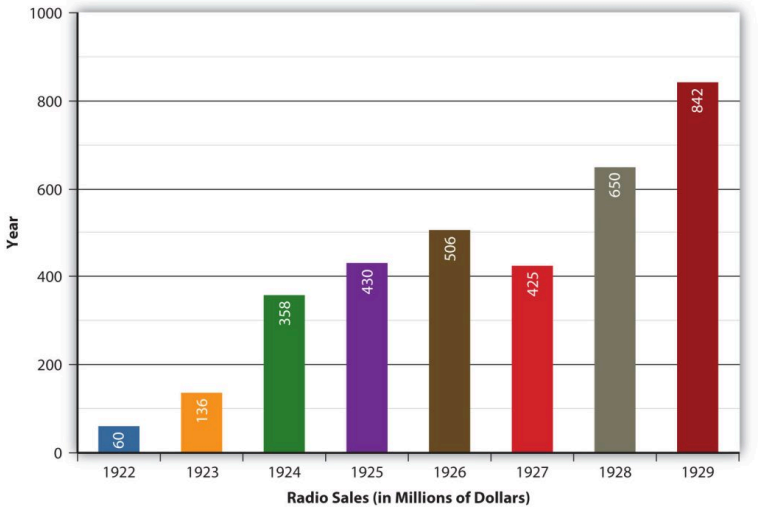
Radio's Commercial Potential

After the World War I radio ban was lifted with the end of the conflict in 1919, several small stations began operating

using technologies developed during the war. Many of these stations developed regular programming that included religious sermons, sports, and news. The dawn of commercial radio in the United States fundamentally reshaped the landscape of news dissemination. A pivotal moment occurred on November 2, 1920, when KDKA in Pittsburgh, recognized as the nation's first commercial radio station, broadcast the returns of the Harding-Cox presidential election. This event was groundbreaking because KDKA delivered the results to listeners hours before the morning newspapers could be printed and distributed. The instant delivery of dramatic news posed an immediate challenge to the established press, prompting
newspaper publishers to threaten to cut off radio stations' access
to vital news sources, such as the Associated Press wire, fearing that radio would undermine their sales of "extra" editions.

Newspapers eventually adapted to this new competition, recognizing that they could not match radio's immediacy. They largely phased out special editions for breaking news, instead focusing on providing more in-depth analysis, commentary, and feature stories that radio's early format couldn't yet deliver. KDKA's initial business model, standard for early radio stations, was not based on advertising revenue but on
providing programming solely to encourage consumers to purchase more radio receivers

manufactured by its parent company, Westinghouse. However, this model would quickly evolve.



Radio sales increased dramatically throughout the 1920s because radios offered an affordable way to listen to free music and attend live events.

As early as 1922, Schenectady, New York's WGY broadcast more than 40 original dramas, demonstrating radio's potential as a medium for drama. The WGY players created their scripts and performed them live on air. This same groundbreaking group also made the first known attempt at television drama in 1928. As radio began its rapid ascent in the 1920s, a fundamental question loomed over the new industry: how would this new mass medium sustain itself financially? This pressing concern was underscored in 1924 when *Radio*

Broadcast magazine sponsored an essay contest titled "Who Is to Pay for Broadcasting—and How?"

The contest, offering a then-substantial prize of $500 (equivalent to approximately $9,500 in today's money), highlighted the industry's desperate search for a viable business model. Among the early solutions considered were proposals for a "tithe" on all radio sales or the establishment of a substantial public endowment. The winning essay in the Radio Broadcast contest proposed a particular, yet ultimately impractical, solution: a $2 tax on each vacuum tube and a $0.50 tax on each crystal used in a receiver, with the collection and administration of these funds to be handled by a proposed Federal Bureau of Broadcasting. However, these suggestions, including the winning one, quickly proved utterly inadequate for the scale of the industry's rapid expansion. The rapidly escalating costs of producing high-quality content and, crucially, of attracting popular entertainers far outstripped the meager revenue potential of such component taxes or other public funding models.



As this advertisement indicates, early radios could both receive and transmit signals. **Source**: Company advertisement, White & Boyer advertisement (radio station WJH) December 15, 1921, public domain.

In this economic vacuum, one solution emerged as the clear frontrunner. Despite initial resistance from some who feared it would compromise the medium's integrity, advertising swiftly became—and has remained—the primary source of revenue for radio in the United States. This embrace of commercial sponsorship, which effectively sidelined the initially preferred models, allowed radio stations to afford top talent and extensive programming, ultimately driving the medium's explosive growth and cementing its role as a powerful advertising platform for decades to come. Businesses, such as department stores, which often had their own radio stations, were among the first to utilize radio's commercial applications. However, these stations did not

advertise in a manner recognizable to a modern radio listener. Early radio advertisements consisted only of a "genteel sales message broadcast during 'business' (daytime) hours, with no hard sell or mention of price." Audiences initially considered radio advertising an unprecedented invasion of privacy, because—unlike newspapers, which people purchased at a newsstand—radios delivered content in the home and were present in the living room, where the whole family could hear. However, within a few years, advertising became readily accepted on radio programs. Advertising agencies even began producing their radio programs named after their products. Initially, ads ran only during the day, but as economic pressure intensified during the Great Depression in the 1930s, local stations sought new sources of revenue, and advertising became a standard part of the radio soundscape.

The Rise of Radio Networks



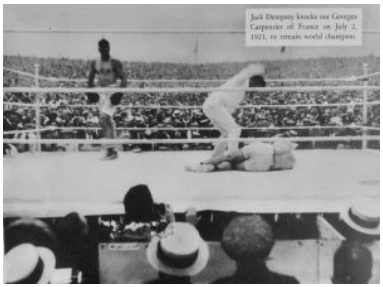
In 1922, David Sarnoff was the general manager and vice-president of RCA, the Radio Corporation of America. **Source**: anonymous, DavidSarnoff 1922, public domain.

David Sarnoff, then an engineer at American Marconi, penned a pivotal document in 1915 titled the "Radio Music Box Memo." This forward-thinking memo was revolutionary for its time, outlining a bold vision for radio as a mass communication tool, rather than merely a point-to-point telegraphic device. Sarnoff remarkably predicted a future in which radio receivers, resembling simple "music boxes," would bring news, music, lectures, and sporting events directly into people's homes, making them an indispensable household utility.

However, Sarnoff's prescient idea for commercial radio broadcasting was put on hold by the onset of World War I. During the conflict, the U.S. government, recognizing the strategic importance of radio, effectively nationalized the technology. The Navy purchased all existing transmitters and

took control of radio operations, making it illegal for private citizens to own or operate a radio without explicit government permission. This wartime centralization of radio technology meant that Sarnoff's broadcasting vision would not be fully realized until after the war's conclusion, when the radio industry could shift its focus from military necessity to public entertainment.

Sarnoff's vision, however, was far from halted by the war; it merely lay dormant, waiting for the opportune moment to blossom. The formation of the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) in 1919 was a strategic move driven by a crucial post-World War I concern: the desire to prevent foreign entities from dominating the burgeoning American radio industry, and to ensure that the U.S. government did not maintain permanent control over radio technology after its wartime nationalization. To achieve this, key American industrial and communication giants were brought together to pool their vast patent holdings. These included General Electric, which manufactured radio transmitters and had acquired American Marconi; AT&T, the global leader in wired communication with vital patents related to amplification; and Westinghouse , another electrical powerhouse holding numerous essential radio patents. Intriguingly, even the United Fruit Company played a role, contributing patents they had developed for their critical radio communications with ships transporting fruit from South American plantations.



The boxing match between Jack Dempsey and Georges Carpentier led to an explosion in radio sales. **Source**: Anefo, Jack Dempsey (links) heeft de Fransman Georges Carpentier knock out geslagen 2 jul, Bestanddeelnr 917-7346 , CC0 1.0

Sarnoff became RCA's general manager and was finally in a position to champion his broadcasting concept. He demonstrated radio's broad appeal by arranging the live broadcast of the Jack Dempsey-Georges Carpentier heavyweight boxing match in 1921, an event that captivated hundreds of thousands of listeners and ignited public demand for home radio receivers. This success provided the crucial momentum to push broadcasting into the mainstream. The primary objective of creating RCA was to consolidate thousands of disparate radio patents under a single American entity. This patent pool was vital, as it enabled various companies to cross-license technologies necessary for manufacturing and developing radio receivers and broadcasting equipment without the constant threat of litigation. This collaborative structure was designed to accelerate the development of radio from a niche

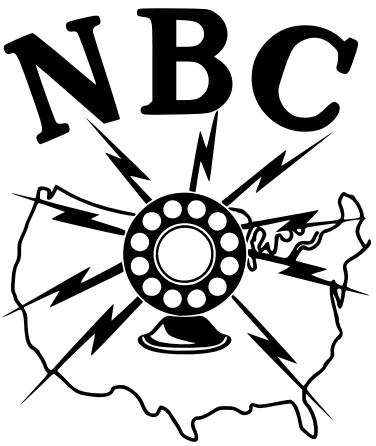
point-to-point communication tool into a widely accessible mass medium. Ultimately, RCA's foundational role in uniting these critical patents laid the groundwork for its subsequent dominance in the industry.

While the commercial model flourished in the United States, alternative broadcast structures developed internationally. The British Broadcasting Company (BBC), founded in 1922, emerged with a distinct public service mission, aiming to inform, educate, and entertain the British public. In its earliest incarnation, the BBC's operations were uniquely supported by revenue generated from the sale of radio receiving sets and compulsory radio-receiving licenses, establishing a funding model distinct from the advertising-driven approach taking root in the United States. This public service ethos would soon extend globally as the BBC began transmitting shortwave signals in multiple languages worldwide, particularly through what would become the BBC World Service.

This international reach proved critical during World War II, when the BBC served as a vital voice against the Nazis. Its broadcasts delivered uncensored news and essential information to occupied territories and Allied forces, standing as an international voice of truth and resistance. Today, the BBC maintains its formidable global presence, reaching hundreds of millions of people worldwide through a multi-platform strategy that leverages digital streaming alongside traditional FM, shortwave, and satellite communication. This

extensive network remains central to its mission of providing independent news and serving as a trusted source of impartial journalism on the global stage.

Under Sarnoff's leadership in 1926, RCA established the National Broadcasting Company (NBC), America's first major radio network. This marked a monumental shift, establishing a standardized programming schedule and bringing entertainment, news, and cultural events to a nationwide mass audience. His influence extended beyond radio, as he became a leading proponent and investor in the development of television, famously pushing RCA's research into electronic television systems that would eventually lead to the commercialization of the medium, first in black-and-white and later in color, further solidifying his legacy as a titan of electronic mass media. Groups of stations that carried syndicated network programs, along with a variety of local shows, soon formed their own Red and Blue networks. Two years after NBC's creation, the United Independent Broadcasters became the Columbia Broadcasting System



NBC's first logo. **Source**: National Broadcasting Company, NBC 1926, public domain.

(CBS) and began competing with the existing Red and Blue networks.

Although early network programming primarily focused on music, it soon evolved to include other innovative programs, such as variety shows. This format generally featured several performers, with a host introducing transitions between acts. Variety shows included styles as diverse as jazz and early country music. At night, dramas and comedies such as *Amos 'n' Andy*, *The Lone Ranger*, and *Fibber McGee and Molly* began to fill the airwaves. News, educational programs, and other types of talk programs also rose to prominence during the 1930s.



CBS founder William Paley sits behind a microphone. **Source**: Harris & Ewing, photographer, William S. Paley, Pres., CBS, N.Y. LCCN2016874918, public domain.

From Cigars to Customers: William Paley and the Birth of Modern Radio Advertising

The growth of radio networks in the 1920s gave rise to two distinct philosophies regarding their fundamental purpose. When RCA founded NBC in 1926, its initial approach, particularly under David Sarnoff, was largely focused on developing high-quality programming for its listeners. The goal was to provide diverse content – from music and news to dramas and educational talks – thereby encouraging the public to purchase more radio sets, which was RCA's primary business. The audience

was seen as the end-user for whom the programming was created.

In contrast, William Paley approached radio from a purely commercial perspective when he took over what would become CBS. Paley, who had started his career in his family's cigar business, first recognized radio's immense potential when he used it successfully to advertise their La Palina cigars. Seeing the undeniable power of compelling programming to influence consumer behavior, he purchased the struggling United Independent Broadcasters in 1928 and swiftly rebranded it as the Columbia Broadcasting System.

Paley's genius lay in his reframing of the broadcasting business model. For him, the real clients were not the listeners, but the advertisers. He famously articulated the idea that the radio network's product was the audience itself. CBS's strategic focus was on attracting and delivering the largest possible audience to advertisers, who paid for access to this aggregated audience. This commercial-first philosophy would ultimately become the dominant model for American broadcasting, fundamentally shaping the industry's trajectory and defining the relationship between content, audience, and revenue for decades to come.

The Radio Act of 1927

In the mid-1920s, profit-seeking companies, including department stores and newspapers, owned a majority of the nation's broadcast radio stations, which promoted their owners' businesses. Nonprofit groups such as churches and schools operated another third of the stations. As the number of radio stations outgrew the available frequencies, interference became a significant problem, prompting the government to intervene.

The Radio Act of 1927 established the Federal Radio Commission (FRC) to regulate the use of the airwaves. A year after its creation, the FRC reallocated station bandwidths to correct interference problems. The organization reserved 40 high-powered channels, setting aside 37 of these for network affiliates. The remaining 600 lower-powered bandwidths were allocated to stations that had to share the frequencies; this meant that as one station went off the air at a designated time, another station began broadcasting in its place. The Radio Act of 1927 enabled major networks, such as CBS and NBC, to gain a 70 percent share of U.S. broadcasting by the early 1930s, yielding them $72 million in profits by 1934. At the same time, nonprofit broadcasting fell to only 2 percent of the market.

In protest of the 1927 Radio Act's favor toward commercial broadcasting, struggling nonprofit radio broadcasters established the National Committee on Education by Radio

to lobby for more outlets. Basing their argument on the notion that the airwaves—unlike newspapers—were a public resource, they asserted that groups working for the public good should take precedence over commercial interests. Nevertheless, the Communications Act of 1934 was passed without addressing these issues, and radio remained a primarily commercial enterprise.



Families would often sit around the radio for news and entertainment during the Golden Age of Radio. **Source**: Ministry of Information Photo Division Photographer, A family relaxes at home in Taunton, Somerset, on a Sunday afternoon during 1942. D12274 , public domain.

The Golden Age of Radio

The so-called Golden Age of Radio spanned from the 1930s to the mid-1950s. Because many associate the 1930s with the struggles of the Great Depression, it may seem contradictory that such a fruitful cultural occurrence arose during this decade. However, radio lent itself to the era. After the initial purchase of a receiver, the radio provided free entertainment that replaced other, more costly pastimes, such as going to the movies.

Radio also presented an easily accessible medium that aired on its schedule. Unlike reading newspapers or books, tuning in to a favorite program at a particular time became a part of listeners' daily routine because it effectively forced them to plan their lives around the dial.

Daytime Radio Finds Its Market

During the Great Depression, radio became so successful that another network, the Mutual Broadcasting Network, began in 1934 to compete with NBC's Red and Blue networks and the CBS network, creating a total of four national networks. As networks became more adept at generating profits, their programming began to take on a format that would later evolve into modern television. Serial dramas and programs that focused on domestic work aired during the day to cater to

female audiences. Advertisers targeted this demographic with commercials for domestic needs such as soap. Because soap companies often sponsored these programs, daytime serial dramas soon became known as soap operas. Some modern televised soap operas, such as *Guiding Light*, which ended in 2009, actually began in the 1930s as radio serials.



Many prime-time radio broadcasts featured film stars recreating famous films over the air. **Source**: Conrad Poirier creator QS:P170,Q2993614, Radio. Lux Theatre. Paul de Vassal – Simone Simon – Albert Cloutier BAnQ P48S1P22998 , public domain.

The Origins of Prime Time

During the evening, many families gathered to listen to the radio together. Popular evening comedy variety shows such as George Burns and Gracie Allen's *Burns and Allen*, *The Jack Benny Show*, and *The Bob Hope Show* all began during the 1930s. These shows featured a central host—often the show's namesake—and a series of sketch comedy, interviews, and musical performances, not unlike contemporary programs such as *Saturday Night Live*. Performed live before a studio audience, the programs thrived on a certain flair and spontaneity. Later in the evening, stations aired so-called prestige dramas such as *Lux Radio Theater* and *Mercury Theatre on the Air*. These shows featured prominent Hollywood actors recreating movies or acting out adaptations of literature.

Instant News

By the late 1930s, the popularity of radio news broadcasts had surpassed that of newspapers. Radio's ability to emotionally draw its audiences close to events made for news that evoked stronger responses and, thus, greater interest than print news could. For example, the kidnapping and murder of the infant son of famed aviator Charles Lindbergh in 1932 prompted radio networks to set up mobile stations that covered events as they unfolded, broadcasting nonstop for several days and keeping listeners updated on every detail while tying them emotionally to the outcome.



Edward R. Murrow's *Hear It Now* radio program helped inform American audiences about the horrors of World War II. **Source**: CBS Radio, Edward R. Murrow 1947, public domain.

As recording technology advanced, reporters gained the

ability to record events in the field and bring them back to the studio to broadcast over the airwaves. In 1937, Herb Morrison witnessed the Hindenburg blimp explode into flames while attempting to land, killing 37 of its passengers. Stations later rebroadcast Morrison's recording, including the sound of the exploding blimp, providing listeners with an unprecedented emotional connection to a national disaster. Morrison's exclamation "Oh, the humanity!" became a common phrase of despair after the event.

Radio news became even more critical during World War II, with programs such as Norman Corwin's *This Is War!* seeking to bring more sober news stories to a radio dial dominated by entertainment. The program dealt with the realities of war somberly; at the beginning of the program, the host declared, "No one is invited to sit down and take it easy. Later, there's a war on." In 1940, Edward R. Murrow, a journalist working in England at the time, broadcast firsthand accounts of the German bombing of London, giving Americans a sense of the trauma and terror that the English were experiencing at the outset of the war. Radio news outlets broke the news of the attack on Pearl Harbor that propelled the United States into World War II in 1941. By 1945, radio news had become so efficient and pervasive that when Roosevelt died, only his wife, his children, and Vice President

Harry S. Truman knew of it before the news spread over the public airwaves.

The Birth of the Federal Communications Commission

The Communications Act of 1934 established the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and marked the beginning of a new era of government regulation. The organization quickly began enacting influential radio decisions. In 1938, it limited stations to 50,000 watts of broadcasting power, a ceiling that remains in effect today, although there have been some exceptions and adjustments over the years. As a result of FCC antimonopoly rulings, the FCC forced RCA to sell its NBC Blue network; this spun-off division became the American Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) in 1943.

In 1949, the FCC established the Fairness Doctrine, stipulating that if broadcasters took a position on a particular issue, they had to provide equal time to all other reasonable positions on that issue. This tenet originated from the long-held notion that the airwaves functioned as a public resource and should therefore serve the public. Although the regulation remained in effect until 1987, the impact of its core concepts remains a topic of debate. This chapter will explore the

Fairness Doctrine and its impact in greater detail in a later section.

The Tragic History and Influence of FM Radio



US engineer Edwin Armstrong at the beach with a portable superheterodyne radio receiver he built for his wife. **Source**: Unknown author, Edwin Armstrong & portable superheterodyne, public domain.

In 1934, American electrical engineer Edwin Howard Armstrong achieved a monumental breakthrough in radio technology with his invention of Frequency Modulation (FM) radio. This innovation represented a significant improvement over the existing Amplitude Modulation (AM) radio, primarily because FM signals were far less susceptible to static and interference, resulting in a much clearer and higher-fidelity listening experience. Armstrong's invention promised to revolutionize broadcasting by delivering a cleaner sound, free from the crackle and hiss familiar on AM.

However, Armstrong's groundbreaking work was met not with widespread adoption

but with fierce opposition from influential industry players. David Sarnoff, the head of RCA and Armstrong's former mentor, viewed FM as a direct threat to RCA's vast investments in AM radio and its burgeoning television ventures. Consequently, Armstrong found himself embroiled in decades of relentless legal battles, as RCA systematically attacked his patents and actively lobbied against the widespread commercial development of FM

. This protracted and debilitating fight, combined with personal struggles including an estranged marriage and declining health, took a severe toll on Armstrong. Tragically, in 1954, after years of legal and financial exhaustion, he took his own life, dying without seeing his invention fully recognized or widely adopted to the extent it eventually would be.

As music came to dominate the airwaves, FM radio attracted new listeners with its high-fidelity sound. When radio primarily featured dramas and other talk-oriented formats, sound quality had not mattered to many people, and the purchase of an FM receiver did not compete with the purchase of a new television in terms of entertainment value. As FM receivers became cheaper and stereo recording technology grew in popularity, the high-fidelity trend created a market for FM stations. Mostly affluent consumers began purchasing component stereos to achieve the highest sound quality possible from their recordings. Although this audience often preferred classical

and jazz stations to Top 40 radio, they were willing to tolerate new music and ideas.

Both the high-fidelity market and the growing youth counterculture of the 1960s had similar goals for the FM spectrum. Both groups eschewed AM radio due to its predictable programming, poor sound quality, and over-commercialization. Both groups sought to treat music as a meaningful experience rather than merely a trendy pastime or a means of earning a living. Many adherents to the youth counterculture of the 1960s came from affluent, middle-class families, and their tastes came to define a new era of consumer culture. The goals and market potential of both the high-fidelity lovers and the youth counterculture created an atmosphere on the FM dial
that audiences had never experienced before.

Between 1960 and 1966, the number of households capable of receiving FM transmissions increased from approximately 6.5 million to over 40 million. The FCC also aided FM by issuing its nonduplication ruling in 1964. Before this regulation, many AM stations operated FM stations that duplicated their programming. The nonduplication rule compelled FM stations to create original programming,
thereby opening up the spectrum for established networks to develop new stations.

The late 1960s saw new disc jockeys taking greater liberties with established practices, including playing several songs in

a row before a commercial break or airing album tracks exceeding 10 minutes in length. University stations and other nonprofit ventures to which the FCC had assigned frequencies in the late 1940s popularized this format. Over time, commercial stations sought to replicate their success by playing fewer commercials and allowing their disc jockeys to have a say in their playlists. Although this made for popular listening formats, FM stations struggled to generate the kinds of profits that AM stations drew

.

In 1974, FM radio accounted for one-third of all radio listening but only 14 percent of radio profits. Large network stations and advertisers began to market heavily to the FM audience in an attempt to correct this imbalance. Stations began tightening their playlists and narrowing their formats to please advertisers and generate greater revenues. By the end of the 1970s, radio stations began to play specific formats, and the progressive radio of the previous decade had become difficult to find

.

Radio on the Margins

Despite the networks' hold on programming, educational stations continued to operate at universities and in some

municipalities. They broadcast programs such as *School of the Air* and *College of the Air*, as well as roundtable and town hall forums. In 1940, the FCC reserved a set of frequencies in the lower range of the FM radio spectrum for public education purposes as part of its regulation of the new spectrum. The reservation of FM frequencies gave educational stations a boost. Still, FM proved initially unpopular due to a setback in 1945, when the FCC moved the FM bandwidth to higher frequencies, ostensibly to avoid interference problems. This change required consumers and radio stations to purchase new equipment, thereby significantly slowing the widespread adoption of FM radio.



A replica of the WHBQ booth where Dewey Phillips broadcast the *Red, Hot, & Blue* radio program. **Source**: Michael Gaylard from Horsham, UK, WHBQ radio DJ booth replica – Sun Studio (2018-09-10 16.55.38 by Michael Gaylard) , CC BY 2.0.

The blossoming sounds of rock 'n' roll in the mid-20th century were powerfully amplified by pioneering radio disc jockeys who dared to defy the norms of racial segregation. Among the most influential was Dewey Phillips, whose *Red, Hot & Blue* radio show on WHBQ in Memphis, Tennessee, became a cultural melting pot. In a deeply segregated South, Phillips fearlessly curated a playlist that transcended racial divides, attracting an unprecedented multi-racial audience, including both Black and white teenagers, who eagerly tuned in.

Phillips's groundbreaking approach lay in his willingness to regularly spin R&B records, a genre then largely confined to Black radio stations and considered "race music." By enthusiastically playing these rhythm-and-blues tracks, Phillips exposed a vital segment of white youth to the energetic, blues-

infused sounds that would become the foundation of rock 'n' roll. His show was not just a source of music; it was a cultural bridge that inadvertently helped dismantle social barriers, directly contributing to rock 'n' roll's cross-cultural appeal and eventual mainstream success.

The Pacifica Radio network represents an enduring anomaly among educational stations. Begun in 1949 to counteract the effects of commercial radio by bringing educational programs and dialogue to the airwaves, Pacifica has grown from a single station—Berkeley, California's KPFA—to a network of five stations and close to 150 affiliates . From the outset, Pacifica aired newer classical, jazz, and folk music along with lectures, discussions, and interviews with public artists and intellectuals. Pacifica refuses to accept money from commercial advertisers, instead relying on listener donations and grants from institutions such as the Ford Foundation, and describes itself as listener-supported.

The growth of border stations signifies another vital innovation on the fringes of the radio dial. Located just across the Mexican border, these stations were exempt from FCC and other U.S. regulatory requirements. Because the stations broadcast at 250,000 watts and higher, their listening range covered much of North America. Their content also diverged—markedly at the time—from that of U.S. stations. For example, Dr. John Brinkley started station XERF in Del Rio, Mexico, after the closure of his station in Nebraska, and

he used the border station in part to promote a dubious goat gland operation that supposedly cured sexual impotence. Besides the goat-gland promotion, the station and others like it often carried music, such as country and western, that regular network radio did not broadcast. Later border station disc jockeys, such as Wolfman Jack, played a crucial role in introducing rock and roll music to a wider audience.

Television Steals the Show

Radio enjoyed considerable success as a medium during the 1920s and 1930s because no other medium could replicate its reach. This shift occurred in the late 1940s and early 1950s as television gained popularity. A 1949 poll of people who had seen television found that almost half believed radio would fail . Television sets had entered the market by the late 1940s, and by 1951, more Americans watched television during prime time than ever before. Famous radio programs such as *The Bob Hope Show* transitioned to television, further diminishing radio's unique offerings.

Surprisingly, some of radio's most critically lauded dramas launched during this period. *Gunsmoke*, an adult-oriented Western show (that later became television's longest-running show), began in 1952; crime drama *Dragnet*, later made

famous in both television and film, broadcast between 1949 and 1957; and *Yours Truly, Johnny Dollar* aired from 1949 to 1962, when CBS canceled its remaining radio dramas. However, these respected radio dramas represent the last of their kind. Although television did not kill radio, it marked the end of its Golden Age.



Top 40 became one of the dominant formats of radio after the arrival of television. **Source**: WLS Radio top-40 flyer, Four weekly WLS Top-40 playlist charts for January 1964. A certain song has been circled in each chart, public domain.

Transition to Top 40

As radio networks abandoned the dramas and variety shows that had previously sustained their formats, radio stations decided to focus on what they could still do better than any

other mass media: play music. With advertising dollars down and the emergence of better recording formats, it made good business sense for radio to focus on shows that played prerecorded music. As strictly music stations began to proliferate, innovations aimed at increasing their profitability emerged. The Top 40 station emerged, a concept that supposedly originated from observing jukebox patrons repeatedly playing the same songs. Robert Storz and Gordon McLendon successfully adapted existing radio stations to fit this new format

. In 1956, the creation of limited playlists further refined the format by providing about 50 songs that disc jockeys played repeatedly every day. By the early 1960s, many stations had developed limited playlists of only 30 songs.

Another musically fruitful innovation came with the increase of Black disc jockeys and programs created for Black audiences. Because its advertisers had nowhere to go in a media market dominated by White performers, Black radio became more common on the AM dial. As traditional programming left the radio, disc jockeys emerged as the medium's new personalities, engaging in more conversation between songs and building followings. Early Black disc jockeys even began improvising rhymes over the music, pioneering techniques that later became rap and hip-hop. This new personality-driven style helped bring early rock and roll to new audiences.

The Rise of Public Radio

After the Golden Age of Radio ended, most listeners tuned in to radio stations for music. The variety shows and talk-based programs that had sustained radio in the early years could no longer draw enough listeners to make them a successful business proposition. One divergent path from this general trend, however, grew from the success of public radio.



Bob Boilen's desk, where they film the *Tiny Desk Concerts*, which have included performances from Dua Lipa, the Magnetic Fields , BTS, Ne-Yo, the cast of *Hadestown*, and many more. **Source**: Selena N. B. H., On the NPR tour, CC BY 2.0.

Groups such as the Ford Foundation had funded public media sources during the early 1960s. When the foundation decided to withdraw its funding mid-decade, the federal government stepped in by passing the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967. This act established the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) and tasked it with generating funding for public television and radio stations. The CPB, in turn, created National Public Radio (NPR) in 1970 to provide programming for already-operating stations. Until 1982, the CPB funded NPR exclusively. Public radio's first program,

All Things Considered, delivered news that focused on analysis and interpretive reporting rather than cutting-edge coverage. In the mid-1970s, NPR attracted Washington-based journalists such as Cokie Roberts and Linda Wertheimer to its ranks, giving the coverage a more professional, hard-reporting edge.

However, in 1983, public radio stood on the brink of financial collapse. NPR survived in part by relying more on its member stations to host fundraising drives, which are now a vital component of public radio's business model. A major donation from the Kroc Foundation in 2003 provided a significant boost to NPR's finances.

Since its early days, NPR has evolved into a respected news provider. Its coverage of major events, such as the Gulf War and the 2001 terrorist attacks, has gained it a wider audience. While NPR has faced criticism for a perceived liberal bias, it has also attracted a significant conservative audience. As of 2024, NPR boasts more than 1,000 member stations and has 28.7 million weekly on-air listeners and 42 million weekly audience members across all platforms. Its digital presence, including podcasts, Tiny Desk concerts, online news, and social media, has further expanded its reach and influence. Public radio continues to navigate an evolving federal funding landscape, balancing government appropriations alongside community donations and corporate underwriting.

Public radio distributors and stations have expanded their

programming beyond news and current events to include a wide range of cultural and entertainment offerings. Quiz shows like *Wait Wait... Don't Tell Me!* and cooking shows like *Radio Kitchen* have become popular favorites. Storytelling programs like *This American Life* and *Radiolab* have pioneered new genres of free-form radio documentary. Meanwhile, shows like *The Moth* have revived older radio formats. This diversity of programming has helped public radio attract a wider audience and showcase its potential as a platform for storytelling, education, and entertainment.



Radio conglomerates like iHeartMedia (formerly Clear Channel Communications) have benefited greatly from the Telecommunications Act of 1996. **Source**: iHeartMedia, Inc., IHeartMedia logo, public domain.

Conglomerates

For decades, the American radio landscape was characterized by strict ownership limitations imposed by the FCC, designed to ensure diversity of voices and prevent undue market concentration. Before 1985, these regulations stipulated that no single person or company could own more than seven AM, seven FM, and seven television stations nationwide. These caps fostered a more fragmented and localized industry, with

numerous independent owners operating stations across the country.

However, this regulatory framework underwent a dramatic transformation with the passage of the **Telecommunications Act of 1996**. This landmark legislation ushered in an era of significant deregulation of broadcast ownership. Critically, the Act eliminated the national cap on the total number of radio stations a single company could own, opening the door for unprecedented consolidation.

Following the 1996 Act, a single company could now own an unlimited number of radio stations across the United States. Local market limits were also substantially relaxed, allowing companies to acquire multiple stations within the same market, in some cases up to 8 stations (depending on the market's overall size). This shift led to a massive wave of mergers and acquisitions, fundamentally reshaping the radio industry from one dominated by local ownership to one increasingly controlled by a handful of large, national broadcast conglomerates.

As large corporations, such as Clear Channel Communications (now iHeartMedia), acquired stations around the country, they reformatted stations that had once competed against one another, so that each focused on a distinct format. This practice led to mainstream radio's present state, in which narrow formats target particular demographic audiences across both terrestrial airwaves and digital streaming networks.

Ultimately, although the industry consolidation of the 1990s made radio profitable, it reduced local coverage and programming diversity. Because stations around the country served as outlets for a single network, the radio landscape became more uniform and predictable. Much as with chain restaurants and stores, some people enjoy this type of predictability, while others prefer a more localized, unique experience.

6.3 RADIO STATION FORMATS



Source: Cropped image by JoshuaJCreative on Pixabay.

Early radio network programming laid the groundwork for television's format, with a variety of programs that appealed to different audiences broadcast at various times of the day. As television's popularity grew, however, radio could not compete, so it turned to new programming techniques. A new format-driven station type became the norm. Propelled by the development of new kinds of music, such as psychedelic rock and smooth jazz, radio station formats evolved. Since the beginning of this shift, different stations have tended to focus on the music preferred by specific demographics. For example, many people raised on Top 40 radio in the 1950s and 1960s did

not necessarily want to hear modern pop hits, so stations that played older popular songs emerged to meet their needs.

Modern formats cater to aging generations, with certain stations playing the pop hits of the 1950s and early 1960s, while others focus on the pop hits of the late 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. These formats have developed to target narrow, defined audiences with predictable tastes and habits. Ratings services, such as Nielsen Audio, can identify the 10-year age demographic, education level, and even the political leanings of listeners who prefer a particular format. Because advertisers want their commercials to reach an audience likely to purchase their products, this kind of audience targeting remains crucial for attracting advertising revenue.

Top Radio Formats

A Nielsen Audio report inspired the following top radio formats and their respective statistics. The most popular formats and subformats span diverse demographics, underscoring radio's broad appeal. Audience tracking by Nielsen utilizes Portable People Meter technology, incorporating modern measurement qualifiers to accurately capture listener engagement across both traditional broadcast signals and station audio streams.



Source: Coach Steve C. Tucker,
Coach Steve C. Tucker on Talk of the Town radio show,
CC BY-SA 4.0.

News/Talk/Information

The news/talk/information format encompasses AM talk radio, public radio stations featuring talk programming, network news radio, and personality-driven talk radio. This format had a share of 11.3% of all radio listeners aged 18 years or older ("share" represents the percentage of those listening to radio who are listening to a particular genre), though audiences tended to skew older; the genre had a share of 3.9% among the 18-34 age range and 12.7% for those aged 35 and older.

Adult Contemporary

Generally targeted toward individuals over 30, the adult contemporary (AC) format favors pop music from the past 15 to 20 years rather than current hits. Different subformats, such as hot AC (ranked #9), target younger audiences by playing more current songs. In 2024, the AC audience earned a 8.1% share of the audience for people aged 18 years and older, earning the largest share (9.8%) among audience members aged 18-34.

Country

Country music, as a genre, encompasses stations that cater to both older and newer country music. Favored in rural regions of the country, the country music format—featuring artists such as Morgan Wallen, Jelly Roll, and Luke Combs—appeals to both male and female listeners from a variety of income levels. In 2024, country music stations had a 5.7% shared of the audience for people aged 18 and older.

Classic Hits

Nielsen defines the "classic hits" radio format as one that primarily features popular music from the 1970s, 1980s, and

1990s, with a focus on softer-tempo, melodic hits compared to classic rock. These stations often feature hits from popular artists of the 1980s but may also include newer songs by those same artists or by artists who emerged between then and the 2000s. This format had a 5.6% share of audiences aged 18 and over in 2024.

Classic Rock

Classic rock stations typically play rock singles from the 1970s and 1980s, such as "Stairway to Heaven" by Led Zeppelin and "You Shook Me All Night Long" by AC/DC. The distinct yet similar format of album-oriented rock (AOR) focuses on songs that were not released as singles, also known as album cuts. In 2024, classic rock stations had a 5.5% share of the audience aged 18 and over.

Urban Adult Contemporary

The urban contemporary format features modern hits from primarily Black artists—such as Chris Brown, Summer Walker , and SZA—and blends soul, hip-hop, and R&B. Urban contemporary focuses on listeners aged 18–34. It had a 5.5% share of the audience aged 18 and older in 2024.

All Sports

Nielsen uses the label "All Sports" to encompass radio offerings primarily dedicated to live sports coverage, sports commentary/analysis, sports news/updates, and related sports programming. In 2024, sports had a market share of 5.2% among audiences aged 18+, and 5.5% among those aged 35+.

Pop Contemporary Hit Radio

Pop contemporary hit radio, or pop CHR, represents a subformat of contemporary hit radio (CHR). Other subformats of CHR include dance CHR and rhythmic CHR. Branded in the 1980s, this format encompasses stations with a Top 40 orientation that draw on a diverse range of formats, including country, rock, and urban (Ford, 2008). This music, including popular artists like Taylor Swift, Sabrina Carpenter, Billie Eilish, and Teddy Swims, is played in the car more often than at home or at work, and is most listened to in the evenings. The format had a 4.4% share in 2024 among ages 18 and older, though it was much more popular with younger audiences, at 6.9% among ages 18-34.

Mexican Regional

The Mexican regional format features Spanish-language music, primarily from Mexico and South America. In 2024, it ranked eleventh in the nation. Mexican regional's listener base was over 96 percent Hispanic, and the format draws large audiences in the Western and Southwestern regions of the country. The rise of the Mexican regional format illustrates how radio can change rapidly to meet new demographic trends.

An increasingly Spanish–language–speaking population in the United States has also resulted in several distinct Spanish-language radio formats. These include Spanish oldies, Spanish adult hits, Spanish religious music, Spanish tropical music, and Spanish talk, among others. Tejano, a type of music developed in Hispanic Texan communities, has also gained a significant enough audience to become a dedicated format. Mexican Regional radio channels had a 2.8% share of audiences aged 18 and over in 2024.

Other Popular Formats

Radio formats have become so specialized that ratings group Arbitron includes more than 50 designations. Popular genres like rock have given rise to subgenres, including alternative and modern rock. Alternative rock originated as a format played on college stations during the 1980s. It evolved into a mainstream

genre in the following decade, mainly due to the popularity of grunge music. As this music developed, stations began using the term "modern rock" to describe a format dedicated to new rock music. This format has also given rise to the active rock format, which plays modern rock hits alongside older rock hits.

Nostalgia formats have also evolved into several distinct formats. Oldies stations now generally focus on hits from the 1950s and 1960s, while the classic hits format typically selects hits from the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Urban oldies, which focuses on R&B, soul, and other urban music hits from the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, has also become a popular radio format. Formats such as adult hits mix older songs from the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s with a small selection of popular music, while formats like '80s hits pick mainly from the 1980s.

Radio station formats offer an interesting perspective on popular culture in the United States. The evolution of nostalgia formats to include nods to new decades reflects the size and tastes of the nation's aging listeners. Hits from the 1980s remain popular enough with their demographic to have entire stations dedicated to the era, while other generations prefer stations that mix decades. The rise of the country format and the continued popularity of the classic rock format suggest potential cultural trends.

In the digital era, station formatting extends beyond traditional over-the-air signals. Modern broadcast station groups leverage digital streaming apps,

HD Radio multicast channels, and smart speaker integration to deliver highly specialized subformats to niche audiences across the globe. By coupling broadcast signals with digital streams, formats can maintain hyper-targeted demographic focus while reaching listeners well beyond their local geographic coverage area.

6.4 RADIO'S IMPACT ON CULTURE

Since its inception, radio has had an immense impact on American culture. Entire genres of music that audiences now take for granted, such as country and rock, owe their popularity and even existence to early radio programs that publicized new forms of artistic expression.



A farm family listening to their radio in 1930. **Source**: Unknown author or not provided, A Farm Family Listening to Their Radio – NARA – 5729282 (page 1) , public domain.

A New Kind of Mass Media

Mass media, such as newspapers, had thrived for years before the advent of radio. Audiences initially considered the radio a kind of disembodied newspaper. Although this idea provided early proponents with a valuable and familiar way to think about radio, it underestimated the medium's power. Newspapers could reach a broad audience, but radio could reach almost everyone simultaneously. Neither illiteracy nor

even a busy schedule impeded the radio's success—one could now perform an activity and listen to the radio at the same time. This unprecedented reach made radio an instrument of social cohesion, bringing together members of different classes and backgrounds to experience the world as a nation.

Radio programs reflected this nationwide cultural aspect. *Vox Pop*, a show based initially on person-in-the-street interviews, attempted to quantify the United States' growing mass culture. Beginning in 1935, the program billed itself as an unrehearsed "cross-section of what the average person knows" by asking random people an assortment of questions. Many modern television shows still employ this format, not only for viewers' amusement and information but also to encapsulate national culture. *Vox Pop* functioned at a cultural level as an acknowledgment of radio's entry into people's private lives, thereby making them public.

Radio news offered more than just a quick way to find out about events; it allowed U.S. citizens to experience them with the same emotions. During the 1937 Ohio and Mississippi River floods, radio brought the voices of those who suffered and those who fought the rising tides. A West Virginia newspaper explained the strengths of radio in providing emotional voices during such crises: "Thanks to radio...the nation as a whole has had its nerves, its heart, its soul exposed to the needs of its unfortunates...We

are a nation that is integrated and interdependent. We are 'our brother's keeper."

Radio's presence in the home also heralded the evolution of consumer culture in the United States. By 1941, two-thirds of radio programs carried advertising. Radio allowed advertisers to sell products to a captive audience. This kind of mass marketing ushered in a new age of consumer culture, establishing commercial broadcasting as the dominant funding model for American electronic media.



A rehearsal of Orson Welles's *War of the Worlds* broadcast. The program would terrify some listeners, many of whom believed a Martian invasion had commenced. **Source**: Acme Telephoto, Mercury-Theatre-Radio-Rehearsal-1938, public domain.

THE NIGHT RADIO UNLEASHED PANIC: ORSON WELLES AND THE *WAR OF THE WORLDS*

During the 1930s, the aftermath of Orson Welles's notorious *War of the Worlds* broadcast demonstrated radio's power and its significant social influence. On Halloween night in 1938, radio producer Orson Welles told listeners of the *Mercury Theatre on the Air* that his players would treat them to an original adaptation of H. G. Wells' classic science fiction novel of alien invasion, *War of the Worlds*.

The adaptation began like a regular music show, only to be interrupted by a news flash reporting an alien invasion. Many listeners had tuned in late and did not hear the disclaimer, and the adaptation's realism led them to believe aliens had invaded the country.

According to some estimates, an impressive 6 million people listened to the show, with an astonishing 1.7 million believing the account to be truthful. Some listeners called loved ones to say goodbye or ran into the street, armed with weapons, to fight off the

invading Martians in the radio play. In Grover's Mill, New Jersey—where the supposed invasion began—some listeners reported nonexistent fires and fired at a water tower, mistaking it for a Martian landing craft. One listener drove through his garage door in a rush to escape the area. Two Princeton University professors spent the night searching for the meteorite that had supposedly preceded the invasion. As calls came to local police stations, officers explained that they felt equally concerned about the problem. Although the story of the *War of the Worlds* broadcast may seem humorous in retrospect, the event left a lasting trauma on those who believed it. The program fooled individuals from every education level and walk of life, despite the producers' warnings before, during the intermission, and after the program. This event revealed the unquestioning faith that many Americans had in radio. This event demonstrated the power of radio's intimate communication style during the 1930s and 1940s.

Radio and the Development of Popular Music

Radio's impact on music remains one of its most enduring legacies. Before the advent of radio, most popular songs would

spread through piano sheet music or word of mouth. This necessarily limited the types of music that could gain national prominence. Although recording technology had emerged several decades before radio, music played live over the radio sounded better than it did on a record at home. Live music performances thus became a staple of early radio. Many performance venues had their own radio transmitters to broadcast live shows—for example, Harlem's Cotton Club broadcast performances that CBS picked up and broadcast nationwide.

Radio networks mainly played swing jazz, giving the bands and their leaders a widespread audience. Popular bandleaders, including Duke Ellington, Benny Goodman, and Tommy Dorsey, and their jazz bands gained national fame through their radio performances. In contrast, a host of other jazz musicians flourished as radio made the genre increasingly popular nationwide. National networks also played classical music. Often presented in an educational context, this programming had a different tenor than did dance-band programming. NBC promoted the genre through shows such as *Music Appreciation Hour*, which sought to educate both young people and the general public on the nuances of classical music. It established the NBC Symphony Orchestra, a 92-piece ensemble under the direction of the renowned conductor Arturo Toscanini. The orchestra gave its first performance in 1937 and became so popular that Toscanini remained as conductor for 17 years.

The Metropolitan Opera also enjoyed great popularity; its broadcasts in the early 1930s had an audience of 9 million listeners.



Country musician Dolly Parton sings a song on stage during a Grand Ole Opry live broadcast in Nashville, Tennessee. **Source:** Foto de Tech. Sgt. Cherie A. Thurlby, USAF, Dolly parton grand ole opry, public domain.

Regional Sounds Take Hold

The promotional power of radio also gave regional music an immense boost. Local stations often aired programs featuring the area's popular music. Stations such as Nashville, Tennessee's WSM played early country, blues, and folk artists. The history of this station illustrates how radio—and its diverse range of broadcasting—created new perspectives on American culture. In 1927, WSM's *Barn Dance*, which

featured early country music and blues, followed an hour-long classical music program. George Hay, the host of *Barn Dance*, used the juxtaposition of classical and country genres to spontaneously rename the show: "For the past hour we have been listening to music taken largely from Grand Opera, but from now on we will present 'The Grand Ole Opry.'" NBC picked up the program for national syndication in 1939. It still broadcasts today, making it currently one of the longest-running radio programs of all time.

Shreveport, Louisiana's KWKH aired an *Opry*-type show called *Louisiana Hayride*. This program propelled stars such as Hank Williams into the national spotlight. Country music, formerly a mix of folk, blues, and mountain music, came to be seen as a suitable genre for national audiences through his show. Without programs that featured these country and blues artists, Elvis Presley and Johnny Cash would not have become national stars, and country music might not have become a popular genre.

In the 1940s, other Southern stations also began playing rhythm and blues records recorded by Black artists. Artists such as Wynonie Harris, famous for his rendition of Roy Brown's "Good Rockin' Tonight," received airtime when White disc jockeys tried to imitate the sound of Black Southern musicians. During the late 1940s, Black individuals owned and operated both Memphis, Tennessee's WDIA and Atlanta, Georgia's WERD. These disc jockeys often provided

a measure of community leadership at a time when few Black individuals held powerful positions.

Radio's Lasting Influences

Radio technology changed the way that musicians performed popular music. Because of the use of microphones, audiences could hear vocalists more clearly than the band, enabling singers to use a wider vocal range and create more expressive styles. This innovation made singers an integral part of popular music's image. The use of microphones similarly allowed individual musicians to perform solos or lead parts, a practice less encouraged before the advent of radio. Radio's exposure also led to more rapid turnover in popular music. Before the advent of radio, jazz bands played the same arrangements for several years without them becoming stale, but as radio broadcasts reached a broad audience, musicians had to produce new arrangements and songs at a more rapid pace to keep up with changing tastes.

The spotlight of radio brought artists' personalities to the forefront of popular music, giving them newfound notoriety. Phil Harris, the bandleader from the *Jack Benny Show*, became the star of his program. Other famous musicians used radio talent shows to gain fame. Popular programs such as *Major Bowes and His Original Amateur Hour* featured unknown entertainers seeking fame through exposure to the show's large audience. Major Bowes used a gong to usher bad performers offstage, often contemptuously dismissing them. However, not all performers struck out; successful singers such as Frank Sinatra debuted on the program.



Major Bowes hosted *Major Bowes and His Original Amateur Hour*. This widely popular 1930s radio talent show launched future stars like Frank Sinatra while famously using a gong to dismiss unsuccessful performers. **Source**: NBC Radio-NBC photo, Major Bowes Amateur Hour 1935, public domain.

Television, much like modern popular music, owes a significant debt to the Golden Age of Radio. Major radio

networks, such as NBC, ABC, and CBS, became—and remain—major forces in television, and their radio programming decisions laid the groundwork for television's development. Actors, writers, and directors who worked in radio transferred their talents to early television, using radio's successes as models.

Radio and Politics

Over the years, radio has had a considerable influence on the political landscape of the United States. In the past, government leaders relied on radio to convey messages to the public, such as President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "fireside chats." The government also used radio to disseminate propaganda during World War II. The War Department established a Radio Division in its Bureau of Public Relations as early as 1941. Programs such as the *Treasury Hour* used radio drama to raise revenue through the sale of war bonds, but other government efforts took a decidedly political turn. The federal Office of Facts and Figures funded Norman Corwin's *This Is War!* to garner support for the war effort directly. It featured programs that prepared listeners to make personal sacrifices—including death—to win the war. The program also featured direct political content, declaring the New Deal as successful and bolstering Roosevelt's image through comparisons with Lincoln.

THE ORIGINAL AIRWAVES INFLUENCER: FDR'S MASTERCLASS IN RADIO POLITICS



During his presidency, Franklin D. Roosevelt delivered fireside chats, a series of radio broadcasts in which he spoke directly to the American people.
Source: UNC Greensboro Special Collections and University Archives – Franklin Roosevelt photograph, 1940s – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Depression-era radio talks, or "fireside chats," remain one of the most famous uses of radio in politics. While governor of New York, Roosevelt had utilized radio as a political tool, so he quickly adopted it to explain the unprecedented actions his administration would take to address the economic fallout of the Great Depression. His first speech took place only one week after his inauguration. Roosevelt had closed all of the banks in the country for four days while the government dealt with a national banking crisis, and he used the radio to explain his actions directly to the American people.

Roosevelt's first radio address set a distinct tone as he employed informal speech in the hopes of inspiring confidence in the American people and of helping them stave off the kind of panic that could have destroyed the

entire banking system. Roosevelt understood both the intimacy of radio and its assertive outreach. He was thus able to strike a balance between a personal tone and a message intended for millions. This relaxed approach inspired a CBS executive to name the series the "fireside chats." Roosevelt delivered a total of 27 of these 15- to 30-minute-long addresses to estimated audiences of 30 million to 40 million people, then a quarter of the U.S. population. Roosevelt's use of radio served as both a testament to his skills and savvy as a politician and a demonstration of radio's power and ubiquity during this period. At the time, no other form of mass media could have had the same effect.

Indeed, the government has used radio for its purposes. Still, it has had an even greater impact on politics by serving as "the ultimate arena for free speech." Such infamous radio firebrands as Father Charles Coughlin, a Roman Catholic priest whose radio program opposed the New Deal, criticized Jews, and supported Nazi policies, aptly demonstrated this capability early in radio's history. In subsequent decades, radio supported the careers of notable politicians who leveraged broadcast experience into political office, including former U.S. Senator Al Franken of Minnesota, former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, and former Vice President Mike Pence , who spent years as a conservative talk radio host before entering Congress. Talk show hosts have gained significant

political influence. Until he died in 2021, conservative talk show host Rush Limbaugh was widely viewed as a primary driving force and de facto leader within the Republican Party.

The Importance of Talk Radio

Modern talk radio programs exemplify a significant contemporary convergence of radio and politics. The genre, which gained widespread national prominence in the late 1980s, features a host who takes callers, analyzes news events, and discusses a wide variety of social issues. Talk radio hosts gain and retain their listeners by sheer force of personality, and some employ provocative, shocking, or confrontational rhetoric to convey their message. These hosts have ranged from syndicated conservative radio figures like Sean Hannity, Mark Levin, and Glenn Beck, to high-



Sean Hannity has one of the most popular talk radio programs in the country. **Source**: The White House from Washington, DC, Sean Hannity 2020, public domain.

profile shock jocks such as Howard Stern. In recent years, political commentary has expanded beyond terrestrial AM/FM dials into the digital podcast ecosystem, where shows like *The Joe Rogan Experience*, *The Daily*, *The Ben Shapiro Show*, and *Pod Save America* command millions of regular listeners.

Repeal of the Fairness Doctrine

While talk radio first emerged during the 1920s, its transformation into a contemporary cultural and political force
occurred during the mid-to-late 1980s, following the repeal of the Fairness Doctrine. This doctrine, established in 1949, required any station broadcasting a political point of view over the air to allow equal time to all reasonable dissenting views. Despite its noble intentions of safeguarding public airwaves for diverse views, the doctrine had long attracted dissent. Opponents of the Fairness Doctrine claimed that it had a chilling effect on political discourse, as broadcasters, rather than risk government intervention, avoided programs that some may find divisive or controversial. In 1987, the FCC, under the Reagan administration, repealed the regulation, setting the stage for a boom in AM talk radio. By the early 2000s, the number of talk radio stations in the United States had increased 17-fold.

The end of the Fairness Doctrine allowed stations to broadcast programs without worrying about finding an

opposing point of view to balance the host's stated opinions. Radio hosts representing all points of the political spectrum could say anything that they wanted to—within FCC limits—without fear of rebuttal.

The Revitalization and Modern Challenges of AM

The migration of music stations to the FM band during the 1960s and 1970s created significant space on the AM band for talk shows. With the Fairness Doctrine no longer a hindrance, these programs rapidly gained momentum during the late 1980s and 1990s. In 1989, talk radio hosts railed against a proposed congressional pay increase, and their listeners became incensed. House Speaker Jim Wright received a deluge of faxes protesting it from irate listeners from stations all over the country. Ultimately, Congress canceled the pay increase, and various print outlets acknowledged talk radio's influence on the decision. Propelled by political events, talk radio stations increased from approximately 200 in the early 1980s to more than 1,300 across the country.

In recent years, the AM band has faced new technological hurdles. As automotive manufacturers transition toward electric vehicles, several automakers attempted to remove AM radios from new models, citing electromagnetic interference generated by electric motors that degrades signal quality. This move sparked

bipartisan congressional action to preserve AM radio, with lawmakers citing its vital historical role in national emergency distribution networks, public safety, and rural broadcasting access.

FROM ALIENS TO AIRWAVES: THE UNLIKELY REIGN OF PARANORMAL TALK RADIO



Source: Dquack wolf, Coast to Coast AM Logo 2024 , CC BY-SA 4.0.

Although political programs unquestionably dominate AM talk radio, that dial also hosts a type of show that some radio listeners may never have experienced: late at night, a program airs featuring stories about ghosts, alien abductions, and fantastic creatures. It's not a fictional drama program,

however, but instead a call-in talk show called *Coast to Coast AM*. The show has maintained a top-tier ranking among national AM talk radio programs for decades—a remarkable feat, considering its late-night time slot and unconventional format.

Coast to Coast AM, which began in the 1980s with host Art Bell, focuses on topics that mainstream media outlets rarely treat seriously. Regular guests include ghost investigators, psychics, Bigfoot biographers, alien abductees, and deniers of the moon landing. The guests take calls from listeners who ask questions or talk about their own paranormal experiences or theories.

Coast to Coast AM's long-time host, George Noory, has continued the show's format, retaining millions of dedicated listeners across hundreds of affiliate stations. In many markets, its ratings have rivaled those of top daytime political hosts. The enduring success of *Coast to Coast AM* serves as a continuing testament to the diversity and unexpected potential of spoken-word radio.

On-Air Political Influence

As talk radio's popularity grew during the 1990s and 2000s, it quickly became an established launching pad and platform for political ambitions. Numerous former or aspiring politicians

have utilized the format to enter public service or maintain public relevance. Conservative hosts long dominated the terrestrial AM talk radio format, following the path forged by Rush Limbaugh, whose syndicated program began shortly after the repeal of the Fairness Doctrine and lasted until his passing in 2021.

During the 2000s and 2010s, conservative talk radio maintained strong momentum through hosts such as Michael Savage, Sean Hannity, and Mark Levin. Earlier attempts to build a competing liberal terrestrial network, such as the Air America network, folded due to financial struggles. However, Air America served as a launchpad for prominent media and political figures, including MS NOW host Rachel Maddow and former Minnesota Senator Al Franken. In the modern media landscape, progressive political commentary has largely moved away from commercial AM broadcast radio and found massive commercial success in the digital podcast space through shows produced by outlets like Crooked Media and *The New York Times*.



The number and popularity of talk radio shows increased dramatically following the 1987 repeal of the Fairness Doctrine. **Source**: JD Lasica – Blogworld Talk Radio – CC BY-NC 2.0.

Freedom of Speech and Radio Controversies

While the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution gives radio personalities the freedom to say nearly anything they want on the air without fear of prosecution (except in cases of obscenity, slander, or incitement of violence, which Chapter 15 will discuss in greater detail), it does not protect them from being fired from their jobs when their controversial comments create public outrage. Many talk radio hosts push the boundaries of acceptable speech to engage listeners and boost ratings. Still, sometimes radio hosts push too far, unleashing a storm of controversy that leads to swift termination or cancellation.

Making (and Unmaking) a Career out of Controversy



Howard Stern's massive popularity lends him considerable influence, enabling him to weather controversy and maintain a successful career. **Source**: Bill Norton, Howard Stern, CC BY 2.0.

Talk radio host Howard Stern built his career on creating controversy. Despite multiple FCC indecency fines early in his career, Stern became one of the highest-paid and most popular radio personalities in media history. Stern's radio broadcasts historically featured adult humor and candid discussions, creating an atmosphere where "anything goes." Because his on-air antics frequently generated controversy that jeopardized traditional corporate sponsorships and risked FCC fines, Stern

signed a landmark contract in 2005 with Sirius Satellite Radio, a subscription-based platform exempt from FCC broadcast regulation. This allowed him to maintain his broadcast style without traditional oversight.

Other radio hosts who have gotten themselves in trouble with poorly considered on-air comments have not shared his luck. In April 2007, Don Imus, host of the long-running *Imus in the Morning*, received a suspension for racist and sexist comments made about the Rutgers University women's basketball team. Though he publicly apologized, the scandal continued to draw negative media attention, and CBS canceled his show to avoid further unfavorable publicity and advertiser withdrawals. Though he returned to the airwaves in December of that year at a different station, the experience resulted in a significant setback to Imus's career and public image. Similarly, syndicated conservative talk show host Dr. Laura Schlessinger ended her radio show in 2010 due to pressure from radio stations and sponsors after her repeated use of a racial epithet on a broadcast incited a public backlash.



Joe Rogan hosts *The Joe Rogan Experience*, a massively popular long-form podcast that shifted modern audio commentary from traditional terrestrial radio to direct digital distribution. **Source**: Do512. Joe_Rogan_SWSW9A7A1718March 13, 2014Drew_DeGennaro . CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

In the digital age, Joe Rogan has emerged as a similarly influential figure, navigating and often generating controversy through his podcast, *The Joe Rogan Experience*. With an estimated audience of tens of millions per episode and major multi-year distribution deals with Spotify valued in the hundreds of millions of dollars, Rogan's platform is immense. Like Stern's move to satellite radio, Rogan's digital distribution model allows him to operate outside the traditional broadcast regulations and advertiser pressures that

constrain terrestrial radio hosts. His long-form interviews, covering a vast range of topics from science and politics to conspiracy theories, often feature controversial guests and discussions that have drawn criticism for spreading misinformation or promoting divisive viewpoints.

Despite these controversies, including petitions to remove him from Spotify and artists boycotting the platform, Rogan's immense listenership and the direct relationship he fosters with his audience have largely insulated his career from the severe setbacks faced by traditional radio hosts like Imus or Schlessinger. This demonstrates a significant shift in how influential figures can build and sustain careers by leveraging direct digital distribution to bypass traditional broadcast gatekeepers and the associated censorship and financial pressures.

Broadcasters on traditional airwaves remain strictly accountable to network station owners and local market expectations. A notable instance from July 2023 involved Don Geronimo, a Washington, D.C., radio host, who was fired from WBIG "BIG 100" after making sexist remarks about female sports reporter Sharla McBride during a broadcast from a Washington Commanders training camp. He referred to her as "Barbie girl" and asked whether she was a cheerleader, prompting widespread condemnation and his swift dismissal by iHeartMedia.

Another example from October 2023 saw Oklahoma City radio personality Ronnie Kay lose his job at KOMA 92.5. He

was reportedly fired after an on-air comment regarding Columbus Day and Indigenous Peoples' Day, where he stated, "I don't know what indigenous means and I don't care." These incidents highlight that, despite the evolving media landscape, radio hosts remain accountable to their employers and the public for on-air comments, particularly when deemed offensive or disparaging.

As the examples of these talk radio hosts demonstrate, the issue of freedom of speech on the airwaves often gets complicated by the need for radio stations to make a profit. Outspoken or shocking radio hosts can draw large audiences, attracting advertisers to sponsor their shows and generating revenue for their stations. Although the hosts may offend some listeners and deter them from tuning in, as long as they continue to attract advertising dollars, their employers usually allow the hosts to speak freely on the air. However, suppose a host's behavior sparks significant controversy, causing advertisers to withdraw their sponsorship to avoid tarnishing their brands. In that case, the radio station will often fire the host and look for someone who can better sustain advertising partnerships. Radio hosts' right to free speech does not compel their employer to give them the forum to exercise it. Popular hosts like Don Imus may find a home on the air again once the furor has died down, but radio hosts concerned about the stability of their careers should remember the practical limits on their freedom of speech.

6.5 RADIO'S NEW FUTURE

Radio still has a future, despite critics' frequent predictions of its demise throughout its history. The medium's inherent portability gives it an advantage over other media that require an individual's full attention, such as television or print. The simplicity of radio has enabled a wide range of applications.

In recent years, new technologies have promised to expand the reach of radio and enhance the types of programming it offers. Satellite and HD radio have increased the amount and diversity of programming by expanding the number of stations. Internet radio and streaming services have increased accessibility, allowing practically anyone with access to an internet connection to create live broadcasts or distribute on-demand audio worldwide. These new technologies promise to make radio an enduring, innovative medium.



Source: Michael Sheehan, XM Satellite Radio – 2012 Chrysler 300S (6996092560), cropped, CC BY 2.0.

Satellite Radio

In 1998, the FCC awarded licenses to two businesses interested in creating a radio version of cable television, without the cables. This act signaled the beginning of satellite radio, and the companies that emerged were XM and Sirius. These two networks sold special receivers that could pick up satellite transmissions broadcasting a wide range of formats on different channels to listeners who paid a monthly fee for the commercial-free programming.

Like cable television, satellite radio did not have to censor its disc jockeys or guests for profanity. This attracted somewhat controversial radio personalities known for their conflicts with the FCC, such as Howard Stern and Opie and Anthony (who abruptly ended their show in 2014 after

SiriusXM fired Anthony Cumia for making racist and hate-filled remarks on social media). The networks also drew hosts such as NPR's Bob Edwards, pop culture figures like Andy Cohen, and Bruce Springsteen's guitarist "Little" Steven Van Zandt to create their own shows. Because listeners paid a single price for access to all the channels, disc jockeys experienced less pressure to adhere to the limited-playlist style of programming commonly found on terrestrial radio stations. In 2008, Sirius and XM merged to form Sirius XM. In 2010, the company recorded its first profits and has remained profitable since then.



Source: LukeDXer, KWMU HD1 cropped, CC BY-SA 4.0

HD Radio

Developed around 2001 to help terrestrial radio stations compete with emerging satellite radio technology, HD Radio provides a digital transmission of radio signals, resulting in

reduced static and improved sound quality, even for AM stations. Not only does HD Radio provide higher audio quality, but the technology also allows for signal compression, enabling one station to air so-called shadow stations on the same frequency as its regular broadcast. Although listeners require an HD radio to receive these channels, they incur no subscription fee, as independent stations provide their programming as needed.

Stations such as NPR's WAMU in Washington, DC, broadcast different types of programming on their shadow channels. For example, the station's 88.5-1 broadcasts WAMU's regular analog schedule, while 88.5-2 broadcasts bluegrass and country music programming.

HD radio enables current broadcasters to offer content that they would typically reserve for more commercial programs. WAMU's bluegrass and country shadow station plays content originally played over the airwaves but relegated to the Internet in favor of more marketable programs. The innovation of HD radio allowed the station to reintroduce the programs without risking its financial stability. With this economic freedom, HD radio offers a host of programming possibilities for traditional radio, though it has not experienced the same explosion as streaming and podcasting.

Internet Radio and Podcasting

Although technological advances of the past 50 years, such as audio recorders and microphones, have made creating a radio program simple, broadcasting that program presents difficulties for the average person. The expansion of the Internet, however, has turned this limitation into a manageable hurdle for both businesses and individuals.

Internet Radio

At its core, Internet radio provides a platform for streaming audio programs over the Internet. As early as 1994, radio stations such as Chapel Hill, North Carolina's WXYC began broadcasting their signal over the Internet, potentially gaining a worldwide audience. Online-only radio stations soon followed. Stream distribution platforms and turnkey hosting services have enabled webcasters to stream their programs directly to global listening audiences.

Pandora represents a distinctive type of internet music service. While it now offers a broader range of features, its foundational model allows users to create highly personalized "radio stations." A listener establishes an account and provides a "seed"—a song, composer, or artist. The service then leverages its proprietary Music Genome Project. This

sophisticated analysis system catalogs songs based on hundreds of musical attributes (from lyrics and instrumentation to harmony and vocal qualities). Using this detailed analysis, Pandora curates a continuous stream of music that aligns with the user's initial selection. Listeners retain control by giving songs a "thumbs up" or "thumbs down" to refine their station's playlist, and can create new stations based on different seeds. While Pandora has expanded to include podcasts and on-demand listening for premium subscribers, its intelligent, algorithm-driven custom radio remains a core part of the service, setting it apart from purely on-demand platforms.

Today's digital music services primarily operate on a freemium model, offering both ad-supported listening and ad-free paid subscriptions. Pandora, for example, continues to rely on a mix of on-screen and audio advertisements for its free tier, while also providing premium, ad-free options with additional features. Pandora competes with Spotify, Apple Music, and YouTube Music, all of which offer extensive tiers providing access to vast catalogs, user-curated and algorithmic playlists, and genre-specific "radio stations." Other major players with ad-supported options or free radio-like experiences include Amazon Music (via its free tier) and iHeartRadio, which also integrates traditional terrestrial radio stations with custom digital channels. These platforms use a combination of audio, display, and video advertisements to monetize their free services and encourage users to upgrade to ad-free subscription plans for an enhanced listening experience.

Problems of Internet Broadcasting

Despite the rise of Internet radio over the past several years, its prospects for success remain uncertain. As the trend gained momentum, many inexperienced broadcasters faced royalty issues, while experienced broadcasters encountered new legal matters related to streaming. Stations that broadcast over the airwaves must pay publishing royalties to the musicians and songwriters behind the recordings. Rather than pay an individual musician or songwriter each time a recording gets played, however, broadcasters—including radio stations, coffee shops, and restaurants—pay for a blanket license that allows them to play any song. As Internet broadcasting grew, musicians and record labels began demanding royalties from Internet stations and specifying new licensing restrictions. For instance, Pandora Radio's licensing and service model today varies significantly between its free, ad-supported tier and its paid subscription tiers (Pandora Plus and Premium).

For users on the free tier, limitations apply. They are generally restricted to a limited number of skips per hour per station, with a daily cap across all stations. However, they may be offered the option to earn additional skips or replays by engaging with video advertisements. For Pandora Plus and Pandora Premium subscribers, these restrictions are lifted, primarily providing access to unlimited skips and replays, as well as ad-free listening. Additionally,

Premium subscribers have on-demand access to Pandora's full music catalog.

Other issues arose as terrestrial stations began streaming on the Internet. Since its inception, the medium has struggled with questions such as whether advertisers should pay for commercials played both over the Internet and over the air, and what types of licenses Internet radio stations should use. Organizations like SoundExchange collect digital performance royalties on behalf of recording artists and master rights owners. The federal government played a critical role in mediating royalty agreements between webcasters and record companies, notably through the Webcaster Settlement Act of 2009. This landmark legislation established a framework for internet-only stations, often referred to as "pure-play" stations, to negotiate royalty rates for the digital public performance of sound recordings. These rates vary by coverage category and service type, aiming to strike a balance between fair compensation for artists and copyright holders and the financial viability of internet radio platforms. While early acts facilitated specific agreements, the royalty landscape remains dynamic. The Copyright Royalty Board regularly reviews and sets new statutory royalty rates for subsequent periods, ensuring ongoing negotiations and adjustments that reflect the evolving digital music industry. This continuous process aims to strike a balance between the interests of content creators and digital broadcasters.

Podcasting

Podcasting has fundamentally reshaped the audio landscape by offering on-demand programs, primarily consumed via streaming through dedicated apps like Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and YouTube, though download options remain available. The term "podcasting" originated from the use of portable MP3 players, such as Apple's now-discontinued iPod, to access these programs at the listener's convenience. Many traditional terrestrial radio stations and networks have fully embraced podcasting to supplement their over-the-air broadcasts, repurposing popular radio shows as podcasts or creating exclusive digital-first audio content. Because they are discrete programs rather than continuous streams, podcasts



Alex Cooper hosts *Call Her Daddy*, a hugely successful podcast that evolved from a candid sex-and-relationships show into a multi-million-dollar media brand featuring high-profile celebrity interviews. **Source**: Barstool Radio Clips, Alex Cooper on Barstool Radio Clips , CC BY 3.0.

generally represent a more accessible medium for individual or small-team production than managing a live Internet radio station.

The accessibility of podcasting has empowered countless creators, leading to substantial careers and commercial ventures. Beyond early successes like Mignon Fogarty's *Grammar Girl*, which, within a year of its launch, had garnered 1 million downloads and received national acclaim, the modern podcasting scene boasts numerous independent and network-backed shows that have attracted vast audiences, generated significant advertising revenue, and expanded into other media. For instance, Joe Rogan's *The Joe Rogan Experience* commands millions of listeners per episode and secured groundbreaking multi-year distribution deals with platforms like Spotify. Similarly, pop-culture and lifestyle shows like *Call Her Daddy* have built massive digital brands and lucrative licensing agreements. In contrast, narrative journalism podcasts such as *The Daily* from *The New York Times* demonstrate the power of audio storytelling to inform millions daily. These examples underscore that podcasting no longer merely offers a potential vision for radio's future; it is a central and thriving component of the contemporary audio medium, demonstrating how radio has evolved beyond its traditional broadcast limitations into a highly diverse, personalized, and on-demand experience.

CHAPTER 7: MOVIES



Source: Stephanie Watson. Weird movie watching. CC BY 2.0.

- 7.1 Movies
- 7.2 The History of Movies
- 7.3 Movies and Culture
- 7.4 Issues and Trends in Film
- 7.5 The Influence of New Technology

7.1 MOVIES



Movie theaters, such as the Senator Theater in Baltimore, Maryland, had to close their doors during the COVID-19 lockdown. **Source**: Austin Kirk, Senator Theater – Circa COVID-19 (51050796756), CC BY 2.0.

The lights dim, the trailers roll, and the familiar scent of popcorn fills the air – for decades, this was the quintessential movie-going experience. This shared communal ritual defined the film industry. From the silent era's flickering images to the golden age of Hollywood and the blockbuster spectacles of the late 20th century, cinema thrived on this model: studios produced, distributors marketed, and

theaters exhibited, drawing millions into darkened auditoriums worldwide. This historical arc, characterized by technological evolution from black-and-white to color, from silent to sound, and from analog to digital, consistently pointed toward larger screens and more immersive collective experiences. However, the dawn of the 21st century has profoundly reshaped this trajectory, pushing the film industry into an unprecedented era of transformation where traditional moviegoing coexists with digital streaming and on-demand access.

A major catalyst for this radical shift was the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced widespread lockdowns and social distancing. As a result, movie theaters, long the bedrock of the industry, faced existential threats. Chains worldwide shuttered their doors, some permanently, while others grappled with reduced capacities and shifting audience habits upon reopening. This unprecedented disruption had a cascading effect on studios. With their primary revenue stream – the traditional theatrical box office – temporarily drying up, the standard release strategy, which relied on exclusive cinema windows before any home viewing, became untenable.

The most visible consequence was the widespread delay of major film releases and the rapid experimentation with release formats. Blockbusters poised to dominate the box office, like Marvel's *Black Widow*, became emblems of this uncertainty. Initially slated for a May 2020 release, *Black Widow* endured

multiple postponements before ultimately adopting a hybrid release strategy in July 2021, launching simultaneously in theaters and on Disney+ Premier Access. This decision, while a lifeline for Disney's streaming service, ignited a fierce debate about theatrical exclusivity and led to a high-profile lawsuit by its star, Scarlett Johansson, over lost box-office bonuses. Similar dilemmas faced nearly every major studio, as films ranging from the James Bond installment *No Time to Die* to *Top Gun: Maverick* and *F9* saw their release dates shuffled, sometimes for years. This era of disruption not only created a significant backlog of content but also permanently accelerated the industry's shift toward flexible, shortened release windows and direct-to-consumer digital platforms.

Yet, even amidst the turmoil, the industry demonstrated its adaptive capacity, sometimes finding unexpected avenues for success. A fascinating and indicative trend in the post-pandemic landscape is the emergence of concert films and experiential content that fill cinematic voids. The monumental success of Taylor Swift's *The Eras Tour* concert film in late 2023 was a revelation. Eschewing traditional studio distribution, Swift partnered directly with AMC Theatres, shattering box-office records for concert films and proving that audiences would flock to cinemas for unique, communal experiences, even when they weren't traditional narrative features. Similarly, Beyoncé's *Renaissance: A Film by Beyoncé* followed suit, distributing through AMC and further

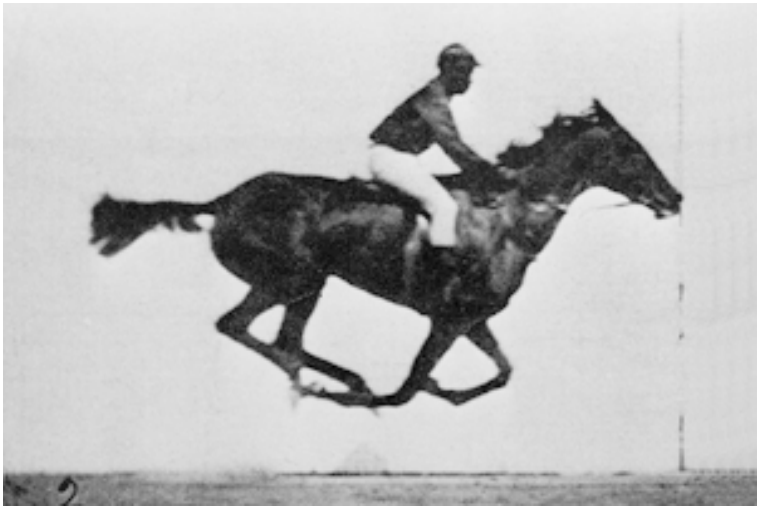
solidifying this new pathway for artists to bring their blockbuster tours to the big screen. These events highlighted the power of an engaged fan base and offered theaters a much-needed boost, demonstrating a new model for content acquisition and revenue generation.

Beyond these high-profile concert films, the industry is experimenting with alternative content and engaging audiences through direct, event-driven experiences. Fathom Events, a leading content distributor to cinemas, has specialized in bringing a diverse range of programming to the big screen. This includes not just live opera and ballet, but also anime premieres, classic film re-releases, documentaries, and special fan engagements for popular franchises. Fathom Events creates unique, limited-time theatrical showings that build a sense of community and urgency, offering compelling reasons for audiences to return to theaters beyond just seeing the latest wide release. This reflects a broader understanding that the movie theater of the future might function as a multi-purpose entertainment venue, offering a more diverse array of content to cater to varied tastes and preferences.

In essence, the contemporary film industry is a dynamic ecosystem wrestling with the legacy of its past and the undeniable pressures of a digital future. While the core magic of storytelling endures, the avenues through which those stories reach audiences are more fragmented and diverse than ever before. The legacy of windowing shifts forced studios to re-evaluate release strategy, embrace streaming platforms, and

explore innovative event content. The success of concert films and experiential events underscores a crucial lesson: the communal magic of cinema persists, but it thrives by adapting, innovating, and continually seeking new ways to capture the collective imagination of an audience that increasingly consumes entertainment across multiple screens and platforms.

7.2 THE HISTORY OF MOVIES



Eadweard Muybridge took this iconic sequence of photographs in 1878, famously inspired by a bet with former California governor Leland Stanford. Stanford wagered that all four of a horse's hooves left the ground simultaneously during a full gallop. Muybridge's groundbreaking "Animal Locomotion" study, using a series of cameras triggered in rapid succession, decisively proved Stanford correct. This experiment not only resolved a long-standing biological debate but also revealed the principle of sequential imaging necessary to create the illusion of movement. By rapidly displaying these individual frames, Muybridge demonstrated the foundational concept that would later evolve into motion pictures, marking a pivotal moment in the history of visual media and laying the groundwork for the invention of cinema. **Source**: Eadweard Muybridge creator QS:P170,Q190568 Animation by User Waugsberg, Muybridge race horse animated, public domain.



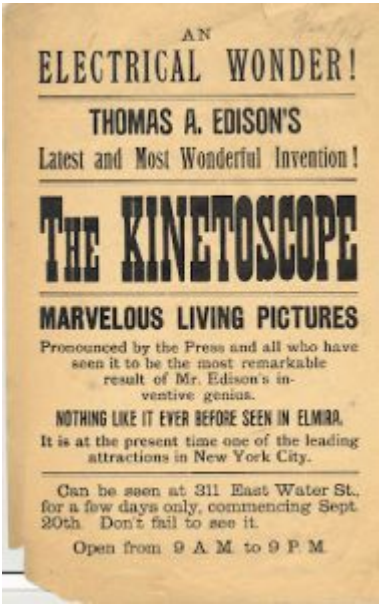
Étienne-Jules Marey used a chronophotographic gun for taking repeated photos of objects in motion. **Source**: Unknown author, Étienne-Jules Marey in Naples, public domain.

The movie industry originated in the early 19th century through a series of technological developments: the creation of photography, the discovery of the illusion of motion by combining individual still images by luminaries such as Eadweard Muybridge and Étienne-Jules Marey, and the study of human and animal locomotion. The history presented here begins at the culmination of these technological developments, where the idea of the motion picture as an entertainment industry first emerged. Since then, the industry has seen extraordinary transformations, some driven by the artistic visions of individual participants, some by commercial necessity, and still others by accident. The complexity of cinema's history prohibits this book from mentioning every important innovator and movement. Nonetheless, this chapter will help readers understand the broad arc of the development of a

medium that has captured the imaginations of audiences worldwide for over a century.

The Beginnings: Motion Picture Technology of the Late 19th Century

While watching movies on smartphones may seem like a drastic departure from the communal nature of modern film viewing, in some ways, the small-format, single-viewer screen display recaptures the early roots of film. Inventor Thomas Edison, along with his assistant William Dickson, introduced the **kinetoscope** in 1891. This device would become the predecessor to the motion picture projector. The kinetoscope consisted of a cabinet with a window through which individual viewers could experience the illusion of a moving image. A perforated celluloid film strip with a sequence of pictures on it was rapidly spooled between a light bulb and a lens, creating the illusion of motion. The images viewers could see in the kinetoscope captured events and performances that Edison staged at his film studio in East Orange, New Jersey, especially for the Edison kinetograph (the camera that produced kinetoscope film sequences): circus performances, dancing women, cat fights, boxing matches, and even a man sneezing.



1894 advertisement for exhibition demonstrating Thomas Edison's kinetoscope. **Source**: Albert Samuel/T. S. Pratt (shop owners), Kinetoscope ad (Elmira – 1894), public domain.

As the kinetoscope gained popularity, the Edison Company began installing machines in hotel lobbies, amusement parks, and penny arcades. Soon, kinetoscope parlors—where customers could pay around 25 cents for admission to a bank of machines—opened around the country. However, when friends and collaborators suggested that Edison find a way to project his kinetoscope images for audience viewing, he refused, claiming that such an invention would make less profit.

Because Edison hadn't secured an international patent for his invention, variations of the kinetoscope soon appeared throughout Europe. This new form of entertainment achieved

instant success, and many mechanics and inventors, seeing an opportunity, began toying with methods of projecting moving images onto a larger screen. However, the invention of two brothers, Auguste and Louis Lumière, who were manufacturers of photographic goods in Lyon, France, saw the most commercial success. In 1895, the brothers patented the **cinématographe** (the origin of the term *cinema*), a lightweight film projector that also functioned as a camera and printer. Unlike the Edison kinetograph, the cinématographe's lightweight design made outdoor filming much easier. Over the years, the brothers used the camera to create well over 1,000 short films, most of which depicted scenes from everyday life.

Believing that audiences would get bored watching scenes that they could just as easily observe on a casual walk around the city, Louis Lumière claimed that the cinema was "an invention without a future." Still, demand for motion pictures grew so rapidly that representatives of the Lumière company soon traveled throughout Europe and the world, showing half-hour screenings of the company's films. While cinema initially competed with other popular forms of entertainment—such as circuses, vaudeville acts, theater troupes, magic shows, and many others—it would eventually supplant them as the main commercial attraction. Within a year of the Lumières' first commercial screening, competing film companies offered moving-picture acts in music halls and



In December 1895, in the basement lounge of the Grand Café, Rue des Capucines in Paris, the Lumières held the world's first-ever commercial film screening, a sequence of about 10 short scenes, including the brother's first film seen above, Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory , a segment lasting less than a minute and depicting workers leaving the family's photographic instrument factory at the end of the day (Encyclopedia of the Age of Industry and Empire). **Source**: Craig Duffy – Workers Leaving The Lumiere Factory – CC BY-NC 2.0.

vaudeville theaters across Great Britain. In the United States, the Edison Company, having purchased the rights to an improved projector called the **Vitascope**, held its first film screening in April 1896 at Koster and Bial's Music Hall in Herald Square, New York City.

Modern audiences may struggle to comprehend the film's profound impact on its original viewers. However, the sheer volume of reports about the early audience's disbelief, delight, and visual fascination suggests that many people were overwhelmed by the novelty of seeing photorealistic motion. Spectators gasped at the lifelike motion in films such as Robert Paul's *Rough Sea at Dover* or the arrival of a locomotive in the Lumière brothers' *L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat*. While popular urban legends later claimed that panicked audiences ran screaming from the theater at the sight of an oncoming train, film historians note that early viewers were far more captivated by the illusion of lifelike movement itself. Even the public's perception of cinema as a medium differed considerably from the contemporary understanding: to them, the moving image improved upon the photograph—a familiar medium for viewers—, and this helps explain why the earliest films documented events in brief segments rather than attempting to tell stories. During this novelty period of cinema, the phenomenon of the film projector itself interested audiences, so

vaudeville halls advertised the kind of projector they used (for example, "The Vitascope—Edison's Latest Marvel"), rather than the names of the films.

By the close of the 19th century, as public excitement over the moving picture's novelty gradually wore off, filmmakers began to experiment with the medium's possibilities as a means of expression in itself (not simply as a tool for documentation, analogous to the camera or the phonograph). Technical innovations allowed filmmakers like Parisian cinema owner Georges Méliès to experiment with special effects that produced seemingly magical transformations on screen: flowers turned into women, people disappeared in puffs of smoke, a man appeared where a woman had just been standing, and other similar tricks.



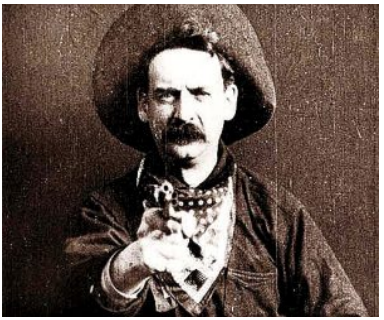
Georges Méliès's *Trip to the Moon* incorporated fantasy elements and used "trick" filming techniques, both of which heavily influenced future filmmakers. **Source**: Georges Méliès creator QS:P170,Q152272, Le Voyage dans la lune, public domain.

Not only did Méliès, a former magician, invent the "trick film," which producers in England and the United States began to imitate, but he also transformed cinema into the narrative medium it is today. Whereas filmmakers had previously created only single-shot films lasting a minute or less, Méliès began combining these short films to create longer stories. His 30-scene *Trip to the Moon*, a film based on Jules Verne's novel, likely stands as one of the most widely seen productions in cinema's first decade.

However, Méliès never developed his technique beyond treating the narrative film as a staged theatrical performance; his camera, representing the vantage point of an audience facing a stage, never moved during a scene. In 1912, Méliès released his last commercially successful production, *The Conquest of the Pole*. From then on, he lost audiences to filmmakers who experimented with more sophisticated techniques.

The Nickelodeon Craze (1904–1908)

Edwin S. Porter, a projectionist and engineer for the Edison Company, broke with the stage-like compositions of Méliès-style films in his 12-minute film, *The Great Train Robbery*. The film incorporated elements of editing, camera pans, rear projections, and diagonally composed shots that created a sense of continuity of action. Not only did *The Great Train Robbery* establish the realistic narrative as a standard in cinema, but it also became the first major box-office hit. Its success paved the way for the growth of the film industry, as investors, recognizing the motion picture's great moneymaking potential, began opening the first permanent film theaters around the country.



Screenshot of the end of the film *The Great Train Robbery*, which caused some audience members to panic when the character pointed his gun at them and fired. **Source**: Edwin Stanton Porter creator QS:P170,Q347864, Great train robbery Barnes, public domain.

Known as nickelodeons because of their five-cent admission charge, these early motion picture theaters, often housed in

converted storefronts, proved especially popular among the working class of the time, who couldn't afford live theater. Between 1904 and 1908, around 9,000 nickelodeons appeared in the United States. The nickelodeon's popularity established film as a mass entertainment medium.

The "Biz": The Motion Picture Industry Emerges



Nickelodeon theater. **Source**: William James creator QS:P170,Q7340632, ComiqueTheatre, public domain.

As demand for motion pictures grew, production companies emerged to meet it. At the peak of Nickelodeon's popularity in 1910, approximately 20 major motion picture companies operated in the United

States. However, heated disputes often broke out among these companies over patent rights and industry control, leading even the most powerful among them to fear fragmentation that would loosen their hold on the market. Because of these concerns, the 10 leading companies—including Edison, Biograph, Vitagraph, and others—formed the Motion Picture Patents Company (MPPC) in 1908. The MPPC served as a trade group that pooled the most significant motion picture patents and established an exclusive contract between these companies and the Eastman Kodak Company , which supplied film stock. Also known as "the Trust," the MPPC attempted to standardize the industry and shut out competition through monopolistic control. Under the Trust's licensing system, only licensed companies could participate in the exchange, distribution, and production of films at various levels of the industry. This shut-out tactic eventually backfired , leading the excluded, independent distributors to organize in opposition to the Trust.

The Rise of the Feature



Sarah Bernhardt. **Source**: Nadar creator QS:P170,Q40116, Sarah Bernhardt by Félix Nadar 2 , public domain.

In these early years, theaters still ran single-reel films, typically 1,000 feet long, allowing approximately 16 minutes of playing time. However, companies began to import multiple-reel films from European producers around 1907, and the format gained widespread acceptance in the United States in 1912 with the release of Louis Mercanton's highly successful *Queen Elizabeth*, a three-and-a-half-reel "feature" starring the French actress Sarah Bernhardt. As exhibitors began to show more features, as the term assigned to multiple-reel films, they discovered several advantages over the single-reel short. For one thing, audiences viewed these longer films as special events and were willing to pay more for admission. In addition, the popularity of the feature narratives meant features generally experienced longer runs in theaters than their single-reel predecessors. Additionally, the feature film

gained popularity among the middle classes, who saw its length as analogous to the more "respectable" entertainment of live theater. Following the example of the French *film d'art*, U.S. feature producers often drew their material from sources that would appeal to a wealthier, better-educated audience, such as histories, literature, and stage productions.



Still for the 1918 film version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. **Source**: Famous Players-Lasky Corporation / Paramount Pictures, Uncle Tom's Cabin (1918) – 2, public domain.

As it turns out, the feature film contributed to the eventual downfall of the MPPC. The inflexible structuring of the Trust's exhibition and distribution system made the organization resistant to change. When movie studio and Trust member Vitagraph began releasing features like *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the Trust compelled it to exhibit the films serially in single-reel showings to conform to industry standards. The MPPC also underestimated the appeal of the star system. This trend began when producers chose famous stage actors, such as

Mary Pickford and James O'Neill, to play leading roles in their productions and to feature on their advertising posters. Because of the MPPC's inflexibility, independent companies capitalized exclusively on two significant trends in film's future: multi-reel features and star power. Today, few people recognize names like Vitagraph or Biograph. Still, the independents that outlasted them—Universal, Goldwyn (which would later merge with Metro and Mayer to form MGM), Fox (later 20th Century Fox, now 20th Century Studios under Disney), and Paramount (the later version of the Lasky Corporation)—became industry juggernauts.



The original Hollywoodland sign eventually became the modern Hollywood sign. **Source**: Unknown, Hollywoodland Sign (cropped), CC BY-SA 4.0.

Hollywood

As moviegoing grew in popularity among the middle class and feature films began to keep audiences in their seats longer, exhibitors felt the need to create more comfortable, richly decorated theater spaces to attract them. These "dream palaces," so called because of their often lavish embellishments of marble, brass, gilding, and cut glass, not only replaced the nickelodeon theater but also created the demand that would

lead to the Hollywood studio system. Some producers realized they could meet the growing demand for new work only if they produced films on a regular, year-round basis. However, this proved impractical with the current system, which often relied on outdoor filming and shot footage predominantly in Chicago and New York—two cities whose weather conditions prevented outdoor filming for a significant portion of the year. Different companies attempted to film in warmer locations, such as Florida, Texas, and Cuba, but producers eventually found an ideal candidate: a small industrial suburb of Los Angeles called Hollywood.



Thomas Edison with licensees of Motion Picture Patents Company. **Source**: Unknown author, Thomas Edison with licensees of Motion Picture Patents Co. (b00ea06c1b754e4a8f812694698dac4d) , cropped, CC0 1.0.

In addition, Thomas Edison's aggressive enforcement of his motion picture patents through the Motion Picture Patents Company (the "Edison Trust") significantly motivated early

filmmakers to relocate. Seeking to operate outside the Trust's restrictive and litigious control, independent producers migrated westward. This desire for creative and operational freedom from Edison's monopoly was a key factor in establishing Hollywood, California, as the burgeoning center of the American film industry.

Hollywood proved to be an ideal location for many reasons. The location combined a temperate climate with year-round sun. In addition, the abundant land was relatively inexpensive, and the location offered proximity to diverse topographies, including mountains, lakes, deserts, coasts, and forests. By 1915, more than 60 percent of U.S. film production was based in Hollywood.

The Art of Silent Film

While commercial factors drove the development of narrative film, individual artists turned it into a medium of personal expression. The motion pictures of the silent era generally appear simplistic, with overly animated movements to engage the eye, and are accompanied by live music performed by musicians in the theater, as well as written titles, to create a mood and narrate a story. Within the confines of this medium, one filmmaker in particular emerged to transform silent film into an art form and unlock its potential as a medium of serious expression and persuasion. D. W. Griffith, who entered the film industry as an actor in 1907, quickly transitioned to

directing, working closely with his camera crew to experiment with shots, angles, and editing techniques to heighten the emotional intensity of his scenes. He found that by practicing parallel editing, in which a film alternates between two or more scenes of action, he could create an illusion of simultaneity. He could then heighten the tension of the film's drama by alternating between cuts more and more rapidly until the scenes of action converged. Griffith employed this technique to significant effect in his controversial film, *The Birth of a Nation*, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next section. Other methods that Griffith employed to new effect included panning shots, through which he established a sense of scene and engaged his audience more fully in the experience of the film, and tracking shots, or shots that traveled with the movement of a scene, which allowed the audience—through the eye of the camera—to participate in the film's action.



Scene still of Belshazzar's feast in the central courtyard of Babylon from D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance*, which demonstrates the profound increase of scope filmmakers started to utilize. **Source**: Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, Griffith intolerance, public domain.

D.W. Griffith's monumental 1916 film, *Intolerance*, ingeniously wove together four distinct stories, each set in a different historical period, to explore themes of prejudice and injustice across the ages. This ambitious project, undertaken largely as a response to the widespread criticism of the overt racism in his previous work, *The Birth of a Nation*, unfortunately resulted in significant financial losses for Griffith, consuming all the money earned from his earlier

success and requiring substantial outside funding. Despite its artistic innovation, *Intolerance* was a commercial failure in its time, owing to its immense production costs and a complex narrative that was often misunderstood, particularly as the United States entered World War I shortly after its premiere. Its costly failure fundamentally shifted power dynamics within the burgeoning film industry, subsequently making directors more accountable to producers and paving the way for greater studio oversight.

MPAA: Combating Censorship

As film became an increasingly lucrative U.S. industry, prominent figures such as D. W. Griffith, the slapstick comedian and director Charlie Chaplin, and actors Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks grew extremely wealthy and influential. The public had conflicting attitudes toward stars and some of their extravagant lifestyles: on the one hand, they idolized celebrities and imitated them in popular culture, yet at the same time, they criticized them for representing a threat, both on and off-screen, to traditional morals and social order. And much as it does today, the news media likes to sensationalize celebrities' lives to sell stories.



Charlie Chaplin's enduring legacy is defined by his creation of "The Tramp," an iconic character who transcended language barriers and became a global phenomenon. As an actor, director, writer, and composer, he mastered the art of silent comedy and profoundly influenced the development of cinematic storytelling. **Source**: P.D Jankens, Charlie Chaplin (cropped), public domain.

Comedian Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle, who worked alongside future icons Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton, found himself at the center of one of the biggest scandals of the silent era. When Arbuckle hosted a marathon party over Labor Day weekend in 1921, one of his guests, model Virginia Rapp, was rushed to the hospital, where she later died. Reports of a drunken orgy, rape, and murder surfaced. Following World War I, the United States underwent significant social reforms, including the Prohibition era. Many feared that movies and their stars could threaten the country's moral order. Because of the nature of the crime and the celebrity involved, those fears became inexplicably tied to the Arbuckle case. Even though autopsy reports ruled that Rapp had died from causes that Arbuckle could not have caused, the comedian still faced trial, where a jury acquitted him of manslaughter, though his career would never recover.

The Arbuckle affair and a series of other scandals only increased public fears about Hollywood's impact. In response to this perceived threat, state and local censorship boards increasingly tried to censor the content of films that depicted crime, violence, and sexually explicit material. Deciding that they needed to protect themselves from government censorship and to foster a more favorable public image, the major Hollywood studios organized in 1922 to form an association they called the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA), later renamed the Motion Picture Association (MPA). Among other things, the

association instituted a code of self-censorship for the motion picture industry, known formally as the Production Code. Today, the MPA operates a voluntary rating system that allows producers to submit a film for review and receive a rating designed to alert viewers to a movie's age appropriateness while still protecting filmmakers' artistic freedom.

Silent Film's Demise



The Jazz Singer's groundbreaking integration of synchronized dialogue and music revolutionized the film industry, propelling Warner Bros. to major-studio status and irrevocably ushering cinema into the sound era. **Source**: Unknown author, The Jazz Singer 1927 Poster, public domain.

In 1925, Warner Bros. sought to differentiate itself from its competitors as a small Hollywood studio seeking expansion opportunities. When representatives from Western Electric offered to sell the studio the rights to a new technology they called Vitaphone, a sound-on-disc system that had failed to capture the interest of any of the industry giants, Warner Bros. executives took a chance, predicting that the novelty of talking films might help them make a quick, short-term profit. Little did they anticipate that their gamble would not only establish them as a major Hollywood presence but also change the industry forever.

The pairing of sound with motion pictures had occurred

before this point. Edison, after all, had commissioned the kinetoscope to create a visual accompaniment to the phonograph, and many early theaters had orchestra pits to provide musical accompaniment to their films. Even the smaller picture houses with lower budgets almost always had an organ or piano. When Warner Bros. purchased Vitaphone technology, it planned to use it to provide prerecorded orchestral accompaniment for its films, thereby increasing their marketability to smaller theaters that lacked their orchestra pits. In 1926, Warner debuted the system with the release of *Don Juan*, a costume drama accompanied by a recording of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra; the public responded enthusiastically. By 1927, after a $3 million campaign, Warner Bros. had wired more than 150 theaters in the United States, and it released its second sound film, *The Jazz Singer*, in which the actor Al Jolson improvised a few lines of synchronized dialogue and sang six songs. The film constituted a breakthrough. Audiences, hearing an actor speak on screen for the first time, became enchanted. While radio, a new and popular entertainment, had siphoned audiences away from the picture houses for some time, with the birth of the "talkie," or talking film, audiences once again returned to the cinema in large numbers, lured by the promise of seeing and hearing their idols perform. By 1929, three-fourths of Hollywood films had some form of sound accompaniment
, and by 1930, the silent movie had become a relic of the past.

From *Fantasia* to the Front Lines: Disney's Animated War Machine



Disney's popular character Donald Duck as seen in *The Spirit of '43*. **Source**: Jack King, Carl Barks, Walt Disney, Donald Duck from Spirit of 43, public domain.

During World War II, the Walt Disney Studio played a significant and often surprising role in the American propaganda effort, leveraging its unique animation style and broad appeal to disseminate wartime messages. Faced with a drastic reduction in commercial film production due to the war, Disney turned its creative talents towards supporting the Allied cause. The studio produced a wide array of films, from morale-boosting shorts to instructional training videos and even overtly anti-Axis propaganda. Characters like Donald Duck and Goofy

became unlikely wartime heroes, engaging audiences with humor while subtly (or not so subtly) promoting themes of patriotism, sacrifice, and the importance of war bonds. This collaboration showcased the power of popular culture to influence public sentiment and demonstrated Hollywood's deep integration into national efforts during times of crisis.

These early Disney propaganda films served multiple purposes. Some, like the Academy Award-winning *Der Fuehrer's Face*, starring Donald Duck, satirized the enemy, depicting the absurdities and harsh realities of life under Nazi rule with a blend of dark humor and pointed criticism. Others, such as *Education for Death: The Making of the Nazi*, adopted a more serious and chilling tone, illustrating the indoctrination of German youth into the Nazi ideology. Beyond direct propaganda, Disney also produced numerous training films for the military, explaining complex concepts or demonstrating proper procedures for soldiers, pilots, and sailors. These films, often featuring familiar characters or clear, simplified animation, proved highly effective in conveying vital information quickly and memorably.

The cultural impact of these Disney war films was profound. They reached millions of Americans, shaping perceptions of the enemy, reinforcing national

unity, and preparing citizens for the sacrifices required by the war. For a studio primarily known for whimsical fairy tales and family entertainment, this foray into political and military messaging solidified animation's versatility as a powerful medium for communication.



Lotus Flower (Anna May Wong) rescues Allan Carver (Kenneth Harlan) in *Toll of the Sea*, one of the first films to use color. **Source**: metro pictures, Toll of theSea rescue-1922, public domain.

"I Don't Think We're in Kansas Anymore": Film Goes Technicolor



Cast of *The Wizard of Oz*.
Source:
NBC Television Network,
The Wizard of Oz Lahr
Garland Bolger Haley 1939
, public domain.

Although filmmakers could employ tinting and hand-painting for some time (Georges Méliès, for instance, used a crew to hand-paint many of his movies), neither method was suitable for large-scale projects. The hand-painting technique became impractical with the advent of mass-produced film, and the tinting process, which filmmakers discovered would interfere with the transmission of sound in cinema, was abandoned with the rise of the talkie. However, in

1922, Herbert Kalmus's Technicolor company introduced a dye-transfer technique that allowed it to produce a full-length film, *The Toll of the Sea*, in two primary colors. However, because they used only two colors, the appearance of *The Toll of the Sea*, *The Ten Commandments*, and other early Technicolor films did not seem very lifelike. By 1932, Technicolor had developed a three-color system that produced more realistic results. For the next 25 years, all major studios produced color films using this improved system. Disney's *Three Little Pigs*, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, and movies featuring live actors, such as MGM's *The Wizard of Oz* and *Gone with the Wind*, achieved early success using Technicolor's three-color method.

Despite the success of certain color films in the 1930s, Hollywood, like the rest of the United States, was deeply affected by the Great Depression. The expenses of special cameras, crews, and Technicolor lab processing made color films impractical for studios trying to cut costs. Therefore, Technicolor largely displaced black-and-white movies until the end of the 1940s.

Rise and Fall of the Hollywood Studio

The spike in theater attendance that followed the introduction of talking films altered the economic structure of the motion

picture industry, leading to some of the largest mergers in industry history. By 1930, eight studios produced 95 percent of all American films, and they continued to experience growth even during the Depression. The five most influential of these studios—Warner Bros., Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, RKO, 20th Century Fox, and Paramount—practiced **vertical integration**, meaning they controlled every part of the system related to their films, from production to release, distribution, and even exhibition. Because they owned theater chains worldwide, these studios controlled which movies exhibitors ran, and because they "owned" a pool of directors, actors, writers, and technical assistants under contract, each studio produced films with a particular character.

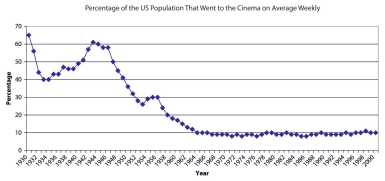
The late 1930s and early 1940s sometimes get



Promotional still for the 1941 film, *Citizen Kane*. **Source**: RKO Radio Pictures, still photographer Alexander Kahle, Citizen-Kane-Orson-Welles, public domain.

referred to as the "Golden Age" of cinema, a time of unparalleled success for the movie industry; by 1939, film ranked as the 11th-largest industry in the United States, and during World War II, when the U.S. economy flourished, two-thirds of Americans attended the theater at least once a week. Some of the most acclaimed movies in history were released during this period, including *Citizen Kane* and *The Grapes of Wrath*. However, postwar inflation, a temporary loss of key foreign markets, the advent of television, and other factors combined to bring that rapid growth to an end. In 1948, the case of the

United States v. Paramount Pictures—mandating competition and forcing the studios to relinquish control over theater chains—dealt the final devastating blow from which the studio system would never recover. Control of the major studios reverted to Wall Street, where multinational corporations eventually absorbed the studios, and the powerful studio heads lost the influence they had held for nearly 30 years.



Rise and Decline of Movie Viewing During Hollywood's "Golden Age." **Source**: Michelle Pautz, Elon University, Percentage of the US Population that went to the Cinema on Average, Weekly, 1930-2000, public domain.

Post–World War II: Television Presents a Threat

While economic factors and antitrust legislation played key roles in the decline of the studio system, the advent of television represents the primary factor. Given the opportunity to watch "movies" from the comfort of their own homes, the millions of Americans who owned a television by the early 1950s began attending the cinema far less regularly than they had just a few years earlier. In an attempt to win back diminishing audiences, studios did their best to exploit the

greatest advantages film held over television. For one thing, television could only broadcast in black and white in the 1950s, whereas the film industry had the advantage of color. While producing a color film still required a considerable budget in the late 1940s, a couple of changes in the industry in the early 1950s made color not only more affordable but also more realistic in appearance. In 1950, as a result of antitrust legislation,
Technicolor lost its monopoly on the color film industry,
allowing other providers to offer more competitive pricing on filming and processing services. At the same time, Kodak introduced a multilayer film stock that enabled the use of more affordable cameras and produced higher-quality images. Kodak's Eastman Color option was integral to the industry's conversion to color. In the late 1940s, studios released only 12 percent of their features in color; however, by 1954 (following the release of Kodak Eastman Color), more than 50 percent of movies featured color.

Filmmakers also tried to capitalize on the sheer size and scope of the cinematic experience. With the release of the epic biblical film *The Robe* in 1953, 20th Century Fox introduced the method that nearly every studio in Hollywood would soon adopt: a technology that allowed filmmakers to squeeze a wide-angle image onto conventional 35-mm film stock, thereby increasing the **aspect ratio** (the ratio of a screen's width to its height) of their pictures. This wide-screen format increased the immersive quality of

the theater experience. Nonetheless, even with these advancements, movie attendance never again reached the record numbers it experienced in 1946, at the peak of the Golden Age of Hollywood.

MASS ENTERTAINMENT, MASS PARANOIA: HUAC AND THE HOLLYWOOD BLACKLIST



Nine members of the Hollywood 10. From right, Robert Adrian Scott, Edward Dmytryk, Samuel Ornitz, Lester Cole, Herbert Biberman, Albert Maltz, Alvah Bessie, John Howard Lawson, and Ring Lardner Jr. **Source**: Los Angeles Times photographic archive – Digital collections — UCLA Library, Nine of the Hollywood 10 charged with contempt of Congress 1947 , CC BY 4.0.

The Cold War with the Soviet Union began in 1947, and with it came the widespread fear of communism, not only from the outside, but equally from within. To undermine this perceived threat, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) commenced investigations to locate communist sympathizers in America whom they suspected of conducting espionage for the Soviet Union. In the highly conservative and paranoid atmosphere of the time, Hollywood, the source of a mass-

cultural medium, came under fire in response to fears that studios had embedded subversive, communist messages in films. In November 1947, Congress called more than 100 people in the movie business to testify before the HUAC about their and their colleagues' involvement with communist affairs. Of those investigated, 10 in particular refused to cooperate with the committee's questions. These 10, later known as the Hollywood Ten, lost their jobs and received sentences ranging from 1 to 12 months in prison. The studios, already slipping in influence and profit, cooperated to save themselves, and many producers signed an agreement stating that no communists would be allowed to work in Hollywood.

The hearings, which recommenced in 1951 with the rise of Senator Joseph McCarthy's influence, turned into a kind of witch hunt as committee members asked witnesses to testify against their associates, and a blacklist of suspected communists evolved. More than 324 individuals lost their jobs in the film industry as a result of blacklisting (the denial of work in a specific field or industry) and HUAC investigations.



Bonnie and Clyde reflected the attitudes of a rising youth culture by focusing on the notorious criminal couple, Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow, whose brash bank robberies during the Great Depression captured the public's interest. **Source**: English: Distributed by Warner Bros.-Seven Arts., Bonnie and Clyde (1967 promo photo – Beatty), public domain.

Down With the Establishment: Youth Culture of the 1960s and 1970s

Movies of the late 1960s began attracting a younger demographic, as a growing number of young people became drawn to films like Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch*,

Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde*, and Dennis Hopper's *Easy Rider*—all revolutionary in their genres—that displayed a sentiment of unrest toward conventional social orders and included some of the earliest instances of realistic and brutal violence in film. These four films, in particular, grossed substantial sums at the box office, prompting producers to churn out low-budget copycats to tap into a new, profitable market. While this led to a rise in youth-culture films, few of them saw great success. However, the new liberal attitudes toward depictions of sex and violence in these films represented a sea of change in the movie industry that manifested in many movies of the 1970s, including Robert Altman's *M*A*S*H*, Francis Ford Coppola 's *The Godfather*, William Friedkin's *The Exorcist*, and Steven Spielberg's *Jaws*, all four of which saw great financial success.



Film crew in Death Valley filming *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi*. **Source**: National Park Service (NPS), Star-Wars filming in Death Valley, public domain.

Blockbusters, Knockoffs, and Sequels



Harrison Ford and Chandran Rutnam on the set of *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*. **Source**: Chandran Rutnam, Harrison Ford and Chandran Rutnam in Sri Lanka, CC BY-SA 3.0.

In the 1970s, with the rise of filmmakers such as Francis Ford Coppola, Steven Spielberg, George Lucas, and Martin Scorsese, a new breed of directors emerged. These young, film-school-educated directors contributed a sense of professionalism, sophistication, and technical mastery to their work, leading to a wave of blockbuster productions, including *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *Star Wars*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*. The computer-generated special effects available at the time also contributed to the success of several large-budget productions. In response to these and several earlier blockbusters, movie production and marketing techniques also began to shift, with studios investing more money in fewer films in the hopes of

producing more big successes. For the first time, the hefty sums producers and distributors invested didn't go solely to production costs; distributors began to discover the benefits of TV and radio advertising and found that doubling their advertising costs could increase profits by as much as three or four times. With the opening of *Jaws*, one of the five top-grossing films of the decade (and the highest-grossing film of all time until the release of *Star Wars* in 1977), Hollywood embraced the wide-release method of movie distribution, abandoning the release methods of earlier decades, in which a film would debut in only a handful of select theaters in major cities before it became gradually available to mass audiences. Studios released *Jaws* in 600 theaters simultaneously, and the big-budget films that followed came out in anywhere from 800 to 2,000 theaters nationwide on their opening weekends.

The major Hollywood studios of the late 1970s and early 1980s, now run by international corporations, tended to favor the conservative gamble of the tried and true, and as a result, the period saw an unprecedented number of high-budget sequels—as in the *Star Wars*, *Indiana Jones*, and *Godfather* films—as well as imitations and adaptations of earlier successful material, such as the plethora of "slasher" films that followed the success of the 1979 thriller *Halloween*. Additionally, corporations sought revenue sources beyond movie theaters, turning to video and cable releases of their films. Introduced in 1975, home video formats like VCRs became central to home viewing by the late 1990s, though

they would later be replaced by optical discs and eventually digital streaming platforms. Cable television expanded rapidly alongside home video, while film-based merchandise (toys, games, apparel) enabled entertainment conglomerates to maximize franchise profits.

The 1990s and Beyond



The Coen Brothers have created classic films such as *Raising Arizona*, *Fargo*, *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, *The Big Lebowski*, and *No Country for Old Men*. **Source**: Created by Rita Molnár 2001, COEN Brothers (cannesPH), CC BY-SA 2.5.

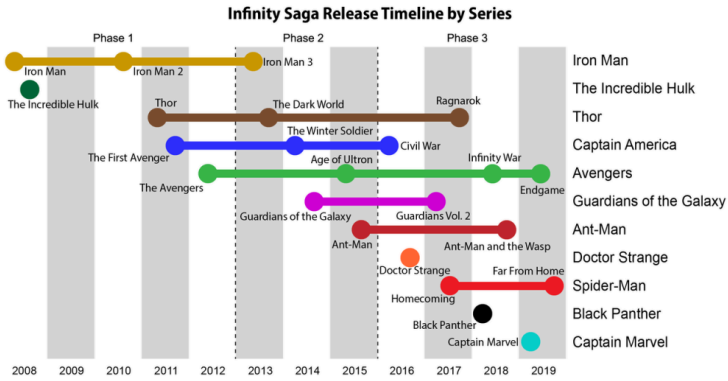
The 1990s witnessed the rise of two divergent strands of cinema: the technically spectacular blockbuster, featuring special, computer-generated effects, and the independent, low-budget film. Studios enhanced special effects capabilities when they began manipulating film digitally, as seen in blockbusters such as *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, *Jurassic Park*, and later James Cameron's *Avatar*. Films with an epic scope—such as *Independence Day*, *Titanic*, and *The Matrix*—also employed a range of computer animation techniques and special effects to

wow audiences and draw more viewers to the big screen. *Toy Story*, the first fully computer-animated film, and those that followed, such as *Antz*, *A Bug's Life*, and *Toy Story 2*, showcased the improved capabilities of computer-generated animation. At the same time, independent directors and producers, such as the Coen brothers and Spike Jonze, experienced increased popularity, often for lower-budget films that audiences were more likely to watch at home on video. A prime example of this occurred at the 1996 Academy Awards program, when independent films dominated the Best Picture category. Only one movie from a big film studio earned a nomination—*Jerry Maguire*—while independent films earned the rest. The growth of both independent movies and special-effects-laden blockbusters continues to the present day.

The past decade and a half has ushered in an era of unprecedented transformation for the film industry, largely driven by the ascendance of streaming services and fundamental shifts in how audiences consume media. Companies like Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime Video, later joined by studio-backed giants such as Disney+, HBO Max , and Apple TV+, revolutionized distribution and consumption patterns. This digital revolution led to a precipitous decline in physical media sales and rentals (such as DVDs and Blu-rays) as consumers embraced the convenience of on-demand digital access. Studios rapidly adapted, transitioning from traditional theatrical exclusivity to diverse

release strategies, including shorter theatrical windows, Premium Video On Demand (PVOD) releases, and even direct-to-streaming premieres—a tension highlighted by theatrical cultural events like the simultaneous release of *Barbie* and *Oppenheimer*.

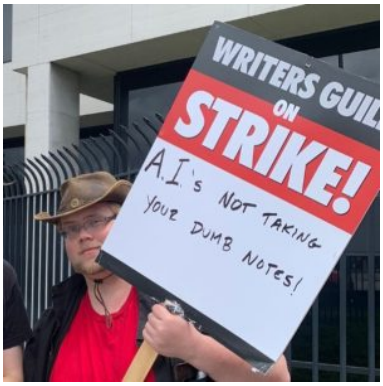
Technologically, the industry has continued its relentless march into the digital realm. Digital filmmaking became the undisputed standard for production, with advancements in camera technology offering stunning resolution and dynamic range. Crucially, visual effects and computer-generated imagery reached new levels of realism and sophistication, enabling the creation of entire virtual worlds and photorealistic characters through innovations like virtual production using LED walls (pioneered on series like *The Mandalorian*). This era also solidified the dominance of franchise filmmaking anchored by established intellectual property (IP), with cinematic universes like the Marvel Cinematic Universe and *Star Wars* generating multibillion-dollar revenues and shaping studio release calendars years in advance. Simultaneously, global box office markets became essential for overall profitability, heavily influencing production decisions and narrative choices.



The Marvel Cinematic Universe is a giant movie series that connects many superhero stories into one shared world, as demonstrated by this timeline. **Source**: Gooey98, Marvel Cinematic Universe Infinity Saga Release Timeline by Series, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Alongside these industry shifts, critical cultural movements such as #MeToo and #OscarsSoWhite spurred crucial conversations about diversity, representation, and accountability within Hollywood, leading to new industry standards—including the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' inclusion criteria for Best Picture eligibility—and an increased emphasis on equitable workplaces. The film industry stands at a pivotal juncture, continuously adapting to technological evolution, shifting consumer behavior, global economics, and active social dialogues.

The Streaming Era and the Generative AI Horizon



A WGA protester carries a sign deriding the proposals by film studios to replace writers with artificial intelligence. **Source**: David James Henry, AI Protest Sign 2023 WGA Strike , CC BY-SA 4.0.

In recent years, the rapid maturation of streaming platforms created complex economic and creative challenges for Hollywood. The initial rush toward streaming-first business models led studios to prioritize subscriber growth over immediate box-office profitability, fundamentally altering residual payment structures for creative talent. This friction came to a head during major labor disruptions, including the historic dual strikes by the Writers Guild of America and the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists . These strikes highlighted critical industry disputes over equitable compensation in the streaming ecosystem and established guardrails surrounding the ethical use of artificial intelligence in screenwriting and performance replication.

Simultaneously, advancements in generative AI and real-time rendering tools began redefining pre-production, visual effects, and post-production workflows. While these technologies offer unprecedented efficiency and visual capabilities, they also raise ongoing questions about intellectual property rights, job security for creative crews, and the preservation of human-driven storytelling in cinema. As Hollywood balances theatrical exhibition, digital distribution, and emerging technologies, the medium continues to redefine what constitutes the cinematic experience in an interconnected world.

7.3 MOVIES AND CULTURE



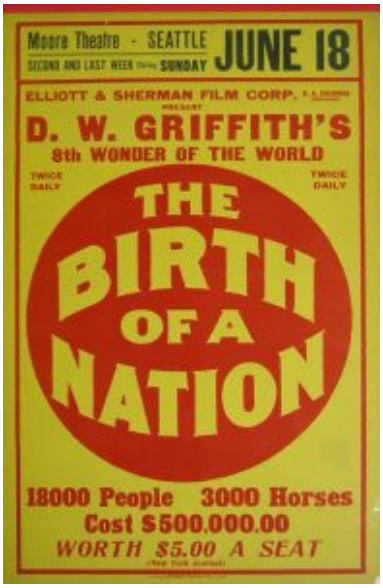
Source: Photo by Unsplash on Freerange, CC0 1.0.

Movies Mirror Culture

The relationship between movies and culture is complex and dynamic. In contrast, American movies certainly influence the mass culture that consumes them; they also represent an integral part of that culture, a product of it, and therefore a reflection of dominant concerns, attitudes, and beliefs. When

considering the relationship between film and culture, it is essential to recognize that while certain ideologies may prevail in a given era, American culture comprises a diverse population that continually evolves from one period to the next. Mainstream films produced in the late 1940s and into the 1950s, for example, reflected the conservatism that dominated the sociopolitical arenas of the time. However, by the 1960s, a reactionary youth culture began to emerge in opposition to the dominant institutions, and these anti-establishment views soon found their way onto the screen—a far cry from the attitudes that had been most commonly represented only a few years earlier.

Some characterize movies as America's storytellers. Not only do Hollywood films reflect certain commonly held attitudes and beliefs about what it means to be American, but they also portray contemporary trends, issues, and events, serving as records of the eras that produced them. Consider, for example, films addressing modern sociopolitical anxieties and existential threats: *Civil War*, *Leave the World Behind*, *Don't Look Up*, and others. These films emerged from the dominant anxieties of their time, capturing issues that preoccupy the American consciousness.



The Birth of a Nation chronicled racial tensions of the early 20th century and was dubbed the "8th Wonder of the World" in promotional material. **Source**: Unknown, on behalf of the Moore Theatre. Photo and retouching by Joe Mabel ., Birth of a Nation Poster – Seattle , CC BY-SA 3.0.

Birth of a Nation

In 1915, director D. W. Griffith established his reputation with the highly successful film *The Birth of a Nation*, based on Thomas Dixon's novel *The Clansman*, a pro-segregation narrative about the American South during and after the Civil War. At the time, *The Birth of a Nation* stood as the longest feature film ever made, at almost 3 hours, and contained huge battle scenes that amazed and delighted audiences. Griffith's storytelling ability helped solidify the narrative style that would go on to dominate the feature film genre. He also experimented with editing techniques, such as close-ups, jump cuts, and parallel editing, which contributed to the film's artistic achievement. *The Birth of a Nation* would go on to earn more money than

any other film in the silent film era (although Griffith would lose a substantial portion of it while making his next film, the box-office flop *Intolerance*).

Griffith's film found success largely because it captured the era's social and cultural tensions. As American studies specialist Lary May has argued, "[Griffith's] films dramatized every major concern of the day." In the early 20th century, fears about recent waves of immigrants had led to certain racist attitudes in mass culture, with "scientific" theories of the time purporting to link race with inborn traits like intelligence and other capabilities. Additionally, the dominant political climate, largely a reaction against populist labor movements, reflected conservative elitist viewpoints, eager to attribute social inequalities to natural human differences. According to a report by the New York *Evening Post* after the film's release, even some Northern audiences "clapped when the masked riders took vengeance on Negroes." However, the outrage many groups expressed about the film serves as a good reminder that American culture does not behave monolithically. Strong contingents in opposition to dominant ideologies can and do exist.

While critics praised the film for its narrative complexity and epic scope, others were outraged. It even started riots at several screenings because of its highly controversial, openly racist attitudes, which glorified the Ku Klux Klan and blamed enslaved people for the destruction of the war. Many

Americans joined the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in denouncing the film, and the National Board of Review eventually cut a number of the film's racist sections. This reflects the cultural attitudes of the early 1900s, a time when the divided nation enforced Jim Crow laws and segregation. In 1992, the Library of Congress classified the film among the "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant films" in U.S. history.



Ingrid Bergman and Humphrey Bogart in the American romantic drama film *Casablanca.* **Source**: Unknown author, distributed by: Warner Bros. Pictures, Bergman & Bogart Casablanca still, public domain.

"The American Way"

Until the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, American films after World War I generally reflected the neutral, isolationist stance that prevailed in politics and culture. However, after the United States entered the war in Europe, the government enlisted Hollywood to support the war effort, establishing the federal Bureau of Motion Picture Affairs in Los Angeles. Bureau officials served in an advisory capacity on the production of war-related films, an effort with which the studios cooperated. As a result, films tended to feature patriotic themes designed to produce feelings of pride and confidence in America and to designate it and its allies as forces of good. For instance, the critically acclaimed *Casablanca* portrays the detrimental effects of fascism, illustrates the values that heroes like Victor Laszlo hold, and depicts America as a haven where refugees can find democracy and freedom.



The *Why We Fight* series consists of seven World War II propaganda and orientation films directed by Frank Capra for the U.S. Department of War between 1942 and 1945 to justify American involvement in the conflict. **Source**: Gawain78, Why We Fight title, public domain.

These early World War II films sometimes became overtly propagandist, intended to influence American attitudes rather than present a genuine reflection of American sentiments toward the war. The U.S. Army developed Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* films, for example, first produced in 1942 and later shown to general audiences; they delivered a war message through narrative. As the war continued, however, filmmakers opted to forgo patriotic themes in favor of a more serious reflection of American sentiments, as exemplified by films like Alfred Hitchcock's *Lifeboat*.

In Mike Nichols's 1967 film *The Graduate*, Dustin Hoffman, as the film's protagonist, enters into a romantic affair with the wife of his father's business partner. However, Mrs. Robinson and the other adults in the movie fail to understand the young, alienated hero, who eventually rebels against them. *The Graduate*, which grossed more than $44 million at the box office,

reflected the attitudes of many members of a younger generation
growing increasingly dissatisfied with what they perceived as repressive social codes imposed by their more conservative elders
.

This baby boomer generation came of age during the Korean and Vietnam wars. Not only did youth culture express cynicism toward the patriotic, pro-war stance of their World War II–era elders, but they also displayed fierce resistance to institutional authority in general, epitomized by the 1967 hit film *Bonnie and Clyde*. In the movie, a young outlaw couple sets out on a cross-country bank-robbing spree until they're killed in a violent police ambush at the film's close.



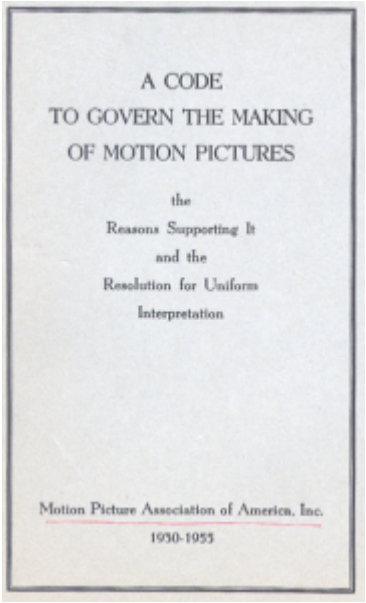
Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper during the filming of *Easy Rider*. **Source**: cobalt123, American Classic: Easy Riders, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.



Directed by Sam Peckinpah (right), *The Wild Bunch* is a 1969 revisionist Western film about a gang of aging outlaws on the Texas-Mexico border trying to survive a changing world through violent means. **Source**: Unknown author, Wild Bunch Agua Verde, public domain.

Bonnie and Clyde's violence provides one example of the ways films at the time tested the limits of permissible on-screen material. The youth culture's liberal attitudes toward formerly taboo subjects like sexuality and drugs began to emerge in film during the late 1960s. Like *Bonnie and Clyde*, Sam Peckinpah's 1969 Western *The Wild Bunch* displays an early example of aestheticized violence in cinema. The wildly popular *Easy Rider*—containing drugs, sex, and violence—may owe a good deal of its initial success to liberalized audiences. And in the same year, *Midnight Cowboy*, one of the first Hollywood films to receive an X rating (for its sexual content), won three Academy Awards, including Best Picture. As the release and subsequent successful reception of these films attest, what had begun as countercultural at the decade's outset had, by the decade's close, become mainstream.

The Hollywood Production Code



The Hays Code outlined regulations for the film industry. **Source**: Unknown author, Motion Picture Production Code, public domain.

When the MPA (originally the MPPDA) first formed in 1922 to combat government censorship and promote artistic freedom, the association attempted to establish a system of self-regulation. However, by 1930—in part because of the transition to talking pictures—renewed criticism and calls for censorship from conservative groups made it clear to the MPPDA that the loose system of self-regulation did not offer enough protection. As a result, the MPPDA instituted the Production Code, also known as the Hays Code (after MPPDA director William H. Hays), which remained in effect until 1967. The code, which, according to motion picture producers, concerned itself with

ensuring that movies remained "directly responsible for spiritual or moral progress, for higher types of social life, and for much correct thinking, became strictly enforced starting in 1934, putting an end to most public complaints. However, many people in Hollywood resented its restrictiveness. Following a series of Supreme Court cases in the 1950s regarding the code's restrictions on freedom of speech, the Production Code gradually weakened until it was replaced in 1968 with the MPAA rating system.



James Cagney in *The Public Enemy*. The Payne Fund Studies identified crime as one of the most common themes in film. **Source**: Trailer screenshot, James Cagney in The Public Enemy, public domain.

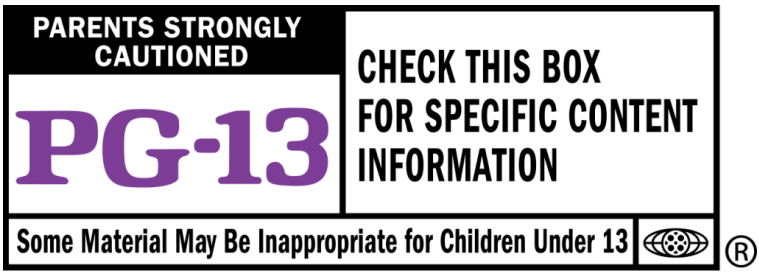
The Payne Fund Studies

The **Payne Fund Studies**, a groundbreaking series of investigations conducted between 1928 and 1933, were among the first large-scale efforts to systematically analyze the effects of motion pictures on audiences, particularly children and adolescents. Undertaken by prominent psychologists, sociologists, and educators from various universities, these studies aimed to provide a scientific understanding of cinema's impact during a period of rapidly expanding film popularity. Their extensive research culminated in the publication of a 12-volume report, which meticulously detailed their findings across diverse aspects of media influence, from sleep patterns to attitudes.

Among their key discoveries, the Payne Fund Studies found that a relatively small number of fundamental themes recurred frequently across the vast majority of films produced during that era. These recurring thematic elements formed the backbone of cinematic storytelling and often dictated a movie's genre and appeal. The prominent themes identified included **Crime**, exploring illicit activities and their consequences; **Sex**, often depicted subtly given the era's Hays Code, but frequently implied through romantic entanglements and suggestive situations; **Love**, a universal and central theme; **Mystery**, driving narratives through puzzles

and investigations; and **War**, reflecting global conflicts and their human toll.

Further analysis revealed additional pervasive themes such as the portrayal of **Children**, either as central characters or elements influencing plot; **History**, bringing past events to life; **Travel**, showcasing exotic locales and adventures; **Comedy**, providing humor and levity; and **Social Propaganda**, subtly or overtly promoting certain societal values, behaviors, or political viewpoints. The findings of the Payne Fund Studies provided early insights into content analysis and laid foundational groundwork for subsequent media effects research, despite later critiques regarding their methodology and interpretation.



PG-13, the most desirable rating from the MPA, originated in the 1980s when films needed a rating to bridge the difference between PG- and R-rated films. **Source**: w:Motion Picture Association, MPA PG-13 RATING (block), public domain.

MPAA Ratings

As films like *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966) tested the limits on violence and language, and it became clear that the Production Code needed to be replaced. In 1968, the MPAA (now MPA) established a rating system to categorize films based on potentially objectionable content. By providing officially designated categories for films that would not have met past Production Code standards, the MPA paved the way for films to address mature content openly. The ratings system originally included four categories: G (suitable for general audiences), M (equivalent to today's PG rating), R (restricted to adults over 16), and X (equivalent to today's NC-17 rating).

The MPA rating system, with some modifications, remains in use today. Before releasing their films in theaters, studios submit them to the MPA board for a screening, during which advisers determine the most appropriate rating based on the film's content. However, the MPA does not require studios to screen releases in advance—some studios release films without obtaining an MPAA rating at all. Commercially, less restrictive ratings generally provide more benefits, particularly for adult-themed films that could earn the most restrictive rating, NC-17. Some movie theaters will not screen an NC-17-rated movie. When filmmakers receive a more stringent rating than

they would have liked, they may resubmit the film for review after editing out objectionable scenes.

The Syntax of the Screen: Crafting Stories Through Grammar and Genre



Source: AiClassEland at English Wikibooks, Film Director and Crew, CC BY-SA 2.5.

Film and television, as powerful mass media, have meticulously developed an intricate "media grammar" over their respective histories, a sophisticated language built upon a precise combination of technical and

artistic elements. This grammar allows filmmakers and television producers to communicate complex narratives, evoke specific emotions, and shape audience perception without relying solely on dialogue. Key components of this visual and auditory syntax include editing, which dictates the pace, rhythm, and flow of a story; camera angles, manipulating perspective and conveying power dynamics or intimacy; lighting, used to establish mood, highlight subjects, and create visual drama; movement, encompassing both camera motion and character blocking to guide the viewer's eye and emphasize action; and sound, which includes dialogue, music, and effects, all contributing to atmosphere, tension, and narrative progression.

This rich media grammar is fundamental to the creation of popular film genres, which serve as recognizable frameworks for both creators and audiences. These genres often combine specific narrative conventions, visual styles, and thematic concerns. Common examples that audiences flock to include high-stakes action/adventure films, humorous comedies, emotionally driven romances, imaginative science fiction tales, thrilling suspense narratives, meticulously crafted historical dramas, chilling horror stories, classic Westerns, fantastical fantasy epics, vibrant musicals, compelling biographies, and

profound dramas. Each genre leverages the established media grammar in unique ways to deliver a distinct viewing experience, demonstrating the versatility and depth of cinematic storytelling.



Films like the satire *Dr. Strangelove: Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* signified a change in perspective on how Hollywood presented war films. **Source**: Directed by Stanley Kubrick, distributed by Columbia Pictures, Dr. Strangelove – The War Room, public domain.

The New War Film: Cynicism and Anxiety

Unlike the patriotic war films of the World War II era, many

of the movies about U.S. involvement in Vietnam reflected strong antiwar sentiment, criticizing American political policy and portraying war's damaging effects on those who survived it. Films like *Dr. Strangelove*, *M*A*S*H*, *The Deer Hunter*, and *Apocalypse Now* portray the military establishment in a negative light and blur clear-cut distinctions, such as the "us versus them" mentality that was present in earlier war films. These, and the dozens of Vietnam War films produced in the 1970s and 1980s—Oliver Stone's *Platoon* and *Born on the Fourth of July* and Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*, for example—reflect the sense of defeat and lack of closure Americans felt after the Vietnam War and the emotional and psychological scars it left on the nation's psyche. A spate of military and politically themed films emerged during the 1980s as America recovered from defeat in Vietnam, while at the same time facing anxieties about the ongoing Cold War with the Soviet Union.

Fears about societal breakdown, technological overreach, or social isolation feel very real to modern audiences. Film critics argue that these anxieties manifest not only in overtly political films but also in the popularity of contemporary horror films like *Get Out* and *A Quiet Place*, which address social paranoia and systemic threats. These fears also play out in fantasy or superhero blockbusters that offer imaginative escapes from complex global challenges.

Movies Shape Culture

Just as movies reflect the anxieties, beliefs, and values of the cultures that produce them, they also help to shape and solidify a culture's beliefs. Sometimes the influence is trivial, as with fashion trends or idiomatic expressions. After the release of *Flashdance* in 1983, for instance, torn T-shirts and leg warmers became hallmarks of 1980s fashion. More recently, the film *Barbie* inspired bright pink attire and Barbiecore aesthetics that dominated global fashion and retail markets. However, sometimes the impact can lead to profound social or political reform or to the reshaping of ideologies.

Film and the Rise of Mass Culture



Some consider Florence Lawrence to be the first movie star. **Source**: Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research , Florence Lawrence 1908, public domain.

Between the 1890s and approximately 1920, American culture underwent a period of rapid industrialization. As people moved from farms to urban centers of industrial production, urban areas began to hold increasingly larger concentrations of the population. At the same time, film and other methods of mass communication (advertising and radio) developed, whose messages concerning tastes, desires, customs, speech, and behavior spread from these population centers to outlying areas across the country. Early mass communication media sought to erode regional differences and foster a more homogeneous, standardized culture.

Film played a key role in this development, as viewers began to imitate the speech, dress, and behavior of their everyday heroes on the silver screen. In 1911, the Vitagraph company began publishing *The Motion Picture*

Magazine, America's first fan magazine. Originally conceived as a marketing tool to keep audiences interested in Vitagraph's pictures and major actors, *The Motion Picture Magazine* played a crucial role in shaping the concept of the film star in the American imagination. Fans became obsessed with the off-screen lives of their favorite celebrities, like Pearl White, Florence Lawrence, and Mary Pickford.

American Myths and Traditions



Gary Cooper in the film trailer for *High Noon*. **Source**: Trailer screenshot, High Noon1, cropped, CC0 1.0.

What does it mean to live like an American? This country's citizens form their identities based on commonly held beliefs and myths about shared experiences, and the media often disseminates and reinforces these American myths. One example of a popular American myth, dating back to the writings of Thomas Jefferson and other founders, emphasizes

the value of individualism by celebrating the ordinary person as a hero or reformer. With the rise of mass culture, the myth of the individual became increasingly appealing because it offered people a sense of autonomy and individuality amid an increasingly homogenized culture. The hero myth finds embodiment in the Western, a popular film genre from the silent era through the 1960s, in which the lone cowboy, a seminomadic wanderer, navigates a lawless and often dangerous frontier, as seen in 1952's *High Noon*. From 1926 until 1967, Westerns accounted for nearly a quarter of all films produced. In other films, like Frank Capra's 1946 movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, the individual triumphs by standing up to injustice, reinforcing the belief that one person can make a difference in the world. And in more recent films, hero figures such as Tony Stark (Marvel Cinematic Universe), Furiosa (*Mad Max: Fury Road*), and Evelyn Wang (*Everything Everywhere All at Once*) have continued to emphasize individualism.

Social Issues in Film

As D.W. Griffith recognized nearly a century ago, film has enormous power as a medium to influence public opinion. Ever since Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* sparked strong public reactions in 1915, filmmakers have produced movies that address social issues, sometimes subtly, and sometimes very directly. Recent examples include *Parasite*

, which offers a scathing critique of class inequality, *Oppenheimer*, which reexamines the moral and political dilemmas of nuclear weapons, and *Killers of the Flower Moon* , which examines systemic exploitation and violence against Indigenous communities. Additionally, the rise of streaming platforms has made it easier for audiences to access documentaries like *I Am Greta*, which highlights the climate crisis, and *Collective*, which investigates a corruption scandal in Romania sparked by a nightclub fire. These films have the potential to shape cultural attitudes and drive social change.

In the 2010s and 2020s, documentaries continued to enjoy significant cultural and commercial success. Films like *Fyre*, which expose a fraudulent music festival, and *Free Solo*, which documents a daring rock-climbing feat, have demonstrated the power of documentary filmmaking to capture audiences' attention and spark conversations. Moreover, the growth of streaming platforms has enabled the distribution of a wider range of documentaries, including those on niche or politically charged topics.



Documentary filmmaker Michael Moore first gained notoriety by chronicling the closure of car factories in his hometown of Flint, Michigan, in his film *Roger & Me*. **Source**: Montclair Film, MichaelMoore2013, CC BY 2.0

Michael Moore remains a prominent figure in documentary filmmaking, known for his politically charged films that often criticize corporate power and government policies. His 2007 film, *Sicko*, offered a scathing critique of the American healthcare system, sparking debates about universal healthcare in the United States. While some critics have accused Moore of producing propagandistic material under the guise of

documentary because of his films' strong biases, his films have proven popular with audiences, with four of his documentaries ranking among the highest-grossing documentaries of all time. *Fahrenheit 9/11*, which criticized the second Bush administration and its involvement in the Iraq War, earned $119 million at the box office, making it the most successful documentary of all time in the United States. Contemporary filmmakers, such as Ava DuVernay, Raoul Peck, and Mstyslav Chernov, have also utilized documentaries to address significant social and political issues, demonstrating the enduring impact of this medium on shaping public opinion.

Unscripting Inequality: Gender, Power, and Progress in Film



Alison Bechdel crafted a simple but effective test to determine whether a film demonstrates meaningful interactions between women. **Source**: Chase Elliott Clark, Alison Bechdel at the Boston Book Festival, CC BY 2.0.

The landscape of the film industry, particularly its cultural output, has been profoundly shaped by critical assessments of representation and seismic shifts in power dynamics. Among the most influential tools for evaluating gender representation in fiction is the

Bechdel Test, a simple yet surprisingly potent metric proposed by cartoonist Alison Bechdel in her 1985 comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For*. To pass the test, a film must feature at least two women who talk to each other about something other than a man. While often criticized for its simplicity and acknowledged by its creator as not being a measure of a film's quality or feminist credentials, the Bechdel Test effectively highlights the pervasive lack of meaningful female interaction and narrative focus in countless mainstream movies, pointing to a systemic issue where women's roles often revolve primarily around male characters. Popular films such as *Fight Club*, *The Substance*, *Deadpool & Wolverine*, *The Big Lebowski*, *Star Wars*, *The Princess Bride*, and many more have failed the test.

The underlying issues of gender disparity and power imbalances that the Bechdel Test subtly illuminates were brutally exposed by the #MeToo movement in Hollywood. Originating years earlier with activist Tarana Burke, the movement gained explosive global traction in late 2017 when numerous women came forward with accusations of sexual harassment and assault against powerful figures in the entertainment industry, most notably producer Harvey Weinstein. This collective uprising shattered a long-standing culture of silence and impunity, revealing how

ingrained abuse of power, sexual misconduct, and gender discrimination were within Hollywood's hierarchical structures. The movement prompted a reckoning, forcing studios, agencies, and production companies to confront widespread misconduct and leading to the downfall of many prominent figures.

The intersection of the Bechdel Test and the #MeToo movement underscores a critical truth about the film industry: issues of representation are inextricably linked to power dynamics. A lack of diverse voices in storytelling (as highlighted by the Bechdel Test's persistent failures) often correlates with environments where marginalized groups, particularly women, lack agency and are vulnerable to exploitation. The #MeToo movement propelled conversations about onscreen representation into broader discussions about off-screen safety, equitable hiring practices, and the dismantling of patriarchal systems that historically concentrated power in the hands of a few, often male, individuals. It became clear that simply putting more women on screen wasn't enough; the industry also needed to ensure women were safe and empowered behind the camera, in executive suites, and at every level of production.

In the wake of #MeToo, Hollywood has seen tangible,

albeit ongoing, shifts. Many studios and organizations implemented stricter codes of conduct, established clear reporting mechanisms for harassment, and invested in initiatives promoting diversity and inclusion both in front of and behind the camera. Organizations like Time's Up emerged, dedicated to combating systemic injustice and inequality in the workplace. While the industry still has a long way to go to achieve true equity and eradicate all forms of misconduct, the Bechdel Test continues to serve as a simple, accessible reminder of the need for richer female narratives. At the same time, the #MeToo movement stands as a powerful testament to the collective courage required to challenge deeply entrenched abuses of power and foster a more equitable and respectful creative environment.



Source: Stock Catalog. Streaming Netflix. CC BY-NC 2.0.

Streaming Services and the Personalization of Film Culture

While 20th-century mass media fostered a shared national culture where millions watched the same blockbuster films in communal theaters, the rise of digital streaming platforms has shifted how cinema interacts with culture. Algorithmic recommendations curate viewing experiences tailored to individual user preferences, transforming movies from monolithic cultural touchstones into fragmented micro-cultural trends. While blockbuster theatrical releases still generate widespread cultural conversations, streaming allows

niche cinema, international films, and indie documentaries to cultivate dedicated global audiences, altering the traditional mechanisms by which movies mirror and shape societal values.

7.4 ISSUES AND TRENDS IN FILM

Filmmaking serves both a commercial and artistic purpose. The current economic situation in the film industry, with rising production and marketing costs and lower theater attendance, often shapes the films that big studios choose to make. Ever wonder why studios release so many remakes and sequels? This section explains everything needed to understand the motivating factors behind those decisions.

The Influence of Hollywood



Source: Thomas Wolf, www.foto-tw.de, Hollywood Sign (Zuschnitt), (cropped), CC BY-SA 3.0

In the movie industry today, publicity and product serve the

same purpose. Even films that get a lousy critical reception can do extremely well at the box office if their marketing campaigns generate enough hype. Similarly, two comparable films can achieve very different box-office results depending on their publicity levels. This explains why a film like *Barbie* brought in $162 million during its opening weekend in 2023, driven by an unprecedented global marketing campaign, while during the same period, major studio films with minimal marketing budgets like *Shortcomings* struggled to reach wide audiences. Unlike in the days of the Hollywood studio system, the performers alone cannot draw audiences to a film. The owners of the nation's major movie theater chains are keenly aware that a film's box-office success has everything to do with studio-generated marketing and publicity. One of the film industry's leading studios can release a film widely on thousands of screens following an extensive marketing effort, whereas independent studios lacking the necessary marketing budget struggle to sell enough tickets for a wide release on opening weekend.

The Hollywood "dream factory," as Hortense Powdermaker labeled it in her 1950 book on the movie industry, manufactures an experience that combines art with a commercial product. While today's studios do not practice vertical integration to the same extent as during the studio system era, the coordinated efforts of a film's production team still resemble a machine calibrated for mass production. The films the studios churn out result from

a capitalist enterprise that ultimately looks to the "bottom line" to guide most major decisions. Hollywood operates as an industry, and, as in any other mass-market industry, its success relies on control of production resources and "raw materials," and on access to mass distribution and marketing strategies to maximize the product's reach and minimize competition. In this way, Hollywood has enormous influence over the films the public has access to.



Walt Disney Studios helped pioneer feature-length animation and created iconic entertainment franchises enjoyed across generations. **Source**: Coolcaesar, Walt Disney Studios Alameda Entrance, CC BY-SA 4.0

Ever since the rise of the studio system in the 1930s, the majority of films have originated with the leading Hollywood studios. Today, the major studios (often called the Big Five: Walt Disney Studios, Warner Bros. Pictures, Universal Pictures, Sony Pictures Entertainment, and

Paramount Pictures) control roughly 85-90 percent of the theatrical film business. In the early years, audiences were familiar with the major studios, their collections of actors and directors, and the types of films each studio was likely to release. All of that changed with the decline of the studio system; screenwriters, directors, scripts, and cinematographers no longer worked exclusively with one studio, so these days, while moviegoers may know the name of a film's director and major actors, identifying the studio that distributes it is more challenging.



Film crews use numerous behind-the-scenes tools like dollies and green screens to enhance the film's properties. **Source**: Prevefilms, Backstage de la película Volviendo a casa, de 2019, CC BY-SA 4.0.

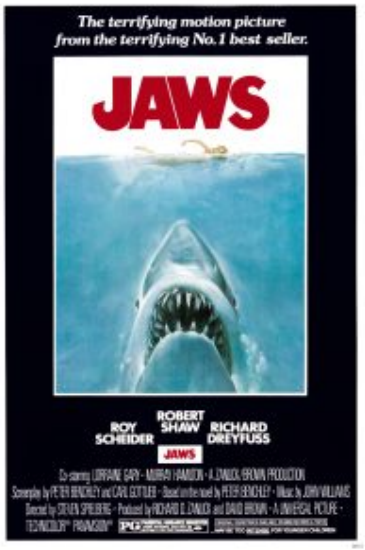
Creating a major studio film is an incredibly complex and

costly endeavor, with an average budget for a wide-release Hollywood production often exceeding $100 million. The film's genre typically has the greatest impact on this cost, as highly stylized projects such as science fiction or fantasy epics demand extensive, expensive visual effects (VFX), elaborate set construction, and specialized technical crews. While the precise percentage can vary widely, production costs—encompassing everything from set building, filming on location, acquiring specialized equipment, and, crucially, crew and talent salaries—usually constitute the largest single component of a film's budget. In major Hollywood productions, nearly all workers, from directors and actors to grips and gaffers, belong to various industry unions, which standardize wages and working conditions. The production journey typically begins when a filmmaker pitches a script to a studio, which often demands revisions to ensure commercial viability before agreeing to bankroll the project and handle distribution. Once a shooting schedule is constructed and major stars are signed, filming commences, a process that can span several weeks to many months. After principal photography wraps, the film enters an extensive post-production phase that can last months, involving meticulous editing, sound design, musical scoring, and visual effects integration. Studios may also schedule reshoots during this period to capture additional footage or refine scenes, adding further to the overall cost. Importantly,

the distribution of the final film now primarily involves sending digital copies to theaters, eliminating the previous costs associated with physical film prints.

Despite these immense investments, profitability in the film industry is far from guaranteed; it's often cited that only about 20-30% of all films actually turn a profit (though some argue the consolidation of the film industry has increased the chances of success) when accounting for all production, marketing, and distribution costs worldwide. A movie's profitability is fundamentally dependent on its initial budget relative to its revenue from theatrical runs, digital sales, streaming licenses, and ancillary markets. Hollywood generally employs two prominent, yet contrasting, formulas for achieving financial success.

Option #1 – The Blockbuster



Based on a best-selling novel, the 1975 film *Jaws* pioneered blockbuster filmmaking. **Source**: Roger Kastel creator QS:P170,Q60774006, Jaws movie poster, public domain.

This formula focuses on the big-budget blockbuster model, aiming for massive global theatrical returns. Extensive marketing tie-ins and major stars characterize these films, which often rely heavily on special effects and established intellectual property to sell vast numbers of tickets. Recent examples include *Dune: Part Two*, which, with an estimated budget of around $190 million, achieved critical acclaim and over $700 million globally, demonstrating that a well-executed tentpole can still be immensely profitable. Similarly, *Barbie*, despite a reported production budget of $145 million, became a cultural phenomenon, grossing over $1.4 billion worldwide, proving the power of smart marketing and broad appeal.

While it may seem like the major studios make hefty profits, moviemaking today is a much riskier, less profitable enterprise

than it was during the studio system era. The massive budgets required for global marketing make a film a huge financial gamble. Most movies cost studios much more to produce and market—upward of $100 million—than their box-office returns ever generate. With such high stakes, studios have come to rely on the handful of blockbuster films that keep them afloat, movies like *Top Gun: Maverick*, *Avatar: The Way of Water*, and *Spider-Man: Brand New Day*. The blockbuster film becomes a touchstone, not only for production values and storylines, but also for moviegoers' expectations. Because studios know they can rely on predictable elements to draw audiences, they tend to invest most of their budgets in movies that fit the blockbuster mold. Remakes, movies with sequel setups, or films based on best-selling novels or comic books offer safer bets than original screenplays or movies with experimental or edgy themes.

James Cameron's *Titanic*, which grossed over $2.2 billion worldwide, saw such success largely because it centered around a famous tragedy, contained predictable plot elements, and appealed to the widest possible range of audience demographics with romance, action, expensive special effects, and epic scope—meeting the blockbuster standard on several levels. The film's astronomical $200 million production cost required the backing of two studios, Paramount and 20th Century Fox. However, the rash of high-budget, high-grossing films that have appeared since—*Avatar*, *Avengers: Endgame*

, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, and *Deadpool & Wolverine*—indicate that, for the time being, the blockbuster standard will continue to drive Hollywood production.

Option #2 – Independent Films



Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite* won the Academy Award for Best Picture. **Source**: anonymous, Parasite (2019 film), CC BY-SA 4.0.

While the blockbuster still drives the industry, the formulaic nature of most Hollywood films of the 1980s, 1990s, and into the 2000s has opened the door for independent films to make their mark. Audiences have welcomed movies like *Fight Club*, *Lost in Translation*, and *Juno* as a change from standard Hollywood blockbusters. This trend has continued with recent acclaimed films such as *Get Out*, *Parasite*, and *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. Few independent films reached mainstream audiences during the 1980s, but developments that decade paved the way for their growing popularity in the years to come. The Sundance Film Festival

(originally the U.S. Film Festival) began in Park City, Utah, in 1980 as a way for independent filmmakers to showcase their work. Since then, the festival has grown to attract more public attention and now often offers independents an opportunity to secure market backing from larger studios. In 1989, Steven Soderbergh's *sex, lies, and videotape*, released by Miramax, became the first independent film to break out of the arthouse circuit and find its way into the multiplexes.

This formula emphasizes a smaller budget and a more focused strategy, aiming for a modest box office while targeting a stellar return on investment (ROI). These films typically target a clear, often niche, audience, relying on compelling storytelling, strong word-of-mouth, or innovative concepts rather than spectacle. Success in this category often means the film's total revenue significantly outstrips its relatively low production cost, leading to high profitability percentages. Modern examples include *Anyone But You*, a romantic comedy made for an estimated $25 million that grossed over $220 million worldwide, showcasing a strong ROI. Another example is the horror film *Talk to Me*, which was made for an estimated $4.5 million and went on to gross over $92 million globally, illustrating how a modest budget combined with effective



Filmmaker Wes Anderson has profoundly influenced contemporary cinema with his highly stylized and idiosyncratic approach, characterized by a unique blend of humor, melancholy, and meticulously crafted worlds. **Source**: John Rasimus, Wes Anderson-20140206-85, CC BY-SA 4.0.

genre execution can yield exceptional returns. These different approaches show the industry's dual strategy for navigating financial success in a changing market. Pioneering this low-budget, high-profit model were films like *The Blair Witch Project* and *Paranormal Activity*, which famously turned minuscule production costs into hundreds of millions in global box office revenue, demonstrating the immense potential for high returns on independent, innovative productions.

In the 1990s and 2000s, independent directors such as the Coen brothers, Wes Anderson, Sofia Coppola, Quentin Tarantino, Chloe Zhao, Ari Aster, and Greta Gerwig made significant contributions to contemporary cinema. At the same time, studios like A24 revolutionized the medium. Tarantino's 1994 film, *Pulp Fiction*, garnered attention for its experimental narrative structure, witty dialogue, and nonchalant approach to violence. It became the first independent film to break $100 million at the box office, proving that movies produced outside of the big six studios can elicit financial windfalls.



The French New Wave movement of the 1950s and 1960s demonstrated that films could succeed both artistically and commercially. Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* incorporated improvisatory techniques and jump cuts to tell the story of a relationship between a petty thug and his journalist girlfriend. **Source**: Tiger500 – Vintage Breathless Movie Poster Detail – CC BY 2.0.

The Role of Foreign Films

English-born Michael Apted, former president of the Directors Guild of America, once said, "Europeans gave me the inspiration to make movies...but it was the Americans who showed me how to do it." Major Hollywood studio films have dominated the movie industry worldwide since Hollywood's golden age, yet American films have formed a symbiotic relationship of mutual influence with films from foreign markets. From the 1940s through the 1960s, for example, American filmmakers admired and emulated the work of overseas auteurs—directors like Ingmar Bergman (Sweden), Federico Fellini (Italy), François Truffaut (France),

and Akira Kurosawa (Japan), whose personal, creative visions ended up reflected in the work of their American contemporaries. The concept of the **auteur** emerged in France in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when French filmmaking underwent a rebirth with the New Wave movement. The French New Wave, characterized by an independent production style that showcased the personal authorship of its young directors, continues to influence cinema to this day. The generation of young, film school-educated directors who became prominent in American cinema in the late 1960s and early 1970s owes much of their stylistic techniques to the work of French New Wave directors François Truffaut, Claude Chabrol, and Agnès Varda.

In today's interconnected world, the impact of international cinema remains significant. The booming entertainment industry in Asia, for example, has fostered a cross-cultural exchange with Hollywood. International hits like Japan's *Godzilla Minus One* have achieved massive worldwide critical and box-office acclaim. At the same time, South Korea's *Parasite*, India's *RRR*, and France's *Anatomy of a Fall* have demonstrated that non-English language cinema can dominate global cultural conversations and major American award ceremonies alike. Meanwhile, U.S. studios actively acquire rights to international intellectual properties or adapt

non-Western formats for global distribution, reinforcing the transnational nature of modern cinematic storytelling.



Source: Graphic by geralt at Pixabay.

Cultural Imperialism or Globalization?

With the growth of Internet technology worldwide and the expansion of markets in rapidly developing countries, American films have increasingly found their way into movie theaters and home entertainment systems around the world. In the eyes of many people, the problem does not lie with the product the U.S. exports to foreign markets, but with the export of American culture that accompanies it. Just as films of the 1920s helped to shape a standardized, mass culture as moviegoers learned to imitate the dress and behavior of their favorite celebrities, contemporary film now helps to

form a mass culture on a global scale, as the youth of foreign nations acquire the American speech, tastes, and attitudes reflected in film.

Staunch critics, feeling helpless to stop the erosion of their national cultures, accuse the United States of cultural imperialism through flashy Hollywood movies and commercialism. At the same time, others argue that the worldwide impact of Hollywood films reflects an inevitable part of globalization. This process erodes national borders, opening the way for a free flow of ideas between cultures. For instance, provisions in NAFTA (and its successor, the USMCA) specifically exclude cultural industries, including entertainment, from its free-trade provisions, protecting domestic cultural industries from the overwhelming influence of U.S. media.

Beyond the Camera: The Enduring Art of the Auteur



Akira Kurosawa's films made Japanese cinema a global phenomenon. **Source**: 映画の友 (Eiga no tomo), Akirakurosawa-ontheseto f7samurai-1953-page88 , public domain.

The concept of the auteur revolutionized film criticism, proposing that the director is the true author of a film, imbuing their works with a distinct personal vision, thematic preoccupations, and a recognizable stylistic signature across their entire filmography. This theory, emerging from French film critics in the 1950s, elevates the director beyond a mere artisan to the central storyteller, whose consistent artistic voice can be identified regardless of the script or genre. Early proponents of this idea

pointed to filmmakers whose unique perspectives permeated every aspect of their creations, leaving an indelible mark.

Among the most celebrated early auteurs are figures like Jean-Luc Godard (*Breathless*, *Contempt*, *Band of Outsiders*), a pivotal figure of the French New Wave whose experimental narratives redefined cinematic grammar. Similarly, Japan's Akira Kurosawa (*Seven Samurai*, *Rashomon*, *Ran*) crafted epic human dramas with sweeping visual ambition, while Alfred Hitchcock (*Psycho*, *Vertigo*, *Rear Window*) became the undisputed "Master of Suspense," renowned for his meticulous control over tension and psychological thrillers. Later generations saw Stanley Kubrick (*2001: A Space Odyssey*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *The Shining*) push the boundaries of genre with his precise, often philosophical, and visually stunning films.

The auteur theory remains relevant to understanding a wide array of directorial voices that consistently imprint their artistic identities on their work. Robert Altman (*Nashville*, *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*, *Gosford Park*) was celebrated for his ensemble casts and naturalistic, overlapping dialogue. Martin Scorsese (*Taxi Driver*, *Goodfellas*, *The Departed*) meticulously explores themes of guilt, redemption, and American masculinity, often set against urban backdrops. David Lynch (*Mulholland Drive*, *Eraserhead*, *Blue Velvet*) is known



Robert Altman was renowned for his subversive, naturalistic style characterized by multi-layered narrative structures, large ensemble casts, and overlapping dialogue in films like *Nashville*. **Source**: Gorup de Besanez, Altman 03, cropped, CC BY-SA 4.0.

for his surreal, dreamlike, and often disturbing explorations of the subconscious. More contemporary figures like Spike Lee (*Do the Right Thing*, *Malcolm X*, *BlacKkKlansman*) infuse their films with powerful social commentary and vibrant stylistic choices. At the same time, Wes Anderson (*The Grand Budapest Hotel*, *The Royal Tenenbaums*, *Rushmore*) is instantly recognizable for his symmetrical compositions, quirky characters, and distinctive visual aesthetic. The Coen Brothers (*Fargo*, *No Country for Old Men*, *The Big Lebowski*) have built a career on darkly comedic and often violent narratives that defy easy categorization. In recent years, directors like Denis Villeneuve (*Arrival*, *Blade Runner 2049*, *Dune*) have crafted visually ambitious, intellectually stimulating science fiction, and Kathryn Bigelow (*The Hurt Locker*, *Zero Dark Thirty*, *Point Break*) has redefined action and thriller genres with her intense, gritty realism and strong command of suspense. These filmmakers, regardless of genre or budget, exemplify the auteur's enduring influence in shaping the art of cinema.



Star Wars revolutionized film merchandising by demonstrating that toy sales and licensed products could generate significantly more revenue than box office ticket sales, fundamentally changing the business model of Hollywood blockbusters. **Source**: Steven Miller, Salacious B. Crumb (7857295398), CC BY 2.0.

The Economics of Movies

With control over roughly 90 percent of U.S. theatrical film distribution, the Big Five Hollywood studios remain at the forefront of the American film industry, setting the standards for distribution, release, marketing, and production values. However, the high costs of moviemaking today mean that even successful studios must find moneymaking potential in crossover media—video games, network TV and streaming rights, spin-off series,

physical media (DVD, Blu-Ray, 4K), toys and merchandising, books, and other after-market products—to help recoup their losses. The drive for aftermarket marketability, in turn, dictates the kinds of films studios invest in.

Rising Costs and Big Budget Movies

In the days of the vertically integrated studio system, filmmaking was a streamlined process, neither as risky nor as expensive as it is today. When producers, directors, screenwriters, art directors, actors, cinematographers, and other technical staff work under contract with one studio, the turnaround time for casting and production can be as little as three to four months. Beginning in the 1970s, after the decline of the studio system, film production costs increased dramatically, forcing studios to invest more of their budgets in marketing efforts to generate presales—that is, sales of distribution rights for a film across sectors before the movie's release. This practice still happens today. With extended production times, costs have risen since the 1930s, when studios could make a film for around $300,000.

Consider James Cameron's *Avatar* or its sequel *Avatar: The Way of Water*, which cost an estimated $250 million to $350 million to produce, making them among the most expensive films ever produced. Where does such an astronomical budget go? When weighing the total costs of

producing and releasing a film, about half of the money goes to advertising and global promotion. Production budgets are divided into above-the-line costs (expenditures negotiated before filming begins, such as screenplay rights and salaries for top talent) and below-the-line costs (fixed costs like crew salaries, location fees, equipment, and catering). Additional expenses often stem from years of technological research and development for custom visual effects. While massive tentpoles represent enormous financial risks, blockbuster theatrical releases like the United States' highest-grossing film of all time, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, and *Avatar: The Way of Water* demonstrate that successful global releases can still generate billions in total revenue across worldwide theatrical box office and downstream licensing.



Burdened by a bloated net production budget exceeding $300 million, *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny* failed to recoup its massive costs, grossing just $384 million worldwide and resulting in an estimated loss of over $130 million for Disney. **Source**: Thank You (25 Millions) views, (1922) Disney's El Capitan Theater cropped, CC BY 2.0

The Big Budget Flop

However, for every expensive film that has made out well at the box office, a handful of others have tanked (regardless of the film's quality). Back in 1980, major Hollywood studio United Artists released its epic western *Heaven's Gate*. The film cost nearly six times its original budget: $44 million instead of the proposed $7.6 million. The movie, which bombed at the box office, represented the largest failure in film history at the time, losing at least $40 million, and MGM bought out the studio as a result. Since then, *Heaven's Gate* has become synonymous with commercial failure in the film industry.

25 years later, the 2005 movie *Sahara* lost $78 million, making it one of the biggest financial flops in film history. The film's initial production budget of $80 million eventually doubled to $160 million due to complications filming in Morocco and numerous script problems. High-profile recent commercial failures—such as *The Marvels*, *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny*, *Borderlands*, *Morbius*, and *Joker: Folie à Deux*—demonstrate that even established franchises and multi-hundred-million-dollar budgets can result in significant financial losses when production costs spiral out of control or audience interest wanes.

Piracy



Source: Arthurbullock. An Anti-Piracy Message from ABS . CC BY 3.0.

Movie piracy used to come in two varieties: either someone snuck into a theater with a video camera, turning out blurred, wobbly, off-color copies of the original film, or someone close to the film leaked a private copy intended for reviewers. In the digital age, however, crystal-clear bootlegs of movies on DVD/Blu-ray/4K Ultra HD Blu-ray and the Internet have become increasingly likely to appear illegally, posing a much greater threat to a film's profitability. Tech-savvy pirates can even frequently sidestep safeguards such as digital watermarks.

In the digital era, leaks of high-profile blockbusters, workprint editions, and high-definition screeners regularly surface on unauthorized file-sharing networks and illicit streaming platforms before or during their official theatrical releases. The ease of theft enabled by the digitization of film and high-speed peer-to-peer sharing or unauthorized IPTV streaming services puts

increased financial strain on the movie industry. Piracy not only affects studios' revenue but also directly impacts filmmakers, who rely on box-office success and licensing deals for their livelihoods. To combat piracy, studios have implemented digital rights management technologies, advanced forensic watermarking, and international legal enforcement against illegal hosting platforms. However, the evolving landscape of piracy presents ongoing challenges for the industry, requiring continuous adaptation and innovation in anti-piracy measures.

The Shift Toward Streaming and Premium VOD Windows

In addition to traditional theatrical releases, the economics of modern film have been radically reshaped by the shortening of theatrical windows and the rise of subscription video-on-demand and Premium Video-on-Demand. Traditionally, movies enjoyed an exclusive theatrical window of 90 days before transitioning to physical media, pay-TV, and broadcast networks. In recent years, studios have compressed this window—often down to 45 days or fewer—allowing films to transition rapidly to digital rental or proprietary streaming platforms like Disney+, HBO Max, Paramount+, and Peacock. Furthermore, tech giants such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and Apple TV

finance and distribute high-budget feature films directly to digital audiences, bypassing theatrical release entirely or using limited theatrical runs primarily for awards eligibility. This shift has redefined how studios measure financial success, balancing traditional box-office returns against subscriber retention, digital licensing fees, and platform growth.

7.5 THE INFLUENCE OF NEW TECHNOLOGY

New technologies have a profound impact not only on the way films are made but also on the economic structure of the film industry. When VCR technology made on-demand home movie viewing possible for the first time, filmmakers had to adapt to a changing market. The recent switch to digital technology also represents a turning point for film. This section will discuss how these and other technologies have transformed the cinematic landscape.



Blockbuster Video dominated the home video rental industry throughout the 1980s and 1990s, but its reliance on physical storefronts and late fees rendered it unable to compete with the rise of Netflix and digital streaming services. **Source**: Stu pendousmat at English Wikipedia, BlockbusterMoncton, cropped, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Effects of Home Entertainment Technology

The first technology for home video recording, Sony's Betamax cassettes, hit the market in 1975. The device, a combined television set and videocassette recorder (VCR), came with a high price tag of $2,495, making it a luxury still too expensive for the average American home. Two years later, RCA released the vertical helical scan (VHS) recording system, which would eventually outsell Betamax, though neither device had yet to garner consumer support. Within several

years, however, the concept of home movie recording and viewing began to catch on. In 1979, Columbia Pictures released 20 films for home viewing, and a year later, Disney entered the market with the first authorized video rental plan for retail stores. By 1983, VCRs had not gained much traction, with just 10 percent of American homes having one, but within two years, the device had found a place in nearly one-third of U.S. households.

At the same time, video rental stores began to spring up across the country. In 1985, three major video rental chains—Blockbuster, Hastings , and Movie Gallery—opened their doors. The video rental market took off between 1983 and 1986, reaching $3.37 billion in 1986. Video sales that year totaled $1 billion, resulting in more than $4 billion in total revenue, marking the first time in history that video revenues surpassed box-office revenues
($3.78 billion that year).

Video sales and rentals opened a new mass market in the entertainment industry—the home movie viewer—and offered Hollywood an extended source of income from its films. On the other hand, the VCR exacerbated piracy.



Introduced by Sony in 1975, Betamax offered superior picture and sound quality compared to VHS but ultimately lost the home video format war due to shorter recording times, higher costs, and VHS's widespread licensing model. **Source**: Bettenburg at de.wikipedia, Sony-Betamax-Recorder, cropped, CC0 1.0.

THE BETAMAX LEGACY: HOW A DUST-COVERED VCR IMPACTS AI COPYRIGHT

In an era when Hollywood was already struggling financially due to rising production costs, Sony's release of home video recording technology became a major concern for Hollywood studios. If people could watch movies at home, would they stop going to the movies altogether? In the 1976 case, *Sony Corp. of America v. Universal City Studios*, Universal Studios and the Walt Disney Company sued Sony in the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California. The suit argued that Sony manufactured technology that could violate copyright law, and the company assumed liability for any copyright infringement committed by VCR purchasers. The District Court struggled with the case, eventually ruling against Sony. However, Sony appealed to the Supreme Court, where the debate continued. The case's outcome had broad implications: Does a device with recording capabilities conflict with copyright law? Is an

individual guilty of copyright infringement if she records a single movie in her own home for her private use?

Eventually, the Supreme Court ruled that Sony and other VCR manufacturers were not liable for copyright infringement. This case represented a significant milestone for two reasons. It opened up a new market in the entertainment sector, enabling video rental and home movie sales. Additionally, the case set a standard for determining whether a device with copying or recording capability violated copyright law. The court ruled that because nonprofit, noncommercial home recording did not constitute a copyright violation, VCR technology did have legitimate legal uses, and the courts could not hold Sony and other companies liable for any misuse of their devices. Movie studios may have initially lamented the ruling, but the decision opened up the home video market, which would become one of the most profitable aspects of the industry. Five years after the verdict, home market sales totaled $2.5 billion, accounting for approximately 22% of the $11.5 billion video market.

This case has posed interpretive challenges in legal battles and debates over file sharing through the Internet. Cases involving Napster, Grokster, Morpheus, and BitTorrent all demonstrate the ongoing debate over the extent to which the *Sony* ruling applies to modern file-sharing technologies,

as well as the challenges of balancing copyright protection with the promotion of innovation and fair use.

The case significantly impacts generative AI by establishing the "substantial non-infringing uses" doctrine, offering a potential defense for AI developers against copyright infringement claims. This principle asserts that a manufacturer of a technology capable of both lawful and infringing uses is not liable for contributory copyright infringement if the product has substantial non-infringing uses. In the context of generative AI, this means that even if an AI model's output *could* infringe on copyrighted material, the AI developer might argue they are not liable if the model also has numerous legitimate, creative, and non-infringing applications. For example, AI models trained on vast datasets of text and images are being used to generate original stories, design new architectural concepts, or create unique musical compositions, none of which directly infringe existing works. This parallels the Betamax VCR, which could record copyrighted TV shows but also had "time-shifting" (watching later) as a legitimate, non-infringing use. However, the exact application remains highly debated, particularly when AI models "memorize" and reproduce copyrighted content or when their outputs directly compete with the market for the original works, leading to ongoing lawsuits against companies like OpenAI and Stability AI, where the scope of "fair use" and

"transformative use" in AI training and output is being rigorously tested.



Introduced in 1997, DVDs revolutionized home entertainment by replacing magnetic VHS tapes with crisp digital optical disc technology, offering higher video quality, instant scene navigation, and interactive bonus features. **Source**: Dillan Payne, Slyvania SDVD1650 DVD Player, CC BY-SA 4.0.

The Optical Disc System

In 1980, around the time when consumers began purchasing VCRs for home use, Pioneer Electronics introduced another technology: the LaserDisc. This optical storage disc produced higher-quality images than VHS tapes. Nonetheless, due to its large size (12 inches in diameter) and lack of recording capabilities, this early disc system never gained popularity in the U.S. market. However, the LaserDisc's successor, the

digital versatile disc (DVD), achieved far greater success. Like LaserDisc, the DVD stores encoded information that follows a spiral pattern on the disc's surface that devices can read when illuminated by a laser diode. However, unlike the analog-formatted LaserDisc, the entirely digital DVD allows for a smaller, lighter, and more compressed medium.

The first DVDs appeared in stores in 1997, impressing consumers and distributors with their numerous advantages over VHS tapes: sharper resolution, compactness, greater durability, interactive special features, and better copy protection. In only a few years, sales of DVD players and discs surpassed those of VCRs and videos, making the DVD the most rapidly adopted consumer electronics product of all time.



Before becoming one of the most popular streaming platforms, Netflix operated by mailing customers rental DVDs and games. **Source**: Marit & Toomas Hinnosaar, Netflix envelope (2655128664), (cropped), CC BY 2.0.

In 1999, Netflix revolutionized the movie rental market. Netflix began in 1997 as a video rental store in California. In 1999, the company introduced an online subscription service. Subscribers would select movies they wanted to see on Netflix's website, and the films would arrive in their mailboxes a few days later, along with a prepaid return envelope. This allowed users to select from thousands of movies and television shows in the privacy of their own home.

The Blu-ray Disc format, intended for storing and producing high-definition video, eventually surpassed DVD technology. Released in 2006, Blu-ray Disc technology has the same physical dimensions as DVDs but offers more than five times the storage capacity.

4K Ultra HD Blu-ray discs appeared a decade later, offering high-dynamic-range video and uncompressed audio for film enthusiasts. However, the widespread adoption of streaming platforms like Netflix, Hulu, Prime Video, and Disney+ has shifted the broader consumer market toward digital access rather than physical ownership. While standalone Blu-ray

player ownership among average households has decreased, physical media continues to be anchored by dedicated video game consoles equipped with optical disc drives (such as the PlayStation 5 and Xbox Series X) and sustained by a dedicated market of boutique physical media collectors.



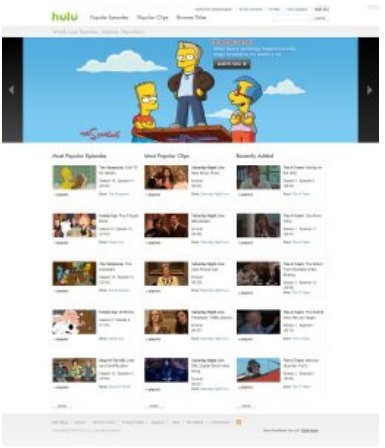
Driven by the widespread adoption of digital streaming and subscription platforms, physical media sales have plummeted by over 90% since their mid-2000s peak, shifting DVDs and Blu-rays from mass-market juggernauts into a specialized niche for collectors. **Source**: Cory Doctorow, DVD/VCD/LD shop, Sim Lim Square, Singapore, CC BY-SA 2.0.

DVD Decline and Growth of Streaming

DVD rentals and sales were once a cornerstone of the movie industry's revenue, generating nearly half of the returns on feature films. For a period, the industry even exploited the profitability of releasing some movies directly to DVD, either without a theatrical premiere or alongside their theatrical release, maximizing early revenue streams. This "straight-to-DVD" model was prolific, with estimates suggesting that for every movie appearing in theaters, three bypassed cinemas entirely. However, the economic shifts of the late 2000s, coupled with the rapid advancement of digital technologies, led to a sharp, irreversible decline in physical media sales and rentals among U.S. consumers.

The true disruptor emerged not from new physical formats like Blu-ray (which itself eventually waned), but from the burgeoning power of online digital downloads and, more significantly, streaming. Netflix, originally a DVD-by-mail service, shrewdly diversified its appeal starting in 2007 by offering subscribers instant streaming of movies and TV shows. This pivotal move allowed viewers to watch content on their computers, early handheld devices, and connected gaming consoles like the Nintendo Wii , Sony PlayStation 3, and Microsoft Xbox 360, without the need for a physical disc. This trend exploded, continuing on

modern gaming systems (such as the PlayStation 5, Xbox Series X/S, and Nintendo Switch 2), smart TVs, and a vast array of dedicated streaming devices (e.g., Roku, Apple TV, Amazon Fire TV Stick). The shift from physical ownership to digital access reshaped consumer expectations, valuing convenience and vast libraries over disc collections.



Hulu rose to prominence by offering next-day streaming of current television episodes and pioneering ad-supported video-on-demand before evolving into an award-winning original content powerhouse. **Source**: Shannonpatrick17, hulu.com Watch your favorites. Anytime. Anywhere , CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Hollywood initially viewed online piracy as its most immediate digital threat. However, by the 2010s, studios began to pivot strategically, transforming this potential vulnerability into a new revenue stream through legitimate digital distribution. Platforms like Hulu, launched in 2007 as a joint venture by major broadcasters, offered a legal, ad-

supported avenue for fans to access a select variety of popular movies and TV shows, mirroring the "free" access model of traditional broadcast television. This model quickly evolved; in April 2010, Hulu introduced Hulu Plus (later rebranded as Hulu's ad-free tier or Hulu with Live TV), a fee-based service that provided access to an expanded library and premium content. Hulu, like many services that followed, focused on providing a seamless home-viewing experience through online streaming rather than allowing content downloads to personal devices, thus maintaining control over intellectual property.

Today, the digital streaming landscape is vastly more complex and competitive. Beyond Hulu, giants like Netflix (which transformed into a global streaming behemoth), HBO Max, Disney+, Amazon Prime Video, and Apple TV, among many others, dominate the market. These services operate primarily on subscription models, offering vast libraries of licensed content, original programming with blockbuster budgets, and often, early access to films shortly after their theatrical runs, or even simultaneous day-and-date releases. Studio revenue streams are now heavily diversified across theatrical box office, Premium Video-on-Demand rentals/purchases, and licensing deals or direct subscriptions for their streaming platforms. Piracy remains a concern, but the industry's focus has largely shifted to optimizing content release strategies across these myriad digital windows.



Star Wars: Episode II – Attack of the Clones made cinematic history as the first major Hollywood feature shot entirely on high-definition 24p digital video rather than traditional 35mm motion picture film. **Source**: Felix Müller, Star Wars Episode 2, PDM 1.0.

The Industry Goes Digital

In an industry where technological innovation can rapidly transform production or distribution, for over a century, most movies relied on celluloid film, the same material Thomas Edison used for his kinetoscope. The transition to digital filmmaking, while initially slow, gained irreversible momentum in the 21st century. George Lucas's *Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones* was indeed a pioneering major Hollywood film shot entirely on high-definition digital video. However, widespread adoption was gradual; much of the movie industry—including directors,

producers, studios, and especially major movie theater chains—slowly embraced this profound shift in filming technology. When *Attack of the Clones* premiered, only a handful of theaters worldwide were equipped with digital projectors,
highlighting the significant infrastructure challenge.

However, digital cinematography has since become the prevailing standard in film production, offering numerous compelling advantages. During production, digital cameras virtually eliminate the need for costly and time-consuming film reloading, allowing directors to capture longer, uninterrupted takes. This digital format also radically streamlines the post-production process. Instead of physically scanning film



The industry-wide transition from traditional motion picture film to digital cameras revolutionized movie production by drastically reducing physical processing costs, streamlining on-set workflows through instant playback, and democratizing high-end filmmaking tools. **Source**: Elio Yañez, From film to digital, CC BY 2.0 .

negatives, digitally captured footage can be sent electronically to editing suites for immediate manipulation, special effects integration, and color grading. Furthermore, digital film files, when properly managed and stored, do not suffer from the physical degradation (scratches, dust, color shifts) inherent to celluloid film, consistently producing crystal-clear, high-resolution images.

For distributors and production companies, the economic benefits of digital production and distribution are immense. Digitally recorded images eliminate the considerable costs associated with purchasing, developing, and printing physical film stock. In the era of celluloid, studios spent hundreds of millions of dollars annually just making film prints for distribution to theaters, plus high additional costs to ship the heavy reels globally. For a major wide release that might go to thousands of screens, printing and shipping 35-mm film could easily cost tens of millions of dollars. In contrast, with a digital format, these costs are drastically reduced or disappear entirely, as files can be sent to theaters on a single hard drive or, increasingly, delivered securely over digital networks (cable, satellite, or dedicated internet lines), saving the industry millions.

The primary hurdle to this digital transition was initially the exhibition side. For theaters, the high upfront costs of making the digital switch – with high-quality digital projectors costing over $100,000 each – offered fewer immediate short-term incentives than the significant

savings seen by distributors. Moreover, many theaters had substantial existing investments in their 35-mm film projection equipment. However, the benefits of digital projection (ease of distribution, pristine image quality, and, in particular, the resurgence of 3-D content) eventually provided the necessary impetus, and virtually all commercial cinemas worldwide have now converted to digital projection.

Despite the operational benefits during production and distribution, digital film introduces new challenges for long-term archival storage. While traditional 35-millimeter masters, stored in controlled environments such as subterranean mines, can have remarkable longevity (often hundreds of years if properly maintained), digital data presents distinct durability challenges. Early digital formats like DVDs proved susceptible to rapid degradation, with uncertain lifespans. Hard drives, while more robust, require active management, including periodic operation to prevent data loss and regular migration of files to newer formats to prevent obsolescence as technology evolves. Consequently, the long-term storage and preservation costs for digital masters can sometimes be higher than those for traditional film archives due to the need for continuous oversight and format migration, a vital consideration given that studios generate significant revenue from the re-release of their extensive film libraries.



Modern 3-D cinema experienced a massive resurgence following the technological leap of James Cameron's *Avatar* in 2009. Still, the format has since settled into a specialized premium theater experience as audiences grew weary of cheap post-production conversions. **Source**: NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, Viewing 3D IMAX clips, CC BY 2.0.

The Resurgence of 3-D

After World War II, as movie attendance began to decline with the rise of television, the motion picture industry experimented with new technologies to entice audiences back into theaters. One such innovation was **3-D**, which offered the novel experience of increased audience immersion, as objects appeared to extend into the theater space. This effect was achieved by mimicking human binocular vision: filmmakers

used specialized camera rigs with two lenses spaced slightly apart, capturing separate images for the left and right eyes. In theaters, these images were projected simultaneously, and audiences wore polarized glasses to filter the projections, ensuring each eye received its intended image.

The initial 3-D boom was an instant sensation. *House of Wax*, released in 1953, became one of the year's most successful films, grossing over $1 million in its first three weeks. The relatively inexpensive equipment required for 3-D production led to a rapid proliferation, with studios churning out dozens of such films in just two years. However, this initial popularity proved fleeting, already waning by the end of 1953. The "3-D headache" phenomenon, caused by technical inconsistencies in filming and projection (such as manual alignment of converging images and distortions from 35-mm film's motion through cameras), contributed significantly to its rapid decline.

For decades, 3-D migrated from mainstream popular entertainment to a novelty attraction, primarily found in IMAX cinemas, as an occasional marketing draw for children's movies, and in theme-park experiences like *Captain Eo* at Disneyland. However, new digital technologies brought about a significant resurgence of the trend in the late 2000s and early 2010s, transforming the contemporary 3-D experience from a mere gimmick into a more serious cinematic development . Pioneers like DreamWorks Animation CEO

Jeffrey Katzenberg championed the new 3-D, likening its potential impact to the introduction of color.



Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland* grossed more than $1 billion worldwide, cementing 2D-to-3D post-conversion as a lucrative studio trend. **Source**: VeganHeart Always, mad hatter, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0 .

Modern digital filmmaking addressed the technical flaws that plagued early 3-D. With computerized calibration, camera alignment is precise, eliminating the "headache" issue. The digital recording format itself removes the celluloid-produced distortion. Furthermore, a single digital projector, often equipped with a sophisticated photo-optical device, can now perform the work that previously required two perfectly synchronized projectors. For theater chains, 3-D provided a compelling incentive to invest in digital projection, as audiences were willing to pay higher ticket prices for an immersive experience that could not be easily replicated at home. Films like James Cameron's *Avatar*, which became the highest-grossing film of all time for many years, and *Alice in Wonderland* powerfully

demonstrated 3-D's box-office potential, with a significant portion of their earnings coming from 3-D ticket sales. While 3-D is no longer an automatic feature for every major release, it remains a pillar of premium large-format theatrical experiences, such as IMAX 3-D and RealD 3D, particularly for visual spectacles like *Avatar: The Way of Water*. Premium screens offering higher frame rates, immersive sound formats (such as Dolby Atmos), and 3-D projection allow theater chains to differentiate the theatrical event from home streaming setups.

Artificial Intelligence and Virtual Production in Modern Filmmaking



Following the reveal of his AI-generated role in *As Deep as the Grave*, the posthumous recreation of Val Kilmer sparked intense debate across Hollywood, with critics and fans condemning the technology as exploitative and disrespectful to the actor's legacy. At the same time, filmmakers and Kilmer's family defended the performance as an ethical, estate-approved tribute. **Source**: Georges Biard, Val Kilmer Cannes, CC BY-SA 3.0.

In addition to digital projection and distribution, cutting-edge technologies are reshaping the physical production phase of filmmaking. One of the most prominent advances is virtual production, epitomized by LED volume displays such as Industrial Light & Magic's StageCraft technology. Instead of shooting against traditional green screens and compositing visual effects months later in post-production, filmmakers can project real-time, photo-realistic digital environments onto surrounding LED walls. Cameras synchronized with game engine software (such as Unreal Engine) dynamically adjust perspective and lighting in real time, allowing actors to interact with visible surroundings and directors to capture finished

visual effects directly in-camera. This technology reduces the need for extensive location travel and streamlines post-production pipelines.

Simultaneously, machine learning and artificial intelligence tools are becoming integrated across multiple stages of production. Visual effects studios utilize digital de-aging algorithms, automated rotoscoping, and generative visual tools to streamline laborious editing tasks and alter performances seamlessly. While these technological developments offer filmmakers unprecedented creative flexibility and cost efficiencies, they have also sparked significant industry debates. Concerns about labor automation, the fair use of actor likenesses, generative scriptwriting tools, and copyright protections have led to major industry contract negotiations and strikes, highlighting how emerging technologies continually challenge and redefine Hollywood's creative and economic structures.

CHAPTER 8: TELEVISION



Source: Julian Tysoe, Children watching TV (cropped), CC BY 2.0.

- 8.1 Streaming and Television
- 8.2 The Evolution of Television
- 8.3 The Relationship Between Television and Culture
- 8.4 Issues and Trends Facing the Television Industry
- 8.5 Influence of New Technologies

8.1 TELEVISION AND STREAMING



Source: Netflix, Squid Game logo, public domain.

The global phenomenon of Netflix's *Squid Game*, released in late 2021, offered a stark illustration of television's profound evolution. Within its first 28 days, the South Korean survival drama captivated an astounding 111 million households worldwide, becoming Netflix's most-watched series at the time. To grasp the magnitude of this, consider the highest-rated traditional broadcast programs released around the same period. While a Super Bowl might still draw over 100 million live linear viewers, a top-rated scripted network drama like *NCIS* or a cable hit like *Yellowstone* typically garners audiences in the range of 10-20 million viewers per new episode. This dramatic disparity in viewership metrics—between global streaming households and domestic linear ratings—underscores a fundamental shift: the very concept of

"watching television" has been irrevocably transformed by the advent and dominance of streaming.

For much of its history, "watching television" was an appointment-based, communal activity. In the medium's "Golden Age" of the 1950s and 60s, families gathered around a single set in the living room, adhering to strict broadcast schedules. With only a handful of channels, programming was a shared national experience, encompassing news, variety shows, and sitcoms. The advent of cable television in the 1970s and 1980s expanded choice exponentially, introducing hundreds of channels and fostering niche programming; however, the linear, schedule-driven model largely persisted. The 1984 Betamax case, which affirmed the legality of time-shifting (recording a program to watch later), offered a nascent form of on-demand viewing, albeit still tethered to the original broadcast. Viewers were still "watching TV" in a fundamentally passive way, receiving content dictated by broadcasters.

The true revolution began subtly with Netflix's pivot from a DVD-by-mail service to a streaming platform
in the late 2000s. Initially, streaming was about convenience, offering a digital library of licensed movies and old TV shows. This marked the first significant departure from the linear channel paradigm; suddenly, viewers could select what they wanted, when they wanted it, from a growing catalog of content. The shift accelerated dramatically when Netflix began

investing heavily in original content, starting notably with *House of Cards* in 2013. This move not only legitimized streaming as a production powerhouse but also popularized "binge-watching"—the consumption of entire seasons in one sitting. This marked a radical departure from the weekly release schedule, giving viewers unprecedented control over their viewing pace.

The success of Netflix's originals spurred a proliferation of rival streaming services, as traditional media companies like Disney (Disney+), Warner Bros. Discovery (HBO Max), and NBCUniversal (Peacock) launched their platforms, reclaiming their content and creating new exclusive programming. This era ushered in cord-cutting, where consumers increasingly abandoned expensive cable subscriptions in favor of a curated bundle of streaming services. The global nature of these platforms, unconstrained by national broadcast boundaries, allowed a show like *Squid Game*, produced in South Korea, to instantly become a worldwide sensation, transcending language and cultural barriers in a way that traditional television rarely could.

Consequently, "watching television" today is a far more personalized, active, and fragmented experience. Viewers are no longer beholden to schedules; they watch what they want, when they want it, on their terms. With multiple devices (smartphones, tablets, laptops, smart TVs) and individual profiles on streaming services, family members often watch different programs simultaneously in other rooms, or even on

the go. The act is no longer just about turning on the TV; it involves navigating vast libraries, searching for specific titles, and curating personal watchlists. Content from virtually any country is now accessible, breaking down geographical barriers that once defined television consumption. "Watching television" doesn't even require a television anymore, as the internet has become the primary delivery mechanism, blurring the lines between traditional television and other forms of digital video content, such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram Reels, and live streams of video games.

As the streaming ecosystem matures, subscription fatigue and rising production costs have driven another major evolution: the return of advertising and algorithmic content recommendation. While early subscription video-on-demand services emphasized ad-free, premium experiences, platforms now heavily promote discounted, ad-supported tiers to maintain subscriber growth and expand margins. Simultaneously, Free Ad-Supported Streaming Television services like Pluto TV, Tubi, and The Roku Channel have gained significant traction by offering scheduled linear channels reminiscent of classic cable television, complete with advertisement breaks but delivered entirely over the internet.

Beyond monetizing viewers, modern streaming hubs rely heavily on machine learning algorithms and predictive analytics to dictate user engagement. Personalization engines analyze viewing habits, time spent on titles, and search queries to generate tailored user interfaces, automated autoplay

queues, and custom homepages. Instead of relying solely on network executives or print programming guides to determine cultural momentum, data-driven distribution models continuously direct viewer attention, representing a complete synthesis of artificial intelligence, digital delivery, and mass entertainment.

In essence, streaming has dismantled the traditional gatekeepers and geographical constraints of television, transforming it from a scheduled broadcast medium into a vast, on-demand content ecosystem. The success of *Squid Game* was not just about a popular show; it was a testament to a new era in which "television" is less about a device or a channel and more about a personalized, borderless, and constantly evolving digital experience. The screen remains central, but what we watch, how we watch it, and where we watch it have undergone fundamental changes, promising continued innovation and adaptation in the years to come.

8.2 THE EVOLUTION OF TELEVISION



Source: Photo by G_r_a_f_i_c on Pixabay.

Since replacing radio as the most popular mass medium in the 1950s, television has played such an integral role in modern life that some find it difficult to imagine life without it. Both reflecting and shaping cultural values, television is sometimes criticized for its alleged negative influences on children and young people, and lauded for its ability to create a common experience for all its viewers. Major world events such as the John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King assassinations and the Vietnam War

in the 1960s, the Challenger shuttle explosion in 1986, the 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, the impact and aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and global pandemic news coverage have all played out on television, uniting millions of people in shared tragedy and hope. Today, as Internet technology and satellite broadcasting change how people watch television, the medium continues to evolve, solidifying its position as one of the most important inventions of the 20th century.

The Origins of Television

Inventors conceived the idea of television—which involves converting an image into electrical impulses, transmitting them via wires or radio waves, and then reconverting them into images—long before the technology to create it was developed. Early pioneers speculated that if they could separate audio waves from the electromagnetic spectrum to make radio, so too could they do the same to television waves to transmit visual images. As early as 1876, Boston civil servant George Carey envisioned complete television systems, putting forward drawings for a "selenium camera" that would enable people to "see by electricity" a year later.

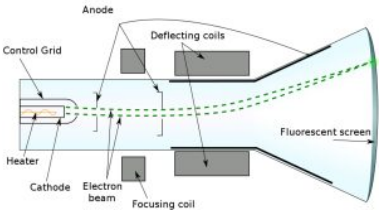


Diagram of the cathode ray tube. **Source**: Vector:Interiot, Raster:Theresa Knott, Cathode ray tube diagram-en, CC BY-SA 3.0.

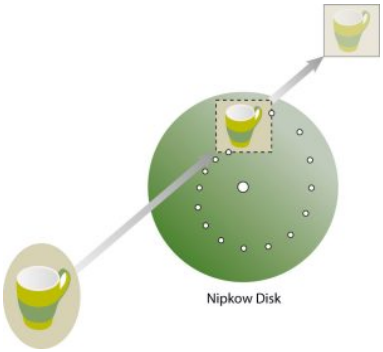
During the late 1800s, several technological advancements laid the groundwork for the development of television. The invention of the **cathode ray tube** (CRT) by German physicist Karl Ferdinand Braun in 1897 was a pivotal precursor to the TV picture tube. Initially created as a scanning device known as the cathode ray oscilloscope, the CRT effectively combined the principles of the camera and electricity. It had a fluorescent screen that emitted visible light (in the form of images) when struck by an electron beam. During the 1880s, a system created by German inventor Paul Nipkow consisted of a large, flat metal **scanning disk** with a series of small perforations arranged in a spiral pattern. As the disk rotated, light passed through the holes, separating pictures into pinpoints of light that could be transmitted as a series of electronic lines. The number of scanned lines equaled the number of perforations, and each rotation of the disk produced a television frame. Nipkow's mechanical disk served as the foundation for experiments on the transmission of visual images for several decades.

In 1907, Russian scientist Boris Rosing used both the CRT and the mechanical scanner system in an experimental

television system. With the CRT in the receiver, he used focused electron beams to display images, transmitting crude geometrical patterns onto the television screen. The mechanical disk system would function like a camera, forming a primitive television system.

Mechanical Television versus Electronic Television

From the early experiments with visual transmissions, two types of television systems emerged: mechanical television and electronic television. Nipkow's disk system formed the basis for **mechanical television**, pioneered by British inventor John Logie Baird in 1926 when he gave the world's first public demonstration of a television system at Selfridge's department store in London. He used rotating mechanical disks to scan moving images into electrical impulses, which he then transmitted via cable to a screen. Here, they showed up as a low-resolution pattern of light and dark. Baird's first television program displayed the heads of two ventriloquist dummies, which he



The Mechanical Disk System

operated in front of the camera apparatus out of the audience's sight. In 1928, Baird extended his system by transmitting a signal between London and New York. The following year, the British Broadcasting Corporation adopted his mechanical system, and by 1932, Baird had developed the first commercially viable television system, selling 10,000 sets. Despite its initial success, mechanical television had several technical limitations. Engineers could get no more than about 240 lines of resolution, meaning images would always appear slightly fuzzy (in contrast to modern high-definition and 4K digital displays, which produce images of 1,080 to 2,160 horizontal lines of resolution). The use of a spinning disk also limited the number of new pictures viewers could see per second, resulting in excessive flickering. The mechanical aspect of television proved disadvantageous and required modifications for the technology to progress.



Philo T. Farnsworth created the first fully electronic television system, successfully transmitting his first image in 1927 based on a design he had famously conceptualized as a teenager while plowing a potato field. **Source**: PSchatzkin, Philo T. Farnsworth in 1936, cropped, CC0 1.0.

At the same time, Baird (and, separately, American inventor Charles Jenkins) developed the mechanical model, and other inventors worked on an **electronic television** system based on the CRT. While working on his father's farm and observing the horizontal rows of crops he tended, Idaho teenager Philo Farnsworth realized that an electronic beam could scan a picture in horizontal lines in much the same way, which would reproduce the image almost instantaneously. In 1927, Farnsworth transmitted the first all-electronic TV picture by

rotating a single straight line scratched onto a square piece of painted glass by 90 degrees.

Farnsworth barely profited from his invention; during World War II, the government suspended sales of TV sets, and by the time the war ended, Farnsworth's original patents had almost expired. However, following the war, RCA modified many of its key patents and applied the changes to improve television picture quality.

Having coexisted for several years, electronic television sets eventually replaced mechanical systems. With better picture quality, reduced noise, a more compact size, and fewer visual limitations, the electronic system provided a significantly superior viewing experience compared to its predecessor. By 1939,
mechanical television broadcasts ended in the United States.



NBC publicity photo that depicts their work in television beginning in 1928. **Source**: National Broadcasting Company (NBC), First television broadcast NBC, cropped, CC0 1.0.

Early Broadcasting

Television broadcasting began as early as 1928, when the Federal Radio Commission authorized inventor Charles Jenkins to broadcast from W3XK, an experimental station in the Maryland suburbs of Washington, DC. The station regularly broadcast silhouette images from motion pictures to the general public, at a resolution of just 48 lines. Similar experimental stations ran broadcasts throughout the early 1930s. In 1939, RCA subsidiary NBC (National Broadcasting Company) became the first network to introduce regular television broadcasts, transmitting its

inaugural telecast of the opening ceremonies at the New York World's Fair

. The station's initial broadcasts reached just 400 television sets in the New York area, with an audience of 5,000 to 8,000 people.

Only a privileged few initially enjoyed television, with sets ranging from $200 to $600—a substantial sum in the 1930s, when the average annual income was $1,368. RCA offered four types of television receivers, which they sold in high-end department stores such as Macy's and Bloomingdale's, and received channels 1 through 5. Early receivers featured a 5-, 9-, or



The Andrea 1-F-5 was a pioneering 5-inch tabletop television set sold both pre-assembled and as a DIY kit, making early electronic broadcasting accessible to home hobbyists. **Source**: RoughRider00, Advertisement for the 1F5 and KTE5 TV models, public domain.

12-inch screen, a fraction of the size of modern TV sets. Television sales before World War II disappointed—an uncertain economic climate, the threat of war, the high cost of a television receiver, and the limited number of programs on offer deterred numerous prospective buyers. Many unsold television sets languished in storage and were sold after the war.

RCA radio's rival, CBS (Columbia Broadcasting System), also began broadcasting regular programs in the 1930s. To prevent viewers from needing a separate television set for each network, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) established a single technical standard for all networks. In 1941, the panel recommended a 525-line system and an image rate of 30 frames per second. It also recommended that all U.S. television sets operate using analog signals (broadcast signals made of varying radio waves). The FCC replaced analog signals with digital ones (signals transmitted as binary code) in 2009.

With the outbreak of World War II, many companies, including RCA and General Electric, turned their attention to military production. Instead of commercial television sets, they began to churn out military electronic equipment. In addition, the war halted nearly all television broadcasting; many TV stations reduced their schedules to around four hours per week or went off the air altogether.



The RCA CT-100 was the first mass-produced color television set for consumers, marking a pivotal milestone in broadcast history. **Source**: HumanisticRationale at English Wikipedia, RCA CT-100 screenshot, CC BY 3.0.

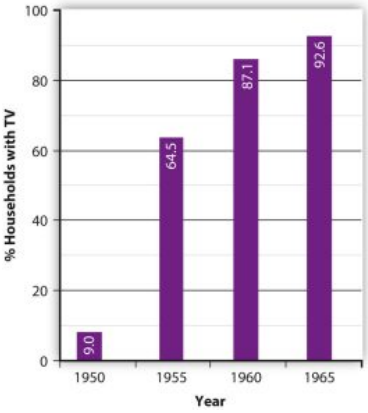
Color Technology

Although it did not become available until the 1950s and did not gain popularity until the 1960s, proposals for producing color television had been made as early as 1904. John Logie Baird demonstrated its use in 1928. As with his black-and-white television system, Baird adopted the mechanical method, using a Nipkow scanning disk with three spirals, one for each primary color (red, green, and blue). In 1940, CBS researchers, led by Hungarian television engineer Peter Goldmark, used Baird's 1928 designs to develop

a concept of mechanical color television that could reproduce the color seen by a camera lens.

Following World War II, the National Television System Committee developed an all-electronic color system compatible with black-and-white TV sets, which gained FCC approval in 1953. A year later, NBC made the first national color broadcast when it telecast the Tournament of Roses Parade, though few people owned color televisions and could enjoy this innovation. Despite the television industry's support for the new technology, it would take another 10 years before color television gained widespread popularity in the United States. Color TV sets officially surpassed black-and-white TV sets in U.S. households in 1972.

The Golden Age of Television



During the so-called "golden age" of television, the percentage of U.S. households that owned a television set rose from 9 percent in 1950 to 95.3 percent in 1970.

Historians have dubbed the 1950s the golden age of television, during which the medium experienced massive growth in popularity. Mass-production advances made during World War II substantially lowered the cost of purchasing a set, making television accessible to the masses. In 1945, the United States had fewer than 10,000 active TV sets. By 1950, this figure had risen to approximately 6 million, and by 1960, it had exceeded 60 million. Many early television program formats borrowed heavily from network radio shows and failed to capitalize on the new medium's potential. For example, newscasters read the news as they would have during a radio broadcast, and the network relied on newsreel companies to provide footage of news events. However, during the early 1950s, television programming began to branch out from radio broadcasting, borrowing from theater to create

acclaimed dramatic anthologies such as *Playhouse 90* and *The U.S. Steel Hour*, and producing high-quality news films to accompany coverage of daily events.

Two new types of programs—the magazine format and the TV spectacular—played an essential role in helping the networks gain control over the content of their broadcasts. A single sponsor developed and produced early television programs, which gave the sponsor significant control over the show's content. By increasing program length from the standard 15-minute radio show to 30 minutes or longer, the networks substantially increased advertising costs for program sponsors, making it prohibitive for a single sponsor to support the program. Magazine programs such as *The Today Show* and *The Tonight Show*, which premiered in the early 1950s, featured multiple segments and ran for several hours. They also preferred daily rather than weekly broadcasts, which drastically increased advertising costs. As a result, the networks began to sell spot advertisements that ran for 30 or 60 seconds . Similarly, the television spectacular (now known as the television special) featured lengthy music-variety shows sponsored by multiple advertisers.



ABC's *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* returned the quiz show to prime-time television after a 40-year absence. Its popularity spawned international versions of the show, including the one pictured here in Bulgaria. **Source**: Slavov2510, Wwtbam bg, CC BY-SA 4.0

In the mid-1950s, the networks brought back the radio quiz show genre. Inexpensive and easy to produce, the trend caught on, and by the end of the 1957–1958 season, 22 quiz shows aired on network television, including CBS's *$64,000 Question*. Shorter than some newer types of programs, quiz shows enabled a single corporate sponsor to have its name displayed on the set throughout the program. The popularity of the quiz show genre declined at the end of the decade, however, when audiences discovered that producers had rigged most shows by providing some contestants with the answers, allowing them to select the most likable or controversial candidates. When a slew of contestants accused the show *Dotto* of this in 1958, the networks rapidly dropped 20 quiz shows. A New York grand jury probe and a 1959 congressional investigation effectively ended prime-time quiz shows for 40 years, until ABC revived the genre with its launch of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* in 1999.

The Evolution of Television Programming



I Love Lucy was initially controversial due to its depiction of a white Lucille Ball married to the Cuban-American Desi Arnaz, a progressive portrayal for its time. **Source**: CBS Television. The Bureau of Industrial Services was a division of advertising agency Young & Rubicam. Information shown on back of photo. Uploaded by We hope at en.wikipedia, I love lucy 1956, public domain.

Radio had a significant influence on the early days of television programming. Many formats, genres, and even specific shows made a direct leap from the airwaves to the television screen. Variety shows, with their mix of musical acts, comedy sketches, and

celebrity appearances, were immensely popular during television's infancy, featuring stars like Ed Sullivan and Milton Berle who became household names. Similarly, anthology dramas, which presented a different story and cast each week, provided a bridge from radio's dramatic serials.

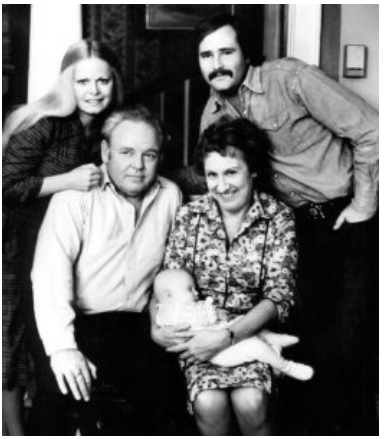
A pivotal moment in this evolution came with the debut of *I Love Lucy* in 1951. This groundbreaking sitcom, starring Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz, famously ended the era of exclusively live television by being taped rather than filmed live. This innovative decision enabled the creation of high-quality episode copies, which could then be rebroadcast, giving rise to the concept of syndication. Ball and Arnaz shrewdly retained the syndication rights, ensuring the show's enduring legacy and profitability. Its episodes continue to be broadcast and enjoyed by audiences today, a testament to its timeless appeal and the foresight of its creators.

Beyond *I Love Lucy*, other iconic programs emerged in television's formative years. Children flocked to shows like *Howdy Doody*, while the Western genre, a carryover from radio, found immense success with series such as *Gunsmoke* . The 1950s and early 1960s also saw the rise of beloved comedies, such as *The Honeymooners*, and the thought-provoking science fiction anthology *The Twilight Zone*. These shows laid the groundwork for television's cultural impact, culminating in watershed moments like *The Ed Sullivan Show* 's broadcast on February 9, 1964, when an astonishing 73

million viewers tuned in to watch The Beatles perform, solidifying television's power as a unifying cultural force.

The evolution of television programming continued to accelerate in the following decades. The 1970s ushered in a new era for sports broadcasting with the debut of *Monday Night Football* in 1970, transforming sports into a cultural mainstay and a prime-time event. This growing prominence even led some sports, like the NBA, to adapt their rules to quicken the pace and enhance viewer engagement. The decade also saw the groundbreaking 1977 mini-series *Roots*. This 26-hour epic captivated the nation and became the third-highest-rated program in history, demonstrating the power of long-form, serialized storytelling. On the opposite end of the spectrum, the 1970s also produced *All in the Family*, arguably the most critically acclaimed sitcom of the period.

The 1980s brought further innovation, notably with the debut of *Hill Street Blues* in 1980. This series pioneered a new genre of gritty, serialized police dramas, distinguishing itself with its large ensemble cast and multiple intertwining storylines —a format that would influence countless shows to follow. Its success underscored the creative vision of producers like Steven Bochco. Another transformative moment arrived in 1981 with the launch of MTV, famously kicked off by The Buggles' "Video Killed the Radio Star." MTV demonstrated that fragmented content, delivered through music videos and niche programming, could generate significant profit and attract a dedicated audience, paving the way for specialized channels.



The controversial comedy *All in the Family* featured a bigoted lead character, fearlessly tackled social issues, and became the highest-rated program of its time, proving that television could be both entertaining and a catalyst for discussion. **Source**: CBS Television, All in the Family cast 1976, public domain.

The competitive landscape of broadcast television also expanded significantly in the 1980s. In 1986, media mogul Rupert Murdoch launched the Fox Network, challenging the

long-standing dominance of the "Big Three" (ABC, CBS, NBC). Fox strategically attracted independent stations by offering them free programming, thereby expanding its reach and establishing a foothold in the industry. Early successes, such as the edgy sitcom *Married...with Children*, helped define its brand. Over the years, Fox solidified its position as a top-rated broadcaster with a string of highly popular and influential shows, including *NFL Football*, *The Simpsons*, *American Idol*, *Glee*, and *So You Think You Can Dance*, proving its ability to deliver diverse hits across genres.



The Sopranos revolutionized television storytelling by exploring the psychological decay of a New Jersey mob boss, cementing the antihero archetype and launching the golden age of prestige TV. **Source**: Ilona Gaynor, Lachapelle/The Sopranos, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

This continuous evolution laid the groundwork for what is often referred to as "America's Second Golden Age of Television." Beginning roughly in the late 1990s and flourishing into the 21st century, this era is defined by an explosion of high-quality, complex,

and often serialized dramas and comedies. Fueled by the rise of cable networks and, later, streaming services, this period has witnessed a dramatic increase in creative freedom, enabling more nuanced storytelling, deeper character development, and a greater willingness to tackle challenging themes. Programs such as *The Sopranos*, which redefined the anti-hero and cinematic storytelling on cable; *The Wire*, celebrated for its intricate social commentary and realistic portrayal of urban institutions; *Mad Men*, lauded for its sophisticated writing, historical detail, and visual artistry; *Breaking Bad*, a masterclass in character transformation and escalating tension; and *Game of Thrones*, a massive cultural phenomenon that demonstrated epic scale and cinematic ambition on the small screen, have pushed artistic boundaries, attracted top-tier talent, and elevated television to an art form on par with, and often surpassing, feature films, fundamentally reshaping audience expectations for narrative depth and production quality.

How Television News Evolved: From Early Broadcasts to the Digital Age



Publicity photo of Mike Wallace and Harry Reasoner from the premiere of *60 Minutes*. **Source**: CBS Television, 60 minutes 1968, public domain.

The roots of television news are deeply intertwined with radio, with many early programs and personalities transitioning directly to the visual medium. A towering figure in this early era was Edward R. Murrow, who gained widespread renown as a voice of World War II through his powerful radio broadcasts. He seamlessly moved to television with *See It Now*, a groundbreaking documentary series that harnessed the new medium's

visual power to explore critical social and political issues. A particularly impactful moment was Murrow's courageous 1954 broadcast challenging Senator Joseph McCarthy. This pivotal event showcased television's potential for investigative journalism and later inspired the film and stage play *Good Night, and Good Luck*. Concurrently, *Meet the Press* debuted in 1947, establishing itself as television's longest-running news and commentary program, while *CBS-TV News* began airing a concise 15-minute program on weeknights in 1948, a standard length for news broadcasts until the early 1960s.

Television's influence on public discourse dramatically expanded with the 1960 Kennedy-Nixon debates. These televised confrontations allowed millions of Americans to see the candidates side by side, with visual impressions playing a significant role in shaping voters' perceptions. Recognizing this growing power, news programming began to expand. By 1963, major news shows had lengthened to one hour, often anchored by iconic figures like Walter Cronkite, widely regarded as "the most trusted man in America." Another significant development in news programming during this time period was the debut of *60 Minutes* on CBS in September 1968. This groundbreaking newsmagazine format, created by Don Hewitt, blended

investigative reporting, newsmaker interviews, and in-depth profiles, becoming television's longest-running prime-time series and setting a new standard for broadcast journalism. This period also saw the widespread adoption of crucial technologies such as videotape, satellite communication, and color broadcasting, which collectively revolutionized the immediacy, reach, and visual quality of news delivery, making it a truly national and often instantaneous experience.



Source: Mel GX, cnn_1979-1980-002, CC BY 2.0.

A fundamental transformation in television news arrived with the launch of CNN (Cable News Network) in 1980. Founded by Ted Turner, this pioneering 24-hour news network was initially met with skepticism and was sometimes derisively called "Chicken Noodle News." However, Turner's audacious vision, encapsulated by his promise that the station would not go off the air "until the world ends," proved prescient. CNN's defining moment came during the 1991 Gulf War, when its live, round-the-clock reporting from the conflict zone provided an unprecedented level of real-

time information, solidifying its reputation as a global news leader and ushering in the era of continuous news cycles.

In the mid-1990s, the cable news landscape diversified further with the emergence of Fox News. Launched in 1996, Fox News quickly became one of the most financially successful cable news networks (it has been the top-rated cable network since 2019), cultivating a distinct conservative viewpoint that resonated with a large audience. Its success challenged the established news order and introduced a more overtly opinion-driven programming style. However, the network faced significant reputational damage and legal scrutiny following its coverage of the 2020 U.S. presidential election, culminating in the high-profile Dominion Voting Systems v. Fox News defamation lawsuit, which raised serious questions about the accuracy and integrity of its reporting. Fox News settled the case for $787.5 million.

News programming continues to undergo rapid transformation in the digital age. The proliferation of smartphones, streaming news apps, short-form video feeds on platforms like TikTok and YouTube, and algorithmic news feeds has fragmented audiences away from traditional evening news broadcasts. While digital

tools enable instantaneous global coverage, news organizations face heightened challenges including deepfake video technology, AI-generated content, algorithmic filter bubbles, and public distrust driven by hyper-partisan commentary. Legacy news outlets continue to test digital subscription models and free ad-supported streaming TV news channels to stay financially viable.



A 1970s-era Jerrold brand cable box, which let customers select what channel to watch by manipulating a three-position switch and pushing one of 12 push buttons. **Source**: Mel GX, cnn_1979-1980-002, CC BY 2.0.

The Rise of Cable Television

Formerly known as Community Antenna Television, cable

television originated in the 1940s in remote or mountainous areas, including Arkansas, Oregon, and Pennsylvania, to enhance the poor reception of regular television signals. People in these communities would erect cable antennas on mountains or other high points, and homes connected to the towers would receive broadcast signals.

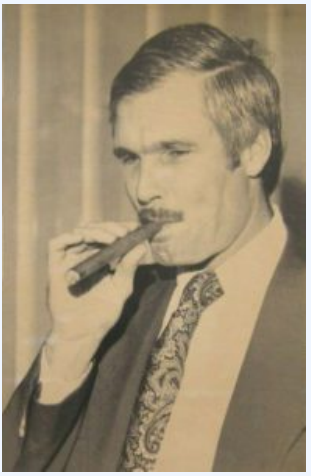
In the late 1950s, cable operators began experimenting with microwave technology to bring signals from distant cities. Taking advantage of their ability to receive long-distance broadcast signals, operators branched out from providing a local community service and began focusing on offering consumers more extensive programming choices. Rural parts of Pennsylvania, which had only three channels (one for each network), soon had more than double the original number of channels as operators began to import programs from independent stations in New York and Philadelphia. The service's wider variety of channels and clearer reception soon attracted viewers from urban areas. By 1962, nearly 800 cable systems served about 850,000 subscribers.

Local TV stations viewed cable's exponential growth as a threat, and broadcasters campaigned for the FCC to regulate it. The FCC responded by restricting cable systems' ability to import signals from distant stations, freezing the development of cable television in major markets until the early 1970s. When gradual deregulation began to loosen the restrictions, cable operator Service Electric launched the service that would change the face of the cable television industry—pay TV. The

1972 Home Box Office (HBO) venture, in which customers paid a subscription fee to access premium cable television shows and video-on-demand products, became the nation's first successful pay cable service. HBO's use of a satellite to distribute its programming made the network available throughout the United States. This gave it an advantage over the microwave-distributed services, and other cable providers quickly followed suit. Further deregulation, provided by the 1984 Cable Act, enabled the industry to expand even further. By the end of the 1980s, nearly 53 million households had subscribed to cable television. In the 1990s, cable operators upgraded their systems by building higher-capacity hybrid networks of fiber-optic and coaxial cable. These broadband networks offer a multichannel television service, along with telephone, high-speed Internet, and advanced digital video services, all delivered over a single wire.

Ted Turner: A Cable Television Visionary

Ted Turner's remarkable journey as a media mogul began in 1963 when he inherited his father's struggling billboard advertising company. Demonstrating an early knack for business, Turner



Ted Turner transformed the television landscape by expanding cable television offerings. **Source**: Unknown author, Ted Turner smoking a cigar, public domain.

not only revitalized the failing enterprise but also set his sights on the burgeoning television industry. In 1970, he acquired Channel 17, an independent UHF station in Atlanta. To ensure a steady stream of compelling programming for his new venture, Turner made the unconventional but brilliant move of purchasing professional sports teams: the Atlanta Braves baseball team in 1976 and the Atlanta Hawks basketball team in 1977. These live sports broadcasts became a crucial foundation for his ambitious plans.

The actual turning point came in 1976 when Turner transformed Channel 17 into SuperStation WTBS. By pioneering the use of satellite technology, he distributed a local station's signal nationwide to cable systems across the United States. This innovative "superstation" concept revolutionized television distribution, offering cable subscribers an unprecedented variety of content, ranging from live sports to classic movies and syndicated reruns. Building on this success, Turner launched his most audacious project: the Cable News Network (CNN) on June 1, 1980.

Turner's genius extended to his understanding of content maximization. He was a pioneer in "repackaging" content across multiple channels to extract maximum value. His acquisition of the vast

MGM film library in 1986 led to the creation of Turner Network Television (TNT), which showcased classic films (TNT's programming priorities would eventually shift, and classic films found a home at Turner Classic Movies [TCM]). Similarly, the 1991 purchase of Hanna-Barbera (the animation studio behind iconic characters like Scooby-Doo and The Flintstones), combined with the MGM cartoon collection, enabled him to launch Cartoon Network in 1992, a dedicated 24-hour animation channel. This strategy of using owned content across specialized networks was highly profitable and became a blueprint for future media conglomerates.

By the mid-1990s, Turner Broadcasting had grown into a formidable and diverse media empire. In 1996, Turner Broadcasting merged with Time Warner in one of the largest media deals of its era. Through subsequent industry consolidation, Turner's suite of networks eventually became part of WarnerMedia (acquired by AT&T in 2018) and later Warner Bros. Discovery in 2022. While media consolidation shifted management of these iconic networks, Ted Turner's legacy as the visionary who created the modern cable television landscape remains foundational to media history.



Source: Photo by afra32 on Pixabay.

The Emergence of Digital Television

Following the FCC standards established in the early 1940s, television sets received programs via analog radio waves. The analog signal reached TV sets through three methods: over the airwaves, via cable, or by satellite transmission. Although the system remained in place for more than 60 years, it had several disadvantages. Analog systems were prone to static and distortion, resulting in a far poorer picture quality than films shown in movie theaters. As television sets grew increasingly larger, the limited resolution made scan lines painfully obvious, thereby reducing the image's clarity. Companies

around the world, most notably in Japan, began developing technology that provided newer, higher-quality television formats, and the broadcasting industry began lobbying the FCC to create a committee to study the desirability and impact of switching to digital television. A more efficient and flexible form of broadcast technology, digital television uses signals that encode TV images and sound into binary code, working much like a computer. This means it requires much less frequency space and provides a far higher-quality picture.



Analog-to-digital television converters allowed millions of older television sets to remain operational after the federal government mandated the nationwide transition to digital broadcasting in 2009.
Source: Joe Haupt, DTV Pal by Dish Network Digital-To Analog Converter Box, CC BY-SA 2.0.

In 1987, the Advisory Committee on Advanced Television Services began meeting to test various TV systems, both analog and digital. The committee ultimately agreed to switch from analog to digital format in 2009, allowing a

transition period during which broadcasters could send their signals on both analog and digital channels. Once the switch took place, many older analog TV sets became unusable without a cable or satellite service or a digital converter. To retain consumers' access to free over-the-air television, the federal government offered $40 gift cards to people who needed to buy a digital converter, expecting to recoup its costs by auctioning off the old analog broadcast spectrum to wireless companies. These companies eagerly sought access to the analog spectrum for mobile broadband projects because this frequency band allows signals to travel farther and penetrate buildings more easily. In subsequent years, digital broadcasting continued to advance with standards such as ATSC 3.0 (branded as NextGen TV), which brings 4K over-the-air broadcasts, immersive audio, and interactive features to digital television viewers.



HDTV utilizes a wide-screen format with a different aspect ratio (the ratio of the image's width to its height) than standard-definition TV. The wide-screen format of HDTV is similar to that of movies, allowing for a more authentic film-viewing experience at home. This picture compares a view of the same object in Ultra HD with the standard 1080p and 720p HDTV formats. The illustration demonstrates the spectacular improvement in the new format's quality. **Source**: European Southern Observatory, Illustration of the advantage of the Ultra HD format for video compared to other formats (12126069976) , CC BY 2.0

The Era of High-Definition Television

The quest for superior picture quality in television began decades ago, with Japanese companies pioneering high-definition technology alongside digital signals to deliver crystal-clear, wide-screen images. High-definition television

(HDTV), first commercially available in the U.S. in 1998, revolutionized viewing by offering significantly higher resolution than standard-definition, using roughly five times as many pixels per frame to create a much more detailed and immersive experience. While initial HDTV sets were prohibitively expensive, costing between $5,000 and $10,000, prices rapidly declined, making the technology accessible to mainstream consumers. By the early 2010s, HDTV had become the dominant standard in American households, marking one of the fastest adoptions of a new television technology.

Today, 4K Ultra High Definition is the universal market standard for home viewing, delivering four times the resolution of 1080p HDTV (3840 x 2160 pixels compared to 1920 x 1080 pixels). Over 85 percent of U.S. households own a 4K display, driven by affordable hardware and streaming platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and Disney+ broadcasting natively in 4K. Hardware innovations have expanded beyond simple screen size to display technologies including OLED, QD-OLED, and Mini-LED, which offer infinite contrast ratios, wide color gamuts, and high dynamic range standards like Dolby Vision. While 8K displays exist on the consumer market, 4K remains the functional standard due to content availability and limits of human visual acuity at normal viewing distances.

8.3 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TELEVISION AND CULTURE

Since its inception as an integral part of American life in the 1950s, television has both reflected and nurtured cultural mores and values. From the escapist dramas of the 1960s, which consciously avoided controversial issues and glossed over life's harsher realities in favor of idealized portrayals, to the numerous reality TV shows of recent years, in which participants openly discuss even the most personal and taboo issues, television has held up a mirror to society. However, the relationship between social attitudes and television is reciprocal; broadcasters have often demonstrated their power to influence viewers, either consciously through slanted political commentary or subtly by portraying controversial relationships (such as single parenthood, same-sex marriages, or interracial couplings) as socially acceptable. Every broadcast exemplifies the symbiotic nature of television and culture, from family sitcoms to serious news reports.

Cultural Influences on Television



Most domestic comedies of the 1950s, such as *Leave It to Beaver*, portrayed an idealized version of family life, largely ignoring social and political events. **Source**: Dennis S. Hurd – The Cleavers – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

In the 1950s, most television entertainment programs ignored current events and political issues. Instead, the three major networks (ABC, NBC, and CBS) developed prime-time shows that would appeal to a general family audience, particularly domestic comedies—a genre characterized by character-based humor and usually set in the home. Seminal examples included popular 1950s shows such as *Leave It to Beaver*, *The Donna Reed Show*, and *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*. Presenting a standardized version of the White middle-class suburban family, domestic comedies portrayed the conservative values of an idealized American life. Studiously avoiding prevalent social issues such as racial discrimination and civil rights, the shows

focused on mostly White middle-class families with traditional nuclear roles (mother at home, father in the office) and always ended with a strong moral lesson, implying that most domestic problems could be resolved in 30 minutes.

Although these shows depicted an idealized version of American family life, many families in the 1950s had traditional nuclear family upbringings. Following the widespread poverty, political uncertainty, and physical separation of the war years, many Americans wanted to settle down, have children, and enjoy the peace and security that family life appeared to offer. During the booming postwar era, a period of optimism and prosperity, the traditional nuclear family experienced significant growth. However, the families and lifestyles depicted in domestic comedies did not accurately represent the overall American experience. As historian Stephanie Coontz points out, "the June Cleaver or Donna Stone homemaker role was not available to the more than 40 percent of black women with small children who worked outside the home." Although nearly 60 percent of the U.S. population made up the middle class by the mid-1950s, 25 percent of all families and more than 50 percent of two-parent Black families were poor. Migrant workers suffered horrific deprivations, and racial tensions escalated. None of this strife appeared in the world of domestic comedies , where even the Hispanic gardener in *Father Knows Best* bore the name of Frank Smith.

Not all programs in the 1950s shied away from tackling controversial social or political issues. In March 1954, journalist Edward R. Murrow



Gunsmoke became the longest-running Western in TV history, spanning 20 seasons on CBS, from 1955 to 1975, and totaling 635 episodes (not to mention the radio series that preceded it). **Source**: CBS Television, Gunsmoke cast 1963, public domain.

broadcast an unflattering portrait of U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy

on his show *See It Now*. McCarthy, a member of the Senate Investigation Committee, had launched inquiries regarding potential Communist infiltration in U.S. institutions. Murrow thought that McCarthy's aggressive tactics posed a possible threat to civil liberties. His portrait cast the senator from Wisconsin in an unflattering light by pointing out

contradictions in his speeches. This led to such an uproar that the U.S. Senate formally reprimanded McCarthy.

Entertainment programs also tackled controversial issues. The long-running television western *Gunsmoke*, which aired on CBS from 1955 to 1975, flourished in a Cold War society, where U.S. Marshal Matt Dillon (James Arness) stood up to lawlessness in defense of civilization. The characters and community in *Gunsmoke* confronted significant social issues, including the treatment of minority groups, the definition of family, the justification of violence, and the resilience of religious faith. During the 1960s, the show adapted to its audience's desires, becoming increasingly aware of and sympathetic toward ethnic minorities, in tune with the national mood of the civil rights era.

Violence and Escapism in the 1960s

During the 1960s, television news broadcasts brought the realities of real-world events into people's living rooms in vivid detail. *The CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite*, which debuted in 1962, quickly became the country's most popular newscast. By the end of the decade, journalist Walter Cronkite had become dubbed the most trusted man in America. Following John F. Kennedy's election to the presidency at the beginning of the decade, the 1960s took an ominous turn. Shocked viewers tuned into

Cronkite's broadcast on November 22, 1963, to learn about the assassination of their president. During the next few days, viewers followed every aspect of the tragedy on television, from the tremor in Cronkite's voice as he removed his glasses and announced the news of Kennedy's death, to the frantic scenes from Dallas police headquarters where the assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald, was gunned down by nightclub owner Jack Ruby, to the thousands of mourners lining up next to the president's flag-draped coffin.



Television began to play a major role in U.S. politics during the presidency of John F. Kennedy. F. Kennedy. **Source**: Cecil W. Stoughton creator QS:P170,Q5056345, Kennedy, Johnson, and others watching the flight of Astronaut Shepard on television, 05 May 1961 , public domain.

Around the same time as Kennedy's assassination,

horrific images from Vietnam streamed into people's living rooms during the nation's first televised war. With five camera crews on duty in the Saigon bureau, news crews captured vivid details of the war in progress. Although graphic images rarely appeared on network TV, several instances of violence reached the screen, including a CBS report in 1965 that showed Marines lighting the thatched roofs of the village of Cam Ne with Zippo lighters and an NBC news report in 1968 that aired a shot of South Vietnamese General Nguyen Ngoc Loan executing a captive on a Saigon street. Further images of children being burned and scarred by napalm and the torture of prisoners fueled the anti-war sentiments of many Americans. In addition to the devastation caused by the president's death and the Vietnam War, Americans also felt the pressure of the Cold War—the clash between the United States and the Soviet Union in the years following World War II. This pressure escalated during periods of tension throughout the 1950s and 1960s, such as the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, a confrontation that caused many people to fear nuclear war.

As a result of the intense stress faced by many Americans during the 1960s, broadcasters and viewers turned to escapist programs such as *I Dream of Jeannie*, a fantasy show about a 2,000-year-old genie who marries an astronaut, and *Bewitched*, a supernatural-themed show about a witch who tries to live as a suburban housewife. Both shows typified the **situation comedy**, or sitcom, a comedy genre featuring a recurring cast of characters who resolve zany situations based on their everyday lives. Other popular sitcoms in the 1960s included *The Beverly Hillbillies*, a show about a poor backwoods family who move to Beverly Hills, California, after finding oil on their land, and *Gilligan's Island*, the ultimate escapist comedy about seven characters shipwrecked on an uncharted island. None of the 1960s sitcoms mentioned any of the political unease taking place in the outside world, providing audiences with a welcome diversion from real life. Other than an occasional documentary, TV programming in the 1960s consisted of a



Escapist sitcoms, such as *I Dream of Jeannie*, provided Americans with a much-needed diversion from the stressful events of the 1960s. **Source**: NBC Television, I dream of jeannie hagman eden , public domain.

sharp dichotomy between prime-time escapist comedy and hard news.

Diversity and Politics in the 1970s



The popularity of shows like *Maude*, which were often considered controversial, reflected the changing cultural and social values of the 1970s. **Source**: CBS Television, Maude and Walter 1973, public domain.

During the 1970s, broadcasters began to diversify families on their shows to reflect changing social attitudes toward formerly controversial issues such as single parenthood and divorce. Feminist groups, including the National Organization for Women (NOW), the National Women's Political Caucus, and the Coalition of Labor Union Women, pushed for equality on issues such as pay and encouraged women to enter the

workforce. In 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court sanctioned women's right to abortion (later overturned in 2022), giving them control over their reproductive rights. Divorce rates skyrocketed during the 1970s, as states adopted no-fault divorce laws, and the change in family dynamics played out on television. Between 1972 and 1978, CBS aired the socially controversial sitcom *Maude*. Featuring a middle-aged feminist living with her fourth husband and divorced daughter, the show exploded the dominant values of the White middle-class domestic sitcom and its traditional gender roles. Throughout its seven-year run, *Maude* tackled social and political issues such as abortion, menopause, birth control, alcoholism, and depression. During its first four seasons, the show placed in the top 10 in Nielsen ratings, illustrating the changing tastes of the viewing audience, who had come of age during the era of civil rights and Vietnam protests and developed a taste for socially conscious television. Other 1970s sitcoms took the same approach, including *Maude*'s CBS predecessor, *All in the Family*, which covered issues ranging from racism and homophobia to rape and miscarriage, and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, which reflected changing attitudes toward women's rights by featuring television's first never-married independent career woman as the central character. Even wholesome family favorite *The Brady Bunch*, which ran from 1969 to 1974, featured a non-nuclear family,

reflecting the rising rates of blended families in American society.

In addition to changing family dynamics on sitcoms and other prime-time shows, variety and comedy sketch shows developed a political awareness in the 1970s that reflected the growing appetite of audiences for social and political commentary. Sketch comedy show *Saturday Night Live* (*SNL*) premiered on NBC in 1975 and has remained on air ever since. Featuring a different celebrity guest host every week and relatively unknown comedy regulars, the show parodies contemporary popular culture and politics, lambasting presidential candidates and pop stars alike. Earlier NBC sketch comedy show *Laugh-In*, which ran from 1968 to 1973, also featured politically charged material, though it lacked the satirical bite of later series such as *SNL*. By the decade's end, television broadcasting reflected a far more politically conscious and socially aware viewing audience.



ESPN pioneered the round-the-clock sports network, forever changing global television viewing habits by transforming sports into continuous entertainment and building a multibillion-dollar media empire. **Source**: Tommy Gilligan/Pointer View, uploaded to Flickr by West Point Public Affairs, Josh Elliott in Sportscenter studio , CC BY 2.0.

The Influence of Cable Television in the 1980s

Until the mid-1980s, the top three networks (ABC, NBC, and CBS) dominated television broadcasting in the United States. However, as cable services gained popularity following the industry's deregulation in 1984, viewers were presented with numerous options. Services such as Cable News Network (CNN),

Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (ESPN), and Music Television (MTV) profoundly altered the television landscape across news, sports, and music. New markets opened up for these innovative program types and older genres, such as the sitcom. During the 1980s, a revival of family sitcoms took place with two enormous hits: *The Cosby Show* and *Family Ties*. Both featured a new take on modern family life, with mothers working outside the home and fathers taking on household chores and parental duties. Despite their success on network television, sitcoms faced stiff competition from the variety of choices offered by cable. Between 1983 and 1994, weekly broadcast audience shares (a measure of the number of televisions in use tuned to a particular show) for network television dropped from 69% to 52%, while cable networks' shares rose from 9% to 26%.

With a growing number of households subscribing to cable TV and later expanding into multi-screen digital environments, concern began to grow about children's exposure to violent content across television and screen media. In addition to regularly broadcast network programs, cable offered viewers the chance to watch films and adult-themed shows at all hours, many of which had far more violent content than regular network programming. Early landmark studies found that by the time an average child left elementary school, they had witnessed 8,000 murders and more than 100,000 other acts of violence on television. While media researchers continue to analyze the complex relationship between

witnessing onscreen depictions and real-world behavior, the loosening boundaries regarding sexual and violent content across linear and digital screens remain a persistent cause for concern for parents and media literacy educators.

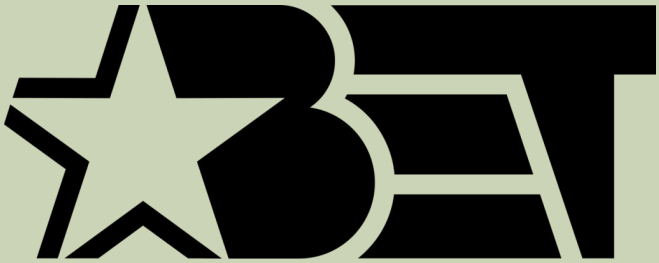
Specialization in the 1990s and 2000s



MTV's *Beavis and Butt-Head* became a defining artifact of 1990s pop culture by combining heavy metal satire, crude adolescent humor, and sharp commentary on youth television culture through two couch-bound slackers critiquing music videos. **Source**: truegritcowboy87, beavis and butthead, CC BY-NC 2.0.

Although TV viewership grew during this period, the vast number of cable channels and other, newer content delivery platforms stretched the audience thin, resulting in a waning influence for network broadcasts. In recent years, broadcasters have narrowed the focus of their programming to meet the needs and interests of an increasingly fragmented audience. Entire cable channels and streaming hubs are devoted to cooking, music, news, African American interests (see shaded box below), weather,

and courtroom drama, enabling viewers to choose precisely the type of show they want to watch. Many news channels also offer coverage tailored to viewers' political opinions. This trend toward specialization reflects a broader shift within society, as companies increasingly cater to smaller, more targeted consumer bases. Business magazine editor Chris Anderson explains, "We're leaving the watercooler era, when most of us listened, watched, and read from the same relatively small pool of mostly hit content. And we're entering the microculture era, when we are all into different things." Just as cable broadcasters cater to niche markets, Internet-based companies such as Amazon, Netflix, Apple, and Google take advantage of this concept by providing consumers with instant access to massive digital on-demand libraries with narrow appeal, rather than just offering the most popular blockbuster titles.



Source: BlackEntertainmentTelevision.com, BET logo 1989-2001, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Black Entertainment Television (BET): A Legacy of Representation

Launched on January 25, 1980, Black Entertainment Television (BET) emerged as a groundbreaking force in the media landscape, becoming the first television network specifically dedicated to African American viewers. Founded by visionary media entrepreneur Robert Johnson, BET's initial programming primarily showcased music videos, capitalizing on the burgeoning popularity of Black artists. However, Johnson quickly recognized the broader need for diverse content tailored to the Black community, expanding the network's offerings to include original programming, public affairs shows, and other culturally relevant content. This strategic diversification allowed Johnson to transform his initial $15,000 investment into a multimillion-dollar enterprise within a decade, demonstrating the significant untapped market for Black-centric media.

BET continued to break barriers throughout the 1990s. In 1991, it achieved a historic milestone by becoming the first Black-controlled company to be listed on the New York Stock Exchange, a testament to its financial growth and increasing influence. The network thrived, expanding its reach through additional cable channels and venturing into

new areas such as film and publishing. This period solidified BET's position as a vital platform for Black voices and stories, providing representation and entertainment that was largely absent from mainstream television.

In 2001, BET underwent a significant ownership change when it was acquired by the media conglomerate Viacom for approximately $3 billion in stock and assumed debt. Through this sale, Robert Johnson became the first Black American billionaire, marking a monumental achievement in the business world. Despite the change in ownership, BET continued to operate as a distinct brand within Viacom's (now Paramount Global's) portfolio, retaining its focus on African American audiences.

In recent years, BET has continued to adapt to the rapidly evolving media landscape, expanding its reach significantly through digital platforms and streaming services. While music videos remain a component of its programming, the network has diversified its content extensively across cable, digital apps, and its dedicated streaming service, BET+. Its lineup features a wide array of original scripted dramas (such as Tyler Perry's *Sistas* and *The Oval*), comedies, reality series, and documentaries designed to explore and celebrate various facets of the African American experience. Through subscription streaming and linear networks, BET+ offers on-demand access to original series and curated archival content tailored for global Black audiences.

Throughout its history, BET has played a crucial and undeniable role in promoting diversity and representation in media, providing an essential platform for Black talent, narratives, and cultural expression. However, the network has also faced persistent criticism, particularly regarding its portrayal of stereotypes, the sexualization of women in some music videos, and the inclusion of controversial content. Critics, including some of its founders, have argued that the network's programming choices have not always aligned with its initial vision of being a comprehensive and uplifting voice for Black America. Despite these ongoing challenges and debates, BET remains a popular and influential force in the entertainment industry, continually striving to balance its commercial objectives with its foundational mission to serve and reflect the Black community.

Television's Influence on Culture

Despite entering a microculture era with a variety of niche markets, television remains the most critical unifying cultural presence in the United States. During times of national crises, television news broadcasts have galvanized the country by providing real-time coverage of major events. When

terrorists crashed planes into the World Trade Center towers in 2001, 24-hour TV news crews provided stunned viewers around the world with continuous updates about the attack and its aftermath. Meanwhile, network blockbusters such as *Survivor* and *The Bachelor*/*Bachelorette* have united viewers in shared anticipation, sparking numerous blogs, fan sites, and workplace discussions about the characters' fates.



Images such as this of police officers beating Civil Rights protesters helped galvanize the country to support the 1964 Civil Rights Act. **Source**: Federal Bureau of Investigation, Bloody Sunday-Alabama police attack, public domain.

Televised news coverage has had several cultural effects since the 1950s. By providing viewers with footage of the most intense human experiences, televised news has reached people in ways that radio and newspapers cannot. The images themselves have played a significant role in shaping viewer opinion. During the coverage of the civil rights movement, for example, footage of a 1963 attack on civil rights protesters in Birmingham, Alabama, showed police blasting African American demonstrators—many of them children—with fire hoses. Coupled with images of angry White segregationist mobs squaring off against Black students, the news footage did much to sway public

opinion in favor of liberal legislation such as the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Conversely, when volatile pictures of the race riots in Detroit and other cities in the late 1960s hit the airwaves, horrified viewers saw the need for a return to law and order. The footage helped create an anti-civil rights backlash that encouraged many viewers to vote for conservative Republican Richard Nixon during the 1968 presidential election.

Over the past few decades, the landscape of mass-media news coverage has undergone a profound transformation, moving well beyond the era of ostensibly impartial, trusted voices like Walter Cronkite, who famously delivered objective reports on major events of the 1960s. Today, the television news environment is largely characterized by highly politicized coverage, particularly on prominent cable channels such as conservative Fox News and liberal MSNBC. This shift reflects a broader trend in which broadcasters are increasingly narrowing their focus to cater to specialized audiences, leading viewers to gravitate toward networks that reinforce their existing political biases.

This ideological alignment has fueled intense competition, with Fox News and MSNBC cultivating fiercely loyal fan bases. Fox News, in particular, has enjoyed sustained success, maintaining its position as the most-watched cable news network for over two decades and frequently outperforming basic cable entertainment channels in total viewership. Its

programming, especially in prime time, often features commentators and hosts who articulate a conservative viewpoint, directly appealing to viewers who share that perspective.

On the other end of the spectrum, MS NOW (formerly MSNBC) has solidified its position as a dominant voice for liberal audiences, with programming that offers critical analysis of conservative policies and figures, and a strong emphasis on progressive social and political issues. This precise ideological positioning, much like Fox News, resonates deeply with its dedicated viewership. In contrast, CNN, which often aims for a more centrist or nonpartisan approach, has frequently struggled in the ratings wars against its more ideologically aligned competitors, usually trailing both Fox News and MSNBC in key viewership metrics.



Mainstream news outlets generally framed the January 6 attack as a violent, coordinated insurrection and direct assault on American democracy. In contrast, conservative media outlets were significantly less likely to call it an insurrection, often framing the event as a chaotic riot, a political protest, or an overblown narrative politicized by opponents. **Source**: Tyler Merbler from USA, 2021 storming of the United States Capitol DSC09254-2 (50820534063) (retouched), CC BY 2.0.

Critics widely contend that the rise of partisan news networks significantly contributes to political polarization. When viewers primarily consume news that aligns with their existing beliefs, they are exposed to a less nuanced understanding of opposing political opinions, reinforcing echo chambers and making genuine dialogue across ideological divides more challenging. For instance, in the aftermath of the 2020 U.S. presidential election and the

January 6th Capitol attack, the framing and emphasis of events varied dramatically across these networks, illustrating how partisan lenses can shape public perception and deepen societal divisions. The Dominion Voting Systems defamation lawsuit against Fox News, settled in 2023, further highlighted the legal, financial, and reputational consequences that can arise from the dissemination of ideologically driven, unverified claims.

The Enduring Influence of Late-Night: *Saturday Night Live* and Talk Shows



Source: Uncredited, AnthonyPerkinsSNL, public domain.

Amid the seismic shifts brought about by streaming, certain television institutions have not only survived but also thrived by adapting their unique blend of comedy, commentary, and cultural relevance. Chief among these are *Saturday Night Live* (SNL) and the venerable late-night talk shows, which have collectively shaped American humor, politics, and pop culture for decades.

Saturday Night Live, which premiered on NBC in October 1975, immediately distinguished itself with its live, irreverent, and often counter-cultural sketch comedy. Born out of a desire to appeal to a younger demographic, *SNL*'s "Not Ready for Prime Time Players," including John Belushi, Gilda Radner, Dan Aykroyd, and Chevy Chase, quickly became household names. The show's format—a weekly rotation of celebrity hosts, musical guests, and a satirical "Weekend Update" news segment—provided a dynamic platform for both established and emerging talent. From its inception, SNL has become a crucial barometer of the cultural zeitgeist, fearlessly lampooning political figures (e.g., Chevy Chase's bumbling portrayal of Gerald Ford, Tina Fey's uncanny impression of Sarah Palin, and Alec Baldwin's divisive portrayal of Donald Trump) and societal trends. Its ability to produce sketches that instantly permeated the national lexicon (e.g., "More Cowbell!", "Debbie Downer") solidified its status as a cultural institution, influencing fashion, catchphrases, and even political discourse. Over its nearly 50-year run, *SNL* has seen cycles of critical acclaim and creative challenges, but its consistent presence and capacity to launch comedic superstars (Eddie Murphy, Will Ferrell, Kristen Wiig,

Kate McKinnon, among many others) underscore its enduring importance.

In parallel with SNL's dominance in sketch comedy, late-night talk shows have evolved from genial, interview-driven programs into multifaceted cultural touchstones. Pioneered by figures such as Steve Allen and Jack Paar, the format was refined by Johnny Carson, who hosted *The Tonight Show* for 30 years (1962-1992). Carson's blend of witty monologues , celebrity interviews, and recurring characters made his show a nightly ritual for millions, often setting the national agenda for watercooler conversations the next day. His influence extended to launching the careers of countless comedians, who famously hoped for "the call" to the couch after a successful stand-up set.

In the post-Carson era, late-night diversified, with hosts like David Letterman, Jay Leno, Conan O'Brien, and later Stephen Colbert, Jimmy Fallon, Jimmy Kimmel, Trevor Noah, and Seth Meyers, each bringing their distinct comedic voices and approaches. This new generation of hosts adopted a more politically charged sense of humor, particularly in response to major national and global events. They transformed the monologue into a sharper, more analytical, yet still comedic, take on the day's headlines.

Furthermore, these shows adeptly leveraged the rise of digital platforms. While still broadcast linearly, their most impactful segments—viral monologues, celebrity games, and political skits—often find a second, massive life on YouTube and social media, reaching audiences far beyond their traditional broadcast slots. This digital extension has allowed late-night to remain highly relevant, shaping online conversations and continuing to serve as a vital space for comedy, social commentary, and cultural reflection in an increasingly fragmented media landscape. Both *SNL* and late-night talk shows demonstrate that, even as the act of "watching television" evolves, the demand for timely, engaging, and culturally resonant content remains as strong as ever.

Social Controversy

The issue of whether television producers have a responsibility to promote particular social values continues to generate heated discussion. When the unmarried title character in the CBS series *Murphy Brown*—a comedy show about a divorced anchorwoman—got pregnant and chose to have the baby without any involvement from the father, Vice President Dan Quayle referenced the show as an example

of degenerating family values. Linking the 1992 Los Angeles riots to a breakdown of family structure and social order, Quayle lambasted producers' poor judgment, saying, "It doesn't help matters when prime-time TV has Murphy Brown, a character who supposedly epitomizes today's intelligent, highly paid professional woman, mocking the importance of fathers by bearing a child alone, and calling it just another 'lifestyle choice.'" Quayle's outburst sparked a lively debate between supporters and opponents of his viewpoint

, with some praising his outspoken social commentary and others dismissing him as out of touch with America and its growing number of single mothers.



Ellen DeGeneres at the 1997 Emmy Awards, where she won for Writing for a Comic Series. **Source**: photo by Alan Light, EllenDeGeneres1997Emmies, CC BY 2.0,

A similar controversy arose with the portrayal of openly gay characters on prime-time television shows. When the lead character on the ABC sitcom *Ellen* came out in 1997 (two weeks after Ellen DeGeneres, the actress who played the role, announced that she was gay), she became the first leading gay character on both broadcast and cable networks. The show turned into a test case for the nation's tolerance of openly gay characters on prime-time TV and prompted much debate. Embraced by liberal supporters and lambasted by conservative objectors (evangelical Baptist minister Jerry Falwell infamously dubbed her "Ellen DeGenerate"), both the actress and the show furthered the quest to make homosexuality acceptable to mainstream audiences. Although ABC canceled Ellen the following year (amid disagreements with producers about whether it should contain a parental advisory warning), DeGeneres successfully returned to television in 2003 with her talk show. Subsequent shows with prominent gay characters quickly followed in Ellen's footsteps.

Industry media watchdogs such as GLAAD continue to track inclusion through annual reporting; recent monitoring indicates that while LGBTQ+ representation on broadcast networks has fluctuated due to industry shifts and streaming consolidations, overall scripted representation across streaming and cable platforms remains significantly higher than during the initial broadcast era.

The debate over television's role in shaping social values continues to generate heated discussion, moving beyond historical narratives to encompass the evolving content and influence of both traditional broadcast and cable networks. While the *Murphy Brown* and *Ellen* controversies highlighted network television's direct impact on public discourse, today's discussions also center on how television content, including news, entertainment, and documentaries, affects issues such as mental health, political discourse, and the spread of misinformation. The pervasive nature of television means that controversies can still ignite and spread rapidly, presenting ongoing challenges for producers and broadcasters in managing their societal impact.



While mainstream media outlets largely relied on official public health guidelines and expert consensus to inform the public during the COVID-19 pandemic, online platforms became breeding grounds for fast-spreading misinformation, unverified remedies, and conspiracy theories that frequently challenged established medical facts. **Source**: US Navy Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Sara Eshleman, COVID-19 Nurse (cropped), public domain.

One significant modern problem, particularly in television news, is the continued proliferation of misinformation and disinformation, especially regarding public health and political events. While social media platforms amplify these narratives, cable news channels remain central to their dissemination and framing. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2022), various television news outlets faced scrutiny for selectively reporting and amplifying unverified claims about the virus, vaccines, and treatments. Similarly, leading up to and following primary elections, such as the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election, partisan news channels were criticized for promoting conspiracy theories and election-related falsehoods

. The "Stop the Steal" movement and the January 6th Capitol attack demonstrated the real-world consequences fueled by television-amplified narratives. This has led to ongoing debates about the responsibility of news broadcasters, content moderation, and the balance between journalistic freedom and societal impact.

Beyond news, other forms of television content, including scripted dramas, reality shows, and true-crime docuseries on both traditional networks and streaming services, continue to generate social controversy. These discussions often revolve around the ethics of portrayal and the impact of content on sensitive social issues. For example, particular reality television series have faced backlash for allegedly promoting harmful stereotypes, manipulating storylines, or exploiting participants for entertainment by fostering dramatic environments. Scripted dramas or docuseries that tackle sensitive historical subjects while aiming for dramatic impact can also spark intense public debates regarding their treatment of trauma and victim consent. A prominent example is Netflix's 2022 series *Dahmer – Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story*, which faced significant criticism for allegedly romanticizing a serial killer and re-traumatizing victims' families through graphic portrayals. These controversies underscore the ongoing challenge for television creators and streaming executives to balance artistic choices with societal impact in a globally connected screen economy.

Creating Stars via Reality Television



Featuring Tim Gunn's iconic catchphrase "make it work," *Project Runway* transformed television fashion competitions by putting high-stakes design, tight deadlines, and runway craftsmanship directly into the reality TV spotlight. **Source**: maddsmadds, Fashion Project Runway, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Stemming from the 1948 TV series *Candid Camera*, in which secretly filmed people responded to elaborate practical jokes, reality television aimed to capture real, unscripted life on camera. The genre developed in several different directions, from home video clip shows (*America's Funniest Home Videos*, *America's Funniest People*) to

true-crime reenactment shows (*America's Most Wanted*, *Unsolved Mysteries*) to thematic shows based on professions of interest (*Project Runway*, *Police Women of Broward County* , *Top Chef*). Near the turn of the millennium, the genre began to lean toward more voyeuristic shows, such as MTV's *The Real World*, an unscripted "documentary" that followed the lives of seven strangers selected to live together in a large house or apartment in a major city. The show drew criticism for glamorizing bad behavior and encouraging excessive drinking and casual sex. However, its ratings soared with each successive controversy (a trend that critics claim actively encouraged producers to stage rating-grabbing scenarios).

During the late 1990s and 2000s, a wave of copycat reality TV shows emerged, including the voyeuristic series *Big Brother*, which filmed a group of strangers living together in an isolated house full of cameras in an attempt to win large amounts of cash, and *Survivor*, a game show in which participants competed against each other by performing endurance challenges on an uninhabited island. *Survivor*'s success as the most popular show on television in the summer of 2000 ensured the continued growth of the reality television genre, and producers turned their attention to reality dating shows such as *The Bachelor*, *Temptation Island*, and *Dating in the Dark*. Cheap to produce, with a seemingly endless supply of willing contestants and eager advertising sponsors, reality TV shows continue to draw big ratings.



The stress of appearing on reality television shows has proven detrimental to the health of some contestants, including *Britain's Got Talent* star Susan Boyle in 2009. **Source**: Matt Garrett – Susan Boyle is Mrs. Beakley (cropped) – CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Reality TV has created the cultural phenomenon of the instant celebrity. Famous for simply appearing on reality shows, contestants often extend their 15 minutes of fame. Kate Gosselin, star of *Jon & Kate Plus 8*, a cable TV show about a couple with eight children, has since appeared in numerous magazine articles. In 2010, she starred on the celebrity reality dance show *Dancing with the Stars*. *Survivor* contestant Elisabeth Hasselbeck became a co-host on TV talk show *The View*, and several *American Idol* contestants (including Kelly Clarkson, Carrie Underwood, and Adam Lambert) have become household names. Over the past decade, this landscape has undergone a dramatic evolution; the genre has seen an explosion of social media integration, with shows and their stars now actively leveraging platforms like Instagram and TikTok to extend narratives, monetize personal brands, and transition into digital creators. This shift led to a diversification of subgenres, moving beyond traditional competition formats to include specialized lifestyle docusoaps, such as Netflix's *Selling Sunset*, and social experiments, like *Love Is Blind* and

Too Hot to Handle, produced directly for global streaming services.

Despite its continued popularity and evolution, the genre has consistently drawn criticism for creating a generation that expects to achieve instant wealth without having to try very hard and also for preying on vulnerable people whom critics call "disposable." When *Britain's Got Talent* star Susan Boyle suffered emotional distress in 2009 after the s tress of transitioning from obscurity to stardom in an extremely short period, the media began to point out the dangers of reality television. In 2009, TheWrap.com investigated the current lives of former stars of reality shows such as *The Contender*, *Paradise Hotel*, *Wife Swap*, and *Extreme Makeover*, reporting that at least 11 participants had committed suicide in tragedies that appeared to be linked to their experiences on screen.

The History and Impact of *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*



The Kardashian sisters. **Source**: hotrock pictures, Kardashians Sears, CC BY 3.0.

Keeping Up with the Kardashians (*KUWTK*) premiered on E! on October 14, 2007, and quickly became a cultural phenomenon, running for 20 seasons over nearly 14 years before concluding on June 20, 2021. After the original cable series concluded, the family transitioned their reality franchise to subscription streaming, launching The Kardashians on Hulu in 2022. The reality franchise centered on the

personal and professional lives of the blended Kardashian-Jenner family, primarily focusing on sisters Kourtney, Kim, and Khloé Kardashian, as well as their half-sisters, Kendall and Kylie Jenner, along with their parents, Kris Jenner (formerly Kris Kardashian) and Caitlyn Jenner (formerly Bruce Jenner), and brother Rob Kardashian.

The show's genesis is often attributed to matriarch Kris Jenner, who, inspired by the success of *The Osbournes*, approached producer Ryan Seacrest with the idea of a reality show about her family. While the family gained some public recognition due to Robert Kardashian Sr.'s involvement in the O.J. Simpson trial, Kim Kardashian's earlier work as a stylist, and a leaked sex tape, *KUWTK* propelled them to unprecedented global stardom. The series offered an unfiltered, albeit often criticized as fabricated, look into their lavish yet relatable lives, showcasing everything from everyday domestic squabbles to major life events, such as marriages, divorces, births, and transitions.

The impact of *KUWTK* on popular culture is undeniable and multifaceted. It revolutionized the concept of celebrity, ushering in an era in which individuals could be "famous for being famous" and leverage their personal lives to build massive business empires. The show served as a powerful marketing

platform, directly contributing to the success of numerous spin-off series and the family's ventures, including fashion lines, beauty brands, and social media endorsements. The Kardashians effectively pioneered modern influencer culture, demonstrating how personal branding and direct engagement with fans could translate into immense wealth and influence.

Beyond its business implications, *KUWTK* also played a significant role in shaping societal conversations. The show brought topics like gender transition (with Caitlyn Jenner's journey), mental health (through Kanye West's public struggles), and criminal justice reform (Kim Kardashian's advocacy) into mainstream discourse. While often criticized for promoting unrealistic beauty standards and consumerism, the series also showcased strong family bonds and the complexities of modern relationships, making the family both aspirational and oddly relatable to millions worldwide. Its legacy lies in its unprecedented ability to transform private lives into public spectacle, forever altering the landscape of reality television and celebrity.



Stranger Things became a global pop-culture phenomenon that reignited widespread mainstream nostalgia for 1980s music, aesthetics, and synth-heavy soundtracks while proving the massive reach of binge-worthy streaming television. **Source**: AntMan3001, First Look at Stranger Things Season 2 cropped, CC BY-SA 2.0.

The Streaming Era, Peak TV, and On-Demand Culture

The rapid transition from linear broadcast and cable systems to subscription video-on-demand platforms—such as Netflix , Amazon Prime Video, Disney+, HBO Max, and Hulu—has radically redefined how audiences consume and engage with television content. Characterized by industry observers as the peak TV era, the volume of scripted series produced annually skyrocketed, offering consumers unparalleled choice across

genres and global markets. This shift popularized binge-watching, a practice where entire seasons are released simultaneously, altering traditional narrative structures and shifting shared cultural experiences from fixed weekly appointments to decentralized online discussions.

Despite this audience fragmentation, high-profile streaming series continue to create massive, unifying cultural events. Shows like Netflix's *Stranger Things* and *Squid Game*, or HBO Max's *The Last of Us* and *House of the Dragon*, demonstrate that global streaming releases can capture the public imagination and generate widespread social media conversation in ways that rival classic broadcast blockbusters. At the same time, short-form video platforms like TikTok and YouTube have integrated deeply into the television ecosystem, where viral clips, fan-edited recaps, and video essays frequently drive viewing trends on streaming networks, cementing television's evolving role in a multi-screen media environment.

8.4 ISSUES AND TRENDS FACING THE TELEVISION INDUSTRY

During television's infancy, producers modeled the new medium on radio. They adapted popular radio shows, such as the police drama *Dragnet* and the western cowboy series *Gunsmoke*, for television. Single advertisers sponsored new television programs, using the same formula as radio programming. The three major networks—NBC, ABC, and CBS—dominated the television landscape, accounting for more than 95 percent of all prime-time viewing until the late 1970s.

Today, the television industry finds itself in a far more complex time. Multiple advertisers now sponsor programming controlled by major media conglomerates, and the three major networks no longer dominate the airwaves; instead, they share viewers with numerous cable channels (not to mention online platforms). Several factors contribute to these trends within the industry, including technological advancements, government regulations, and the emergence of new networks.

The Influence of Corporate Sponsorship



Many sponsors believed that if viewers identified their favorite shows, such as *The Colgate Comedy Hour*, with a sponsor, they would be more likely to purchase the advertised product. **Source**: NBC, Sponsor: Colgate-Palmolive-Peet, Colgate Comedy Hour title card, public domain.

A single sponsor often developed, produced, and supported early television programs, which sometimes reaped the benefits of having its name inserted into the program's title, such as *The Colgate Comedy Hour*, *Camel News Caravan*, and *Goodyear Playhouse*. However, as production costs soared during the 1950s (a single one-hour TV show cost a sponsor about $35,000 in 1952, compared with $90,000 at the end of

the decade), sponsors became increasingly unable to bear the financial burden of promoting a show on their own. This suited the broadcast networks, which disliked the influence sponsors exerted over program content. Television executives, notably NBC's Sylvester L. "Pat" Weaver, advocated for the magazine concept, in which advertisers purchased one- or two-minute blocks rather than the entire program, just as magazines contained multiple advertisements from different sponsors. The presence of numerous sponsors meant that no one advertiser controlled the program as a whole.

Although advertising agencies once relinquished control of production to networks, they have retained some influence over program content. One executive commented, "If my client sells peanut butter and the script calls for a guy to be poisoned eating a peanut butter sandwich, you can bet we're going to switch that poison to a martini." While streaming services and digital advertising have introduced new avenues for advertisers, traditional methods such as financial support and sponsorship withdrawals still play a significant role.

Advertisers continue to exercise influence over program content, particularly through product placement and brand-safety concerns. A notable recent example of this influence occurred with the HBO Max series *And Just Like That...* (the *Sex and the City* revival) in early 2022. In the premiere episode, a major character, Mr. Big, suffers a fatal heart attack after an intense workout on a Peloton exercise bike. Although Peloton confirmed it approved the bike's appearance and an

instructor's cameo, it said it was unaware of the specific plotline involving Mr. Big's death. The immediate negative association led to a significant drop in Peloton's stock price and a public relations crisis for the brand. Peloton quickly responded with an ad featuring Chris Noth (the actor who plays Mr. Big) and a Peloton instructor, attempting to counter the negative narrative. This incident shows that even in the age of streaming, brands remain highly sensitive to how their products are portrayed and can react quickly when content unexpectedly affects their image, with financial support and the potential withdrawal of future partnerships still playing significant roles in content decisions.



Fox News fired the controversial Tucker Carlson in 2024 for apparently alienating many of his colleagues at the network. **Source**: Gage Skidmore from Surprise, AZ, United States of America, Tucker Carlson (52586718370) (cropped), CC BY-SA 2.0.

Furthermore, increasing political polarization in the United States has led advertisers to be far more selective in where their ad dollars go. Companies routinely consider social and ethical factors when deciding which programs or media platforms to sponsor. When hosts or outlets engage in polarizing rhetoric, corporate sponsors frequently pull advertising campaigns to protect their brand equity. Major corporations regularly pause or cancel ad campaigns on contentious cable commentary shows and social media platforms when content conflicts with corporate social responsibility goals. For instance, in late 2018 and early 2019, Fox News program *Tucker Carlson Tonight* lost advertisers following controversial comments made by its host regarding immigration. Several prominent advertisers, including Pacific Life, Indeed, Bowflex (Nautilus), and IHOP,

announced that they were pulling their advertisements from his show. These companies explicitly cited Carlson's statements as being misaligned with their brand values, demonstrating that advertisers continue to exert influence by withdrawing financial support when a program's content becomes politically contentious. This shift reflects a growing corporate desire to manage risk and avoid public backlash in an era of rapid online boycotts.

In conclusion, while the advertising landscape has evolved, advertisers continue to shape program content. Factors such as public opinion, social media, and corporate social responsibility now influence their decisions more than ever before.

Public Television and Corporate Sponsorship



PBS Kids Go! was a brand introduced by PBS specifically for programs aimed at school-aged children (ages 6-8), differentiating from the preschool focus of the main PBS Kids block. Its mission was to provide educational and engaging content for this older demographic, with popular shows including *Arthur*, *Cyberchase*, *Fetch! with Ruff Ruffman*, and *WordGirl*. **Source**: PBS, PBS Kids Go!, public domain.

Corporate sponsorship does not just affect network television. Even public television has become subject to advertising influence. Established in 1969, the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) evolved from a report by the Carnegie Commission on Educational Television, which examined the role of educational, non-commercial television in society. The report recommended that the government finance public television to provide a diversity of programming

during the network era—a service created "not to sell products" but to "enhance citizenship and public service." The government intended for public television to provide universal access to television for viewers in rural areas or those who could not afford private television services. PBS focused on educational programming, targeting viewers whom commercial networks and advertisers did not appeal to, such as the over-50 demographic and children under 12.

The Carnegie Commission's vision of a federally funded public television system was significantly curtailed by industry lobbying. While the original proposal called for a manufacturer's excise tax on TV sets to establish a trust fund, the National Association of Broadcasters successfully opposed this measure. As a result, public television has historically relied on a combination of viewer contributions and federal funding.

Federal funding for public television has faced recurring political and financial challenges. To offset uncertain federal appropriations, PBS has increasingly relied on corporate underwriting to maintain its operations, with corporate sponsors funding a substantial portion of public television programming. While this support allows flagship series to continue, it also raises ongoing concerns about the commercialization of public broadcasting. When PBS first introduced corporate banner ads and digital underwriting on its online platforms, media watchdog groups warned of a growing intrusion of commercial interests into

an institution explicitly founded to remain noncommercial. These funding pressures remain acute as political debates over federal spending repeatedly put public broadcasting appropriations on the congressional chopping block

.

The competitive landscape for public television has also evolved significantly. Where PBS once competed mainly with commercial broadcast networks and early cable channels, it now faces intense competition from subscription streaming services and specialized digital outlets that produce high-budget documentaries and educational series. PBS continues to rely on its long-running, trusted programs, such as *Nova* , *Nature*, and *Frontline*, to attract and retain viewers. The future of public television remains tied to its ability to navigate digital distribution, shifting audience habits, and persistent funding uncertainties.



News anchor Michelle Wang interviews Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. Wang works for CBS affiliate KMTV Channel 3 in Omaha, Nebraska. **Source**: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Michelle Wang..., CC BY-ND 2.0.

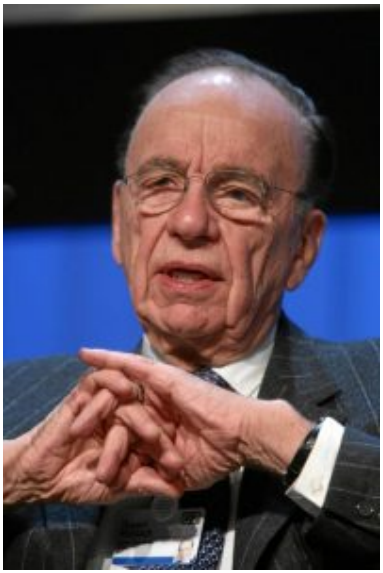
The Structure of Broadcast Television: Networks and Affiliates

The landscape of broadcast television is primarily defined by the symbiotic relationship between national broadcast networks and their local affiliate stations. Broadcast networks, such as ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox, are responsible for producing or acquiring a wide array of programming,

including national news, prime-time dramas, comedies, and major sporting events. They then provide this content to their local affiliate stations across the nation. These affiliates are independently owned or operated stations that hold a license from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to broadcast over the airwaves in a specific geographic market. Each affiliate maintains its own equipment and local staff, enabling them to serve their community directly.

When an affiliate chooses to carry programming from its network, it typically receives a portion of the advertising revenue generated from national commercial spots within that programming. In some arrangements, affiliates may also receive direct financial compensation from the network for carrying their content. This national programming forms a significant part of the affiliate's schedule. Still, local stations also produce their unique content, including local news, public affairs programs, and coverage of community events. Furthermore, affiliates can acquire syndicated programming—shows sold directly to individual stations—to fill their schedules. For all local and syndicated programming, the affiliate retains 100% of the advertising revenue generated, providing a crucial independent revenue stream alongside their network affiliations. Still, the traditional relationship between networks and affiliates has become more fraught with risk as the Internet, social media, and streaming platforms have grown.

The Rise and Fall of the Network



Media mogul Rupert Murdoch started the Fox Network in 1986. **Source**: worldeconomicforum at Flicker., Rupert Murdoch – WEF Davos 2007 , CC BY-SA 2.0.

The network era occurred between 1950 and 1970, when, aside from a small portion of airtime controlled by public television, the three major networks (known as the Big Three) dominated the television industry. In 1986, Rupert Murdoch, the head of multinational company News Corp, launched the Fox network, challenging the dominance of the Big Three. In its infancy, Fox acted, at best, as a minor irritation to the other networks. With fewer than 100 affiliated stations (the different networks all had more than 200 affiliates each), reaching just 80 percent of the nation's households (compared with the Big Three's 97 percent coverage rate), and broadcasting just one show (

The Late Show Starring Joan Rivers), Fox barely impacted the ratings war. During the early 1990s, these dynamics began to change. The tremendous success of *The Simpsons* transformed the network, attracting large audiences, and Fox established itself as an edgy, youth-oriented network with shows such as *Beverly Hills, 90210*, *Melrose Place*, and *In Living Color*. Luring affiliates away from other networks to increase its viewership, Fox also extended its programming schedule beyond the initial two-night-a-week broadcasts. By the time the fledgling network acquired the rights to National Football League (NFL) games in its $1.58 billion 1994 NFL deal, which entitled it to four years of games, Fox had established itself as a worthy rival to the other three broadcast networks. Its success turned the Big Three into the Big Four. In the 1994–1995 television season, 43 percent of U.S. households were watching the Big Four at any given moment during prime time.

Fox's success in the mid-1990s prompted the launch of several smaller networks. UPN (initially a joint venture between Chris-Craft Industries' United Television and Paramount Television, a subsidiary of Viacom) debuted on January 16, 1995. The WB (a joint venture between Warner Bros. Entertainment, a division of Time Warner, and Tribune Broadcasting) debuted slightly earlier on January 11, 1995. Using strategies similar to Fox's, the networks initially broadcast programs two nights a week, expanding to a six-day schedule by 2000. Targeting young and minority audiences

with shows such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Moesha*, *Dawson's Creek*, and *The Wayans Bros.*, the new networks hoped to draw stations away from their old network affiliations.



The CW defined youth television for over a decade through iconic teen dramas and superhero franchises before shifting toward broader broadcast demographics under Nexstar's ownership. **Source**: DixonBaxi, Nexstar Media Group, Paramount Global, and Warner Bros. Discovery, The CW 2024, public domain.

However, rather than replicating Fox's success, UPN and WB struggled to make an impact. Unable to attract many affiliate stations, the two fledgling networks reached fewer households than their larger rivals, as some smaller cities were unable to obtain their programming. High start-up costs, relatively low audience ratings, and increasing production expenses spelled the end of the "netlets," a term coined by *Variety* magazine for minor-league networks that lacked a whole week's worth of programming. After losing $1 billion each, parent companies CBS (having split from Viacom) and Time Warner agreed to merge UPN and WB, resulting in the creation of the CW network in 2006. Targeting the desirable 18–34 age group, the network retained the most popular shows from before the merger—*America's Next Top Model* and *Veronica Mars* from UPN, and *Beauty and the Geek* and

Smallville from WB—as well as launching new shows such as *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries*. Despite its cofounders' claims that the CW would earn the distinction of the "fifth great broadcast network," the collaboration got off to a shaky start. Frequently outperformed by Spanish-language television network Univision in 2008 and with declining ratings among its target audience, critics began to question the future of the CW network. However, the relative success of shows such as *Gossip Girl*and *90210* gave the network a foothold with its intended demographic, quashing rumors that co-owners CBS Corporation and Warner Bros. might disband it. Warner Bros. Television Group President Bruce Rosenblum said, "I think the built-in assumption and the expectation is that the CW is here to stay."

In 2019, CBS Corporation and Warner Bros. merged their shares in The CW, forming a joint venture. However, in 2022, Nexstar Media Group acquired a majority stake in the network, marking a major strategic shift. Nexstar reoriented The CW away from high-cost, teen-focused scripted dramas toward cost-effective unscripted programming, imported series, and live sports broadcasts like LIV Golf and NASCAR . The network has faced ongoing challenges with declining linear viewership and the departure of legacy hit shows. Today, its lineup features a mix of game shows like *Trivial Pursuit*, long-running favorites like *Penn & Teller: Fool Us*, and drama acquisitions such as *Sullivan's Crossing*. Despite these

disruptions, The CW continues to broadcast, operating on a business model fundamentally different from its original vision.

Cable Challenges the Networks



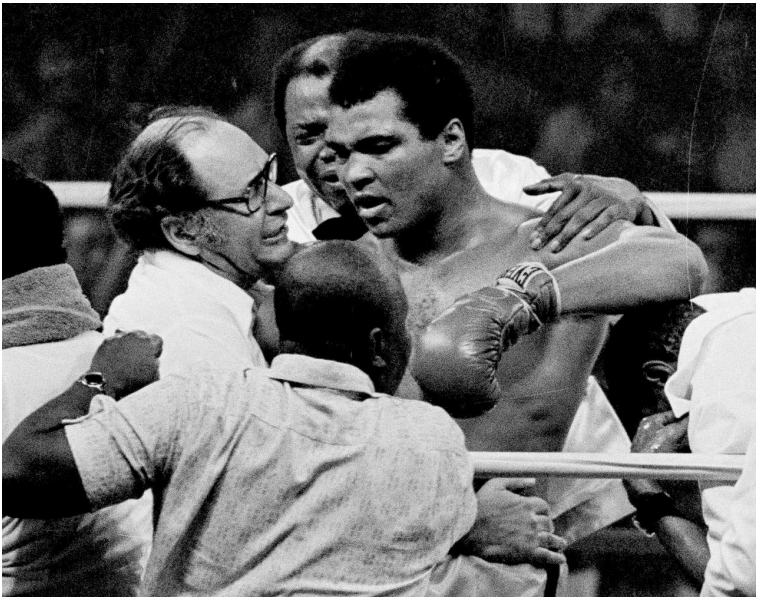
Cable television revolutionized home entertainment by expanding beyond traditional network broadcasting, creating dedicated channels that allowed niche content—such as the 24-hour animation offered by Cartoon Network—to thrive. **Source**: Photo by Sunriseforever on Pixabay.

The increasing dominance of cable television proved a far greater challenge to network television than the emergence of smaller competitors. Between 1994 and 2009, the percentage of U.S.

households watching the Big Four networks during prime time plummeted from 43 percent to 27 percent. Two key factors contributed to the rapid growth of cable television networks: industry deregulation and the use of satellites to distribute local TV stations nationwide.

FCC regulations restricted the growth of cable television during the 1970s, which protected broadcasters by establishing franchising standards and enforcing anti-siphoning rules that prevented cable from taking sports and movie programming away from the networks. However, during the late 1970s, a court ruled that the FCC had exceeded its authority and repealed anti-siphoning rules. This decision paved the way for the development of cable movie channels, contributing to the exponential growth of cable in the 1980s and 1990s. Further deregulation under the 1984 Cable Communications Policy Act removed restrictions on cable rates, enabling operators to charge whatever they wanted for cable services as long as the service faced effective competition (a standard that over 90 percent of cable markets could meet). Other deregulatory policies implemented during the 1980s included eliminating public-service requirements and reducing regulated advertising in children's programming, thereby expanding the scope of cable channels. The government intended deregulation to encourage competition in the industry, but instead, it enabled local cable companies to establish nationwide monopolies. In 1989, U.S. Senator Al Gore of Tennessee commented, "Precipitous

rate hikes of 100 percent or more in one year have not been unusual since cable was given total freedom to charge whatever the market will bear.... Since cable was deregulated, we have also witnessed an extraordinary concentration of control and integration by cable operators and program services, manifesting itself in blatantly anticompetitive behavior toward those who would compete with existing cable operators for the right to distribute services." The FCC reintroduced regulations on basic cable rates in 1992, by which time more than 56 million households (over 60 percent of households with televisions) subscribed to cable service.



The October 1, 1975 transmission via global satellite of the "Thrilla in Manila" fight between Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier marked a historic milestone for closed-circuit television and home pay-per-view distribution. **Source**: Associated Press creator QS:P170,Q40469, 1975 MUHAMMAD ALI v JOE FRAZIER III THRILLA IN MANILA AP photo , public domain.

The growth of cable TV gained momentum with the development of a national satellite distribution system. Pioneered by Time Inc., which founded cable network company HBO, the corporation used satellite transmission in 1975 to beam the "Thrilla from Manila"—the historic heavyweight boxing match between Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier—into people's

homes. Shortly afterward, entrepreneur Ted Turner, owner of independent Atlanta-based station WTBS, uplinked his station's signal onto the same satellite as HBO, enabling cable operators to downlink the station on one of their channels. Initially offered free to subscribers to encourage interest, the station later aired TV reruns, wrestling, and live sports from Atlanta. Having created the first "superstation," Turner expanded his realm by founding 24-hour news network CNN in 1980. At the end of the year, cable television networks offered 28 national programming services, marking the beginning of the cable revolution. Over the next decade, the industry experienced rapid growth and rising popularity, and by 1994, viewers could choose from 94 basic and 20 premium cable services.



HBO's *Game of Thrones* redefined event television by capturing global audiences with its complex political intrigue, groundbreaking visual effects, and willingness to shock viewers by killing off main characters. **Source**: Hax09, Game of Thrones: House Stark Painting , CC BY-NC-ND 3.0.

The rise of cable and premium television significantly reshaped the broadcasting landscape. Premium cable channels and streaming platforms, free from broadcast FCC regulations, introduced more explicit content with higher levels of violence, sexuality, and mature themes. To compete for adult audiences, major broadcast networks gradually pushed their own boundaries, allowing for darker storytelling and more graphic elements. While premium cable hits like *Game of Thrones* on HBO and cable powerhouses like *The Walking Dead* on AMC demonstrated the massive appetite for prestige, mature content, broadcast networks struggled to match that edge while remaining accessible to general audiences and local affiliates.

Despite these efforts, broadcast networks have faced declining viewership. The increasing availability of streaming services and on-demand content has diverted audiences away

from traditional television. As a result, broadcast networks have had to adapt their strategies to remain competitive in the evolving media landscape.



Source: The Nielsen Company (US), LLC., Nielsen 2021, public domain.

Nielsen Ratings: Measuring the Evolving Television Audience

Nielsen Media Research is the leading authority in television audience measurement, tracking which shows are watched in homes across the country . This data is the foundation for setting advertising rates for television stations. However, accurately rating audiences presents significant challenges, particularly when accounting for the diverse landscape of major and minor broadcast and cable networks.

A primary hurdle in traditional measurement has been the rise of Digital Video Recorders (DVRs). To address the complexity of time-shifted viewing, Nielsen has developed various metrics beyond "Live Only" viewing. These

include "Live + SD" (same day), which covers viewing within the same broadcast day; "Live + 3" (within three days); and "Live + 7" (within seven days), providing a more comprehensive picture of viewership. In larger markets, "people meters" are employed to gather granular data on who is watching. Additionally, "sweeps periods" in November, February, May, and July are critical times when Nielsen intensively measures the audience size of individual stations, directly influencing their advertising revenue potential.

Nielsen data consistently highlights a continuing decline in linear television viewership, reflecting a fundamental shift toward digital consumption. According to Nielsen's ongoing tracking metrics, subscription streaming platforms and free ad-supported streaming services now consistently capture a larger share of total TV usage than either broadcast or cable television. While the average American still spends a substantial amount of time consuming screen content, linear viewing continues to contract. Key metrics, such as **rating point**—representing the percentage of the potential television audience watching a show—and **share**—indicating the percentage of television sets in use tuned to a specific show—remain vital. Still, their traditional application has shifted radically in a fragmented ecosystem.

As digital consumption grows, Nielsen has expanded its measurement to include streaming services, recognizing their increasing dominance. A significant development has been the

willingness of major streaming platforms to share their viewership data with Nielsen, providing a more holistic view of the television landscape. This collaborative effort now includes data from a wide array of services such as Netflix, YouTube (central platform), Disney+, Hulu (SVOD content), Prime Video, HBO Max, Paramount+, Peacock, The Roku Channel, Pluto TV, Tubi, and Apple TV+, offering advertisers and content creators unprecedented insights into how audiences are engaging with content across all platforms.

Game On, TV On: How Sports Shaped the Small Screen



Fútbol superstar Lionel Messi helped lead Argentina to a FIFA World Cup title in 2022, which was watched by an estimated 1.5 billion people worldwide. **Source**: Tasnim News Agency, Lionel-Messi-Argentina-2022-FIFA-World-Cup (cropped), CC BY 4.0.

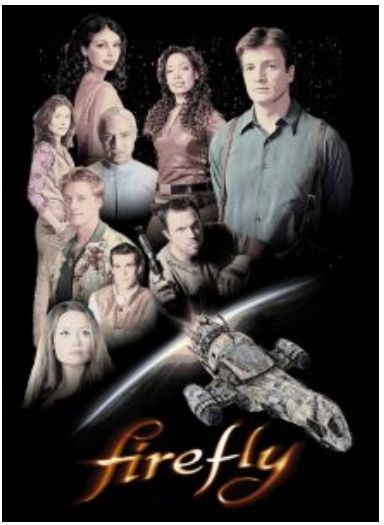
Sports events consistently rank among the most popular draws on television, captivating massive audiences worldwide. Iconic spectacles like the Super Bowl and the FIFA World Cup consistently command unparalleled viewership, underscoring the enduring appeal of live athletic competition. Beyond these global titans, sports broadcasting has also been a crucible for technological innovation. A landmark moment occurred during the 1963 Army-Navy football game, which famously marked the debut of instant replay, forever changing how fans experienced key plays. This innovation was swiftly followed by the introduction of slow-motion

replay, which further enhanced the viewing experience and deepened engagement with the action on screen.

Within the realm of sports broadcasting, Disney's ESPN has solidified its position as the dominant sports channel. While specific profitability figures can fluctuate and are often reported within broader segment results, ESPN consistently remains a significant revenue generator and one of Disney's most valuable assets. For instance, in Disney's fiscal first quarter ending December 28, 2024, the Sports segment, primarily driven by ESPN, reported revenues of $4.85 billion and saw a significant turnaround in operating income, moving from a loss in the prior year to a gain of $247 million. This underscores the substantial financial impact that major sports networks continue to have within large media conglomerates.

The appeal of sports on television transcends mere entertainment; it fosters a communal viewing experience, drives technological advancements in broadcasting, and remains a cornerstone of advertising revenue for networks. The ability to witness live, unscripted drama unfold, coupled with sophisticated production techniques such as instant and slow-motion replays, ensures that sports will remain a central pillar of the television landscape.

Narrowcasting



The Sci-Fi Channel began rebroadcasting *Firefly* in 2005, giving the cult space western a second life on television. **Source**: GeekTruth64, Firefly Poster, CC BY-NC-ND 3.0.

Because the proliferation of cable channels provided viewers with numerous choices, broadcasters began to shift away from mass-oriented programming in favor of more targeted shows. Whereas the broadcast networks sought to reach the widest possible audience by avoiding programs that might appeal only to a small minority of viewers, cable channels sought out niche audiences within specific demographic groups—a process known as narrowcasting. In much the same way that specialist magazines target readers interested in a particular sport or hobby, cable channels focus on a single topic or a group of related topics that appeal to specific viewers (often those overlooked by broadcast television). People interested in current affairs can watch CNN, MS NOW, Fox News, or any number of other news channels, while those interested in sports can switch to ESPN or Fox Sports. Other

channels focus on music, shopping, comedy, science fiction , or programs aimed at specific cultural or gender groups. Narrowcasting has proved beneficial for advertisers and marketers, who no longer need to time their communications to the groups most likely to watch television at certain times of day. Instead, they focus their approach on subscription channels and targeted digital platforms that directly appeal to their target consumers.

A Feast for All Eyes: Food Network's Commitment to Culinary Representation

The Food Network has long been recognized for its notable commitment to on-screen diversity, particularly when compared to many other television channels. This is especially evident in its popular competition series, such as *Chopped*, which consistently features a wide array of contestants from diverse ethnic backgrounds, culinary traditions, and professional experiences. This inclusive casting not only reflects the rich tapestry of the culinary world but also provides viewers with a broad spectrum of cooking styles and cultural influences.



Chef Jet Tila is a celebrated culinary figure known for his expertise in Asian cuisine and for holding multiple Guinness World Records for large-scale food creations. He is a prominent Food Network personality, appearing as a host, co-host, judge, and competitor on numerous shows, including *Iron Chef America*, *Chopped*, *Beat Bobby Flay* , *Guy's Grocery Games*, and *Ready Jet Cook*. **Source**: ActsRetirement, Jet Tila for Acts Retirement , CC BY 3.0.

Beyond *Chopped*, numerous other programs on the network contribute to its diverse representation. Long-running staples like *Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives*, hosted by Guy Fieri, alongside major competition series like *Tournament of Champions*, celebrate America's varied culinary landscape by showcasing local eateries run by people from different walks of life and serving a vast range of cuisines. Similarly, the network has featured and continues to feature a diverse roster of celebrity chefs and hosts, including those who highlight specific ethnic cuisines or bring unique cultural perspectives to their cooking demonstrations and competitions. This broad representation, both in front of and behind the camera, reinforces Food Network's reputation as a channel that embraces and celebrates the global nature of food and cooking.



The Bobo Doll study, conducted by Albert Bandura, demonstrated that children are likely to imitate aggressive behaviors they observe in adults, providing key evidence for social learning theory. **Source**: Okhanm, Bobo Doll Deneyi, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Television and Violence: A History of Research and Debate

The relationship between television content and violent behavior has been a subject of extensive academic inquiry for decades, with hundreds of studies conducted and millions of dollars invested in understanding this complex dynamic. Early and influential research in the 1950-60s included the groundbreaking Bobo Doll studies. These experiments demonstrated that children exposed to televised violence were

significantly more likely to mimic the aggressive behaviors they witnessed in a laboratory setting, such as punching the Bobo doll, compared to those who were not exposed. These findings provided early evidence of observational learning about media.

Decades later, a comprehensive review of the accumulated research was presented in the influential 1992 report, " Big World, Small Screen: The Role of Television in American Society ." This report concluded that "The accumulated research demonstrates a correlation between viewing violence and aggressive behavior. Children and adults who watch a large number of aggressive programs also tend to hold attitudes and values that favor the use of violence." It is crucial to note, however, that while this research established a strong correlation, correlation does not equate to causation. This distinction is vital in understanding that while a relationship exists, it does not necessarily mean that watching television violence directly causes aggressive behavior in all individuals, but rather suggests a complex interplay of factors where media consumption can play a role. Modern research continues to build on these findings, expanding the inquiry beyond traditional linear broadcasts to examine how violence in interactive, on-demand, and digital screen environments affects diverse audience demographics.

Social Issues and Cultural Representation on Television



Following years of criticism—crystallized by Hari Kondabolu's 2017 documentary *The Problem with Apu*—regarding South Asian stereotypes, long-time voice actor Hank Azaria stepped down from the role in 2020, leading *The Simpsons* to phase out Apu Nahasapeemapetilon as an active speaking character. **Source**: The Pop Culture Geek Network, Simpsons 500th Episode Marathon – Apu, CC BY-NC 2.0.

Beyond violence and commercial narrowcasting, television serves as one of the primary arenas where society debates cultural norms, identity, and social issues. The stories told on

screen shape public perception regarding race, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic class, and disability. Over the past several decades, television has evolved from presenting homogenized, idealized depictions of family life toward reflecting a wider variety of lived experiences. Programs that authentically depict marginalized communities can foster empathy and broaden public understanding, while stereotypical or exclusionary portrayals can reinforce existing biases. As networks and platforms respond to calls for greater inclusion both on screen and in writers' rooms, television remains a powerful cultural mirror that reflects and influences ongoing debates about equity and societal change.

A clear example of this dynamic was the groundbreaking FX drama *Pose*, which centered on New York City's underground African American and Latino LGBTQ+ ballroom culture during the height of the 1980s and 1990s HIV/AIDS epidemic

. Created with the largest cast of transgender actors in series regular roles for a scripted television show, as well as a significant cohort of LGBTQ+ writers and directors, *Pose* shifted television away from historical tropes that often reduced transgender characters to tragic punchlines or background victims. By centering the joy, chosen families, and systemic struggles of black and brown queer communities, the series allowed viewers to build empathy with marginalized individuals whose stories had long been excluded from mainstream broadcasting. The show's critical acclaim and

awards recognition demonstrated how authentically cast and written television can reshape broader cultural narratives around identity, health equity, and social acceptance.

8.5 INFLUENCE OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES



A Nielsen report from early 2025 indicates that the average U.S. adult spends approximately 33 hours per week watching television, encompassing both traditional linear TV and content accessed via connected devices and streaming platforms. **Source**: Photo by claudid on Pixabay.

The television viewing experience has undergone a dramatic transformation in recent years. Gone are the days of being limited to a few channels and a predetermined schedule. Technological advancements have empowered viewers with

unprecedented control over what they watch and when they watch it. Streaming services like Netflix, Hulu, and Disney+ have revolutionized the way people consume television. These platforms offer extensive libraries of movies, TV shows, and original content, allowing viewers to binge-watch their favorite series or discover new ones at their own pace. Additionally, the widespread adoption of smartphones and tablets has enabled people to watch television on the go.

While the rise of on-demand services has challenged the traditional concept of prime-time viewing, overall television and video consumption remains exceptionally high. Modern measurement shows that the average American adult spends upwards of 4 to 5 hours per day engaged with video content, spanning
live broadcast TV, recorded programming, subscription streaming apps, and digital platforms
like YouTube. While television audiences have become increasingly fragmented across dozens of platforms, the overall time spent consuming screen entertainment has remained relatively stable. The convenience and flexibility offered by new technologies have contributed to the enduring popularity of television as a form of entertainment. Viewers might not all sit together in the family room watching prime-time shows on network TV between 7 and 11 p.m., but they still watch.

The War Between Satellite and Cable Television

Satellite television can trace its origins to the 1950s space race, when the United States and the Soviet Union competed to launch the first satellite into orbit. Soviet scientists achieved the goal first with the launch of Sputnik in 1957, galvanizing Americans (who feared falling behind in space technology during the Cold War) to intensify their efforts, ultimately leading to the creation of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in 1958. AT&T launched *Telstar*, the first active communications satellite, on July 10, 1962, and the first transatlantic television signal—a black-and-white image of a U.S. flag waving in front of the Andover Earth Station in western Maine—was transmitted that same day. However, the television industry did not use satellites for broadcasting until the late 1970s, when PBS introduced the Public Television Satellite Service. Satellite communication technology proliferated as a distribution method between 1978 and 1984, with pioneering cable channels such as HBO, Turner Broadcasting System (TBS), and Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN), later evolving into the Family Channel.



Large satellite dishes, which provided access to more than 100 cable channels, became more popular once their prices dropped in the mid-1980s. **Source**: Collectie Wereldmuseum (v/h Tropenmuseum), part of the National Museum of World Cultures , COLLECTIE TROPENMUSEUM Schotelantenne voor de ontvangst van televisie aan de achterzijde van het Istana Maimun het paleis van de sultan van Deli TMnr 20023786 , (cropped), CC BY-SA 3.0

Early satellite television systems had a problem that once people purchased a satellite system, they had free access to every basic and premium cable service broadcast via satellite signals. The FCC had an "open skies" policy, under which users had the same right to receive signals as broadcasters had to transmit them. Initially, most families found the cost of the satellite receiver, which exceeded $10,000, prohibitively expensive. However, as the price of a satellite dish dropped to around $3,000 in the mid-1980s, consumers began to view satellite TV as a more affordable, higher-quality alternative to cable. Following the initial purchase of a dish system, the actual programming—consisting of more than 100 cable

channels—became available for free. Cable broadcasters lobbied the government for legal assistance and, under the 1984 Cable Act, were granted permission to encrypt their satellite feeds, allowing only those who purchased a decoder from a satellite provider to receive the channel.

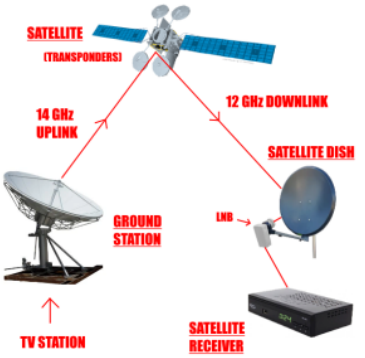
Following the passage of the Cable Act, the satellite industry suffered a significant setback. Sales of the popular direct-to-home systems (precursors to the smaller, more powerful direct broadcast satellite systems introduced in the 1990s) that had offered free cable programming slumped from 735,000 units in 1985 to 225,000 units a year later, and around 60 percent of satellite retailers went out of business. The satellite industry's sudden drop in popularity was exacerbated by large-scale anti-satellite advertising campaigns by cable operators that portrayed satellite dishes as unsightly. Although sales picked up in the late 1980s with the introduction of integrated receiving and decoding units and the arrival of program packages, which saved consumers the time and effort of signing up for individual programming services, piracy—the theft of satellite signals—stunted the industry's growth. Of the 1.9 million units manufactured between 1986 and 1990, fewer than 500,000 received signals legally. The actions of the Satellite Broadcasting and Communications Association (SBCA), formed in 1986 through the merger of two trade organizations—the Society of Private and Commercial Earth Stations (SPACE) and the Direct Broadcast Satellite Association (DBSA)—ultimately solved the problem.

SPACE's membership comprises manufacturers, distributors, and retailers of direct-to-home systems, as well as DBSA-represented companies interested in direct broadcast satellite systems. The SBCA established an anti-piracy task force that aggressively pursued illegal hackers with assistance from the FBI.

Once the piracy problem was under control, the satellite industry could move forward. In 1994, four major cable companies launched a first-generation direct broadcast satellite (DBS) system called PrimeStar. The system, a small-dish, satellite-delivered program service intended explicitly for home reception, became the first successful DBS system to enter the United States market. Within a year, PrimeStar beamed 67 channels into 70,000 homes for a monthly fee of $25 to $35 (in addition to a hardware installation fee of $100 to $200). By 1996, competing companies DirecTV and EchoStar's Dish Network had entered the industry, and Dish Network's lower prices forced its competitors to lower their fees as well. DirecTV acquired PrimeStar's assets in 1999 for around $1.82 billion, absorbing its rival's 2.3 million subscribers.

Satellite Television Loses Ground to Streaming Services

The satellite television industry has undergone significant changes in recent years. While DirecTV and Dish Network were once the dominant players, the landscape has become increasingly competitive with the emergence of streaming services such as Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime Video. These services offer a wide range of content at affordable prices, challenging the traditional cable and satellite TV models.



Subscribers to DBS receive signals from geostationary satellites that broadcast digital signals at microwave frequencies, which are intercepted by a satellite dish. A converter next to the television produces output that audiences can view on the television receiver. **Source**: Sebas007, Satellite TV diagram, public domain.

The Satellite Television and Radio Broadcasting Act of 1999 played a crucial role in expanding the reach of satellite TV. By allowing satellite providers to carry local TV stations, the act put them on a more level playing field with cable companies. This helped satellite providers attract subscribers and grow

their market share. Satellite companies have historically offered competitive pricing and bundled packages to attract customers. They have often provided access to premium channels, such as HBO and ESPN, at a lower cost than traditional cable providers. Additionally, satellite TV has typically offered a wider range of channels, including international programming.

However, the rise of streaming services has presented a significant challenge to the satellite TV industry. Many consumers have found it more cost-effective and convenient to subscribe to streaming services instead of cable or satellite TV. As a result, the market share of satellite TV has declined in recent years. In late 2024, DirecTV proposed acquiring Dish Network to consolidate the struggling satellite market, though corporate negotiations underscore the severe headwinds both platforms face. To remain competitive, satellite providers have focused on offering additional features and services, including advanced DVR capabilities, voice control, and integration with other smart home devices. However, the long-term viability of the satellite TV industry remains uncertain as consumers increasingly embrace streaming platforms.

The Impact of DVRs and the Internet: Changing Content Delivery

The television landscape has undergone significant changes in recent years, driven by technological advancements and shifting consumer preferences. The introduction of digital video recorders (DVRs) and streaming services has fragmented audiences and altered how viewers consume content. For example, viewers can set their DVRs to record all new (or old) episodes of *South Park* and then watch them whenever they have free time.



DVRs fundamentally reshaped television viewing habits in the early 2000s by empowering audiences to pause live broadcasts, skip commercials, and build personalized playback schedules on their own terms. **Source**: Steve Garfield, Comcast TiVo DVR – Scheduled Recordings in Guide, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

DVRs have empowered viewers to take control of their viewing schedules. By recording programs to view later, audience members can skip commercials and watch content at their convenience. While DVRs initially raised concerns about

user privacy, the industry has implemented standards to protect consumer data.

The internet has revolutionized content consumption. Streaming services like Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime Video provide extensive libraries of movies and TV shows, enabling viewers to access content on demand. While online platforms have posed challenges for traditional media industries, television has remained a dominant form of entertainment, and the average American continues to spend a significant amount of time watching television. Despite the growth of streaming services, traditional TV remains a popular medium. Many viewers combine television with other forms of media, such as watching YouTube videos or catching up on missed episodes online.

New Viewing Outlets: YouTube and Hulu



Source: Thanhhoat237, Logo Youtube app (IPhone OS), CC BY-SA 4.0

Among the many recent Internet phenomena, few have had as significant an impact as the video-sharing website YouTube. Created by three PayPal engineers in 2005, the site enables users to upload personal videos, television clips, music videos, and movie snippets that other users can watch. Although it initially drew unfavorable comparisons with the original music-sharing site Napster (see Chapter 6 "Music"), which found itself buried under an avalanche of copyright infringement lawsuits, YouTube managed to survive the controversy by forming agreements with media corporations, such as NBC Universal Television, to broadcast video clips from shows such as *The Office* legally. In 2006, Google purchased the company, which showed more than 100 million video clips per day, for $1.65 billion. Correctly

predicting that the site represented the "next step in the evolution of the Internet," Google CEO Eric Schmidt has watched YouTube's popularity explode since the takeover. According to current data, people watch over 1 billion hours of video on YouTube every day, and users upload more than 500 hours of video every minute. To secure its place as the go-to entertainment website, YouTube has expanded its offerings by developing a movie rental service and streaming live music concerts and sporting events in real time. In 2023, YouTube secured the exclusive rights to stream NFL Sunday Ticket, bringing live out-of-market NFL games to millions of subscribers and showcasing the platform's evolution into a comprehensive entertainment hub.

While platforms like YouTube initially gained prominence through user-generated content, Hulu emerged as a key destination for commercial videos, particularly current and past seasons of movies and TV shows. Established in 2007 as a joint venture primarily between NBC Universal and News Corp (later 21st Century Fox), Hulu's initial model offered a



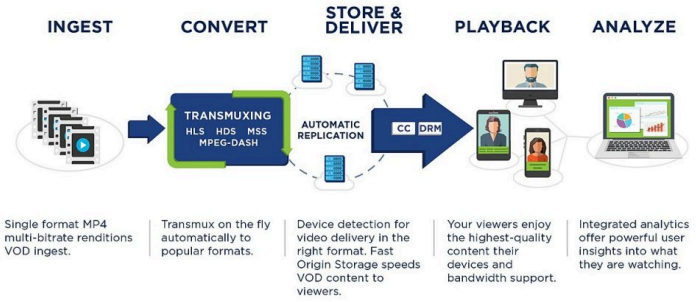
Agreements between YouTube and media corporations allow viewers to watch clips of their favorite shows on YouTube for free. **Source**: andresmh – Homeless on YouTube – CC BY-SA 2.0.

library of video content, including full episodes of popular network shows, free of charge, supported entirely by advertising. This approach quickly gained traction, and within a few years, it became a significant player in the online video industry.

However, Hulu's business model has undergone a profound transformation. It is now primarily a subscription-based streaming service, offering both ad-supported and ad-free tiers, and is wholly owned by The Walt Disney Company , following Disney's acquisition of 21st Century Fox assets in 2019 and its subsequent buyout of Comcast's remaining stake in 2025. Today, Hulu remains a U.S.-centric platform, boasting a robust library that includes current-season episodes from Disney-owned networks (ABC, FX, Freeform, and National Geographic), as well as NBCUniversal and others, alongside a growing slate of critically acclaimed Hulu Originals, such as *The Bear* and *Only Murders in the Building*. Hulu has grown to approximately 53.6 million paid subscribers and generates billions in revenue, reflecting its successful adaptation to the subscription video-on-demand landscape. While its ad-supported tier still features commercials, the industry has moved beyond simple minute-for-minute comparisons, focusing instead on targeted advertising and integrated brand experiences.

The rise of streaming services like Hulu initially sparked intense debate within the traditional television industry about

"cannibalization"—the fear that offering content online would undermine lucrative cable subscriptions and DVD sales. Early disputes, such as Fox temporarily pulling episodes of *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* or networks refusing to stream certain shows, highlighted these anxieties. However, the industry has essentially come to accept that digital distribution is not just inevitable but essential. The lesson learned from early viral successes, such as Saturday Night Live's "Lazy Sunday" clip, which generated millions of YouTube views without NBC directly profiting, underscored the need for networks to control and monetize their digital content. Consequently, major broadcast networks and media conglomerates have either launched their own comprehensive streaming platforms or, as in Hulu's case, consolidated their content onto a powerful, jointly owned service, recognizing that embracing streaming is crucial for retaining audiences and revenue in the evolving media landscape.



Simplified graph that demonstrates the video-on-demand model. **Source**: DavidBrownley, Simplified Video on Demand Model, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Video-on-Demand

Initially introduced in the early 1990s, the concept of video on demand (VOD)—a system allowing viewers to order or stream content via television or the Internet at their convenience—faced early adoption hurdles due to high costs and delayed release windows relative to physical home video. Media studios solved these barriers by moving toward simultaneous digital releases and competitive pricing structures. Traditional pay-TV providers continue to offer legacy VOD and near-video-on-demand packages. Still, on-demand consumption has largely migrated to standalone digital apps and direct-to-consumer streaming environments.

As a powerful alternative to traditional cable or satellite VOD services, viewers can now readily access movies and

television shows online through a diverse ecosystem of streaming platforms. While free, ad-supported services like YouTube and Pluto TV remain popular, the market is dominated by paid subscription services that stream vast libraries of content. Netflix, for instance, which launched its streaming service in 2007, has grown into a global powerhouse, having fully transitioned from its original online DVD rental service (which was spun off into DVD.com and eventually shut down in September 2023). Similarly, Amazon, which initially offered a pay-per-view model in 2008, has evolved its Prime Video service into a comprehensive subscription offering that includes an extensive content library, original productions, and even live sports. Viewers can also continue to stream free, ad-supported episodes of their favorite shows directly via the websites and apps of broadcast and cable networks.

The increasing ubiquity of smartphones and other mobile devices has profoundly impacted VOD consumption, leading to a significant rise in viewers watching television outside the home. Recognizing that consumers are eager to watch entire TV episodes or even films on their mobile devices, industry executives have aggressively capitalized on this trend. Today, virtually every major streaming service, from HBO Max and Disney+ to Peacock and Paramount+, offers robust mobile applications that provide seamless access to their entire catalogs, often with download capabilities for offline viewing.



"Cord-nevers" represent a generation of consumers who have never paid for a legacy television subscription, opting instead to rely entirely on digital streaming services and online video platforms for their entertainment.
Source: Cropped photo by AndrewAngelov on Pixabay.

The evolving landscape of television consumption has introduced new categories of viewers, primarily defined by their relationship with traditional cable or satellite TV services. "Cord-cutters" are consumers who have intentionally canceled their conventional television subscriptions, opting instead to access their entertainment and news content exclusively through internet-delivered services, often referred to as streaming platforms. This group typically previously subscribed to cable or satellite and made a conscious decision to switch, driven by factors such as cost savings, on-demand content availability, and personalized viewing experiences. In contrast, "cord-nevers" represent a newer demographic that has never subscribed to traditional pay television services. These individuals, often younger generations, have grown up in an era where mobile devices, wireless internet, and

streaming platforms are the primary means of content consumption, making linear broadcast or cable television an unfamiliar or unnecessary concept for them. Both cord-cutters and cord-nevers contribute to the ongoing, significant shift in media consumption away from traditional models, forcing the television industry to adapt rapidly to a fragmented, on-demand viewing environment.

This profound shift from traditional linear television viewing to online, on-demand consumption has made a substantial and accelerating dent in the cable and satellite industry. What was once a "small but noticeable dent" has become a significant disruption to a multi-billion-dollar industry. Between 2008 and 2009, an estimated 800,000 U.S. households cut the cord; however, this trend has dramatically intensified. Current industry data indicates that approximately half of all U.S. internet households now identify as cord-cutters or cord-nevers who do not subscribe to traditional pay-TV. The high cost of conventional cable primarily drives this mass migration, along with the flexibility of streaming and the sheer volume of content available online, which fundamentally reshape the media landscape.



Dancing with the Stars helped pioneer interactive television by allowing home viewers to influence competition outcomes in real time through telephone, text, and online voting, transforming passive fans into active participants who directly determine which celebrities advance each week. **Source**: Walt Disney Television, 135711_5866, CC BY-ND 2.0.

Interactive Television

Moving beyond simple video-on-demand, interactive television has evolved dramatically, seamlessly integrating traditional viewing with dynamic online content to create a multifaceted entertainment experience. Today, this interactivity is primarily driven by smart televisions with built-in operating systems and a vast array of streaming applications, rather than external set-top boxes. Viewers can now effortlessly

engage with content through features like integrated polls and quizzes during live events, access real-time statistics and highlights directly within streaming apps during sports matches, create personalized watchlists, or participate in interactive narratives offered by select streaming originals. Beyond the television screen itself, the second-screen phenomenon has become pervasive, with viewers routinely using smartphones, tablets, and laptops to simultaneously engage with social media platforms like X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, Reddit, and TikTok, discussing shows in real-time, participating in fan communities, and accessing supplementary content. When used widely and simultaneously, it creates a rich, shared viewing experience, and marketing strategies often encourage live social engagement or offer exclusive behind-the-scenes content on companion digital platforms. The industry's initial skepticism about "Internet-like experiences" on TVs has vanished, as virtually all new televisions are now internet-enabled, making deep interactivity and multi-device engagement the new standard for modern television consumption.

AI, Personalization, and the Future of Content Recommendation

As the volume of available video content has expanded

exponentially across hundreds of streaming channels and platforms, artificial intelligence and machine learning algorithms have become central to the modern television experience. Rather than relying on printed program guides or fixed channel lineups, viewers navigate personalized home interfaces driven by predictive recommendation engines. Algorithms analyze user viewing histories, time-of-day preferences, viewing completion rates, and device types to curate tailored content hubs for individual profile holders. Furthermore, machine learning models now influence content creation itself, helping studios analyze audience engagement trends to greenlight projects, target advertising with high precision, and dynamically generate promotional thumbnails designed to maximize user engagement. As television continues its digital evolution, artificial intelligence plays a decisive role in determining what content reaches viewers in an increasingly saturated media ecosystem.

CHAPTER 9: ELECTRONIC GAMES AND ENTERTAINMENT



Source: Footy.com images.
Playing Football Video Games on PlayStation 49. CC BY 2.0.

- 9.1 Electronic Games and Entertainment
- 9.2 The Evolution of Electronic Games
- 9.3 Influential Contemporary Games

- 9.4 The Impact of Video Games on Culture
- 9.5 Controversial Issues
- 9.6 Blurring the Boundaries Between Video Games, Information, Entertainment, and Communication

9.1 ELECTRONIC GAMES AND ENTERTAINMENT



Two people play the Wii, one of the innovative video game systems from the 2000s that revolutionized the gaming genre by incorporating motion controls, opening up the hobby to people of all ages. **Source**: Anders Adermark – Playing – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Video games have undergone a dramatic transformation since the pixelated adventures of Pac-Man and the simple joystick controls of early arcade cabinets. Today, the landscape is vastly more complex and immersive. Consider the global

phenomenon of esports, where professional gamers compete in packed arenas for millions of dollars, or the intricate virtual worlds of titles like *Fortnite* and *Roblox*, which serve as massive social hubs where millions interact daily, far beyond just playing a game.

Such widespread engagement stands in stark contrast to the early days of home gaming, when Atari dominated the industry and gameplay primarily revolved around basic hand-eye coordination. Players might have maneuvered a paddle to play virtual table tennis or controlled a spaceship to shoot lines of aliens. However, as technology advanced, so too did the sophistication of games. The era of reading physical magazines like *Nintendo Power* for tips has evolved into a dynamic ecosystem where players exchange strategies, lore, and fan content across dedicated wikis, streaming platforms like Twitch and YouTube Gaming, and vast online communities on Discord. Modern games, from expansive open-world RPGs like *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom* to narrative-driven epics like *Final Fantasy VII Rebirth*, offer hundreds of hours of intricate storytelling and exploration.

While video games were once criticized for promoting sedentary lifestyles, many contemporary titles encourage physical activity and engagement. Beyond the pioneering efforts of *Wii Fit* and *Dance Dance Revolution*, virtual reality experiences immerse players in active environments, and dedicated fitness games integrate advanced motion tracking to turn gaming into a genuine workout. The notion of video

games as a mere scapegoat for health issues has largely faded as the industry embraces active play.

The logistics of video games continue to evolve rapidly, leading to their deep integration into nearly every facet of modern culture. Players can "perform" their favorite songs in rhythm games. At the same time, product placement and brand integrations are as prevalent in popular series like *Forza Motorsport* or *EA Sports FC* (formerly *FIFA*) as they are in film and television. The rise of esports has solidified competitive gaming as a legitimate professional sport, drawing massive viewership and sponsorships. Furthermore, the artistic merit of video games is now widely recognized, with their increasingly complex animation, cinematic storytelling, and interactive narratives earning them a respected place in the art world.

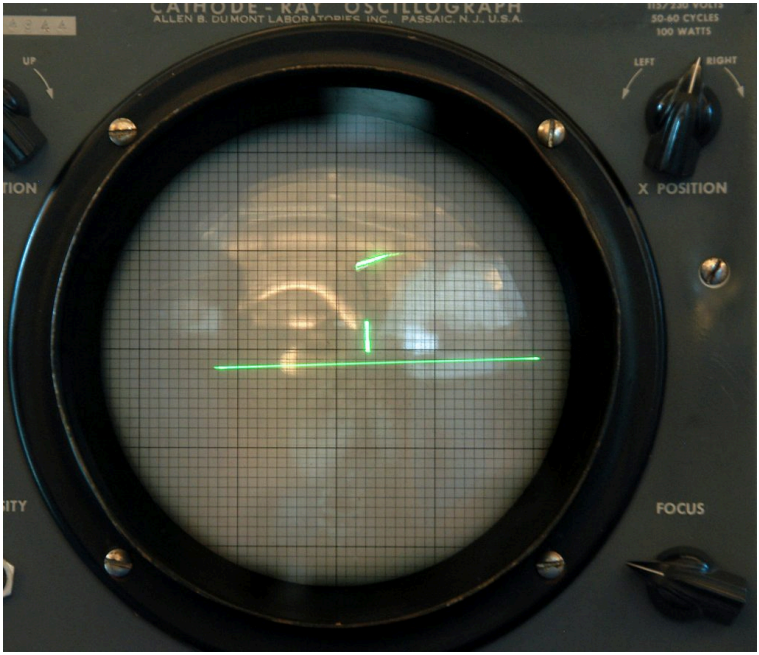
The future of video games is boundless, continually attracting new and diverse demographics. Gaming has become more accessible than ever through various platforms, from dedicated consoles and powerful PCs to cloud gaming services that stream titles directly to smart TVs and mobile devices. The ubiquity of smartphones has transformed mobile gaming, offering a vast array of free-to-play titles with sophisticated in-app purchases, making games available anytime, anywhere. Why carry a cumbersome board game when an entire universe of interactive entertainment fits in your pocket?

Video games are no longer a niche hobby but an

integral and influential part of modern culture.

Understanding this dynamic medium is crucial for a comprehensive grasp of its profound implications across entertainment, information dissemination, social interaction, and communication. Studying their ongoing history reveals new insights into how video games continue to shape and reflect mainstream society.

9.2 THE EVOLUTION OF ELECTRONIC GAMES



Tennis for Two, seen here on a DuMont Lab Oscilloscope, was a rudimentary game designed to entertain visitors to the Brookhaven National Laboratory. **Source**: Brookhaven National Laboratory (BNL), Tennis For Two on a DuMont Lab Oscilloscope Type 304-A, public domain.

Pong, the electronic table tennis simulation game, marked the

entry point into the world of video games for many people who grew up in the 1970s, and it now famously symbolizes the early days of video gaming. However, a rare few had the opportunity to experience the precursors to modern video games as early as the 1950s, if they knew where to look. In 1952, the Electronic Delay Storage Automatic Calculator, one of the first stored-information computers, developed a computer simulation of tic-tac-toe. In 1958, Brookhaven National Laboratory developed a game called *Tennis for Two* to entertain visitors on laboratory tours.

These games would generate little interest among the modern game-playing public. Still, at the time, they enthralled their users and introduced the basic elements of the cultural video game experience. In an era before personal computers, these games enabled the general public to interact with technology previously accessible only to those in the abstract sciences. *Tennis for Two* created an interface that allowed anyone with basic motor skills to operate a complex machine. The first video games served as a medium, disseminating the experience of computer technology to those without access to it.

As video games evolved, their role as a medium grew as well. Video games have evolved from simple tools that made computing technology accessible to forms of media that can convey cultural values and human relationships.



Spacewar! running on the Computer History Museum's PDP-1. **Source**: Joi Ito from Inbamura, Japan, Spacewar!-PDP-1-20070512, (cropped), CC BY 2.0.

The 1970s: The Rise of the Video Game

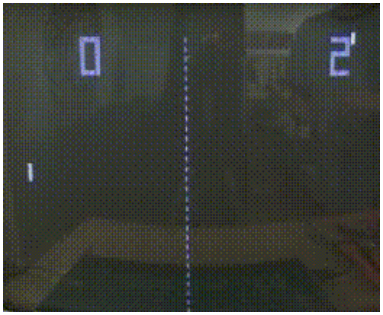
The 1970s saw the rise of video games as a cultural phenomenon. A 1972 article in *Rolling Stone* describes the early days of computer gaming:

> Reliably, at any nighttime moment (i.e., non-business hours) in North America hundreds of computer technicians are effectively out of their bodies, locked in life-

> or-death space combat computer-projected onto cathode ray tube display screens, for hours at a time, ruining their eyes, numbing their fingers in frenzied mashing of control buttons, joyously slaying their friend and wasting their employers' valuable computer time. Something fundamental is happening.

This scene describes *Spacewar!*, a game developed in the 1960s at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on a DEC PDP-1 minicomputer. The basic configuration of a PDP-1 cost approximately $120,000 at the time, equivalent to nearly $1 million in today's dollars. This made the computer, and thus the game, inaccessible to the general public, as it existed primarily in university and research labs. In the early '70s, very few people owned computers. Most computer users worked or studied at universities, businesses, or government facilities. Those with access to computers quickly turned to gaming.

Arcade Games



A demonstration of *Pong*'s gameplay. **Source**: pong74ls, Pong Game Test2, CC BY 3.0.

The creators of the first coin-operated arcade game, *Computer Space*, modeled the game on *Spacewar!* It performed poorly among the general public due to its complex controls and user interface. In 1972, the fledgling company Atari created *Pong*, the table-tennis simulator that became an immediate success. Atari initially placed *Pong* in bars alongside pinball machines and other games of chance, but as video games gained popularity, they were installed in any establishment willing to host them. By the end of the 1970s, so many people were opening video arcades that some towns passed zoning laws to limit their number.

The end of the 1970s ushered in a new era—what some call the golden age of video games—with the game *Space Invaders*, an international phenomenon that exceeded all expectations. In Japan, the game achieved such popularity that it was rumored to have caused a national coin shortage. Games like *Space Invaders* illustrate both the effect of arcade games and their influence on international culture. In two different countries on opposite sides of the globe, Japanese and

American teenagers, although they could not speak to one another, had the same experiences thanks to a video game.

Video Game Consoles

The first home video game console went on sale in 1972. The Magnavox Odyssey, based on prototypes developed by Ralph H. Baer in the late 1960s, included a *Pong*-type game. When the arcade version of *Pong* became popular, the Odyssey began to sell well. This prompted Atari to produce a home version of *Pong*, which was released in 1974. Although this system could only play one game, its graphics and controls surpassed the Odyssey. Due to these advantages, the Atari home version of *Pong* sold well, and a host of other companies began producing and selling their versions of *Pong*.

The development of game cartridges that stored the games provided a significant step forward in the evolution of video games. This allowed consoles to play multiple games. With this technology, video game console manufacturers could shift their focus to developing games. Several



The Atari 2600, which popularized interchangeable game cartridges, became the first widely successful video game console in the United States. **Source**: Evan-Amos, Atari-2600-Wood-4Sw-Set, public domain.

groups, such as Magnavox, Coleco, and Fairchild, released cartridge-based consoles; however, Atari's 2600 console had the upper hand due to the company's expertise in arcade games. Atari capitalized on its arcade successes by releasing games familiar to the public and that performed well in arcades. The popularity of games like *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man* contributed to the Atari 2600's success. The late 1970s also saw the birth of companies such as Activision, which developed third-party games like *Pitfall!* for the Atari 2600.



The Altair 8800 microcomputer lacked a standard monitor or keyboard, prompting early personal computer enthusiasts to interface with the machine using a Model 33 ASR Teletype to enter program code via paper tape and print out line-by-line responses. **Source**: Tim Colegrove, Altair 8800 and Model 33 ASR Teletype, CC BY-SA 4.0,

Home Computers

The birth of the home computer market in the 1970s paralleled the emergence of video game consoles. The Altair , the first computer designed and sold for home consumers, was first sold in 1975, primarily to a hobbyist market, several years after the introduction of the first video game consoles. During this period, people such as Steve Jobs, a co-founder of Apple, built computers by hand and sold them to get their start-ups going. In 1977, three significant computers—Radio Shack's TRS-80, the Commodore PET, and the Apple II—began production and entered the home market.

The rise of personal computers allowed for the development of more complex games. Game designers of titles such as *Mystery House*, developed in 1979 for the Apple II, and *Rogue* , created in 1980 and played on IBM PCs, used the processing power of early home computers to build video games with extended plots and storylines. In these games, players navigate landscapes composed of basic graphics, solving puzzles and progressing through an engaging narrative. These games eclipsed the capabilities of text-based games like *Zork*. The development of video games for the personal computer platform expanded the medium's capabilities by enabling complex narratives and introducing new forms of player interaction.

The 1980s: The Crash and Rebound



E.T. and *Centipede* game packaging from the excavation of the landfill site of the 1983 Atari video game burial. **Source**: taylorhatmaker, Atari E.T. Dig- Alamogordo, New Mexico (14036097792) , (cropped), CC BY 2.0.

Atari owed its success in the home console market largely to its ownership of already popular arcade games and the large number of game cartridges available for the system. These strengths, however, eventually proved detrimental to the company and led to the video game crash of 1983. Atari bet heavily on its past successes with popular arcade games by releasing *Pac-Man* for the Atari 2600. The successful arcade game did not translate well to home consoles after being rushed into production, leading to disappointed consumers and lower-than-expected sales. Additionally, Atari produced 12 million lackluster *Pac-Man* games during its first run, even though it meant they had made more than one copy

for every console they had sold up to that point. A game based on the movie *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* gained notoriety as one of the worst games in Atari's history. Consumers disliked the confusing game despite the movie's success, and Atari had again bet heavily on it. Atari buried piles of unsold *E.T.* game cartridges in the New Mexico desert under a veil of secrecy. This urban legend was confirmed in 2014 when the site was excavated, and hundreds of cartridges were recovered.

As retail outlets became increasingly wary of home console failures, they began stocking fewer games on shelves. This action, combined with an increasing number of companies producing games, led to overproduction and a resulting fallout in the video game market in 1983. Many smaller game developers were unable to withstand this downturn and went out of business. Although Coleco and Atari survived the crash, neither company regained its former share of the video game market. Some speculated the home video game market would never recover.

The Rise of Nintendo

Nintendo, a



Will Smith playing Nintendo's *Baseball*. **Source**: Memento000. Will Smith Playing the NES (cropped). PDM 1.0.

Japanese card and novelty producer that began producing electronic games in the 1970s, enjoyed success with arcade games such as *Donkey Kong* in the early 1980s. Its first home console, the Famicom, developed in 1984 for the Japanese market, sought to succeed where Atari had failed. The Nintendo system utilized newer, higher-quality microchips, purchased in large quantities, to ensure high-quality graphics at a price consumers could afford. Keeping console prices low meant Nintendo had to rely on games for most of its profits and maintain control of game production. Atari failed to do this, which led to a glut of low-priced games that contributed to the 1983 crash. Nintendo addressed this problem by

incorporating proprietary circuits that prevented the console from playing unlicensed games. This allowed Nintendo to dominate the home video game market through the end of the decade, by which time one-third of homes in the United States had a Nintendo system

.

Nintendo introduced its Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) in the United States in 1985. This 8-bit system ushered in the third generation of consoles, dramatically advancing home gaming with superior graphics and processing power compared to its predecessors. The game *Super Mario Bros.*, released with the system, signified a landmark in video game development. The game employed a narrative similar to that of more complex computer games, but it featured accessible controls and straightforward objectives. The game appealed to a younger demographic, generally boys in the 8–14 age range, than the one targeted by Atari. Its designer, Shigeru Miyamoto, sought to recreate the experiences of childhood adventures, creating a fantasy world not based on previous models from science fiction or other literary genres. *Super Mario Bros.* also gave Nintendo an iconic character whom they have since used in numerous other games, television shows, and blockbuster animated films. The development of this type of character and fantasy world became the norm for video game makers. Games such as *The Legend of Zelda* have become franchises with

film and television possibilities, rather than simply one-off games.

As video games developed into a form of media, the public struggled to come to terms with the kind of messages this medium conveyed to children. These games did not resemble simple reflex games comparable to similar non-video games or sports; instead, they included stories and messages that concerned parents and children's advocates. Arguments about the broader meaning of the games became common, with some viewing the games as driven by ideas of conquest and gender stereotypes. In contrast, others saw them as basic stories about travel and exploration.



The 8-bit Sega Master System struggled against Nintendo's dominance in North America while achieving massive, long-lasting popularity in international markets like Europe and Brazil. **Source**: Evan-Amos, Sega-Master-System-Set, public domain.

Other Home Console Systems

Other software companies attempted to establish themselves in the home console market in the mid-1980s. Atari released the 2600 Jr. and the 7800 in 1986, following Nintendo's success, but the consoles were unable to compete with Nintendo. The Sega Corporation, which had produced arcade video games, released its Sega Master System in 1986. Although the system had more graphics possibilities than the NES, Sega failed to make a dent in Nintendo's market share until the early 1990s, with the release of the Sega Genesis.



Though the graphics of laser-disc games like *Dragon's Lair* surpassed those of most games at the time, gameplay often suffered. **Source**: Rosenfeld Media. PD020: Figure 4.5 . CC BY 2.0.

Computer Games Flourish and Innovate

The enormous number of games available for Atari consoles in the early 1980s took its toll on the video arcade industry. In 1983, arcade revenues had fallen to a three-year low, leading game makers to turn to newer technologies that home consoles could not replicate. This included stunningly animated arcade games powered by laser discs, such as *Dragon's Lair* and *Space Ace*. Still, their novelty soon wore off due to the simplistic nature of the gaming interface, and laser-disc games became museum pieces. In 1989, museums were already curating exhibitions of early arcade games, including ones from the early 1980s. Although newer games continued to be released on arcade platforms, they could not compete with the home console market and never achieved the same level of success as they had in the early 1980s. Increasingly, arcade gamers chose to stay at home to play games on computers and consoles. Traditional neighborhood arcades have largely evolved into modern entertainment venues, retro barcades, and family entertainment chains like Dave & Buster's and Chuck E. Cheese, which blend gaming with full-service dining, VR experiences, and redemption attractions.

The Unlikely Ace: Golden Tee's Enduring Swing in a Fading Arcade World



Source: Phil Whitehouse. Golden Tee. CC BY 2.0.

Although arcade games have largely fallen out of favor, *Golden Tee*, the iconic arcade golf game developed by Incredible Technologies, has maintained extraordinary popularity and impact since its inception in 1989. Its signature trackball control, which lets players meticulously shape their golf shots with power, direction, and curve, quickly sets it apart. While the initial releases garnered a following, the series truly exploded in popularity with the release of *Peter Jacobson's Golden Tee 3D Golf* in 1995. This version introduced online networked play, a groundbreaking feature for its time, enabling

competitive tournaments across different cabinets and fostering a vibrant community of players.

The game's genius lies in its accessibility—easy to pick up for casual players yet incredibly challenging to master —which attracts a dedicated competitive scene. *Golden Tee* became a ubiquitous fixture in bars, pubs, and restaurants across North America, often referred to as the "pool table of the next generation" due to its social appeal and ability to generate consistent revenue for establishments. Its enduring legacy is reflected in annual updates that add new courses and features, demonstrating its continued popularity. It even pioneered early forms of esports, with real-money tournaments dating back to the mid-90s, well before the term "esports" became mainstream, demonstrating its significant and long-lasting influence on both casual gaming culture and competitive play.

Home games fared better than arcade games because they could capitalize on the surge in personal computer purchases in the 1980s. Some significant developments in video games occurred in the mid-1980s, with the emergence of online games. Multiple players could role-play simultaneously in multiuser dungeons, also known as MUDs. The generally text-based games described the world of the MUD through text rather than illustrating it through graphics. The games allowed

users to create a character and move through different worlds, accomplishing goals that awarded them with new skills. If characters attained a certain level of proficiency, they could then design their area of the world. *Habitat*, a game developed in 1986 for the Commodore 64, added graphics to the storyline. Users dialed up to a central host server via modems and then controlled characters on screen, interacting with other users.

During the mid-1980s, a demographic shift occurred. Between 1985 and 1987, the percentage of games designed to run on business computers rose from 15 percent to 40 percent of the total games sold (Elmer-Dewitt et al., 1987). This trend allowed game makers to utilize the increased processing power of business computers to create more complex games. It also demonstrated that adults were interested in computer games and that the market could be profitable.

The 1990s: The Rapid Evolution of Video Games

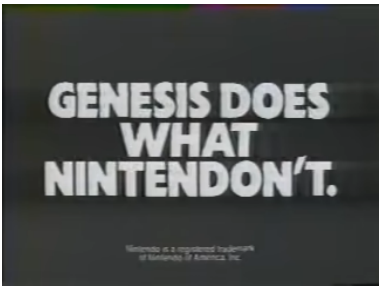
Video games evolved rapidly throughout the 1990s, progressing from the first 16-bit systems (named for the amount of data they could process and store) in the early 1990s to the first Internet-enabled home console in 1999. As companies focused on new marketing strategies, they targeted

broader audiences, and the influence of video games on culture expanded.

Console Wars

Nintendo's dominance of the home console market throughout the late 1980s enabled it to build an extensive library of games for the NES. This also proved problematic, however, because Nintendo was reluctant to improve or change its system, fearing that doing so would render its game library obsolete. Technology had changed since the introduction of the NES, and companies such as NEC and Sega were prepared to challenge Nintendo with 16-bit systems .

NEC's TurboGrafx-16 struggled to become a major competitor against Nintendo (and later Sega) due to a combination of factors, including a confusing marketing strategy, a higher price point for the console and its essential accessories (like the multi-player adapter), and a limited software library in



Sega marketed its games to older audiences, since the NES initially produced family-friendly games. **Source**: Sega of America, Genesis does what Nintendon't , public domain.

North America compared to the well-established NES and the rapidly rising Genesis. Despite its innovative hardware and early adoption of CD-ROM technology, these challenges prevented it from gaining significant market share. The Sega Master System had failed to challenge the NES, but with the release of its 16-bit system, the Sega Genesis, the company pursued a new marketing strategy. Whereas Nintendo targeted 8- to 14-year-olds, Sega's marketing plan targeted 15- to 17-year-olds, making more mature games and advertising them during programs such as the MTV Video Music Awards. The campaign successfully branded Sega as a more appealing alternative to Nintendo, shifting mainstream video games into a more mature arena. Nintendo responded to the Sega Genesis with its 16-bit system, the Super NES, and began creating more mature games as well. Games such as Sega's *Mortal Kombat* and Nintendo's *Street Fighter II* competed to raise the level of violence that could be depicted in a video game. Sega's advertisements even suggested that it made better games because of their more violent possibilities.



Some consider *Super Mario World* for the SNES to be one of the greatest video games ever created. **Source**: Cross-Stitch Ninja. Mario Bros 3 Map. CC-BY-NC-ND 2.0.

By 1994, companies such as 3DO, with its 32-bit system, and Atari, with its allegedly 64-bit Jaguar, attempted to enter the home console market but failed to utilize effective marketing strategies to support their products. Both systems were discontinued before the end of the decade. Sega, fearing that its system would become obsolete, released the 32-bit Saturn system in 1995. They rushed the system into production and did not have enough games available to ensure its success. Sony stepped in with its PlayStation console at a time when Sega's Saturn floundered and before Nintendo could release its 64-bit system. This system targeted an even older demographic, 14- to 24-year-olds, and had a significant impact on the market; by March 2007, Sony had sold 102 million PlayStations. The PlayStation console revolutionized the industry by adopting CDs for game distribution, significantly reducing manufacturing costs and enabling larger, more intricate games. The PlayStation also brought true 3D graphics to the forefront of console gaming, captivating audiences with immersive new worlds, with

popular games including *Final Fantasy VII*, *Gran Turismo*, and *Tekken 3*.

Computer Games Gain Mainstream Acceptance



Doom revolutionized the video game industry by popularizing the first-person shooter genre, pioneering immersive 3D graphics, and establishing the groundwork for online multiplayer gaming. **Source**: Xbox México , Doom classic box art, cropped, CC BY 3.0.

Computer games had avid players, but they still represented a niche market in the early 1990s. The development of the first-

person shooter genre marked a significant step in the mainstream acceptance of personal computer games. First popularized by the 1992 game *Wolfenstein 3D*, these games put the player in the character's perspective, allowing them to experience the sensation of firing weapons and attacking enemies. *Doom*, released in 1993, and *Quake*, released in 1996, used the increased processing power of personal computers to create vivid three-dimensional worlds that video game consoles of the era could not replicate. These games pushed realism to new heights and began attracting public attention for their graphic violence.

The game *Myst*, an adventure game in which the player walked around an island solving a mystery, drove sales of CD-ROM drives for computers and motivated audiences outside the video game community to explore the medium. In the 1990s, *Myst*, its sequel *Riven*, and other non-violent games, such as *SimCity* and *Sid Meier's Civilization*, demonstrated the growing popularity of alternative game genres alongside the dominance of action titles like *Doom* and *Quake*. These nonviolent games appealed to people who did not generally play video games, thereby increasing the form's audience and expanding the types of information that video games conveyed.

Online Gaming Gains Popularity



The *Ultima* series defined the modern computer role-playing game. **Source**: Blake Patterson, Ultima IV: ready to go... cropped, CC BY 2.0.

A significant advance in game technology occurred with the widespread adoption of the Internet by the general public in the 1990s. *Doom* enabled multiplayer gaming over the Internet, a significant factor in its appeal. Strategy games such as *Command & Conquer* and *Total Annihilation* also included options that allowed players to play each other over the Internet. Other fantasy-inspired role-playing games, such as the *Ultima* series, helped establish the massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) genre by utilizing the Internet. These games used the Internet as their platform, much like text-based MUDs, creating a space where individuals could play while engaging in social interaction.

Portable Game Systems



Nintendo's Game Boy release in America and Europe came packaged with *Tetris*.
Source: William Warby from London, England, Tetris on Game Boy, CC BY 2.0.

The development of portable game systems boosted another vital aspect of video game evolution during the 1990s. People could purchase handheld electronic games as early as the 1970s, and the early 1980s saw the introduction of a handheld system with interchangeable cartridges. Nintendo released the Game Boy in 1989, using the same principles that made the NES dominate the handheld market throughout the 1990s. Nintendo bundled the Game Boy with *Tetris*, using the game's popularity to drive unit sales. The unit's simple design meant users could get 20 hours of playing time on a set of batteries, and Nintendo left this basic design essentially unaltered for most of the decade. More advanced handheld systems, such as the Atari Lynx and

Sega Game Gear, could not compete with the Game Boy despite their superior graphics and color displays.

The decade-long success of the Game Boy belies the conventional wisdom of the console wars, which holds that more advanced technology makes for a more popular system. Audiences found the Game Boy's static, simple design easy to use, and its stability allowed for the development of an extensive library of games. Despite using nearly a decade-old technology, the Game Boy accounted for 30 percent of Nintendo of America's overall revenues at the end of the 1990s.

Level Up or Lose Out: The Titans Reshaping the Video Game Industry

The video game manufacturing landscape experienced rapid consolidation during the 1990s. This trend continues to shape the industry today as major publishers absorb smaller studios and expand their market reach. Among the most prominent players are Nintendo, represented by its highly successful console and iconic franchises, but many companies vie to be the

world's most successful publisher of video game entertainment.

Activision Blizzard, once recognized as one of the world's largest independent interactive entertainment companies, became part of Microsoft following a historic acquisition completed in October 2023 for $68.7 billion. Before this landmark deal, Activision Blizzard was celebrated for its highly popular franchises, including *Call of Duty*, *World of Warcraft*, *Overwatch*, and *Candy Crush*. The company's growth was significantly fueled by strategic acquisitions, including Blizzard Entertainment in 2007 and King Digital Entertainment in 2016. However, Activision Blizzard also faced considerable controversies in recent years, notably stemming from widespread allegations of sexual harassment and discrimination within its workplace.

Electronic Arts (EA) is one of the oldest and largest American gaming companies,

distinguished by its extensive portfolio and a strong focus on digital distribution, including its platforms and subscription services such as EA Play. EA's popular franchises span various genres, most notably in sports with titles like *FIFA* (now *EA Sports FC*) and *Madden NFL*, as well as iconic series such as *The Sims*, *Battlefield*, and *Apex Legends*. The company's expansion has been bolstered by numerous acquisitions over the years, including key developers such as BioWare and Maxis. Despite its commercial success, EA has frequently faced public criticism regarding its business practices and monetization strategies within its games.



Ubisoft, a major French video game company, is one of Europe's largest gaming entities, known for its extensive global presence and studios worldwide. The company is responsible for a strong lineup of popular open-world action-adventure and shooter franchises, including *Assassin's Creed*, *Far Cry*, *Watch Dogs*, and *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six*. While often lauded for its innovative approach to game design and technology, Ubisoft, like other industry leaders, has not been immune to controversies,

including significant allegations of sexual harassment and discrimination, as well as recent criticisms over confident game design choices and digital rights policies.

The 2000s: The Console Wars Continue and Gaming Expands

This century, three major companies dominate the home console market: Nintendo, Sony, and Microsoft. Sega gave its final effort in the console wars with the Sega Dreamcast in 1999. This console could connect to the Internet and emulate the sophisticated computer games of the 1990s. The new features of the Sega Dreamcast could not save the brand; Sega discontinued production in 2001, leaving the console market entirely.

Sony's 2000 release of the PlayStation 2 (PS2) likely contributed to the Dreamcast's downfall. The PS2 could function as a DVD player, expanding the console's role beyond just playing video games. This capability helped it become the best-selling console of all time, ultimately topping 155 million units worldwide. Nikkei Online surveyed participants in Japan and found that more than 60% said they used the PS2 primarily as a DVD player. This console enjoyed an incredible production run, supported by a vast array of titles from popular franchises such as *Gran Turismo*, *Final Fantasy*, and *Metal Gear Solid*.



The PlayStation 2's ability to play DVDs set it apart from competitors during its debut. **Source**: Joe Haupt. Vintage Sony PlayStation PS2 Home Video Game Console . CC BY 2.0.

In 2001, two major consoles attempted to compete with the PS2: the Xbox and the Nintendo GameCube. The Xbox represented Microsoft's attempt to enter the market with a console that expanded on the functions of other game

consoles. The unit had features similar to a PC, including a hard drive and an Ethernet port for online play through its service, Xbox Live. The popularity of the first-person shooter game *Halo*, an Xbox exclusive, also boosted sales. Nintendo's GameCube did not offer DVD playback; instead, it focused on gaming. Both of these consoles sold millions of units, but did not come close to the PS2's sales.



Naughty Dog's *Uncharted* series for the PS3 earned the studio much acclaim and became the system's best-selling franchise. **Source**: Naughty Dog. Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception. CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Microsoft's Xbox 360 expanded media capabilities and integrated access to Xbox Live, an online gaming service. Sony's PlayStation 3 (PS3) followed in 2006. It also featured enhanced online access and expanded multimedia functions, including the ability to play Blu-ray discs. Popular games included the *Uncharted* series and *The Last of Us*. Nintendo

released the Wii at the same time. This console featured a motion-sensitive controller that departed from previous controllers, focusing on accessible, often family-oriented games. This combination successfully brought in large numbers of new game players, including many older adults. The console's appeal was broadened by bundled titles like *Wii Sports*, which expertly showcased the motion controls, and a vast library of family-friendly games like *Mario Kart Wii* and *Super Mario Galaxy*. By July 2010, in the United States, the Wii had sold 72.1 million units, the Xbox 360 had sold 40.4 million, and the PS3 trailed at 35.5 million. In the wake of the Wii's success, Microsoft released Kinect, and Sony released the PlayStation Move to incorporate motion-sensing systems, but neither sold as many units as the Wii. However, Kinect arguably laid the groundwork for Microsoft's future ventures into virtual reality.



Screenshot from *Mario Kart 8*. **Source**: Instacodez. Mario-Kart-8-Deluxe-260618-002. PDM 1.0.

Nintendo released the Wii U in 2012, an attempt to bridge the gap between traditional console gaming and tablet-style interaction. Its defining feature was the GamePad, a large controller with an integrated touchscreen that enabled "asymmetric gameplay," in

which one player could have a unique view or control scheme. The Wii U also introduced Miiverse, an early social network for gamers discontinued in 2017, and continued Nintendo's tradition of offering engaging local multiplayer experiences. While it struggled commercially compared to its predecessor, it nonetheless gave birth to critically acclaimed titles that would later find massive success in its successor, such as *Mario Kart 8* , *Super Mario 3D World*, and *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*, which IGN has ranked as the best video game ever made.

Following closely, Sony launched the PlayStation 4 (PS4) in 2013, quickly establishing itself as a dominant force in the market. The PS4 emphasized powerful hardware and a developer-friendly architecture, resulting in stunning graphical fidelity and seamless gameplay. Innovative features included the DualShock 4 controller, which featured an integrated touchpad and Share button, facilitating easy content sharing on social media and for live streaming. Remote Play enabled users to stream games to other devices, such as the PlayStation Vita, expanding gameplay beyond the main TV. The console's success was driven by a robust library of exclusive titles, including *God of War*, *Marvel's Spider-Man*, *Horizon Zero Dawn*, and *The Last of Us Part II*, as well as major third-party releases such as *Grand Theft Auto V* and *Red Dead Redemption 2*.

Microsoft's 2013 entry was the Xbox One, initially positioned as an all-in-one entertainment system with a strong focus on media integration via HDMI pass-through and a refined Kinect sensor for voice and gesture control. While its initial emphasis on multimedia and always-online features faced some resistance, Microsoft quickly pivoted to focus on gaming. Key innovations included the improved Xbox Wireless Controller with impulse triggers, cloud-powered processing, and the groundbreaking Xbox Game Pass subscription service, which offered a vast library of games for a monthly fee. Popular titles that defined the Xbox One era included *Halo 5: Guardians*, *Forza Horizon 3* and *4*, *Gears 5*, and a wide array of third-party hits, such as *Fortnite* and *Minecraft*.



Microsoft stopped publicly reporting Xbox One sales figures in 2016. However, documents later revealed that Xbox One sales were less than half of the PlayStation 4's. The PS4 sold over 117.2 million units, meaning the Xbox One likely sold under 58.6 million units. **Source**: Raysonho @ Open Grid Scheduler / Grid Engine , MicrosoftXBoxOneBooth, CC0 1.0.

The Nintendo Switch, released in 2017, revolutionized console design with its hybrid nature, allowing players to seamlessly switch between TV mode, tabletop mode with its

kickstand, and handheld portable mode. This versatility, combined with its detachable Joy-Con controllers, which offer HD Rumble and motion controls, made it a unique and immensely popular system. The Switch also fostered innovative local multiplayer, allowing players to share a single Joy-Con. Its success was monumental, propelled by beloved first-party titles like *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*, *Super Mario Odyssey*, *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*, and *Mario Kart 8 Deluxe*, which showcased the console's unique playstyles and broad appeal across all demographics.

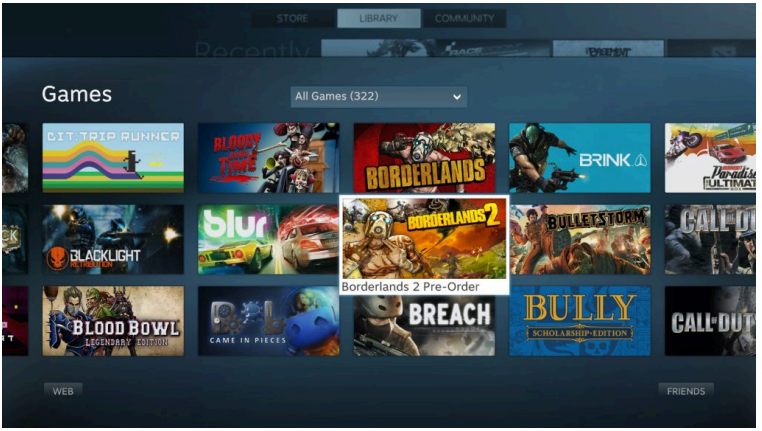
Sony and Microsoft introduced their ninth-generation hardware with the PlayStation 5 (PS5) and Xbox Series X|S . Both systems emphasize high-performance hardware, using solid-state drives to drastically reduce load times, ray tracing for realistic light simulation, and high-frame-rate rendering up to 4K resolution. The PS5 introduced tactile innovations through its DualSense controller, featuring adaptive triggers and advanced haptics, while Microsoft focused on cross-generational compatibility and subscription ecosystems like Xbox Game Pass. Critical and commercial successes on these hardware platforms include multi-platform blockbusters like *Elden Ring* and *Baldur's Gate 3*, alongside platform-defining releases like *God of War Ragnarök* and *Starfield*.

Building on Nintendo's legacy, the Nintendo Switch platform maintained extraordinary longevity through hardware iterations like the Nintendo Switch 2, Nintendo Switch Lite, and Nintendo Switch OLED Model.

By refining display quality and portable ergonomics, Nintendo sustained high player engagement across global demographics. Franchise titles like *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom* demonstrated how specialized hardware design could continue delivering massive open-world experiences, further cementing the hybrid format as a permanent fixture in modern hardware design.

The Enduring Evolution and Expansion of Computer Gaming

Since the turn of the millennium, computer gaming has not merely persisted. Still, it has undergone a profound evolution, cementing its status as a dynamic and ever-expanding segment of the entertainment industry. The period from 2000 to the present has been marked by continuous innovation and a burgeoning player base. The early 2000s witnessed the rise of groundbreaking online experiences, notably the explosion of massively multiplayer online (MMO) games like *World of Warcraft*, which cultivated vast, persistent virtual worlds and fostered unprecedented levels of player community and long-term engagement.



Steam offers a colossal library of video game titles. **Source**: Joshua Livingston. Steam big picture games. CC- BY 2.0.

A pivotal development was the widespread adoption of digital distribution platforms. Steam, launched in 2003, revolutionized how computer games were purchased, managed, and updated, making a colossal library of titles instantly accessible and often more affordable. This digital shift empowered independent developers, leading to a vibrant indie game scene that brought immense creative diversity and experimental gameplay to the forefront. Concurrently, computer gaming became the undisputed foundation for the global phenomenon of esports, with competitive titles like *League of Legends*, *Dota 2*, and *Counter-Strike* driving professional leagues, massive tournaments, and attracting millions of spectators on streaming platforms such as Twitch.

The computer gaming community, while always valuing high performance, has diversified beyond just the most

dedicated enthusiasts. While a segment of players continues to invest in powerful, custom-built gaming PCs with advanced hardware and multi-monitor setups for cutting-edge experiences, the ecosystem has also become more accessible. Innovations in hardware, coupled with the flexibility for user-generated content (mods) that vastly extend game longevity and replayability, have ensured that computer gaming remains at the forefront of technological advancement in the industry. This blend of evolving distribution models, diverse game offerings across all genres, and a robust, engaged community underscores computer gaming's enduring appeal and its significant, continuous growth throughout the 21st century.



Although a commercial failure, the Nokia N-Gage demonstrated that mobile phones could serve as a platform for video games. **Source**: J-P Kärnä, Nokia N-Gage wikittää, (cropped), CC BY-SA 3.0.

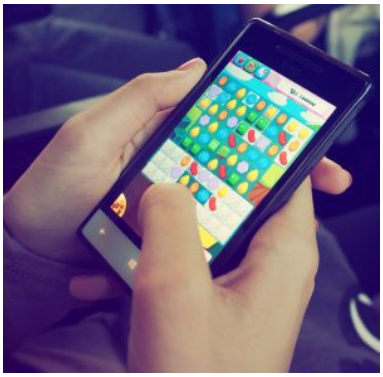
The Evolution of Portable Gaming

Nintendo continued to dominate the handheld game market into the 2000s with the 2001 release of the Game Boy Advance , a redesigned Game Boy that offered 32-bit processing and compatibility with older Game Boy games. In 2004, anticipating Sony's upcoming handheld console, Nintendo released the Nintendo DS, a handheld console featuring two screens and Wi-Fi for online gaming. Sony released the PlayStation Portable (PSP) the following year. The device featured Wi-Fi capabilities and a flexible platform that could play other media, such as MP3s. Although the Nintendo DS (and later the 3DS) and the PSP enjoyed great popularity (the DS is Nintendo's best-selling console of all time), handheld game consoles would eventually lose most of their market share to another mobile device: the smartphone.

One interesting innovation in mobile gaming occurred in 2003 with the release of the Nokia N-Gage. The N-Gage combined a game console and mobile phone, which, according to consumers, did not excel in either role. Nokia discontinued the product line in 2005, but the idea of playing games on phones persisted. The mobile phone gaming industry has since burgeoned into a colossal market, far surpassing its nascent beginnings to become a dominant

force in global entertainment. While Apple's App Store historically led in revenue, the landscape has evolved into a duopoly, with Android now boasting a larger global user base. This immense growth is reflected in recent figures: in 2023, global mobile game revenue soared to $76.7 billion, and forecasts suggest it could exceed $100 billion by 2028, with the United States consistently remaining the largest market for this burgeoning sector.

Modern innovations in portable gaming on smartphones extend well beyond simply downloading an app, transforming these devices into sophisticated gaming platforms. Cloud gaming services, such as Xbox Cloud Gaming, NVIDIA GeForce NOW, and Amazon Luna, enable users to stream high-fidelity, console-quality games directly to their smartphones. This eliminates the need for powerful local hardware and extensive downloads, a capability significantly enhanced by the advent of 5G connectivity, which provides the crucial high speeds and low latency necessary for a seamless streaming experience.



Candy Crush Saga became a global mobile gaming phenomenon that popularized free-to-play match-three puzzle mechanics and transformed casual gaming into a ubiquitous daily habit for hundreds of millions of players. **Source**: Cropped photo by Pexels from Freerange Stock.

Simultaneously, the hardware within flagship smartphones has advanced dramatically. These devices now feature stunning OLED displays with high refresh rates, reaching up to 185Hz, coupled with powerful processors like the Snapdragon 8 Elite. To manage the demands of intensive gaming, they incorporate internal cooling chambers and offer expansive storage capacities up to 1TB. Furthermore, specialized "gaming phones" from brands like Asus (ROG Ally X Phone) and Nubia (RedMagic) push these boundaries even further, integrating dedicated features such as ultrasonic shoulder buttons and advanced cooling systems for optimal performance.

Immersive technologies are also redefining the mobile gaming experience. Haptic feedback has become remarkably sophisticated, delivering nuanced vibrations that realistically simulate in-game actions, from subtle movements to powerful explosions, thereby greatly enhancing player immersion.

Augmented Reality (AR) games, famously popularized by titles like *Pokémon Go*, continue to evolve, seamlessly overlaying digital elements onto the real world to create dynamic, interactive, and location-based experiences that blend the virtual with the physical.



Screenshot of the popular game *Fortnite*. **Source**: Whelsko. Fortnite Screenshot 2018.05.21 – 21.15.32.00 . CC BY 2.0.

The business models supporting mobile gaming have diversified as well. Subscription services, including Apple Arcade and Google Play Pass, offer curated libraries of games for a monthly fee, often ad-free and free of in-app purchases, providing a "Netflix-like" approach to mobile gaming consumption. Even traditional streaming giants like Netflix have entered this space, integrating mobile games directly into their existing subscription offerings. This era also champions connectivity, with many popular titles such as *Fortnite* and *Call of Duty: Mobile* supporting cross-platform play, allowing mobile gamers to compete directly with players on consoles and PCs. Alongside this, cross-progression features ensure players can seamlessly continue their progress across devices, offering unparalleled flexibility. Looking ahead, artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly being integrated into mobile games, promising more personalized

experiences, dynamically adaptive non-playable characters (NPCs), and even adaptive storytelling, further enriching the mobile gaming landscape.

Current Trends

The contemporary video game industry is characterized by several dynamic trends that are fundamentally reshaping how games are developed, distributed, and played. A significant shift is the increasing move towards digital-only platforms, with many gaming systems now offering or prioritizing digital downloads and online access over physical discs. Services like Steam, primarily a PC gaming platform, along with Xbox's extensive ecosystem (including Xbox Cloud Gaming) and Ubisoft Connect, are at the forefront of this shift, enabling gamers to access and play their titles across an expanding array of devices, from traditional PCs and consoles to mobile phones and smart TVs. This push towards digital convenience is further enhanced by popular streaming platforms like Twitch, which has become a central hub for live gameplay, esports, and community interaction, influencing how games are consumed and shared.

Beyond distribution, cloud gaming has emerged as a transformative force. Services such as Amazon Luna and Microsoft's Xbox Cloud Gaming allow players to stream demanding titles directly to their devices, effectively

eliminating the need for expensive, powerful local hardware. This technology makes a wide range of games available on smartphones and tablets, web browsers, and smart TVs so that more people can enjoy high-fidelity gaming. Complementing this, mobile gaming remains the largest segment of the global gaming industry, driven by its accessibility on smartphones and tablets, primarily through the free-to-play model that generates revenue from in-app purchases.

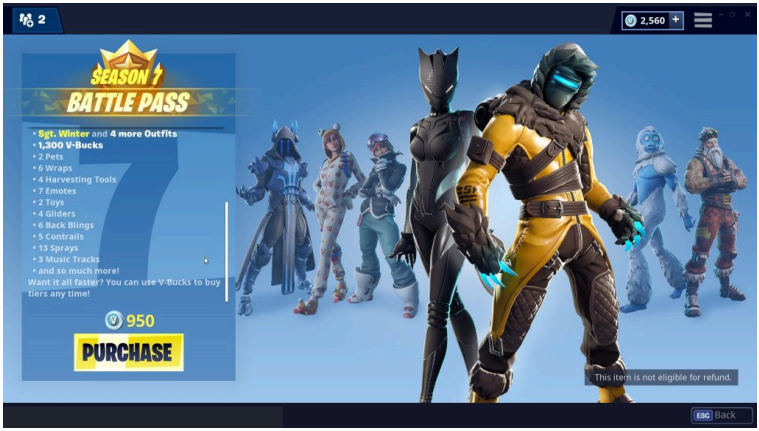


Jonathan Blow's *The Witness* delivers a colorful and dazzling puzzle game. **Source**: Gerwin Sturm, The Witness – Symmetry Puzzle, CC BY-SA 2.0.

The indie game scene also continues to thrive, offering immense creative diversity and pushing the boundaries of traditional genres and gameplay mechanics. Critically acclaimed titles such as the Metroidvania-style *Hollow Knight* and *Ori and the Blind Forest*, narrative-driven experiences like *Night in the Woods* and *Outer Wilds*, and visually distinct

pixel art games like *Celeste* and *Undertale* showcase the independent sector's ability to achieve both commercial success and widespread critical acclaim. Furthermore, unique gameplay experiences such as the innovative puzzle design of *Baba Is You* and *The Witness* and the whimsical mischief of *Untitled Goose Game* highlight the indie community's relentless pursuit of novel interactive forms.

Further shaping the industry are "live service games" and the broader "Game-as-a-Service" (GaaS) model. Live service games receive continuous updates, new content, events, and features, fostering long-term player engagement and loyalty, essentially treating games as evolving platforms rather than one-off products. Concurrently, GaaS platforms like Xbox Game Pass and PlayStation Plus offer subscribers extensive game libraries for a recurring monthly fee, providing immense convenience and value for gamers. These trends—from the shift to digital and cloud-based gaming to the flourishing indie scene and the pervasive live-service and GaaS models—are fundamentally altering the video game industry landscape, which creates exciting new opportunities for both players and developers. Virtual and augmented reality are also gaining significant traction, with VR offering deeply immersive experiences and AR blending digital elements with the real world, further expanding the horizons of interactive gaming experiences.



Popularized by games like *Fortnite*, the battle pass model transformed video game monetization by replacing traditional random loot boxes with a tiered progression system where players earn cosmetic rewards through active gameplay and time spent playing. **Source**: Whelsko, FortniteClient-Win64-Shipping_2018-12-06_12-25-06, CC BY 2.0.

Generative AI, Microtransactions, and the Subscription Era

Beyond hardware and distribution, the structural business models of the video game industry have shifted toward continuous monetization and subscription ecosystems. Where players once purchased fully self-contained software packages at retail, modern publishing increasingly relies on battle passes, cosmetic microtransactions, and recurring platform subscriptions. This economic transition incentivizes studios to build persistent online environments

that maximize long-term user retention, shifting developer focus toward player engagement metrics.

Simultaneously, technological integration is altering how games are produced and experienced. Developers are increasingly leveraging machine learning and generative artificial intelligence tools to streamline asset generation, automate procedural environment creation, and design dynamic non-playable character behavior. While these innovations allow smaller development teams to produce expansive digital worlds, they also raise pressing questions regarding workplace automation, creative ownership, and software preservation. As video games continue to merge advanced software engineering with mass media entertainment, these ongoing technological and financial shifts will redefine the medium's role in global culture.

9.3 INFLUENTIAL CONTEMPORARY GAMES

Given their relatively short history, the role of video games in culture is constantly evolving. Are video games entertainment or art? Should they focus on fostering real-life skills or developing virtual realities? Certain games have come to prominence in recent years for their innovations and genre-expanding attributes. These notable games not only achieved economic success and popularity but also imparted a visible influence on culture.

The *Grand Theft Auto* series



Grand Theft Auto V took three days to reach $1 billion in sales, the fastest of any entertainment product ever made. **Source**: CrAzY ToMaTo. Download GTA 5 – Grand Theft Auto for PC – Free Download. CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

The first game in the *Grand Theft Auto* (*GTA*) series debuted in 1997 for the PC and Sony PlayStation. The game had players stealing cars—not surprising given its title—and committing a variety of crimes to achieve specific goals. The game's extreme violence made it popular among players of the late 1990s, but it was the open-world elements that especially appealed to them. They could pursue specific narratives and goals, but if they wanted to drive around and explore the city, they could do that as well in a large variety of cars, from sports cars to tractor-trailers, depending on the player's goals. Players could also take the violence to any extreme they wished, including stealing cars, killing pedestrians, and engaging the

police in a shoot-out. This sandbox-type game permits users to pursue objectives of their choice freely.

The *GTA* series has evolved over the past decade by increasing the realism, options, and explicit content of the first game. The *Grand Theft Auto* franchise, propelled by the immense and enduring success of *Grand Theft Auto V* (*GTA V*) and its online component, *Grand Theft Auto Online*, has solidified its position as one of the most profitable and consistently controversial entertainment properties in history. While *GTA III*and *GTA IV* (including their expansions, such as *The Ballad of Gay Tony*) were foundational, *GTA V*, released in 2013, has sold over 215 million copies and generated nearly $10 billion in worldwide revenue, making it the highest-grossing entertainment product of all time.

The franchise continues to court controversy, highlighted by discussions surrounding the content and themes of the highly anticipated *Grand Theft Auto VI*. Past controversies, such as the infamous "Hot Coffee" mod in *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* and the torture scene in *Grand Theft Auto V*, highlight the series' consistent push of boundaries and its mature, often satirical, depiction of crime and society, which continues to spark debate and occasionally lead to censorship in certain regions, as seen with *GTA V*'s release in Saudi Arabia and UAE under strict 21+ maturity ratings.

World of Warcraft



World of Warcraft allows players to team up with other avatars to go on quests or socialize. **Source**: Sergiy Galyonkin from Raleigh, USA, Gamescom 2014 (14741934408), CC BY-SA 2.0.

World of Warcraft (*WoW*), released in 2004, hosts a massive multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) loosely based on the *Warcraft* strategy franchise of the 1990s. The game is conducted entirely online, though players access it through purchased software and subscription fees. Each player chooses an avatar, or character, from one of several races, such as orcs, elves, and humans. These characters can spend their time in the game by completing quests, learning trades, or interacting with other characters. As characters gain experience, they obtain skills and earn virtual money. Players also choose whether they can attack other players without prior agreement by selecting a PvP (player versus player) server. The standard server allows players to fight each other, provided both players consent. Players can reserve a third server if they want to role-play or act in character.

The unlimited possibilities in such a game expand the idea

of what constitutes a game. *WoW* challenges conventional notions of what makes a game by allowing players to create their own goals. Some players may want to increase their character's experience points; others may feel more comfortable engaging in role-playing, whereas others use the platform to make a profit. This kind of flexibility leads to scenarios never before encountered in gameplay, such as the emergence of economic classes.

Various organizations have sprung up within the *WoW* universe. Guilds within the universe adhere to specific codes of conduct and collaborate to complete tasks that individuals cannot accomplish alone. The players organize the guilds; *WoW* developers do not maintain them. Each has its own unique identity and social rules, much like a college fraternity or social club. Voice communication technology enables players to interact with each other as they complete missions, fostering social bonding within such organizations.

WoW has taken the video game medium to unprecedented heights. Although games like *Grand Theft Auto* offer players considerable freedom, *WoW* relies on the actions of millions of players to drive the game, allowing people to live their lives through a game in a literal sense. In the game, players can still earn virtual gold through various in-game activities such as mining, gathering herbs, skinning, killing enemies (mob grinding), completing quests, selling loot from old dungeons and raids (especially transmog items), and utilizing crafting professions.

While accumulating gold through these methods can be time-consuming, *WoW* developers Blizzard Entertainment now officially offer the "*WoW* Token." This in-game item can be purchased with real money and then sold on the Auction House for gold, or purchased with gold and redeemed for game time or Blizzard Balance. This official system provides a legitimate way for players to convert real money into gold (and vice versa), effectively legitimizing a form of RMT within the game's ecosystem.

Despite the *WoW* Token, third-party real-money trading (buying gold directly from external websites or individuals) remains against Blizzard's End User License Agreement and is prohibited. Accounts involved in such transactions can face penalties, including the removal of gold and temporary or permanent bans. However, enforcement can be inconsistent, and some players still engage in it, as evidenced by ongoing discussions in player communities.

Call of Duty: Modern Warfare



The *Call of Duty* series has profoundly impacted the gaming industry by setting new standards for annual releases and monetization strategies. **Source**: Bhautik Joshi. MW 2 Wallpaper 3. CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

The *Call of Duty* series of first-person shooter games has achieved unparalleled success in the video game market, evolving into a global entertainment behemoth. The franchise has generated over $35 billion in revenue, solidifying its position as the best-selling first-person shooter game series of all time, with more than 500 million copies sold across all platforms.

The release of *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* in 2009 marked a landmark moment, garnering critical acclaim while also sparking considerable controversy. The game famously included a 5-minute sequence, "No Russian," where the

player, as an undercover CIA agent, could participate in a massacre of innocent civilians at an airport. While players had the option to avoid shooting civilians or skip the sequence entirely, these choices did not prevent widespread international attention and calls to ban the game, with the debate even reaching the United Kingdom's House of Commons. This incident highlighted the unique impact of interactive violence in video games compared to passive media, such as movies.

In the years since, the debate surrounding *Call of Duty*'s content and influence has continued to evolve with the series' ongoing releases and changing monetization strategies. The franchise has seen numerous successful iterations, including the *Black Ops* series, the *Modern Warfare* reboots, and the highly popular free-to-play battle royale, *Call of Duty: Warzone*. These titles continue to be annual best-sellers. The franchise now boasts diversified revenue streams, including premium game sales, extensive in-game microtransactions, and robust mobile gaming platforms, with *Call of Duty: Mobile* alone surpassing $3 billion in revenue since its launch.

Regarding the effectiveness of age ratings, proponents still argue that the "M for Mature" (or PEGI 18+) rating should deter minors. However, research indicates that while ratings can be effective when parents actively use them to mediate

game purchases and playtime, many underage players still access M-rated titles. The widespread availability of digital games, online communities, and social media makes strict enforcement challenging, and some studies even suggest that restrictive ratings can inadvertently make games more appealing to adolescents.

Beyond just violence, modern *Call of Duty* controversies have expanded significantly. The aggressive implementation of cosmetic bundles, battle passes, and other in-game purchases has become a significant point of contention, with players frequently expressing frustration over the perception that games are designed to push additional spending. This was recently exemplified by backlash against "ads" for microtransactions appearing directly within the menus of *Black Ops 6* and *Warzone*. Furthermore, when *Call of Duty* games depict real-world conflicts or political scenarios, they frequently face criticism for historical inaccuracies, simplified narratives, or perceived biases in their portrayal of nations and events. Older *Call of Duty* titles have also recently been subject to concerns over security vulnerabilities in their online components. The ongoing battle against cheaters in online multiplayer, particularly in *Warzone*, remains a persistent issue that impacts the player experience. In conclusion, while the core debate over violence and age ratings persists, the *Call of Duty* franchise has grown exponentially, navigating new controversies related to

its business model and its depiction of modern warfare in an increasingly interconnected and scrutinized gaming landscape.

Wii Sports and *Wii Fit*



Wii Sports revolutionized the video game industry by bringing motion-controlled gaming to a mainstream, casual audience, fundamentally expanding the market beyond traditional gamers and inspiring a wave of accessible, active entertainment. **Source**: Itchy Melvin. Wii Bowling. CC BY-SA 2.0.

The Nintendo Wii, with its dedicated motion-sensitive controller, launched in 2006. The company had attempted to implement similar controllers in the past, including the Power Glove in 1989, but it had never based an entire console around such a device. The Wii's simple design, combined with basic games such as *Wii Sports*, appealed to previously untapped audiences. Nintendo included *Wii Sports* with the purchase of the Wii console to demonstrate the new technology. It included five games: baseball, bowling, boxing, tennis, and golf. *Wii Sports* created a way for group play without requiring familiarity with video games, as the game

felt closer to outdoor social games such as horseshoes or croquet than to playing *Doom*. The game excluded objectionable content: no violence, no in-your-face intensity—just a game that any generation could access and enjoy. Retirement communities sometimes organized Wii Bowling tournaments, and many people found the game offered a new way to socialize with their friends and families.

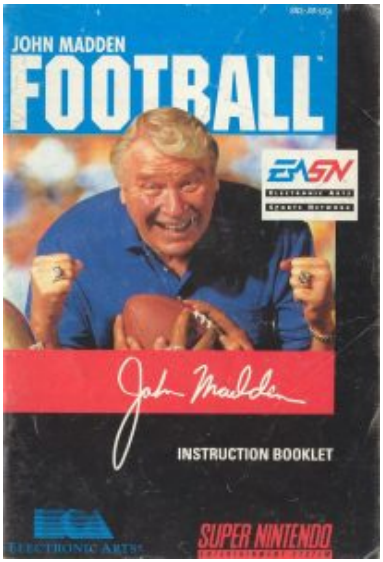
Wii Fit combined the previously incompatible terms "fitness" and "video games." Using a touch-sensitive platform, players can engage in activities such as aerobics, strength training, and yoga. The game tracked players' weights, serving as a virtual trainer. *Wii Fit* used the potential of video games to create an interactive version of an exercise machine, replacing workout videos and other forms of fitness that had never before considered Nintendo a competitor. This type of design leverages the inherent strengths of video games to create a new kind of experience.

Nintendo found most of its past success marketing to younger demographics with less controversial games than the 1990s' first-person shooters. *Wii Sports* and *Wii Fit* saw Nintendo playing to its strengths and expanding on them with family-friendly games that encouraged multiple generations to use video games as a social platform. This campaign was so successful that rival companies, Sony and Microsoft, imitated it and released the Sony PlayStation Move and the Microsoft Kinect. Both failed

to achieve equal popularity despite increased graphical capabilities.

Madden NFL

The *Madden NFL* series, developed by EA Sports, began its storied history in 1988 with *John Madden Football*, named after the legendary NFL coach and commentator. Initially released on various home computers, it quickly became synonymous with American football simulation. It later moved to consoles, with



Cover art for an early SNES version of *John Madden Football*, a series that has spawned a dedicated following. **Source**: Jeff Egnaczyk. madden football. CC BY 2.0.

yearly iterations becoming a staple for football enthusiasts. The franchise's core features center on delivering an authentic NFL experience, including realistic player attributes, team rosters, playbooks, and strategic gameplay. Each annual release strives to deliver graphical enhancements, refined physics, and updated mechanics to better reflect the complexities of professional football. Beyond standard exhibition and franchise modes, the introduction of "Madden Ultimate Team" added a popular card-collecting and team-building meta-game, allowing players to assemble fantasy rosters of current and historical NFL stars.

The impact of *Madden* on society and the gaming industry is immense. It has long dominated the sports simulation genre, virtually becoming a monopoly in American football gaming. For many, *Madden* is their primary connection to the NFL, offering an interactive way to understand the sport's intricacies and participate in its drama. Its yearly release cycle has influenced consumer expectations for sports titles, and its consistent presence has made it a cultural phenomenon, even spawning the popular "*Madden* Curse," a superstition that players featured on the game's cover will suffer injuries or poor performance in the upcoming NFL season. The series has also served as a proving ground for new gaming technologies and online multiplayer experiences, cementing its status as a cornerstone of both sports and video game culture.

Undertale



Undertale demonstrated that a simple, pixel-art RPG could achieve critical and commercial success through its exceptionally witty writing, branching narratives, and innovative combat system. **Source**: Toby Fox and/or Temmie Chang, Undertale cover, public domain.

Undertale, an independent role-playing game (RPG) created almost entirely by Toby Fox, first launched in 2015 after a successful Kickstarter campaign. Its history is rooted in a desire to subvert traditional RPG tropes, particularly concerning combat and narrative choices. Unlike most RPGs, where fighting is central, *Undertale* famously offers a "pacifist" route, allowing players to complete the entire game without killing a single enemy. Its distinctive pixel art style, memorable characters, and critically acclaimed soundtrack quickly garnered a dedicated fanbase. The game's features include a unique combat system that lets players "ACT"

(interact) with enemies through dialogue, jokes, or specific actions to resolve encounters peacefully, as well as a bullet-hell-inspired dodging mechanic that enables evasion during enemy attacks. The narrative is deeply influenced by player choices, resulting in a meta-narrative that acknowledges the player's presence and decisions across subsequent playthroughs.

Undertale's impact on society and the gaming landscape has been profound, especially for an independent title. It demonstrated that a game doesn't need AAA budgets or hyper-realistic graphics to deliver a deeply emotional and thought-provoking experience. Its innovative approach to morality and player agency challenged conventions, sparking widespread discussion about ethics in gaming and the consequences of in-game actions. The game cultivated an incredibly passionate and active fan community, generating vast amounts of fan art, music, and theories. *Undertale* became a powerful symbol of indie game success, inspiring countless developers to pursue unique creative visions and proving the commercial viability of games that prioritize narrative depth and player choice over traditional power fantasies.

The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim



Skyrim set a new benchmark for expansive, immersive open-world RPGs and demonstrated the enduring appeal of vast, explorable fantasy environments rich in lore.
Source: John Lester. Me and my posse in Skyrim. CC BY 2.0.

The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim, developed by Bethesda Game Studios, was released in 2011 as the fifth main installment in the long-running *Elder Scrolls* fantasy RPG series. Its history is built upon a legacy of expansive open worlds and deep role-playing mechanics. *Skyrim* transported players to the titular northern province of Tamriel, a vast land of snowy mountains, sprawling forests, and ancient ruins, where they assume the role of the Dragonborn, a prophesied hero capable of slaying dragons. The game's defining features include its unparalleled open-world design, offering

immense freedom to explore, engage in countless side quests, join various factions, and craft a unique character through a flexible skill system. The game's combat blends first-person action with magic and shouts, while a robust crafting system enables deep gear customization. Its most enduring feature is its extensive modding community, which has continuously expanded and enhanced the game with new content, visuals, and mechanics for over a decade.

Skyrim's impact on gaming and popular culture has been immense and long-lasting. It set a new standard for open-world games, influencing countless titles with its approach to exploration, emergent storytelling, and environmental design. Its longevity is remarkable, remaining popular years after its release thanks to its replayability, re-releases on new platforms, and the vibrant modding scene that keeps it fresh. The game permeated popular culture, leading to numerous memes (most famously, "I used to be an adventurer like you, then I took an arrow to the knee") and becoming a touchstone for fantasy role-playing. *Skyrim* is a testament to the power of player freedom and community-driven content, solidifying its place as one of the most beloved and influential RPGs of all time.

Minecraft

Minecraft, created by Markus "Notch" Persson and later developed by Mojang Studios, began its journey in 2009 before its full release in 2011. Its history is one of exponential growth, starting as an indie phenomenon and evolving into a global cultural touchstone, eventually acquired by Microsoft in 2014. At its core, *Minecraft* is a sandbox game that offers players unparalleled freedom to build, explore, and create within a procedurally generated, blocky 3D world. Its primary features include a "Survival" mode, where players gather resources, craft tools, build shelters, and fend off hostile creatures, and a "Creative" mode, which provides unlimited resources for pure construction. Multiplayer functionality allows players to collaborate or compete in shared worlds, fostering immense creativity and



Minecraft popularized open-world sandbox gameplay, emphasizing player creativity through building and exploration while fostering an unprecedented sense of community. **Source**: hobbymb. minecraft-fight-with-the-skeleton . CC BY 2.0.

community interaction. The game's simple yet infinitely deep mechanics, combined with its distinctive aesthetic, have made it accessible to players of all ages.

Minecraft's impact on society extends beyond traditional gaming. It has become a powerful tool for creativity and education, used in classrooms to teach a wide range of subjects, from basic programming to architecture and urban planning. Its unique visual style and open-ended nature have made it a dominant force on platforms like YouTube , where "Let's Play" videos and creative builds have garnered billions of views and influenced a generation of content creators. *Minecraft* fosters problem-solving, collaboration, and imaginative thinking, becoming a virtual playground where players can bring almost any idea to life. Its cross-generational appeal, from young children to adults, has made it one of the best-selling video games of all time, demonstrating the enduring power of player-driven experiences and boundless creativity.

The Legend of Zelda



The Legend of Zelda established foundational elements of the action-adventure genre through its emphasis on open-world exploration, puzzle-solving, and a compelling blend of combat and narrative depth. **Source**: Colony of Gamers. Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword. CC BY-NC 2.0.

The Legend of Zelda, a seminal action-adventure franchise created by Shigeru Miyamoto and Takashi Tezuka, debuted in Japan in 1986 for the Famicom Disk System (and later the NES in North America). Its history is a testament to Nintendo's enduring design philosophy, consistently pushing boundaries while retaining core elements of exploration, puzzle-solving, and a compelling narrative centered around the hero Link, Princess Zelda, and the villain Ganon. Key features across the series include vast, interconnected worlds (often

referred to as Hyrule), intricate dungeons filled with environmental puzzles and unique bosses, and a blend of melee combat and a diverse arsenal of items and magical abilities. Each installment introduces new mechanics, art styles, and storytelling techniques, from the 2D top-down perspective of early games to the revolutionary 3D environments of *Ocarina of Time* and the expansive open worlds of *Breath of the Wild*.

The impact of *The Legend of Zelda* on society and the gaming industry is undeniable. It is widely regarded as one of the most influential and critically acclaimed video game series of all time

, having defined and refined the action-adventure genre. Its emphasis on non-linear exploration and discovery fostered a sense of wonder and player agency that was groundbreaking for its time. The series's consistent quality, innovative design, and memorable characters have earned it a dedicated global fan base and immense cultural recognition. *Zelda* games are frequently cited as benchmarks for game design, storytelling, and immersive world-building

, inspiring countless developers and solidifying Nintendo's reputation for creativity and excellence. The franchise continues to evolve, with recent titles like *Breath of the Wild* and *Tears of the Kingdom* redefining open-world gaming and further cementing its legendary status.

Animal Crossing



Animal Crossing carved out a unique and significant niche in video games by popularizing a serene, open-ended life simulation focused on creativity, customization, and social interaction. **Source**: Ian Hughes. Animal crossing new horizons . CC BY 2.0.

The *Animal Crossing* series, developed by Nintendo, has a history rooted in charming life simulation, dating back to its Japanese release in 2001. The games typically feature players moving into a new town inhabited by anthropomorphic animals, where they engage in activities such as fishing, bug-catching, fossil digging, decorating their homes, and interacting with neighbors. The series is known for its real-time clock and calendar, meaning in-game events align with real-world seasons and holidays. The latest main installment, *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*, released in March 2020 for the Nintendo Switch, coincided almost perfectly with the global onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and widespread lockdowns. Its features included the ability to customize an entire deserted island, terraform landscapes, craft items, and visit friends' islands online.

The impact of

Animal Crossing: New Horizons during the COVID-19 pandemic

was extraordinary and deeply societal. As people worldwide faced unprecedented isolation and uncertainty, the game offered a much-needed escape and a sense of normalcy. Its gentle pace, creative freedom, and emphasis on community provided a virtual haven where players could relax, express themselves, and connect with others. The ability to visit friends' islands became a vital social outlet, allowing for virtual gatherings, birthday parties, and even weddings when real-world interactions were restricted. The game became a cultural phenomenon, featured in mainstream news and even used by real-world organizations for events. For many, *Animal Crossing* served as a tool for mental well-being, offering comfort, routine, and a sense of control in a chaotic world, profoundly demonstrating the power of video games as a source of connection and solace during a global crisis.

Pokémon GO!

Pokémon GO!, developed by Niantic in collaboration with Nintendo and The Pokémon Company, launched in July 2016, igniting a global phenomenon. Its history is rooted in Niantic's previous augmented reality (AR) game, *Ingress*, and the enduring



Pokémon GO popularized augmented reality (AR) technology and location-based gameplay, inspiring millions to explore the real world while interacting with digital content. **Source**: Virginia State Parks. PW Pokemon Go. CC BY 2.0.

popularity of the *Pokémon* franchise. The game's core feature is its innovative use of augmented reality, overlaying digital

Pokémon onto the real world as viewed through a smartphone camera. Players physically move around their real-world environments to discover and catch Pokémon, visit "PokéStops" to collect items, and battle at "Gyms." The game uses real-world maps and GPS technology, encouraging players to explore and interact with landmarks. Regular updates introduce new Pokémon, events, and gameplay mechanics, keeping the experience fresh and engaging.

The impact of *Pokémon GO!* on society was immediate and immense, transcending the typical boundaries of mobile gaming. The addictive game popularized augmented reality gaming on a mass scale, demonstrating the potential for interactive digital experiences integrated with the physical world. The game famously encouraged millions of players to go outdoors, explore their local communities, and engage in physical activity, often leading to unexpected social interactions as strangers bonded over shared Pokémon sightings. It sparked a cultural craze, with news reports of large groups congregating in public spaces, businesses leveraging PokéStops for marketing, and discussions about public safety and etiquette. While the initial fervor eventually settled, *Pokémon GO!* remains a highly successful and influential mobile game, having profoundly impacted AR development, encouraged outdoor activity, and showcased gaming's power to foster real-world social connections.

Wordle



Wordle captured global attention by demonstrating the immense appeal of simple, accessible daily puzzle games, fostering widespread social sharing and discussion.
Source: Kurinurm, Wordle 6. veebruar 2022, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Wordle, a simple yet addictive web-based word puzzle, was created by software engineer Josh Wardle for his partner and gained widespread public attention in late 2021 before being acquired by *The New York Times* in early 2022. Its history is a prime example of a grassroots viral sensation, designed as a personal project with no monetization or aggressive marketing. The game's core features are its elegant simplicity: players have six attempts to guess a five-letter word, with feedback provided after each guess indicating which letters are correct and in the proper position (green), correct but in the wrong position

(yellow), or not in the word at all (gray). Crucially, *The New York Times* only releases one new puzzle per day for everyone globally, creating a shared daily ritual. Its shareable results, presented as a grid of colored squares without revealing the word, fueled its virality on social media.

The impact of *Wordle* on society was swift and widespread , transforming it into a daily ritual for millions of people. Its single-daily-puzzle format fostered a sense of community, as friends, family, and colleagues could discuss their results without spoilers. It became a popular topic on social media, with people sharing their unique colored grids and strategies. *Wordle* tapped into a desire for casual, accessible gaming that could be enjoyed quickly and easily, and that allowed for collaborative play. Its success demonstrated the power of minimalist design and the appeal of a shared, low-stakes daily challenge in an often-overwhelming digital landscape. The game's acquisition by *The New York Times* further solidified its status as a cultural phenomenon and a beloved daily brain teaser for a global audience.

League of Legends



League of Legends revolutionized the video game industry by pioneering a highly successful free-to-play model and establishing itself as the undisputed leader in esports. **Source**: Mamadou278, Championship-series-league-of-legends-competition-team-lesjeunespommes, CC BY-SA 4.0.

League of Legends (*LoL*), developed and published by Riot Games, launched in 2009 and quickly became the most popular Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA) game globally, playing a pivotal role in the explosion of esports. Its history is rooted in the custom maps of *Warcraft III*, particularly "Defense of the Ancients" (DotA), which laid the groundwork for the MOBA genre. *LoL*'s core features involve two teams of five players battling to destroy the opposing team's "Nexus" on a symmetrical map. Players choose from a vast roster of "Champions," each with unique abilities, roles, and playstyles, resulting in deep strategic complexity and team-building opportunities. The game is free-to-play, monetizing through cosmetic items and new champions —a model that has contributed significantly to its widespread adoption. Constant updates, balance changes, and new content keep the competitive meta evolving.

The impact of *League of Legends* on society, particularly through the rise of esports, is monumental. *LoL* pioneered the professionalization of competitive gaming, establishing structured leagues, large-scale tournaments (such as the World Championship, which draws millions of viewers), and substantial prize pools. It transformed gaming from a hobby into a viable career path for professional players, coaches, and support staff. The game's massive viewership on platforms like Twitch and YouTube has made esports a mainstream entertainment spectacle, rivaling traditional sports in engagement and production value. *League of Legends* fostered a global community, transcending language and cultural barriers through shared competitive passion. Its success demonstrated the immense commercial and artistic potential of esports, inspiring other developers to invest in competitive scenes and solidifying gaming's place as a legitimate and highly profitable spectator sport worldwide.

Beat Saber



Beat Saber demonstrated the commercial viability and immense appeal of intuitive, physically engaging rhythm gameplay, becoming a flagship title that showcased VR's unique immersive potential. **Source**: Official GDC. 1D5_5359. CC BY 2.0.

Beat Saber, developed by Beat Games, debuted in 2018 and quickly became a flagship title for virtual reality (VR) gaming. Its history is relatively short but impactful, emerging as one of the first "killer apps" for consumer VR headsets. The game's features are deceptively simple yet incredibly engaging: players wield virtual lightsabers (represented by their VR controllers) to slice through incoming blocks in time with a pulsating musical soundtrack. Blocks are color-coded to indicate which hand to use and feature directional arrows that dictate the required slice angle. Obstacles, such as walls and bombs, add further challenge. The combination of satisfying haptic feedback, intuitive motion controls, and a diverse range of music tracks creates an exhilarating full-body rhythm experience. The broader market for rhythm games and specialized music integration in video games represents a multi-billion-dollar segment of the overall gaming ecosystem.

The impact of *Beat Saber* on society, particularly within

the emerging VR market, has been transformative. It demonstrated the immense potential of virtual reality for immersive, active gameplay
, proving that VR could offer unique experiences impossible on traditional screens. *Beat Saber* became a powerful driver for VR headset adoption, often cited as the primary reason many consumers purchased VR hardware. Beyond entertainment, it gained recognition as a fun, engaging form of fitness gaming that encourages players to move while providing an enjoyable workout. Its accessibility, combined with its high replayability and the constant addition of new music packs, has made *Beat Saber* a mainstream success story for VR, helping to raise the technology's profile and inspiring a new wave of VR rhythm and fitness games.



Fortnite revolutionized modern gaming by turning its free-to-play battle royale mode into a massive cultural phenomenon complete with live virtual concerts, major pop-culture crossovers, and a thriving social hub for millions of players worldwide. **Source**: Whelsko, Fortnite Screenshot 2018.04.18 – 18.28.44.52, CC BY 2.0.

Fortnite

Fortnite, developed by Epic Games and released in 2017, transformed from a co-op survival title into a global cultural movement following the release of its free-to-play "Battle Royale" mode. Combining 100-player elimination gameplay with real-time building mechanics, *Fortnite* captured an unprecedented audience across consoles, PCs, and mobile devices. Its structural innovations popularized the

Battle Pass monetization system, replacing random loot boxes with transparent progression rewards that reshaped industry-wide monetization strategies.

Beyond mechanics and business models, *Fortnite* pioneered the concept of the game as a virtual social platform. By hosting live in-game events, including fully realized virtual concerts by major recording artists and promotional film debuts, Epic Games expanded the boundaries of interactive media. The platform operates as a shared space for digital pop culture crossovers, blending IP from film, television, comics, and athletics into a single persistent ecosystem. *Fortnite* demonstrated that modern video games can function not merely as competitive software, but as primary social venues where digital identity, entertainment, and communal interaction converge.

9.4 THE IMPACT OF VIDEO GAMES ON CULTURE



Source: Lynccoff.
Team of Professional eSport Gamers Playing in Competitive Video Games on a Cyber Games Tournament
. CC BY 2.0.

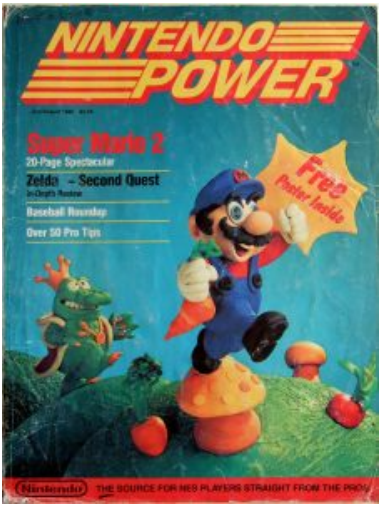
In the United States, video games remain a pervasive form of entertainment. Recent data from the Entertainment Software Association, in its 2024 "Essential Facts About the U.S. Video Game Industry" report, indicates that 61% of Americans aged 5-90 play video games, translating to

approximately 190.6 million people engaging with games for at least one hour each week. This figure underscores the widespread adoption of gaming across diverse demographics. Another report from Activision Blizzard Media in April 2025 suggests even higher engagement, stating that 86% of the U.S. population plays video games, with most active across multiple platforms, including mobile, console, and PC. In 2010, more people spent time playing video games than checking or writing email. This effect becomes visible in the growing mainstream acceptance of aspects of gaming culture. Video games have also altered the production and consumption of other media, including music and film. However, their most profound impact may be in education, through the integration of innovative technologies that open new avenues for communication and learning. Modern educational games and gamified learning platforms now offer immersive, interactive experiences that blend entertainment with the core curriculum, leveraging technologies such as virtual and augmented reality, as well as collaborative gameplay, to enhance student engagement, critical thinking, and communication skills.

Game Culture

Video games, like books or movies, have avid users who have made this medium a central part of their lives. In the early

1970s, programmers gathered in groups to play *Spacewar!*, spending considerable time competing in a rudimentary game compared to modern titles. As video arcades and home video game consoles gained popularity, youth culture quickly adapted to these media, competing to achieve high scores and spending hours at the arcade or at home on their consoles.



The debut issue of *Nintendo Power* helped build excitement for new and future NES titles. **Source**: Bryan Ochalla. Nintendo Power magazine (premiere issue) (cropped). CC BY-SA 2.0.

In the 1980s, an increasing number of children spent time playing games on consoles and, more importantly, increasingly identified with the characters and products associated with these games. Networks developed Saturday morning cartoons based on the *Pac-Man* and *Super Mario Bros.* games, and game companies sold a wide array of non-game merchandise featuring video game logos and characters. The public recognition of some of these characters has made them into cultural icons. A 2007 poll found that more Canadians surveyed could identify a photo of Mario from *Super Mario Bros.* than a photo of the current Canadian prime

minister. *Nintendo Power*, published from 1988 to 2012, was Nintendo's official magazine in North America, serving as a vital source of news, strategies, and previews for a generation of gamers in the pre-Internet era. Its unique blend of insider information, vibrant artwork, and engaging content, including the iconic "Howard & Nester" comic, fostered a strong sense of community and significantly shaped Nintendo's cultural presence during its golden age.

As the generations who first played iconic titles like *Super Mario Bros.* matured, the video game industry, including companies like Sega, Sony, and Microsoft, strategically broadened its appeal to older demographics. This shift has significantly increased the average age of video game players, which, according to the Entertainment Software Association's 2024 "Essential Facts" report, now stands at 36 years old in the U.S. Modern gaming has found a strong foothold among older adults through diverse platforms, including smartphones, tablets, and even current-generation consoles like the Nintendo Switch, Xbox, and PlayStation. The AARP reports that 44% of adults over 50 play games monthly, engaging with titles ranging from casual puzzle games, such as *Candy Crush Saga*, and word games like *Words With Friends* , to more complex strategy games, often citing benefits for mental sharpness, stress relief, and social connection. This widespread adoption across age groups has firmly cemented

video games as an accepted and integral form of mainstream entertainment.

THE REVENGE OF THE NERDS: HOW GAMING CHANGED THE DEFINITION OF “GEEK”



Source: Tehsigo Eternamente from USA, NTF 2015 SE – Group of Geeks (15738943673) , CC BY 2.0.

The acceptance of video games in mainstream culture has consequently changed how the culture views certain people. People applied the term "Geek" to those adept at technology but lacking in the skills that tended to make one popular, like fashion sense or athletic ability. Many of these individuals, who often did not fare well in society, favored imaginary worlds, such as those found in the fantasy and science fiction genres. Video games appealed to them because they both took place in fantasy worlds and offered a way to excel at something. Jim Rossignol, in his 2008 book *This Gaming Life: Travels in Three Cities*, explained part of the lure of playing *Quake III* online:

> Cold mornings, adolescent disinterest, and a nagging hip injury had meant that I was banished from the sports field for many years. I wasn't going to be able to indulge in the camaraderie that sports teams felt or in the extended buzz of victory through dedication and cooperation. That entire swathe of experience had been cut off from me by cruel circumstance and a good dose

> of self-defeating apathy. Now, however, there was a possibility for some redemption: a sport for the quick-fingered and the computer-bound; a space of possibility in which I could mold friends and strangers into a proficient gaming team.

Video games provided a means for a group of previously excluded individuals to develop social proficiency. As video games became a more mainstream phenomenon and more people sought to improve their video game skills, the popular idea of geeks evolved. The term geek no longer carries the negative connotations it once did. It now refers to a person who has a deep understanding of computers and technology. This former slur appears often in the media, with headlines such as "Turning Geek Into Chic" and "The unstoppable rise of geek culture." This evolution of the term geek reflects a changing cultural landscape where everyone can find their place.

Many media stories focusing on geeks examine how this subculture has gained acceptance in the mainstream, suggesting that while geeks may have become "cooler," mainstream culture has simultaneously become "geekier." This acceptance of geek culture has led to a proliferation of its aesthetics and themes across various media. The mainstreaming of video games, in particular, has fueled a widespread appeal for fantasy and virtual worlds, evident in the immense popularity of recent film and television series

such as HBO's *House of the Dragon*, Netflix's *Stranger Things*, and Amazon Prime Video's *The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power*. Comic book characters, once niche emblems of geek culture, have become central to blockbuster cinema, with recent examples including Marvel's *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse*, DC's *Superman*, and Marvel's *The Fantastic Four: First Steps*. These cinematic universes have expanded the idea of immersive worlds, appealing to vast global audiences. Furthermore, virtual worlds within modern online games like Epic Games' *Fortnite* (which has evolved beyond battle royale into a social hub for concerts and interactive events) and *Roblox* offer not merely means of escape but new, interactive ways for people to connect, socialize, and express themselves within persistent digital environments.

The Effects of Video Games on Other Types of Media

Video games in the 1970s and 1980s were often inspired by other forms of media, such as films and literature. *E.T.*, *Star Wars*, and numerous other games drew inspiration from movies, television shows, and books. This began to change in the 1980s with the development of video game-based cartoons

, and continued in the 1990s and 2000s with the emergence of live-action feature films based on video games. These films, such as the *Resident Evil* series and the *Tomb Raider movies*, not only expanded the reach of the video game franchises but also influenced the film industry by introducing new narrative and visual styles.



Amazon Prime's *Fallout* (2024) achieved critical and commercial acclaim by capturing the retro-futuristic, dark satire, and post-apocalyptic dark humor of the original series while presenting an original storyline that appealed to longtime fans and newcomers alike. **Source**: Favorisxp, Fallout (2024) animated wallpaper in 4K, CC BY-NC-ND 3.0.

Television

Television programs based on video games have a long history, dating back to the early 1980s with animated series such as *Pac-Man*, *Pole Position*, and *Q*bert*. The late 1980s saw shows

such as *The Super Mario Bros. Super Show!* and *The Legend of Zelda* promote Nintendo games. The 1990s brought *Pokémon*, which originated as a game for the Nintendo Game Boy and exploded into a global phenomenon with a highly successful television series, a trading card game, numerous movies, and even a musical.

In recent years, the influence of video games on television has reached unprecedented levels, with a golden age of adaptations. Critically acclaimed and commercially successful series like HBO's *The Last of Us*, Amazon Prime Video's *Fallout*, and animated hits such as Netflix's *Arcane* (based on *League of Legends*) and Netflix's *Cyberpunk: Edgerunners* have demonstrated the rich storytelling potential of game narratives. These adaptations often boast high production values, complex



Naughty Dog's hit video game series *The Last of Us* debuted as a television series on HBO Max in 2023. **Source**: Skush. The Last of Us Wallpaper cropped. CC BY-SA 2.0.

character development, and intricate plots that appeal to both long-time fans and new audiences.

Beyond direct adaptations, the very concept of video games and "geek culture" has become deeply embedded in mainstream television. Shows like *The Big Bang Theory* (although it has concluded, it popularized nerd archetypes) and the continued prevalence of fantasy and sci-fi epics reflect this shift. The proliferation of virtual worlds and expansive narratives, once confined to games like *Grand Theft Auto* and *Halo*, now extends across various media. Modern online games, such as Epic Games' *Fortnite* and *Roblox*, serve as social hubs, hosting virtual concerts and brand experiences, fostering new forms of community interaction that blur the lines between gaming and everyday life.

This growing ubiquity of gaming has also impacted how media consumption is measured and perceived. Nielsen, a leading company in audience measurement, now actively tracks and reports on video game engagement, recognizing it as a significant media category alongside traditional television. This data highlights that gaming is no longer a niche hobby but a pervasive form of entertainment, influencing advertisers' decisions and solidifying its place as a core media habit akin to watching television.

Furthermore, the interactivity inherent in video games has had a profound influence on television production. Modern sports broadcasts, for example, frequently employ augmented reality overlays to display real-time player statistics,

tactical analyses, and even virtual graphics directly on the field or court, enhancing the viewer's understanding and engagement. Companies like Cosm are creating immersive entertainment venues that project live sports and other content onto massive LED domes, offering a shared-reality experience that blends physical presence with virtual spectacle. Additionally, streaming platforms and live events increasingly incorporate real-time audience interaction through polls, Q&A sessions, and interactive graphics, allowing viewers to influence content or participate directly. This type of innovation can exist only with a public that has come to demand and rely on the dynamic engagement that video games provide.

Film

Video games have profoundly influenced the film industry, transforming their role from a challenging source of adaptations to a vibrant wellspring of cinematic inspiration and technological innovation. While earlier film versions of video games, such as 1995's *Mortal Kombat* and 2001's *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*, found some box office success, they often struggled to gain critical acclaim or fully satisfy fans. This narrative has undergone a dramatic shift over the past seventeen years, particularly during the 2010s and 2020s. Video game film adaptations have entered a golden age, marked by blockbuster successes like

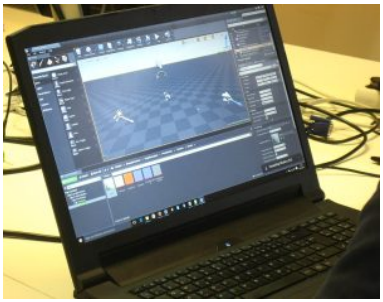


A visually vibrant and nostalgic adventure, *The Super Mario Bros. Movie* successfully brought the iconic video game world to the big screen, delighting audiences and setting box office records despite mixed critical reception. **Source**: MaksKochanowicz123. The Super Mario Bros. Movie VHS Cover . CC BY 3.0.

The Super Mario Bros. Movie, which soared to become one of the highest-grossing animated films ever, alongside the popular *Sonic the Hedgehog films*, *Pokémon Detective Pikachu*, *Uncharted*, *Five Nights at Freddy's*, and *A Minecraft Movie*. This new wave of adaptations benefits from larger production budgets, more faithful storytelling, and creative teams deeply invested in the original material, allowing these cinematic ventures to resonate widely with diverse audiences.

Beyond direct adaptations, video games have reshaped the film industry in several fundamental ways, notably in marketing and public perception. The sheer scale of production and the immense profitability of major video game titles now frequently rival those of Hollywood blockbusters. Game releases are often promoted with the same intensity as major movie premieres, sometimes even competing directly for public attention. This elevated status has profoundly altered public perception, with video games increasingly recognized as a powerful and legitimate form of narrative entertainment. The staggering revenue generated by the video game industry, which has even surpassed the combined totals of the film and recorded music industries in recent years, underscores its significant economic and cultural influence. The scale of production and profit for video games has become similar to that of cinema. Video games often feature music scores, actors, and directors, in addition to game designers, and the budgets for major games reflect this.

Grand Theft Auto IV cost an estimated $100 million to produce. At the same time, major modern AAA titles (high-budget, blockbuster games created and funded by major publishers) frequently see development and marketing budgets exceeding several hundred million dollars.



Unreal Engine has grown from a groundbreaking first-person shooter framework into one of the world's premier real-time 3D creation tools, powering blockbuster video games, virtual film production, and architectural design. **Source**: I G, Unreal Engine at Game Jam, CC BY 2.0.

Furthermore, the very methods of film production have increasingly adopted tools and methodologies first pioneered in the gaming world. Game engines, such as Epic Games' Unreal Engine and Unity Technologies' Unity, initially designed for developing interactive virtual experiences, are now indispensable in filmmaking. These powerful software platforms facilitate real-time rendering of intricate digital environments, empowering directors and cinematographers to visualize scenes, adjust lighting, and fine-tune camera movements directly on set. This innovative approach was famously employed in productions like Disney's *The Mandalorian*, where

massive LED walls displayed high-fidelity virtual backgrounds, dramatically reducing the reliance on traditional green screens and enhancing actor immersion within the digital world. Beyond rendering, motion capture technology, refined through years of game development, has become a cornerstone for creating remarkably realistic computer-generated characters and complex action sequences in films, bringing an unprecedented level of authenticity to digital performances. Game engines also significantly enhance pre-visualization, allowing filmmakers to "play through" scenes and experiment with creative choices before principal photography, resulting in substantial savings in time and resources. Even the branching narratives and player-choice elements common in video games have inspired experimental interactive films, exemplified by Netflix's *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch*, in which viewers actively make decisions that alter the storyline, blurring the traditional boundaries between passive viewing and active participation.

This dynamic and symbiotic relationship continues to evolve, with video games serving not only as a rich source of intellectual property for adaptation but also as a powerful driver of technological innovation and the evolution of narrative approaches in the film industry.

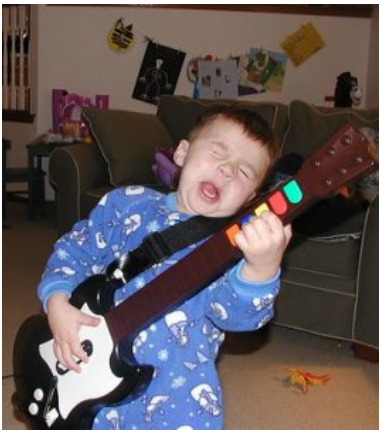
Music



Nobuo Uematsu, known for composing the soundtracks for the *Final Fantasy* game series, was one of the pioneers in creating robust, nuanced music for video games. **Source**: Sharon Nathan, Nobuo uematsu 001 , CC BY-SA 3.0 DE.

Music has been an integral part of video games since the earliest arcade days, evolving dramatically from simple computer beeps constrained by hardware limitations into sophisticated, immersive soundscapes. The advent of consoles like the Nintendo 64, Sega Saturn, and Sony PlayStation in the mid-1990s revolutionized game audio by enabling sampled sound. This breakthrough allowed developers to incorporate recorded music played on physical instruments, moving beyond synthesized tones. This innovation truly blossomed with the music of iconic series such as *Final Fantasy*, famously scored by Nobuo Uematsu, whose compositions took on the grand, emotional quality of film scores, complete with full orchestral and vocal tracks. This artistic leap proved highly

beneficial to the broader music industry, opening new avenues for exposure and employment. Today, renowned composers like Austin Wintory (*Journey*, *Abzû*), Lena Raine (*Celeste*, *Minecraft*), and Bear McCreary (*God of War*) are celebrated for their original game scores, reaching vast new audiences. Composing music for video games has become a highly sought-after and profitable career path, leading prestigious institutions such as Berklee College of Music, New York University, and the University of Southern California to establish dedicated programs focusing on video game scoring, where students learn principles akin to those used in film composition, often collaborating with game development students on real projects.



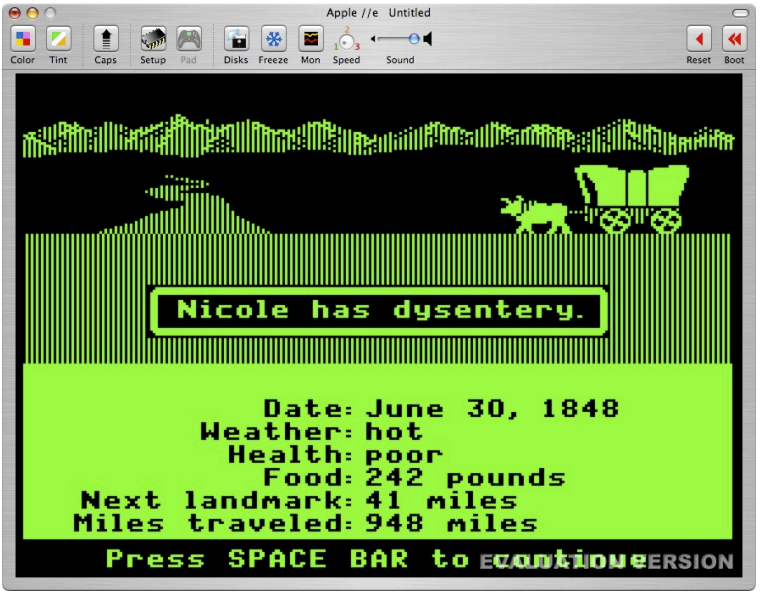
Guitar Hero popularized rhythm games by letting players live out rock-and-roll fantasies using a signature guitar-shaped controller to play along with popular music tracks. **Source**: yellowblade67, Guitar Hero Baby cropped, CC BY 2.0.

Beyond original scores, video games have had a significant impact on the music industry through the licensing of popular songs. Many contemporary artists and rock bands readily allow their previously recorded music to be featured in games, mirroring the inclusion of hit songs on movie soundtracks. This provides artists with licensing fees and, crucially, exposes their music to new generations of potential fans who might not otherwise encounter it. While rhythm games like *Rock Band* and *Guitar Hero* were highly influential in promoting bands in the late 2000s, even leading to special releases such as *The Beatles: Rock Band*, coinciding with remastered albums, the integration of licensed music has evolved. Modern titles across various genres, from sports franchises like *MLB: The Show*, *EA Sports FC* (formerly *FIFA*), and *NBA 2K* to open-world epics like *Grand Theft Auto V* (renowned for its diverse in-game radio stations featuring original and licensed music),

consistently curate extensive soundtracks of popular contemporary and classic tracks. *Sound Shapes*, released in 2012, innovated the music video game genre by seamlessly blending platforming gameplay with music creation, allowing players to build levels that simultaneously composed dynamic soundtracks. Its unique approach, featuring musical contributions from professional artists such as Beck, Deadmau5, and Jim Guthrie, demonstrated a deeper integration of interactive music, influencing subsequent games to explore more creative, player-driven audio experiences beyond traditional rhythm-matching. This deep integration makes music an integral part of the game's atmosphere and identity, often leading to songs experiencing a renewed popularity or discovering new fan bases.

Another vibrant phenomenon related to music and video games involves musicians performing and reinterpreting video game music. The trend of bands performing video game covers has continued to flourish, with groups like the popular Japanese ensemble The Black Mages, who specialize in rock versions of *Final Fantasy* music, maintaining a dedicated following. Orchestras and choruses dedicated to playing well-known video game music, such as the globally touring *Video Games Live*, continue to draw large crowds, often projecting synchronized gameplay footage and graphics during their performances to create a truly immersive experience. Furthermore, the rise of streaming platforms has made official game soundtracks and fan-created remixes widely

accessible, with many video game scores now garnering millions of streams and even receiving official recognition from major awards, including dedicated categories at the Grammy Awards, solidifying video game music's place as a significant and respected genre within the broader musical landscape.



Early educational games like *The Oregon Trail* taught children the challenges of settling the western United States in a fun way. **Source**: The Pug Father. Nicole has dysentery. CC BY 2.0.

Video Games and Education

The increasing embrace of video games by educational institutions underscores their mainstream acceptance and

growing recognition as valuable learning tools. Decades ago, games like *Number Munchers* and *Word Munchers* offered early examples of how interactive digital experiences could foster basic math and grammar skills in children. *Oregon Trail*, first developed in 1971, became a foundational educational computer game widely used in schools, immersing students in the challenges of 19th-century American westward expansion through resource management and decision-making. Its interactive and often unforgiving gameplay taught valuable lessons about history, geography, and problem-solving, setting a precedent for experiential learning in digital environments. *Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego?*, launched in 1985, revolutionized geography education by transforming learning into an engaging detective adventure. This game cleverly integrated real-world geographical facts and cultural information into its mystery-solving mechanics, proving that educational software could be both informative and highly entertaining.

Integrating video games and education has evolved dramatically,



Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego? balanced education and entertainment and would spawn a Netflix series decades after its debut as a video game. **Source**: Mark Mathosian. Carmen Sandiego on Apple IIc (cropped). CC BY-NC-SA.

supported by extensive research consistently highlighting the cognitive benefits of video game play, including improvements in visual processing, problem-solving, critical thinking, and even "fluid intelligence"—the ability to adapt and solve novel problems without prior knowledge. More recent research, including ongoing work by the Office of Naval Research, continues to explore how gaming can enhance information processing speed and fundamental reasoning abilities in adults, noting that

frequent gamers often exhibit superior perceptual and cognitive skills

.

Modern educational landscapes are now rich with examples of video games and game-inspired approaches. Far beyond early examples, contemporary educational games and gamified learning platforms offer immersive and interactive experiences that seamlessly blend entertainment with core curriculum. Educators now leverage game-based learning to simplify complex subjects, such as math and science, transforming abstract concepts into engaging, hands-on activities where students can experiment in virtual laboratories without real-world consequences. Games like *Minecraft: Education Edition* enable students to explore and build in interactive environments across various subjects, while *Civilization VII* immerses learners in historical, cultural, and geopolitical concepts, fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Platforms such as Kahoot! and Quizlet transform traditional quizzes into dynamic, competitive games, providing immediate feedback and fostering a fun, engaging atmosphere that reinforces knowledge. For younger learners, applications like Khan Academy Kids use gamified features, such as points and badges, to enhance literacy and math skills through adaptive, personalized learning paths.



Small groups engage with a Quizlet Live exercise. **Source**: Eric E Castro. Quizlet Live. CC BY 2.0.

Crucially, these new technologies also revolutionize how teachers and students communicate and collaborate. Many modern educational games are specifically designed for teamwork, requiring players to articulate their thoughts, strategize, and coordinate actions in real time. This active engagement in multiplayer environments naturally hones communication skills, fostering collaboration and social interaction among learners. Beyond specific games, the principles of **gamification**—incorporating elements like points, badges, leaderboards, and progress bars into learning activities—motivate students and provide clear visual indicators of their progress, making the learning journey feel more manageable and rewarding. Teachers can effectively use these systems to track individual and group achievements, encouraging healthy competition and a strong sense of accomplishment.

The validation of video games in education extends beyond traditional classrooms. Youth organizations, recognizing the appeal and skill-building potential of gaming, have integrated

it into their programs. The rise of scholastic and collegiate esports is a prime example, with high schools and universities worldwide establishing competitive gaming teams. These programs not only offer new avenues for student engagement and scholarships but also cultivate crucial 21st-century skills such as teamwork, communication, strategic thinking, and digital literacy, often linking directly to STEM fields and potential career paths in the rapidly expanding esports industry.

Furthermore, immersive technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) are being increasingly integrated into educational gaming. VR can transport students to entirely different worlds, whether it is ancient Rome or the intricate interior of a human cell, offering a deeply immersive learning experience that significantly enhances retention. AR, conversely, overlays digital information onto the real world, allowing students to interact with 3D models of the solar system on a classroom desk or bring historical figures to life within their physical learning space. These technologies not only make learning more engaging but also provide unique opportunities for interactive discussions and shared discoveries, fundamentally changing the dynamic between educators and learners.

Government bodies and public sectors have also actively promoted the educational potential of video games. Initiatives like iCivics offer free, interactive games designed to teach students in grades K-12 civics and government concepts.

The Federal Games Guild serves as a community of practice for U.S. federal agencies interested in leveraging games for various initiatives, including public education and outreach. Moreover, the military continues to be a significant adopter of advanced gaming technology for training. Highly sophisticated military training simulators use cutting-edge game engines and virtual reality to create realistic, immersive environments where recruits can practice tactical decision-making, engage in combat scenarios, and develop cultural awareness in a safe, repeatable setting. These simulators are continuously updated to reflect real-world conditions and leverage the latest advancements in game development. The U.S. Army and Army National Guard have also effectively used video games as engaging recruiting tools, offering potential service members a virtual glimpse into military life.

The widespread and increasing adoption of video games by diverse educational institutions and cultural authorities signifies a profound shift in perception. While some individuals may still harbor skepticism about the societal benefits of video games, their integration into formal and informal learning environments unequivocally validates their capacity to provide meaningful educational experiences and exert a powerful, positive cultural influence. The continuous evolution of video game technology promises even more sophisticated and interconnected learning experiences, further blurring the lines between play and education.



Journey is often cited as one of the most artistic video games ever created. **Source**: Rob Obsidian. Journey PS4 Full Gameplay Walk-through. CC BY 2.0.

Video Games as Art

While video games have long been widely accepted as a prominent medium, a significant and evolving debate has centered on whether they truly constitute art. Historically, well-known film critics, such as Roger Ebert, have famously argued that "video games can never be art," often framing them primarily as exercises in competition rather than experiences designed to evoke profound emotion or aesthetic appreciation.

However, Ebert's remarks, though influential at the time, sparked a widespread outcry from both video gamers and

developers, who pointed to a growing body of interactive experiences that defied such narrow definitions. Games like *Flower*, which invite players to control the gentle flow of flower petals through the wind, intentionally eschew traditional plots and characters to focus on the player's interaction with the serene landscape and the emotional resonance of the gameplay. Similarly, the imaginative *Katamari*series, first released in 2004, centered on the whimsical act of creation, tasking players with rolling a sticky ball to amass a massive clump of objects and ultimately form a new star.

In the years since, the artistic ambition and sophistication of video games have soared, further challenging and essentially refuting the notion that they cannot be art. Modern titles frequently demonstrate breathtaking visual design, intricate soundscapes, and profound narrative depth that rival those of traditional artistic media. Games such as *Journey* are widely celebrated for their evocative

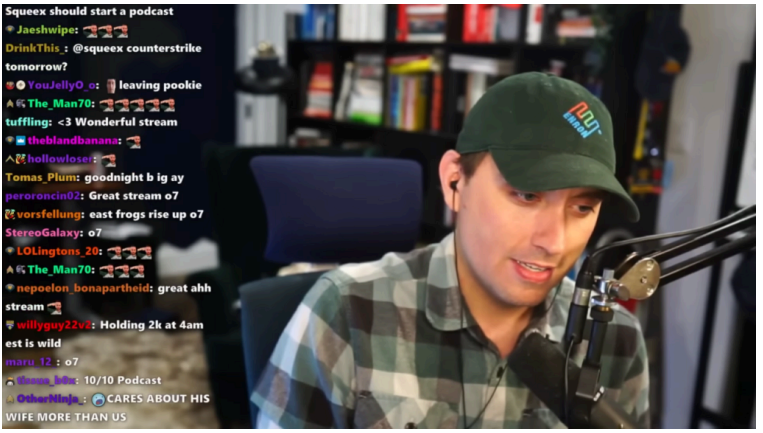


What Remains of Edith Finch achieved widespread critical acclaim as a masterpiece of environmental storytelling, inviting players to experience the final moments of members of a doomed family through a series of inventive, deeply emotional vignette-style gameplay segments. **Source**: Scarlizz, Photographer, CC BY-NC 2.0.

visuals, minimalist storytelling, and powerful emotional impact, often described as interactive poems. *What Remains of Edith Finch* pushes the boundaries of narrative, using unique gameplay mechanics to explore themes of family, memory, and loss with striking originality. Even expansive, critically acclaimed titles like *Elden Ring* showcase unparalleled world-building, implicit storytelling, and environmental artistry that invite deep interpretation and appreciation. The visual splendor of games like *Gris*, with its stunning watercolor aesthetics and exploration of grief through abstract imagery, further exemplifies the medium's capacity for artistic expression.

Once dismissed as a mindless pastime, video games are now regular
subjects of serious critical analysis and cultural commentary in prestigious publications such as *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times*, reflecting a broader societal recognition of their cultural significance. The development of increasingly complex and emotionally resonant musical scores, often performed by full orchestras, and the continued evolution of techniques like machinima (filmmaking within a real-time 3D environment, usually a video game) have further blurred the boundaries between video games and other established forms of media. While a lingering debate about their artistic merits may persist in some corners, the undeniable contributions of video games to modern artistic culture, through their innovative design, immersive storytelling, and profound

emotional resonance, have firmly established them as a powerful and evolving art form.



Atrioc during a livestream on Twitch. The platform transformed digital entertainment by pioneering live video game streaming, creating a space where content creators build real-time interactive communities with millions of active viewers. **Source**: Atrioc, Atrioc – I Trained The Worst Hitman In Human History. (SBUX7pKeimM – 1993×1121 – 58m52s), CC BY 3.0.

The Rise of Streaming Culture, Creator Economies, and Social Communities

Beyond traditional media production, video games have given rise to entirely new communication environments driven by live streaming and creator communities. Platforms such as

Twitch and YouTube Gaming have transformed gameplay from a private or local activity into a global spectator sport and social event. Millions of viewers watch content creators, esports professionals, and casual streamers play games in real time daily, interacting through live chat rooms and building dedicated online communities. This creator economy has reshaped media distribution, as video game publishers increasingly rely on popular streamers and influencers to market new titles rather than depending solely on traditional journalism or advertising campaigns.

This participatory culture has also redefined how audiences consume entertainment, turning passive viewers into active participants who influence broadcasts through real-time feedback, subscriptions, and community donations. Digital platforms like Discord have further extended these gaming spaces, serving as virtual third places where gamers organize events, discuss shared interests, and form global friendships. By combining real-time broadcasting, interactive chat, and community building, the rise of streaming culture illustrates how video games have evolved into a primary social infrastructure for contemporary digital communication.

9.5 CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

The increasing realism and expanded possibilities of video games have sparked considerable controversy. However, even early games, though rudimentary and seemingly laughable nowadays, raised controversy over their depiction of adult themes. Although the increased realism and graphics capabilities of modern video games have heightened the shock value of in-game violence, international culture has struggled to come to terms with it since the inception of video games.



The enhanced realism of video games has led to more graphic forms of violence, as demonstrated in *Mortal Kombat 11*. **Source**: Instacodez. Mortal-Kombat-11-121218-004. PDM 1.0.

Violence



Death Race was the first video game that faced controversy for its depiction of violence. **Source**: User:Piotrus, Musée Mécanique 221, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Violence in video games has created controversy from its earliest days. *Death Race*, an arcade game released in 1976, encouraged drivers to run over stick figures, which then turned into tombstone *X*s. Although the programmers claimed that the stick figures did not depict humans, the game caused controversy, making national news on the TV talk show *Donahue* and the TV news magazine *60 Minutes*. Video games, regardless of their level of realism, have added a new dimension to the world of gaming and entertainment: the ability to simulate violence, including murder.

A rise in violent games accompanied the enhanced realism of video games in the 1990s as companies expanded their market to target older demographics. A great deal of controversy exists over the influence of this kind of violence on children. Critics linked real-life violent acts like the 1999 Columbine High School massacre to the teenage perpetrators' enthusiasm for video games. The families of Columbine victims brought a lawsuit against 25 video game companies, claiming that if the games had not existed, the massacre would not have happened . In 2008, a 17-year-old boy shot his parents after they took away his video game system, killing his mother. Also in 2008, six teens arrested for attempted carjacking and robbery stated that they had tried to re-enact scenes from *Grand Theft Auto* . Several other high-profile acts of violence (including the Uvalde School shooting, where parents have sued *Call of Duty* maker Activision) have reignited this discussion. Following the devastating Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in 2012, and subsequent tragedies like the Munich Olympia Mall shooting in 2016, the Parkland school shooting in 2018, mass shootings in 2019 (including El Paso, Dayton, Suzano, and Halle), and more recent tragedies in Prague, Moscow, and across North America, video games have repeatedly been drawn into the public discourse as a potential contributing factor.

However, the scientific community's understanding of this complex issue has evolved significantly. While these incidents understandably provoke intense public concern, leading scientific organizations, including the American Psychological Association, have consistently maintained that there is no conclusive evidence to establish a direct causal link between violent video game play and real-world violent criminal behavior. Research often indicates a small, reliable correlation between violent video game use and aggressive behaviors such as increased aggressive thoughts, angry feelings, or minor physical aggression (like yelling or pushing). Yet, experts emphasize that these findings do not translate to severe acts of violence like mass shootings. They argue that attributing such complex acts solely to video game exposure is not scientifically sound and often diverts attention from other, more significant contributing factors, including pre-existing psychological conditions, social isolation, access to weapons, and broader societal issues. Critics also frequently point out that individuals who commit video-game-related crimes may already possess psychopathic tendencies, suggesting that a naturally violent predisposition might lead them to seek out violent media, rather than the press causing the violence itself. This perspective highlights correlation over causation.

In December 1993 and March 1994, Sega of America,

represented by Vice President Bill White, testified before the United States Senate committees during hearings on violence in video games, which were sparked mainly by the graphic fatalities in *Mortal Kombat* and the full-motion video horror of *Night Trap*. While Nintendo advocated for a more family-friendly approach and censored its version of *Mortal Kombat*, Sega defended its games as suitable entertainment for adults. It highlighted its self-developed Video Game Rating Council, which had already assigned ratings such as MA-13 and MA-17 to titles on its Genesis platform. These hearings, led by Senators Joe Lieberman and Herb Kohl, ultimately pressured the video game industry to establish a unified, independent rating system, leading to the creation of the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) in 1994.



ESRB ratings. **Source**: The original uploader was Tkgd2007 at English Wikipedia., ESRB ratings, public domain.

The challenge of regulating children's access to violent games remains a complex issue, partly due to inconsistencies in content rating systems across different media. The ESRB employs ratings such as "M" (Mature, 17+) and "AO" (Adults Only, 18+). An "AO" rating can severely impact a game's sales and distribution, as many major retail

outlets refuse to stock such titles (Hyman, 2005). This contrasts sharply with film ratings from the Motion Picture Association, where an "R" rating (Restricted, under 17 requires accompanying parent or adult) is widely accepted by theaters and retailers, even for content that might be considered "AO" if it were a video game. This disparity creates a situation where a video game with violence or sexual themes as graphic as those in R-rated movies may be challenging to purchase. At the same time, more explicit content in other forms of media might be readily available. This issue reveals a unique cultural dynamic surrounding video games. Despite many titles being designed explicitly for adult audiences, the distribution channels and broader societal perception often remain disproportionately youth-oriented, creating a persistent tension in how these mature-themed games are accessed and understood.



Video game use can become an addiction or obsession for some people. **Source**: Steven Andrew – Video Games – CC BY-NC 2.0.

Video Game Addiction

The issue of problematic video game use, often referred to as video game addiction, has evolved significantly over the past two decades, gaining increasing attention from both the public and the medical community. The American Medical Association once used the term "video game overuse." However, the World Health Organization officially recognized "Gaming Disorder" as a mental health condition in its 11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases in 2018. Similarly, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth

Edition, published in 2013, included "Internet Gaming Disorder" in its "Conditions for Further Study" section, outlining diagnostic criteria. This formal recognition underscores a growing consensus among experts that, for a small proportion of individuals, gaming behavior can become severe enough to cause significant impairment in personal, family, social, educational, or occupational functioning. Studies continue to find that socially marginalized individuals may be more susceptible to problematic gaming patterns, particularly when engaging in online role-playing games or competitive multiplayer titles that offer a strong sense of community and achievement. Research also indicates that patterns of excessive time commitment and social dysfunction in those struggling with a gaming disorder often resemble those observed in other behavioral addictions.

In response to these challenges, support systems have continued to develop. Groups like Internet and Technology Addicts Anonymous, which evolved from earlier initiatives like Online Gamers Anonymous, offer 12-step programs modeled after Alcoholics Anonymous, providing a community and framework for individuals seeking to manage or overcome compulsive gaming behaviors. These groups, run by former gamers and affected family members, offer a vital resource for those experiencing difficulties. Beyond the behavioral aspects, excessive gaming, much like prolonged

computer use in an office setting, can lead to painful repetitive stress injuries such as carpal tunnel syndrome or "gamer's thumb." While sporadic, historical incidents, such as the deaths linked to the arcade game *Berzerk* in the early 1980s due to heart attacks, highlight extreme health risks associated with intense, prolonged sessions, modern medical studies continue to highlight severe physical risks from extreme play. Comprehensive reviews of non-violent deaths linked to gaming show persistent cases, primarily in young males, occurring after extremely long gaming sessions with minimal rest, with causes including pulmonary embolism, cerebral hemorrhage, and cardiac arrhythmia, usually exacerbated by pre-existing health conditions, prolonged sedentary positions, dehydration, and sleep deprivation. Additionally, dangerous malicious practices stemming from online gaming culture, such as "swatting"—calling in fake emergency threats to a player's home during live play—have resulted in real-world physical injuries and fatalities.



Commonly known as PC bangs in South Korea and wangba in China, internet cafes became vibrant social hubs for competitive gaming while simultaneously emerging as central focal points in national debates and public policy surrounding video game addiction.
Source: User:Vmenkov, Tongyang – downtown – internet cafe – CIMG9869 cropped, CC BY-SA 3.0

Problematic gaming is particularly pronounced in countries with highly developed infrastructure, such as South Korea and China, where gaming is deeply ingrained in daily life. In response, governments have implemented various measures. For instance, China introduced strict national regulations limiting minors to just three hours of online gaming per week (restricted to specific weekend and holiday hours), requiring real-name registration, and imposing hard caps on in-game microtransactions. These regulations often follow high-profile incidents or public concerns, such as the tragic 2010 case in South Korea where parents were found to have neglected their infant while playing an online game at an internet café, leading to the baby's death from starvation.

However, the narrative surrounding intensive gaming is not solely one of caution. While acknowledging the potential for negative influences, there is also growing discussion of the positive changes and career opportunities that can emerge from passionate engagement with video games. The story of Jim Rossignol, who transformed his intense involvement with *Quake III* from a job-losing obsession into a successful career as a games journalist, exemplifies how deep gaming expertise can open unexpected professional doors. More broadly, the burgeoning esports industry and live-streaming platforms like Twitch, YouTube Gaming, and Kick offer lucrative career paths for experienced players, coaches, commentators, and content creators. Furthermore, studies increasingly show that skills honed in gaming, such as problem-solving, strategic thinking, teamwork, and even technical skills like server administration (as seen with games like *Minecraft*), can serve as valuable pathways into high-demand fields like information technology and software engineering. This nuanced perspective acknowledges that while excessive gaming can pose risks, the dynamic and complex nature of video games also presents unique opportunities for personal growth and professional development.



Throughout its history, the *Dead or Alive* franchise has drawn widespread criticism for its heavy objectification and hyper-sexualization of female characters, relying on exaggerated breast physics, revealing costumes, and provocative spin-offs like *Dead or Alive Xtreme* as primary marketing tools. **Source**: AKLIKESS, Doa Girls 5 (Dead or Alive), CC BY-NC-ND 3.0.

Sexism

The landscape of video game demographics has shifted significantly, challenging the long-held perception of the industry as an exclusively male domain. While young adult men historically constituted the majority of gamers, contemporary global industry data indicates a balanced picture. Women now comprise approximately 45% to 48% of all video game players globally, reflecting widespread participation across console, PC, and mobile

platforms. The average age of gamers has also increased to the mid-30s, with adults forming the overwhelming majority of players and dispelling the outdated stereotype that gaming is solely the domain of teenage boys. This growing diversity in the player base reflects the widespread appeal of gaming across various genres and platforms, particularly with the rise of mobile, casual, and social gaming environments.



Gamer designer Zoë Quinn found herself a target of hate speech and death threats during the #Gamergate controversy. **Source**: Official GDC, Zoe Quinn, March 2016 (cropped), CC BY 2.0.

Despite this demographic shift, male influence has persistently manifested throughout the video game industry, particularly in development and leadership roles. While the percentage of women, non-binary, and gender-diverse professionals in game development has grown to roughly 30% to 34% in recent industry workforce reports, men still comprise the majority of technical, creative, and executive positions. Women who enter the field too often find themselves facing subtle and overt sexism, a pervasive issue that has, at times, erupted into

significant public controversies. The #GamerGate harassment campaign in 2014, for instance, targeted prominent female game developers and critics with misogynistic abuse, doxing, and death threats, exposing a toxic undercurrent within specific segments of the gaming community

. More recently, in 2021, a lawsuit filed against Activision Blizzard by the state of California brought widespread attention to allegations of a "frat boy" culture, sexual harassment, and discrimination against female employees within the company, leading to significant internal and public backlash. These incidents highlight that despite progress, the industry still grapples with systemic issues of gender inequality and hostile work environments.

Sexism in video game content has also been a persistent issue since the medium's inception. Early examples like the infamous 1982 Atari 2600 game *Custer's Revenge*, centered on the depiction of sexual assault, and popular NES titles such as *Super Mario Bros.* and *The Legend of Zelda*, which frequently featured male heroes rescuing passive "damsels in distress," set problematic precedents. *Leisure Suit Larry*, a series of adventure games beginning in 1987, became notorious for its protagonist's relentless and often crude pursuit of women, frequently portraying female characters as one-dimensional objects of conquest. This pervasive focus on sexual humor and stereotypical depictions unfortunately reinforced sexist tropes within video games,

contributing to a perception of the medium as unwelcoming or demeaning to women. The hypersexualized portrayal of female characters, exemplified by the original *Tomb Raider*'s Lara Croft with her exaggerated proportions, continued into the 2000s with games in the *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball*series, designed primarily to showcase female characters in revealing swimwear .

However, in recent years, there has been a notable movement among game designers to challenge and move away from these clichéd gender representations. Games like 2007's *Portal*, featuring a female protagonist in a practical jumpsuit who relies on intellect to solve complex logic puzzles, were early examples of this shift. Contemporary titles have further diversified female characters, presenting them as complex, capable, and non-sexualized heroes. Examples include Aloy from *Horizon Zero Dawn* and *Horizon Forbidden West*, a resourceful hunter in a post-apocalyptic world; Ellie and Abby from *The Last of Us Part II*, nuanced and resilient survivors; Saga Anderson from *Alan Wake 2*, a capable FBI investigator balancing motherhood and professional duty; and Senua from



Senua's character in *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* is significant due to its grounded and empathetic portrayal of a person with psychosis, challenging the stigmatized depiction of mental illness in video games. **Source**: Andy Cull. Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice • In Game Photomode . CC BY-NC 2.0.

Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice, who navigates psychological trauma with strength and vulnerability. Many modern games, such as the *Mass Effect* series, *Cyberpunk 2077*, and *Baldur's Gate 3*, also empower players to customize their main character's gender, identity, and appearance without altering core plot elements, offering greater inclusivity and player agency. Similarly, male characters are increasingly portrayed with more diverse traits beyond hypermasculine stereotypes, featuring heroes who rely on intelligence, empathy, or strategic thinking rather than brute force alone.

While sexism undeniably manifests in various forms within video games and the industry, the ongoing dialogue and growing demand for diverse and respectful representation are driving significant change. Research into the effects of gender stereotypes in games is complex, with some studies suggesting that highly sexualized female characters, even if portrayed as strong, can still have negative impacts on perceptions of femininity and likability, particularly among female players. However, the industry is gradually evolving, with a growing number of developers actively working to create more authentic and varied portrayals for all genders. Despite recent strides, representation remains a dynamic, ongoing challenge as the video game industry continues to mature and diversify.

The Steaming Cup of Controversy: Grand Theft Auto's "Hot Coffee"



Source: Niranjan. gta sa. CC BY 2.0.

The "Hot Coffee" incident, which erupted in 2005, centered around the discovery of a hidden, sexually explicit mini-game within Rockstar Games' highly popular *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*. While the content was initially inaccessible to players in the retail version, PC modders found ways to unlock animated sexual encounters between the protagonist, Carl "CJ" Johnson, and his in-game girlfriends. This revelation quickly spiraled into a major controversy, drawing widespread attention from mainstream media, concerned parent groups, and politicians, including Senator Hillary Clinton, who

advocated for stricter regulations on video game content.

The fallout was immediate and severe for Rockstar Games and its parent company, Take-Two Interactive. After an investigation, the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) re-rated *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* from its original "Mature" (M) rating to "Adults Only" (AO). This change was devastating for sales, as most major retailers in the United States have policies against stocking AO-rated games. Rockstar was forced to cease manufacturing existing copies and release a patched version of the game with the "Hot Coffee" content entirely removed to regain its M rating. The incident also led to class-action lawsuits and an investigation by the Federal Trade Commission into whether consumers had been misled about the game's content.

Beyond the immediate financial and legal ramifications for Rockstar, the "Hot Coffee" scandal had a lasting impact on the broader video game industry. It significantly increased scrutiny on game content and the effectiveness of the ESRB's rating system. The ESRB subsequently implemented more stringent guidelines, requiring developers to disclose all

content present on a game disc, regardless of whether it's accessible to players, and introduced the possibility of substantial fines for non-compliance. This forced a more transparent and cautious approach to mature content in game development, as companies became acutely aware of the potential for public outcry and regulatory pressure if hidden or controversial material was discovered.

Portrayals of Race in Video Games

The portrayal of race in video games has long been a subject of critical scrutiny, reflecting broader societal biases and evolving in tandem with the medium's technological and narrative advancements. Historically, racial minorities in games were often either underrepresented or relegated to stereotypical caricatures. Early examples included the aforementioned 1982 Atari 2600 game *Custer's Revenge*, which depicted a naked General Custer assaulting a Native American woman, a blatant example of racist and sexist content that sparked widespread outrage and legal action. For Black characters, early depictions frequently confined them to roles as athletes



Very few Black characters appeared in NES games, and those that did were often relegated to the sporting world, like boxing trainer Doc Lewis from *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out*. **Source**: dennis crowley. If you run south along the East River (just below the W'burg bridge) on a cold + clear morning there's NO WAY you can't think of this scene as you approach the Seaport. It looks *exactly* the same . CC BY 2.0.

or, particularly in "urban/street" genres, as violent criminals or gang members. Similarly, Latino characters were often stereotyped as gang members or drug dealers, frequently identified by exaggerated accents or token Spanish phrases. East Asian characters, especially in fighting games, were usually presented within narrow "mystic warrior" archetypes or, in the case of women, hypersexualized to cater to a "fan service" audience. Native American characters, when present, often fell into tropes of "savages" or overly spiritual figures, reinforcing harmful historical narratives.

While these problematic portrayals persisted for many years, the past decade and a half has seen a growing awareness and a concerted effort within the industry to improve racial representation. However, progress has been uneven, and challenges remain. The demographics within the video game development industry itself mirror some of these disparities; while diversity has increased, the workforce remains predominantly White, particularly in senior and leadership roles. White individuals still constitute the largest racial group in game development, with Asian, Hispanic/Latino, and Black/African American individuals making up smaller percentages. This lack of diversity among creators has often been cited as a contributing factor to the perpetuation of stereotypes and the slow pace of change in character representation.

Controversies related to race in video games persist. Online multiplayer environments, in particular, can be

breeding grounds for racial harassment, with players of color frequently experiencing derogatory remarks and discrimination, especially when their racial identity is revealed through voice chat. Ongoing annual surveys by the Anti-Defamation League continue to report that over 60% to 70% of online gamers experience severe harassment, with players of color, women, and LGBTQ+ individuals targeted at disproportionately high rates. Beyond player interactions, some games have faced criticism for their problematic content. For example, *Resident Evil 5 drew controversy* for its depiction of Black characters as zombie-like enemies in an African setting, leading to accusations of perpetuating racist imagery. *The Call of Duty* franchise has also faced criticism for its often monolithic and stereotypical portrayal of Middle Eastern and Arab characters
as antagonists.



Miles Morales's inclusion in the *Spider-Man* game series is a landmark moment for Black representation, offering players a relatable hero who not only saves the city but also celebrates and protects his unique cultural background and his Harlem community. **Source**: PrimalElf1512. Spider-Man and Miles Morales. CC BY-NC-ND 3.0.



Colt Vahn is a sharp-witted assassin trapped in a time loop in the game *Deathloop*. He's forced to eliminate eight targets in a single day to break the cycle while his rival Julianna constantly hunts him. **Source**: cedry2kio, DEATHLOOP Icon, CC BY 3.0.

Despite these ongoing challenges, notable strides have been made in creating more nuanced and positive representations of race in recent years. Many modern games now feature diverse casts of characters, often with rich backstories and complex personalities that defy traditional stereotypes. For instance, Miles Morales in *Spider-Man: Miles Morales* and *Spider-Man 2* presents a compelling Afro-Latino protagonist who assumes the mantle of Spider-Man, offering a relatable and empowering hero for a new generation. Modern titles like *Deathloop* feature Black leads (Colt Vahn and Julianna Blake) in complex narrative roles, while Saga Anderson in *Alan Wake 2* leads a major thriller narrative as a Black female protagonist. The diverse cast of characters in *The Last of Us Part II* includes prominent Asian, Jewish, and Latinx individuals, integrated organically into a complex narrative.

Connor Kenway, a half-Mohawk, half-English protagonist in *Assassin's Creed III*, explores themes of identity and

colonialism with historical sensitivity, developed in consultation with Mohawk experts. Games like *Guild Wars 2* and *Baldur's Gate 3* have been praised for their extensive character customization options, allowing players to create avatars with a wide range of realistic hairstyles, facial features, and skin tones, reflecting a greater commitment to inclusivity in character design. Furthermore, *Life Is Strange 2* directly addresses the racism and discrimination faced by its Latinx protagonists, Sean and Daniel Diaz, offering a poignant and relatable narrative for players from marginalized communities.

Research on the impact of racial stereotypes in video games suggests that problematic portrayals can reinforce prejudice and negatively affect players' perceptions of racial groups

. Conversely, positive and authentic representation can foster a greater sense of belonging and self-esteem among players from underrepresented communities. As the video game industry continues to grow and diversify its player base, the demand for equitable and authentic racial representation in both game content and industry demographics will undoubtedly continue to drive further evolution.



Modern game players have to contend with loot boxes, which are randomized digital reward systems that allow players to purchase or earn virtual items. This mechanic has sparked global regulatory scrutiny due to its functional similarities to gambling and its widespread use in video game monetization. **Source**: Photo by OleksandrPidvalnyi on Pixabay.

Monetization, Dark Patterns, and Gambling Mechanics

In addition to debates over violence, addiction, and representation, modern video game controversy increasingly centers on commercial design and player monetization. As the industry transitioned from upfront retail purchases to free-to-play models, microtransactions, and live-service games, developers introduced mechanics designed to maximize

ongoing player spending. Central to this debate are **loot boxes**—virtual items containing randomized rewards that players purchase with real money or earned in-game currency. Critics and regulators argue that loot boxes mirror psychological mechanisms found in traditional gambling, such as variable ratio reinforcement schedules, posing risks to players, particularly children and teens.

This monetization shift has prompted scrutiny from consumer advocate groups and international governments. Countries such as Belgium and the Netherlands ruled that certain randomized loot box mechanics violate national gambling laws. At the same time, regulatory bodies across the European Union, United Kingdom, and North America have pressured publishers to disclose reward probabilities and implement spending controls. Additionally, consumer ethicists point to the rise of **dark patterns**—game design choices intentionally engineered to exploit human psychology, induce fear of missing out, or encourage compulsive spending through limited-time events, battle passes, and complex virtual currencies that obscure real-world monetary costs. As games become increasingly sophisticated financial ecosystems, the ethical boundary between engaging game design and predatory commercial practices remains one of the most actively debated issues in contemporary media studies.

9.6 BLURRING THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN VIDEO GAMES, INFORMATION, ENTERTAINMENT, AND COMMUNICATION

Early video games had basic goals and set rules of play. As games have evolved in complexity, they have enabled new options and an expanded understanding of what constitutes a game. At the same time, the aesthetics and design of game culture have infiltrated tools and forms of entertainment. This has blurred the lines between games and other forms of communication, leading to new ways to combine information, entertainment, and communication.

Video Games as Mass Communication

Video games have undergone a remarkable transformation,

evolving from niche entertainment into a formidable segment of mass communication that rivals and often surpasses traditional media in scale and influence. This growth has been propelled by significant advancements in graphic capabilities, as exemplified by groundbreaking titles like *Cyberpunk 2077* and *Black Myth: Wukong*, which broadened their appeal to a mainstream audience. Modern video game consoles are no longer just gaming machines, but sophisticated media content devices. The PlayStation 5 and Xbox Series X, for instance, include Ultra HD Blu-ray playback, high-end streaming apps, and integrated social media sharing, serving as all-encompassing entertainment hubs.



A large number of video game characters have popularity that equals or surpasses that of Hollywood celebrities. **Source**: AntMan3001. *UPDATED* Super Smash Bros Roster . CC BY-SA 2.0.

The cultural impact of video games is further evident in the

celebrity-like status of many popular video game characters, who are instantly recognizable globally. Beyond character popularity, video games have become a significant and growing venue for advertising. Companies like Anzu specialize in embedding dynamic advertisements within virtual landscapes. At the same time, major brands regularly launch virtual activations—such as Nike creating interactive worlds within *Fortnite* or high-fashion houses hosting virtual runways—building upon the precedent set when early political campaigns first utilized in-game ads to reach voters.

Furthermore, video games serve as vibrant centers for online communities. Titles such as *World of Warcraft* and *Call of Duty* have long fostered massive online social spaces. More recent examples, such as *Final Fantasy XIV*, are renowned for their welcoming communities, while *The Elder Scrolls Online* offers an immersive world ripe for social interaction. The battle royale



Video games like *Final Fantasy XIV* have fostered large online communities. **Source**: JR Salazar. Final Fantasy XIV. CC BY-NC 2.0.

genre, encompassing games like *Fortnite*, *Apex Legends*, and *Call of Duty: Warzone*, boasts enormous player bases and strong community engagement driven by frequent live-service updates, virtual concerts, and cooperative gameplay. Similarly, multiplayer online shooters like *Overwatch 2*, *Valorant*, and *Counter-Strike 2* thrive on their competitive scenes and passionate fan bases. Even sandbox games like *Minecraft* and user-generated content platforms like *Roblox*, alongside competitive MOBAs like *League of Legends* and the unique *Rocket League*, play a pivotal role in fostering creativity, collaboration, and extensive online communities.



Hollywood has converted popular video game franchises like *Uncharted* to the silver screen. **Source**: hassanalmokadem. Uncharted 2022 Movie – Folder icon . CC BY-NC-ND 3.0.

Economically, video games are an incredibly profitable part of popular culture, often outperforming films. For perspective, the film *Avengers: Endgame* took five days to eclipse $1 billion in revenue, while *Grand Theft*

Auto V famously did it in just three. Global video game revenues have consistently eclipsed total global movie box office receipts, underscoring their immense financial power. This dominance is intrinsically linked to video games' role as a significant element in media synergy and convergence. This convergence is evident in integrated ecosystems like Disney's Marvel Cinematic Universe and the *Star Wars franchise*, where movies, TV shows, comics, and merchandise are intricately interwoven. Content distribution also spans multiple platforms, from Netflix Originals reaching various channels to Amazon Prime Video integrating with other Amazon services. Social media is heavily utilized, with TikTok challenges and Instagram Live Shopping providing new avenues for brand promotion. Within the gaming industry, convergence is evident in wildly successful game-to-screen adaptations, such as *The Last of Us* on HBO and *Fallout* on Prime Video, as well as in interactive storytelling and the immersive experiences offered by virtual and augmented reality in both gaming and live entertainment.

The legal landscape also recognizes video games as a form of mass communication; in the landmark 2011 case Brown v. Entertainment Merchants Association, the Supreme Court affirmed First Amendment protection for video games, striking down a law that restricted the sale of violent video games. Justice Scalia famously stated that " Disgust is not a valid basis for restricting expression."

Supporting this ecosystem are platforms like Twitch,

acquired by Amazon for $970 million, which hosts tens of millions of daily viewers, cementing its role as a premier live streaming service for gaming. Similarly, *Minecraft* has profoundly shaped YouTube's content landscape, popularizing "Let's Play" videos, inspiring countless *Minecraft*-focused channels, and fostering creative content and community building, ultimately influencing other gaming genres on the platform. Beyond organized platforms, active discussion boards and the widespread phenomenon of modifications (mods) for games like *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, *Baldur's Gate 3*, *Starfield*, *Grand Theft Auto V*, *Minecraft*, *RimWorld*, and *The Sims* demonstrate the deep engagement and creative contributions of gaming communities, further blurring the lines between content creators and consumers in this pervasive form of mass communication.

Video Games and the Social World of Sports



Team video games can provide many of the benefits of physical sports. **Source**: Fabio Hofnik – New Super Mario Bros. – CC BY-NC 2.0.

The meteoric rise of esports further solidifies video games' position. This competitive gaming phenomenon has evolved from a niche hobby into a global industry, driven by technological advancements such as high-speed internet and streaming platforms, increased accessibility of gaming hardware, and professionalization through global leagues and sold-out stadium tournaments like the *League of Legends World Championship*. Expanded media coverage and passionate fan engagement have transformed esports into a significant economic driver with a profound cultural influence, challenging stereotypes about gamers.

Video games have evolved in complexity and flexibility to the point that they offer new forms of social interaction. For instance, compare video games to physical sports. Most of the abstract reasons for involvement in sports—such as teamwork,

problem-solving, and leadership—also motivate people to play online video games, which often involve team interaction. Parents, coaches, and fans frequently praise sports as a social platform where people can acquire new skills. Amateur sports teams offer a vital means of socialization and communication for many people, enabling individuals from diverse genders, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds to find a common platform for interaction. Video games, with their similar capacities, offer a more inclusive platform for socializing. They do not exclude most individuals with social or physical challenges. Although competitive endeavors of any sort inevitably create opportunities for negative communication, the social platform allows people of different genders, races, and nationalities to play on equal footing —a feat, albeit different, if not improbable, to achieve in the physical realm.

Virtual Worlds and Societal Interaction: The Potential and Excitement

Massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) like *Final Fantasy XIV* and *World of Warcraft* have long allowed players to pursue an unprecedented variety of goals beyond traditional questing and combat. These virtual environments inherently foster the development of complex

social, cultural, and economic systems, transforming games from solitary activities into vibrant, parallel virtual communities. In this respect, modern MMORPGs function as a compelling hybrid of social media and interactive entertainment. A player might choose to forgo a game's prescribed goals entirely, instead spending their time engaging in social activities, interacting with other avatars, participating in player-run events, or even running virtual businesses. At such a point, the distinction between playing a game and engaging in a form of social media becomes remarkably thin.



Shown here is the first Metaverse Music Festival (MVMF) held in Decentraland in 2021. It was a four-day event featuring music, art, gaming, and culture in the virtual world, with performances by artists including Deadmau5, Paris Hilton, Nina Nesbitt, and 3LAU across five stages. **Source**: Duncan Rawlinson. The Metaverse Festival. CC BY-NC 2.0.

This blurring of lines is even more pronounced in dedicated

virtual worlds and metaverse platforms such as *VRChat*, *Roblox*, and *Fortnite Creative*, as well as pioneering spaces like *Second Life* and decentralized platforms like *Decentraland* and *The Sandbox*. In these environments, users create highly customizable avatars to represent themselves, then explore vast digital landscapes and actively participate in their evolving cultures. These platforms differentiate themselves from traditional games by emphasizing user freedom and creator economics. Crucially, residents retain ownership of their in-world creations, fostering a unique creator economy. Decentralized platforms leverage blockchain technology and NFTs (Non-Fungible Tokens) to enable digital ownership of virtual land, assets, and user-generated content, allowing for the exchange of real-world economic value within these digital realms. *Roblox*, with its vast ecosystem of user-created experiences, further exemplifies this trend, attracting tens of millions of daily active users who are not just players but also creators and entrepreneurs within its virtual economy.

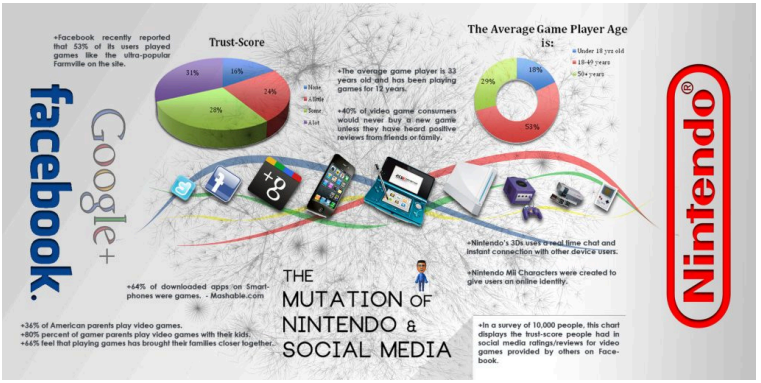


NASA astronaut Raja Chari participates in virtual reality testing of the Gateway lunar space station in Building 15's VR Lab in 2024. This testing ensures comfort and safety for astronauts who will live and conduct science there on future Artemis missions. **Source**: NASA Johnson. Through Astronaut Eyes, Virtual Reality Propels Gateway Forward . CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Regardless of their specific classification, these virtual worlds heavily rely on the aesthetics and design principles of video games, leveraging immersive environments and interactive elements to facilitate rich social interaction. These virtual societies significantly expand communication opportunities, enabling the relay of information and experiences in ways that traditional media cannot equal. Spatial computing, Virtual Reality (VR), and Augmented Reality (AR) technologies—powered by hardware like Meta Quest 3 and Apple Vision Pro—are increasingly integrated into educational settings, offering unique possibilities for immersive simulations, collaborative learning, and global interaction. A class on architecture could lead students through a three-dimensional recreation of a Gothic cathedral in VR; a history class might use an interactive battlefield simulation to explain the mechanics of a famous battle; or a

physics class could use AR overlays to demonstrate complex principles tangibly.

Beyond education, virtual worlds and immersive technologies provide a range of other societal benefits. Since 2007, specialists have developed virtual-reality simulations to help individuals with social communication challenges, such as those with autism spectrum disorder, navigate complex social situations more effectively. These simulations enable users to create avatars and practice scenarios, such as job interviews or everyday conversations, in a safe and controlled environment. Specialists can adjust the complexity of interactions, and users can replay their performances and receive real-time feedback to understand nonverbal cues better and adapt to changing social dynamics. This direct influence of video game design, particularly the creation of avatars and the ability to practice and refine actions, offers a powerful therapeutic tool. The continuous evolution of these virtual environments promises even more sophisticated and interconnected applications, further blurring the lines between digital play and meaningful real-world impact.



This 2012 infographic displays the evolution of Nintendo and the state of video game consoles. **Source**: Steven-L-Johnson, Mutation of Nintendo and Social Media cropped, CC BY 2.0.

Social Media and Games

The integration of video games into social media platforms has profoundly influenced communication and community building. This symbiotic relationship has evolved significantly, pushing the boundaries of how and where people engage with games and with each other.

Facebook Instant Games: A Case Study in Platform Integration

In 2016, Facebook (now Meta) launched Facebook Instant Games, an HTML5-based cross-platform

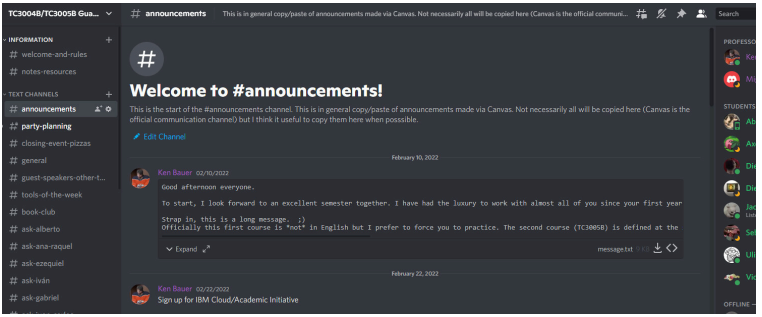
gaming experience integrated directly into Messenger and the Feed. This initiative aimed to lower the barrier to entry for casual gaming, allowing users to discover, share, and play games without installing separate applications. While lightweight platform initiatives have evolved—with social networks shifting toward cloud streaming, integrated Discord Activities, and micro-games on TikTok—these efforts demonstrate a persistent push by major social media companies to leverage casual gaming to drive user engagement and retention.

The phenomenon described by Tim Walker regarding "coupling games with social media sites," which pushes the influence of video games to "unprecedented levels," remains even more relevant today. While Facebook Instant Games focuses on direct gameplay, the broader impact extends to how social media platforms serve as vital hubs for gaming content, discussions, and community formation.

Dedicated Social Networking for Gamers: Beyond General Platforms

The increasing popularity of video games has led to the emergence and growth of numerous social networking websites and platforms that cater to both hardcore and casual gamers. These platforms recognize that gamers often seek

connections beyond a specific game and desire dedicated spaces to discuss their passion, find teammates, and even form personal relationships.



Discord is a versatile voice, video, and text chat application that has evolved from a gaming-centric platform into a popular hub for diverse communities, from study groups and artists to businesses and friends, to communicate and connect. **Source**: Ken Bauer. Discord. CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Today, the landscape of social networking for gamers is dominated by comprehensive and dynamic platforms that offer a multitude of features beyond simple dating or general discussion. Discord is arguably the most prominent and widely used platform for gamers, offering robust voice, video, and text communication. Users can create or join servers dedicated to specific games, communities, or interests, making it ideal for team coordination, community events, and casual chat. Twitch, a leading live-streaming platform, allows gamers to broadcast their gameplay, interact with viewers in real-time through chat, and build a community around their content.

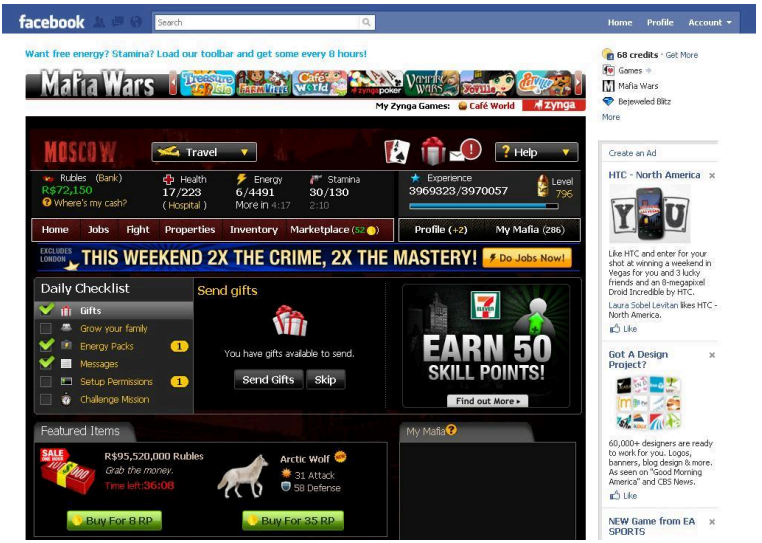
It is a significant hub for esports, game promotion, and direct engagement between streamers and their audience.

Reddit, with its numerous "subreddits" dedicated to virtually every game imaginable, serves as a massive forum for discussions, news, memes, and community-driven content. Gamers use it to find tips, share experiences, and connect with niche communities. Beyond being a digital storefront, the Steam Community offers extensive features like forums, user reviews, guides, workshops for user-created content, and integrated chat, allowing players to connect directly within the ecosystem where they play many of their PC games. YouTube Gaming, although part of a broader video platform, is immense, hosting numerous gameplay videos, reviews, tutorials, esports highlights, and streams, with many gamers following content creators and engaging through comments and subscriptions. Other apps like GameTree aim to connect gamers based on compatibility, using personality tests and gaming preferences to help users find ideal gaming buddies and even romantic partners, with a focus on personalized matchmaking and fostering meaningful connections.

In essence, social media's influence on gaming has moved beyond simple integration to the creation of entirely new ecosystems where gaming communities thrive, content is shared, and social connections are formed, sometimes even leading to real-world relationships. The constant evolution of technology and user behavior will undoubtedly continue to reshape this dynamic intersection of social media and games.

Mobile Phones and Gaming

The emergence of Internet-enabled mobile phones revolutionized gaming, transforming it from a niche activity into a pervasive form of entertainment and social interaction. What began as a shift from computers to mobile devices has blossomed into a sophisticated ecosystem in which mobile games profoundly shape how people connect, communicate, and express themselves.



Mafia Wars significantly impacted the early days of Facebook gaming by popularizing the use of social ties in gameplay, encouraging users to recruit friends for in-game bonuses, and helping establish a "free-to-play" model built on microtransactions. **Source**: David Berkowitz. Mafia Wars Home Screen – Earn 50 Skill Points – 7-Eleven Zynga Partnership Screenshots and Store Photos . CC BY 2.0.

Early mobile social games, such as Zynga's *FarmVille* and *Mafia Wars*, demonstrated the power of integrating casual games with nascent mobile capabilities. *FarmVille*, in particular, leveraged social network features for virality, with players sending virtual gifts and collaborating on farm-building tasks. While these titles laid the historical foundation , modern global hits like *MONOPOLY GO!*, *Roblox Mobile*, and *Honor of Kings* carry this legacy forward. This evolution led to more than just a platform shift; it laid the groundwork for mobile gaming to become a primary means of social interaction. The ease of access, the "always-on" nature of mobile devices, and intuitive touch interfaces made games accessible to a far broader audience than traditional PC or console gaming.

Adding games to phones creates a new language that people can use to communicate with each other. Before social media, the notion of transmitting a spat or a romantic connection through a game was conceptual, but today, it is commonplace. The sheer volume of virtual gifts exchanged in early social games was a harbinger of this powerful social dimension. During events like the annual Winterfest in *Fortnite* or seasonal events in mobile titles, players often exchange thousands of gifts, which are primarily cosmetic items like outfits, emotes, and virtual currency. The social dimension is crucial: the act of gifting is not just about the item itself, but about strengthening friendships and celebrating holidays within the game's community. The feature allows players to

interact directly and show appreciation, proving that social gestures in a virtual world remain a powerful driver of engagement.

More recently, mobile games have integrated sophisticated social features that facilitate diverse forms of communication and interaction. Modern multiplayer mobile games, ranging from competitive titles like *PUBG Mobile*, *Free Fire*, *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang*, and *Call of Duty: Mobile* to casual cooperative experiences, now feature robust in-game text and voice chat. This enables real-time strategy, friendly banter, and the development of strong social bonds among players, whether they are friends in real life or have met within the game. Many mobile games are also built around guild or clan systems, where players form persistent groups to collaborate on objectives, compete against other groups, and share resources. These in-game social structures foster a sense of belonging and teamwork, often leading to extensive out-of-game communication on platforms like Discord.



PUBG Mobile successfully adapted the intense battle royale formula of its PC predecessor to mobile devices, becoming one of the highest-grossing and most downloaded mobile video games in history. **Source**: SmnMhmdy, PUBG Mobile Banner Steam Style, CC BY 3.0.

The prevalence of cooperative and Player-versus-Player (PvP) modes inherently encourages direct interaction. Whether it's helping a friend overcome a challenging level or engaging in a friendly rivalry on a leaderboard, these interactions fuel a broad spectrum of emotions, from generosity and camaraderie to intense competition and even playful aggression. Players routinely send in-game items, resources, or even "lives" to friends, not just as a game mechanic but as a genuine gesture of support, gratitude, or even a subtle form of communication.

Furthermore, mobile games often integrate with major social media platforms, such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and TikTok, allowing players to share achievements, invite friends, and spectate gameplay easily. This integration extends the game's social reach beyond its ecosystem. The rise of mobile esports and game streaming on platforms like Twitch and YouTube has further transformed how players interact, as spectators can chat directly with streamers and other viewers, forming vibrant communities around shared interests and favorite content creators.

In contemporary mobile gaming, the expression of competition, aggression, hostility, generosity, and general friendliness is not just given "new means of expression". Still, it has become deeply embedded in the core gameplay loop and the broader social fabric surrounding these titles. Mobile phones have unequivocally made gaming a common, indeed

ubiquitous, means of social interaction, fundamentally reshaping how individuals connect in the digital age.

Video Games and Their Messages

Beyond entertainment, video games have evolved into powerful interactive mediums for conveying specific messages,



Games like *Papers, Please* attempt to explore complex social issues. **Source**: Fjana. Papers, Please. CC BY-NC-SA 3.0.

exploring complex social issues, and engaging players with thought-provoking political and ethical dilemmas. These "serious games," often created by independent developers, advocacy groups, or even mainstream organizations, push the boundaries of what video games can communicate.

Sometimes, independent developers or small studios create impactful, often low-budget, games to convey a specific point

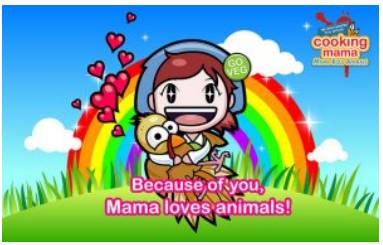
or critique. Molleindustria, for example, remains a prominent collective known for producing a range of critical games that blend satire with social commentary. Their titles, such as *Oiligarchy*, where players manage an oil-drilling business and navigate corruption to maximize profits, and *Faith Fighter*, which satirically depicts religious icons in combat, exemplify how games can deconstruct complex societal structures and beliefs. Other games of theirs include *The New York Times Simulator*, *The McDonald's Videogame*, *Queer Power*, and many more.

The modern video game landscape includes titles that feature substantial content designed to inform players about current events and complex global phenomena. The field of "newsgames" or "journalism games" has expanded considerably, immersing players in scenarios that help them understand the forces at work behind real-world issues, from geopolitical conflicts to economic crises. For instance, the indie game *Papers, Please*, where players act as a border agent in a fictional dystopian state, forces them to confront difficult ethical decisions and the complexities of political systems. Titles like *This War of Mine* and *Frostpunk* similarly place players in harsh survival scenarios that highlight the human and societal cost of conflict and scarcity.

Similarly, games designed for civic engagement and education demonstrate how interactive experiences can inform players about specific policy issues and inspire action. iCivics , a nonprofit founded by former Supreme Court Justice

Sandra Day O'Connor, offers a range of free-to-play games where players can run a law firm specializing in constitutional rights, draft legislation, or manage a presidential campaign. Furthermore, titles like *Alba: A Wildlife Adventure* teach players about sustainability and environmental issues as they clean up a Mediterranean island and restore its natural habitats. Publishers and developers are increasingly leveraging the interactive nature of games to convey information in uniquely engaging ways.

Political satire delivered through video games offers a distinct advantage: it allows the player to effectively play out a satirical joke to its logical conclusion, exploring the entire scope and implications of the commentary through direct interaction. This engagement contrasts sharply with passive forms of media consumption.



The unauthorized PETA edition of *Cooking Mama* tackles the issue of animal cruelty. **Source**: Shahab Zargari – Evil Cooking Mama – CC BY 2.0.

The concept of advocacy games has matured significantly. These games engage players with an interactive political or social message, often proving more impactful than traditional media advertisements. Mainstream non-profit and advocacy groups widely utilize video games to convey their

messages. For instance, PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) has a long history of creating parody games to highlight concerns about animal cruelty, such as their Thanksgiving-themed parody of the popular *Cooking Mama* series, designed to criticize meat consumption. This practice continues today, with PETA regularly releasing new games that comment on various animal welfare issues, often targeting widespread cultural phenomena or major game releases with their satirical takes.

The use of games for advocacy extends beyond satire. Organizations develop "serious games" or "games for change" to raise awareness about humanitarian crises, environmental issues, mental health challenges, and historical events. These games can foster empathy, encourage critical thinking, and even facilitate real-world action by providing players with actionable information or connections to relevant causes. They transform abstract concepts into tangible, interactive experiences, allowing players to grasp the complexities of an issue by experiencing it firsthand or making consequential decisions within a simulated environment.

While these message-driven games may not always compete with blockbuster series like *The Legend of Zelda* in terms of production budgets or mainstream popularity, they are crucial in pushing the boundaries of video games as a medium. Just as political pamphlets played a significant role as primary sources of information and platforms for political discourse during

historical periods such as the American Revolution, video games are increasingly serving a similar informational and discursive function in the digital age. They offer a unique avenue for expressing complex ideas, challenging perspectives, and fostering a deeper, more interactive engagement with social, political, and ethical messages.

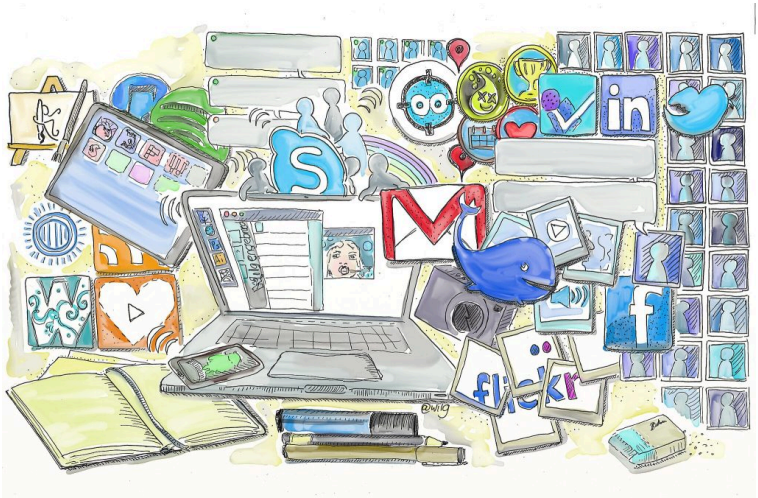
Gamification, Generative AI, and the Future of Synthetic Media

The boundaries between gaming and daily life continue to erode through gamification—the application of game design elements, such as points, leaderboards, and achievement badges, to non-game contexts. From fitness applications and language-learning tools to workplace productivity software, mechanics pioneered by video games now structure everyday habits, education, and labor. By turning mundane activities into interactive loops, gamification demonstrates how game logic has transcended screen entertainment to become an organizing principle of contemporary communication and behavior.

Looking forward, the integration of generative artificial intelligence is redefining production, narrative, and social dynamics within digital spaces. Real-time AI systems enable dynamic non-player characters (NPCs)

capable of unscripted conversation, personalized storytelling adapted instantaneously to player choices, and user-led world generation. As synthetic media tools make game creation increasingly accessible to non-technical users, the distinction between playing a game, generating content, and communicating with artificial agents will blur even further, ushering in an era where interactive media is fully personalized, continuous, and ubiquitous.

CHAPTER 10: THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA

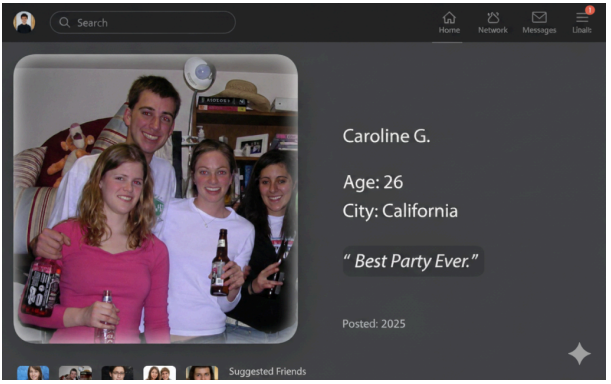


Source: Wilgengebroed on Flickr, Social networking services, CC BY 2.0.

- 10.1 The Internet and Social Media
- 10.2 The Evolution of the Internet
- 10.3 The Participatory Web and the Evolution of Engagement

- 10.4
  The Effects of the Internet and Globalization on Popular Culture and Interpersonal Communication
- 10.5 Issues and Trends

10.1 THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA



Hiring agents review potential candidates' social media profiles. Do you think employers would want to hire you based on what you post publicly on your social media accounts? **Source**: Brian Rosner – New Friends at CU – CC BY 2.0.

Applying for a job used to follow a predictable pattern: submit a résumé, draft a cover letter, and provide a list of references.

Today, a critical intermediary step has emerged—the curation of the digital self. This process often begins with an ego-search or identity audit, in which an individual searches their own name or pseudonym in quotation marks on search engines to monitor their online reputation and see what a prospective employer might find first. If a search reveals a public thread of unfiltered personal opinions or unprofessional photos, the applicant must decide whether to pivot to privacy or take control of their narrative. Managing an online persona is no longer just a defensive maneuver; it is a strategic necessity that can determine whether an application rises to the top of the pile or is filtered out by an AI-driven applicant-tracking system .

The ubiquity of the social web—from legacy platforms like Facebook and X to visual-centric media like TikTok and Instagram—means that individuals often begin building a digital footprint before they can fully grasp its implications. This persona, whether curated or accidental, serves as a stranger's first impression. While a casual photo with friends may seem harmless, modern hiring processes often use social listening tools and automated AI screening to assess brand alignment, sentiment, and public behavior. In many cases, recruiters will vet an applicant's digital presence before they ever pick up the phone to call a reference, making it essential to treat one's digital footprint as a living extension of one's résumé.

Professionalism in the digital age requires a shift from

passive observation to active curation. Individuals should think of their online persona as the opening statement of an interview. Modern job seekers don't leave search results to chance; they influence the algorithm by highlighting a professional portfolio, a well-maintained LinkedIn profile, or an industry-specific site like GitHub or Behance. The goal: to present a digital brand that reinforces expertise. In a competitive market, a positive, intentional online presence does more than avoid red flags; it actively builds credibility and trust with potential employers seeking digital literacy.

However, the stickiness of digital data remains a significant hurdle. Unlike the ephemeral nature of early broadcast media, the internet has permanence built in. For years, privacy advocates have warned about the difficulty of truly breaking free from social platforms that monetize user data. While modern regulations like the General Data Protection Regulation and the California Consumer Privacy Act have introduced concepts such as the Right to be Forgotten, the complexity of data deletion persists. Information is often cached, archived, scraped by third-party data brokers, or ingested into massive AI training datasets. Deleting an account does not necessarily mean the data ceases to exist; it usually just means the user can no longer view it.

This enduring permanence is a byproduct of the internet's fundamental architecture. From Google's cached pages to the vast snapshots of the Internet Archive, the transition from

fleeting communication to a permanent record has fundamentally changed how people interact. Understanding the logic behind how computer scientists designed these systems—prioritizing data redundancy and universal access—provides a key to navigating the modern world. By grasping these structures, users can better manage the tension between the ease of instant global communication and the long-term consequences of a digital life that never truly disappears.

The imperative to manage one's digital self highlights a broader transformation: the internet is no longer merely a network for transmitting data, but a primary environment where personal identity, public discourse, and economic opportunity collide. As platforms increasingly rely on algorithmic feeds to curate information, individuals find themselves navigating dual roles as both creators of digital content and subjects of algorithmic evaluation. Understanding how these platforms process, preserve, and prioritize digital artifacts is essential for analyzing the modern media landscape. This intersection of human agency, platform architecture, and persistent data sets the stage for examining the evolution of the internet and social media.

10.2 THE EVOLUTION OF THE INTERNET



In the 1960s, the concept of a portable computer that was useful was still a dream; huge mainframes, like the ones pictured above, were required to run a basic operating system. **Source**: Joe Mabel, LCM – DEC VAX 11-780-5 – 01, CC BY-SA 3.0

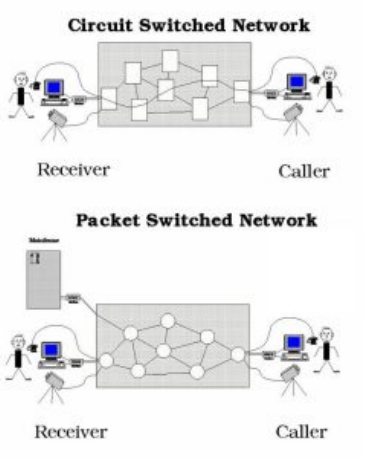
From its early days as a military-only network to its current status as a primary global communication platform, the internet has evolved rapidly. Yet, two elements have stayed constant. First, the internet's design reflects a need for

persistence—a legacy of the Cold War. To ensure communication could withstand a large-scale attack, engineers moved away from a hub-and-spoke model (where a single central location controls all traffic) toward a decentralized web . In this model, information is broken into packets that can travel along multiple paths to reach their destination. Even if several nodes—connection points in the web—are destroyed, the data reroutes.

Second, the internet relies on protocols, or shared rules of communication. Much like the etiquette of a telephone call (saying "hello" and "goodbye"), computers require strict, logical rules to exchange data without errors. While these technical rules define how the internet speaks today, computer scientists did not develop them in a vacuum; instead, they forged them in the high-stakes environment of 20th-century geopolitical tension. To understand why the industry prioritizes decentralization and unbreakable protocols today, look back to the mid-1960s, when the threat of nuclear conflict forced a radical rethinking of how human knowledge is stored and shared

.

The History of the Internet



Source: Sajidur89, PK Switched Vs Circuit Switched , CC BY-SA 3.0.

The resilience of information on the internet stems from a military and scientific principle designed to survive catastrophe: decentralization. In the early 1960s, researcher Paul Baran of the RAND Corporation conceptualized a network capable of sustaining communication even during a nuclear strike. He proposed a technology known as **packet switching**, which functions much like breaking a long letter into several individual postcards. Each postcard (or packet) contains a piece of the message and the final destination address, allowing them to travel independently.

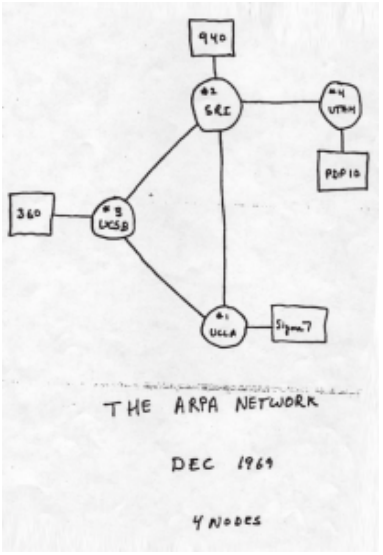
This was a radical departure from the traditional hub-and-spoke model. In a circuit-switched telephone system, an operator (the hub) had to create a direct, continuous physical connection between two people (the spokes). If the central hub were destroyed, the entire network would fail. In contrast, a decentralized web allows packets to navigate through a vast

grid of interconnected nodes. If one path is blocked or a node is destroyed, the packets find an alternate route.

During the Cold War, the U.S. military grew concerned about a nuclear attack destroying the hub in its hub-and-spoke model. With this new web-like model, a secure voice transmission would be more likely to endure a large-scale attack. A web of data pathways could still transmit secure voice packets, even if a few nodes—places where the web of connections intersected—were destroyed. Only through the destruction of all the nodes in the web could the data traveling along it disappear entirely—an unlikely event in the case of a highly decentralized network.

This decentralized network could only function through standard communication protocols. Just as individuals use specific protocols when communicating over a telephone—"hello," "goodbye," and "hold on for a minute"—any machine-to-machine communication must also use protocols. These protocols constitute a shared language that enables computers to communicate clearly and efficiently. Unlike English, where both nonverbal communication and context help parties understand the meaning of polysemous words like "rat" and "watch," computer language lacks such nuances.

The Building Blocks of the Internet



Drawn by computer scientist Larry Roberts in the late 1960s, the original sketch of the ARPANET outlined a simple four-node network topology connecting university mainframes through Interface Message Processors, establishing the conceptual foundation for the modern internet. **Source**: DARPA, A sketch of the ARPANET in December 1969 , public domain.

The birth of the networked world occurred in 1969—the same year as

the Apollo 11 moon landing. This early network, called ARPANET, consisted of just four hosts: UCLA, Stanford, UC Santa Barbara, and the University of Utah. By 1973, the U.S. Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) began refining protocols that would enable these isolated islands of computers to communicate more reliably across a distributed network.

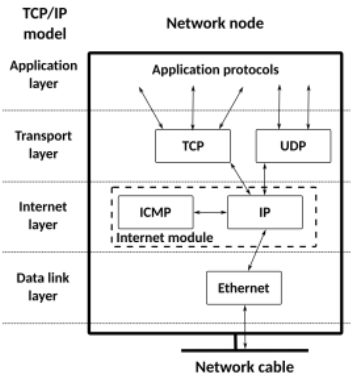
The breakthrough came with packet switching. In traditional communication, computers transmitted data as an unbroken stream of ones and zeros. This constant stream was highly susceptible to **noise** or electronic interference. Imagine a telephone call where static cuts out a single word: "Meet me [static] the restaurant." While a human can infer the missing word is "at," a computer cannot, so the machine would characterize the message as corrupted.

Packet-switching solves this by breaking data into small, numbered bundles. Each packet contains extra information that allows the receiving computer to verify its integrity. If a packet arrives damaged, the system requests that the specific piece be resent. This makes transmission faster, more secure, and remarkably resilient to errors.

For this system to work globally, every device needs a unique identifier: an **Internet Protocol** (IP) address. Think of an IP address like a physical home address. Much like a college campus might have one global mailing address but thousands of internal student mailboxes, the internet uses a nested structure. A single global IP address can serve as a gateway

for an entire network of local devices, enabling the system to support the tens of billions of connected devices active across the global network.

TCP/IP acts like the glue that holds these addresses together. As proposed in a 1974 paper, the Transmission Control Protocol (TCP) acts "like a postal service." IP handles addressing and routing, ensuring the package knows which path to take to reach its destination. TCP handles the reliability. It acts as a digital auditor, verifying for errors, ensuring packets are reassembled in the correct order, and confirming the data reached its destination intact.



Source: Michel Bakni creator QS:P170,Q81411358, Basic TCP-IP node-en, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Today, this infrastructure has grown from a handful of researchers to a global phenomenon connecting over 5.5 billion people worldwide. While the internet may seem invisible, it is a massive, physical reality of interconnected nodes—from smartphones in our pockets to undersea fiber-optic cables—all speaking the same language, TCP/IP.

You've Got Mail: The Beginnings of the Electronic Mailbox

In the earliest days of computing, sending a message was a local affair. Initially, people would record electronic messages within a single mainframe computer system. Each person working on the computer would have a personal folder, so sending that person a message required nothing more than creating a new document in that person's folder, much like leaving a note on someone's desk, so that the person would see it when they logged onto the computer.



Ray Tomlinson. **Source**: Andreu Veà, WiWiW.org, Ray Tomlinson (cropped), CC BY-SA 3.0.

However, as networks began linking separate computers, a method was needed to enable users to communicate with others on different machines. In 1971, computer programmer Ray Tomlinson

developed the naming system still used today. He chose the @ symbol to separate the user's name from the specific host or server where their mailbox lived.

Under this standard, an address like name@gmail.com tells the internet to find the gmail.com server and deliver the data packet to the name folder. This simple, open standard catalyzed the internet's rapid growth by offering an application that everyone—from scientists to government officials—wanted to use.

Email transitioned from a specialized tool to a household utility in the 1990s and early 2000s. Early Internet Service Providers (ISPs) like America Online (AOL) bundled email with dial-up access. The Webmail revolution followed, led by services like Hotmail and Yahoo! Mail, which offered free addresses accessible from any browser.

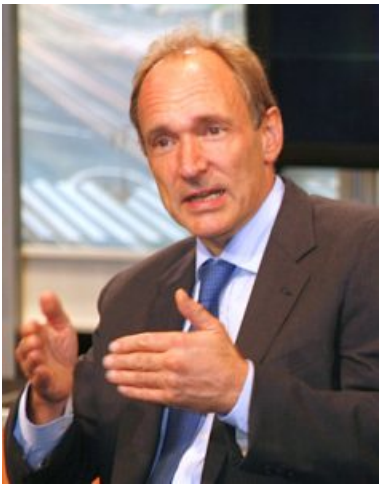
The most significant shift occurred in 2004 with the launch of Gmail. At a time when most providers limited users to a few megabytes of storage—requiring people to delete old messages constantly—Gmail offered a full gigabyte of free space. Today, cloud-integrated email services offer tens of gigabytes of storage, allowing users to treat their inboxes as searchable, permanent archives of their lives and careers.

Email fundamentally changed the speed of global communication, virtually eliminating the cost barriers of international snail mail. However, its role continues to shift. While it remains the official record for business and legal correspondence, some

informal, high-speed communication has shifted to instant messaging and collaboration platforms such as Slack and Teams.

Furthermore, while email replaced the personal letter, the growth of e-commerce giants like Amazon has actually increased the reliance on physical shipping services. While people use the postal service less frequently to send words, they rely on it more than ever to deliver the physical goods they purchase through the digital interfaces that email helped build.

Hypertext: A New Language for Computers

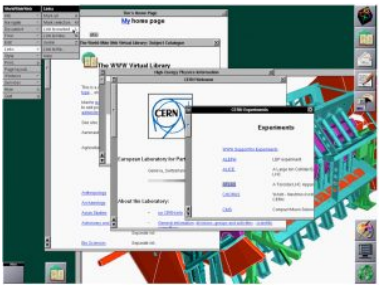


Tim Berners-Lee. **Source**: John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Tim Berners-Lee-Knight-crop , CC BY-SA 2.0.

In 1989, Tim Berners-Lee , a graduate of Oxford University and a software engineer at CERN (the European particle physics laboratory), conceived the idea of developing a new protocol to share documents and information across the CERN network. Instead of transferring regular text-based documents, he created a new language called Hypertext Markup Language (HTML). The last word, hypertext, describes text that extends beyond the boundaries of a single document. Hypertext can include links to other documents (hyperlinks), text-style formatting, images, and a wide variety of components.

This new language required a new communication protocol so that computers could interpret it; Berners-Lee decided on the name Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP). Through HTTP, users can send hypertext documents from one

computer to another for interpretation by a browser, which converts the HTML files into readable web pages. The browser Berners-Lee created, called the World Wide Web, served as both a browser and an editor, allowing users to view other HTML documents and create their own.



Tim Berners-Lee's first web browser also functioned as a web page editor.

Modern browsers, like Google Chrome, Apple Safari, and Microsoft Edge, primarily allow users to browse content; companies now market complex web design software, though even a functional page can be written entirely in a basic program like Windows Notepad. The adoption of specific protocols by the most common browsers explains why simple tools can create web pages. Because Microsoft Edge, Firefox, Apple Safari, Chrome, and other browsers all interpret the same code in more or less the same way, creating web pages is as simple as learning how to speak the language of these browsers.

In 1991, the same year Berners-Lee created his web browser, the Internet service Q-Link changed its name to America Online (AOL for short). This service would eventually grow to employ over 20,000 people, enabling Internet access (and, critically, making it simple) for anyone with a telephone line. Although the web in 1991 looked and performed differently

from what it does today, AOL's software allowed its users to create communities based on just about any subject, and it only required a dial-up modem—a device that connects any computer to the Internet via a telephone line—and a telephone line.

In addition, AOL incorporated two technologies—chat rooms and Instant Messenger—into a single program (along with a web browser). Chat rooms allowed many users to type live messages to a virtual room full of people, while Instant Messenger allowed two users to communicate privately via text-based messages. AOL brought all these once-disparate programs together into a single, user-friendly bundle. Although AOL later became disparaged for customer service issues, such as its users' inability to deactivate their service, it played an instrumental role in bringing the Internet to mainstream users

.

In contrast to AOL's proprietary services, users needed to access the World Wide Web through a standalone web browser. First came the Mosaic program, which quickly gained popularity because it was free and offered features that are now integral to the web.



The National Center for Supercomputing Applications at the University of Illinois released Mosaic, the world's first internet browser. **Source**: Charles Severance, NCSA Mosaic Browser Screenshot, CC0 1.0.

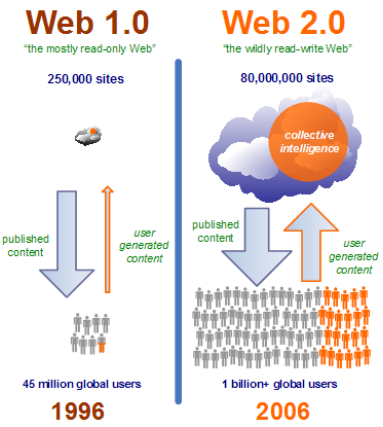
Mosaic introduced features like bookmarks, which let users save the location of specific pages without needing to remember them, and images, which made the web more usable for many people.

Although developers have not updated Mosaic since 1997, those who worked on it went on to create Netscape Navigator, an extremely popular browser during the 1990s. AOL later acquired Netscape and discontinued the Navigator browser in 2008 after losing market share to Microsoft's preloaded Internet Explorer. However, Netscape had converted its Navigator software into the open-source Mozilla Firefox. While Firefox remains a steadfast choice for users prioritizing privacy and independent web standards, it faces a steep competitive landscape dominated by

Google Chrome and browsers built on Google's open-source Chromium engine.

By basing their software on Chromium, browsers like Microsoft Edge and Opera benefit from Chrome's speed and vast library of extensions, but they also reinforce a monoculture where Google's technical standards dictate the structure of the Internet. Consequently, Firefox stands as the last major browser with its own independent engine (Gecko), fighting for relevance against a tide of rivals that come pre-packaged with operating systems or rely on the foundational code of their most significant competitor.

For Sale: The Web 1.0



Source: Andre Pan, Web 1.0 vs Web 2.0, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

As the World Wide Web became a more accessible, less moderated alternative to proprietary services like AOL, the internet entered a gold rush era often called Web 1.0. This period, roughly spanning the 1990s, was characterized by a read-only web, in which companies used the internet's global reach to

broadcast information and sell products in ways never before seen.

During this dot-com boom, it seemed as if any startup with a .com suffix could attract millions in investment. However, many of these companies lacked sustainable business plans. Alan Greenspan, then-chairman of the U.S. Federal Reserve, famously labeled this era as one of "irrational exuberance." Investors poured money into companies like eToys.com that had never turned a profit, operating on the dangerous belief that traditional economic rules no longer applied to the New Economy. Though eToys' stock quadrupled on the day it went public in 1999, it filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in 2001.

The bubble burst in 2000, leading to the dot-com crash. Thousands of companies went bankrupt, and market growth evaporated almost overnight. Yet, a few resilient businesses survived by solving the trust gap of the early internet. eBay, for instance, revolutionized e-commerce by creating a peer-to-peer auction system that made sending money to strangers commonplace.

Other startups, such as TheGlobe.com, pioneered social networking but failed to solve the profitability problem. These early sites relied on static advertising—the same banner ad shown to every visitor—which was expensive and often ignored.

The failure of the early dot-coms paved the way for a more sophisticated economic model. Instead of showing the same ad to everyone, Google revolutionized the web with AdSense,

which used algorithms to match ads to the specific content of a page. Today, this has evolved into programmatic advertising , where AI analyzes thousands of data points about a user's history and location to serve a hyper-targeted ad in milliseconds.

This transition solved the profitability problem that had plagued early social networks like Usenet and theGlobe.com. However, it also introduced a new media paradigm: if the service is free, the user's data becomes the product. This radical thinking regarding revenue would eventually lead to the rise of the modern data-driven social media giants.

How Did We Get Here? The Late 1970s, Early 1980s, and Usenet



A graphical interpretation of the "Big Nine" hierarchies on Usenet. **Source**: Benjamin D. Esham / Wikimedia Commons, Usenet Big Nine, CC BY-SA 2.5.

Almost as soon as TCP began to stitch disparate networks together, former DARPA scientist Larry Roberts founded Telenet, the first commercial packet-switching service. By 1977, the invention of the dial-up modem, combined with the market debut of personal computers like the Apple II, allowed individuals to transmit data over standard telephone lines. While the official Internet remained primarily within academic and military circles, these tools enabled a growing community of computer hobbyists to build their own informal networks.

This hobbyist expansion led directly to the creation of Usenet. In 1979, University of North Carolina graduate students Tom Truscott and Jim Ellis linked three computers to share messages using a set of scripts. This system functioned as an electronic community bulletin board, allowing anyone with access to post topics or replies in specialized categories,

called newsgroups. Unlike the centralized proprietary services that would follow, Usenet was explicitly decentralized and non-hierarchical.

The founders and participants outlined the philosophy of the network in a famous document titled "What is Usenet? " This document says, "Usenet is not a democracy...there is no person or group in charge of Usenet ...Usenet cannot be a democracy, autocracy, or any other kind of '-acy." This decentralized nature made Usenet a powerful tool for global collaboration. Users could join specific groups, such as those dedicated to kite flying or programming, to solve niche problems by leveraging collective knowledge from people around the globe. This era marked the first time that social connectivity and collaborative problem-solving became possible on a worldwide scale, independent of geographic boundaries. "I was able to join rec.kites and collectively people in Australia and New Zealand helped me solve a problem and get a circular two-line kite to fly," one user told the United Kingdom's *Guardian*.



Cult webcomic xkcd commemorated the end of Geocities by transforming its site into the mid/late 90s style of the transformational internet service. **Source**: secretlondon123, xkcd commemorates the end of Geocities, CC BY-SA 2.0.

GeoCities: The Rise and Fall of the Homesteaders

In 1995, David Bohnett and John Rezner launched GeoCities . This service allowed users, referred to as homesteaders, to create free personal web pages within themed communities. In exchange for free hosting, GeoCities placed a small advertising banner at the top of each page. The site organized these communities around specific interests; for instance, the Broadway neighborhood hosted sites about live theater, while fans of philosophy and education could explore Athens.

The concept of topical organization was a visual evolution of the text-based Usenet system. In Usenet, a newsgroup like alt.rec.kites followed a strict hierarchy: the “alt” (alternative)

category, the "rec" (recreation) sub-category, and the specific "kites" topic. GeoCities adopted a similar organization but allowed for much more than just text. However, early web developers faced extreme constraints. Each user was typically limited to only two megabytes of space. To save room, users relied on standardized graphics—such as Under-Construction animations and mailbox icons—hosted on the central GeoCities servers. These images became so pervasive that they now serve as the foundational visual language of the early web.

GeoCities used a freemium model, offering basic services for free while charging for premium features such as increased storage or e-commerce capabilities. While this model helped the site grow into the third-most-visited destination on the internet, it faced challenges after the dot-com crash. Yahoo! acquired GeoCities for $3.6 billion in 1999, but as the web moved toward the more interactive, social-media-driven era of Web 2.0, personal homepages fell out of favor. On October 26, 2009, Yahoo! shut down the service worldwide except in Japan, prompting a massive community effort by digital archivists to save millions of pages of internet history before they were permanently deleted.

Today, diversifying revenue remains a primary concern for internet businesses. From digital subscription models and creator monetization tools to integrated social shopping platforms on YouTube and TikTok, modern websites rely on diverse revenue streams to sustain global infrastructure costs.



Source: Today Testing (For derivative), Social Media Marketing Strategy, CC BY-SA 4.0.

The Birth of Social Media and How It Transformed the Internet

The growth of social media led to Web 2.0, a fundamental shift in how the internet was used and designed. The internet moved away from featuring static, one-way information pages toward a participatory, interactive web. While Web 1.0 functioned like a digital encyclopedia where users primarily consumed content created by professionals, Web 2.0 turned the internet into a platform where the users themselves became the primary creators of content. This era introduced technologies that enabled real-time collaboration, social interaction, and user-generated media. Concepts such as

liking, commenting, tagging, and sharing—features now considered standard—originated during this period, as developers created tools that prioritized community and human connection over simple data retrieval.

The flexible, open protocols of the internet have allowed the medium to weave itself into the fabric of daily life. The internet influences everything from morning routines—such as accessing hyper-local news from the other side of the globe—to methods of collaboration in decentralized work environments. This medium has fundamentally altered three pillars of human communication, each triggering profound shifts in social connectivity: the velocity of information, the staggering volume of data available, and the democratization of publishing. This final pillar allows any individual to share ideas with a global audience without the need for a traditional gatekeeper, such as a newspaper editor or book publisher.

One of the most transformative shifts in this landscape occurred through the rise of social networking. Platforms have moved social interaction from a series of private, direct exchanges into a public or semi-public performance. Through services like Instagram or TikTok, users engage with the visual lives of peers in real time; through blogs and newsletters, individuals digest the specialized expertise of strangers; and through platforms like Facebook or LinkedIn, people maintain dormant ties with hundreds of acquaintances, preserving social capital that would have previously faded over time.



Friendster was a pioneering social networking service that popularized connecting with friends online, paving the way for the modern social media era before rapidly losing its dominance to rivals like Myspace and Facebook. **Source**: davemc500hats, friendster, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Before the dominance of modern platforms, a series of influential pioneers established the blueprints for digital interaction. Friendster, launched in 2002, represents the first major success in the social networking space. It introduced the concept of the social graph, allowing users to see how they were connected to others through a chain of mutual friends. While it initially grew at an unprecedented rate, technical instability and a rigid insistence on real-name profiles eventually led users to seek alternative platforms.

In 2003, MySpace capitalized on Friendster's shortcomings by offering a more flexible, creative environment. Unlike its predecessor, MySpace allowed pseudonymity and gave users unprecedented control over their profiles' aesthetics. Through basic HTML and CSS, homesteaders could customize backgrounds, embed music players, and arrange their Top 8 friends. This focus on self-expression made MySpace a cultural powerhouse, particularly for the music industry, where it served as the primary launchpad for independent artists.

During this same era, other niche pioneers emerged, such as Orkut, which found massive localized success in international markets like Brazil and India. LinkedIn also launched during this window, proving that the social networking model could be successfully adapted for professional utility rather than just social entertainment.

These pioneers proved that the value of the internet was shifting away from the information itself and toward the people accessing it. While many of these early sites eventually faded due to corporate mismanagement or the rise of Facebook, they established the core mechanics of the interactive age: the profile, the friend request, and the public wall.

In recent years, the definition of social media has expanded beyond simple profile pages to encompass a vast array of participatory apps driven by algorithmic recommendation engines, short-form video streaming, and real-time interaction. These services utilize complex data models to predict user preferences and maximize platform engagement.

The Evolution of Major Social Media Platforms

SixDegrees.com



Source: Six Degrees, SixDegrees.com logo, public domain.

Launched in 1997 by Andrew Weinreich, SixDegrees.com is widely recognized by internet historians as the first modern social media platform. Named after the "six degrees of separation" concept, the site allowed users to create personal profiles, list friends, and browse member networks across first-, second-, and third-degree connections. While previous digital services featured message boards or online chat rooms, SixDegrees was the first to combine profile creation with explicit friend lists. At its peak, the platform attracted approximately 3.5 million registered users. However, because late-1990s internet infrastructure was slow and relatively few people had digital photos or persistent connections, engagement remained limited, and the site shut down in 2001.

Friendster



Source: Basavarajtalwar, Friendster logo, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Friendster brought social networking into mainstream culture. Founded in 2002 by Jonathan Abrams, the site was designed as a tool for social discovery, dating, and event planning. Friendster allowed users to expand their real-world social circles by connecting with friends of friends. Within months of launching, the service grew to millions of users, demonstrating the massive public appetite for online social networking. Despite its early popularity, Friendster struggled to maintain server infrastructure during periods of rapid user growth. Technical slowdowns and rigid site policies regarding user pseudonymity caused many members to migrate to newer alternatives.

LinkedIn



Source: EremRey, LinkedIn, CC0 1.0.

Reid Hoffman and members of PayPal's founding team launched LinkedIn in May 2003, which introduced social networking to the professional realm. Rather than focusing on social entertainment or personal identity, LinkedIn served as an online resume platform, professional networking directory, and career development channel. By allowing professionals to connect with colleagues, search for employment opportunities, and establish business credentials, LinkedIn established a distinct niche that shielded it from the direct competition that displaced early consumer-oriented networks. Today, it remains one of the longest-running major social media platforms on the web.

Myspace



Source: ZyMOS, Myspace logo, CC0 1.0.

Myspace quickly became the dominant social network of the mid-2000s. Created in 2003 by Chris DeWolfe and Tom Anderson, Myspace differentiated itself by offering users extensive profile customization through HTML and CSS code, allowing members to embed custom backgrounds, auto-playing music tracks, and curated friend rankings. The platform became an essential hub for music discovery, launching the careers of numerous independent bands and artists. Between 2005 and 2008, Myspace was the most visited social media website in the world. However, excessive ad clutter, complex profile layouts, and a failure to transition effectively to mobile devices led to a steep decline as users migrated to simpler alternatives. Current owners Tim and Chris Vanderhook hope to revitalize the platform by deemphasizing algorithmic feeds.

Facebook



Source: Facebook, Logo de Facebook, CC BY-SA 4.0

Founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg and his college roommates at Harvard University, Facebook initially operated as an exclusive social directory for university students. Unlike Myspace, Facebook enforced a standardized, clean design and relied on real-name verification. After expanding to high schools and corporate networks, Facebook opened to the general public in 2006. The introduction of the "News Feed" in 2006 fundamentally transformed social media from static profile pages into a real-time, algorithmic stream of friend activity and shared content. Facebook eventually grew into the largest social network in history, forming the flagship platform of Meta.

YouTube

Former PayPal employees



Source: YouTube, YouTube social white square (2024), public domain.

Chad Hurley, Steve Chen, and Jawed Karim launched the video-sharing website in 2005. YouTube revolutionized the internet by democratizing video publishing. Before YouTube, hosting and embedding video on web pages required specialized software, high hosting costs, and complex file conversions. YouTube eliminated these technical hurdles by offering free, browser-based video uploads and simple embed tools. Acquired by Google in 2006, YouTube evolved from a platform for home video clips into a global media landscape featuring creator economies, professional streaming, news distribution, and independent broadcasting.

Reddit



Source: sandiskplayer34, Reddit App Icon, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Founded in 2005 by Steve Huffman and Alexis Ohanian, Reddit introduced a forum-based social network organized into specialized interest communities known as subreddits. Rather than centering user relationships around personal identities or follower lists, Reddit relies on a crowdsourced voting system where members submit text, links, and images and upvote or downvote them. This structure allowed user consensus to dictate information visibility, turning Reddit into an influential incubator for internet culture, niche discussion, and real-time community information. Over the years, the platform expanded into a massive public directory of human knowledge and discourse, hosting hundreds of millions of active users who generate discussions on virtually every topic imaginable. At the same time, this decentralized design presented unique content moderation challenges, prompting Reddit to implement evolving policies and dedicated volunteer

moderation teams to balance open expression with community safety.

Twitter / X

Twitter popularized microblogging by restricting messages to 140 characters.



Source: Sawyer Merritt, X (current owner), X-Logo-Round-Color, public domain.

Launched in 2006 by Jack Dorsey, Biz Stone, Evan Williams, and Noah Glass

, it was designed around mobile SMS constraints. Twitter enabled users to broadcast real-time, public updates. Features pioneered by its community—such as hashtags for categorizing topics and retweets for redistributing content—became standard tools across digital media. Twitter became the primary social platform for breaking news, political discourse, and live event commentaries

. Following its acquisition by Elon Musk in 2022, the platform

underwent significant structural changes and was officially rebranded as X in 2023.

Instagram



Source: Instagram, Instagram logo 2022, public domain.

Created in 2010 by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger , Instagram capitalized on the rapid growth of smartphones equipped with digital cameras. Built as a mobile-first, photo-sharing app, Instagram allowed users to apply artistic filters to square photographs and instantly post them to a streamlined feed. Its simple, aesthetic-driven interface attracted tens of millions of users within months. Meta (then Facebook) acquired Instagram in 2012 for $1 billion. Over time, Instagram expanded beyond photo sharing to include Stories, direct messaging, in-app shopping, and short-form video through Reels. This continuous evolution transformed the platform into a cornerstone of influencer marketing, digital commerce, and modern internet culture. Today, Instagram remains one of the world's most dominant social networks, shaping visual trends and everyday communication for over two billion active users.

Snapchat

Launched in 2011 by Evan Spiegel, Bobby Murphy, and Reggie Brown, Snapchat introduced temporary, ephemeral communication. Unlike previous platforms where posts remained permanently attached to a public profile,



Source: Lrz091!, Snapchat-logo-svgrepo-com, CC BY 4.0.

Snapchat photos and videos disappeared seconds after being viewed. This design encouraged spontaneous, informal sharing among younger demographics who sought alternatives to permanent, curated digital records. Snapchat also pioneered "Stories"—twenty-four-hour public posts—and advanced augmented reality facial filters, both of which were later adopted across competing social platforms.

TikTok



Source: Zakiwarner, Tiktok logo, CC0 1.0

TikTok was launched internationally by Chinese tech company ByteDance in 2017 following its integration with Musical.ly. It shifted social media away from personal social graphs toward algorithmic interest graphs. Centered on vertical, short-form video clips, TikTok's recommendation algorithm analyzes user interaction signals in real time to serve tailored content via the "For You" feed. This structure enabled creators to reach millions of viewers without established follower bases. TikTok's explosive growth altered media consumption habits globally, prompting established platforms to adopt similar vertical video formats. To address national security and data privacy concerns, U.S. legislation mandated that ByteDance sell TikTok's American operations to a U.S. entity or face a nationwide ban. The deadline passed after TikTok's legal challenges failed, resulting in its American assets being acquired by a coalition of U.S. investors so the app could continue operating in the country.

Historical Eras of the Interactive Web

The evolution of the interactive web over recent decades reflects a continuous movement toward persistent, AI-infused infrastructure that mediates modern communication. This trajectory can be understood through key technological movements.



Steve Jobs displaying the iPhone 4. The iPhone revolutionized mobile technology by popularizing the multi-touch smartphone interface, ultimately reshaping global communications, app ecosystems, and everyday digital culture. **Source**: Matthew Yohe, Steve Jobs Headshot 2010-CROP, CC BY-SA 3.0.

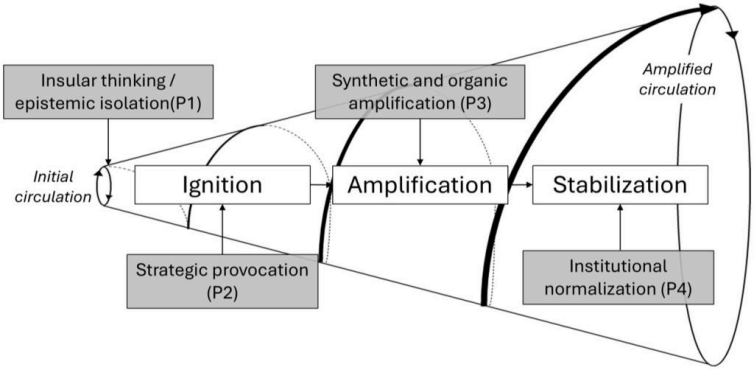
The Mobile-First Revolution

Between 2010 and 2014, the primary gateway to the internet shifted from desktop computers to smartphones, catalyzed by the iPhone's release in 2007 and the

launch of the first Android phone the following year. This always-on connectivity and faster 3G and 4G networks gave rise to ephemeral media, popularized by Snapchat. Unlike the permanent archives of Facebook or blogs, ephemeral media featured content that disappeared after viewing, more closely mimicking the spontaneity of face-to-face conversation. This era established the mobile app as the dominant interface for digital life.

The Great Platform Centralization

As social media became central to global communication, a period of massive corporate consolidation occurred. Large tech conglomerates—primarily Meta (parent company of Facebook , Instagram, and WhatsApp) and Alphabet (parent company of Google)—acquired rising competitors to secure dominance across global social graphs and digital messaging infrastructures.



A framework that conceptualizes social media echo chambers as socio-technical engagement machines: provocative content ignites reactions, platforms/bots amplify them, and institutions stabilize the narrative for offline publics. **Source**: Carlos Diaz Ruiz, Echo chamber dynamics on social media, CC BY 4.0.

The Crisis of Truth and the Echo Chamber

By 2016, the social costs of algorithmic curation became impossible to ignore. Because platforms prioritized engagement to drive ad revenue, their algorithms often amplified polarizing or inflammatory content. This led to the formation of echo chambers, where users were shielded from opposing viewpoints. The 2016 U.S. Election and the COVID-19 pandemic served as global case studies on how misinformation could spread faster than verified facts, leading to the first major push for large-scale content moderation and digital fact-checking.

The Rise of the Interest Graph

In 2018, the launch of TikTok in global markets signaled a shift away from the social graph (seeing what friends posted) toward the interest graph (seeing what an algorithm generated based on personal interests). This forced a total redesign of the interactive web; established giants like YouTube and Instagram pivoted to vertical, short-form video (Shorts and Reels) to compete with TikTok's highly addictive, behavior-based recommendation engine.

The AI and Synthetic Media Era

Beginning in 2023, the rapid integration of generative AI models (such as ChatGPT and Gemini) introduced a dynamic layer to the participatory web. For the first time, digital content creation no longer required direct human production. The rise of synthetic media—including AI-generated text, imagery , audio, and deepfake videos—has challenged traditional concepts of digital authenticity, shifting online environments into spaces populated by both human users and synthetic automated systems.

The Push for Decentralization

In response to platform centralization, recent years have seen

renewed interest in open, interoperable networks. The expansion of the Fediverse alongside protocols like ActivityPub and AT Protocol—powering platforms such as Mastodon, Bluesky, and Meta's integrated Threads platform—reflects a partial return to open-source web principles, enabling cross-platform communication and user-managed data controls.

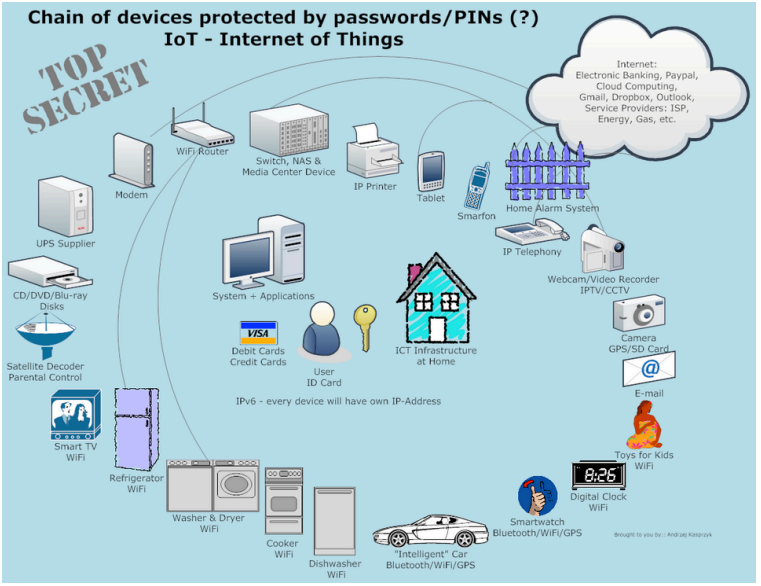
The Era of the Mobile and Algorithmic Web

The transformation of the internet over the last two decades is defined by a shift in how users access information and how that information is curated. While the early web required users to sit at a desk and seek out content, the modern internet is characterized by its portability and ability to find users.

The widespread adoption of smartphones made the internet a constant presence rather than a destination. This mobility enabled the rise of ephemeral and real-time media. Rather than creating permanent neighborhoods as seen in previous decades, platforms began to prioritize disappearing content and short-form video. This shift reflected a change in human behavior, where the speed of a shared moment became more valuable than the permanence of a personal archive.

Perhaps the most significant innovation in this period was the implementation of the algorithmic feed. In older models of communication, users viewed content chronologically or

by visiting specific sites intentionally. Modern platforms, however, utilize machine learning to analyze trillions of data points—including a user's location, scrolling speed, and past interactions—to predict precisely what will keep them engaged. This has shifted the internet from a search-based to a recommendation-based model, in which the infrastructure itself determines which information reaches the audience.



The Internet of Things refers to the expanding network of physical devices equipped with sensors, software, and connectivity, enabling everyday objects to collect, share, and exchange data seamlessly without human intervention. **Source**: Andrzej Kasprzyk (itring.pl), Chain of home devices (including IoT) with passwords or pin, CC BY 3.0.

Furthermore, the internet has expanded beyond screens to include the Internet of Things. This refers to tens of billions of physical devices—from home thermostats and wearable health monitors to industrial sensors—that are now connected to the global network. These devices constantly exchange data without human intervention, creating a silent layer of the internet that manages everything from global logistics to personal health.

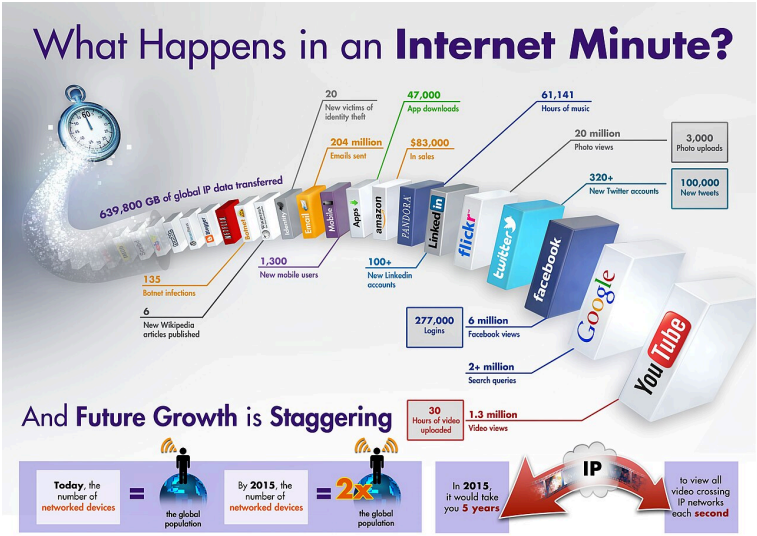
The current state of the internet is a complex ecosystem of massive data centers, high-speed fiber-optic networks, and expanding low-Earth-orbit satellite constellations that provide global connectivity. It has evolved from a simple tool for researchers into a foundational utility of modern civilization, serving as the primary medium for commerce, politics, and human connection.

10.3 THE PARTICIPATORY WEB AND THE EVOLUTION OF ENGAGEMENT

Although early experiments like GeoCities and theGlobe.com eventually faded, the underlying drive for social connectivity persisted and evolved. In the current interactive age, individuals access a wide range of platforms that serve distinct purposes in the digital landscape. These range from traditional social networking sites like Facebook and LinkedIn, which focus on maintaining personal and professional relationships, to content-driven social media such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram, where the emphasis shifts toward global broadcasting and creative expression.

The modern web also supports specialized tools like WordPress and Substack, which allow for deep-form publishing and direct audience engagement through newsletters. A significant trend in this evolution is the emergence of platforms that aim to become **super-apps**. These environments attempt to integrate every facet of digital life—socializing, shopping,

banking, and entertainment—into a single, seamless interface. This move toward all-encompassing ecosystems marks a departure from the fragmented web of the past and represents the current high-water mark of interactive technology.



This 2011 infographic of the internet minute showcases the profound impact of the digital revolution on humanity. **Source**: Intel Free Press, Internet Minute Infographic, CC BY 2.0.

Social Networking and the Participatory Web

Social networking services—such as Meta (Facebook and Instagram), X, LinkedIn, and TikTok—provide platforms for users to curate a digital profile. This profile acts as a gateway

to five core characteristics of social media: user-based profiles, participation, community formation, relationship networking, and high-velocity information exchange. This exchange is often measured in internet minutes, a metric indicating that in any 60-second window, millions of interactions occur simultaneously across the globe.

Bandwidth availability drove the evolution of these services. While early Web 2.0 tools like LiveJournal and Blogger faced limitations such as slow connections, text-only content, and small images, modern fiber-optic networks and 5G enable the video-heavy environments of YouTube, Twitch, and TikTok.

X offers a different approach to social networking, allowing users to post 280-character messages to their followers, making it something of a hybrid of instant messaging and blogging. Users can search the platform openly, so anyone can visit the site and quickly see what other X users have to say about any subject. X has proved helpful to journalists reporting on breaking news and to those highlighting the "best of" the Internet. Businesses have also found X helpful in sharing marketing messages for free. Facebook, initially deployed exclusively to Ivy League schools, has since opened its doors to anyone over 13 with an email account. With the service's explosion and massive growth among older demographics, "My parents joined Facebook" became a common complaint.

As technology evolves, users frequently move to platforms that offer a better interactive experience. However, network

effects often keep users anchored to dominant sites. For an individual or organization with a massive following on X, moving to a competitor means losing a decade of established social capital, making platform loyalty as much about social survival as about technical features. NPR became one of many to challenge this principle when it paused posting on the platform in 2023 over a dispute about the "government-funded media" label applied to its coverage.



Source: Chris Messina, Twitter Logo, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

BLUE CHECKS AND BLACK LOGOS: FROM BIRD TO BRAND X

In October 2022, the social media landscape underwent a seismic shift when Elon Musk completed a $44 billion acquisition of Twitter. While the platform had long struggled with profitability, it occupied a unique cultural position as the world's primary real-time news source. Under Musk's ownership, the company underwent a radical transformation in its corporate culture and brand identity, culminating in the retirement of the iconic bluebird logo in favor of X in July 2023.

Musk's vision for X is rooted in the **super-app model**, which seeks to integrate social media with financial services, video streaming, and artificial intelligence. However, the transition has been defined by significant volatility. Upon taking control, Musk reduced the workforce by roughly 80% to eliminate bureaucracy. This shift to a hardcore engineering culture led to rapid feature updates but also raised concerns regarding platform stability and content moderation.

One of the most contentious changes was the overhaul of the verification system. Historically, the blue

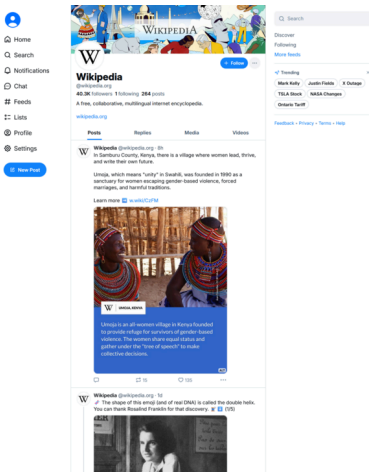
checkmark was a free badge used to verify the identities of public figures. Musk renamed this X Premium, a subscription service in which any user could purchase a checkmark and receive algorithmic priority. While Musk defended this as a way to democratize the platform and combat bots, critics argued it eroded the site's credibility as a reliable news source.

As a self-described "free speech absolutist," Musk also loosened moderation policies and reinstated thousands of banned accounts. This led to a polarized response: while some users praised the expanded range of discourse, many major advertisers suspended spending, concerned that their brands would appear alongside toxic content. This exodus forced X to pivot more aggressively toward data-driven revenue and the integration of Grok, an AI chatbot trained on the platform's real-time data.

The transition from Twitter to X represents a high-stakes experiment in platform governance. It challenges the traditional rules of branding and social media economics. Whether X achieves its goal of becoming an everything app or serves as a cautionary tale of radical disruption remains a central question in the study of the modern interactive web.

LinkedIn serves a distinct purpose by catering to business

professionals. Rather than sharing personal media, users post credentials and professional achievements. This illustrates how the character of a social network depends on the social circle it serves. While a musician uses TikTok or Instagram to promote a new track, a professional uses LinkedIn to manage their career identity.



Bluesky saw its user base explode as millions sought a decentralized alternative following Elon Musk's acquisition and rebranding of Twitter. **Source**: Bluesky, PBC, Bluesky profile on Wikipedia (March 2025) cropped, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Microblogging platforms like X and Bluesky offer a hybrid of instant messaging and broadcasting. Because these public platforms have search features, they have become a vital tool for journalists and citizen activists. During global events, individuals on the ground can bypass traditional news gatekeepers to provide real-time updates. This democratization of information allows the public to receive news directly from the source. However, it also requires users to be more critical of the virality and accuracy of unverified posts.

Modern social media also includes specialized communities like Discord, where interaction happens on private servers rather than in a public square, and Wikipedia, where wikis enable mass-scale collaborative editing. Underpinning much of this experience are the services provided by Alphabet, Google's parent company, which controls both the Chrome browser and YouTube, the world's largest video-sharing platform. This convergence of tools enables a constant, multidirectional conversation that defines the current interactive age.

Blogs, or web logs, represent another pillar of social media. Originally functioning as digital diaries on sites like LiveJournal or Blogger, they provided a platform for anyone to publish thoughts without a traditional editor. Today, this has evolved into the creator economy. While WordPress remains a standard for open-source blogging, many writers have moved toward newsletter models that allow for direct engagement with subscribers.

Most modern media companies have embraced media convergence by integrating these tools into their daily operations. Reporters no longer wait for a nightly broadcast; they provide instant updates via social feeds. This shift enables citizen journalism, where individuals on the ground—such as those witnessing a protest or a natural disaster—can broadcast live updates directly to a global audience. By bypassing traditional gatekeepers and government censors, the

interactive web provides a direct, though often unverified, link to global events.

These tools collectively form the foundation of the modern interactive age. From the encyclopedic collaboration of Wikipedia to the ephemeral, disappearing messages of Snapchat, the focus has shifted entirely toward user-generated content and rapid social interaction.



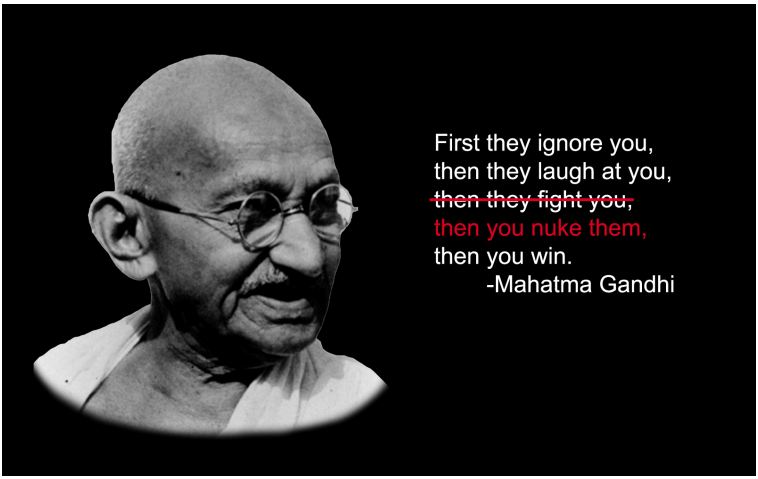
Jimmy Donaldson, known online as MrBeast, transformed digital content creation by turning video virality into an exact science, relying on ultra-high-budget spectacles, meticulous thumbnail optimization, and high-stakes philanthropic giveaways to command hundreds of millions of views consistently. **Source**: Fidias, MrBeast 2022 01, CC BY 3.0.

Going Viral: The Mechanics of Digital Propagation

In the interactive age, media that spreads rapidly from person to person is said to have "gone viral." This phenomenon occurs when content—whether a video, a social movement, or a humorous image—captures collective attention at an exponential rate. While early viral hits were often accidental, modern web engineers engineer virality. Creators like MrBeast (Jimmy Donaldson) have turned the viral loop into a science, often garnering over 100 million views within 24 hours of a video's release. This scale demonstrates the concept of an internet minute, in which massive bandwidth enables the simultaneous streaming of millions of high-definition files to users globally.

The business of virality has shifted from traditional advertising to the creator economy. In the past, a brand might have hired a blogger to write a review; today, businesses partner with influencers who have built direct relationships with their audiences on platforms like TikTok or Twitch. These creators often bypass traditional media gatekeepers entirely, using services like Patreon or Substack to monetize their viral reach through direct fan support. However, this environment remains unpredictable. Viral concepts find themselves immediately subject to **remix culture** (also known as read-write culture), where users create their own versions, spoofs, or duets, often causing the original message to evolve

into something entirely different from what the creator intended.



Before memes were algorithmic, they were born from collective inside jokes like this one: a tribute to the legendary strategy-game glitch that proved sometimes the internet's best humor comes completely by accident. **Source**: Facenapalm, Nuclear Gandhi, CC BY-SA 4.0.

The Evolution of the Internet Meme

Not all viral media is designed for profit; much of it consists of **memes**—cultural ideas or symbols that spread through imitation. While early memes often featured static images with captions, such as lolcats, modern memes are dynamic and multisensory. On platforms like TikTok, a sound or a 15-second audio clip can become a meme in itself, serving as a template for millions of users to add their own visual context. This participation represents a core characteristic of the interactive age, allowing individuals to feel part of a global community by contributing to a shared trend.



The #BlackLivesMatter movement aims to highlight racism, discrimination, and racial inequality experienced by people of color and saw nearly 10 million distinct users tweet the phrase following the death of George Floyd in 2020. **Source**: Becker1999 from Grove City, OH, 03IMG 5743 (50095345741), CC BY 2.0.

Memes also serve as vehicles for social and political power. The rise of the hashtag turned the meme into a tool for

advocacy. Movements like #WhyIStayed and #WhyILeft demonstrated how a single viral phrase could aggregate thousands of disparate voices into a unified narrative, forcing mainstream media and political institutions to address issues that had previously been ignored. #OscarsSoWhite and #BlackLivesMatter reignited discussions about the challenges people of color experienced in the United States, while #MeToo launched a global campaign against sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and rape culture. In this sense, virality embodies the ultimate expression of the participatory web: a decentralized force that can elevate an individual creator to global stardom or a social cause to the forefront of international policy within a single day.

Benefits and Problems of Social Media

The role of social media as a primary information gatekeeper has fundamentally changed how society consumes news. **Algorithmic curation** has fundamentally changed how the internet and social media platforms operate. Rather than users seeking out information, platforms use complex data models to predict and deliver content. This shift enables unprecedented volumes of real-time communication but raises significant concerns about the quality and reliability of the global information ecosystem.

One major benefit of this connectivity is **crowdsourcing**, the practice of harnessing the efforts of a global community to solve problems or report breaking news. Major news organizations now rely on citizen journalists on the scene to provide immediate, unverified footage of events. However, this immediacy has created a crisis for professional journalism. Platform conglomerates like Meta and Alphabet have siphoned advertising revenue from news organizations, often leaving them without the resources for in-depth investigative reporting. This nonstop news cycle encourages rapid reporting over factual verification, making it easier for public relations firms and bad actors to exploit the system.

Critics like Andrew Keen have long warned that the internet risks replacing expertise with a "cult of the amateur." He said, "In our Web 2.0 world, the typewriters aren't quite typewriters, but rather networked personal computers, and the monkeys aren't quite monkeys, but rather Internet users." Keen's concern that young people might struggle to distinguish credible news from unverified blog posts has evolved into a broader debate over media literacy. In an age of deepfakes and AI-generated content, the ability to identify a credible source is no longer just a generational concern but a fundamental requirement for a functioning democracy.

Conversely, defenders of the interactive web argue that these fears often mirror a "generational paranoia" toward technological change. Greg Downey, who runs the

collaborative blog Neuroanthropology, says that fear of kids on the Internet—and social media in particular—can slip into "a 'one-paranoia-fits-all' approach to technological change." He wrote, "A legitimate interest in the possible effects of significant technological change in our daily lives

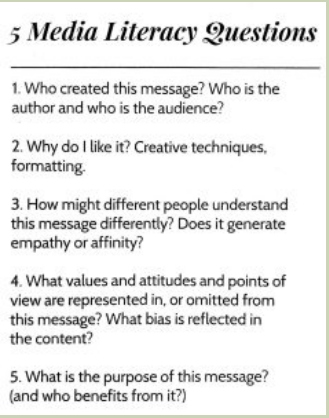
can inadvertently dovetail seamlessly into a 'kids these days' curmudgeonly sense of generational degeneration, which is hardly new." Defenders argue social networking allows individuals with niche interests to build supportive communities that were previously impossible to sustain. Furthermore, platforms have enabled a "narrativization" of life, where users intentionally document and share their experiences to build social capital.

However,

the echo-chamber effect remains a significant downside. By exposing users primarily to opinions they already support, algorithms can reinforce biases and make social compromise more difficult. Additionally, the anonymity and distance provided by the screen can facilitate cyberbullying and harassment, which have the potential to pervade large social networks. Ultimately, the impact of social media is a balance between the democratic potential of universal participation and the systemic risks of a world where information quality is often sacrificed for engagement.

MEDIA LITERACY HANDBOOK: NAVIGATING THE INFORMATION DELUGE

Developing the skills to distinguish between credible reporting and viral misinformation is essential in the modern world. The following strategies provide a framework for evaluating digital content in the interactive age.



Source: Wesley Fryer, 5 Questions for Media Literacy cropped, CC BY 2.0.

1. **Investigate the Source**: Check the About page of a website and look for a

history of professional standards. In the era of the creator economy, verify whether an influencer has a background in the subject matter or primarily entertains.

2. **Check for Lateral Reading**: Instead of staying on a single post, open new tabs to see what other established news outlets or fact-checking sites have said about the same claim. If a viral story appears only on an obscure social media account, it is likely unverified or false.
3. **Analyze the Tone**: Misinformation is often designed to trigger strong emotional responses like anger or fear. If a headline uses clickbait tactics or inflammatory language, it has likely prioritized engagement over accuracy.
4. **Reverse Image Search**: Many viral memes and news stories use real images out of context. Using a reverse image search can reveal if a photo from a current crisis was actually taken years ago during a different event.



Source: University of Salford Press Office, Students in a computer lab, CC BY 2.0.

Education in the Interactive Age

The relationship between social media and education began at the university level, with Facebook initially serving as a directory for Ivy League students. However, as these platforms evolved, a debate emerged regarding their impact on academic performance. Early studies, such as those conducted by researchers at Ohio State University, suggested a correlation between frequent social media use and lower grade point averages

. While these findings do not prove that social media causes

poor grades, they highlight the challenge of continuous partial attention, where the constant influx of notifications competes with the deep focus required for academic success.

Despite these concerns, the interactive web has fundamentally expanded the boundaries of the classroom. The transition from physical textbooks to digital devices and the deployment of high-speed Wi-Fi on school buses have created a rolling study hall environment. This shift extends educational hours beyond the traditional school day, allowing students—particularly those with long commutes or athletic commitments—to utilize travel time for research and collaboration. The accessibility of the participatory web frees learning from its tether to a specific physical location.

In the modern educational landscape, the distinction between social networking and learning has blurred. Many students
utilize platforms like Discord or specialized Slack channels to form peer-led study groups
, effectively crowdsourcing their education. Furthermore, the rise of artificial intelligence and open educational resources has transformed the internet from a static library into an interactive tutor. Students regularly use AI assistants to generate practice problems, explain complex theoretical concepts, or adapt open-license educational materials to their personal learning styles. While critics continue to worry about the potential for digital distraction, technology's presence is

not the primary challenge for modern education; rather, the challenge is developing media literacy—ensuring that students can navigate an information-dense world with the critical thinking skills necessary to distinguish credible instruction from algorithmic noise.

The effectiveness of these tools also depends heavily on infrastructure. The digital divide remains a critical issue; students without reliable home bandwidth or modern devices face significant disadvantages compared to their peers. As education becomes increasingly reliant on the tools of the interactive age, policy has shifted toward ensuring that the benefits of the participatory web are accessible to all learners, regardless of socioeconomic status.



Source: A modified and cropped version of Operations by Nick Youngson, CC BY-SA 3.0, Alpha Stock Images.

The Erosion of Privacy in a Networked World

Social networking provides unprecedented connectivity, yet this transparency often leads to unintended consequences. While early concerns focused on oversharing—such as an employee inadvertently notifying a supervisor of non-work activities—the modern landscape involves a much deeper erosion of the boundary between the private and public self. This era reflects a shift where the digital documentation of personal life has become a cultural standard.

A significant legal challenge in the interactive age is the reasonable expectation of privacy. Legal scholar Kieron O'Hara suggests that as more individuals voluntarily share intimate details of their lives online, the legal threshold for what is considered private begins to lower for everyone. If the majority of a society treats personal data as public currency, it becomes increasingly difficult for the minority to claim a legal right to keep that same data hidden. This creates a systemic decline in privacy that affects even those who are diligent about their digital footprints.

Furthermore, the privacy debate has moved beyond conscious user choices to passive data collection. Every interaction on the participatory web—from how long a user hovers over an image to their geographic location—is harvested to build a **shadow profile**. These profiles are often managed

by third-party data brokers who aggregate information across multiple platforms to predict user behavior. The privacy paradox describes the reality in which users express high levels of concern about their data but continue to use services that require the surrender of that data to access them.

In response to these challenges, new legal frameworks, such as the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), have introduced the right to be forgotten and stricter consent requirements. However, as social media becomes more integrated into professional and social survival, the choice to opt out becomes increasingly illusory. In the interactive age, privacy is no longer a personal setting that can be toggled on or off; it is a complex negotiation between individual rights, corporate profit models, and the evolving social norms of a hyper-connected society.



Source: Stock Catalog, facebook testify Zuckerberg cropped, CC BY 2.0.

THE DEATH OF THE DEFAULT—A CASE STUDY IN FACEBOOK PRIVACY

Facebook has long been the primary battleground for digital privacy. In 2010, founder Mark Zuckerberg famously claimed that privacy was no longer a "social norm," a statement that

preceded a decade of radical shifts in how personal data is handled. This era marked the transition from "Privacy by Default" (where information is hidden until shared) to "Public by Default" (where information is shared until hidden).

In 2009, Facebook introduced third-party applications such as "Which Character Are You?" and "Honesty Box." While these appeared to be simple games, they created a massive app gap. By installing one app, a user unwittingly granted developers access not only to their own profile but also to the private data of all their friends—including political affiliations, religion, and photos. This loophole eventually laid the groundwork for the 2018 Cambridge Analytica scandal, in which a third-party developer exploited Facebook's API to harvest data from 87 million users—most of whom had never authorized the app—to build psychological profiles for political campaigning.

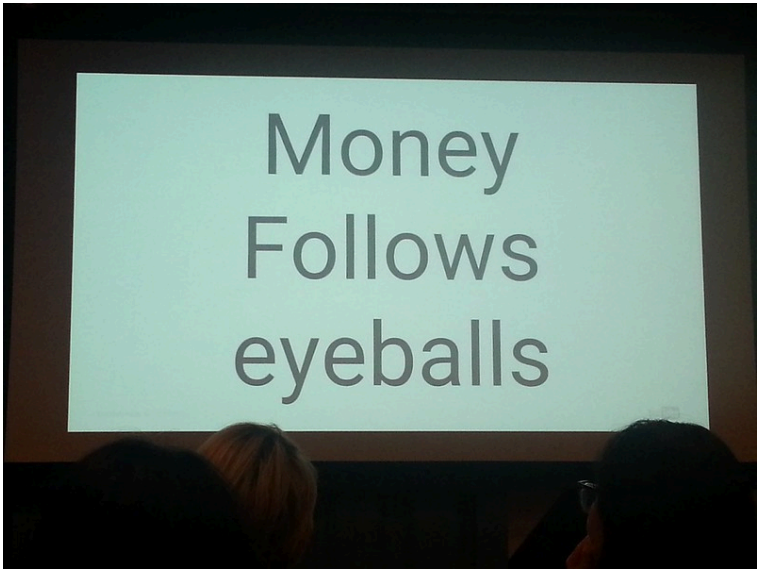
The backlash against these blatant data-collection ploys led to a series of high-profile revisions.

- **2010**: Facebook simplified its privacy dashboard in response to user protests, moving away from complex, multi-page settings.
- **2018-2022**: Under pressure from global regulators, the platform was forced to adopt Privacy Centers and comply with the GDPR, giving users the right to be

forgotten.

- **2026**: Privacy has shifted from a setting to an automated negotiation. Modern tools now use AI to alert users when their data is being harvested to train large language models or when third-party trackers are creating automated shadow profiles behind the scenes.

The ultimate goal of eroding privacy has always been micro-targeting. The more information marketers possess, the more effectively they can deliver a message. What began as a way to sell products has evolved into a tool for influencing social behavior and political outcomes. Today, the reasonable standard of privacy is no longer defined by what a user chooses to post, but by how well they can protect their data from the invisible algorithms tracking them behind the scenes.



The attention economy is an economic framework that treats human attention as a scarce and valuable commodity, driving digital platforms to design increasingly engaging algorithms and interfaces to capture and monetize consumer focus. **Source**: Louisa Mac, presentation attention economy, CC BY 2.0.

Social Media and the New Economy

Social media has fundamentally reorganized global commerce by transforming the "consumer" into a "participant." Early marketing efforts focused on demographic targeting—using age, location, and gender to place ads. However, as younger demographics migrated away from legacy media toward

streaming and social platforms, marketers were forced to move beyond traditional interruptive advertising. Today, commerce is driven by the **attention economy**, where the primary goal is to capture and monetize user engagement through highly personalized, algorithmic feeds.

The influencer (or creator) economy has now bridged the credibility gap that once plagued traditional advertisers. Rather than a brand speaking directly to a consumer, creators leverage their established trust with niche audiences to promote products. This has evolved into **social commerce**, in which platforms like TikTok and Instagram integrate digital storefronts directly into their user interfaces. This seamless experience allows a user to discover, review, and purchase a product without ever leaving the app, fulfilling Mark Zuckerberg's early vision that "nothing influences a person more than a trusted friend." However, that friend is now often a professional content creator.

For social media companies, the user is often the product. The need for reliable revenue has led to the sophisticated harvesting of behavioral data. In 2007, Facebook Beacon faced backlash for privacy violations when it broadcast users' activities, including purchases, to their Facebook friends. That pales in comparison to modern practices, in which platforms use

cross-app tracking to monitor user behavior across the entire web

. They then feed this data into predictive AI models that map

purchasing intent, attention spans, and political leanings with startling accuracy. This shift from "selling ads" to "selling access to predictable behavior" represents the most significant change in commerce since the dawn of the internet.



This hyper-realistic AI-generated image depicting the iconic Hollywood sign engulfed in flames went viral on social media during the 2025 Los Angeles wildfire, sparking widespread public alarm before being debunked as a deepfake, illustrating the growing potential of synthetic media to spread misinformation. **Source**: Unknown author, AI-generated deepfake hoax image of the Hollywood sign during the 2025 California wildfires , cropped, CC0 1.0.

Generative AI, Synthetic Media, and the Automated Web

The emergence of generative artificial intelligence represents a structural pivot in the participatory web, altering the

foundational dynamic of user-generated content. For decades, the interactive web operated on the assumption that digital media—whether text, audio, or video—was created by human beings interacting through digital software. Large language models and multimodal AI systems have disrupted this paradigm by enabling automated systems to produce human-quality prose, synthetic voiceovers, photorealistic imagery, and code at scale. Consequently, the participatory web is transitioning into an environment where human users interact alongside synthetic entities, conversational agents, and algorithmically generated media environments.

This proliferation of synthetic content presents opportunities and structural risks for the digital public sphere. On one hand, generative AI lowers technical barriers to creation, allowing non-programmers to build software applications, writers to produce complex workflows, and visual artists to generate complex media without legacy hardware constraints. On the other hand, the low marginal cost of automated content generation enables mass digital pollution, synthetic engagement manipulation, and the proliferation of deepfake media that can undermine institutional trust. As automated agents take over routine communication tasks and search engines pivot toward generative summaries, the web is increasingly defined by

machine-to-machine data exchanges operating beneath the surface of human digital engagement.

The Fediverse and the Push Toward Decentralized Protocols



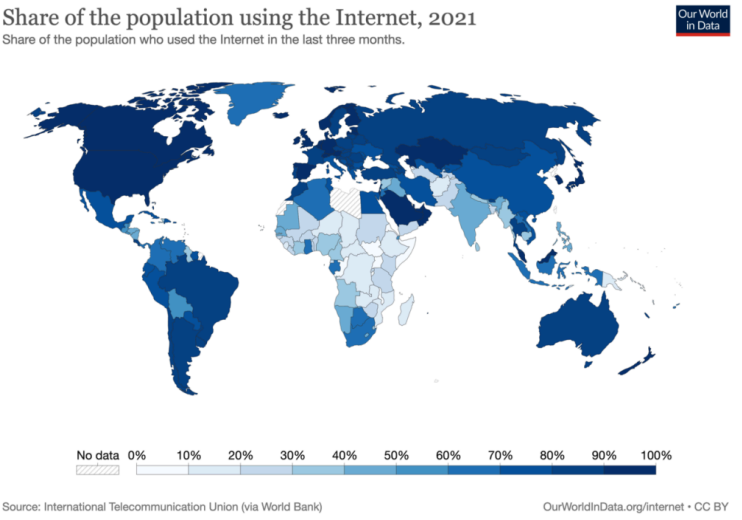
Fediverse logo. **Source**: Eukombos, Fediverse logo proposal, CC0 1.0.

In reaction to corporate platform consolidation and algorithmic lock-in, a major technological movement has emerged centered on open, interoperable protocols. Known collectively as the Fediverse, this architecture relies on open standards like ActivityPub and the AT Protocol to allow users to communicate across separate, independently hosted servers. Unlike closed corporate environments—where a user's social connections, posts, and verification status are trapped within a single platform—decentralized networks allow individuals to carry their identity, follower graphs, and content across different servers and application interfaces.

Platforms such as Mastodon, Bluesky, and Meta's

integrated Threads service illustrate this shift toward federated communication structures. By decoupling the user interface from the underlying network protocol, decentralized networks restore elements of the original open-web architecture. This framework allows communities to establish their own governance rules, moderation standards, and algorithmic feeds rather than relying on a single corporate board. As users and creators seek alternatives to centralized gatekeepers, the tension between walled-garden corporate platforms and open federated protocols represents a primary frontier in the ongoing evolution of the interactive web.

10.4 THE EFFECTS OF THE INTERNET AND GLOBALIZATION ON POPULAR CULTURE AND INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION



Source: Our World in Data,
Share of individuals using the internet, CC BY 4.0.

The name World Wide Web encapsulates its essence. The internet has shattered communication barriers between cultures, a feat that earlier generations could only dream of. Today, individuals can access a multitude of news services from around the world and understand their content with tools like translation software. This connectivity not only facilitates the spread of American culture but also empowers smaller nations to export their own news, entertainment, and even propaganda at a fraction of the cost.

Despite the rise of digital exports from various nations, media and culture remain among the United States' most significant global exports. In 2023, the arts and cultural sector contributed over $1.2 trillion to the U.S. economy, representing approximately 4.2% of the national GDP. This cultural footprint is evident in a substantial trade surplus; the value of American arts exports—including motion pictures, music, and streaming content—exceeded imports by nearly $37 billion in 2023. These figures underscore the continued global demand for American-produced media, even as the interactive age allows for more diverse content to enter the marketplace.

The internet, a catalyst for globalization, has significantly reduced the impact of geographical distances. It enables the outsourcing of specialized labor, such as software development, to teams in distant countries. Despite the thousands of miles that separate them, communication is seamless through tools such as email, instant messaging, and

high-definition video conferencing. The most challenging aspect of setting up an international video conference is often just navigating time zone differences.



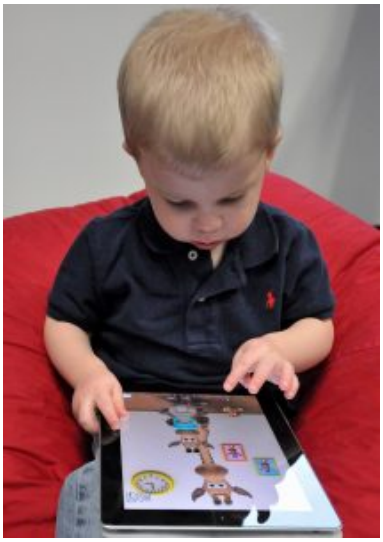
Source: Prosa, Educação sem fronteiras – Conectando saberes e tecnologia através da EaD, CC BY 4.0.

Electronic Media and the Globalization of Culture

The rise of globalization has not only spurred economic growth but has also democratized access to information. At its core, the internet dismantles economic and cultural barriers, fostering instantaneous communication between countries.

This is evident in the ease of access to foreign newspapers or the ability of individuals in previously closed societies to share their experiences with the world at minimal cost.

Despite the rise of digital exports from various nations, American popular culture remains one of the United States' most significant global exports. At the Eisenhower Fellowship Conference in Singapore, U.S. ambassador Frank Lavin noted that American culture is not a monolithic export like Starbucks or MTV, but a "nation of immigrants" that absorbs and then redistributes global influences. This idea of a truly globalized culture—one in which a person can distribute content just as easily as receive it—is now realized through the participatory web.



The term "digital native" describes the generation of people who grew up surrounded by digital technology from an early age, making them naturally fluent with computers, smartphones, and the internet in ways distinct from older generations. **Source**: Intel Free Press, Child with Apple iPad, CC BY-SA 2.0.

For the **digital native**—an individual born during or after the 1980s who has grown up surrounded by digital technology—this globalized environment is a foundational reality. Digital natives often process information more rapidly and favor multitasking, viewing the web as an essential layer of social and professional life rather than a separate tool. This generational shift is most evident in the adoption of hyper-integrated platforms such as WeChat, a super-app in China. WeChat is an indispensable cornerstone of Chinese culture, integrating social media, digital payments, and government services into a single ecosystem. For hundreds of millions of users, WeChat functions as an operating system for daily life, illustrating how

digital connectivity can become inextricably linked to national and cultural identity.

This level of connectivity has also introduced new forms of social coordination known as swarming. **Swarming** refers to the rapid, decentralized coordination of individuals who use digital tools to gather—physically or virtually—around a specific event or cause. Because it is non-hierarchical, swarming allows for the internet minute to transform a local grievance into a global movement. For instance, K-pop fans and TikTok users organized a digital swarm to artificially inflate ticket registrations for a Donald Trump rally in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in June 2020. Users requested thousands of tickets they had no intention of using, which led to significantly lower in-person attendance. Whether used for social justice activism or cultural celebrations, swarming demonstrates how the internet has moved human interaction from static social circles to dynamic, real-time collective action.



Source: citizens4taxjustice, Shareholders to Google: Don't Be Evil, Stop Dodging Taxes cropped, CC BY 2.0.

DON'T BE EVIL: HOW GOOGLE'S STANCE ON CENSORSHIP TESTED GLOBALIZATION

The transmission of entertainment and culture across borders is often impeded by geographical lag, resource scarcity, and state-sponsored censorship. China serves as a primary case study of how the internet both facilitates cultural exchange and enables authoritarian control. As a leading economic power with

more than one billion internet users as of 2026, China's digital landscape is defined by the Great Firewall—a sophisticated system of filters and blocks designed to maintain domestic political stability.

In January 2010, the relationship between Western tech giants and the Chinese government reached a definitive breaking point. Google, operating under the corporate motto "Don't be evil," announced it would no longer censor search results on its Chinese-language engine, Google.cn. Operation Aurora, a series of sophisticated cyberattacks originating from China that targeted Google's corporate infrastructure and the Gmail accounts of Chinese human rights activists, sparked this decision. When negotiations with the Chinese government over censorship failed, Google effectively departed mainland China in March 2010 by redirecting its search traffic to its unfiltered servers in Hong Kong.

Google's departure enabled domestic platforms to achieve total dominance. Baidu became the primary search engine, while the super-app WeChat evolved into an indispensable cultural and economic tool. Because these platforms operate within China's regulatory framework, they subject themselves to the government's real-time monitoring. This has contributed to the rise of a splinternet, in which the

global web has become divided into distinct, incompatible zones with different rules governing speech, data, and truth.

This digital divide has significant implications for political dissidents and marginalized groups. While Google's encrypted servers once provided a layer of protection, the rise of digital authoritarianism has made such safeguards harder to maintain. Governments now use AI-driven surveillance and data analytics to track behavior both online and offline. The 2010 Google-China conflict remains a landmark event because it demonstrated that globalization is not an inevitable or uniform process; rather, it can be halted or redirected by governments that prioritize national control over the free flow of information.



Driven by the decline of traditional print media and the rapid expansion of high-speed internet, online digital news organizations emerged to reshape journalism by delivering real-time coverage, interactive multimedia, and targeted reporting to a global audience. **Source**: Photo by Pexels on Pixabay.

Internet-Only Sources and the New Media Landscape

In 2008, the internet officially overtook print media as a source for national and international news in the United States. This shift signified a watershed moment, signaling a fundamental reorganization of the media industry. While television maintained a significant lead for several years, the gap has closed rapidly, particularly as younger

generations—the digital natives—began to bypass traditional broadcasts entirely in favor of social media feeds and digital-first publications. Nowadays, the internet represents the dominant news medium for nearly all age groups, with over 80 percent of adults receiving news through digital devices.

Legacy news organizations initially struggled to adapt to this shrinking market, often treating their websites as secondary to their print or broadcast products. However, they soon faced competition from a new breed of online-only news sources. These publications do not merely aggregate existing news; they produce original, journalistically viable reporting without the overhead costs of printing presses or broadcast towers. This transition was pioneered by outlets like *Politico*, founded in 2006 by former *Washington Post* reporters. *Politico* demonstrated that an online-only platform could achieve mainstream credibility, eventually stationing reporters on every White House trip and influencing the national political narrative through daily digital columns like Playbook.

The rise of these outlets illustrates media convergence on the internet. Rather than relying on a single format, modern digital news organizations reach audiences through a variety of channels, including email newsletters, podcasts, and social media threads. This has transformed the media from a one-way broadcast into a two-way public forum. The interactive nature of these services, featuring active comment boards and real-

time social media engagement, allows the public to participate in the news cycle as it happens.

However, the democratization of news production has introduced significant challenges. Advertisers have abandoned legacy media outlets in favor of social media. The echo chamber effect—where algorithms show users only information that reinforces their existing biases—has made it increasingly difficult for a shared set of facts to reach the public at large

. Additionally, the low cost of digital publishing has enabled the spread of misinformation. While the internet has empowered digital natives to seek out diverse perspectives, it also requires a higher level of media literacy to distinguish between professional journalism and "fake news" (though the Associated Press advises not to use that term since it actively attempts to undermine public trust in professional journalism) designed to go viral.

This era also saw the emergence of viral marketing as a legitimate tool for cultural influence. A prime example is the 1999 film *The Blair Witch Project*, often cited as the first major motion picture to use the internet as its primary marketing vehicle. By creating a website that presented the film's fictional plot as a real-life mystery, the filmmakers bypassed traditional advertising. They used the early web's capacity for swarming to build a massive, decentralized fan base. This tactic proved that digital buzz could be just as

effective—and far cheaper—than a multi-million dollar television ad campaign.

"LIVE" FROM NEW YORK: THE SHIFT TO ON-DEMAND CULTURAL IMPACT

Traditional entertainment programs have undergone a radical transformation to maintain relevance in the interactive age. *Saturday Night Live* (*SNL*), a program that has historically built its brand around a specific linear broadcast time slot, serves as an excellent example. While the declaration "Live from New York, it's Saturday Night!" remains a



Tina Fey and Jimmy Fallon on "Weekend Update." **Source**: Steve Garfield, @jimmyfallon and Tina Fey on SNL Weekend Update , CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

cultural staple, the internet's anytime, anywhere convenience provides a perfect fit for the show's sketch-comedy format. By releasing individual sketches and its "Weekend Update" news parody on digital platforms immediately after broadcast, the program ensures its content can go viral long after the live episode concludes.

This shift has changed how networks monetize television and how audiences consume it. Platforms like Hulu and Peacock now categorize their offerings as online premium video to distinguish high-production content from amateur uploads. This model offers a legal, centralized hub for viewers to access diverse content—shifting from a Comedy Central parody to an NBC sketch with a single click. For the viewer, this means a more efficient experience: an episode that takes 90 minutes to watch live on television can be reduced to just over an hour online, as shorter, more targeted digital advertisements replace traditional commercial breaks.

Beyond mere convenience, the move to digital platforms has amplified the show's impact on American politics. Because consumers can easily share digital clips, political parodies now reach a global audience far larger than the original broadcast viewership. This phenomenon was famously demonstrated during the 2008 U.S. Presidential election, when

Tina Fey's portrayal of Vice-Presidential candidate Sarah Palin

became so pervasive that it arguably influenced public perception of the candidate's competence—a phenomenon social scientists dubbed the "*SNL* Effect."

This impact intensified over the past two decades as the show utilized the internet to swarm the political conversation. During the 2016, 2020, and 2024 elections, *SNL* sketches were often viewed tens of millions of times on YouTube within forty-eight hours of airing. These digital-first impressions allow the program to act as a real-time satire of the news cycle, effectively shaping the narrative for digital natives who may never watch the show on a traditional television set. In this context, the internet does not just distribute entertainment; it serves as a megaphone, turning localized satire into a national political force.



Source: Photo on Rawpixel. CC0 1.0.

Premium Online Video Content and the Streaming Revolution

The success of early platforms like Hulu indicated a significant demand among internet users for professional content consolidated into a single, user-friendly interface. Unlike typical dot-com startups, Hulu was a joint venture among major media conglomerates, including News Corporation and NBCUniversal (now part of Disney). These companies collaborated to monetize content that was frequently being pirated on amateur sites. A turning point occurred in late 2005, when the *Saturday Night Live* digital short "Lazy Sunday," featuring Andy Samberg and

Chris Parnell, went viral on YouTube. After the video garnered millions of views, NBC demanded its removal and later hosted it on its own platform to capture advertising revenue. This transition marked the beginning of the industry's shift toward controlling digital distribution.

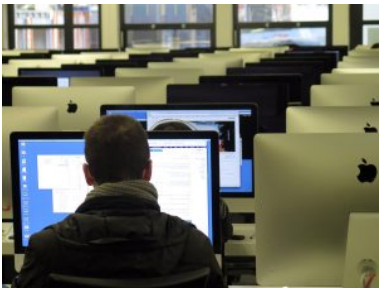
Hulu allowed users to break free from the rigid programming models of broadcast and cable providers. This flexibility proved exceptionally beneficial for "cult" programs that struggled with traditional time slot shifts. Shows such as *Arrested Development* and *30 Rock*, which faced low viewership on linear television, found second lives and growing fan bases through on-demand access. In a historic move in 2008, NBC launched a new season of *30 Rock* on Hulu a full week before its traditional broadcast, signaling that digital audiences had become a priority rather than an afterthought.

The landscape has since evolved from simple ad-supported models to a complex subscription economy. While early services often provided content for free to build an audience, the industry eventually transitioned to the paid subscription model to establish reliable revenue streams. This shift led to the rise of original streaming-only series, in which platforms no longer just hosted network reruns but also became primary producers of high-budget cinema and television. This era effectively ended the cable bundle era, as consumers moved

toward cord-cutting, selecting specific apps and services based on exclusive content.

Modern premium video platforms have also integrated the web's participatory nature. Similar to digital news outlets, these services use sophisticated algorithms to analyze user ratings and viewing habits, creating a two-way street in which the audience's behavior directly dictates which shows are renewed or canceled. This data-driven approach has leveled the playing field for diverse creators, allowing niche content to find global audiences that traditional broadcasters might have deemed too risky. For the digital native, the concept of a time slot has become obsolete, replaced by a personalized, on-demand library that is accessible across all devices. Audiences now have many streaming platform choices (Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney+, HBO Max, Hulu, Apple TV , Peacock, Paramount+, YouTube Premium, Crunchyroll, and more), which has led to consumer fatigue.

The Role of the Internet in Social Alienation



While computers and digital networks offer unprecedented global connectivity, excessive screen time and solitary usage can paradoxically worsen real-world social alienation by replacing meaningful face-to-face interactions with superficial virtual contacts. **Source**: Photo on Pixnio. CC0 1.0.

Early in its development, it became apparent that the internet generation did not typically suffer from perpetual loneliness. Instead, this demographic—raised on instant messaging and digital coordination—leveraged technology to reinvent the social landscape. Platforms like Facebook provided a comprehensive model for how younger people connect, particularly within educational settings.

A foundational study by Michigan State University showed that college-age social media users tended to use the internet to supplement, rather than replace, their physical social circles. Participants connected with offline friends twice as often as they did with purely online acquaintances. In fact, 90 percent of users identified high school friends, classmates, and other

existing acquaintances as their primary groups on the platform. This suggests that for many, social media functions as a "digital glue" that maintains pre-existing social bonds.

However, as platforms grew, the sheer scale of user networks began to challenge traditional concepts of privacy and social intimacy. By 2009, friend networks had expanded exponentially, becoming increasingly difficult to manage. Facebook eventually discontinued its regional network system—which had grouped users by city or large employer—acknowledging that networks comprising millions of people were no longer an effective way to protect personal privacy. This marked a shift in the digital social contract, moving away from broad, semi-public communities toward a more tiered privacy model categorized by "friends," "friends of friends," and "everyone."

Despite these early indicators of connectivity, recent data suggest a more complex relationship between the internet and social alienation. While digital natives remain highly connected, they report record levels of perceived social isolation. Research indicates that when the internet is used to enhance existing relationships, it reduces loneliness; however, when it is used as a substitute for face-to-face interaction, it can lead to a displacement effect. In 2026, roughly 50 percent of Americans report feeling more disconnected than ever, and 70 percent say

excessive screen time contributes to feelings of loneliness rather than authentic connection.

This tension has led to a significant chronically offline movement among Millennials and Gen Z. Many users intentionally disconnect from the internet to prioritize analog social experiences, such as writing physical letters and attending in-person gatherings, to combat the emotional exhaustion of performing their lives online. This shift highlights a growing realization that while technology can shatter geographical barriers, it cannot always replicate the emotional depth of physical proximity.

Meetup: Meeting Up "IRL"



Meetup logo. **Source**: Jennifer Gergen, on behalf of Meetup, Inc. , Meetup Logo, CC BY-SA 4.0

The internet has become a central hub for bringing diverse groups of people together in physical spaces. In 2002, Scott Heiferman founded Meetup on the simple idea of using

the internet to get people off it. Unlike early platforms like Usenet, which focused on global discussion, Meetup provides a platform for organizing local in-person events. While the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated the addition of online hosting capabilities—a feature that remains popular today—facilitating real-life interaction remains the service's core mission.

Users search for Meetups based on a wide range of interests, including professional networking, athletic clubs, spiritual gatherings, or niche hobbies. The service, which charges organizers a subscription fee, distinguishes itself from other social networking sites by prioritizing physical presence. While a member of a Facebook group may never interact with other members outside of a comment section, Meetup encourages and tracks self-reported real-life activity. Groups with higher levels of physical engagement often attract more members, as users seek the tangible social capital that comes with face-to-face proximity.

This desire for physical connection often stems from the digital-native experience. For those who have spent their entire lives in digital environments, the act of meeting up provides a necessary counter-balance to screen fatigue. By lowering the transaction costs of organizing, Meetup has turned the internet into a staging ground for real-world interactions.

The Rise of Creative Social Spaces

Despite the time these local groups spend together, certain online communities have historically led the way in high-intensity digital interaction. For many years, players of massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs), such as *World of Warcraft*, set the standard for complex, long-term social coordination. At its peak, the game maintained a subscription base exceeding 12 million users and required players to complete quests within an inherently social framework. While the early stages of the game allow small groups of four to five players, the most advanced content requires raiding parties of up to 40 players to coordinate complex strategies in real time.



Guilds often go on "raiding parties"—just one of the many semi-social activities in *World of Warcraft*. **Source**: monsieur paradis – gathering in Kargath before a raid – CC BY-NC 2.0.

A defining feature of this social interaction is the guild system. Players create or join these organized communities to tackle the game's most difficult challenges. This social dynamic creates a highly immersive and time-

consuming environment. While guilds occasionally meet in person, members often spend several hours a day interacting through their digital avatars. This consistent collaboration has led some participants to report significant improvements in their real-world professional skills. For example, business leaders and investors have noted that managing a diverse, high-level guild—balancing the needs of inexperienced players with the expectations of veterans—requires a delicate leadership style comparable to executive management in a corporate setting.

The massive subscriber base of *World of Warcraft* pushed the boundaries of previous virtual worlds, attracting an unprecedented number of players across demographics. The social nature of the game challenged the stereotype of the antisocial gamer; instead, participants are more accurately described as social video game players. This shift was characterized by a move away from the isolated play of earlier console generations toward a model of persistent, shared digital existence.

Modern digital natives have transitioned from the structured quests of *WoW* to more open-ended virtual environments where social interaction, commerce, and identity formation occur simultaneously. This trajectory illustrates a new method of online interaction in which the "virtual" and "real" social lives of individuals are no longer separate but deeply intertwined.



Roblox has become a massive cultural phenomenon among children and teenagers by providing a dynamic platform where young players can easily build, program, and share their own interactive games with a global audience. **Source**: Henry Burrows from Winchester, United Kingdom, Playing Roblox (48707377571), CC BY-SA 2.0.

While *World of Warcraft* established the model for large-scale social coordination, the subsequent decade saw a shift toward sandbox platforms where users do not just play a game but build the environment itself. Platforms such as *Minecraft* and *Roblox* introduced a new form of social interaction based on collaborative creation rather than combat or competition. In these spaces, digital natives interact by building shared worlds, effectively turning the internet into a digital playground where the game is social construction.

Furthermore, the rise of the **creator economy** on these

platforms has made social interaction a form of commerce. On *Roblox*, young developers can create their own games and social experiences, earning real-world income through digital transactions. This has blurred the lines between play, work, and social networking. For many digital natives, these platforms have replaced the physical mall or town square as the primary location for interpersonal communication, where status is defined by digital aesthetics (avatars and skins) rather than physical possessions.

This shift represents a move toward **emergent sociality**, in which users, rather than software developers, define the rules of interaction. As virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies continue to mature, these creative social spaces are expected to become even more integrated into daily life, further challenging the distinction between one's online and offline identity.



Launched in response to rising anti-Asian racism during the COVID-19 pandemic, Stop AAPI Hate utilized an online reporting portal and targeted social media campaigns to crowdsource data on hate incidents, turning community-submitted stories into actionable research and public advocacy. **Source**: Becker1999, 03.20.21_Solidarity Against Hate Crimes (105c) cropped, CC BY 2.0.

Social Interaction on the Internet Among Marginalized Groups

The interactive age has fundamentally altered the social landscape for marginalized groups, offering a digital lifeline that bypasses traditional media gatekeepers. Historically, marginalized communities—including LGBTQ+ individuals, ethnic and racial minorities, and people with disabilities—were often isolated by physical geography or excluded from mainstream representation. The participatory web shifted this dynamic, allowing these groups to build

counter-publics where they can define their own narratives and find safety in numbers.

For many, the internet serves as a vital space for identity formation and language preservation. Digital natives, who were born into a world of ubiquitous connectivity, often find their first sense of belonging in online subcultures. On platforms like TikTok and YouTube, Indigenous creators from the Navajo Nation to the Māori in New Zealand use short-form video to teach traditional languages to a global audience. These digital activists use the web's viral nature to ensure their cultures survive in a globalized world, turning a personal hobby into a tool for cultural preservation.

For individuals in restrictive environments, the anonymity of the early web and modern encrypted spaces like Discord provides a safe environment to explore identity. Organizations like The Trevor Project leverage the internet to provide 24/7 crisis support and community to youth who may lack a physical support system, creating a digital sanctuary that transcends borders. Similarly, platforms have allowed neurodivergent communities to advocate for neuro-inclusion. Through hashtags and dedicated forums, these groups share social strategies and life hacks, shifting the public narrative from a medical disorder to a celebration of cognitive diversity.

As previously mentioned, social media has also enabled swarming, in which individuals rapidly coordinate on a decentralized platform to gather around a specific issue and demand justice. Unlike traditional top-down activism,

swarming is non-hierarchical and relies on the speed of the internet in real time. For instance, the Stop AAPI Hate campaign utilized the internet to track incidents against Asian Americans in real time and organize community patrols in response to rising violence.

However, the digital divide remains a significant barrier. While the internet offers a platform, access to high-speed bandwidth and modern hardware is not distributed equally. Marginalized communities often face underconnectivity, relying on mobile-only access that can limit their ability to participate in the creator economy or access educational resources. Furthermore, the same algorithms that enable community building can also be used to facilitate digital redlining, where data is used to exclude certain groups from healthcare, housing, or job opportunities.

Despite these risks, the role of the internet in fostering global solidarity cannot be overstated. From the Chinese diaspora's use of WeChat to maintain cultural ties to activists' use of Signal to protect themselves from state surveillance, marginalized groups have proven remarkably adept at repurposing digital tools for survival. The ability to receive information directly from the source, rather than having it filtered through biased news organizations, remains a primary victory for marginalized voices in the interactive age.



Boosted by global streaming access and social media virality, anime (like *Heroines Run the Show: The Unpopular Girl and the Secret Task* pictured above) has transformed from a niche subculture into a dominant mainstream phenomenon, driving unprecedented global viewership, merchandise sales, and box office success. **Source**: HoneyWorks OFFICIAL, Anime video frame, CC BY 3.0.

Global Pop Currents and Transnational Fandoms

While Western cultural exports historically dominated global media flows, the modern participatory web has enabled a multidirectional exchange where non-Western media hubs achieve unprecedented global saturation. The explosion of global pop phenomena—such as South Korean K-pop, Japanese anime, Nigerian Afrobeats, and Spanish-language

reggaeton—demonstrates how digital platforms bypass traditional regional gatekeepers. Platforms like TikTok, Spotify, and Netflix allow cultural products from Asia, Africa, and Latin America to acquire global audiences in real time. Transnational fandoms organize via digital channels to translate lyrics, analyze music videos, coordinate streaming campaigns, and fundraise for international social causes, redefining global youth culture into a networked, multi-polar landscape.

Digital Soft Power, Platform Imperialism, and National Sovereignty

The global distribution of internet infrastructure has elevated social platforms to critical agents of geopolitical soft power and national sovereignty concerns. As major social networks, cloud networks, and algorithmic video apps dominate domestic media consumption worldwide, governments increasingly view platform architectures through the lens of digital sovereignty. Regulatory battles over international data storage illustrate this dynamic, state restrictions on foreign software applications, and national efforts to construct domestic platform alternatives. The friction between borderless global communication protocols and state-level regulatory enforcement underscores a fundamental tension in

modern media globalization: as digital culture becomes increasingly interconnected, national governments actively reassert physical and legal control over the infrastructure that governs public discourse.

10.5 ISSUES AND TRENDS

By 1994, the promise of the information superhighway had become so potent that the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) held a landmark Superhighway Summit. This event marked the first major public dialogue between industry leaders, academic scholars, and government officials regarding the future of digital connectivity. The consensus was clear: the web could be harnessed for profound educational purposes. Moving beyond its origins as a niche tool for computer hobbyists, this new vision positioned the internet as a constant learning resource, empowering individuals with unprecedented access to global knowledge.

Video art pioneer Nam June Paik popularized the term "information superhighway" when using the phrase "electronic superhighway" in a 1974 report for the Rockefeller Foundation. Decades before the launch of the modern web, Paik presciently argued that a broadband communication network—utilizing satellite constellations, coaxial cables, and fiber optics—would eventually unify the world. His prediction that "if you create a highway, then people are going to invent cars" accurately described the dialectic of technological evolution; once the

internet's infrastructure was built, a vast array of unforeseen applications and social behaviors inevitably followed.

Al Gore's advocacy for the term in the House of Representatives and as vice president provided a slightly different context. Drawing a parallel to the



While Al Gore did not invent the Internet, he played a significant role in popularizing the term information superhighway' and advocating for Internet infrastructure and neutrality. His efforts were instrumental in building support for the Internet as a public utility. **Source**: Unknown photographer, Al Gore, Vice President of the United States, official portrait 1994, public domain.

Interstate Highway System developed during the Eisenhower era

, Gore envisioned the internet as a public good that the government should help maintain. Gore believed the government should facilitate communication across natural and socioeconomic barriers, ensuring that the electronic pathways remained neutral. He argued that allowing purely commercial interests to dictate the flow of information could compromise its purpose as a public service—much like a freeway that functions without tolls or judgment. While critics during his 2000 presidential campaign often mischaracterized his contributions, his legislative work in the 1980s and 90s proved instrumental in funding the transition from a closed military network to the public internet.

Commercial services like America Online (AOL) initially provided access for consumers. In many ways, AOL served as the Model T of the digital age—a standardized, relatively affordable service that put the information superhighway within reach of the average person. By simplifying the technical hurdles of getting online, AOL brought networked computing to the masses. However, despite falling hardware and service costs, certain demographics continued to lack internet access. This disparity, known as the *digital divide*, remains a critical issue. While more than 65 percent of the global population can now access online services, the divide has evolved from a simple question of access to one of quality, as ultra-fast 5G and fiber-optic connections remain concentrated in wealthy, urban hubs.

The metaphor of the information superhighway has proven remarkably apt across various dimensions of modern life. From the speed of data transmission to the credibility of roadside information, every aspect of the metaphor mirrors a contemporary digital challenge. Issues of security (keeping the car doors locked), net neutrality (ensuring toll-free roads), and the threat of piracy all continue to evolve. As the internet matures into an AI-driven environment, the highway metaphor is being tested once again, with the "cars" on the road increasingly driven not by humans but by automated algorithms and bots.



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https://idaho.pressbooks.pub/massmediainafreesociety/?p=246

Information Access Like Never Before

In past decades, studies showed that a strong majority of the public believed they could find essential information on healthcare, government, news, or shopping on the internet.

Nowadays, this expectation has become a foundational reliance; currently, more than 95 percent of U.S. adults use the internet, and over 80 percent of Americans cite the web as a primary source of healthcare information and news. The public no longer merely believes they can find information; they expect virtually unlimited, instantaneous access to every facet of human knowledge.

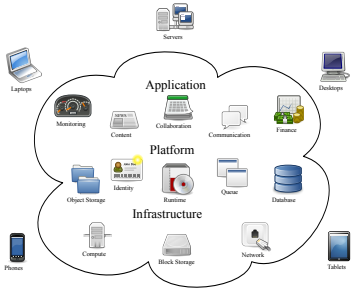
To make this expectation a reality, the U.S. government has consistently prioritized expanding high-speed infrastructure through federal broadband initiatives. Early national educational technology plans recommended universal broadband access to revolutionize learning. As Nam June Paik predicted, stringing fiber optics around the globe and deploying high-speed wireless networks has enabled seamless video communication and real-time collaboration. The call for broadband access "24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year" laid the groundwork for the modern always-on educational environment.

This vision has evolved into a unified connectivity model. High-speed fiber-optic networks and 5G technology now support immersive learning experiences, such as virtual laboratories and AI-driven adaptive tutoring, which were technologically impossible in early iterations of the web. These advancements have fundamentally shifted the educational landscape from a brick-and-mortar-centered experience to a decentralized, hybrid model. Students now use

the internet not just as a repository of static information, but also as a dynamic space for synchronous global interaction.

However, the pursuit of this Golden Age has also highlighted the critical nature of the digital access divide, as discussed later in this chapter.

The Cloud: Instant Updates, Instant Access



Cloud computing frees a computer from having to store data on its own hard drive. **Source**: Sam Johnston, Cloud computing, CC BY-SA 3.0.

As technology has improved, it has become possible to provide software as a service that resides entirely online rather than on a local personal computer. Because modern users maintain constant internet connectivity, they can utilize online programs to perform nearly all computing tasks, from real-time collaborative document editing to high-end 3D rendering and video production.

Cloud computing refers to outsourcing everyday computing tasks to remote servers. The device attached to the user's monitor—whether a laptop, tablet, or

smartphone—does not necessarily perform the heavy processing or store the primary data. Instead, it relies on a network of powerful cloud computers. For example, rather than a local processor calculating a complex equation, the device sends the query to the cloud and receives the result. Consequently, local system resources are freed, and the user's device requires less raw processing power to perform sophisticated functions.

Furthermore, storing data in the cloud ensures that files remain conveniently portable and less vulnerable to local hardware failures, such as a hard drive crash. However, this model relies heavily on bandwidth. The necessity of a reliable, always-on internet connection remains the primary constraint; without it, the functionality of cloud-based services is significantly limited.

The proliferation of mobile applications on platforms like iOS and Android owes its success to the evolution of cellular networks. This began in earnest with 3G and 4G networks, which provided enough speed to augment the limited computing power of handheld devices. A mobile map application, for instance, does not calculate the shortest route locally; it sends the coordinates to a remote server, which processes traffic data and road hierarchies before sending the result back to the phone.

With the global implementation of 5G and ongoing development of next-generation wireless standards, connectivity speeds have surpassed the local calculation

abilities of even the most advanced handheld devices. These next-generation networks offer ultra-low latency, which is essential for resource-heavy multimedia, real-time language translation, and augmented reality overlays. Nowadays, the cloud has moved beyond simple data storage to become the primary engine of the Internet of Things, where everything from home appliances to autonomous vehicles relies on it for real-time decision-making.



The Associated Press advises against using the label "fake news" because the term has been weaponized by politicians to discredit legitimate reporting, favoring more precise terms like "misinformation" or "disinformation" instead. **Source**: Wesley Fryer, Disinformation, Misinformation and Malinformation, cropped, CC BY 2.0.

Credibility Issues: (Dis)information Superhighway?

The internet has proven to be an invaluable resource for researchers and writers, offering a spectrum of services that range from real-time news to vast archives of historical scholarship. However, the decentralized, open nature of the web allows almost anyone to establish a professional-looking platform to disseminate false or misleading information. This low barrier to entry has transformed the information superhighway into a complex landscape where high-quality journalism exists alongside sophisticated misinformation.

Evaluating the authorship and institutional backing of a website is a critical step in assessing the reliability of its content. Beyond identifying overt falsehoods, analyzing the source provides insight into subtle biases, potential conflicts of interest, and the editorial standards applied to the information. In a digital environment where deepfakes, synthetic media, and AI-generated text can mimic credible sources, the necessity for rigorous media literacy has never been greater.

The credibility challenge has been further complicated by the rise of "the inversion." This term, first used by YouTube engineers to describe a point at which automated traffic surpasses human traffic, is no longer hypothetical. It is a

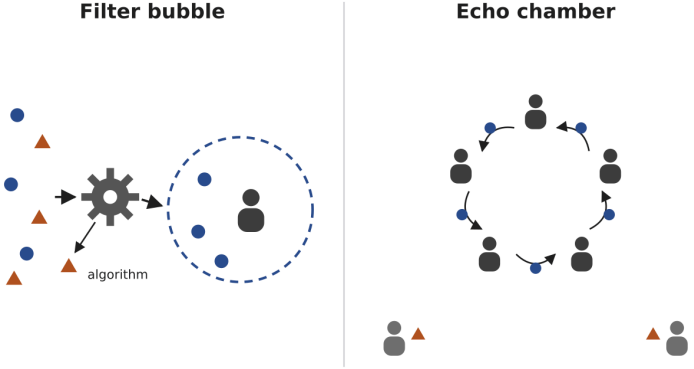
documented reality. When a system reaches inversion, its metrics—views, clicks, and likes—no longer represent human interest but rather the activity of automated scripts. Automated security assessments show that non-human traffic regularly accounts for nearly half of all web activity

. A significant portion of this traffic—often nearly one-third of total visits across the web—is driven by bad bots designed for malicious purposes such as data scraping, account takeovers, or the artificial inflation of metrics.

The rampant escalation of bot activity has led to a conspiracy theory known as the dead internet theory, which suggests that much of the modern web is a simulacrum in which bots interact with other bots, creating a false impression of engagement. This artificial engagement distorts the informational landscape, making it difficult for users to determine what content is truly relevant to human society.

This automation of engagement creates a distorted reality on social media platforms. High view counts or trending topics may result from bot-driven swarming rather than genuine public interest. This artificial engagement can lend fringe theories or false narratives the appearance of mainstream credibility, making it difficult for the average user to distinguish authentic human discourse from programmed propaganda. For instance, platform transparency tools and independent cybersecurity audits routinely expose coordinated networks of foreign bot farms and commercial

engagement services operating globally to manipulate political discourse and manufacture fake consensus.



Algorithmic bias on online platforms can manifest in myriad ways, from recommendation engines trapping users in echo chambers and isolated filter bubbles to search engines prioritizing stereotypes and automated systems unfairly flagging minority dialects. **Source**: Metalicat, Filter bubble versus echo chamber, CC0 1.0.

Just Trust Me: Bias on the Web

Legacy media sources traditionally strive to achieve a degree of balance in their reporting by interviewing opposing viewpoints and reserving judgment for editorial pages. In contrast, corporate sources often present information in ways that favor their specific products or interests. Because users frequently view the web as a source of entertainment as well

as news, sites relying on advertising revenue may prioritize inflammatory content. Such content is more likely to be linked and forwarded for its shock value, driving traffic regardless of its informational quality.

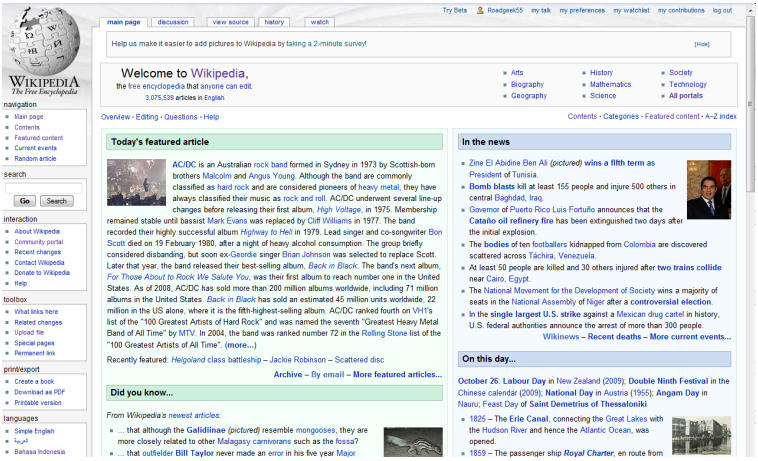
A website may also present itself as a credible authority on a topic, but ultimately it may only want to generate commerce. For instance, a site offering pest-control advice with direct links to its proprietary products may not provide the most objective guidance. To navigate this, users must understand how a service sustains itself. If a website offers information for free, that information may express bias toward the interests of the advertisers who fund it. Conversely, the online archive of *Consumer Reports* requires a paid subscription; ostensibly, this revenue allows the service to act as an impartial judge, serving its users rather than corporate sponsors.

Corporations and interest groups occasionally establish "credible" fronts to disseminate specific narratives. Climate change is a prime example of a topic where online information often reflects the platform owner's bias. Industry-backed think tanks and trade groups have historically published materials challenging environmental regulations under the guise of independent research. Investigative reporting and corporate disclosures have repeatedly revealed that many of these entities received substantial backing from major energy conglomerates. While watchdog groups have their own analytical frameworks, the availability of these

corporate financial reports illustrates a unique digital paradox: while the internet makes false information more widely available, it also makes the tools for cross-examination and fact-checking incredibly accessible. The tobacco, food, and beverage industries also engage in this practice, using **astroturfing** to make corporate campaigns appear to have originated through grassroots efforts.

The challenge of bias has shifted from human-authored content to algorithmic curation. Modern users are often trapped in **filter bubbles**, where search engines and social media platforms prioritize information that aligns with their past behavior. This creates a feedback loop in which bias is not only present in the content itself but also in the delivery system, preventing users from seeing opposing views. Furthermore, the rise of the inversion in online metrics means that what appears to be a popular or trending consensus may actually be the result of bot-driven artificial engagement.

Investigations into manufactured digital social proof highlight how easily public perception can be manipulated. By purchasing millions of simulated views or automated followers, entities can make a video, post, or article appear to be a mainstream cultural touchstone, triggering swarming behavior among real users who assume the content is credible because of its high engagement numbers. This manipulation of digital social proof makes identifying bias a constant requirement for modern internet users.



Source: Roadgeek55, English Wikipedia main page 20091026, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Wikipedia: The Internet's Precocious Problem Child

Could a platform provide free information available to all? This vision, shared by founder Jimmy Wales, became a reality with the launch of Wikipedia in 2001. Since then, the Wikimedia Foundation has grown into one of the most visited entities on the web, consistently ranking among the top global sites in terms of unique page views. While previous organizations attempted to develop authoritative factual content for the web, Wikipedia shifted the focus from absolute truth to verifiability.

The core guidelines for editing Wikipedia state that the threshold for inclusion is whether readers can verify that

material has already been published by a reliable source, rather than whether editors believe it to be true. This necessitates outside citations for any content likely to be challenged and for all direct quotations. This model creates a transparent trail of information, allowing users to trace claims back to their original publications.

However, the platform's open-source nature introduces a unique paradox: anyone can edit Wikipedia. This accessibility enables rapid updates and a "wisdom of the crowd" effect, where errors are often corrected within minutes. Conversely, it also leaves the site vulnerable to vandalism and "edit wars" over contentious topics. To manage this, administrators can protect sensitive pages or place warning banners at the top of articles. These notices inform readers if a page lacks sufficient citations, violates neutrality policies, or contains unverified claims about living persons.

The neutrality policy is designed to mitigate extreme views, empowering the community to determine which perspectives constitute a significant view warranting representation. In the past couple of decades, Wikipedia has also had to contend with sophisticated modern threats, such as inversion attempts that use bot traffic to manipulate perceived consensus or create artificial notoriety for fringe subjects.

As long as users do not take facts at face value and instead verify information by following the linked citations, the site serves as a vital reference tool. Nevertheless, the lack of traditional authorial credit makes it more difficult to judge

subtle bias. Users must exercise the same critical thinking skills required for any other online source, ensuring that the crowdsourced consensus aligns with credible, expert scholarship.

Security of Information on the Internet

As the internet has expanded in scope and the amount of personal information stored online has grown, securing this data has become a critical concern. The digital landscape now houses sensitive infrastructure, including online banking systems, medical records, and highly personal communications. While encryption and security protocols constantly improve, this



Anonymous is a decentralized, leaderless collective of hacktivists known for wearing Guy Fawkes masks and launching high-profile cyberattacks against governments, corporations, and organizations in the name of free speech and social justice. **Source**: Rohan Raj S, Hackers , CC BY-SA 4.0.

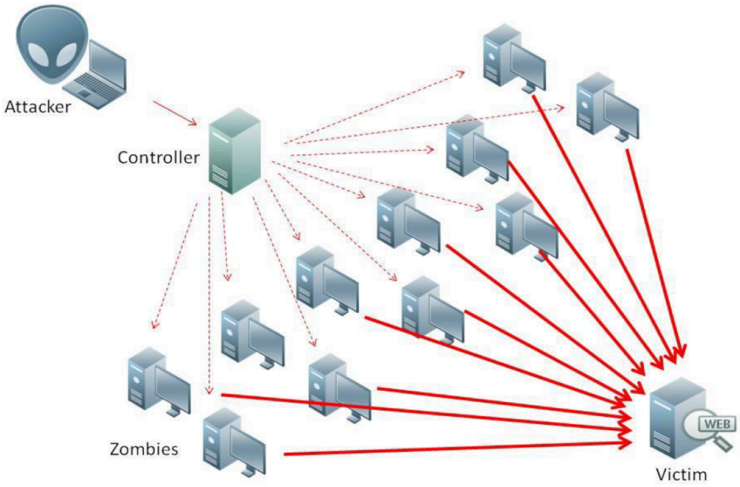
information remains vulnerable to increasingly sophisticated threats.

A corporation or government can lose control of private information through various vulnerabilities inherent in the network's design. The same protocols that enable open access and seamless communication also facilitate potential exploitation. Much like the Interstate Highway System, the internet offers impartial access to its users; however, this impartiality means that the pathways are just as available to malicious actors as to legitimate citizens.

In the modern era, the nature of these threats has shifted from individual hackers to automated, large-scale systems. Security is no longer just a matter of "locking the car doors" on the information superhighway; it involves defending against coordinated botnets that can scan millions of systems for vulnerabilities in seconds. The transition to cloud computing, while offering redundancy and professional-grade security, also centralizes data, creating honeypots that attract high-level state and corporate espionage.

The rise of the Internet of Things has further complicated the security landscape. Billions of everyday objects—from home thermostats to industrial sensors—are connected to the web, often with minimal security features. Each of these connected devices represents a potential entry point for attackers to infiltrate a larger network. This interconnectedness means that a security failure in a minor consumer product can have cascading effects, potentially

compromising the integrity of much larger systems and the privacy of millions of users.



A DDoS attack overwhelms a targeted server, service, or network with a flood of malicious Internet traffic originating from multiple compromised systems, rendering it inaccessible to legitimate users. **Source**: Nasanbuyn, Ddos-attack-ex, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Can't Wait: Denial of Service

While society increasingly relies on the internet for essential communication and access to information, this dependence introduces significant vulnerabilities. A single exploit can create massive roadblocks to digital traffic, leading to widespread disruptions in global commerce, interpersonal communication, and national security. As

military and infrastructure systems become more integrated with the web, the stakes of these disruptions continue to rise.

Distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks function similarly to cloud computing but in reverse. Rather than a single computer drawing resources from multiple servers, a DDoS attack involves a coordinated effort by thousands or even millions of computers to overwhelm a specific website or server. Every web server has a finite capacity for handling simultaneous data requests. Even the most robust and stable servers can be brought down if traffic volume exceeds their processing capacity.

In October 2016, a massive DDoS attack against DNS provider Dyn paralyzed internet infrastructure across North America and Europe, rendering major platforms like Netflix, Twitter, and Spotify temporarily inaccessible. The attack utilized the Mirai botnet, which infected hundreds of thousands of consumer IoT devices—such as smart cameras and home routers—turning them into zombie machines that overwhelmed target servers with unprecedented traffic volumes. This landmark event demonstrated how easily malicious actors can weaponize everyday consumer electronics to cripple essential web infrastructure.

Today, the scale of these attacks has grown exponentially. Modern DDoS efforts no longer rely solely on infected personal computers; they now leverage the billions of insecure devices within the Internet of Things. Because devices like smart cameras and home appliances often lack robust security

protocols, they can be easily co-opted into massive botnets. Furthermore, current cybersecurity reporting indicates that malicious bot activity accounts for nearly 40 percent of all internet traffic. These bad bots can be deployed to launch attacks that are not only larger in volume but also more targeted, specifically targeting the underlying infrastructure of the internet—such as domain name system providers—to take down entire regions of the web at once.

Net Neutrality



Across the country, thousands of activists staged both physical demonstrations outside government offices and massive online site blackouts to protest the repeal of net neutrality, advocating for an open internet where broadband providers cannot block or throttle online content. **Source**: Credo Action, Protect Net Neutrality rally, San Francisco (37503835710) , CC BY 2.0.

Most internet users in the United States connect to the web through a commercial Internet Service Provider (ISP). Major companies—such as Comcast, Verizon, Charter (Spectrum), and AT&T—act as gatekeepers to the broader internet. These providers manage the physical lines that deliver broadband access to homes and businesses, essentially controlling the ramps onto the information superhighway.

Ideally, ISPs follow the principle of net neutrality, treating all data impartially. Under this model, any two websites should load at the same speed, provided they have comparable server capabilities. However, many service providers have long advocated for a multi-tiered service model. This would allow corporations to pay for fast lanes to deliver their content more quickly than competitors. For example, a

provider could prioritize its own streaming service over a rival's, creating a powerful incentive for partnerships between content creators and the companies that control their distribution. ISPs argue that such a system is necessary to recoup the massive investments required to expand high-speed infrastructure.

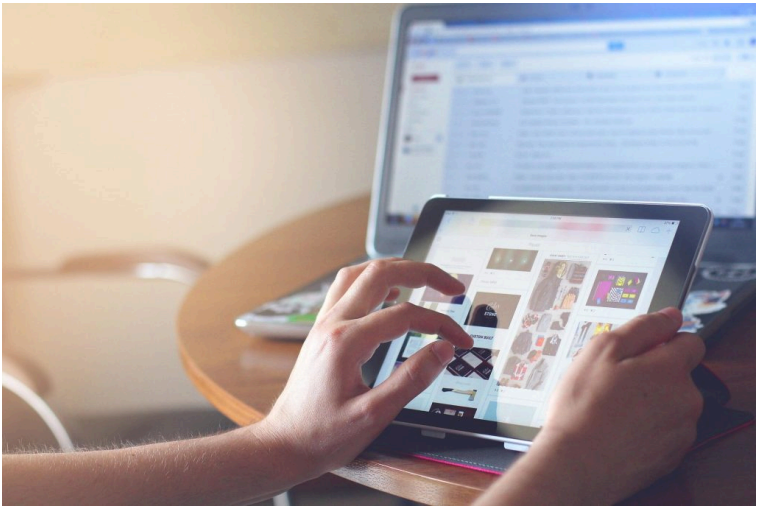
Critics argue that a tiered system would stifle innovation by creating a pay-to-play environment. Startups and small businesses, lacking the capital to purchase premium speeds, would be relegated to second-tier lanes. This could lead to a cable-ization of the internet, where users pay for bundles of specific services rather than open access to the entire web. This debate mirrors historical precedents; before the 1960s, AT&T restricted customers to using only its own hardware on its telephone networks. The FCC eventually intervened, ruling that customers could use any device—such as a fax machine—so long as it did not harm the network. This early proto-net neutrality was fundamental in protecting the inventions that defined the early digital age.

The landscape of net neutrality shifted significantly during the first Trump administration. In 2017, the FCC—under the leadership of Chairman Ajit Pai—voted to repeal the 2015 Open Internet Order. This repeal reclassified broadband as an information service rather than a telecommunications service, effectively stripping the FCC of its authority to enforce strict neutrality rules. The administration argued that this deregulation would spark permissionless innovation and

encourage ISPs to invest more heavily in rural broadband and 5G networks.

This move sparked a massive legal and social backlash. In the absence of federal oversight, several states—most notably California and Washington—enacted their own strict net neutrality laws. While the Trump administration initially sued to block these state-level rules, the legal challenges were largely unsuccessful. Today, the issue remains a partisan pendulum. While the Biden administration attempted to restore federal rules in 2024, those efforts stalled in federal appeals courts following the Supreme Court's 2024 Loper Bright decision, which significantly limited federal agencies' authority to interpret their own regulations.

Today, the issue remains a partisan pendulum. While federal agencies have periodically moved to reinstate nationwide rules, those efforts continue to face significant friction in federal courts following major administrative law rulings that strictly limit agency authority to interpret regulatory scope without explicit congressional mandates.



Source: Photo by fancycrave1 on Pixabay.

Digital Technology and Electronic Media

Content on the internet now competes directly with traditional media outlets, but the fundamental nature of that competition has shifted. In the early digital era, the focus was on the transition from physical to digital formats. Today, the unlimited, inexpensive duplication of digital content has permanently removed the concept of scarcity from the media economy. Consumers no longer need to purchase physical CDs or newspapers; digital bits convey music, news, and video with absolute fidelity at a minuscule cost. This abundance

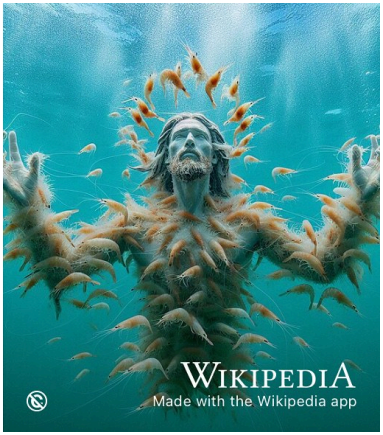
has forced the media industry to reinvent itself as audiences fragment into increasingly specialized subcategories.

Traditional media companies have adapted by evolving into cross-platform ecosystems. While they no longer hold a monopoly on distribution, they remain relevant by serving as anchors of credibility in a saturated market. For example, the music industry has moved from selling units to managing authenticated engagement. Social media offers an inexpensive, highly targeted way to maintain a following. A record label or an independent artist can use platforms like Instagram or TikTok to notify fans of new releases or tour dates, effectively bypassing traditional gatekeepers.

Today, social networking has enabled a globalized discovery process where eclectic tastes are no longer bound by geography. A band in Seoul or a journalist in Lagos can build a dedicated audience in New York or London without a local distribution deal. This shift is driven by sophisticated recommendation algorithms that analyze user behavior to surface niche content. However, this has also led to a creator-journalist blur, in which individual influencers and niche experts often command more trust within their communities than established institutions. As a result, the modern media landscape is defined by a paradox: ownership is becoming more concentrated among a few tech giants. At the same time, audience attention is more dispersed than ever before.

digital content made with generative artificial intelligence that is lacking in effort, quality, or meaning, and produced in high volume as clickbait to gain advantage in the attention economy

AI slop



AI-generated images of "Shrimp Jesus" that proliferated on Facebook in 2024. **Source**: Dunk, AI #Slop Case Study Nº 1: Shrimp Jesus, CC BY 4.0.

The Influence of AI on Online Platforms

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence has further complicated the inversion by introducing high-quality synthetic content into the digital ecosystem. AI is no longer merely a tool for background processing; it has become a primary creator of information on the digital highway. According to software engineering benchmarks, AI's influence is particularly evident in software development, where over 40 percent of newly written code in major programming languages is suggested or generated by AI tools like GitHub Copilot and automated coding assistants. While these tools significantly increase productivity, they also

contribute to the Slop Era—a period characterized by a flood of low-quality, AI-generated content specifically designed to capture search engine attention.

This shift has given rise to several critical challenges, including model collapse. As the internet becomes saturated with synthetic data, new AI models are increasingly trained on the outputs of previous AI systems rather than on original human-generated content, leading to measurable quality degradation and an increase in hallucinations (logical errors). Simultaneously, the rise of the answer economy has fundamentally altered how users seek information. Many people have moved away from traditional keyword searches toward AI-driven answer engines; instead of visiting a primary news site, users ask an AI to summarize current events, a shift that directly threatens the economic survival of traditional publishers.

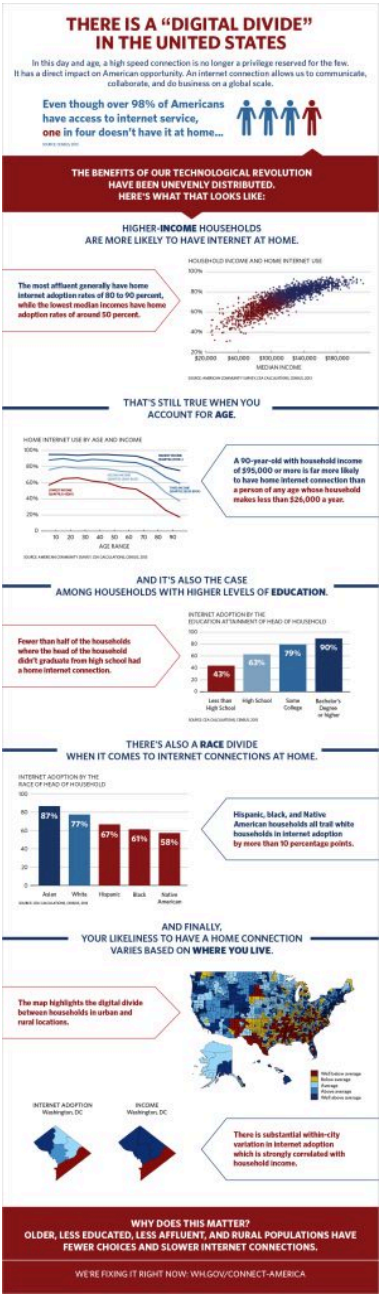
These technological leaps also facilitate the mass production of deepfakes and misinformation. AI tools now enable the creation of hyper-realistic fake images and news stories at an unprecedented scale, with media watchdog groups reporting widespread proliferation of automated AI-generated news websites
that operate with little to no human oversight. The result is a digital environment that demands a new form of AI literacy . Users must now look beyond corporate or political bias to distinguish between human-centered discourse and algorithmic noise. As individuals increasingly retreat into

walled gardens—such as private Discord servers or paid, verified newsletters—to find authentic interaction, the open web faces a credibility crisis that Nam June Paik and Al Gore could scarcely have imagined at the dawn of the information superhighway.

The Digital Divide and the "Homework Gap"

While the information superhighway promises universal access, a significant gap persists between those with high-speed internet and those without. This disparity, known as the **digital divide**, has evolved from a simple lack of physical cables into a complex issue involving affordability, quality of service, and digital literacy.

Nowadays, approximately 6 billion people—about 74 percent of the world's population—have access to the internet. However, this progress is deeply uneven. In high-income countries, internet use is nearly universal at over 90 percent, whereas in low-income nations, less than 30 percent of the population is connected. Furthermore,



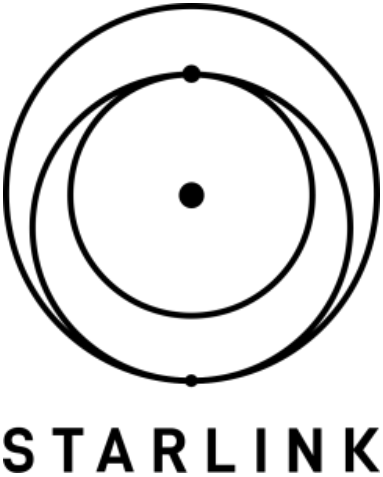
the divide is no longer just about getting online, but about the quality of that connection. A typical user in a high-income country generates significantly more mobile data than a user in a low-income country, reflecting a widening quality gap in how people use the web for work, education, and healthcare.

Source: The White House (US federal government), Wh digital divide sharepage 07152015 2, public domain.

In the United States, the digital divide is primarily driven by income and geography. Millions of American households remain offline or underconnected because they cannot afford a high-speed connection. While federal programs like the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment initiative have allocated tens of billions to fund physical infrastructure in rural areas, affordability remains a major barrier. Research indicates that low-income households adopt home broadband at significantly lower rates than those earning higher incomes. This disparity creates the **homework gap**, in which students without reliable home internet access struggle to keep pace with a curriculum that increasingly relies on cloud-based assignments and AI-driven tutoring. Studies indicate that students with limited home connectivity face persistent educational disadvantages, such as lower GPAs and higher dropout rates, compared to their peers. This reality underscores that while the internet offers unprecedented opportunities, the equity of that access is as vital as the

technology itself. Students on underserved rural or tribal lands often lack terrestrial broadband and must rely on limited mobile data or public Wi-Fi. This lack of access limits not only educational attainment but also economic mobility, as remote work and digital upskilling become inaccessible to millions of Americans.

Satellite Solutions and the AI Divide



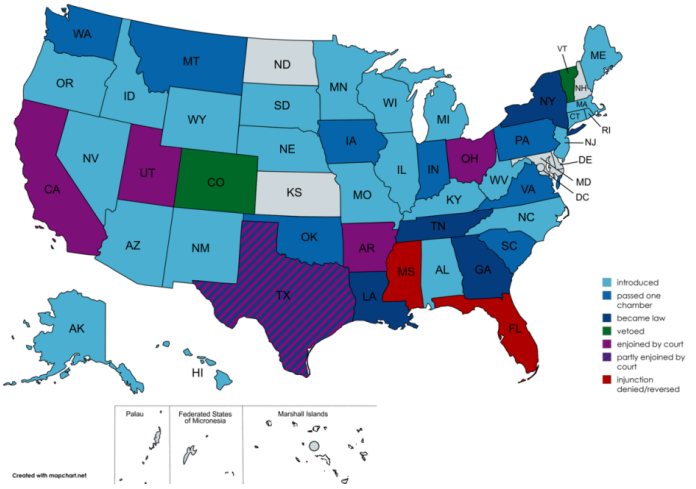
Starlink logo. **Source**: Starlink Services, LLC, Starlink Logo 2024, public domain.

New technologies are emerging to bridge these physical gaps.

Low-Earth Orbit satellite constellations, such as SpaceX's Starlink and Amazon Leo, aim to provide high-speed, low-

latency internet to the most remote corners of the globe. These services eliminate the need for expensive ground-based cables, offering a lifeline to rural communities and the maritime and aviation sectors. However, the cost of the necessary hardware and monthly subscriptions remains a hurdle for many in the Global South, where the vast majority of the world's offline population resides.

Furthermore, a new AI divide has emerged. As artificial intelligence becomes integrated into search engines and workplace tools, those with the skills to leverage AI are pulling ahead of those who lack either the access or the digital literacy to use it. While consumer adoption of generative AI tools has expanded rapidly
, adoption in high-income economies is growing at nearly twice the rate of developing nations. This suggests that without targeted intervention, the next generation of the digital divide will be defined by an individual's ability to navigate an AI-driven economy.



State-level social media age verification laws in the United States have sparked intense legal battles, pitting child safety advocacy against Constitutional challenges over user anonymity, digital privacy, and First Amendment rights.
Source: Squidyyy, Social media age verification laws as of April 30, 2025, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Global Social Media Regulation and Cultural Shifts

The era of the internet as an unregulated frontier has largely come to an end. Governments worldwide have transitioned from passive observation to active intervention, treating social media platforms more like public utilities than private hobbyist sites. This shift is driven by a global consensus that

the digital environment significantly impacts national security, mental health, and the integrity of democratic processes.

A landmark development in this area occurred when Australia passed strict social media restrictions for minors, requiring mandatory age-verification mechanisms. This policy catalyzed other nations, including several U.S. states and European Union members, to propose similar Digital Age Verification laws. These regulations require platforms to use biometric checks or government-issued identification to verify user age, fundamentally challenging the long-standing norm of online anonymity.

In the United States, the regulatory landscape is defined by a tension between federal deregulation and state-level activism. While federal courts have limited the power of agencies like the FCC to enforce net neutrality, state governments have stepped in to regulate data privacy and algorithmic transparency. For example, more than a dozen states have passed laws requiring platforms to provide users with a reverse chronological feed option
, allowing individuals to opt out of the personalized, AI-driven algorithms that often contribute to filter bubbles and radicalization.



Social media has fundamentally rewired modern communication and culture by democratizing information sharing and connecting global communities, while simultaneously amplifying ideological polarization, mental health challenges, and digital misinformation. **Source**: Gemdation, Social media platter, CC0 1.0.

The Battle for Relevance

The culture of the internet has shifted from a race for reach to a battle for relevance. With nearly 5 billion active social media users worldwide, who comprise a supermajority of the global online population, the novelty of being connected has worn off. Consequently, users are increasingly moving away from massive, public-facing town squares toward smaller, private communities.

This fragmentation has precipitated the end of the global monoculture, as algorithms now tailor

content so specifically to individual tastes that the concept of a mainstream cultural moment is rapidly disappearing. In its place is a landscape of micro-dramas and niche celebrities who may be household names to millions yet remain completely unknown to the general public. This shift is accompanied by the rise of a trust economy, where human-made authenticity has become the most valuable digital currency in response to the flood of AI-generated slop on the public web. Modern users now prioritize raw, unpolished user-generated content over polished corporate media to engage with real human perspectives.

Furthermore, the mechanics of information discovery have been transformed as social search overtakes traditional engines. For the first time, a plurality of young users—nearly 40 percent of Gen Z—utilize social media apps like TikTok and Instagram as their primary search engines for discovery and advice, bypassing traditional keyword-based search entirely. These trends point toward a future in which the information superhighway is less a single road and more a series of interconnected, private hubs. While the internet has compressed distance and time, the challenge today is to ensure that this hyper-connectivity does not lead to hyper-isolation, in which individuals are surrounded by data yet disconnected from a shared reality.

Conclusion: Navigating the Synthetic Highway

The internet today is a vastly different environment from the one envisioned at the 1994 UCLA Summit. The information superhighway is now an AI-augmented, bot-saturated ecosystem where the distinction between real and synthetic is constantly blurred. From the leadership lessons learned in *World of Warcraft* guilds to the complexities of managing 12 million global subscribers, the social nature of the web has proven to be its greatest strength and its most significant challenge.

Looking ahead, the primary task for digital citizens is to maintain critical media literacy. Whether navigating the inversion of bot traffic, advocating for net neutrality, or bridging the digital divide, the goal remains the same: to ensure that the tools of the digital age enhance human potential rather than diminish it.

CHAPTER 11: ADVERTISING



Advertising standards have changed over the years, as evident in this 1885 ad selling cocaine toothache drops. **Source**: National Library of Medicine. Cocaine Toothache Drops, public domain.

- 11.1 Strategic Communication
- 11.2 History of Advertising
- 11.3 The Components and Types of Advertising
- 11.4 Government Regulation of Advertising
- 11.5 Advertising's Influence on Culture

11.1 STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION



2023 Barbie Movie Billboard Times Square 42nd St NYC 7786, Brecht Bug, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Strategic communications is a deliberate effort to persuade an audience to adopt a particular viewpoint or take a desired action. To achieve this, communicators must first thoroughly understand their target audience, including their existing beliefs, values, and potential biases. This deep audience insight is crucial for tailoring the message and selecting the most

effective delivery medium. For example, a campaign aimed at encouraging young adults to vote might utilize social media and influencers. At the same time, a public health message for an older demographic might prioritize television PSAs and community outreach.

Advertising (the subject of this chapter) and public relations (Chapter 12) are prime examples of strategic communication in action. Successful advertising campaigns, like the iconic "Got Milk?" campaign, do not just present information; they employ persuasive techniques, such as emotional appeals, endorsements, and humor, to encourage consumers to align with the advertiser's point of view and, ultimately, make a purchase. Often, the most powerful persuasion happens when individuals feel they are freely choosing to agree with a message rather than being overtly coerced. Advertisers meticulously consider factors like imagery, language, and placement to maximize an ad's persuasive impact. This art of persuasion, known as rhetoric, has been recognized since ancient times as one of the three classical areas of learning, alongside logic and grammar, highlighting its fundamental role in influencing thought and action.

Developing effective advertising campaigns, supplemented by public relations, can be challenging. For instance, Warner Bros. and Mattel faced immense pressure as they developed a plan for the *Barbie* movie. The challenge was to transform a decades-old toy, often associated with outdated ideals, into a relevant,

critically acclaimed, and successful cinematic experience for a diverse, modern audience. The answer lay in a masterclass of integrated marketing, where advertising and public relations worked together smoothly, painting the world pink and turning a film release into a cultural touchstone.

Barbie's advertising strategy was ubiquitous. From the earliest teasers, the campaign leaned heavily on the brand's iconic visual language, particularly the color pink. Billboards, bus stops, and digital ads were saturated with this signature hue, often featuring minimalist designs that displayed only the release date, creating an immediate sense of anticipation. Trailer drops were meticulously timed, evolving from surreal nods to Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* to full-blown peeks into Barbie Land. Beyond traditional ad buys, the campaign executed an unprecedented number of brand collaborations. Companies ranging from fashion giants like Gap and Zara to essentials like Crocs, Airbnb, and even Burger King released *Barbie*-themed products. This was a pervasive marketing ecosystem that made the brand inescapable, turning everyday consumption into participation in the movie's impending release.

Alongside this widespread advertising, a strong public relations strategy used earned media and organic buzz to elevate the film. The initial casting announcements of Margot Robbie and Ryan Gosling generated immediate excitement, while Greta Gerwig's directorial involvement signaled artistic depth. Early set photos went viral, sparking

countless memes and discussions. Perhaps the most significant PR coup was the "Barbenheimer" phenomenon—the unexpected, user-generated cultural mashup with Christopher Nolan's *Oppenheimer*. This accidental synergy generated enormous free publicity, turning a potential box-office clash into a shared cinematic event. Furthermore, the film's exploration of themes such as feminism and nostalgia provided fodder for numerous articles and interviews, extending the conversation far beyond its cinematic merits.

The *Barbie* campaign exemplifies the powerful synergy between advertising and public relations. Advertising laid the groundwork, creating visual saturation through paid placements. This paid media acted as a foundation, but it was the earned media generated by PR efforts—the viral moments , critical discussions, and the "Barbenheimer" phenomenon —that truly transformed the film into a global conversation.

The impact of strategic communication on the modern world is profound, primarily driven by the digital transformation of media. Advertising has adapted, using advanced data analytics for hyper-targeting. Beyond commercial objectives, advertising and PR wield significant influence in shaping political discourse and social movements. They are not merely tools for selling products but powerful mechanisms for communicating values and navigating the complexities of a globalized, digitally mediated society.

11.2 HISTORY OF ADVERTISING



This bronze plate represents the earliest form of commercial advertising. **Source**: BabelStone, Bronze printing plate for an advertisement, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Advertising promotes a product or service through paid announcements to persuade a target audience to take a specific action. Its controlled nature characterizes it: advertisers dictate the message, the medium, the timing, and the frequency. This control enables precise targeting and consistent branding across television commercials, print ads, and sponsored social media posts. The

primary goal is often to generate direct sales or build brand awareness through repetitive exposure. Advertising has had a profound impact on modern culture and thus deserves considerable attention in any treatment of the media's influence. From early town criers and print broadsheets to today's hyper-targeted digital algorithms, the evolution of advertising mirrors broader shifts in technology, economy, and human behavior. Tracing this historical trajectory reveals not only how businesses learned to capture public attention, but also how commercial messaging came to shape the aesthetic and financial foundation of mass media itself.

History of Advertising

Advertising is a



Edo period advertisement from 1806 for a traditional medicine called Kinseitan. **Source**: Chris 73 / Wikimedia Commons, Edo period advertising in Japan , CC BY-SA 3.0.

foundational element of the global economy, stretching from the public markets of ancient Rome to the algorithmically targeted feeds on modern smartphones. It has evolved from simple announcements into a complex psychological tool that both funds the independent press and, at times, promotes harmful societal habits. In the modern world, advertising is an

inescapable human invention that shapes how we perceive value, identity, and necessity.

Ancient and Medieval Advertising

The roots of branding are surprisingly ancient. In 79 CE, the eruption of Mount Vesuvius preserved the city of Pompeii, providing archaeologists with a time capsule of early commercial life. These ruins reveal that ancient merchants already understood the importance of differentiation. Fish sauces were sold under distinct brand names, such as "Scaurus' tunny jelly," while wine manufacturers positioned their products by making specific claims about prestige and vintage. Perhaps most strikingly, merchandise from this era often bore the names of famous gladiators and athletes, representing some of the earliest known instances of celebrity endorsement.

The invention of the printing press in 1440 transformed advertising from a localized oral or hand-painted tradition into a scalable industry. By the 1600s, the first newspapers began incorporating printed advertisements. This shift was revolutionary: advertising revenue allowed the press to operate independently of government or religious subsidies, eventually enabling the rise of daily circulation. By the end of the 17th century, advertisements in news publications had become standard practice.

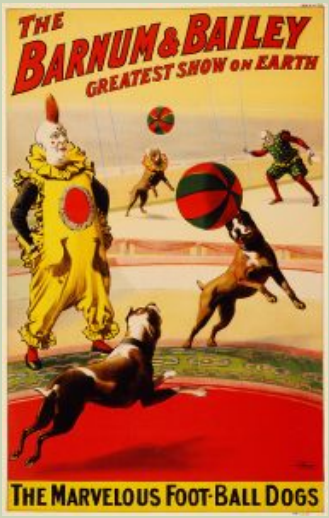
Selling the New World

The European colonization of the Americas in the 1600s sparked one of history's first large-scale destination marketing campaigns. To exploit the economic potential of natural resources like timber, fur, and tobacco, European trading companies needed a massive labor force. Advertisements for the British colonies painted a picture of a literal paradise—a land of endless opportunity and no beggars. These persuasive (and often exaggerated) campaigns convinced many impoverished Europeans to sign away years of their lives
as indentured servants to finance their passage across the Atlantic.

The Roots of Modern Advertising

The 19th century saw the birth of the advertising industry as we recognize it today, driven largely by the **Penny Press**. In 1833, the *New York Sun* adopted a disruptive business model: selling newspapers at a fraction of the cost of production to achieve massive circulation. This huge audience became a product in itself, which the paper sold to advertisers at a premium. For the first time, advertising revenue—rather than subscription fees—became the primary driver of media profit.

Barnum's Big Top of Buzz: Advertising in the Unregulated 1800s



P. T. Barnum used the press to spark interest in his shows. **Source**: trialsanderrors – The marvelous foot-ball dogs, poster for Barnum & Bailey, 1900 – CC BY 2.0.

The career of P. T. Barnum, co-founder of the Barnum & Bailey Circus, provides a vivid look at the unregulated nature of 1800s advertising. Beginning in the 1840s, Barnum moved beyond simple newspaper ads to pioneer immersive promotion, using brass bands, vibrant building-sized murals, and street-spanning banners to command public attention.

Barnum was an early master of **earned**

media—the art of creating news to gain free publicity. In one famous stunt, he hired a man to silently stack bricks at various street corners leading toward his museum. As the curious crowd followed the man to the museum's entrance, the bricklayer would buy a ticket and walk inside. When police eventually shut down the display for blocking traffic, the resulting newspaper coverage only drove ticket sales higher. Even legal trouble was marketing fodder for Barnum. When sued for fraud over the bearded woman Annie Jones, whom plaintiffs claimed was a man, Barnum didn't hide; he turned the trial into a spectacle, parading witnesses to testify to her gender and ensuring the controversy stayed on the front pages.

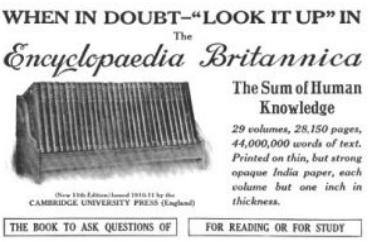
Barnum's strategy relied on what he called the humbug—a purposeful blend of mystery and artful deception. His Feejee Mermaid—a monkey torso sewn to a fish tail—succeeded not because audiences believed it was real, but because the advertisement sparked a heated social debate over whether it *could* be. This moved the advertisement from the newspaper into daily conversation

.

While modern truth-in-advertising laws prevent the literal humbugs of the 1800s, Barnum's DNA survives in today's hype cycles. Companies like Tesla or Nothing use cryptic social media teasers and leaks to build anticipation long

before a product launch. Similarly, the rise of stunt marketing—such as Red Bull's televised space jump—proves that Barnum's belief in the power of the spectacle remains the cornerstone of the attention economy.

In 1843, Volney Palmer



A print advertisement for the 1913 edition of *Encyclopedia Britannica*. **Source**: Encyclopædia Britannica, Ad Encyclopaedia-Britannica 05-1913, public domain.

founded the first U.S. advertising agency in Philadelphia, acting as a middleman between businesses and newspapers. By the late 1860s, agencies began to move beyond simple space-selling to focus on strategy. George Rowell pioneered modern **market research** by using surveys and circulation audits to estimate viewership and target specific demographics. Rowell's data-driven approach allowed agencies to place ads where they would be most effective, a trend that led him to launch the first major industry trade magazine, *Printers' Ink*, in 1888.

As mentioned in Chapter 5, magazines like *McClure's* and *Ladies' Home Journal* perfected the art of niche marketing in the late 1800s. By slashing cover prices and relying on high-volume advertising, these publications reached specialized audiences. This transition was so successful that even prestigious publications like *Harper's Weekly*, which had famously resisted advertising for decades, were dedicating nearly half of their pages to commercial content by 1900.

The Rise of Brand Names

The birth of modern consumer culture was driven by **industrialization**, which shifted society from artisanal, handcrafted goods to mass-produced factory goods. Before the 1800s, brand names were virtually nonexistent for everyday items. Most commerce involved face-to-face interactions where shoppers bought generic commodities—flour was just flour, and soap was just soap. This era coincided with **modernization**, a social shift where individuals began to move away from identities predetermined by birthright, instead using their purchasing power to "craft" and present a desired self-image to the world.

From Barrels to Boxes



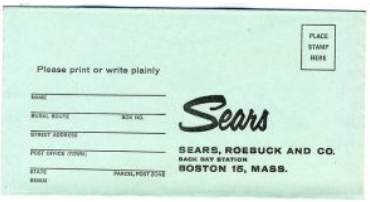
In the early 1900s, brand-name food items, such as this one, began to establish themselves as household names. **Source**: Stuart Rankin – Payn's Sure-Raising Flour – CC BY-NC 2.0.

For most of the 19th century, shopping was a tactile, bulk-oriented process. Consumers weighed out scoops of sugar or flour from large wooden barrels and paid by the pound. The innovation of **industrial packaging** changed everything. Companies gained the ability to mass-produce uniform tins, bags, and cartons printed with specific logos and names.

While branding had previously been reserved for high-end luxury items like fine china or mahogany furniture, it now moved into the pantry. By naming a specific type of honey or flour, manufacturers allowed customers to ask for a product by name. This created a significant competitive edge over

"unnamed" commodities, enabling consistency and perceived reliability across regions.

The Department Store and Trust



Department stores such as Sears, Roebuck and Co. reached consumers outside of the city through mail-order catalogs. **Source**: Nesster – 1961 Sears: Mail Order Envelope – CC BY 2.0.

The rise of the department store in the late 1800s provided the final catalyst for brand dominance. Nationwide retailers like Sears, Roebuck & Co. and Montgomery Ward standardized the shopping experience. Through massive mail-order catalogs—often called "the consumer's bible"—a shopper in a remote rural village could purchase the same item seen in a Chicago storefront.

This shifted the locus of trust. Rather than knowing the local miller or blacksmith personally, consumers began to trust the retailer's brand. If an item came from Sears, purchasers assumed it possessed a certain quality. This transition laid the groundwork for modern retail, in which the brand name serves as a silent promise of quality, regardless of where the product is actually manufactured.



Source: Velcro, Velcro Brand, public domain.

Sticking to the Name: VELCRO's Brand's Battle Against Genericide

Branding is the strategic process of establishing a distinct identity for a company's product, logo, or trademark. This identity is the soul of a product, differentiating it in a crowded marketplace. Because successful brands are worth billions, companies vigilantly protect their intellectual property. For example, in the mid-2010s, the makers of 5-Hour Energy aggressively sued competitors like 6-Hour POWER to prevent consumer confusion. More recently, Twitter's massive 2023 rebranding to X demonstrated the immense risks of intentionally abandoning a household-name brand that has already become a verb ("to tweet").

However, the responsibility to protect a brand lies solely with the company. If a brand name becomes so ubiquitous that the public uses it to describe the entire category of products, the company risks genericide—the legal loss of trademark protection. This is how aspirin, escalator, cellophane, and trampoline transitioned from protected brand names to generic nouns that any competitor can use.

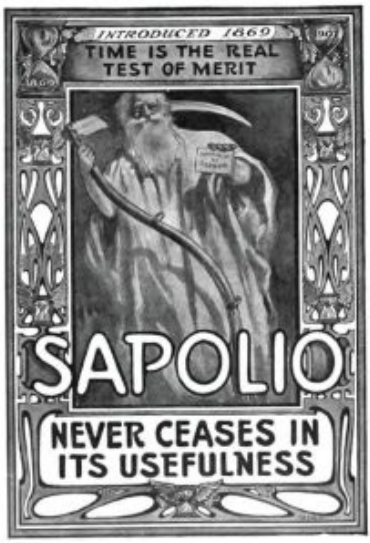
This is where the story of VELCRO® Companies becomes a masterclass in brand defense. They are in a constant battle to remind the world that they do not sell Velcro; they sell hook-and-loop fasteners.

To prevent their name from going the way of the zipper, VELCRO® Companies launched a sophisticated, humorous campaign to educate the public. Their 2017 viral music video, "Don't Say Velcro," featured lawyers pleading with the public to use the generic term hook-and-loop. They followed this up with a 2018 sequel that addressed the internet's snarky reaction to the first video.

Today, this battle has moved to social media. The company now monitors influencers and TikTok creators, gently (and sometimes firmly) requesting that they use the ® symbol or the generic descriptor. This isn't just pedantry; it is a critical legal defense. In 2017,

Google narrowly won a court battle to keep its trademark after plaintiffs argued that "Google" had become synonymous with "search." By actively policing their name through humor and digital engagement, VELCRO® Companies hopes to avoid a similar day in court, proving that a brand's greatest success—becoming a household name—can also be its greatest threat.

Advertising Gains Stature During the 20th Century



Sapolio soap became an American household staple through creative slogans, popular rhymes, and iconic advertising concepts like Spotless Town**. Source**: Unknown author, Sapolio Soap Advertisement 1907 , public domain.

At the dawn of the 1900s, advertising underwent a radical transformation from an unseemly trade to a sophisticated profession. As highbrow magazines began to embrace commercial revenue, the industry attracted top-tier artists and writers who elevated the medium with poetry and high-quality illustrations. This era birthed the first **brand characters**—enduring icons like the Jolly Green Giant and the Pillsbury Doughboy—designed to give mass-produced goods a friendly, human face.

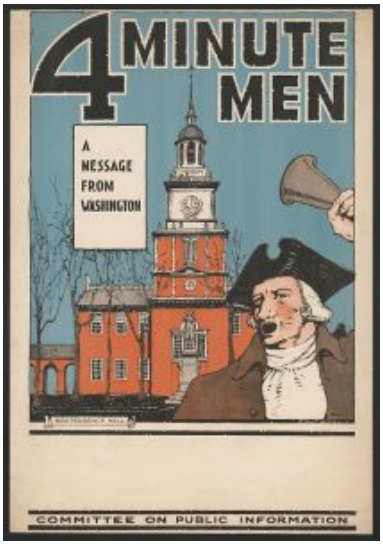
This shift was more than aesthetic; it was psychological. As industrialization created an **economy of abundance**,

manufacturers faced a new problem: people had more than they needed. In 1927, banker Paul Mazur famously argued that America must shift from a needs culture to a desires culture. "Man's desires must overshadow his needs," he declared, providing the blueprint for modern advertising. The goal was no longer to inform, but to cultivate aspiration and a constant yearning for the new.

A prime example of this artistic advertising was the Sapolio soap campaign, which featured the fictional Spotless Town. The public followed these rhyming, illustrated ads with the same fervor modern audiences give to a hit streaming series. This campaign proved that advertising could do more than sell—it could influence civic behavior and popular culture.

Advertising as a Public Tool: The World Wars

World War I accelerated the integration of advertising into public life. Corporations used ads to broadcast their patriotism, while the government utilized agencies to sell the war effort through posters like the iconic Uncle Sam. President Woodrow Wilson's



The Four-Minute Men were a group of approximately 75,000 volunteers authorized by the U.S. government's Committee on Public Information during World War I to deliver brief, patriotic speeches to build public support for the war effort. **Source**: CPI, 4-Minute-Men 1917 CPI, public domain.

Committee on Public Information effectively proved that advertising techniques could mobilize an entire nation. By the

1920s, advertising had shed its snake-oil reputation and become an essential pillar of the American economy.

The Era of Broadcasting

The 1920s brought the rise of the film industry and celebrity testimonials. Stars like Clara Bow and Joan Crawford endorsed Lux soap, teaching consumers to use products to emulate the lifestyles of the famous.

Radio became an accepted commercial medium during the 1920s. It became the first truly intrusive commercial medium. Initially, critics feared that broadcast ads would be an unwelcome guest in the living room, but by the late 1920s, advertising was the lifeblood of the airwaves. Agencies didn't just buy spots; they produced the shows. This led to **product placement** and integrated sponsorship, such as Jell-O's long association with *The Jack Benny Show*. However, this model gave advertisers total creative veto power; writers were strictly forbidden from including any content that might offend the sponsor.

The Great Depression and Regulation

The 1930s nearly crippled the industry, with ad spending plummeting to less than 40% of its previous peak. The desire

culture was difficult to maintain when people lacked the means to meet their basic needs. This era also saw a backlash against deceptive claims—such as those made by Fleischmann's Yeast, which claimed it could cure crooked teeth.

In response to this growing skepticism, the federal government empowered the Federal Trade Commission in 1938 to police false and misleading advertising. For the first time, legal guardrails were placed on what a company could claim about its products.



The 1950s quiz show *Twenty-One* sparked a massive national scandal after revelations that producers had rigged the competition by feeding answers to charismatic contestant Charles Van Doren (center), forever shattering the public's trust in television broadcasting and prompting federal regulations on game shows. **Source**: New York World-Telegram and the Sun staff photographer: Orlando Fernandez, Vivienne Nearing, Jack Barry, Charles Van Doren NYWTS, public domain.

The Television Revolution

By 1955, television had surpassed all other media as the primary vehicle for advertising, triggering a 75 percent increase in industry spending. This rate outpaced almost every other economic indicator of the era. This new

medium provided advertisers with massive, geographically diverse markets that could be targeted with unprecedented visual impact. Early television programs followed the single-sponsor model inherited from radio, giving companies total control over shows like *Goodyear TV Playhouse* and *Kraft Television Theatre*. This influence was often extreme; for instance, actress Joy Harmon changed her name to Patty Harmon when she became a hostess for *Tell it to Groucho* because her real first name coincided with a detergent made by the Procter & Gamble Company, and the show planned to identify with its competitor, The Lever Brothers Company.

The present-day network model of television advertising emerged in the late 1950s as escalating production costs made sole sponsorship financially impossible for most corporations. In response, networks began producing their own shows and selling smaller time slots to multiple sponsors. This shift granted producers significantly more creative control, but the quiz show scandals of 1958 solidified the transition. When it was revealed that sponsors had been manipulating show outcomes to drive ratings, the resulting public outcry caused advertisers to withdraw from direct program production.

As the industry moved into the 1960s, advertising research began to employ more scientific and psychological techniques to influence consumer opinion. While the effectiveness of these methods was debated, the idea of subconscious

consumer manipulation became a major public concern. Vance Packard's 1957 bestseller, *The Hidden Persuaders*, brought these critiques to the mainstream, arguing that advertisers were using depth interviews and motivational research to bypass the rational mind. This growing skepticism forced the industry to evolve, leading adventurous agencies to experiment with more self-aware and creative styles to combat increasing consumer fatigue.

The Creative Revolution



The "Think Small" campaign revolutionized the advertising industry by rejecting post-war American consumer extravagance in favor of minimalist design, self-deprecating humor, and unvarnished honesty. **Source**: Alden Jewell, 1962 Volkswagen Ad, CC BY 2.0.

In the late 1950s, Volkswagen faced a significant branding challenge due to its origins in Nazi Germany and its small, unconventional design. To address this, the Doyle Dane Bernbach agency launched a daring campaign in 1959 that fundamentally changed the industry. By adopting a frank, self-deprecating tone and openly mocking the planned obsolescence model of major Detroit automakers, the campaign appealed to a growing demographic of skeptics. The advertisements satirically used 1950s icons such as suburbia and game shows, positioning the Volkswagen Beetle as the ultimate tool for nonconformity. By the end of the 1960s, this approach had become a cultural

touchstone, prompting other brands, like Dodge, to emulate its style by championing rebellion over corporate values.

This era, known as the **Creative Revolution**, prioritized wit and artistic expression over aggressive salesmanship. It mirrored the broader countercultural shifts of the 1960s, which valued authenticity over traditional authority. However, this creative peak eventually gave way to more conventional, product-oriented advertising in the 1970s. Economic recession and a wave of advertising agency mergers led many firms to return to safer, recycled techniques. A major shift occurred early in that decade when television networks lifted their ban on **comparative advertising**. This paved the way for the brand wars that would define the era, most notably the Pepsi Challenge and the long-standing rivalry between Coca-Cola and Pepsi.

The 1980s introduced a new visual language sparked by the debut of **MTV**. Because music videos emphasized rapid-fire editing and stylistic effects, producers of youth-oriented products began to mirror this aesthetic in their commercials. By the end of the decade, these high-concept visual techniques had moved into the mainstream. For example, the pain reliever Nuprin utilized stark black-and-white footage highlighted only by bright yellow pills. At the same time, Michelob used grainy, atmospheric cinematography to sell a lifestyle rather than just a beverage. This focus on vibe and visual identity over direct product claims laid the

groundwork for the modern age of digital and lifestyle branding.

The Shift Toward Brand Identity

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, the traditional advertising model faced a significant crisis as consumer loyalty began to erode. A combination of economic recession and general brand fatigue led many shoppers to abandon expensive name brands in favor of generic alternatives. This shift was reflected in corporate spending: while marketing budgets in the early 1980s allocated roughly 70 percent of their funds to traditional advertising, that number plummeted to just 25 percent a decade later, with the remainder shifting toward direct promotions and price-cutting strategies.

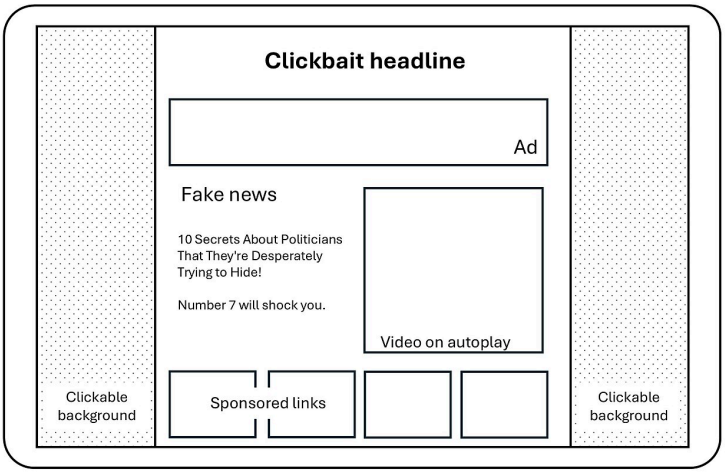
The decline of brand dominance contributed to the meteoric rise of big-box retailers like Walmart, which prioritized low prices over brand prestige. To survive, major corporations began to pivot away from selling a product's physical features and toward selling a lifestyle or an idea. Nike's "Just Do It" campaign, famously associated with Michael Jordan, epitomized this shift. By focusing on the emotional experience of athleticism rather than the technical specifications of a shoe, Nike transitioned

from being a product manufacturer to a marketing-oriented powerhouse.



In the 1990s, protestors targeted Nike due to its questionable labor practices. **Source**: WBUR Boston's NPR News Station – Protest – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

As these megabrands became symbols of global culture, they also became primary targets for social activists. In the late 1990s, companies like Nike and Starbucks faced intense scrutiny and widespread protests over labor practices and sweatshop conditions in their global supply chains. Because these brands had worked so hard to represent broader social values, the public held them to higher ethical standards. This era marked the beginning of a modern trend in which branding and public relations are inextricably linked, as companies must manage their global reputations alongside their product quality.



A diagram illustrating how a made-for-advertising website monetizes low-quality content via advertising technologies. **Source**: Carlos Diaz Ruiz, Made for Advertising (MFA) website, CC BY 4.0.

The Digital Age and the Attention Economy

The transition into the 21st century sparked the most radical shift in advertising history since the invention of the printing press. As audiences migrated from traditional television and print to the internet, the broadcast model of advertising—sending one message to a mass audience—was replaced by **precision targeting**. The rise of social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok transformed consumers from passive viewers into active participants,

allowing brands to integrate themselves into personal social feeds through **influencer marketing** and native content that mimics the look of non-commercial posts.

Data-Driven Personalization and Search

The hallmark of digital advertising is the use of **big data**. Unlike a billboard or a magazine ad, digital ads are powered by complex algorithms that track user behavior, search history, and geographic location in real time. This led to the dominance of **programmatic advertising**, where ad space is bought and sold in automated auctions lasting milliseconds
. Search engines like Google revolutionized the industry by introducing **intent-based advertising**, showing users products at the exact moment they are looking for them.

The AI Revolution and Generative Content

By the mid-2020s, artificial intelligence (AI) became the primary engine of the advertising world. Beyond targeting, AI is now used for dynamic creative optimization, in which an ad's imagery, headline, and call-to-action are automatically rewritten for each user to maximize the likelihood of a click.

Generative AI tools have also drastically reduced production costs, allowing brands to create high-quality video and photographic content instantly. However, this has also raised new ethical concerns regarding deepfakes and the transparency of AI-generated endorsements.



In-game advertisements seamlessly integrate commercial branding into virtual video game environments—ranging from dynamic billboard placements to sponsored playable content—allowing advertisers to reach deeply engaged audiences without disrupting gameplay. **Source**: Pedro Vera, In-game ads, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Emerging Frontiers: Gaming and the Metaverse

As traditional broadcasting continues to decline, advertisers have pivoted toward interactive environments. **In-game advertising** has become a multi-billion-dollar industry, with

brands creating branded experiences on platforms like *Roblox* and *Fortnite*. Simultaneously, the development of augmented reality (AR) allows consumers to virtually place products in their homes via a smartphone camera
before buying, blurring the line between digital browsing and physical reality. This era of the **attention economy** means that advertising is no longer a separate commercial break; it is a seamless, constant, and highly personalized part of the digital experience.

11.3 THE COMPONENTS AND TYPES OF ADVERTISING

The Four Components of Advertising

The advertising business is a complex ecosystem comprising four interconnected components, each playing a crucial role in delivering a message to consumers.



For over a century, Procter & Gamble has cemented its status as a global marketing powerhouse by consistently investing heavily in innovative brand-building strategies, from pioneering early radio soap operas to driving modern, data-driven digital campaigns. **Source**: James Vaughan, 1949 ... Tide's In – Dirt's Out, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

The Client

The **Client** is the company or individual selling a product, service, or idea. Clients engage in advertising for various reasons: to introduce new products, increase sales, build brand loyalty, or manage their public image. While advertising can significantly influence consumer perception, it cannot force the public to buy something they genuinely do not want. Despite this, investment remains massive. In the mid-2020s, global advertising spend exceeded $700 billion annually, with top advertisers like Amazon, Procter & Gamble, and Samsung each spending billions to maintain their market dominance.



Publicis Groupe has grown into one of the world's largest advertising and communications holding companies, renowned for pioneering data-driven marketing transformations and orchestrating global agency networks like Saatchi & Saatchi and Leo Burnett. **Source**: Ferdinando Scala, Publicis Headquarter cropped, CC BY-SA 3.0.

The Agency

The **Agency** consists of professionals who conceptualize, create, and manage campaigns. Since the mid-19th century, agencies have evolved from simple space brokers into strategic partners that handle everything from market research to high-end video production. Today, the industry is dominated by the holding companies WPP, Omnicom, and Publicis Groupe , which manage vast networks of specialized firms.

These agencies follow a systematic process: they meet with clients to define objectives, conduct research to identify the target audience, develop a marketable idea, and then execute the production. In the modern era, this process increasingly involves data scientists who use algorithms to ensure creative content resonates with specific digital subcultures.



Source: Picture on The Mario Blog, CC BY-NC-ND 3.0.

The Media

Media refers to the platforms through which advertisements are delivered. This landscape is in constant flux. Traditional platforms—television, radio, and print—offer broad reach and established credibility but face declining audiences. Conversely, digital platforms like social media (TikTok, Instagram), search engines like Google, and streaming services have revolutionized the industry.

Digital channels offer unprecedented targeting and real-time analytics. Advertisers often use metrics like **CPM** (Cost Per Mille, or

cost per thousand impressions) to measure an ad's efficiency at converting those views into potential customers. A major trend in the 2020s is the shift toward **retail media networks**, in which retailers such as Walmart and Amazon sell ad space directly on their websites, reaching consumers at the exact moment they are ready to purchase.



Source: Lyncconf Games, Social media addiction people using the smartphone in barcelona , CC BY 2.0.

The Audience

The **Audience** comprises the message recipients. To reach them effectively, advertisers segment the population using two primary methods:

- **Demographics:** Segmenting by measurable characteristics such as age, gender, income, education level, and ethnicity. For example, a high-end financial service may target individuals with a household income exceeding $150,000.

- **Psychographics:** Delving into psychological attributes, including lifestyles, values, interests, and attitudes. A brand like Patagonia targets consumers who share its value of environmental sustainability, regardless of age or location.

The most coveted audience for many advertisers is the **heavy user**—the small percentage of consumers who account for a large percentage of a product's sales—or the **influencer**, whose early adoption of a product can trigger a viral trend across social circles. Understanding these nuances is essential to crafting messages that reach people and resonate with them.

Types of Advertising

Consumer advertising encompasses various strategies tailored to reach different audiences and achieve specific goals. **Local advertising** aims to drive foot traffic or engagement with businesses within a particular geographic area, such as a local pizzeria running targeted social media ads or local radio spots

to attract nearby residents. In contrast, **national advertising** focuses on building broader demand for products or services available nationwide. Major campaigns for global brands like Coca-Cola or Samsung aim to create widespread brand recognition and desire rather than immediate visits to a specific storefront.

Within these broader categories, advertising messages can be further categorized by their intended impact. A **direct action message** explicitly prompts consumers to take an immediate, specific action, such as "Limited Time Offer! Shop Now!" buttons on Instagram or a QR code in a magazine that urges customers to scan for a discount. Conversely, an **indirect action message** aims to cultivate a positive image and long-term demand. A luxury watch commercial that showcases heritage and craftsmanship, rather than detailing a specific sale, builds brand prestige over time, making the brand the consumer's first choice when they eventually decide to purchase.



Created in 1944 by the U.S. Forest Service and the Ad Council, Smokey Bear became the longest-running public service advertising campaign in American history, famous for educating generations of citizens that "Only You Can Prevent Wildfires." **Source**: Forest Service, United States Department of Agriculture, in cooperation with the Association of State Foresters and the Advertising Council, Smokey Bear Only You campaign hat , public domain.

Beyond product promotion, **advocacy advertising** aims to advance a particular viewpoint or cause. These campaigns are often sponsored by corporations seeking to highlight their commitment to social issues—such as environmental

sustainability—or by trade associations promoting the benefits of an entire industry. A specific subset of this is **public service advertising (PSA)**, typically created by non-profit organizations or government agencies to promote public welfare. While classic PSAs like Smokey Bear relied on donated television airtime, modern PSAs often use social media challenges and influencer partnerships to reach a younger, digitally native audience.

Beyond consumer-focused efforts, **trade advertising**, also known as business-to-business (B2B) advertising, targets other companies rather than individual consumers. These ads appear in specialized industry journals or at professional conventions, promoting products such as cloud computing infrastructure, industrial robotics, and raw materials. Similarly, **infomercials** represent a distinct long-form format. While originally a staple of late-night broadcast television, the infomercial has evolved into live shopping events on platforms like TikTok and Amazon Live, where creators demonstrate products in real time for a global audience.

Despite the rise of digital media, many traditional advertising methods have proven their enduring effectiveness. Local advertisers and large corporations continue to rely on billboards and direct mail. In a notable example of analog success, Google once launched a massive billboard campaign to promote its business software. The billboards featured a different text-based message every day for an entire month, proving that even the world's largest internet company still

sees value in the physical presence and geographic targeting of traditional billboards.



World-renowned as a global beacon of commercial spectacle, Times Square transforms urban space into an immersive visual theater through towering, neon-lit digital billboards that command the attention of millions of visitors each year. **Source**: MK Feeney, Times Square, NYC (12482671445), CC BY 2.0.

Billboards and Out-of-Home Advertising

Billboards remain a powerful and surprisingly resilient advertising medium, offering high visibility and repeated impressions to a geographically guaranteed audience. In an era of digital

fragmentation, traditional static billboards continue to provide a high return on investment. At the same time, the shift toward **digital out-of-home** advertising has revolutionized the industry. Digital billboards now represent a significant and rapidly growing share of total billboard revenue, largely because they can rotate multiple advertisements and display dynamic content that changes with the time of day, weather, or current traffic conditions.

The effectiveness of this medium stems from the mobile-first nature of modern life. More than 70 percent of consumers report actively noticing roadside billboards, and digital formats have shown an impressive ability to drive conversions. This is often achieved through **omnichannel integration**, in which a billboard serves as a high-impact visual anchor, reinforced by targeted ads on a consumer's smartphone. For instance, geofencing technology allows an advertiser to send a mobile notification or a social media ad to a driver shortly after they pass a specific physical billboard, creating a multi-layered brand experience.

Modern billboards have also embraced the **attention economy** through 3D anamorphic displays—often seen in major hubs like New York's Times Square or Tokyo's Shinjuku—which create a viral spectacle that people film and share on social media. This turns a physical, localized advertisement into a global digital campaign. As data analytics continue to improve, billboards are increasingly bought and sold through programmatic platforms, allowing even small

businesses to purchase digital slots during specific peak hours, making the medium more accessible and data-driven than ever before.

Newspapers and Magazines



As one of the oldest forms of mass marketing, print advertisements leverage tangible media—such as newspapers, magazines, broadsheets, and billboards—to capture consumer attention through tactile presence, visual layout, and lasting physical shelf life. **Source**: Photo by Talewind Creative, CC BY-NC-ND 3.0.

The growth of the internet has profoundly disrupted the traditional economic model of the press. A projected 10.34% annual decline in newspaper ad spending from 2023 to 2027 signals a continued downward trend for the industry, underscoring the ongoing shift of advertising budgets to digital platforms. Historically, newspapers relied on a mix of commercial display ads and classified listings to fund

their operations. However, commercial advertisers have largely shifted to video and social media, while specialized platforms like Craigslist and Facebook Marketplace have made the traditional newspaper classified section nearly obsolete.

Print magazines have faced similar pressures, with many iconic titles either ceasing publication or moving to digital-only formats. The global magazine advertising market, valued at an estimated $11.5 billion in 2021, is projected to contract at a compound annual growth rate of -4.5% from 2022 to 2028. However, the industry is not simply disappearing; it is evolving. Many newspapers and magazines are successfully transitioning to **subscription-based models** and digital-first newsrooms. By implementing paywalls, these organizations have shifted their primary revenue source from advertisers to readers, enabling more independent, high-quality journalism.

Furthermore, some print magazines are finding a sustainable niche as high-end, tactile luxury goods. These publications focus on high production value, premium paper, and long-form storytelling that cannot be replicated on a screen. In the digital space, publishers are leveraging **first-party data**—the information they collect directly from their subscribers—to offer advertisers highly specific, premium audiences that are more valuable than the broad, anonymous traffic found elsewhere on the web. Until the industry fully masters these hybrid models, the landscape will remain a site of intense

experimentation between the enduring prestige of print and the vast reach of digital.



By leveraging theatre of the mind, radio advertising uses voice, music, and sound effects to deliver intimate, highly localized commercial messages directly into listeners' daily routines. **Source**: Cropped photo on rawpixel, CC0 1.0.

Radio and Digital Audio

Compared to traditional print media, radio has demonstrated remarkable resilience by evolving into a multifaceted **digital audio** industry. While traditional AM/FM broadcast revenue has plateaued, the digital side of the business—including streaming, podcasts, and digital station extensions—has become the primary driver of growth. In 2023, the U.S. radio advertising market was valued at $13.6 billion, with digital revenue accounting for approximately 21% of total radio ad revenue. This revenue is projected to increase by 9.7% in 2025. This shift indicates that

while the device in the dashboard may change, the appetite for audio content remains at an all-time high.

Radio's enduring appeal lies in its ubiquitous presence. Approximately 93 percent of adults still engage with broadcast audio at least weekly, and it remains a dominant force in the connected-car ecosystem. However, the industry has successfully expanded far beyond the transmitter. Satellite radio, internet-only stations, and the explosive growth of the **podcast market** have allowed advertisers to follow listeners from their cars to their headphones. Unlike the broad spray-and-pray method of traditional broadcasting, digital audio platforms now utilize **programmatic advertising** to deliver highly personalized spots based on a listener's specific habits, interests, and real-time location.

One of the medium's most potent tools is the **host-read endorsement**. For decades, radio personalities have acted as trusted companions to their audiences. This relationship creates a trust halo, where a recommendation from a familiar DJ carries the weight of a personal friend. In the modern era, this has migrated into podcasting, where host-read ads are considered among the most effective forms of advertising. Because these ads feel like a natural part of the conversation rather than a commercial interruption, they achieve levels of brand recall and consumer trust that traditional visual ads often struggle to match.

Radio's flexibility, relatively low production costs, and

unique ability to create emotional connections through sound and storytelling ensure its continued relevance. Whether through a local FM broadcast or a globally distributed podcast, audio remains a lean-forward medium that captures the consumer's imagination in ways visual media cannot.



Screenshot from the AI-assisted Coca-Cola holiday commercial "Silver Santa". This frame is an AI-generated image of a red truck trailer with a distorted version of the Coca-Cola logo misspelled as "Coca-Coola", awkwardly placed on the rear corner of the trailer, above the wheel and underride guard. While the ad campaign as a whole involved significant human authorship, and the logo was manually edited onto the trucks in other clips used in the video ads, this particular frame appears to be an uncorrected output from generative AI. **Source**: Silverside AI for The Coca-Cola Company AI technologies used in the ad campaign include: Leonardo, Luma, Runway, Kling, Sora (OpenAI), and Minimax, Coca-Cola AI ad – truck with misspelled logo, public domain.

Television and Video Advertising

Television advertising has historically relied on the interruptive model, in which a 15- to 30-second spot interrupts the narrative to deliver a commercial message. However, the landscape has shifted from scheduled linear TV broadcasts to **connected TV** (CTV) and streaming. While traditional broadcast revenue continues to decline cyclically—often dipping in years without major elections or the Olympics—advertising spend is not disappearing; it is migrating. The trend of cord-cutting has led to a reality where traditional pay-TV accounts for less than half of total video subscription revenue. In response, streaming giants have introduced ad-supported tiers, effectively recreating the television model within a digital framework.

The biggest challenge to traditional TV ads remains ad-avoidance technology, such as DVRs and skip buttons. To counter this, advertisers have turned to **programmatic CTV**, which uses digital data to show different commercials to different households watching the same show. This combines the big-screen impact of television with the surgical precision of internet tracking. Furthermore, **shoppable TV** has emerged as a major innovation,

allowing viewers to use their remotes or smartphones to purchase products
directly from the screen during a show or commercial.

Because viewers are increasingly adept at skipping commercials, **product placement** has evolved from a secondary tactic into a primary strategy. While the practice dates back to the 1890s, the modern gold rush began with reality shows like *Survivor* in 2000. Today, this integration is more seamless and high-tech. Reality hits like *Selling Sunset* or *Vanderpump Rules* don't just feature products; they build entire storylines around luxury brands, fashion, and beverages. Even in scripted media, the technology has changed: **virtual product placement** now allows studios to digitally insert a brand-name soda can or a background billboard into a scene
long after filming has wrapped, and even swap that product for different ones across international markets.

The evolution of television advertising marks a move away from the one-size-fits-all broadcast model toward a highly personalized, interactive experience. Whether through a high-stakes giveaway—reminiscent of Oprah Winfrey's famous 2004 car giveaway—or a subtle, AI-inserted brand in a Netflix drama, the goal remains the same: to make the advertisement an unskippable and organic part of the viewing experience.



In one of the most successful product placement deals in cinematic history, sales of Hershey's Reese's Pieces skyrocketed after the candy was famously used to lure the gentle alien in Steven Spielberg's 1982 blockbuster E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial. **Source**: Steven Miller, E.T. and Steven, CC BY 2.0.

Seamless Sales: Weaving Brands into the Narrative Tapestry

Product placement is a sophisticated, increasingly prevalent form of advertising that subtly embeds branded goods or services into the fabric of television programs, films, video games, and other media content. Rather than interrupting the viewing

experience with overt commercials, these products are woven into the narrative, appearing as natural elements characters use or display. This technique aims to introduce audiences to brands in an aspirational or relatable way, letting the product absorb some of the positive associations from the story or characters, which can influence how people see the brand without triggering skepticism about traditional ads.

One of the most iconic examples of the powerful impact of product placement was the use of

in *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*. This beloved Steven Spielberg film featured the endearing alien E.T., who was enticed by a trail of colorful candy. This seemingly minor plot detail had an astonishing real-world effect: Hershey's reported a 65-85% surge in sales following the movie's release. This success story became a benchmark, showing how a product, when organically integrated into a highly popular and emotionally resonant narrative, can achieve unparalleled visibility and directly stimulate consumer demand—especially notable because M&M's, the initial candy choice, declined the opportunity.

Another striking testament to the effectiveness of product placement is the use of Ray-Ban sunglasses in *Risky Business* and *Top Gun*. Ray-Ban, a brand

experiencing flagging sales, saw a dramatic resurgence in popularity thanks to its prominent role in these two blockbusters. In *Risky Business*, Tom Cruise's character, famously donning Wayfarer sunglasses, became a cultural touchstone. Just a few years later, in *Top Gun*, Cruise's character, Maverick, prominently sported Ray-Ban Aviators. These deliberate placements propelled sales of both models into the stratosphere, firmly cementing Ray-Ban's image as cool, rebellious, and adventurous.

In more recent years, the ubiquitous presence of Apple products in countless TV shows and movies serves as a masterclass in long-term, pervasive product placement. For decades, Apple has made its laptops and iPhones the communication devices of choice for characters across all genres. This consistent integration reinforces Apple's brand as premium, intuitive, and the natural choice for modern life. Interestingly, Apple's influence is so pervasive that it has reportedly established a rule: villains in movies are rarely shown using an iPhone on screen.

The landscape of product placement has expanded further in the digital age. In the 2020s, companies are using digital insertion technology to add brand logos or products into scenes *after* filming is completed. This

allows streaming services to swap out products based on the viewer's location or current trends, ensuring that a background soda can or billboard remains relevant years after the original content was produced. Furthermore, video games like *Death Stranding* or *Cyberpunk 2077* have integrated real-world brands directly into their gameplay, making the commercial element an inescapable part of the interactive experience.



By integrating dynamic billboards, branded virtual goods, and sponsored events directly into interactive environments, in-game advertising offers brands an immersive way to engage captive gaming audiences without interrupting gameplay. **Source**: Funcom Productions, Anarchy Online Billboard, cropped, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Video Games and Immersive Platforms

Video games have evolved from a niche hobby into one of the most sophisticated and data-rich platforms for modern advertising. This transformation is driven by the intense flow state of gamers—a level of engagement and focus that traditional media cannot match. As a result, brands no longer buy space *around* games; they embed themselves *within* the virtual experience.

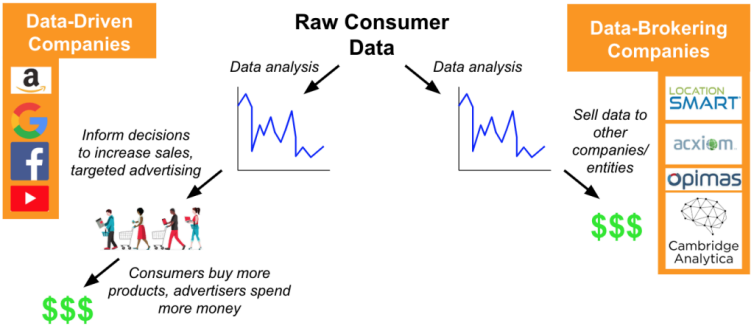
The history of in-game advertising reached a major turning point during the 2008 U.S. presidential election. The Barack Obama campaign was a pioneer in this space, purchasing dynamic billboard space in titles like *Burnout Paradise*, *Madden NFL 09*, and others. By placing "Vote Early" banners in games popular with younger demographics, the campaign proved that virtual spaces were legitimate arenas for serious social and political messaging, not just commercial products.

In the current landscape, video game advertising has moved far beyond simple billboards. **Dynamic in-game advertising** now functions much like the broader internet, with ads served in real-time based on the player's geographic location and past behavior

. This is most prominent in product placement, where brands are woven into the gameplay itself. In a modern racing game like *Forza Horizon*, the advertising is the content; players spend hours interacting with high-fidelity recreations of real-world car brands, building a deep, functional affinity for the product through use rather than observation.

The rise of social hub games like *Roblox* and *Fortnite* has ushered in an era of **brand activations and virtual worlds**. Rather than placing a single ad, companies now build entire persistent environments. For example, Nikeland in *Roblox* lets users play branded mini-games and outfit their avatars with digital apparel. This has given rise to the skin-to-store model , where players can purchase digital clothing for their avatar that simultaneously orders a physical version of the item to be shipped to their real-world address.

Furthermore, the integration of **AI-driven NPCs** has created a new frontier for conversational advertising. In some modern titles, background characters may be programmed to mention a specific brand or offer a player a quest sponsored by a real-world company. Whether through incentivized ads in mobile games—where players watch a video to earn in-game currency—or through massive virtual concerts in *Fortnite*, the video game industry has become a primary pillar of the modern attention economy, offering a level of brand immersion previously impossible.



A schematic of the difference in workflow between data-driven and data-brokering companies that shows how each type of company generates revenue from data. **Source**: Jasraj Raghuwanshi, Data-driven vs data-brokering , CC BY-SA 4.0.

Digital Media and the Data-Driven Frontier

Digital media advertising has transformed the internet from a static library into a highly personalized marketplace. While traditional media sends the same message to everyone, digital platforms leverage vast amounts of data to target specific individuals with surgical precision. This shift is driven by the exchange of free content for user data, enabling advertisers to move beyond broad demographics to **behavioral targeting**. However, this efficiency introduces a significant ethical tension: the line between helpful personalization and invasive surveillance is often blurred, creating a gray area that current laws are still struggling to define.

Historically, the **cookie** was the primary tool for this tracking. These small text files allowed websites to remember login details and track a user's journey across the web
. However, the 2020s marked the post-cookie era. Due to increased privacy regulations (like GDPR) and technical changes by browser developers, the industry has shifted away from third-party tracking toward **first-party data**. This means brands now focus on building direct relationships with consumers through newsletters and loyalty programs. While this shift is often framed as a privacy victory, it has led to the rise of walled gardens—massive platforms like Meta or Amazon that own so much internal data they can track users' habits without ever needing an external cookie, raising new questions about digital monopolies and fair competition.

This data collection also enables **dynamic pricing**, a strategy in which algorithms adjust prices in real time based on perceived intent. While often discussed as a life hack for travel sites—where
repeated searches for a flight might trigger a price nudge
—modern dynamic pricing is a sophisticated AI-driven tool used across e-commerce. It analyzes supply and demand, as well as the devices individuals use, to determine the optimal price point. From an ethical standpoint, critics argue this borders on price discrimination, yet it remains largely legal under current frameworks, illustrating

the gap between technological capability and regulatory oversight.



The "The Man Your Man Could Smell Like" campaign revitalized the Old Spice brand by using fast-paced, surreal humor and seamless single-take visual effects to humorously appeal to female buyers while redefining men's body wash marketing. **Source**: SOCIALisBETTER, Old Spice | Deodorant, Antiperspirant & Other Man Fresheners , CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Viral Ads and the Shared-Media Phenomenon

As the internet has matured, advertisers have sought to move beyond simple placement and toward the holy grail of marketing: the **viral ad**. A viral advertisement achieves spontaneous, explosive success through organic user sharing, turning consumers into the brand's primary distribution

channel. While the success rate of such ads is notoriously difficult to predict, modern marketers have developed sophisticated strategies to increase an ad's viral potential by prioritizing emotional resonance—such as humor, awe, or surprise—over a traditional hard-sell strategy.

A classic and enduring benchmark for this strategy is the Old Spice "The Man Your Man Could Smell Like" campaign. Launched with actor Isaiah Mustafa, the ad became a global sensation for its absurd, rapid-fire monologue and single-take filming technique that transitioned seamlessly from a shower to a yacht and, finally, to a horse. By targeting women—the primary purchasers of men's hygiene products—with the opening line "Hello, ladies," the campaign was as strategically smart as it was creative. Its longevity is notable; even decades after its debut, the campaign remains a case study in how a brand can reinvent itself for the digital age by embracing the spectacle.

In the contemporary landscape, the definition of a viral ad has shifted away from high-production television commercials and toward short-form vertical video. On platforms like TikTok and Instagram Reels, brands often find success by mimicking lo-fi user-generated content. A viral moment in the 2020s often looks less like a polished movie and more like a person filming in their kitchen. For example, when an Ocean Spray cranberry juice bottle was featured in a low-key, viral skateboarding video set to Fleetwood Mac, the brand saw a massive surge in sales and brand sentiment.

Today, the viral loop is often sustained through **remix culture**. Advertisers now create content specifically designed to be memed or used as background audio in other users' videos. This turns a single advertisement into thousands of derivative pieces of content, ensuring that the message stays relevant long after the initial post. By successfully entering the viral loop, these advertisements transcend their commercial purpose and become part of a shared cultural vocabulary, creating catchphrases and references that persist in the public consciousness long after the campaign ends.



Source: Geralt, Social-media-3758364 1920, CC0 1.0.

Social Media

Social media platforms have revolutionized advertising by leveraging the vast amounts of personal information users share on their profiles to deliver highly targeted ads. If a user follows a specific musician or joins a local hiking community group, algorithms can immediately

serve them ads for concert tickets or outdoor gear. While this level of personalization enhances relevance, it has also sparked intense debate over the ethics of data collection and the boundaries of digital privacy.

Since 2010, privacy concerns have shifted from theoretical worries to major public scandals. The 2018 Cambridge Analytica scandal served as a turning point, revealing how personal data from millions of Facebook users could be harvested without explicit consent for political profiling. This event brought data privacy to the forefront of global discourse, prompting a wave of stringent regulations designed to restore control to consumers. The European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the California Consumer Privacy Act established new standards, requiring companies to be transparent about how their data is used and granting users the legal right to opt out of tracking.

Beyond government regulation, major technology companies have introduced their own privacy-centric changes. Apple's 2021 **App Tracking Transparency** framework was particularly disruptive, requiring apps to ask for explicit permission before tracking a user's activity across other platforms. This led to a significant decrease in the availability of third-party data, forcing advertisers to abandon the practice of following users around the web. Instead, brands have turned toward **first-party data**, which is information collected directly from their own customers through sign-ups

and purchases, and **contextual advertising**, which places ads based on the content of a page rather than the profile of the person reading it.



Khaby Lame became the most-followed influencer on TikTok by using silent, expressive comedy to deadpan simple solutions to overly complicated "life hack" videos. **Source**: State Farm, Khaby Lame, Jake from State Farm, and Mat during Tik Tok video shoots (Khaby Lame cropped), CC BY 2.0.

Despite these shifts, free digital services—such as email platforms like Gmail and social networks like TikTok—remain dependent on advertising for survival. Google, for instance, generates the majority of its revenue from its ad network. However, to maintain user trust in a privacy-conscious world,

these companies have moved toward privacy sandboxes and anonymized data sets. They now explicitly state that they do not use the contents of private communications for ad personalization
, relying instead on broader, anonymized online activity and user-controlled settings.

The digital advertising industry continues to seek a delicate balance. Advertisers must navigate a landscape in which users demand highly personalized experiences yet are increasingly unwilling to share the personal data required to deliver them. This tension has led to the rise of **zero-party data**, where users proactively share their preferences and interests with brands
in exchange for a better, more ethical experience. The goal of modern social media advertising is no longer to target users, but to earn their trust through transparency and value.

The rise of **influencer marketing** has brought new legal and ethical complexities. In 2026, the Federal Trade Commission tightened its enforcement of this type of marketing, requiring influencers to provide "clear and conspicuous" disclosures, such as placing #ad or #sponsored at the very beginning of captions or verbally stating the partnership within the first few seconds of a video. A major shift in this space is the emergence of **virtual influencers**—fully AI-generated digital personas such as Lil Miquela and Shudu. While these characters offer brands total creative control and 24/7 availability without the risk of

real-world scandals, they raise questions about authenticity. Marketers are now expected to transparently disclose when a person in an ad is actually a synthetic entity to maintain consumer trust.

Social Marketing

While traditional advertising focuses on selling products, **social marketing** applies the same persuasive techniques to promote ideas, behaviors, and social causes. This branch of the industry is not about the commercial exchange of goods, but about influencing the public to adopt behaviors that benefit society as a whole. Common examples include campaigns promoting public health (such as vaping cessation or vaccination), environmental protection (like recycling or water conservation), and civic engagement (such as encouraging citizens to vote).

Successful social marketing depends on understanding the barriers that prevent people from changing their behavior. Unlike a consumer who might buy a snack on impulse, a social consumer is often asked to do something difficult, such as giving up a habit or spending more time on a civic duty. Therefore, these campaigns often use **social cognitive theory** to

show relatable individuals successfully performing the desired behavior

, creating a sense of self-efficacy in the viewer. In the digital

age, social marketing has shifted toward community-based approaches that use social media to build local networks of support that encourage long-term lifestyle changes.

A powerful real-world example of a highly successful influencer engaging in social marketing is Charli D'Amelio, the TikTok sensation. In 2020, Dunkin' (formerly Dunkin' Donuts) partnered with the then-16-year-old, who had amassed an enormous following on the platform, to introduce "The Charli" – a limited-edition beverage that was her actual go-to Dunkin' order (cold brew with whole milk and caramel swirl). The campaign was a multifaceted success:



Charli D'Amelio rose to rapid global stardom on TikTok by sharing short dance choreography videos. **Source**: NickRewind, Charli D'Amelio at KCAs 2023 01, CC BY 3.0.

D'Amelio announced the drink on her social channels, Dunkin' promoted it on its social media and in its app, and customers were incentivized with bonus points for ordering "The Charli" via the mobile app. This collaboration resulted in a significant 57% surge in Dunkin's mobile app downloads

and a reported 20% sales boost for all cold brew coffees on the day "The Charli" debuted, followed by a 45% increase the day after. The success stemmed from the authenticity of the partnership – D'Amelio was a known Dunkin' fan before the collaboration – and from her ability to connect directly with a highly engaged Gen Z audience, demonstrating how an influencer's credibility can translate into tangible sales and brand engagement.

Mobile Phones and the Hyper-Local Frontier

Mobile phones have evolved into the primary platform for a diverse range of advertising opportunities, moving far beyond early internet radio ads and simple banner placements. The ubiquity of smartphones and the rollout of 5G connectivity have transformed mobile advertising into a sophisticated, high-impact sector. While early mobile apps featured basic advertisements in the margins to offset development costs, the industry has since diversified into more complex models in which users often choose between paying for pro versions and engaging with ad-supported content that offers tangible value.



Free smartphone apps often include ads to help offset service costs. **Source**: FriscoFoodie at English Wikipedia, AppfloodFullScreenInterstitial, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Recent developments in mobile advertising focus heavily on **geofencing** and **location-based targeting**. With user consent, apps can access precise geographic coordinates to offer hyper-local ads for businesses within walking distance. This enables real-time proximity marketing, such as a coffee shop sending a digital coupon to a user's phone the moment they enter a two-block radius of the store. This level of precision ensures that messages are not only relevant to the user's interests but also to their immediate physical context.

In-app advertising has matured into several distinct, highly engaging formats designed to reduce ad fatigue. **Interstitial ads** appear as full-screen experiences between content segments, while **rewarded video ads** offer users in-game currency or extra lives in exchange for their attention. Additionally, **playable ads** serve as interactive mini-games, allowing users to test a simplified version of an app before committing to a download. These formats turn the

advertisement into an interactive experience, often resulting in conversion rates much higher than with static images.

Perhaps the most transformative shift in mobile advertising is the rise of **augmented reality**. Unlike virtual reality, which requires a headset and a fully simulated environment, AR overlays digital information onto the real world via the smartphone's camera. This technology has revolutionized product visualization; for example, apps from retailers like IKEA let users virtually place furniture in their living rooms to check size and style before purchase. Similarly, beauty brands use AR for virtual try-ons, letting consumers see how different makeup shades look on their own faces in real time.

The evolution of mobile advertising is increasingly driven by **artificial intelligence**. These systems manage campaigns through algorithmic optimization, ensuring that the right message reaches the right user at the most effective time without relying on invasive tracking methods. Despite privacy frameworks like Apple's App Tracking Transparency, the industry continues to innovate by focusing on first-party data and contextual relevance. Mobile advertising remains a dynamic force, constantly pushing the boundaries of how brands and consumers interact in a hybrid physical-digital world.

Does anyone watch advertisements?



Best known for playing Sawyer on *Lost*, actor Josh Holloway starred as the rugged face of Davidoff Cool Water in a memorable mid-2000s advertising campaign that featured him diving off high cliffs into ocean waves. **Source**: Scorpions and Centaurs, Josh Holloway – Davidoff 'Cool Water' display , CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

The pervasive issue of clutter represents a significant challenge for advertisers in today's media-saturated world. **Clutter** refers to the overwhelming volume of non-programming messages—primarily advertisements, but also promotional announcements and station identifications—that constantly compete for consumer attention across various platforms. The scale of this problem is staggering; estimates suggest the average American is exposed to 4,000-10,000 advertisements daily. On television, roughly 15 minutes of every hour of programming is typically dedicated to this type of commercial clutter.

This relentless barrage makes it increasingly difficult to break through the clutter. The human brain naturally filters

out constant commercial noise, and the impact of an advertisement diminishes rapidly with repetition. To combat this, advertisers employ **celebrity endorsements**, hoping to leverage the fame and credibility of a well-known personality to capture attention and build trust. For example, a celebrity chef might endorse a specific brand of cookware to stand out within a crowded commercial break. Beyond traditional spots, brands are increasingly opting for engaging 30-second vignettes that feel like mini-stories or entertainment snippets, designed to hold attention amid the surrounding noise and keep viewers from fast-forwarding through commercial breaks.

Hidden Persuaders Under the Surface?

The notion of **subliminal advertising**—hidden messages designed to influence consumers below the threshold of conscious perception—has long captivated the public imagination. However, the scientific community largely agrees that there is



Subliminal advertising at work: notice the word "mom" embedded in Wendy's necklace? **Source**: Famartin, 2020-03-25 20 27 53 A large carton of french fries from Wendy's in the Franklin Farm section of Oak Hill, Fairfax County, Virginia , CC BY-SA 4.0.

no robust research supporting the effectiveness of subliminal messages

in compelling people to act against their will. The most famous claim regarding this practice dates back to 1957, when researcher James Vicary claimed that flashing "Eat Popcorn" and "Drink Coca-Cola" for mere milliseconds during a film resulted in a dramatic increase in concession sales. Vicary later admitted that the study was a fabricated publicity stunt

, yet the myth of advertisers' secret power persisted.

While the human brain does process information unconsciously, fleeting stimuli are generally too weak to exert the kind of controlling influence often attributed to them. Despite this, regulatory bodies in countries such as the United Kingdom and Australia have explicitly banned the practice for its deceptive nature. In the United States, the Federal Trade Commission would likely deem intentional subliminal messaging deceptive advertising if it were proven to mislead consumers. The enduring fascination with this topic speaks more to a general unease about hidden persuasion than to any actual efficacy.



By leveraging the established trust and authenticity of popular content creators, influencer marketing allows brands to connect with highly targeted audiences through organic, relatable endorsements rather than traditional broadcast ads. **Source**: Victor Sergeevich, Asian fashion blogger cropped, CC0 1.0

Disguising Ads as Content

As consumers have grown increasingly adept at ignoring banners and using ad blockers, advertisers have employed various techniques to reach customers. These approaches blur the lines between editorial material and promotional messaging. By mimicking the look, feel, and function of the platform on which it appears—whether a news article, social media feed, or podcast segment—sponsored content bypasses ad blindness. These diverse applications demonstrate how sponsored content has become a sophisticated and effective

way for advertisers to connect with audiences in a less disruptive, more authentic way.

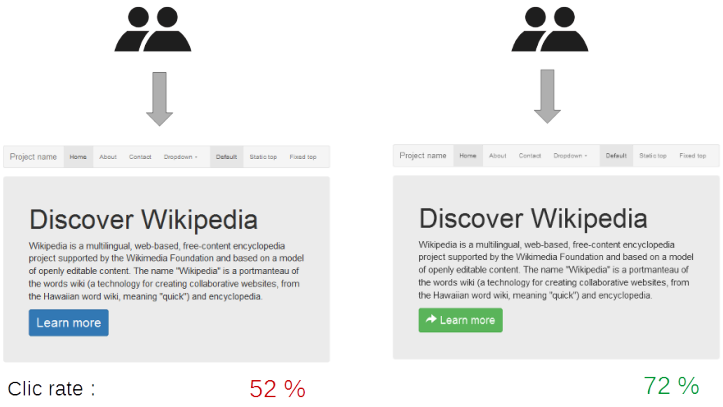
Advertorials and native advertising are sophisticated forms of paid media that seamlessly blend commercial messages with editorial content. An advertorial is a paid message crafted to resemble a journalistic article or editorial piece. While these are meticulously designed to mimic the surrounding font and layout of a publication, they are legally required to be labeled as "advertisement" or "sponsored content" to maintain transparency.

Native advertising takes this concept further by matching a publication's editorial standards in both form and value. The goal is to provide genuine information or entertainment that meets audience expectations while subtly promoting a brand. A positive example might be a retirement planning guide on a financial news site sponsored by a wealth management firm; the content provides unbiased, helpful advice while building the brand's authority. However, native advertising can be controversial if transparency is lacking. A famous 2013 incident involving *The Atlantic* and a sponsored feature for the Church of Scientology drew sharp criticism for failing to distinguish the ad from objective journalism. This example reminds advertisers that they must tread

carefully when integrating messages into content people actually want to read.

On platforms like TikTok or Instagram, creators use **influencer marketing** to produce get-ready-with-me videos or lifestyle vlogs that subtly feature products. Because the recommendation comes from a creator the audience already trusts, the engagement is far higher than a traditional commercial. This trust-based model has also revitalized podcasting and digital journalism, where partner content provides deep dives into topics such as technology or wellness, funded by brands seeking to associate with those areas of expertise.

The next evolution is **shoppable content**, where the line between seeing and buying gets erased. Users can now click a product directly within a sponsored video or article and complete a purchase without ever leaving the app. This seamless integration of entertainment and commerce represents the final stage of digital media's evolution: a world where everything individuals consume is potentially a storefront.



A/B testing is a data-driven optimization strategy that compares two distinct variants of a webpage, advertisement, or user interface element to determine which version generates higher engagement and conversion rates. **Source**: Maxime Lorant, A-B testing simple example, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Impact of AI on Advertising

Artificial intelligence is rapidly transforming the advertising industry, fundamentally reshaping how campaigns are conceived, executed, and optimized. Its impact comes from its ability to process and analyze large datasets, identify complex patterns, and make highly accurate predictions that far exceed human capabilities. This has led to an era of **hyper-personalization**, where advertising messages are no longer broad strokes but f

inely tuned communications delivered to individual consumers
at precisely the right moment.

Algorithms now analyze a user's browsing history, purchase patterns, and social media activity alongside real-time contextual signals. Major platforms like Google Ads and Meta Ads heavily leverage **AI** to dictate who sees an ad and how much it costs. While this level of granular targeting vastly improves relevance, it also creates an accountability gap. The black-box nature of these algorithms means that even the advertisers themselves often cannot explain precisely why a specific individual was targeted. This lack of transparency creates an ethical dilemma: if an AI agent inadvertently targets vulnerable populations with high-interest loans or gambling ads, who is responsible—the programmer, the brand, or the algorithm itself?

Beyond targeting, technology is revolutionizing the creative process. **Generative AI** tools can now produce countless variations of ad copy and visual assets in seconds. This allows brands to rapidly perform **A/B testing** to see what resonates most with specific audience segments.
However, the move toward automated creativity carries the risk of **algorithmic bias**. If an AI is trained on historically biased data, it may inadvertently perpetuate harmful stereotypes or unfairly exclude certain demographic groups from seeing opportunities

, such as housing or job ads. As we will see in the next section, these ethical gray zones are exactly where government regulators must step in to protect the public from unintended technological harm.

Sustainability and Greenwashing



Pharmaceutical and agricultural giant Bayer faced widespread public scrutiny and legal challenges over greenwashing after marketing its glyphosate-based weedkiller, Roundup, as "environmental," "safety-approved," and friendly to biodiversity despite mounting evidence of ecological harm and human health risks. **Source**: Philipp Mimkes Coordination gegen BAYER-Gefahren www.CBGnetwork.org, UNEP Stop Greenwashing Bayer , cropped, CC BY 3.0.

Sustainability has moved from a marketing buzzword to a core business operating system. Consumers increasingly demand that brands demonstrate a commitment to **ESG** (Environmental, Social, and Governance) principles. However,

this has led to the rise of **greenwashing**—the practice of making deceptive or exaggerated claims about a product's environmental benefits to appeal to eco-conscious buyers. To combat this, regulators have introduced stricter standards for "green" labels, requiring brands to provide verifiable data on their carbon footprint and on the ethics of their supply chain. Modern advertising is less about virtue signaling and more about providing transparent, science-based evidence of a company's impact on the planet.

In recent years, several high-profile cases have illustrated the risks of deceptive environmental messaging. For example, in 2025, the Advertising Standards Authority banned ads from major fashion brands like Nike, Lacoste, and Superdry for using vague terms like "sustainable" or "sustainable style" without sufficient evidence. The regulator ruled that these absolute claims could mislead consumers into believing the products had zero detrimental impact on the environment throughout their entire lifecycle. Similarly, the airline industry has faced intense scrutiny; airlines like Virgin Atlantic and KLM have been censured for promoting "sustainable aviation fuel" and "carbon-neutral" flights, with courts and regulators finding that such claims often downplay the significant, ongoing fossil fuel emissions inherent in air travel.

Conversely, brands that successfully navigate this landscape do so through radical transparency and measurable action.

Patagonia remains a gold standard with its "Worn Wear" program, which explicitly encourages customers to repair and reuse gear rather than buy new items. This message reinforces their anti-consumerist stance. Another example is IKEA, which transitioned from vague eco claims to functional circular-economy initiatives, such as its furniture buyback and resale program. Nowadays, the most effective "green" ads have shifted away from images of lush forests and toward hard data, such as carbon-footprint labels and third-party certifications, proving that in a skeptical market, showing is far more powerful than telling.

11.4 GOVERNMENT REGULATION OF ADVERTISING

Government Regulation of Advertising

Advertising regulation has played a significant role in shaping the industry's history and cultural influence. The journey began with the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906, enacted in response to public outcry over patent medicines that promised miraculous cures but often contained dangerous ingredients. While this law required informational labels, it did not address the deceptive nature of the advertisements themselves, leaving a loophole that would remain open for decades.



Source: Tiffany & Co. creator QS:P170,Q1066858, Seal of the United States Federal Trade Commission, public domain.

The Formation of the FTC

Founded in 1914, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) was established to regulate unfair competition, including false advertising. Initially, the law required plaintiffs to prove that an ad caused actual physical or financial harm. However, the Wheeler-Lea Amendment of 1938 expanded the FTC's

mandate to protect consumers directly, regardless of whether a competitor was harmed. This established the FTC as the primary watchdog for the consumer movement.

Truth in Advertising and Substantiation



The Federal Trade Commission ordered the makers of Listerine to run millions of dollars in corrective advertising. **Source**: James Vaughan, 1942...gag-a-light!, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

In 1971, the FTC initiated the Advertising Substantiation Program, which shifted the burden of proof onto the advertiser. Companies must now have a reasonable basis for their claims *before* the ad runs. If an ad is found to be deceptive, the FTC can issue a

Cease-and-Desist Order or, in extreme cases, order Corrective Advertising. A famous example of this occurred when the makers of Listerine were forced to run ads clarifying that their mouthwash did not, in fact, prevent colds or sore throats as previously claimed.

This oversight also extends to specialized claims. In 1992, the FTC introduced the Green Guides to define terms such as "biodegradable" and "recyclable." This was a direct response to companies like Mobil Oil, which advertised Hefty trash bags as biodegradable even though they take centuries to decompose in a landfill. More recently, in 2006, the FTC fined Sunny Health Nutrition $375,000 for HeightMax pills after discovering that the company had used a fake expert to promote a product with no scientific basis for increasing a person's height.

Regulation in the Digital and AI Era

The rise of social media and artificial intelligence (AI) has forced regulators to adapt rapidly. The Endorsement Guides, updated in 2023, now explicitly require influencers to disclose material connections to a brand (e.g., money, free products, or family ties). These disclosures must be clear and conspicuous, meaning they cannot be buried in a sea of hashtags.

With the advent of generative AI, the marketplace has been

flooded with inauthentic content. In August 2024, the FTC issued a landmark final rule prohibiting the sale or purchase of fake or AI-generated reviews. This allows the agency to seek significant civil penalties against companies that pollute the marketplace with bot-generated testimonials or fake social media followers, creating a false sense of popularity.

Protecting Vulnerable Populations

The Children's Online Privacy Protection Act of 1998 remains the cornerstone of digital protection for minors, prohibiting the collection of personal data from children under 13 without parental consent. However, modern challenges persist. Alcohol brands, for example, have faced scrutiny for creating gamified virtual environments that—while technically requiring age verification—are easily bypassed by tech-savvy minors.

The ongoing challenge for the FTC, the Federal Communications Commission, and the Food and Drug Administration is to keep pace with an industry that moves at the speed of an algorithm. As advertising becomes more integrated into our digital lives through native advertising and sponsored content, the

industry's referees must continually redefine what it means to be truthful in a world of deepfakes and data tracking.

11.5 ADVERTISING'S INFLUENCE ON CULTURE



Source: Jonathan McIntosh, Mall culture jakarta36, CC BY 2.0.

Advertising's Influence on Culture

The debate over advertising's influence on culture is a classic "chicken or the egg" scenario: does advertising merely reflect existing cultural trends, or does it actively shape them? In reality, both ideas hold merit. Advertising acts as a cultural mirror, but the mirror is often a funhouse variety—it selects, amplifies, and distorts specific values to align them with a **consumer culture**.

Advertising and the Rise of Consumer Culture

George Babbitt, the protagonist of Sinclair Lewis's 1922 novel *Babbitt*, truly believed in the growing American consumer culture:

> Just as the priests of the Presbyterian Church determined his every religious belief, so did the national advertisers shape the surface of his life, altering what he believed to be his individuality. These standard advertised wares—toothpastes, socks, tires, cameras, instantaneous hot-water heaters—were his symbols and proofs of excellence; at first the signs, and then the substitutes, for joy and passion and wisdom.

This fictional account captured a very real historical transition: the birth of the American consumer.

During this era, automobile ads stopped selling engines and started selling freedom. Simultaneously, advertisers began breaking social taboos to create new markets. By transforming bad breath from a minor social nuisance into the medicalized epidemic of halitosis, Listerine commercials made public discussion of the body acceptable while heightening social anxiety. This era proved that advertising could create needs by redefining cultural standards of hygiene and social acceptance.

Creating the Modern World

By the mid-20th century, advertising had become the primary architect of the modern American dream. Following World War I, advertising was increasingly viewed as a tool for social engineering. In an address to the



Source: Coca-Cola inc., Coca-Cola ad – 1912-05, public domain.

American Association of Advertising Agencies in 1926, President Coolidge went as far as to hold advertisers responsible for the "regeneration and redemption of mankind." In the 1950s and early 60s, agencies—largely staffed by affluent White men—propagated a sanitized, suburban ideal. Shows like *Leave It to Beaver* and the commercials that surrounded them created a standard of the American family that was almost exclusively White, middle-class, and patriarchal.

However, the cultural backlash of the 1960s forced

advertisers to pivot. Instead of ignoring the rebellion, they co-opted it. When Volkswagen marketed the Beetle with the "Think Small" campaign, they turned the era's anti-consumerist sentiment into a new set of consumer symbols. They proved that even rebellion could be packaged and sold.

The Power of Cultural Symbols: From Apple to Generation X



Apple's iconic "1984" commercial framed the launch of the Macintosh computer as a revolutionary act against totalitarian conformity, establishing a bold new standard for cinematic event advertising. **Source**: All About Apple, Macintosh 128k transparency , CC BY-SA 2.5 IT

One of the most significant examples of advertising defining a product through cultural trends is Apple's "1984" Super Bowl commercial. Directed by Ridley Scott, the ad utilized imagery from George Orwell's dystopian novel to frame the Macintosh not as a computer, but as a weapon against conformity and Big Brother (represented by the industry giant IBM). Apple didn't just sell a machine; they sold a pioneer identity.

In his study of advertising's cultural impact, *The Conquest of Cool*,

Thomas Franks compares the advertising of the 1960s with that of the early 1990s

:

> How [advertisers] must have rejoiced when the leading minds of the culture industry announced the discovery of an all-new angry generation, the "Twenty-Somethings," complete with a panoply of musical styles, hairdos, and verbal signifiers ready-made to rejuvenate advertising's sagging credibility.... The strangest aspect of what followed wasn't the immediate onslaught of even hipper advertising, but that the entire "Generation X" discourse repeated...the discussions of youth culture that had appeared in *Advertising Age*, *Madison Avenue*, and on all those youth-market panel discussions back in the sixties.

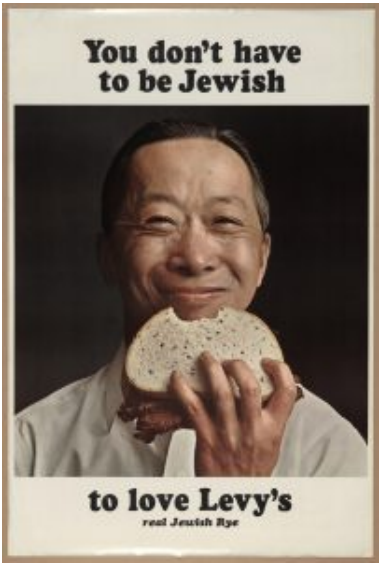
Advertisers have not set out to consciously manipulate the public in the name of consumer culture. Instead, advertisers perform their job, one that has had an enormous influence on culture.

Advertising Stereotypes and the Visual Language of Perfection

The composition of advertising agencies has historically dictated whose stories are told and how they are visualized. For decades, a predominantly White, middle-class workforce in Madison Avenue agencies created a standard American image that often ignored or caricatured minority populations

. However, as social movements gained momentum, the industry began a slow, sometimes painful transition toward more authentic representation.

Breaking the "Mainstream" Mold



Source: Photo on rawpixel, CC0 1.0.

In the 1960s, the Doyle Dane Bernbach agency—famous for its innovative Volkswagen work—began to challenge the industry's ethnic blind spot. Their campaign for Levy's Rye Bread featured the headline "You don't have to be Jewish to love Levy's," accompanied by photos of people of various races and ethnicities enjoying the product. This was revolutionary; it transformed ethnic diversity from something to be ignored

into a primary selling point. Brands are increasingly responding to these insights. Recent examples of inclusive advertising include Mattel's initiative to make its games colorblind-accessible, Amped Fitness's creation of Babe Cave women-only gym spaces, and Dove's "The Code" campaign, which highlighted the damaging impact of AI-generated images on female confidence. Nike's black-and-white spot during Super Bowl LIX, featuring diverse female athletes, also aimed to defy stereotypes and resonate with a broader audience. These efforts reflect a growing understanding that authentic and diverse representation is not just a social imperative but a strategic business advantage that fosters deeper connections with consumers and drives growth.

From Servants to Professionals: Racial Stereotypes

Before the Civil Rights Movement, African Americans were largely invisible in advertising except when portrayed in domestic roles. Icons such as Aunt Jemima, the Cream of Wheat chef, and Uncle Ben became famous not for their achievements, but as symbols of servitude. By the 1960s, civil rights leaders began meeting with the



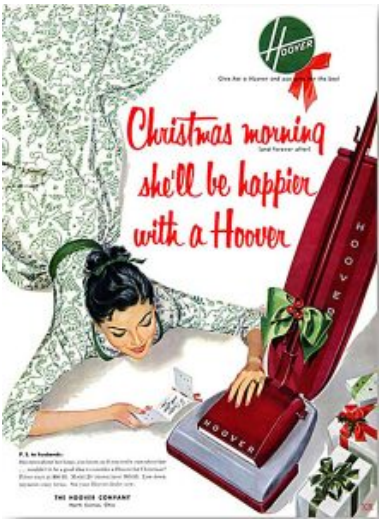
Aunt Jemima was rebranded and discontinued its original logo and name. **Source**: Davis Milling Company, New-York Tribune, November 07, 1909, Page 20, Image 44. Aunt Jemima , public domain.

American Association of Advertising Agencies to protest these biases. While this led to the hiring of more Black employees and the rise of Black-owned agencies in the 1970s, modern data show that disparities remain. In 2023, Hispanic/Latino and Black individuals remained underrepresented within the marketing profession compared

to their share of the total U.S. population, while Asian representation was slightly above the national average.

Recent studies, such as those by the Unstereotype Alliance, show that inclusive advertising is not just a social goal but a business imperative. Campaigns that authentically portray a full range of people deliver 3.5% higher short-term sales and a staggering 16% higher long-term sales. Research also indicates that diverse representation in ads can positively influence purchase intent across consumer groups, suggesting that authenticity and broad appeal resonate.

The Gendered Gaze and the Domestic Housewife



Mid-twentieth-century advertisements targeting domestic housewives heavily leveraged traditional gender roles and consumer anxiety, framing household appliances and cleaning products as essential tools for proving maternal devotion and domestic efficiency. **Source**: James Vaughan, ...happier with a Hoover, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

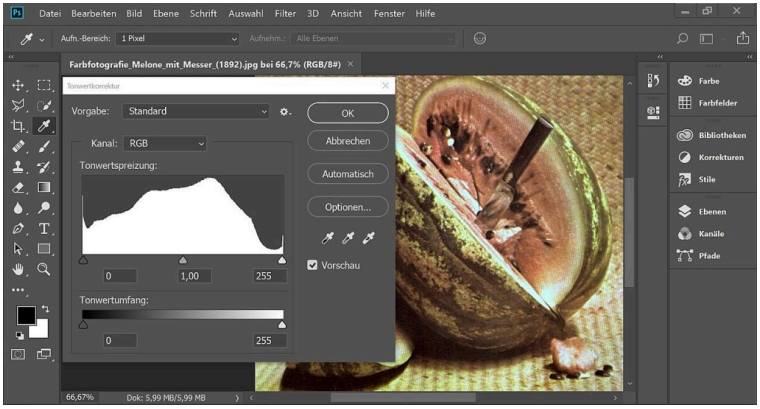
Historically, women were the primary targets of advertising because they made approximately 70-80% of consumer purchases. Despite this, early ads placed them in incredibly narrow roles. In the 1960s, women were almost exclusively shown performing

domestic chores. In ads targeted at men, women were often portrayed in submissive or hyper-sexualized roles, such as the infamous 1970s National Car Rental ad featuring a disheveled woman with the tagline "Go Ahead, Take Advantage of Us." Another advertisement from the era pictured a man standing on top of a woman to promote slacks, claiming "it's nice to have a girl around the house."

An advertising profile printed in *Advertising Age* magazine gave a typical advertiser's understanding of the housewife at the time:

> She enjoys watching TV but doesn't read much. She is most easily reached through TV and the simple, down-to-earth magazines.... Mental activity is arduous for her.... She is a person who wants to have things she can believe in rather than things she can think about.

The National Organization for Women fought back in the early 1970s, protesting offensive billboards and demanding that networks stop treating the housewife as someone for whom mental activity is arduous. While women now make up 67.2% of the marketing workforce and hold over half of senior leadership positions, on-screen representation in high-profile events like the Super Bowl still leans male, with men accounting for 61% of performers in 2023 commercials.



Adobe Photoshop fundamentally revolutionized the advertising industry by making digital photo manipulation fast and widely accessible, enabling marketers to create hyper-polished imagery while simultaneously raising enduring cultural debates over digital realism, deceptive beauty standards, and ethical disclosure. **Source**: Screenshot: Own work Photograph: Frederic Eugene Ives (1856–1937), Photoshop-screenshot, public domain.

The Impact of Adobe Photoshop: The Digital Ideal

The 1990 launch of Adobe Photoshop fundamentally changed the visual language of persuasion. By digitizing the workflow, Photoshop allowed advertisers to create hyper-idealized, perfect versions of reality. Models could now have digitally smoothed skin, cinched waists, and altered features that were impossible to achieve in real life. While this gave creators immense artistic power, it also ushered in significant negative consequences, particularly concerning the

perpetuation of unrealistic beauty standards and their impact on mental health.

Constant exposure to digitally sculpted bodies has been linked to increased body dissatisfaction and eating disorders, particularly among younger audiences who compare themselves to fabricated images. This widespread digital alteration can blur the lines between reality and fantasy, fostering a sense of inadequacy. Furthermore, excessive manipulation has raised ethical concerns about truthfulness, prompting countries such as France and Norway to require that advertisements disclose when images have been digitally altered. Brands are increasingly responding to these insights by prioritizing unretouched imagery to foster deeper connections with consumers.



Source: Alec Couros, In the Glow, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Advertising to Children

The landscape of advertising to children has undergone a significant transformation, yet core challenges persist. Traditionally, most advertisements targeting children featured either toys or junk food. A fundamental concern, still relevant today, is that children under eight often struggle to distinguish between fantasy and reality, a vulnerability that some advertisers have historically exploited. Studies continue to show that a high percentage of food advertisements aimed at children promote high-calorie, low-nutritional value foods, such as sugary cereals, contributing to concerns about childhood obesity.

While governments and self-regulatory bodies have long sought to regulate this area, the proliferation of digital media has introduced more subtle marketing tactics. Online video games, known as **advergames**, remain a prominent example, offering children immersive periods of product exposure. Beyond these games, digital tactics include:

- **In-app advertising:** Many free mobile applications for preschoolers include ads to offset costs.
- **Location-based advertising:** Apps can access a user's location to serve ads for local businesses, blurring the lines between content and commerce.

- **Influencer marketing:** Children are increasingly exposed to endorsements from child influencers on YouTube and TikTok, making it difficult to identify commercial intent.

- **Dark patterns:** Manipulative design practices can trick children into making in-app purchases or prolonging engagement.

- **AI-driven personalization:** Artificial intelligence enables highly personalized ads tailored to a child's specific online behavior.

In response to these evolving tactics, the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act was updated with a final rule in early 2025. These new regulations require separate parental opt-in consent for targeted advertising and impose strict limits on data retention. Additionally, the Children's Advertising Review Unit continues to monitor child-directed media across all platforms, including the Metaverse and AI applications, to ensure age-appropriate messaging.

As children's media consumption has shifted from television to social platforms, the rise of kid-fluencers—minors who review toys or vlogs about their daily lives—has created a new ethical frontier. Many states have introduced legislation modeled after the Coogan Laws to ensure that child digital creators are protected from financial exploitation

by their guardians. These laws require a percentage of advertising earnings to be set aside in a trust for the child and mandate strict limits on work hours. This reflects a broader cultural shift toward recognizing that when a child's play becomes a primary driver of multi-million-dollar advertising campaigns, they deserve the same labor protections as traditional child actors.

Positive Effects of Advertising

Despite many focusing on the adverse outcomes, the medium has provided unique benefits over time. Early newspaper advertising allowed publications to become independent
of church and government control, encouraging a free press capable of criticizing powerful interests. When the media transitioned to an advertising model, these publications became accessible to a larger audience who previously could not afford them. This model also supported the golden ages of radio and television in each medium's infancy, when advertisers participated heavily in program production.

Advertising also makes newer forms of media both practical and accessible. Many internet services, such as email and smartphone applications, appear free because they are supported by advertising revenue. This allows lower-income classes to participate in mass culture by eliminating upfront purchase prices. Furthermore,

advertising has promoted the arts throughout its history; where painters once relied on wealthy patrons, corporate advertising now provides artists and musicians with new means to fund their creative endeavors and gain public notoriety.

Changing Standards of Advertisements



Tipalet's late-1960s cigarette advertising campaign became a textbook example of overt vintage sexism by suggesting that flavored tobacco smoke possessed seductive power over women. **Source**: Mid-Century Press, Tipalet Cigarettes – Blow in her face , CC BY-NC 2.0.

Advertising standards are dynamic reflections of societal values and ethical considerations, evolving significantly over time. Examining past ads offers a stark illustration of how our collective understanding of gender roles, race, and health has evolved. For instance, a 1950s print ad for Schlitz beer depicted a man comforting a woman holding a frying pan with burnt food with the tagline "Don't worry, darling, you didn't burn the beer!" This ad, designed to reinforce traditional domestic roles, would be

widely criticized today for its demeaning portrayal of women.

Another deeply problematic area in historical advertising is the pervasive use of racist tropes. In the early 20th century, brands like Aunt Jemima and Uncle Ben's used imagery rooted in problematic racial stereotypes, often depicting Black individuals in subservient roles. These practices are now widely recognized as unacceptable and damaging. Similarly, tobacco companies used to run campaigns directly linking smoking to positive attributes like sophistication, vitality, and even good health, with slogans such as "More Doctors Smoke Camels." Ads for Lucky Strike cigarettes even suggested smoking could help women stay slender. These claims, now legally prohibited in many contexts and utterly disproven, illustrate a complete disregard for public health that would be considered grossly irresponsible and unethical today. These examples show that advertising standards are closely tied to changing laws and a stronger commitment to ethical responsibility

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In the modern marketplace, advertising has become a primary vehicle for communicating a brand's commitment to Environmental, Social, and Governance principles. Modern consumers increasingly view their purchases as votes for the kind of world they want to inhabit

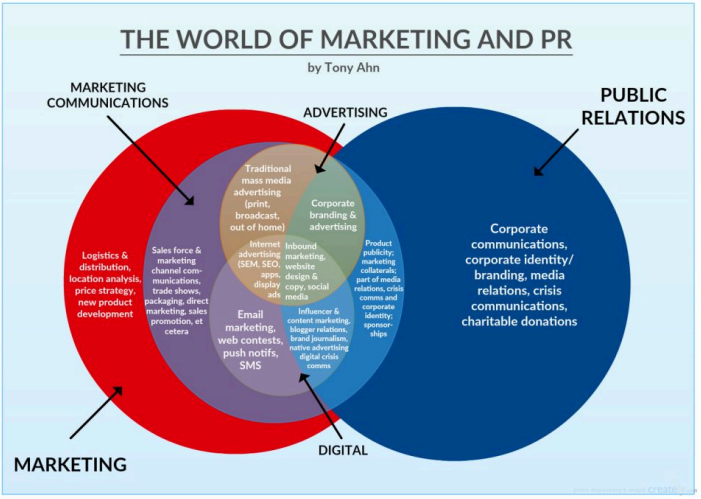
, forcing advertisers to move beyond simple product features

toward values-based storytelling. While this has encouraged many brands to adopt more sustainable practices, it has also fostered a culture of heightened scrutiny. Advertisements that tout environmental or social progress are now regularly fact-checked by global audiences in real-time, making corporate transparency a non-negotiable standard for cultural relevance.

Algorithmic Culture and Social Proof

The influence of advertising on culture has moved beyond direct persuasion into the realm of **algorithmic culture**. Through artificial intelligence, digital platforms amplify specific trends, sounds, and aesthetics
, creating a sense of social proof that dictates what is considered popular or desirable. This means that advertising no longer tells a consumer what to buy; it shapes the very cultural environment they inhabit by ensuring that certain viral brand moments appear everywhere at once. In this ecosystem, the line between a genuine cultural trend and a calculated advertising maneuver is increasingly thin, as algorithms prioritize content that keeps users engaged with brand-adjacent lifestyles.

CHAPTER 12 - PUBLIC RELATIONS



Source: Tony Ahn, World of Marketing and Public Relations , CC BY-SA 4.0.

- 12.1 Public Relations
- 12.2 History of Public Relations
- 12.3 Four Models of Public Relations
- 12.4 PR Campaigns
- 12.5 PR vs. Advertising
- 12.6 Public Relations in the Public Sphere

12.1 - PUBLIC RELATIONS



McDonald's Big Arch debut was underscored when the company's CEO took a small bite in a promotional video. **Source**: Anemonemma, 3df, Big Arch, CC BY-SA 4.0.

In March 2026, the corporate media world witnessed a textbook demonstration of the volatile, hyper-connected reality of modern public relations. During the highly anticipated global rollout of a major new menu item, the Chief Executive Officer of McDonald's sat down for a filmed promotional video. What was intended to be a seamless,

controlled piece of corporate marketing quickly turned into a digital disaster. The CEO took a tiny, noticeably hesitant bite of the new burger, delivering a rigid review that struck audiences as completely staged.

Within minutes of hitting the internet, the clip was intercepted by social media users. TikTok creators, internet memers, and everyday consumers began relentlessly ridiculing the executive's lack of enthusiasm. The top-down corporate narrative had fractured, leaving the brand exposed to public mockery.

Sensing a massive opportunity, the PR team at rival chain Burger King swung into action. They did not buy prime-time commercial slots or spend millions on billboards to counter the launch. Instead, they quickly produced and published a reactive video featuring their own company president taking an exaggerated, visibly enthusiastic bite of a Whopper.

The internet erupted. Media outlets, industry bloggers, and millions of social media users shared the two clips side by side, transforming the corporate misstep into a massive, culturally dominant "burger war." McDonald's found itself in a defensive crisis, struggling to regain control of a narrative that had been completely hijacked by meme culture and a nimble competitor.

This modern corporate showdown illustrates that the traditional, highly scripted era of public relations is over. A generation ago, a company could carefully control its public image through press releases and scripted television

appearances. Today, an executive's minor facial expression can be dissected by millions of people in real time, and a competitor can capitalize on that mistake within hours.

The incident also highlights the profound difference between pushing a message through paid marketing and earning authentic cultural relevance. McDonald's paid to produce a polished promotional piece, but it was Burger King that earned the public's attention, trust, and engagement by acting authentically and adapting instantly to the online conversation. Ultimately, this high-stakes digital environment is where modern strategic communication operates.

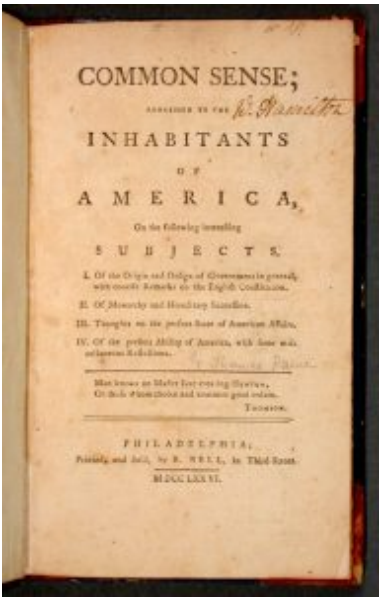
Public Relations (PR) focuses on building and maintaining a positive public image and fostering mutually beneficial relationships. Unlike advertising, PR primarily relies on earned media—coverage obtained through news articles, features, and social media mentions that are not paid for directly. PR professionals craft narratives, manage crises, and engage with influencers to influence perception. While the message is less controlled and more reliant on media interpretation, it carries greater credibility because it comes from a third-party source.

The rise of social media and the 24/7 news cycle has fundamentally altered how information is consumed. In this hyper-connected environment, PR plays a critical role in shaping online narratives and responding to crises in real time. Consumers today demand greater authenticity and transparency, making the

credibility earned through effective PR more valuable than ever.

12.2 HISTORY OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

The origins of public relations can be


COMMON SENSE;

INHABITANTS

OF

AMERICA,

PHILADELPHIA:

Common Sense, a pamphlet published by Thomas Paine in 1776, attempted to persuade colonists to seek independence from Great Britain. **Source**: NguyenVan BaoQuoc, Common Sense, xuất bản năm 1776 , CC BY-SA 4.0.

traced back to early forms of persuasive communication and propaganda

. Works like Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* and media accounts of the Boston Massacre employed sophisticated techniques to sway public opinion, closely resembling modern PR campaigns. However, the field truly began to take shape as a distinct industry during the Industrial Revolution with the rise of **press agentry**. As massive corporate monopolies formed, they faced intense public backlash and scrutiny from investigative muckraking journalists like Ida Tarbell. Corporate leaders quickly realized they needed a structured way to manage public perception and defend their business interests against widespread public fury.

The Era of Press Agentry and Early Corporate Counsel

The era of press agentry was characterized by a strict one-way flow of communication from agents to the media. This early form of promotion was often deceptive, highly sensationalized, and focused on generating sheer publicity rather than cultivating a factual image. Notable practitioners included P.T. Barnum, who famously accused himself of fraud under false names to garner headlines. Similarly, major corporations like Standard Oil

published advertisements that mimicked legitimate news articles

, intentionally blurring the line between journalism and corporate promotion. This manipulative approach aligns with what theorists call the press agentry model of public relations . This concept will be explored in greater detail in the next section, along with other foundational models in the industry.



Armed strikers pose in Ludlow. Following the tragic 1914 massacre there, John D. Rockefeller Jr. hired publicist Ivy Lee to rebuild his family's image; this historic turning point pioneered modern corporate crisis communications and public relations strategies. **Source**: E. Doyle, Armed Strikers at Ludlow, Colorado, c. 1914 cropped, public domain.

The Push for Public Information and Transparency

The early 20th century brought a massive public backlash against corporate monopolies. Investigative journalists, nicknamed muckrakers, exposed hazardous working conditions, political corruption, and corporate greed. Facing intense public fury and the threat of government regulation, corporations desperately needed a new approach to communication.

Ivy Lee marked a significant transition away from this deceptive showmanship by recognizing that symbols and a human face were far more impactful for an organization than purely rational or aggressive arguments. He encouraged businesses to move away from bribing the media and instead advocated for corporate transparency. In his 1906 " Declaration of Principles," Lee argued that the public deserved open, honest, and timely information. He dramatically demonstrated this new philosophy by inviting reporters directly to the scene of a major Pennsylvania Railroad accident, handing out factual statements, and essentially creating the first modern press release. Later in his career, Lee controversially applied these same principles of humanizing corporations when he was hired to rehabilitate the image of John D. Rockefeller following the violent Ludlow Massacre of 1914, demonstrating both the

power and the ethical complexities of early public relations counsel.



Edward Bernays attempted to engineer consent by convincing women it was socially acceptable to smoke during his "Torches of Freedom" publicity stunt. **Source**: Unknown (Suomen Kuvalehti), Tupakoivia naisia, public domain.

Social Science and the Power of Government Persuasion

Edward Bernays, the nephew of Sigmund Freud, further revolutionized the field by applying psychology and social science to influence public opinion, a concept he termed **engineering consent**. Bernays believed that by understanding

the subconscious triggers of the human mind, practitioners could systematically alter public behavior. He demonstrated this during his famous 1929 "Torches of Freedom" campaign. Hired by the American Tobacco Company to break the social taboo against women smoking in public, Bernays hired psychoanalysts to determine what cigarettes represented to the female psyche. He then orchestrated a media event where debutantes marched in the New York Easter Parade while publicly lighting cigarettes, framing smoking as a bold symbol of women's liberation and permanently shifting social norms. Beyond his corporate campaigns, Bernays taught the first public relations course at New York University and identified the three core functions of the industry that endure today: informing, persuading, and integrating.

World War I demonstrated the massive power of government-led communication through the Committee on Public Information, also known as the Creel Committee. The committee's use of 75,000 " Four-Minute Men"—volunteers who gave short, passionate speeches in local theaters and churches—illustrated the concept of **opinion leadership**, in which influential community members act as trusted intermediaries to persuade the general public. This government mobilization of media expanded dramatically during World War II with the creation of the Office of War Information, which utilized mass multimedia campaigns to produce enduring cultural symbols

like "Rosie the Riveter" to recruit women into the defense workforce. Concurrently, the 1942 launch of the Voice of America established the practice of public diplomacy, using international broadcasting to shape foreign public opinion and advance democratic ideals overseas.

Diversifying the Pioneers of Advocacy



Activist Ida B. Wells masterfully utilized public relations techniques to lead a powerful grassroots crusade against lynching in the American South. **Source**: Barnett, Ida B. Wells, public domain.

While textbook histories often focus exclusively on corporate executives, the evolution of strategic communication was simultaneously shaped by diverse pioneers who utilized public relations techniques to drive vital social movements. In the late nineteenth century, journalist and activist Ida B. Wells weaponized data collection, investigative pamphlets, and international speaking tours to launch a powerful grassroots campaign against lynching in the American South. Her sophisticated use of media advocacy proved that public relations could be a potent tool for social justice and institutional accountability.

In the mid-twentieth century, diverse practitioners broke barriers within the commercial industry as well. In 1944,

Moss Kendrix established his own Washington, D.C., public relations agency and completely revolutionized the way major corporations marketed to Black consumers. Kendrix successfully pitched clients like Coca-Cola and Ford to move away from offensive racial caricatures and instead depict Black Americans as ordinary, dignified consumers and professionals. A decade later, in 1957, Inéz Kaiser became the first Black woman to open a national public relations firm, Inéz Kaiser and Associates, and the first Black woman to join the Public Relations Society of America. Kaiser pioneered multicultural marketing strategies and advised major corporate clients such as 7-Up and Burger King, demonstrating that effective public relations required a deep, authentic understanding of diverse publics.

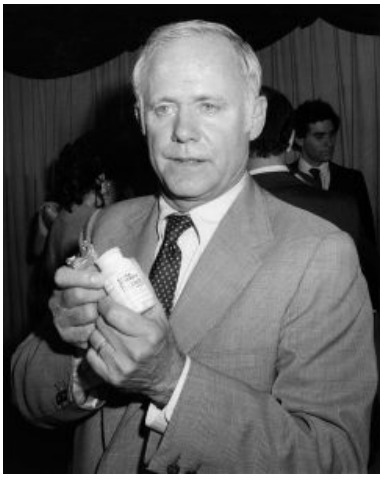
Professionalization, Corporate Ethics, and the Digital Revolution

As the industry grew, the need for formal ethical guidelines became paramount. Arthur Page, serving as the Vice President of PR for AT&T, became the first PR professional to sit on the board of a major public corporation. He established the Page Principles, which remain a cornerstone of industry ethics. Page emphasized that a company's reputation is ultimately earned through its daily actions rather than its promotional

words alone, championing the idea that public relations must be a core management function, not an afterthought. The Page Principles advocate:

- **Tell the truth**: Let the public know what is happening and provide an accurate picture of the company's character, ideals, and practices.
- **Prove it with action**: Public perception of an organization is determined 90% by what it does and only 10% by what it says.
- **Listen to the customer**: Discover what the public wants and expects from the corporation.
- **Manage for tomorrow**: Anticipate public reaction and eliminate practices that create difficulties.

This commitment to ethical responsibility was put to the ultimate test during the era of crisis communication in the late twentieth century, most notably in the



Following the fatal 1982 cyanide poisonings in Chicago, Johnson & Johnson CEO James Burke pioneered modern corporate crisis management by swiftly initiating a massive, $100 million nationwide recall of 31 million Tylenol bottles and introducing revolutionary tamper-resistant packaging. **Source**: Suzanne Vlamis, James E. Burke holding Tylenol bottle in 1982, public domain.

1982 Johnson & Johnson Tylenol recall. When seven people died from cyanide-laced capsules, the company prioritized public safety over short-term profits by immediately pulling 31 million bottles off store shelves, cooperating fully with law enforcement, and introducing the world's first tamper-evident

packaging. This response established the modern gold standard for crisis public relations.

Following the world wars, the field's professionalization accelerated with the creation of dedicated global agencies, the standardization of academic programs, and the growth of the Public Relations Society of America. However, the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries brought the most disruptive shift in industry history through the digital revolution. The internet completely shattered the traditional media gatekeeping model. Public relations professionals no longer had to rely strictly on pitching journalists to reach their target audiences; the advent of corporate websites, email distribution networks, and eventually, social media allowed organizations to communicate directly with consumers. This evolution to Web 2.0 also shifted immense power back to the audience. In the modern era of citizen journalism and real-time digital engagement, corporate reputations can be elevated or severely damaged by viral public feedback within minutes. This interactive environment has transformed modern public relations into a hyper-reactive, research-driven discipline focused on continuous dialogue and long-term relationship management.

12.3 FOUR MODELS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

Public relations (PR) is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics. Bill Gates has often been credited with saying, "If I was down to my last dollar, I would spend it on public relations," which underscores the immense value placed on PR, even above traditional advertising. This sentiment stems from the fundamental difference between the two. Whereas advertisers must pay for media space to sell a product, PR employs tactics to establish and maintain favorable relations between an organization and its constituents.

In practice, PR campaigns aim to leverage the free press to secure **earned media**. In their book *The Fall of Advertising and the Rise of PR*, Al and Laura Ries argue that the public trusts the press far more than it trusts advertisements. Because an editorial mention carries the "third-party endorsement" of a journalist, it provides significantly more credibility than a paid ad. Today, this function has expanded into the digital realm, where social media allows

brands to deliver unfiltered messaging directly to loyal followers

, effectively turning owned platforms into powerful PR channels.

Grunig and Hunt's Four Models of Public Relations

Todd Hunt and James Grunig developed a theory of four models of public relations that provides a solid introduction to PR concepts and has remained a foundational framework in the field. These models differ based on the direction of communication and whether the goal is to disseminate information or foster mutual understanding:

Grunig a

Model Type	
Traditional publicity model (or the **press agentry model**)	Profession clients, pr
Public information model	Businesses desired res
Persuasive communication model (or the **two-way asymmetric model**)	Organizati adopt a pa
Two-way symmetric model	Both parti

Traditional Publicity Model (Press Agentry)



By orchestrating a provocative hotel room encounter between Rudy Giuliani and actor Maria Bakalova, Sacha Baron Cohen leveraged press agentry to drive interest for *Borat Subsequent Moviefilm*. **Source**: User Skssoft on de.wikipedia; Michael Bulcik / SKS Soft GmbH Düsseldorf, cropping by User:Hammersoft, Borat, cropped, CC BY 2.5.

Under the traditional publicity model, PR professionals seek to create media coverage for a client, product, or event. These efforts can range from wild publicity stunts to simple news conferences or celebrity interviews. An early American practitioner of this style, P. T. Barnum, believed that all media coverage had value and staged outrageous stunts that thrived despite negative press. More recent examples of this extreme style include viral social media stunts, such as the widely publicized and ultimately disastrous Willy Wonka Experience in Glasgow, which generated immense global media attention despite its failure. For more restrained examples, the Kardashian-Jenner family has used reality television and massive social media presences to stay in the public eye and promote their personal brands.

In the digital era, the traditional news release has been

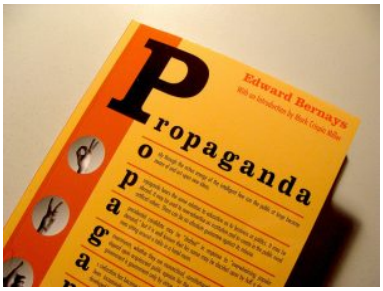
largely supplemented—and in some cases replaced—by direct-to-consumer PR. Rather than relying solely on journalists to act as gatekeepers, organizations now use social media platforms to deliver unfiltered messaging directly to their publics

. A high-profile post on platforms like X or Threads can serve as an official statement, allowing a company to control the narrative in real time and bypass potential filtering by traditional media outlets. This shift has made owned media (the company's social channels) a primary tool for media relations.

Public Information Model

Providers of the public information model aim to share factual information with a specific group. This model does not focus on obtaining dramatic or extensive media coverage, but rather on distributing information in a way that ensures adequate reception and understanding. For example, utility companies often include energy-efficiency fliers with customers' bills, and government agencies like the IRS issue news releases explaining changes to existing tax codes. Additionally, public interest groups release research findings intended for policymakers and the general public.

Persuasive Communication: Two-Way Asymmetric



Edward Bernays wrote the book *Propaganda*. **Source**: chrisch_ – Rule the World! – CC BY-NC 2.0.

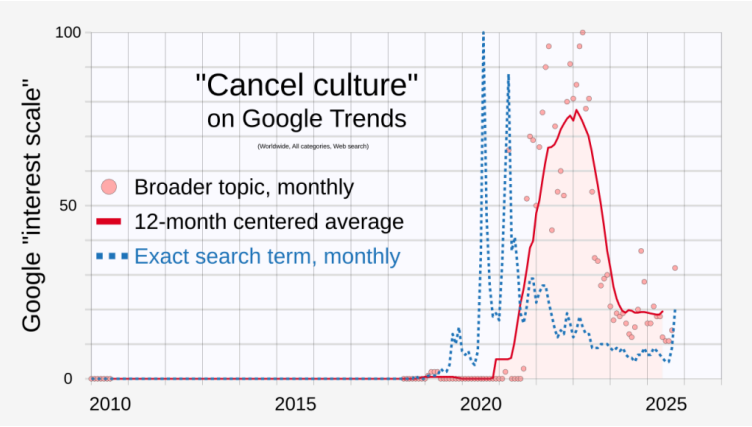
The persuasive communication model, also known as the two-way asymmetric model, aims to persuade a specific audience to adopt a particular behavior or perspective.

For this to work, the model requires a measured response from its intended audience to help the organization fine-tune its message, though the power remains primarily with the sender. Government propaganda often employs this model. Edward Bernays made this his hallmark, famously convincing celebrities to smoke in the New York Easter parade to entice women to take up the habit. Most modern corporations employ this model to influence consumer behavior through targeted messaging.

Two-Way Symmetric Model

The two-way symmetric model requires proper

communication between all parties involved. By holding a back-and-forth discussion that fosters mutual understanding and an agreement that respects both sides' wishes, this model ensures that the public has a real impact on the outcome. This often occurs in town hall meetings and other public forums. In an ideal republic, congressional representatives would strictly adhere to this model. Many nonprofit groups run by boards with public service mandates use this model to maintain public support. Commercial ventures also rely on it to facilitate communication among a company and its investors, partners, and employees, fostering an environment in which stakeholders feel they have a legitimate voice.



In the era of cancel culture, crisis communication has shifted from slow, carefully polished official statements to real-time, digital-first responses, where brands and public figures must rapidly balance transparent accountability with the risk of amplifying viral outrage. **Source**: RCraig09, 2010- Cancel culture – Google Trends, CC BY-SA 4.0.

PR Functions

Either private or public relations firms or in-house communications staffers carry out PR functions. A PR group generally handles all aspects of an organization's or an individual's media presence, including company publications and news releases. Such a group can range from a single person to dozens of employees, depending on the organization's size and scope.

One of the most visible functions is media relations, which involves unpaid communication with media outlets through news releases or staged events to secure earned media coverage. Internal communications focus on the dialogue within a company between management and employees, or among various subsidiaries. Business-to-business PR facilitates communication between partner businesses, while public affairs involves engaging with community leaders and public policy stakeholders.

Investor relations is a specialized function aimed at shareholders and the financial community. Strategic communication involves any messaging intended to accomplish a specific organizational goal. Finally, PR professionals engage in issues management by keeping tabs on public topics important to the organization and crisis management, which involves handling sudden events that could damage an organization's reputation.

The speed of the internet has fundamentally reshaped

crisis management. In what is often referred to as **cancel culture**, a brand's reputation can be threatened within minutes by a viral video or a problematic post. Modern PR teams need to use social listening tools to monitor brand sentiment around the clock, as the window for an effective response has shrunk from days to mere minutes. A successful modern crisis strategy requires a brand to be not only fast but authentic, as digital audiences are highly adept at spotting insincere corporate apologies.

The Role of AI in Strategic Communication

Artificial intelligence has become an indispensable tool in the PR toolkit. Professionals use AI-driven sentiment analysis to track public mood in real time, enabling them to predict potential PR crises before they erupt. Additionally, generative AI is used to draft initial press materials and tailor messages for different demographic groups, though this has raised new ethical questions about the human face of PR. While AI can handle data and drafting, the strategic decision-making and relationship-building at the core of public relations still rely heavily on human intuition and empathy.

Spin and Greenwashing

While the industry has moved toward professionalization, it still faces significant criticism regarding **spin**, or the practice of providing a biased interpretation of an event to influence public opinion. A common modern manifestation of this is **greenwashing**, in which PR teams use strategic communication to make an organization appear more environmentally friendly or socially responsible than its internal practices actually warrant. Because the goal of PR is to secure favorable coverage, the line between highlighting the positive and distorting the truth remains a central ethical debate in the profession.

12.4 PR CAMPAIGNS



Anatomy of a PR Campaign

Public relations campaigns occur for many reasons. Firms can use them to issue a quick response to a crisis or emerging issue, or they can stem from a long-term strategy tied to other marketing efforts. Regardless of its purpose, a typical campaign often involves four distinct phases, known as the ROPES model: Research, Objectives, Programming, and Evaluation. Analyzing De Beers' groundbreaking campaign to embed diamond engagement rings in American culture provides a classic example of this meticulously planned framework in action.

DE BEERS GROUP

Source: FDRMRZUSA, De Beers Group – Logo, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Research Phase

The first step in many PR campaigns is the initial research phase. Practitioners identify and qualify the issue they wish to address, then research the organization to clarify public perception, positioning, and internal dynamics. Strategists also research the potential audience, including media outlets, constituents, consumers, and competitors. Finally, they research the campaign's context, including potential consequences and effects on the organization. After considering all these factors, practitioners can choose the right campaign type.

Before launching their campaign in the late 1930s, De Beers faced a significant challenge: diamonds were seen as a luxury for the wealthy, and sales were declining due to the Great Depression. While engagement rings existed, only about 10% contained diamonds, and there was no strong cultural tradition linking diamonds specifically to marriage proposals. De Beers, which held a near-monopoly on the world's diamond supply, needed to create demand and stabilize prices. Their research indicated that men were already purchasing about 90% of all

engagement rings, identifying a clear target audience that needed an emotional connection to justify the financial commitment of a diamond.

Objectives Phase

During the strategy phase, PR professionals determine objectives aligned with the campaign's desired goal and formulate strategies to achieve them. Broad strategies, such as determining the overall message and the most effective communication channels, are finalized at this stage.

De Beers hired the advertising agency N.W. Ayer to transform diamonds from mere commodities into symbols of enduring love and commitment. The overarching goal was to establish the diamond engagement ring as an indispensable symbol of marriage in American culture —the core message centered on diamonds representing eternal love and, for the giver, masculinity or responsibility. Key strategic decisions included focusing on emotional value over monetary value and avoiding overt product placement of the De Beers brand, instead promoting the general idea of diamonds to create a tradition that did not widely exist.

Programming Phase

During the tactics phase, the PR group determines the means to implement the strategies. This involves devising specific communication techniques and selecting the most suitable forms of media. This phase also addresses budgetary restrictions and possibilities.



Beginning in 1938, De Beers and the N. W. Ayer agency executed a legendary public relations campaign that transformed natural diamonds into an essential romantic tradition. **Source**: National Museum of American History Smithsonian Institution , DeBeers Love Scene Advertisement , CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

N.W. Ayer used a multi-part plan to establish the new cultural norm. They achieved media integration by planting stories and photographs in popular magazines featuring movie stars and socialites wearing diamond rings. In 1948, the iconic slogan "A Diamond Is Forever" was coined, perfectly encapsulating the desired emotional association of permanence. Educational efforts were also undertaken as De Beers introduced the 4 Cs (Cut, Clarity, Color, and Carat

Weight) to provide men with a framework for valuing their purchases. Furthermore, celebrity endorsements played a crucial role, with Marilyn Monroe's song "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend" reinforcing the link between diamonds and an aspirational lifestyle. De Beers also strategically promoted the idea that a man should spend at least one month's salary (later increased to two months' salary) on a ring, anchoring the gift's perceived value to a significant financial sacrifice.

Evaluation Phase

After the overall campaign launches, PR practitioners enter the evaluation phase to review the plan and assess its effectiveness. They may conduct further research to better understand the campaign's results, costs, and benefits. The firm establishes specific evaluation criteria to determine whether the original objectives were met.

The success of the De Beers campaign was profound. From 1939 to 1979, De Beers' wholesale diamond sales in the United States soared from $23 million to $2.1 billion. A significant cultural shift occurred: by the early 1980s, more than 80% of American engagement rings featured diamonds, up from just 10% before the campaign. The campaign also achieved remarkable brand longevity; "A Diamond Is Forever" was proclaimed the "Slogan of the Century" by Advertising

Age in 1999. This campaign remains a masterclass in emotional branding, illustrating how strategic PR can create demand and reshape societal traditions.

AI and Real-Time Social Listening

In the Research and Evaluation phases of modern campaigns, the traditional wait-and-see approach has been replaced by **social listening**. Using AI-powered sentiment analysis, PR practitioners can track the temperature of public conversation in real time across millions of data points. This allows strategists to identify emerging issues before they become full-blown crises and to pivot a campaign's messaging midstream if the data show it isn't resonating with the target audience. The success of a campaign is often measured by real-time metrics rather than post-campaign surveys alone.

PR Campaign Examples

Since its modern inception in the early 20th century, PR has produced numerous campaigns—some highly successful, others dismal failures. Some of these campaigns have become particularly significant for their lasting influence or creative execution. This section highlights a few notable PR campaigns

from past years that demonstrate the diverse ways organizations influence public opinion.

Big Tobacco Aids Researchers

In 1953, studies showing the



In response to the increasing number of health concerns surrounding smoking, tobacco companies began running ads that attempted to present the benefits of smoking their brand. **Source**: Grimault's cigarette ad, public domain.

detrimental health effects of smoking caused a drop in cigarette sales

. An alliance of tobacco manufacturers hired the PR firm Hill & Knowlton to develop a campaign addressing this issue. First, Hill & Knowlton created the Tobacco Industry Research Committee (TIRC) to promote studies that questioned the health effects of tobacco use. The TIRC ran advertisements featuring the results of these studies, making it easy for journalists who covered the subject to find a source to quote. The groups working against smoking lacked familiarity with media relations, making it harder for journalists to quote them and incorporate their arguments.

The campaign achieved success, however, not because it denied the harmful effects of smoking, but because it stressed the disagreements between researchers. By providing the press with information favorable to the tobacco manufacturers and publicly promoting new filtered cigarettes, the campaign aimed to replace the idea that smoking was undeniably bad with the idea that scientists disagreed over the effects of smoking. This strategy served tobacco companies well up through the 1980s, and climate change-denying organizations like the Heartland Institute and the CO2 Coalition have employed similar tactics in recent years.

The tobacco industry's efforts reflect a darker side of strategic communication called **astroturfing**, a deceptive practice in which PR firms create the illusion of grassroots public support for a

corporate or political goal. This often involves creating fake social media accounts, funding front groups that appear independent, or paying influencers to post testimonials. While Big Tobacco campaigns of the 1950s used experts to sow doubt, modern astroturfing uses digital volume to make a minority opinion seem like popular consensus. This practice is widely considered unethical as it violates the core PR principle of transparency and honest communication.

Dove "Real Beauty" Campaign



Exhibit honoring the Dove "Real Beauty" campaign. **Source**: Bungleboo, COLLINS Dove, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Launched in 2004, Dove's "Real Beauty" campaign challenged conventional beauty standards in advertising by featuring diverse women of

various ages, shapes, and ethnicities rather than professional models. The campaign aimed to broaden the definition of beauty and boost women's self-esteem. Through powerful print ads, TV commercials, and viral videos like "Evolution" and "Real Beauty Sketches," Dove sparked a global conversation about body image and authenticity. The campaign generated immense earned media, with models appearing on talk shows and millions engaging online. While facing some criticism, "Real Beauty" successfully differentiated Dove, fostered deep emotional connections with consumers, and significantly increased brand loyalty and sales by aligning the brand with a higher purpose.



A participant in the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge. **Source**: Anthony Quintano from Hillsborough, NJ, United States, Mission Accomplished – ALS Ice Bucket Challenge (14848289439), CC BY 2.0.

Ice Bucket Challenge

The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge, which went viral in the summer of 2014, was a phenomenally successful social media campaign that raised unprecedented awareness and funds for Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) research. Participants

filmed themselves dumping a bucket of ice water over their heads, nominated others to do the same, and encouraged donations to the ALS Association. Its simple, shareable, and interactive nature, combined with widespread celebrity participation including Bill Gates and Oprah Winfrey, propelled it into a global phenomenon. The campaign raised over $115 million for the ALS Association in just eight weeks, significantly increasing public understanding of the disease and directly contributing to the discovery of a new ALS gene.



Source: Unknown author, Patagonia (Unternehmen) logo, public domain.

Patagonia's "Don't Buy This Jacket" Campaign

Patagonia likely identified a burgeoning consumer concern regarding fast fashion and its environmental impact, which resonated strongly with their core values of sustainability and product longevity. They understood that their target audience deeply valued ethical consumption and environmental responsibility. The campaign aimed to

reinforce Patagonia's brand image as a leader in sustainable practices and provoke thought about consumerism. They launched the audacious "Don't Buy This Jacket" campaign on Black Friday, a day typically synonymous with rampant consumerism. This included prominent full-page advertisements in *The New York Times*, a robust online presence, and public statements from company leadership emphasizing the importance of repairing and reusing products. They also heavily promoted their Worn Wear program, encouraging customers to repair and extend the life of their garments. Patagonia closely monitored media coverage and public discourse, tracking brand sentiment and shifts in customer loyalty related to its environmental commitment.

Starbucks "Race Together" Initiative



Source: Håkan Dahlström, Starbucks cropped, CC BY 2.0.

Following public incidents of racial bias and widespread criticism, Starbucks conducted extensive internal and external research to understand the depth of the issue and what the public expects from companies on diversity and inclusion. They analyzed social media sentiment, gathered employee feedback, and consulted with diversity experts. The main goals were to address perceptions of racial bias and build a more inclusive environment. Initially, the "Race Together" campaign involved baristas writing the phrase on cups, but it faced significant and immediate public backlash. In response to this rapid evaluation, their programming shifted dramatically. They made the unprecedented move of closing all stores for comprehensive racial bias training , invested heavily in long-term diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, and forged partnerships with civil rights organizations. The swift

response to the initial backlash served as a crucial example of real-time evaluation in action.

Spotify Wrapped Campaign

Spotify Wrapped, an annual personalized data visualization launched in 2016, lets users review their listening habits over the past year. It presents data on top artists, songs, genres, and podcasts in visually engaging, shareable stories and graphics. This campaign is a masterclass in data storytelling and user-generated content, transforming personal listening data into a cultural phenomenon. Spotify Wrapped generates immense social media buzz annually, with millions of users sharing their personalized results, effectively turning individual listening summaries into widespread brand promotion. It fosters a sense of community and belonging, driving user engagement, retention, and new subscriptions by making music consumption a social identity marker.

Targets for PR Campaigns

In the realm of public relations, the public is defined as any group of people who share a common set of interests and goals and with whom an organization needs to communicate. Understanding these diverse groups is fundamental to effective PR, as each public requires tailored communication strategies.

These publics are categorized into two main types: internal and external.



Source: Photo by 089photoshootings on Pixabay.

Internal publics consist of individuals within the organization. This includes employees at all levels, from front-line staff to senior management, as well as volunteers, board members, and sometimes temporary contractors. Clear communication with internal teams is key to fostering a positive work environment, staying aligned with the company's goals, and maintaining morale. Standard methods for engaging internal publics include regular company-wide emails, internal newsletters, intranet portals, town hall meetings, and employee recognition programs. For example, a tech company might send out a weekly internal newsletter

detailing project updates and employee achievements to ensure all staff feel connected to the company's mission.

The definition of internal publics has evolved significantly with the rise of remote and hybrid work. Communicating with a decentralized workforce requires more than just an intranet portal; it demands digital-first engagement strategies that prevent employee isolation and maintain a unified corporate culture. Modern internal PR focuses on hosting virtual town halls and using collaboration tools to ensure remote workers feel as informed and valued as those in a physical office. When employees are physically disconnected from the headquarters, the PR team's role in fostering brand ambassadors becomes even more critical to the organization's stability.



Source: Photo by Ben_Kerckx on Pixabay.

Conversely, **external publics** encompass groups of people outside the immediate organization. This is a much broader and less homogeneous category, making effective communication more complex. External publics include customers, potential customers, investors, shareholders, media outlets, government officials, community leaders, suppliers, and the general public. Communication with the public aims to build a positive reputation, influence public opinion, and build support for the organization's activities. A retail chain might engage its customers through social media and loyalty programs while simultaneously communicating with investors through quarterly earnings calls. Because external publics are diverse, companies need to implement a multi-faceted approach, using different messages and channels to connect with each group.

Crisis Communication

A crisis is an event perceived to threaten a company's reputation or image, requiring a swift, strategic response. Effective crisis communication is paramount to mitigating damage and preserving public trust. Several core principles guide successful crisis management.

First, an organization must be prepared. This means having

a comprehensive plan for a wide range of potential events, from the likely to the highly improbable. For instance, Delta Air Lines maintains detailed protocols for responding to a plane crash, while a factory handling hazardous materials must prepare for chemical spills. Proactive planning ensures that an organization is not caught flat-footed, enabling an organized response.

Secondly, honesty is the only sustainable policy. Lies or deliberate obfuscations almost invariably catch up with an organization, and cover-ups frequently prove more damaging than the original problem. Historical examples such as the Watergate scandal and



Bill Clinton's initially forceful public denial of his relationship with Monica Lewinsky—which he was later forced to recant—serves as a cautionary case study in public relations demonstrating how deceptive messaging ultimately shatters public trust and amplifies a crisis far beyond the original controversy. **Source**: Bob McNeely, The White House[1], Bill Clinton, public domain.

Bill Clinton's impeachment proceedings illustrate how attempts to conceal information can spiral into greater catastrophes. Transparency builds credibility, while deceit erodes it completely.

After being honest, it is crucial to apologize and mean it. A

genuine apology demonstrates sincere remorse and includes a commitment to action. A superficial apology without tangible steps to rectify the situation is often perceived as disingenuous. If a product defect causes harm, a meaningful apology is accompanied by a recall and an investigation into the cause, rather than just a press statement. In crisis communication, practitioners must be wary of the non-apology, a statement that sounds like an apology but avoids taking responsibility. Phrases such as "we regret if anyone was offended" or "we are sorry for the misunderstanding" often backfire because they shift the blame onto the public's reaction rather than the company's actions. Modern audiences are highly sensitive to these linguistic dodges. A successful apology must be unconditional, focusing on the harm caused and the specific steps being taken to prevent the mistake from happening again.

Furthermore, an organization must move quickly. In a hyper-connected world, the news cycle operates at lightning speed. Delays allow misinformation to spread and fill the vacuum with speculation. A rapid, well-coordinated response helps control the narrative and demonstrates a commitment to addressing the issue. Finally, effective communication must reach all constituencies, including the press and internal employees, who often serve as the public's first point of contact.



Poison to Precedent: J&J's Textbook Crisis Response

Source: Tylenol_bottle_closeup.jpg : Colin from Los Angeles, USA derivative work: — raeky (talk | edits), Tylenol bottle closeup crop, CC BY-SA 2.0.

The Tylenol Scare of 1982 stands as a seminal case study in crisis communication, often lauded as the gold standard for how a company should respond to a catastrophic threat to its product and public trust. The

crisis began tragically when seven people in the Chicago area died after ingesting Extra Strength Tylenol capsules that had been laced with cyanide by an unknown perpetrator. This horrific event immediately put Johnson & Johnson (J&J), the parent company of Tylenol, under intense scrutiny and immense pressure.

J&J's response was swift, decisive, and ultimately exemplary. They immediately pulled Tylenol products off the shelves in the Chicago area, demonstrating a clear prioritization of public safety over profit. Furthermore, they ceased all advertising for the product. As public fears mounted and the gravity of the situation became clear, J&J made the unprecedented decision to issue a nationwide recall of all Tylenol products, pulling 31 million bottles from shelves at an estimated cost of over $100 million. This was a bold move, as the tampering was localized, but it underscored their commitment to consumer safety.

To manage the complex communication around the crisis, J&J partnered with the public relations firm Burson-Marsteller. This collaboration ensured that corporate communication was strategic, consistent, and transparent. When Tylenol returned, it introduced triple-sealed, tamper-resistant packaging, setting a new industry standard for over-the-counter

medications. The company effectively communicated these safety enhancements through various channels, including direct engagement with sales representatives, comprehensive news conferences, and a high-profile interview on the popular news program *60 Minutes*.

The effectiveness of J&J's approach was undeniable. Their swift, honest, and proactive measures enabled them to regain public trust and quickly reclaim their market share. Before the crisis, Tylenol held a dominant 37 percent share of the analgesic market. In the immediate aftermath, this plummeted to just 8 percent. However, just a month after the relaunched product hit the shelves, Tylenol's market share rebounded significantly to 28 percent, and it would eventually regain its status as the industry leader. John O'Brien of the *Chicago Tribune* encapsulated the media's perception, stating that the PR people were knowledgeable and available when the media needed to speak with them, and that they didn't try to sugarcoat anything. This external validation shows how transparency, accessibility, and a genuine commitment to public welfare help us navigate even the most devastating crises.



When a viral 2009 YouTube video showed two employees tampering with food, Domino's Pizza launched a direct, digital-first executive response that became a landmark case study in social media crisis management. **Source**: Purplellamas01 at the English Wikipedia, Domino's Pizza In Spring Hill,FLA, CC BY-SA 3.0.

The Digital Landscape and Online Crises

The internet has profoundly reshaped public relations by giving critics direct access to the world without the gatekeeper limits of traditional journalism. Organizations no longer have exclusive control over their narratives. A negative comment or viral video can spread globally in minutes, making online crises difficult to contain. These crises are often self-inflicted, such as the 2009 Domino's Pizza incident, in which a video of employees engaging in unsanitary food preparation went viral, or the 2017 United Airlines passenger removal incident, in which an

initially defensive response led to a massive stock price drop and severe reputational damage.

The Nestlé social media crisis of 2010 serves as a classic example of mishandling direct communication. When Greenpeace launched a campaign against Nestlé's palm oil sourcing, the company responded aggressively by deleting critical Facebook comments. This heavy-handed approach infuriated users and amplified the condemnation, proving that defensive, tone-deaf responses on social media only escalate the problem.

Furthermore, the internet makes confidential leaks incredibly easy. WikiLeaks is a prime example of this shift, as it bypasses traditional gatekeepers to publish vast quantities of classified government and corporate documents. In an era when internal documents can be shared globally with minimal effort, maintaining confidentiality and controlling narratives have become among the greatest challenges for modern PR practitioners.

The velocity of information has fundamentally changed the stakes of crisis management. PR professionals used to operate on a 24-hour news cycle, giving them time to gather facts and draft a response before the morning papers hit the stands. Today, this has compressed into 24-minute news cycles. In the time it takes for a corporate board to meet, a viral video can reach millions of viewers and cause a company's stock price to plummet. This near-instantaneous feedback loop requires PR teams to have standing response protocols and AI monitoring

tools ready at all times, as delays of even a few hours can result in the public setting the narrative rather than the organization.

12.5 PR VS. ADVERTISING



Source: Ginidietrich, PESO Model™ Full Graphic 4C, CC BY-SA 4.0.

To navigate the overlap between PR and advertising, industry professionals have historically used the **PESO Model**, which categorizes media into four types: **Paid, Earned, Shared,** and **Owned**. **Paid** media includes traditional advertising, such as TV spots and sponsored social posts. **Earned** media is the holy grail of PR, comprising organic news coverage and word-of-mouth. **Shared** media refers to social media interactions and community engagement, while **owned** media includes a

company's own website, blog, or specialized apps. Most successful modern campaigns, such as the Dove "Real Beauty" or Spotify Wrapped examples, succeed by seamlessly integrating all four quadrants of this model to reach their audience from multiple angles. The PESO Model has continued to evolve as the media world becomes more fragmented.

PR as a Replacement for Advertising



After the 1969 Public Health Cigarette Smoking Act banned tobacco advertising on U.S. radio and television starting in 1971, Philip Morris and other manufacturers pivotally shifted their marketing budgets to print media, sports sponsorships, and event promotions to maintain brand dominance. **Source**: 1950sUnlimited, Phillip Morris 1954 (8209679495) , CC BY 2.0.

In some cases, public relations has begun to overtake advertising as the preferred way to promote a company or product. The tobacco

industry offers a clear historical case study of this migration. When regulations prohibited cigarette advertising on radio and television, the industry shifted to PR tactics to maintain brand presence. Philip Morris began underwriting cultural institutions and causes as diverse as the Smithsonian and the Joffrey Ballet. Marlboro sponsored the "Marlboro Country Music Tour," which featured talent contests for local bands and generated significant positive press. By associating with major cultural events—such as funding new inscriptions for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in 1987—tobacco companies partially restored brand stature that growing health concerns had eroded.

A more contemporary and striking example of PR essentially replacing traditional advertising is Tesla, an automotive and technology company. Unlike conventional car manufacturers that spend billions annually on television and print ads, Tesla has historically maintained a near-zero advertising budget. Instead, CEO Elon Musk's highly active social media presence serves as the primary engine for public relations. His posts and public appearances generate constant media coverage and viral buzz around new products. Tesla also relies on a passionate community of early adopters who generate organic word-of-mouth marketing. This strategy effectively turns every product launch or software update into a global news

event, demonstrating how earned media can replace paid advertising.



Lululemon markets itself not merely as an apparel brand, but as a premier aspirational lifestyle identity centered on wellness, community-driven studio events, and premium technical athletic wear. **Source**: Windmemories, 20241231 Lululemon store at Grand Emporium, cropped, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Branding and the Shift From Advertising to PR

While brands rely heavily on advertising during an initial release, PR campaigns are vital for developing a brand's more abstract aspects. These campaigns aim to position a brand in the public sphere, lending it cultural significance.

The older, advertising-centric model of branding focused on the product itself, using ads to associate goods with quality. However, as consumers were exposed to an ever-increasing number of ads, the effectiveness of traditional advertising dwindled. Today, the public often ignores or distrusts

commercial claims. To overcome this credibility gap, the new PR-oriented model focuses on the company's overall image rather than the specific merits of a product. This model seeks to associate a company with personal and cultural values that resonate with consumers. Companies like Procter & Gamble pioneered this change in marketing in the 1930s, when they attempted to attract female audiences by sponsoring serialized radio dramas, programming now more commonly referred to as soap operas.

Lululemon has masterfully applied this strategy by building a brand around a lifestyle of wellness and mindfulness. Their PR campaigns emphasize holistic well-being by offering free yoga and meditation classes in their stores. By cultivating a network of local brand ambassadors who embody these values, Lululemon transforms customers into a dedicated community. Similarly, companies leverage PR to restore their image during crises. In 2018, when Starbucks faced accusations of racial bias following the arrest of two Black men in a Philadelphia store, the CEO issued a public apology and closed 8,000 stores for mandatory racial bias training. This transparent response prioritized accountability over promotional messaging, reinforcing the brand's commitment to being a welcoming third place.



Apple's advertising strategy centers on sleek minimalist design, emotional storytelling, and aspirational lifestyle branding, positioning its devices not around technical specifications, but as intuitive tools for personal creativity and status. **Source**: Azreey, TRX- Apple Store cropped, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Studies in Success: Apple and Nike

Apple has consistently employed PR-oriented branding to position itself as a symbol of creativity and innovation. By focusing on constructing a seamless ecosystem—where the iPhone, Apple Watch, and AirPods reinforce the Apple experience—the company has turned its products into markers of personal identity. Apple fosters community through initiatives like "Today at Apple" in-store events, transforming retail spaces into hubs for connection.

Douglas Atkin, who has written about brands as a form of cult, readily admits and embraces his brand loyalty to Apple:

> I'm a self-confessed Apple loyalist. I go to a cafe around the corner to do some thinking and writing, away from the hurly-burly of the office, and everyone in that cafe has a Mac. We never mention the fact that we all have Macs. The other people in the cafe are writers, professors, and members of the media, and the feeling of cohesion and community in that cafe becomes very apparent when someone comes in with a PC. There's almost an observable shiver of consternation in the cafe, and it must be discernible to the person with the PC, because they never come back.

Brand managers who once focused on the product now find themselves in the role of community leaders, responsible for maintaining the well-being of a cultural image.

Kevin Roberts, former CEO of Saatchi & Saatchi, coined the term "lovemark" to describe brands that have created "loyalty beyond reason." These brands inspire a level of devotion similar to that felt toward friends or family. Much of Apple's success stems from this mystique; the company strategically leaks selected rumors to press outlets to encourage intense speculation, creating emotional anticipation for every release.



In 2018, Nike launched its "Dream Crazy" campaign, featuring former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick, who had knelt during the national anthem to protest racial injustice. The campaign's slogan, "Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything," directly referenced Kaepernick's controversial stance. This bold move ignited a firestorm of debate, with both strong support and calls for boycotts. Despite initial stock dips, Nike's online sales surged by 31% shortly after the campaign's launch, and its stock price recovered and surpassed previous levels. **Source**: Brecht Bug. Colin Kaepernick – Just Do It – Nike Billboard 1680. CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Emotional connections are equally crucial to Nike's enduring success. Nike's enduring success began with its initial product endorsement deal with Michael Jordan in the 1990s and continues to demonstrate this kind of emotional branding. Jordan's iconic performances created an initial

emotional attachment, and since then, Nike has evolved its PR strategy to connect with broader social causes. Recent campaigns featuring Colin Kaepernick or advocating for women in sports showcase a commitment to empowerment. By telling stories of struggle and triumph, Nike fosters a movement of self-belief. Through digital platforms like the Nike Run Club app, the brand builds active communities, fostering a sense of shared purpose that transcends mere product consumption.

The Shift Toward Micro-Influencers

While historic PR relied on mega-influencers and A-list celebrities like Michael Jordan, modern PR strategies have shifted toward **micro-influencers**. These individuals have smaller, highly engaged followings (typically 10,000-50,000 followers) in specific niches such as sustainable fashion, indie gaming, or local fitness. Because micro-influencers often have a more personal, peer-to-peer relationship with their audience, their endorsements are perceived as more authentic and less corporate than those of a celebrity. This allows brands to build loyalty beyond reason within specific subcultures, ensuring that their message resonates with a community rather than just a crowd.

Branding Backlashes

To maintain a consistent brand, companies must preserve the emotional attachment consumers have with that identity. Just as PR campaigns build brands, PR crises can severely damage them. This occurs most frequently when a company's actions are perceived as a direct contradiction of its stated values.



Although BP's early 2000s "Beyond Petroleum" rebranding campaign sought to position the company as an environmentally conscious energy pioneer, the catastrophic 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill (shown here) erased those green reputation gains, inflicting severe and lasting damage on the brand's global trust. **Source**: Unknown author, Deepwater Horizon offshore drilling unit on fire cropped, public domain.

The BP "Beyond Petroleum" Collapse

In 2000, BP launched a massive campaign to rebrand itself from British Petroleum to Beyond Petroleum, presenting itself as an environmentally friendly energy leader. The company acquired a major solar producer and pledged to invest $8 billion in alternative energy. Their PR model even emulated the two-way symmetric approach by featuring a carbon footprint calculator and conducting interviews to allow consumers to air grievances about energy policy. However, the 2010 Deepwater Horizon explosion in the Gulf of Mexico nullified a decade of PR work. The disaster immediately placed BP at the bottom of environmental rankings, exposing the Beyond Petroleum narrative as a fragile facade.

Greenwashing and Sustainability Scrutiny: H&M and Shein



Launched to promote eco-friendly fashion made from organic and recycled materials, H&M's "Conscious Collection" faced heavy criticism and greenwashing accusations from regulators and consumer advocates who questioned the true sustainability of the fast-fashion giant's supply chain. **Source**: MediaPhoto.Org, H&M, CC BY 3.0.

A similar backlash occurred with H&M in the mid-2020s. Despite its "Conscious Collection" and recycling initiatives, a class-action lawsuit (dismissed in 2023) and several investigations revealed that many sustainability claims were unsubstantiated. Some of their labeled sustainable products actually contained more synthetic materials than regular lines, leading to widespread accusations of greenwashing.

Similarly, the fast-fashion giant Shein faced ongoing challenges related to exploitative labor practices. In 2023, the brand attempted to counter negative perceptions by inviting influencers on a sponsored trip to an "Innovation Center" in China. The move backfired

spectacularly as critics labeled the trip propaganda and accused the influencers of ignoring documented human rights abuses. This failed PR stunt further eroded trust in Shein's ethical claims.

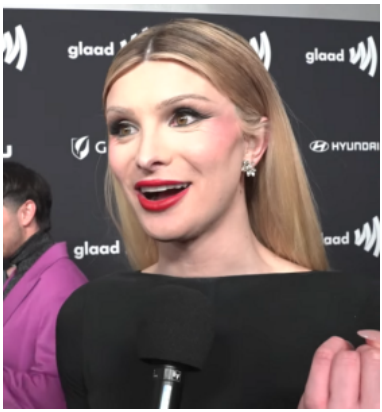
Tone-Deafness and Social Sensitivity: Pepsi and Balenciaga

Public relations disasters often stem from a failure to understand the gravity of social issues. In 2017, Pepsi faced intense backlash over a commercial featuring Kendall Jenner that depicted the model de-escalating a police standoff by offering an officer a soda. Viewers condemned the ad for trivializing serious social justice movements like Black Lives Matter. Pepsi pulled the ad within 24 hours, acknowledging they had "missed the mark."

In 2022, luxury brand Balenciaga faced global outrage over ad campaigns featuring child models with teddy bears in bondage gear. The images were widely perceived as promoting the sexualization of children. The brand's initial attempt to shift blame to third-party photographers only deepened public anger, underscoring a misjudgment of ethical responsibility and public sentiment.

The Volatility of Social Alignment: Bud Light

The 2023 Bud Light



Dylan Mulvaney**. Source**: Stay Tuned, Dylan Mulvaney – GLAAD Media Awards 2024 b (cropped), CC BY 3.0.

partnership with transgender influencer Dylan Mulvaney demonstrates the volatility of brand alignments in a polarized culture. The brief Instagram collaboration, intended to broaden the brand's appeal, ignited a massive boycott from conservative consumers. The resulting sales declines and deep public division highlighted the potential for severe, sustained adverse reactions when a campaign is perceived as alienating a brand's core customer base. When Anheuser-Busch responded with a cautious, ambiguous statement that pleased neither critics nor supporters, the company further damaged

its public standing by alienating consumers on both sides of the culture war. This costly misstep underscored a vital lesson in modern crisis management: brands must fully understand their audience values and commit authentically to a stance before taking a prominent social position.

The Echo of Dissent: When Brands Meet Their Anti-Brands



Source: Megan Ann. Blackspot. CC BY 2.0.

The new PR-oriented branding model focuses on the company's overall image rather than the product's specific merits. This branding model seeks to associate a company with specific personal and cultural values that hold meaning for consumers. However, this focus on values also exposes brands to intense scrutiny and counter-movements, particularly when their actions are perceived as contradicting their stated ideals.

A potent early example of this phenomenon was Blackspot: The Anti-Brand Brand. Adbusters, a Canadian-based media foundation devoted to reducing the influence of advertising on global culture, took direct action against Nike by creating and marketing its own shoe. Launched in the early 2000s, Blackspot shoes were meticulously manufactured in union shops, using recycled tire rubber for soles and organic hemp fabric for the uppers. Their design was deliberately minimalist, featuring a simple round black dot that appeared to cover a typical corporate logo, symbolizing a rejection of mainstream branding. The boots also sported a symbolic red dot on the toe, a cheeky invitation to "kick Nike."

Blackspot's strategy was ingenious in its simplicity and its direct challenge to Nike's global dominance. It didn't just offer an alternative product; it provided an ideological alternative, using Nike's immense brand recognition as a foil by explicitly positioning itself as the "anti-Nike." Blackspot aimed to highlight Nike's controversial labor practices in sweatshops and its environmental footprint. The shoes became a tangible symbol of progressive labor reform and environmentally sustainable business practices, allowing consumers to make a statement with their purchase that resonated far beyond the shoes' practical use. Choosing Blackspot was a public endorsement of ethical production

and a powerful act of dissent and culture jamming against corporate consumerism.

In the contemporary landscape, this anti-brand sentiment and the tactics employed by Adbusters have evolved and proliferated, amplified mainly by social media and the increasing demand for corporate accountability. Today, activist groups and ethical consumers don't always need to launch a physical product, such as Blackspot shoes, to challenge established brands. Instead, they leverage digital platforms to create viral campaigns, hashtags, and online movements that directly confront corporate practices. For instance, movements like Fashion Revolution, born out of the Rana Plaza factory collapse, have consistently pressured fast-fashion brands on labor ethics and supply chain transparency, using social media to expose discrepancies between brand promises and reality. Similarly, environmental groups frequently launch targeted campaigns against companies perceived as engaging in greenwashing, using data, visuals, and public pressure to highlight ecological damage.

This evolution means brand managers today need to be aware of their entire value chain and ensure their public image aligns with their operations. The anti-brand is no longer just a niche product; it is a pervasive mindset among

a growing segment of consumers who demand authenticity and ethical conduct. Public relations in this era is not merely about crafting positive messages but about cultivating genuine trust through transparent actions and being prepared to respond to sophisticated critiques from an empowered, digitally connected public. The Blackspot campaign remains a foundational case study in understanding how brand identity can be both built and challenged through the lens of public relations.

Social Media's Impact on Public Relations

Social media platforms have fundamentally transformed the landscape of public relations, giving companies a direct, two-way way to connect with their audiences, rather than serving as one-way channels for information dissemination. To truly harness the power of social media, organizations must actively build and maintain relationships with their audiences, fostering a sense of community and trust. This involves listening as much as it consists of speaking, participating in conversations, and responding authentically to feedback, both positive and negative.



Wendy's prolific use of Twitter/X has earned them considerable notoriety, particularly for roasting competitors and others. **Source**: Hullian111, Wendy's on Kingswood, Kingston upon Hull Jan24 Main Sign, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Real-Time Engagement and Brand Personality

One brand that consistently excels at this dynamic engagement is Wendy's. Their social media strategy, particularly on X (formerly Twitter), showcases a masterclass in witty, timely, and often humorous interaction with customers and even competitors. For instance, Wendy's famously roasts competitors in playful jabs that garner significant media attention and engagement, solidifying their image as a brand with personality. Their highly successful #NuggsForCarter campaign in 2017 saw them respond to a teen's request for free chicken nuggets; while he didn't hit the massive retweet goal, Wendy's engaged with him throughout, ultimately providing the nuggets and donating to charity. This transformed mundane customer service into entertaining brand interactions.



When a severe chicken shortage forced hundreds of UK restaurants to close in 2018, KFC turned a potential public relations nightmare into an award-winning success by running a witty, self-deprecating full-page newspaper ad rearranging its logo letters to read "FCK." **Source**: Phillip Pessar, KFC Hialeah (39699848495) cropped, CC BY 2.0.

Turning Crisis into Narrative

Other companies have leveraged social media for impactful, real-time engagement during potential disasters. During the 2022 FIFA World Cup, Budweiser faced a significant challenge when the host nation, Qatar, unexpectedly banned alcohol sales at stadiums just days before the tournament. As a major sponsor with ample beer ready for sale, Budweiser quickly pivoted. Instead of lamenting the ban, they announced that the unsold beer would be awarded to the winning country. This creative response

turned a potential PR disaster into a positive narrative of generosity.

Similarly, KFC UK masterfully used social media to address a massive chicken shortage in 2018. Instead of issuing a bland corporate apology, they published an ad that rearranged their acronym to "FCK" with the headline "WE'RE SORRY." This witty, self-deprecating, and highly relatable apology, combined with active online engagement, earned them widespread praise for their transparency and humor.

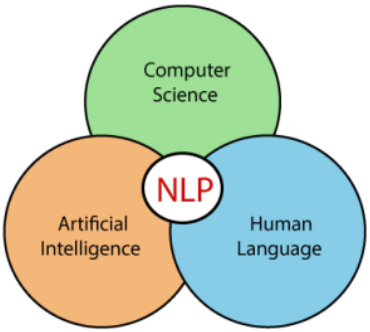
Community Building and Fandom

Another excellent illustration of building relationships through social media comes from Netflix's highly personalized interactions. Beyond promoting their shows, Netflix frequently
engages with fans' theories, memes, and discussions. They often respond to individual comments with inside jokes related to specific series or participate in online fandom debates. This level of personalized engagement makes their audience feel seen and part of a larger community, transforming a transactional streaming service into a beloved entertainment companion. This ongoing, informal dialogue builds deep loyalty and brand affinity that traditional advertising alone could never achieve.

Impact of AI on Public Relations

The advent of artificial intelligence (AI) is ushering in a transformative era for public relations, fundamentally reshaping how professionals strategize, execute, and measure their campaigns. Rather than replacing the human element, AI acts as a potent enhancer, automating tedious tasks, providing deeper insights, and enabling more targeted and efficient communication.

Media Monitoring and Sentiment Analysis



Natural language processing (NLP) is a branch of artificial intelligence that enables computers to understand, interpret, and generate human language. **Source**: javatpoint, What-is-nlp, public domain.

One of the most significant impacts of AI is in media monitoring and sentiment analysis. Traditionally, PR teams manually sifted through news clippings and social media mentions, a time-consuming and often imprecise process. Today, AI-powered tools scan millions of online sources in real time, identifying brand mentions across news articles, blogs, forums, and social media platforms.

Crucially, these tools leverage **natural language processing** to interpret the sentiment behind these mentions. This allows PR professionals to gauge public perception in real time, identify emerging crises early, and adjust messaging accordingly. For instance, a team launching a new product can monitor social media for initial reactions; if a negative trend

emerges, they can quickly pinpoint the source and adapt their response before it escalates into a full-blown crisis.

Content Creation and Personalization

AI also revolutionizes content creation through **natural language generation**. Tools like large language models can draft initial versions of press releases, email pitches, and social media posts
. This frees professionals from repetitive writing tasks, allowing them to focus on high-level strategy and creative storytelling. Beyond mere drafting, AI excels at analyzing vast amounts of audience data to enable highly targeted messaging at scale. For example, an AI tool might suggest tailoring a press release to emphasize eco-friendly aspects for environmental outlets, while recommending a pitch focused on cost efficiency for business publications. This level of micro-targeting ensures messages resonate more deeply with specific audience segments.

Crisis Management and Predictive Analytics

In crisis management, AI's ability to rapidly detect anomalies in brand sentiment provides an invaluable early warning

system. **Predictive analytics** can even forecast potential public responses to campaigns or news, giving teams lead time to develop response strategies and neutralize misinformation. During a crisis, AI-powered bots can help manage high volumes of inquiries, ensuring stakeholders receive timely updates and preventing the spread of rumors or inaccurate information.

Streamlining Outreach and Measurement

AI streamlines traditionally labor-intensive processes in media relations. Tools can now identify relevant journalists covering specific beats, suggest optimal outreach times, and draft customized email pitches for each journalist's profile. These efficiencies allow PR professionals to dedicate more time to nurturing genuine relationships rather than spending hours on research. Furthermore, AI enhances campaign measurement by providing real-time insights into engagement, reach, and shifts in sentiment, enabling teams to optimize campaigns on the fly and demonstrate a tangible return on investment.

Ethical Implications of AI

While AI brings immense benefits, its ethical implications

cannot be ignored. Concerns include data privacy, algorithmic bias (where AI reflects and amplifies biases in its training data), the potential for spreading misinformation through deepfakes, and the lack of transparency in AI-generated content. PR professionals must prioritize ethical AI use, ensuring content remains accurate and authentic, and that audiences are aware when AI tools are involved in communication. Ultimately, the irreplaceable human elements of creativity, empathy, and strategic judgment remain at the core of successful public relations.

As AI has enhanced legitimate communication, it has also given rise to **dark PR**—the unethical practice of actively sabotaging a competitor's reputation through disinformation, bot farms, and deepfakes. Unlike traditional spin, which focuses on highlighting the positive, dark PR is purely defensive or offensive, aimed at creating artificial crises for rivals. Crisis management teams spend as much time fact-checking and debunking AI-generated rumors as they do promoting their own brand, turning the PR field into a high-stakes arena for information security and authenticity.

12.6 PUBLIC RELATIONS IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Relationship With Politics

Politics and PR have gone hand in hand since the dawn of political activity. Politicians communicate with their constituents and deliver messages using PR strategies. Benjamin Franklin's trip as ambassador to France during the American Revolution stands as an early example of the **publicity model**. Franklin enjoyed international acclaim, and his choice of a symbolic American-style fur cap inspired a new fashion for women's wigs. He also brought a printing press to produce leaflets that circulated through Paris's intellectual circles, ultimately securing a treaty with France that helped win the American Revolution.



Print of Ben Franklin wearing a fur cap. **Source**: Popular Graphic Arts, D. Benjamin Franklin, et vita inter Americanos acta, et magnis electricitatis periculis clarus LCCN2003675418 , public domain.

In the 20th century, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's *Fireside Chats* used radio to bypass the press and speak directly to the people. His familiar tone helped justify New Deal policies and became an essential promotional tool. More recently, organizations have used PR to distance themselves from controversy through rebranding. For example, the private military contractor Blackwater Worldwide changed its name to Xe Services in 2009 to move away from associations with civilian violence in Iraq.

The proliferation of media and the 24-hour news cycle have forced politicians to abandon old, secretive PR methods. In 2006, Vice President Dick Cheney remained silent for three days after accidentally shooting a friend during a hunting trip—a tactic criticized as outdated in the digital age. Today, the doctrine is to respond instantaneously and, where possible, with a strong counterattack via cable news and the internet.

Propaganda efforts have utilized PR techniques throughout the 20th century and into the 21st. In the 1990s, Kuwait employed the firm Hill & Knowlton to encourage U.S. involvement in the Persian Gulf. A young girl known as Nurse Nayirah gave tearful, widely broadcast testimony to Congress alleging that Iraqi troops dumped babies out of incubators. It was later revealed that she was the daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador and had been coached by the PR firm. This incident remains a stark illustration of how PR can manipulate public sentiment for geopolitical ends.



Volodymyr Zelenskyy visited Bucha during the Russian invasion. During this invasion, Russia deployed state-controlled media, coordinated bot networks, and false-flag narratives to flood the digital space with conflicting information, attempting to justify its aggression, obscure war crimes, and erode Western public support for Ukrainian military aid. **Source**: Cropped photo on rawpixel, CC0 1.0.

In a modern context, state-sponsored disinformation campaigns utilize digital tools on an even vaster scale. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, reports detailed campaigns using fake news websites and AI-generated personas to spread narratives favorable to Russia. By blurring the lines between fact and fiction on platforms like X and Facebook, these efforts undermine trust in democratic institutions through a contemporary evolution of propaganda.

In the high-stakes world of modern politics and international relations, PR functions have expanded to include real-time fact-checking and reputation defense. As AI-

generated deepfakes and automated misinformation become more sophisticated, PR teams must act as digital guardians of authenticity. This involves using advanced software to monitor the internet for forged videos or misleading narratives that could damage a client's reputation before they go viral. In modern times, the primary goal of political PR is often not just to spin a story, but to provide an immediate, data-backed defense against digital sabotage, ensuring that the public has access to verified facts in a chaotic information environment.

Lobbyists often influence public policy by subtly reframing language to shape discourse. In the 1990s, the sewage industry successfully coined the term "biosolids" to replace the unappealing term "sludge." By 1992, the EPA officially adopted the term, reclassifying it from hazardous waste to fertilizer. This linguistic shift allowed cities to ship tons of treated sewage to agricultural states that permitted the application of biosolids.

A contemporary parallel exists in energy policy. Fossil fuel groups often promote natural gas as a bridge fuel or a "cleaner" alternative to coal. This framing downplays methane emissions and the continued contribution to global warming. Similarly, the promotion of carbon capture and storage suggests a path to decarbonization that does not require a fundamental shift away from fossil fuels. By carefully choosing language, lobbying groups shape the policy agenda and maintain their interests in a rapidly evolving environmental landscape.

Political Branding



The communicative power of Donald Trump's red MAGA hats lies in their ability to instantly signal political allegiance, foster a strong sense of collective identity among supporters, and serve as an obvious, portable symbol of his populist movement. **Source**: Gage Skidmore from Peoria, AZ, United States of America, Make America Great Again hat (27149010964) (cropped), CC BY-SA 2.0.

Political branding has evolved significantly since the early 2000s, embracing sophisticated public relations techniques to shape public perception and mobilize support. Former President Bill Clinton's observation that political battles are brand wars remains as relevant today as ever. His observation that Republicans were "brilliant at branding" by framing concepts like the "death tax" (rather than the "estate tax") underscores how effective PR can distill complex policies into emotionally resonant slogans that become powerful political brands.

A consistently popular political brand is that of the outsider or reform-minded politician. While John McCain adopted this brand in 2008, more striking examples appeared in later cycles. Donald Trump, a businessman with no prior political office, masterfully crafted an outsider brand by

positioning himself against the establishment. His "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) slogan became an instantly recognizable brand that transcended traditional party lines and fostered a fervent sense of community. Similarly, Bernie Sanders successfully branded himself as a democratic socialist outsider fighting for systemic change, mobilizing a passionate grassroots movement around a consistent, non-traditional message.



Obama's iconic "Hope" image. **Source**: Fred Seibert. Big OBAMA Hope. CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Barack Obama's 2008 campaign pioneered modern political branding strategies that continue to influence campaigns today. His campaign used iconic portraits and aspirational slogans like "Hope" and "Change" to create a consistent identity. This visual and rhetorical branding was integrated across all channels, from traditional media to nascent social platforms. The unprecedented volume of campaign merchandise sold before his 2009 inauguration demonstrated the power of branding to foster deep emotional

connections, transforming supporters into active brand advocates. By utilizing micro-targeting data to personalize digital outreach, the campaign effectively turned online engagement into real-world grassroots organizing and record-breaking small-donor contributions. Today, political candidates across the spectrum rely on this digital-first blueprint, proving that unified visual storytelling and targeted community-building remain essential to modern election strategy.



Effective branding is the practice of crafting a distinctive identity and emotional promise that sets an organization apart, shaping how consumers perceive, feel about, and trust a product or company. **Source**: Claireneon, Logo design branding, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Branding as a New Form of Communication

Branding has moved beyond the corporate world to become a ubiquitous form of personal communication. The rise of social media has democratized and intensified personal branding, allowing individuals to meticulously curate online profiles to showcase their values, interests, and aspirations. What was once a technique used by companies to sell products is now an everyday means of communication for individuals, celebrities, and public figures.

This shift provides the most compelling evidence of PR's impact on modern culture. **Influencers** are essentially personal brands; their success hinges on cultivating authenticity and a perceived connection with their audience, often blurring the lines between personal expression and commercial endorsement. From professionals crafting LinkedIn profiles to Gen Z creators building careers on TikTok through a unique personal brand, the conscious construction of a narrative is now fundamental to navigating public life. Even anti-commercial groups, such as Adbusters, strategically use these same branding techniques and viral campaigns to challenge corporate power
, proving that branding has become an inescapable communicative force.



During the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Anthony Fauci's white house news conference appearances became a focal point of national crisis communication, where his calm, data-driven explanations both reassured millions seeking scientific clarity and exposed him to intense political polarization. **Source**: Trump White House Archived, White House Coronavirus Update Briefing, PDM 1.0.

Public Relations and the News

Public relations plays an integral, often unseen, role in shaping the news landscape, with a significant portion of daily news originating from PR efforts, directly or indirectly. It is estimated that anywhere from 40% to 90% of all news stories begin as public relations initiatives, such as news releases, news conferences, speeches, or events designed to

attract media coverage. A key concept in this dynamic is the **pseudo-event,** a term coined by historian Daniel J. Boorstin. A pseudo-event is an activity manufactured primarily to capture the media's and the public's attention. These are not spontaneous occurrences; they are planned with the express purpose of generating news coverage. Common examples include news conferences and elaborate award ceremonies that provide perfect photo opportunities and pre-packaged narratives for journalists.



During the Artemis II mission, NASA leveraged participatory digital campaigns—such as allowing millions to send their names into lunar orbit—alongside social media storytelling from the crew to build global public engagement and sustained support for deep-space exploration. **Source**: NASA HQ PHOTO, Artemis II Launch (NHQ202604010250), CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

Government extensively uses PR to communicate policies and manage public image. Many elected federal officials employ a press secretary whose primary role is to manage media relations. Beyond individual officials, the influence of PR is evident in the sheer number of lobbyists—

about 13,000 individuals in Washington, D.C.—who engage in persuasive communication on behalf of various interest groups. As Transportation Secretary, Pete Buttigieg strategically utilized public appearances and media interviews to highlight the benefits of infrastructure plans, turning policy goals into relatable public narratives. Similarly, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Anthony Fauci used daily press briefings and public service announcements as a deliberate PR effort to communicate vital health information and urge public compliance with guidelines. NASA also provides a masterclass in modern PR through the Artemis program by live-streaming the Artemis II launch and releasing high-quality imagery to build public support for deep-space exploration.

Spin control refers to the deliberate attempt to shape how the press interprets a story to an organization's advantage. This often occurs in a spin room immediately after a major event, such as a presidential debate. Campaigns dispatch spokespeople to provide their preferred interpretation of a candidate's performance, hoping to frame the narrative before reporters file their stories. Various spin techniques are employed to influence the media, such as selective leaking, which involves providing favorable information in advance to set the story's initial tone. Another tactic is immediate interpretation, in which a politician's team contacts the press immediately after an event with preferred talking points. Finally, some practitioners use a strategy of false equivalence,

pushing the idea that there are two sides to every story, even when one side is objectively less credible, to create doubt or balance a narrative in the public's perception.

As the line between journalism and public relations continues to blur, the rise of **native advertising** has become a significant ethical consideration. This practice involves creating PR content that looks and feels exactly like an editorial news story, matching the font, layout, and tone of the hosting news outlet. While these pieces are often labeled as "sponsored content" or "paid post," the visual similarity to objective news can mislead readers into believing they are consuming independent journalism. For the modern PR professional, the challenge is to use these storytelling formats without losing the transparency and trust that build long-term brand credibility.

In the digital landscape, the relationship between PR and the news also involves the critical issue of **brand safety**. PR firms must now work tirelessly to ensure that their clients' messages do not appear alongside misinformation or extremist content

, which can happen accidentally through automated ad-placement algorithms. This involves constant monitoring of news sites and digital platforms to protect a brand's reputation from being associated with guilt. Additionally, firms must combat ad fraud—where bot farms mimic human readers to inflate the reach of a news story—ensuring that the

data used to measure a campaign's success is accurate and that the brand is reaching a genuine human audience.



Leaders of the Civil Rights Movement strategically orchestrated nonviolent protests, marches, and boycotts to generate dramatic television and print news coverage that exposed racial injustice and galvanized national public support for landmark legislation. **Source**: DataRat17, St Pete FL Civil Rights Movement Boycottjpg, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Public Relations and Social Justice Movements

Public relations, often perceived as a tool primarily for corporations and governments, has also proven to be an

incredibly effective instrument for social change. This power was nowhere more clearly demonstrated than during the Civil Rights Movement. The leaders of this pivotal movement understood that achieving their goals required a strategic combination of direct action, powerful words, and unwavering visibility

. They meticulously orchestrated protests in locations where local officials could be reliably counted on to overreact with violence and repression. This deliberate strategy aimed to expose the brutal realities of segregation and injustice. Crucially, they ensured that the northern press would be present to witness these protests, guaranteeing that images and stories of peaceful demonstrators being met with dogs, fire hoses, and brutal beatings would be broadcast across the nation and around the world.

Martin Luther King, Jr., in particular, was a master of this form of public relations. He understood the power of visual media and strategic messaging to sway public opinion and pressure political leaders. His iconic speeches, non-violent demonstrations, and willingness to endure personal sacrifice were all part of a sophisticated communication strategy designed to win the hearts and minds of Americans and international observers. The impact of televised and newspaper coverage of peaceful marches disrupted by violence was instrumental in galvanizing support for the movement and eventually leading

to landmark legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

This historical precedent illustrates that PR can be a transformative tool for social change, a lesson that various advocacy groups apply today. A compelling modern example is the



Protesters supporting the Coalition of Immokalee Workers. **Source**: Working Families Party, 4N3A3363, CC BY-NC 4.0.

Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW). This human rights organization, comprised mainly of migrant farmworkers in Florida, has utilized sophisticated PR strategies to improve working conditions and wages in the agricultural industry

. Their key initiative, the Fair Food Program, aims to compel major food corporations to pay a penny-per-pound premium for tomatoes, which goes directly to farmworkers, and to adopt a human-rights-based code of conduct enforced by a third party.

The CIW achieved a significant victory with Taco Bell in 2005. After a four-year boycott campaign, including hunger strikes, marches, and widespread public awareness efforts, Taco Bell and its parent company, Yum! Brands became

the first fast-food giant to sign a Fair Food agreement. This success was due to the CIW's ability to frame their struggle as a moral issue, using powerful narratives and public pressure campaigns that garnered media attention and consumer support. Currently, the CIW is engaged in a similar protest campaign to encourage Wendy's to join the Fair Food Program. They have organized boycotts, protests at Wendy's locations, shareholder resolutions, and consumer education initiatives, all designed to put pressure on the company and its reputation to bring about change. Their strategy mirrors the Civil Rights Movement's emphasis on visibility and public awareness to achieve tangible improvements in human rights and labor conditions, underscoring the lasting power of well-placed public relations in the pursuit of social justice.

In contrast to the genuine grassroots mobilization seen in social justice movements, some PR campaigns employ a deceptive tactic known as **astroturfing**. This involves creating a fake grassroots movement that appears to be a spontaneous outpouring of public support but is actually funded and orchestrated by a large corporation or political interest group. By using bot networks to inflate social media trends or creating front groups with names that sound like community organizations, practitioners can manufacture a false sense of public consensus. Understanding the difference between a real social movement and an astroturf campaign is

vital for consumers and policymakers to identify who is truly behind the messaging that shapes public debate.

The Modern PR Professional

As this chapter has demonstrated, the role of the public relations practitioner has evolved from a simple publicist to a complex strategic advisor. The modern PR professional must be a guardian of fact, balancing three distinct skill sets: storytelling, data science, and ethical diplomacy. They must be masters of narrative to reach human hearts, experts in AI and predictive analytics to understand digital trends, and ethical counselors who ensure that a company's or politician's actions align with their public promises. Success in this field today requires more than managing an image; it demands transparency and persuasion to benefit both the organization and the public.

CHAPTER 13: ECONOMICS OF MASS MEDIA



Source: Jsatc002 at English Wikibooks, Money eci, CC BY-SA 3.0.

13.1 Economics of Mass Media
13.2 Characteristics of Media Industries
13.3 The Internet's Effects on Media Economies
13.4 Digital Divide in a Global Economy
13.5 Information Economy
13.6 Globalization of Media
13.7 Cultural Imperialism

13.1 ECONOMICS OF MASS MEDIA



Source: Mike Mozart from Funny YouTube, USA, Comcast (29013733784), (cropped), CC BY 2.0.

In the late 19th century, the pioneering industrialist Andrew Carnegie conceived a revolutionary business model that transformed the steel industry. Rather than simply purchasing raw materials, Carnegie pursued a strategy of vertical integration by acquiring mines, railways, and every other stage of the production process. This allowed a single corporation to own both its suppliers and its distribution channels, effectively eliminating the middleman and driving competition out of the

market. This historical blueprint remains the foundation for modern mass communication businesses.

In late 2009, Comcast, then primarily a cable company, unveiled a plan to acquire a controlling stake in NBCUniversal , a move that would enable Comcast to merge with NBC. This multibillion-dollar deal, completed in 2011, initially saw Comcast take a 51 percent stake and General Electric (GE) retain 49 percent. Comcast then acquired the remaining 49 percent in 2013, bringing NBCUniversal entirely under its umbrella. This consolidation integrated all NBCUniversal content—including Universal Pictures and Focus Features, as well as the Spanish-language network Telemundo and the cable networks USA , Bravo, CNBC, and MSNBC (now MS Now)—with Comcast's extensive cable channels, which at the time included E! Entertainment, the Golf Channel, and Versus (now NBC Sports Network). As one of the nation's largest cable and broadband Internet providers, Comcast (which rebranded its consumer cable, internet, and phone services as Xfinity
in 2010) gained immense power to influence content distribution.

While early concerns focused on the potential to restrict content to specific cable boxes, the economic battle has shifted toward

controlling digital access and prioritizing proprietary streaming platforms

.

Today, the strategy of bypassing traditional intermediaries is the standard for industry leaders. The Walt Disney Company has become a prime example of this model by acquiring major production houses such as Pixar, Marvel, and Lucasfilm to secure exclusive control over high-value intellectual property. By distributing this content directly through its own subscription services, the company can maximize revenue and gather granular data on consumer behavior. Similarly, Amazon leverages its e-commerce and logistics empire to bundle original content with its broader subscription ecosystem, using media as a tool to retain customers within its massive commercial infrastructure.

The modern economics of mass media are no longer defined solely by who owns the wires, but by who owns the data and the interface. Vertical integration now extends into predictive analytics, where the industry's raw material is user data. Companies use sophisticated algorithms to determine which projects to greenlight and how to market them to specific individuals, creating a closed loop in which the producer is also the data analyst and the distributor.

As the marketplace has fractured into dozens of competing services, the industry is experiencing a trend toward re-bundling. To combat subscription fatigue, large technology and media

conglomerates are increasingly forming digital malls that offer multiple services through a single interface. This allows dominant firms to act as the new gatekeepers of the internet, mirroring the power once held by traditional cable providers but on a global, data-driven scale. This concentration of power continues to raise significant questions regarding market competition and the diversity of information available to the public.

The economics of mass media have reached a new level of complexity as global platforms transition from being simple content distributors to all-encompassing data ecosystems. In this environment, vertical integration is no longer just a strategy for profitability; it is a mechanical necessity for survival, allowing a single corporation to control the raw data of consumer behavior, the proprietary algorithms that predict demand, and the digital interfaces that dictate what audiences see.

13.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF MEDIA INDUSTRIES

The merger of Comcast and NBCUniversal serves as a significant case study in the intricate ways media companies conduct business. While the economic dynamics of television, print, radio, music, and film are unique, they are broadly categorized into three models: monopoly, oligopoly, and monopolistic competition.

Most people are familiar with the concept of a **monopoly**, which occurs when one company controls a product or service, such as a small town with only one major newspaper. While pure monopolies are rare and subject to antitrust scrutiny, the digital age has seen the rise of near-monopolies in specific niches, where a single player holds an overwhelming market share, such as in search engines or social networking.

An **oligopoly** occurs when a few companies control a market for a product or service. This is common across modern media. In publishing, a handful of major houses release most best-selling books, and a few companies control the highest-circulating magazines. Television broadcasting operates similarly, with major

networks—NBC, Disney's ABC, Paramount Global's CBS, and Fox Corporation—owning nearly all broadcast and many prominent cable outlets. This extends to the streaming landscape, where a few dominant platforms control a significant portion of the subscription video-on-demand market
. The music industry is also an oligopoly, with Universal Music Group, Sony Music Entertainment, and Warner Music Group controlling the vast majority of recorded music distribution.



Source: Statista, Ticketmaster Dominates the U.S. Ticketing Landscape (Apr. 2023 Mar. 2024), CC BY-SA 4.0.

Monopolistic competition takes place when multiple companies offer essentially the same product but differentiate themselves through branding or niche appeal. For example, the merger of Ticketmaster and Live Nation created a powerful entity operating in the broader event promotion

market, where smaller, specialized companies compete by targeting specific genres or offering unique features (so powerful that a federal jury ruled in 2026 that they have acted as an illegal monopoly). In the digital realm, this model is evident in the myriad independent news sites and podcasts vying for attention by offering distinct perspectives.

The last few decades have seen increasing media conglomeration, allowing for **economies of scale**. Large corporations like iHeartMedia can buy wholesale advertising across dozens of radio stations in a single market, a feat individual local stations cannot match. Because diversified conglomerates now own everything from theme parks to news networks, concerns regarding corporate control of messaging and the diversity of voices have intensified.

However, a powerful countercurrent exists in the form of independent media. Nonprofit and college radio stations provide news and music that corporate stations often ignore. The rise of the creator economy has dramatically expanded this alternative perspective.



Source: Alpha, Mr Beast Feastables at Woolworths, Glen Huntly – close cropped, CC BY-NC 4.0.

Consider the phenomenon of MrBeast. While traditional media companies operate within established market structures, individual creators have built media empires from the ground up. With hundreds of millions of subscribers, MrBeast commands an audience that often surpasses major television networks. His content is funded directly through platform ad revenue and sponsorships, bypassing traditional gatekeepers entirely. By diversifying into physical products, such as his Feastables brand, he demonstrates vertical integration of content through direct-to-consumer sales. This underscores a profound shift: the power to produce and distribute compelling content is no longer the sole domain of massive corporations.

Raising Revenue

Media companies utilize various strategies to generate revenue, yet nearly all are built on two fundamental pillars: consumer funding or advertising revenue. In practice, many outlets combine these to create a flexible, multi-stream income. Consumers often participate in this dynamic by choosing their preferred trade-off: paying a premium for an ad-free experience or accepting advertising in exchange for free content.

Traditional book publishers still derive the vast majority of their income through direct consumer sales, a model that now includes robust digital markets for e-books and audiobooks. Conversely, broadcast television historically represented the purest form of advertising-driven revenue. Because these networks charged no direct fees, they could command premium prices from advertisers by promising the largest possible audience. However, as the digital landscape has diversified, these clear distinctions have largely dissolved into a hybrid ecosystem.

Cable companies, such as Comcast, continue to employ a hybrid model, collecting both monthly subscription fees and advertising revenue. However, the traditional bundled package has faced intense pressure as consumers shift toward digital streaming. In response, providers have pivoted to emphasize high-speed broadband as their primary product, with television services

often relegated to a secondary add-on. To retain control over their content libraries and capture the digital video market, these companies now operate their own streaming platforms, such as Peacock and Paramount+, effectively blurring the lines between traditional utility providers and modern content distributors.

Legacy broadcast networks have also adapted by launching **FAST** (Free Ad-supported Streaming Television) and **AVOD** (Advertising Video-on-Demand) channels. Services like Tubi and Pluto TV offer extensive libraries and live events without a subscription fee, mirroring the traditional broadcast model but in a digital-first environment. This allows networks to reach the growing cord-cutter demographic while leveraging the precision of digital ad targeting.



Former NASA engineer turned YouTube creator Mark Rober uses creative engineering challenges, popular science demonstrations, and viral prank videos to make science and technology accessible and engaging for millions of viewers. **Source**: Countingmagic, Mark Rober 2020, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Beyond corporate structures, the creator economy has introduced entirely new revenue dynamics. Independent creators, such as Mark Rober, have built massive, highly engaged audiences that often rival the reach of major television networks. While these creators earn revenue through platform ad-sharing and integrated brand sponsorships, their most significant economic innovation is **product-led growth**.

Rather than relying solely on external advertisers, successful creators are launching their own physical products and educational ventures. Rober's CrunchLabs, for instance, uses a subscription-box model to provide hands-on engineering challenges directly to its fans. This vertical integration allows creators to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and build a

direct, loyal relationship with their audience, turning viewers into long-term customers and stakeholders in their brand ecosystem.

Across all sectors, the collection and analysis of user data have become central to revenue generation. This information allows advertisers to target specific demographics with extreme precision, making ad space more valuable. For subscription services, data is the primary tool for reducing **churn**—the rate at which customers cancel—by personalizing content recommendations to keep users engaged.

Furthermore, the integration of e-commerce directly into content platforms—from social media feeds to digital news sites—has created a seamless shopping experience. Consumers can now discover a product within a video or article and complete a purchase without ever leaving the platform. This fusion of content, advertising, and retail represents the current state of media economics: a complex, data-driven environment where every interaction is a potential revenue stream.

Characteristics of Media Industries

Modern media economics is defined by a shift from physical distribution to digital ecosystems. While the fundamental business models of monopoly, oligopoly, and monopolistic

competition remain, data analytics, direct-to-consumer platforms, and the rise of the creator economy have transformed how these companies raise revenue and manage costs.

Print Media

Print media is categorized into three primary types: books, newspapers, and magazines. The book publishing industry operates as a consolidated oligopoly. While traditionally led by the Big Five, the landscape shifted in late 2023 when Simon & Schuster was acquired by the private equity firm KKR
, moving it from the media-conglomerate structure of Paramount to an investor-owned model. Along with Penguin Random House, HarperCollins, Macmillan, and Hachette, these entities dominate the trade market. Despite the growth of digital formats, physical print has proven remarkably resilient, remaining a premium product that accounts for approximately 74% of industry revenue.



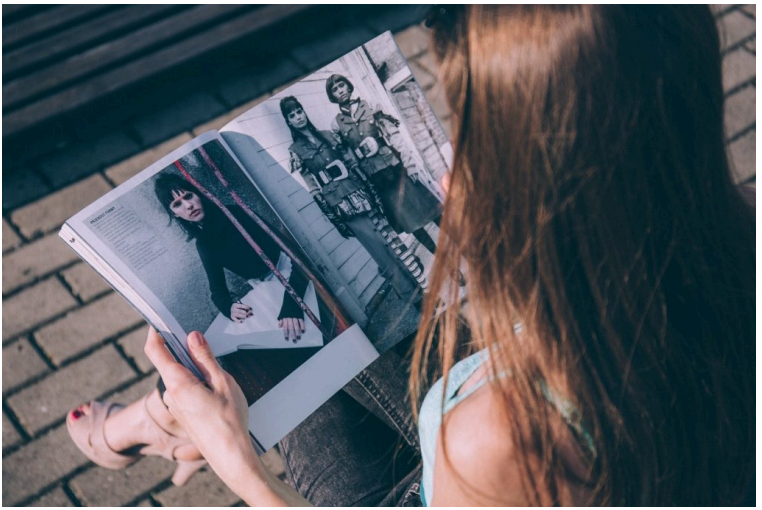
Source: Cropped photo by hitesho0141 on Pixabay.

Newspapers

Journalistic and editorial expenditures remain the highest costs for newspaper companies, far outweighing newsprint and physical distribution. While electronic printing reduced marginal costs, the industry has been severely impacted by the total collapse of classified advertising revenue due to free digital services like Craigslist. Furthermore, lucrative display advertisers have largely migrated to social media and search platforms that offer superior data analytics.

To counter these shifts, large ownership groups like Gannett and McClatchy leverage their scale by centralizing back-office functions and regional reporting across hundreds of local titles. Modern newspapers now prioritize a digital-first revenue model, focusing on subscription paywalls, native advertising, and branded events. A major economic

development in this sector is negotiating licensing deals with AI companies to recoup revenue lost when AI search engines summarize news articles directly, bypassing publishers' websites.



Source: Photo by StockSnap on Pixabay.

Magazines

Like newspapers, a few large conglomerates, such as People Inc. (formerly Dotdash Meredith) and Hearst Communications, own most major magazine titles. However, the industry has seen a dynamic shift in ownership; for instance, Salesforce co-founder Marc Benioff acquired *Time*, and Minute Media now manages *Sports Illustrated*. The industry is adapting by focusing on specialized content and digital transformation. Print

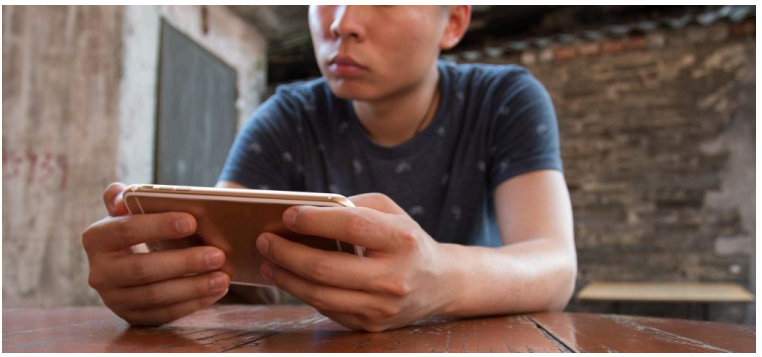
magazines are increasingly treated as luxury or collectible items, while core growth is driven by digital subscriptions, affiliate marketing (earning commissions on product recommendations), and e-commerce integration.

Television and Radio

The television landscape is defined by accelerating cord-cutting. As of early 2025, a significant majority of U.S. adults (83%) watch streaming TV , while far fewer (36%) subscribe to traditional cable or satellite TV. This cord-cutting trend has led to a steady decline in cable TV subscriptions, with projections indicating a continued decrease in conventional pay-TV households. In response, conglomerates like Comcast, Disney, Paramount, and Fox have pivoted to FAST and AVOD models. These services, such as Tubi and Pluto TV, allow networks to regain the mass-market advertising reach they once held on broadcast TV.

Radio has seen massive consolidation, with iHeartMedia operating hundreds of stations as a singular advertising network. However, the most significant economic shift in audio is the growth of digital groups, with digital radio and podcasting revenue now exceeding $2 billion annually. Diversity in this sector is largely maintained by noncommercial FM stations (educational and public radio),

which, because they are funded by listener donations rather than advertisers, can cater to niche audiences that corporate stations ignore.



Source: Cropped photo by Chanzj on Pixabay.

Video Games

The video game industry has evolved into a colossal economic force, generating approximately $224 billion in annual global revenue and surpassing the combined totals of the film and recorded music industries. This growth is driven by a fundamental shift from the traditional buy-to-play model toward Games-as-a-Serviceand free-to-play models. While a one-time purchase still grants access to many console and PC titles, most of the industry's modern revenue comes from post-purchase monetization. **Microtransactions**, which include small, incremental purchases for character skins, in-game currency, or power-ups, now account for

over half of all PC and mobile gaming revenue. This model thrives on long-term player engagement, encouraging small, repeated expenditures rather than a single upfront transaction.

In-game advertising has also become a sophisticated revenue stream, particularly through **rewarded video ads**. In this opt-in model, players watch a short commercial in exchange for in-game benefits such as extra lives or currency, providing value to users while generating direct income for the developer. This is often supplemented by native advertising, such as branded content or virtual billboards that appear organically within the game world. Furthermore, the industry has embraced subscription ecosystems like Xbox Game Pass and PlayStation Plus, which offer a rotating library of titles for a recurring fee. These services provide steady, predictable revenue and reduce the financial risk associated with individual game launches.

Beyond direct gameplay, the industry maximizes its earning potential through downloadable content, seasonal battle passes, and the expansion of intellectual property into ancillary markets. Successful franchises now generate substantial income through professional esports sponsorships, physical merchandise, and licensing deals for film and television adaptations. This diversified, multi-platform approach ensures that a single game can remain a highly profitable interactive experience for years after its initial release.



Source: Photo by Viralyft on Pixabay.

Music and the "Big Three"

Popular music, therefore, operates widely as an oligopoly, despite the presence of numerous small, independent companies. The recorded music industry is a tight oligopoly controlled by the Big Three: Universal Music Group, Sony Music Entertainment, and Warner Music Group. These labels focus on national and international acts, as their scale allows them to push artists across global streaming platforms and consolidated radio networks simultaneously.

While the Big Three dominate the recorded music industry, they have surprisingly little to do with live performances. Traditionally, musicians have toured to promote their albums—and sell enough copies to recoup their

advances—and live shows have presented both self-promotion and income opportunities. An artist's record company provided financial support, but a concert ticket generated significantly more income per sale than a CD. Since the merger of the ticketing companies Ticketmaster and Live Nation, ticketing services for large venues have been effectively monopolized.



Taylor Swift performs on the Eras Tour. **Source**: Ronald Woan from Redmond, WA, USA, Taylor Swift Eras Tour – Arlington, TX – Folklore act 3 (cropped 2), CC BY-SA 2.0

This dominance has led to significant public battles between artists and Ticketmaster. The ticketing process for Taylor Swift's "Eras Tour" in late 2022 became a highly publicized debacle, drawing widespread

criticism and leading to legal and governmental scrutiny. Millions of fans registered for Ticketmaster's Verified Fan presale, but when tickets went on sale on November 15, 2022, the website experienced severe technical issues, including crashes, frozen queues, and error messages. Ticketmaster attributed the chaos to "historically unprecedented demand" and a "staggering number of bot attacks," leading them to cancel the general public sale due to "insufficient remaining ticket inventory." T aylor Swift herself publicly expressed her frustration, stating it was "excruciating for me just to watch mistakes happen with no recourse." Fans filed multiple lawsuits against Live Nation Entertainment (Ticketmaster's parent company), alleging fraud, misrepresentation, and antitrust violations. The controversy also prompted a U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee hearing in January 2023, where senators from both parties criticized Ticketmaster's market dominance. In May 2024, the U.S. federal government, joined by 29 states, filed an antitrust lawsuit against Live Nation-Ticketmaster, seeking to dissolve their merger and alleging unlawful business practices that harm the live music industry. The Justice Department settled its case in March 2026. However, numerous states refused the settlement, and found success in court months later when a

federal jury in Manhattan found Live Nation and Ticketmaster liable
for violating antitrust laws on multiple counts.

Film

The film industry is dominated by major studios—Sony Pictures, Universal, Disney, Warner Bros., and Paramount—which are all parts of larger, vertically integrated media conglomerates. These studios sell to large cinema chains like AMC Theatres and Regal, but streaming has reshaped the revenue landscape. The traditional theatrical release window has significantly shortened, with many films released on platforms like Disney+ or HBO Max shortly after their theatrical debuts.

Independent filmmakers often bypass traditional theaters entirely, relying on film festivals to secure distribution deals with streaming services or utilizing direct-to-consumer video-on-demand sales. To maximize earnings, both major studios and independent creators now rely on ancillary markets, including licensing for in-flight entertainment, brand partnerships, and the creation of related interactive experiences or theme park attractions.



Source: A24, A24 logo, public domain.

The Indie Evolution: New Models, Enduring Vision

The question of independent cinema's viability remains a complex and evolving discussion. Historically, boutique studios like Miramax proved that films produced outside the traditional Big Six system—such as *The Terminator*, *Pulp Fiction*, and *The Passion of the Christ*—could achieve massive commercial and cultural success. However, as major studios shifted their primary focus toward high-budget, low-risk blockbusters, funding for mid-budget projects without guaranteed franchise potential began to dry up. This did not signal the death of the independent landscape; rather, it forced a total transformation in how films are financed, produced, and distributed.

While many dedicated independent divisions of major studios, such as Warner Independent and Paramount Vantage, were shuttered, a new generation of distributors has filled the void. A24 stands out as the most significant success story of this era. Founded in 2012, A24 has become a brand synonymous with unconventional, auteur-driven cinema, producing hits like *Everything Everywhere All at Once* and *Moonlight*. Their success comes from a commitment to creative freedom and innovative, digitally native marketing that targets a loyal cinephile audience. By diversifying into acclaimed television series such as *Euphoria* and *Beef*, they have established stable revenue streams to support riskier cinematic ventures. Other players, such as Neon, have found similar success by focusing on prestigious film festival acquisitions and building a distinct, curated brand identity.

The impact of streaming services on this ecosystem has been a double-edged sword. On one hand, global platforms have democratized distribution, offering independent filmmakers an audience of millions without the need for a massive theatrical release. These platforms have also become vital financiers for niche projects that traditional studios would consider too risky, leading to a surge in diverse storytelling.

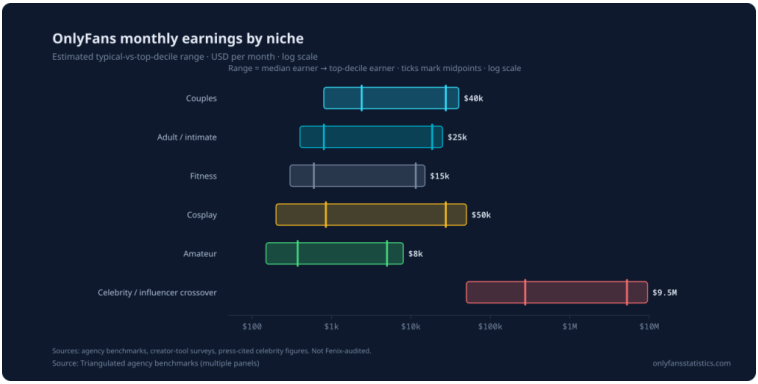
However, this new landscape presents significant hurdles.

The sheer volume of content on digital platforms creates an oversaturated environment in which independent films often struggle for visibility against high-profile studio productions. There are also growing concerns regarding **algorithmic curation**, which may favor formulaic content over experimental art. Furthermore, the shortening or total elimination of the theatrical window has fundamentally changed how independent films are monetized and experienced.

To navigate these economic pressures, modern independent filmmakers have pioneered new financial and technical models. One significant shift is the rise of **equity crowdfunding**, in which thousands of individual supporters provide capital in exchange for a stake in the film's potential profits. This model turns the audience into stakeholders, fostering intense brand loyalty and providing a safety net for projects that traditional banks or studios might reject.

Additionally, integrating generative artificial intelligence into post-production has leveled the playing field for smaller budgets. Independent creators can now utilize AI-driven tools for high-end visual effects, color grading, and sound design that previously required the resources of a major studio. By lowering the cost of technical excellence, these tools let

filmmakers focus on narrative depth and creative experimentation, keeping the indie spirit strong and technologically savvy in the global media economy.



OnlyFans fundamentally shifted the creator economy away from traditional ad-based revenue by enabling creators to monetize exclusive content directly through paywalled subscriptions, direct messages, and fan tips. **Source**: OnlyFansStatsEditor for onlyfansstatistics.com, OnlyFans creator earnings by content niche, CC BY-SA 4.0.

New Media, Old Models

The rise of digital platforms has fundamentally reshaped the media landscape, yet the core dynamics of revenue generation persist, though with new complexities. While the internet changed the game, major media conglomerates continue to exert significant influence by owning and controlling the most

popular content sites. This concentration has only deepened. Alphabet Inc. (Google) maintains its dominance through YouTube, while The Walt Disney Company has finalized its full acquisition of Hulu, paying Comcast billions to secure total control. Similarly, Amazon continues to leverage Twitch, and even TikTok has transitioned into a new U.S.-based entity, TikTok USDS, governed by a board of American investors, including Oracle and Silver Lake, to satisfy regulatory requirements while remaining a global tech powerhouse.

The creator economy has matured into a sophisticated professional sector valued at over $300 billion. Modern content creators—ranging from investigative journalists on Substack to niche experts on YouTube and TikTok—no longer rely solely on platform ad-share. Their revenue models are highly diversified, often prioritizing direct brand partnerships, which now account for approximately 70% of creator income. This is supplemented by affiliate marketing, tiered membership models on platforms like Patreon, and the sale of branded physical merchandise and digital products such as masterclasses. The relationship between creators and platforms has shifted from simple hosting to a complex ecosystem in which creators operate as independent media brands with their own loyal, monetizable communities.

As content has shifted from scarcity to abundance, the attention economy has become the primary battleground.

Human attention is the currency, and media organizations have adapted with increasingly technical strategies. While advertising remains essential, digital subscriptions have evolved into membership programs that offer more than just access; they provide community perks, exclusive events, and direct access to editors. AI content licensing has become a significant emerging revenue stream. Major publishers—including Hearst , Condé Nast, and the Associated Press—now participate in marketplaces to license their archives to AI developers, ensuring they are compensated when their reporting is used to train or inform large language models.

Digital advertising has reached a peak of sophistication through **programmatic advertising** and AI-driven targeting. Tech giants like Meta and Alphabet leverage massive datasets to match advertisers with highly specific audiences, allowing them to offer free services while generating tens of billions in revenue. However, the industry is also pivoting toward **native advertising** and **Connected TV (CTV)** formats. These ads are designed to feel like organic parts of the user experience —such as a sponsored article that matches a news site's editorial tone or a shoppable ad on a smart TV interface. This interplay of advertising, subscriptions, and the creator economy defines a world where every click is a calculated transaction in the pursuit of audience engagement.

In essence, while the internet initially challenged traditional

media's revenue models by making content abundant and often free, the industry has adapted by embracing new forms of monetization. This includes a complex interplay of advertising, direct consumer payments through subscriptions and micro-transactions, and the burgeoning creator economy, all vying for the finite resource of audience attention in an increasingly digital and interconnected world.

13.3 THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION'S EFFECTS ON MEDIA ECONOMIES



While *The Wall Street Journal* pioneered early digital subscriptions by establishing a hard paywall for its specialized financial news in 1996, *The New York Times* revolutionized mass-market digital news in 2011 by introducing a flexible, metered paywall that both publications eventually evolved into AI-driven dynamic paywalls that adjust reader access in real time based on individual user behavior. **Source**: Steve Rhodes, New York Times app on iPad at launch at San Francisco Apple Store 141 , CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

The challenge in media economics concerns production. When print media had no competition, the concept was simple: Sell newspapers, magazines, and books. Companies could gauge the sales of these goods like any other product, although, in the media's case, the good was intangible—information—rather than the physical paper and ink. The transition from physical media to broadcast media presented a new challenge because consumers did not pay for radio and, later, television programming; instead, the price was the occasional interruption by a word from its sponsors. However, even this practice hearkened back to the world of print media; just as newspapers and magazines sell advertising space, radio and television networks sell time on their airwaves.

The minuscule cost of online space compared to that in traditional print or broadcast media, combined with the instantaneous proliferation of information, indeed initiated a fundamental shift in media economics. This digital transformation continues to pose both a grave threat and significant opportunities for traditional media.

The initial culture of providing free content online, primarily supported by ads, proved unsustainable for many news organizations. Consequently, most major newspapers and high-quality news outlets have successfully implemented robust digital subscription models. For instance, *The New York Times* has been a leading example, demonstrating impressive subscription-driven growth, with millions of digital-only subscribers. They have achieved this by offering

premium, distinctive content, implementing strategic pricing , including bundled subscriptions with products like Games and Cooking, and focusing on deep subscriber engagement to reduce churn. Similarly, *The Wall Street Journal* has maintained its strong paid subscription model, proving that audiences are willing to pay for high-value, specialized content. While some free articles or limited access may still exist as a sampling mechanism, the prevailing trend for quality journalism is towards paid digital access.

Traditional media outlets have responded to the digital imperative not just by setting up websites, but by undergoing a comprehensive digital transformation and adopting a multi-platform approach

. Their archives have indeed opened up, but this content is now often behind paywalls or integrated into subscription offerings. Newspapers have developed sophisticated multimedia newsrooms that produce original video series, podcasts, and interactive features that leverage their journalistic expertise. Conversely, radio and television networks have expanded beyond audio and visual content to publish traditional text-and-photo stories, long-form articles, and in-depth analyses on their websites and apps.

Through digital platforms and internal changes, media companies have strengthened their content. They no longer merely act as television networks or local newspapers but have evolved into comprehensive digital content hubs that offer a wide range of content. This strategy captures audience

attention across multiple touchpoints and turns it into revenue through diverse streams. These streams now include digital subscriptions and memberships, which have become a primary focus, with tiered access, bundled products, and personalized content driving recurring revenue. Digital advertising, while traditional print ad revenue has declined, has surged, encompassing programmatic, video, and native formats. Social media advertising, in particular, has seen renewed confidence and significant growth in 2024, with brands leveraging user-generated content and creator partnerships. Many media companies, such as *The New York Times*' *Wirecutter*, integrate e-commerce and affiliate marketing by embedding product recommendations and affiliate links into their content to earn commissions on sales. Events, both virtual and in-person, often tied to specific content verticals or journalistic themes, have become a significant revenue stream. Furthermore, content is licensed to other platforms, including streaming services, and syndicated across various digital channels. Some media companies even monetize their proprietary data and insights, offering research reports or specialized data services to businesses.

The economic reality of the Internet has permanently changed the media landscape. The abundance of free content has intensified the attention economy, in which media companies fiercely compete for a finite resource: user attention. This has driven a shift towards more engaging and

personalized content formats, often powered by AI, and a relentless pursuit of diversified revenue models. While the challenge of dwindling traditional revenues persists, the most successful media companies are those that have innovated their content creation, distribution, and monetization strategies to thrive in this complex digital ecosystem.



Source: Art by JasonZigino, CC BY-NC-ND 3.0.

The Cloud's Silver Lining: How Adobe Subscribed to Success

Adobe's decision to move from selling individual software licenses to the

Adobe Creative Cloud subscription was a major turning point, reshaping the creative software industry and reinforcing Adobe's position as the industry standard. Previously, users would purchase a perpetual license for software like Photoshop, Illustrator, or Premiere Pro, incurring a substantial upfront cost and then facing additional expenses for major version upgrades every few years. This model often meant users were working on outdated software to avoid upgrade costs, and it also created a lucrative environment for software piracy.

The shift to Creative Cloud introduced a subscription-based model where users pay a recurring monthly or annual fee to access a suite of applications. This change, initially met with resistance from a segment of their user base that preferred owning their software outright, proved highly advantageous for several reasons and ultimately established Adobe as an industry standard.

Firstly, the subscription model provided continuous access to the latest versions and updates. Instead of waiting for a new major release, Creative Cloud users automatically receive feature enhancements, bug fixes, and performance improvements as soon as they are available. This meant professionals always had the most cutting-edge tools at their disposal, crucial in fast-

evolving fields like graphic design, video editing, and web development.

Secondly, Creative Cloud enabled seamless integration and a unified workflow across multiple applications. With a single subscription, users could access a vast array of Adobe products, including Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign, Premiere Pro, and After Effects. This facilitated smoother project handoffs, consistent asset management through Creative Cloud Libraries, and a more cohesive creative ecosystem. For instance, a designer could easily create vector graphics in Illustrator, import them into Photoshop for photo manipulation, and then use them in an animation created in After Effects, all within a seamlessly integrated environment. This comprehensive toolkit became indispensable for creative professionals who often utilize multiple applications for complex projects

.

Thirdly, the subscription model made Adobe's powerful software more accessible and affordable upfront. While the long-term cost could exceed that of perpetual licenses for very infrequent users, the lower monthly entry point allowed students, freelancers, and small businesses to access professional-grade tools without a hefty initial investment, though

costs have increased. This broad accessibility fostered a larger user base and created a self-reinforcing cycle in which more users meant more industry training, more online tutorials, and more jobs requiring Adobe proficiency, further cementing its status as a standard.

Finally, the cloud-based service improved collaboration and cloud storage. Teams could easily share files, track versions, and collaborate on projects in real-time, regardless of their physical location. This flexibility became particularly valuable for remote workforces and distributed teams, streamlining creative workflows and increasing productivity. By shifting from a product vendor to a service provider, Adobe adapted to the digital age, fought piracy, secured a predictable revenue stream, and built an ecosystem now synonymous with professional creative work.

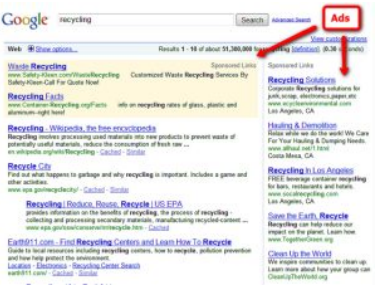
Online Synergy

The internet has also drastically changed the way companies' advertising models operate. During the early years of the internet, many web advertisements primarily directed traffic to e-commerce sites like Amazon and eBay for direct purchases of products or services. Today, however, digital advertising is far more sophisticated and pervasive. Ads, particularly on sites

for high-profile media outlets, now commonly highlight products and services that consumers might not typically purchase online, such as automobiles, financial services, or major credit cards.

A significant evolution in advertising has been the prominence of highly targeted, data-driven approaches. This involves matching advertisers with specific user demographics, interests, and online behaviors, often in real-time through programmatic advertising. For instance, if a web page provides suggestions on how to fix a refrigerator, some of the targeted advertisements would likely include local refrigerator repair shops or appliance parts suppliers. This precision extends beyond simple keyword matching to encompass a deep understanding of user intent and context.

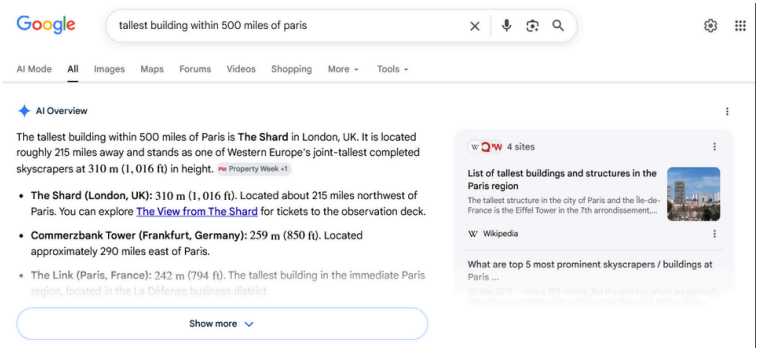
Search engine giant Google has been a pioneer in perfecting this type of targeted advertising. Through its robust advertising platforms, Google Ads (formerly Google AdWords) and Google AdSense, it has fundamentally reshaped the advertising landscape. Google Ads allows businesses to bid on



Google generates almost all of its revenue through advertising, enabling it to offer various services, such as email and document sharing, at no cost. **Source**: search-engine-land – Google Ads – CC BY 2.0.

keywords and display highly relevant text ads next to search results, on various websites (through the Google Display Network), and within its free web-based services like Gmail and YouTube. Conversely, Google AdSense enables website publishers to automatically display targeted ads on their sites and earn revenue based on clicks or impressions.

Google's innovation lies not just in using advanced algorithms to sort through massive amounts of data and match advertising to content, but also in significantly lowering the cost barrier and volume barrier to advertising. Because Google automatically connects publishers with advertisers, an independent website can easily integrate Google AdSense to monetize its content, earning revenue from each user interaction with the ads displayed. Likewise, relatively small companies can purchase advertising space in specialized niches through Google Ads without needing to be large-volume ad buyers. This business model has proven immensely productive; the vast majority of Alphabet's (Google's parent company) revenue, totaling hundreds of billions annually, comes from its advertising segments, even as it provides many services, such as email and document sharing, at no direct cost to the user. This ongoing evolution underscores how digital platforms have not only transformed content consumption but also fundamentally redefined the economics of media through data-driven, highly targeted advertising.



By providing direct, synthesized answers at the top of search results, Google's AI Overviews have significantly driven up zero-click searches, sharply reducing referral traffic to third-party websites and threatening the traditional ad-driven business models of digital publishers. **Source**: Google, includes a thumbnail of File:Vue tours du 13e.JPG by LPLT, Google AI Overview results, public domain.

Problems of Digital Delivery

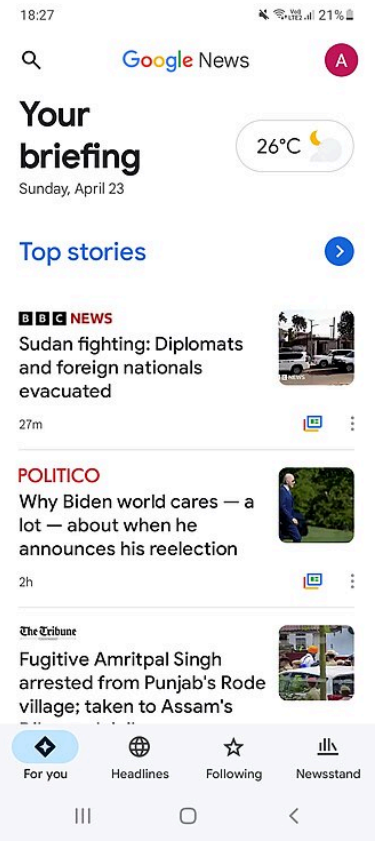
Search engines like Google and video-sharing sites like YouTube, owned by Google's parent company Alphabet, primarily function as aggregators and hosts of information created by others, rather than direct content producers themselves. While YouTube once pursued original programming, its current focus is on funding and supporting its vast network of independent creators. This fundamental dynamic, in which platforms provide free access to content, continues to create significant tension with those who depend financially on creating and

selling that content. News publishers, for instance, have largely abandoned the early internet's free content model, with major outlets like *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* successfully implementing paid digital subscriptions, a stark contrast to previous decades. This ongoing challenge is further complicated by the rise of AI in search, which can summarize information directly, potentially reducing traffic to sources. Despite these tensions, platforms like Google rely heavily on advertising, using programs such as Google Ads and Google AdSense to connect advertisers with relevant content and audiences, thereby lowering entry barriers for both advertisers and publishers and forming the bulk of Alphabet's revenue.

Google News

Google News, a prominent news aggregator owned by Alphabet, continues to automatically collect and organize news stories from various online sources, providing users with a convenient portal for the latest headlines from multiple outlets. However, the relationship between Google and news publishers remains complex and often contentious, having evolved significantly since the early criticisms.

The historical contention that Google infringed on copyrights and cost publishers revenue, famously articulated by *The Wall Street Journal*'s editor Robert Thomson in April 2009, who



Google News is an automated news aggregation service that organizes, curates, and ranks headlines from thousands of global publishers to deliver personalized, real-time coverage to users. **Source**: Opera19, Google News on Phone, CC BY-SA 4.0.

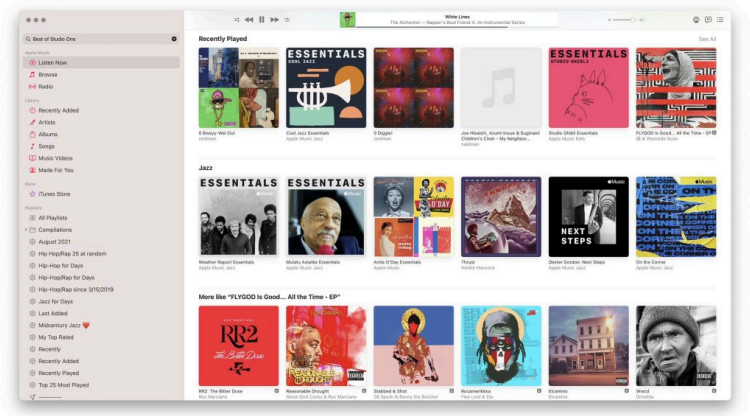
described news aggregators as "parasites," still resonates with many in the media industry. While Google did respond in December 2009 by allowing publishers to set limits on free article views, this was an early step in a much more protracted and intricate negotiation.

In the modern digital landscape, the core issue persists: how to fairly compensate content creators for the value derived from their journalism when platforms like Google facilitate access, often without direct payment for the content itself. This has led to several key developments. In a significant shift, Google launched News Showcase. In this program, participating publishers are paid directly to curate and display their premium content on Google News, Google Discover, and other platforms. This initiative aims to provide direct financial support and increased visibility for news organizations, moving beyond a purely traffic-referral model.

The advent of AI-generated summaries in Google Search results, known as AI Overviews, has introduced a new layer of concern for publishers. While these summaries aim to provide quick answers to user queries, many news outlets report significant drops in referral traffic, as users may no longer need to click through to the source. Publishers argue that this zero-click phenomenon directly affects their advertising revenue and subscriber acquisition efforts, prompting renewed calls for transparency and fair compensation

. Globally, news publishers and governments have increased pressure on tech giants to pay for news content. Influenced by initiatives like Australia's News Media Bargaining Code, Google has entered into various licensing agreements with publishers worldwide, though the terms often remain confidential. Furthermore, Google is actively exploring new AI licensing deals with news publishers to compensate them for their content used to train and power its artificial intelligence tools, acknowledging the value of high-quality, authoritative information in the AI era. Google News has also transitioned to automatically generated publication pages, moving away from manual submissions and customization options previously available to publishers. This streamlines the process but also means Google's algorithms increasingly determine how content is presented
, further influencing visibility and user engagement.

In essence, while the "parasite" accusation from 2009 highlighted an early imbalance, the relationship has evolved into a complex ecosystem of negotiation, direct payments, and ongoing adaptation. Publishers are actively seeking diversified revenue streams, including subscriptions and direct deals, while continuing to grapple with the impact of evolving search and AI technologies on their traffic and financial sustainability.



By transitioning the music industry from physical CDs to $0.99 digital downloads, iTunes established a scalable framework for digital music consumption that paved the way for modern, on-demand streaming services like Spotify and Apple Music. **Source**: Jeffrey Zeldman, Lazy Sunday, CC BY- ND 2.0.

Music and File Sharing

The clash between digital platforms and traditional news media is merely one facet of the profound challenges and transformations ushered in by digital technology. The inherent ability of digital formats to create exact, lossless copies of data dramatically amplified the risk of piracy across various media industries. In the music industry, this threat became acutely apparent with the widespread adoption of peer-to-peer file-sharing services in the late 1990s

. Platforms like Napster, which enabled users to freely share MP3 files directly with one another, quickly gained immense popularity,
leading to unprecedented levels of copyright infringement and a significant decline in traditional music sales.

However, the music industry's response to this initial wave of digital piracy has evolved considerably beyond legal battles alone. While
aggressive legal action against file-sharing platforms and individual users
did lead to the shutdown of services like Napster and LimeWire in the early 2000s, the industry recognized that a purely punitive approach was unsustainable in the face of changing consumer behavior. This realization led the music industry to shift toward legitimate digital distribution models.

The landscape of how music generates revenue on online platforms has undergone a significant transformation, moving from physical sales to primarily digital models. Broadly, two standard business models dominate this space: downloads and subscription services.

Downloads, while less cutting-edge now, represented a crucial early victory for the music industry in the digital realm. The introduction of iTunes in 2003 marked a turning point, successfully persuading consumers to pay for digital music after years of widespread piracy. Before this, the music industry grappled with unauthorized file-sharing services like Napster. iTunes provided a legal, convenient, and relatively affordable

way to acquire individual tracks or whole albums, establishing a viable revenue stream for artists and labels in the nascent digital music market. Although it still exists, the download model has significantly declined in prominence as streaming has become the preferred method of consumption for most listeners.

Subscription services, on the other hand, have grown remarkably in recent years and now represent the dominant revenue stream for music. These services offer immense potential for new and diverse income streams for artists and the music industry. Many operate on a freemium model, where some content or basic functionality is offered for free, but a monthly subscription is required to unlock all the site has to offer. For instance, platforms like LiveOne (formerly LiveXLive), Pandora, Spotify, and Apple Music all utilize variations of this model. Spotify, the best-known example, offers a free tier supported by advertisements and limited features (such as restricted skips or shuffle-only play). At the same time, its premium subscription provides an ad-free experience, offline downloads, and unlimited skips. This strategy enables platforms to attract a massive user base through free offerings, then convert a percentage of those users into paying subscribers, generating significantly more revenue.

Beyond these established platforms, crowdfunding has emerged as



Amanda Palmer demonstrated the power of direct fan funding by raising nearly $1.2 million on Kickstarter for her album Theatre Is Evil, setting a landmark record for crowdfunded music projects. **Source**: Beth Hommel, Amanda serious, CC BY 3.0.

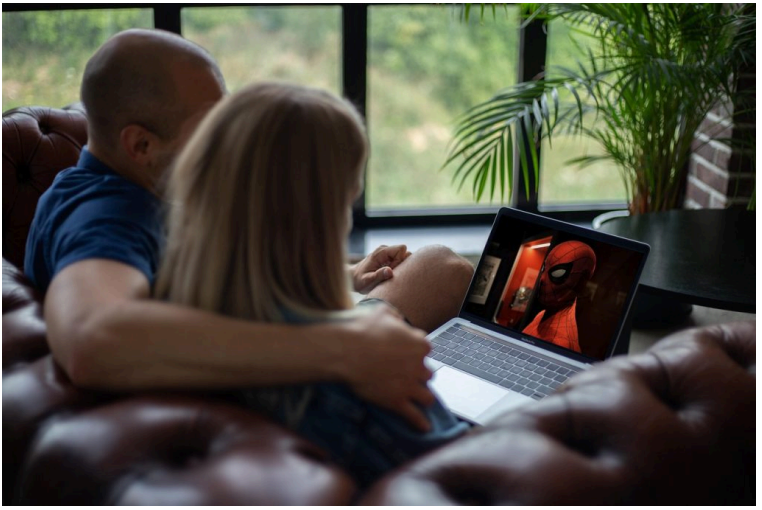
a powerful alternative for artists to directly engage with their fanbase and secure funding for their projects. Platforms like Kickstarter allow musicians to solicit financial contributions from fans in exchange for various rewards, ranging from digital downloads and exclusive merchandise to personalized experiences. A famous, albeit controversial, example is Amanda Palmer of the Dresden Dolls. In 2012, she launched a

Kickstarter campaign for her album *Theatre Is Evil*, initially aiming to raise $100,000. The campaign vastly exceeded expectations, earning an astonishing $1.2 million. However, Palmer later faced significant public chastisement for asking musicians to join her on tour for "beer, hugs, and high fives" in the wake of her substantial crowdfunding success. This sparked a contentious debate about fair compensation for artists and the ethics of crowdfunding.

Current trends in crowd-sourcing for music extend beyond one-off project funding. Many artists now utilize subscription-based crowdfunding platforms like Patreon, where fans become patrons and provide ongoing financial support in exchange for exclusive content, early access to new music, behind-the-scenes glimpses, or direct interaction with the artist. This model fosters a deeper, more consistent relationship between artists and their most dedicated fans, providing a predictable income stream that is less reliant on the fluctuating payouts from streaming services. Additionally, artists are increasingly exploring direct-to-fan sales via their websites or platforms like Bandcamp, which often offer a higher revenue share than primary streaming services, giving them more control over their music and its monetization. The rise of Web3 technologies, including NFTs, is also creating new avenues for fan engagement and artist compensation, offering unique digital collectibles and fractional ownership of music rights.

Despite ongoing challenges,

the music industry has largely recovered and is experiencing sustained growth, primarily driven by streaming revenue. Paid subscriptions now account for the majority of global recorded music revenue, with physical sales, particularly vinyl, experiencing a niche resurgence. The industry continues to invest in anti-piracy technologies, including AI-powered content recognition and digital watermarking, and fosters collaborations between streaming platforms and anti-piracy organizations. This evolution from a direct battle against file-sharing to a comprehensive strategy embracing accessible legal alternatives demonstrates the music industry's dynamic adaptation to the digital age.



Driven by widespread high-speed internet access and on-demand content, the rise of video streaming transformed global media consumption by shifting audiences away from traditional broadcast television toward subscription-based platforms. **Source**: Photo by Frank_Rietsch on Pixabay.

Video Streaming

As high-bandwidth internet connections proliferated, video-sharing and streaming sites like YouTube emerged, fundamentally transforming how video content is created, distributed, and consumed. While YouTube initially gained prominence as a platform for users to upload and share amateur videos, its scope rapidly expanded to include professional content, music videos, and

clips from television shows. However, the ease of digital replication and online transmission also posed significant challenges, as some users exploited these platforms to post a high volume of copyrighted commercial content illegally.

This inherent replication potential, combined with widespread online access, has driven a profound shift across media industries, particularly affecting those that traditionally relied on direct consumer income from film and television. The early era of rampant piracy, where unauthorized television show episodes and movies were widely shared, pushed the industry to innovate its business models. This led to the rise of dedicated video streaming services such as Netflix, Hulu, Disney+, HBO Max, and Amazon Prime Video. These platforms initially offered vast libraries of licensed content, then increasingly invested in producing their own original programming to attract and retain subscribers, a shift that led to the streaming wars of the 2010s and early 2020s.

The video streaming landscape is characterized by a mix of subscription-based models and the growing prominence of ad-supported tiers, as services seek to diversify revenue and appeal to a broader audience. Many major streaming providers now offer cheaper, ad-supported plans alongside their premium, ad-free subscriptions. Live sports content has also become a significant driver for subscriber acquisition and advertising revenue on platforms like Peacock and HBO Max. This evolution has dramatically impacted the traditional television and film industries, accelerating cord-cutting as viewers

abandon linear cable and satellite subscriptions in favor of on-demand streaming. Movie studios are increasingly releasing films directly to streaming platforms, challenging the traditional theatrical window.

Despite the widespread availability of legal streaming options, video piracy remains a persistent challenge, evolving into new forms like illegal streaming sites, torrenting, and credential sharing for subscription services. The industry continues to combat this through technological measures, including digital rights management (DRM) and AI-powered content recognition, as well as legal enforcement and international collaboration. The interplay between technological advances, changing consumer behavior, and efforts to monetize content is driving a major transformation in the video media landscape. However, as the next section will demonstrate, this pervasive shift of media and information to the internet can also pose the risk of a digital divide, in which individuals without internet access face an even greater disadvantage in navigating everyday life.

SAFE HARBORS AND SHIFTING SANDS: THE DMCA'S EVOLVING ROLE IN ONLINE MEDIA



This notice indicates that a hosting platform or website has taken down a photo or graphic after receiving a formal copyright infringement complaint from the rights holder under the Digital Millennium Copyright Act. **Source**: Lexein, Image removed DMCA, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Content producers continue to rely on legal frameworks to protect their intellectual property in the digital realm. In 1998, the United States Congress enacted the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) with the primary goal of adapting copyright law for the internet age and curbing the unauthorized copying and distribution of copyrighted material. This landmark legislation clarified many gray areas in digital law that previously lacked explicit legal coverage. Key provisions included making it illegal to circumvent technological measures designed to protect copyrighted works (often referred to as DRM), establishing requirements for webcasters to pay licensing fees to record companies, and granting specific

exemptions for libraries, archives, and certain other nonprofit institutions under defined circumstances.

Since its enactment, the DMCA has formed the foundational legal basis for numerous claims against major online platforms, including user-generated content sites like YouTube. Under the law's notice-and-takedown provisions (specifically Title II, the Online Copyright Infringement Liability Limitation Act), copyright holders can send formal notifications to internet hosts or online service providers that distribute their copyrighted material without permission. By certifying a good-faith belief that the host lacks prior authorization, copyright holders can request the swift removal or disabling of access to that content from the site. This process has become a ubiquitous mechanism for online copyright enforcement, with many large platforms, including YouTube, developing sophisticated automated systems such as Content ID to manage and respond to these notices at scale.

Crucially, the DMCA also established safe-harbor protections for internet service providers (ISPs) and other online service providers. This provision clarifies that ISPs are generally not liable for copyright infringement committed by their users, provided they adhere to specific requirements. These include adopting and implementing a

policy to terminate repeat infringers, accommodating standard technical measures used by copyright owners to identify and protect their works, and, most notably, expeditiously removing or restricting access to allegedly infringing material upon receipt of a valid takedown notice. This safe harbor was designed to foster the growth of internet services by alleviating the burden on ISPs of proactively policing their vast networks for illegal content.

While the DMCA has provided essential clarity and protection for copyright holders and has enabled the growth of online platforms, it has not been without its critics. Corporations can find issuing individual takedown notices time-consuming, especially given the sheer volume of content uploaded daily. Conversely, concerns have been raised that the system's relative lack of robust safeguards can allow large companies or even malicious actors to abuse the notice-and-takedown process, potentially bullying smaller sites or individuals into removing legitimate or fair-use content with only a good-faith notice. The U.S. Copyright Office has acknowledged that the operation of the Section 512 safe harbor system can be unbalanced and has identified areas for potential refinement.

The DMCA continues to be a central, yet increasingly scrutinized, piece of legislation. The rapid evolution of digital media, including the proliferation of streaming

services, user-generated content, and, in particular, the emergence of generative artificial intelligence, poses new complexities for copyright law. The use of copyrighted material to train AI models and the copyrightability of AI-generated outputs are actively debated issues that are prompting new legal challenges and discussions about whether the DMCA, enacted over two decades ago, will require further amendments to adequately address these cutting-edge technologies and ensure a balanced approach to intellectual property in the ever-expanding digital landscape.



Streaming services make traditional syndication more challenging by fragmenting audience viewership, complicating global royalty calculations, and prioritizing exclusive direct-to-platform library rights over local television station licensing. **Source**: stockcatalog, Netflix iPhone, CC BY 2.0.

The New Reality of Syndication

The economics of producing a hit TV show have been dramatically altered by the rise of streaming, making a successful series potentially worth hundreds of millions of dollars less than it would have been under the old system, as Forbes contributor Matt Craig highlights. This fundamental

shift stems from the different business models underpinning broadcast television and streaming platforms.

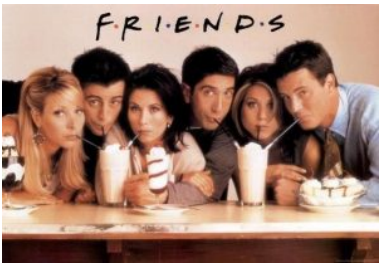
In the traditional television landscape, studios and television networks operated as distinct entities. Studios bore the financial burden of producing shows, often incurring significant deficits, and then licensed or rented out their content to networks for initial broadcasts. While most shows didn't recoup their costs during the initial network run, profitability came from syndication. Once a show reached around 100 episodes, it became eligible for syndication, meaning it could be re-licensed to cable TV channels, other broadcast stations for reruns, and eventually to overseas markets and, later, to early streaming services. This long tail of reruns and re-licensing could generate hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue for the studios, which then trickled down to talent through residuals and profit participation.

However, the advent of streaming fundamentally disrupted this model. Streaming services offered consumers a significantly cheaper alternative to cable, providing vast libraries of content on demand. Initially, studios licensed their existing content to these streamers, creating new revenue streams. The critical turning point came when streaming services began producing their own high-quality original content, directly competing with traditional networks and studios. As viewers

flocked to streaming platforms for this exclusive, on-demand programming, traditional cable television began to decline.

The core issue is that because everyone went to streaming, the overall pool of money available for content has paradoxically become less in certain key areas. The streaming business model, exemplified by giants like Netflix, is fundamentally different and, in many ways, worse for a show's long-term profitability and talent compensation. In this new paradigm, the same company that pays for a show also broadcasts it and serves as its exclusive repository.

This integrated model removes the traditional incentives for hit shows. Since Netflix (or other streamers) primarily earns revenue through subscriptions, a single hit show doesn't necessarily translate into a massive, direct increase in advertising revenue that could be shared with the studio or talent. There's less incentive for streamers to endlessly renew a show if its primary purpose of attracting initial subscribers has been served, as they don't benefit from a continuous, incremental revenue increase from reruns or syndication in the same way traditional networks did.



Generating over $1 billion annually in rerun rights for Warner Bros., the massive global syndication of Friends secured lifelong multi-million-dollar annual residual payouts for each of its six lead cast members thanks to their historic joint contract negotiations.
Source: Geoffrey Chandler, friends, CC BY 2.0.

Consequently, talent, including actors and showrunners, now has significantly less leverage to negotiate raises or receive substantial backend profits. Consider *The Bear*, a critically acclaimed and highly popular show that has swept the Emmys. While it's a critical darling, its actors and showrunners are not being paid as the stars of past network hits. An Emmy-winning star might earn, for example, $750,000 a year, but with little to no hope for significant residuals. This pales in comparison to the massive, long-term residual checks that stars of syndicated hits like *Friends* continued to receive for decades. In the streaming era, awards do not necessarily equal substantial long-term financial gain for talent.

Moreover, streaming shows typically have fewer episodes per season, making it far more challenging to

reach the 100-episode threshold traditionally required for profitable syndication. *The Bear*, for instance, with five seasons totaling just 54 episodes, will likely never see syndication in the traditional sense, meaning its revenue-generating potential ends where it starts, for the most part. This lack of a backend has contributed to a significant contraction in the TV industry, as evidenced by the 2023 WGA and SAG-AFTRA strikes.

Iconic TV producer Dick Wolf, known for creating sprawling, long-running franchises such as *Law & Order* and *Chicago*, amassed immense wealth (reportedly over $1 billion) primarily through the syndication model, with his shows constantly airing across various networks and earning ongoing licensing fees. It is doubtful that anyone will be able to follow in his financial footsteps under the current streaming paradigm. Instead, as the industry tightens its belts, TV producers may find themselves living more like well-compensated doctors rather than princes of media empires.

While TV content is arguably more popular and diverse than ever, it is also significantly more fragmented across numerous streaming platforms

. Broadcast TV, in contrast, increasingly caters to an older demographic, with Nielsen reporting that the average age of a primetime broadcast viewer is just under 65. Consequently, advertisers, especially those targeting younger, more affluent audiences, have

shifted their budgets away from broadcast or are now featuring different brands, leading to a significant reduction in ad revenue for traditional networks.

Streaming, however, largely transcends age demographics and is undeniably the future of television consumption. Digital advertising on streaming platforms operates on different metrics, as it can track user behavior with much greater precision, enabling highly targeted ads and being paid on metrics like impressions or conversions rather than broad viewership numbers. This precision is what advertisers value. As broadcast TV continues its decay and potentially dies out, streaming will fully inherit its mantle. However, this doesn't mean an ad-free future; consumers have already seen an increase in commercials on streaming platforms as they seek new revenue streams beyond just subscriptions. Furthermore, in an interesting full-circle moment, major streaming players like

HBO Max and Disney+ have started offering bundled packages

, echoing the bundling strategies previously employed by cable TV providers, to increase perceived value and reduce churn.

Ultimately, the question of whether talent pay will return to its previous heights is complex. While top hitmakers and in-demand stars will continue to command high fees upfront due to competition, the long-term, passive income from residuals and syndication that characterized the golden age of television appears unlikely to return to where it was, at least in the short

term, due to the fundamental restructuring of the industry's financial ecosystem.

13.4 DIGITAL DIVIDE IN A GLOBAL ECONOMY



The global digital divide represents the stark economic, social, and technological gap between populations with reliable access to high-speed internet and digital tools and those left without, limiting educational opportunities, healthcare, and financial mobility in developing regions. **Source**: Image by geralt on Pixabay.

More than just a tool for information transfer, the internet has become the fundamental conduit for a truly globalized workforce. A New York-based corporation can now seamlessly outsource electronic work to highly connected developing

economies such as India, the Philippines, or Eastern European nations, avoiding the high shipping costs and communication delays that once impeded such efforts. Pervasive internet access, especially for businesses, has spurred economic development in remote areas globally, providing corporations with access to diverse talent pools and often lower-cost labor, while simultaneously facilitating the flow of capital and opportunities into developing countries. For instance, it is now common for companies to hire remote customer support teams, software developers, graphic designers, or even specialized virtual assistants from around the world and integrate them fully into their operations. However, as the internet has become deeply integrated into nearly every aspect of daily business and personal life, a persistent and evolving digital divide has emerged: some individuals and regions derive immense benefits from internet access and digital literacy, while many others remain significantly disadvantaged.

Many U.S. and international leaders, along with numerous governmental and nongovernmental organizations, have identified the digital divide as a critical global concern. A truly globalized workforce and economy no longer segment the world into easily divisible political territories but rather into populations with adequate access to technology and the requisite digital skills to participate in and reach broader markets, and those without such access. As the 21st century unfolds, equitable access to global communication and digital

infrastructure has become increasingly crucial for fostering healthy and competitive economies. The digital divide, therefore, is not merely a technological disparity; it represents a fundamental challenge to economic prosperity, social inclusion, and equitable development worldwide.

However, the problem extends beyond simple internet access or even basic digital competency; it delves into the quality and purpose of that access. The Pareto principle, often referred to as the 80/20 effect in economics, suggests that roughly 80 percent of wealth or profit is generated by the most affluent 20 percent of the population. This principle, when applied to the digital realm, exacerbates the digital divide, as the internet—developed initially primarily by and for the more affluent and technologically privileged—can remain practically inaccessible or irrelevant for the poor, particularly in developing countries. Simply providing a connection does not guarantee meaningful participation or economic uplift. Bridging the digital divide requires a comprehensive approach that helps people with limited or no access to the digital world connect and build the skills and resources to use technology in ways that are economically beneficial and transformative so that they can be included in the global digital economy.



By requiring customers to join line queues via smartphones, digital queue platforms like QLess can exacerbate the digital divide at the DMV by creating barrier-heavy wait systems that disadvantage lower-income, elderly, or rural individuals who lack reliable mobile technology when seeking essential government services. **Source**: Rockclaw1030, People waiting in line at the DMV, cropped, CC0 1.0.

The Informational Shift

As information and media increasingly move online, those without ready access to the internet or the necessary digital skills face significant disadvantages. Even developed countries like the United States exhibit persistent digital divides. This disparity often affects older adults and those with lower levels of education or income, who may lack computer proficiency, reliable home internet access, or adequate devices.

Recent data from the Pew Research Center, based on surveys conducted in 2023 and 2024, reveal that while overall internet adoption in the U.S. is very high (96% of adults use the internet daily), significant gaps remain. For instance, among adults aged 65 and older, 90% now report using the internet, a substantial increase from 45% in 2009, yet a notable portion remains offline compared to younger demographics. Similarly, a significant disparity persists across income levels: nearly all adults (95%) with an annual household income of $100,000 or more have home broadband, compared to only 57% of those earning less than $30,000 per year. These figures underscore how socioeconomic factors continue to influence digital inclusion, severely hampering economic mobility for affected workers.

The shift in job searching and application processes has made internet access indispensable. Classified advertisements and job postings have almost entirely migrated from newspapers to the web, with most employers now requiring online applications, digital resumes, and even virtual interviews. A 2023 report from the National Skills Coalition found that 92% of analyzed jobs require digital skills, yet nearly one-third of the U.S. workforce has low or no foundational digital skills. This creates a substantial barrier for those without adequate digital literacy or internet access, effectively locking them out of a vast segment of the modern job market.

Beyond employment, the digital divide impacts everyday life

and access to essential services. For example, many government services, healthcare portals, and even fundamental customer service interactions increasingly rely on online platforms or digital applications. Consider the app Qless, which allows users to virtually get in line for services at various establishments, from government offices like the DMV to retail stores and restaurants, by using their smartphone or a kiosk. While Qless aims to improve efficiency and convenience by eliminating physical queues, it inadvertently highlights the digital divide. Individuals without a smartphone, data plan, or the digital literacy to navigate such an app are excluded from its benefits, potentially facing longer wait times or being unable to access services at all. This illustrates how digital tools, while designed for convenience, can inadvertently create new barriers for those on the wrong side of the digital divide. The internet has become an integral part of American society, and a lack of access or proficiency among certain groups could severely hamper their economic mobility and overall participation in daily life.



Nonprofits, community centers, and libraries are bridging the digital divide by offering tailored digital literacy programs and intergenerational tech coaching that empower senior citizens to use computers confidently, navigate the internet, and access essential online services.
Source: Pavla Pelikánová, Overview of class of Senior Citizens write Wikipedia in Municipal Library of Prague at 2014-11-04 in Prague-Nové Město, Prague
cropped, CC BY-SA 4.0

Computer Skills and Older Workers

As information and media increasingly move online, those without ready access to the internet or the appropriate digital skills risk being left behind. Even in developed countries such as the United States, the digital divide is apparent and continues to pose significant challenges. Often,

older adults and those with less formal education may lack the computer and technology skills required for contemporary jobs and daily life. In 2024, AARP reports that while older adults are eager to continue working and upskill, structural barriers like ageism and technological gaps persist. A significant portion of older adults, particularly those over 70, report lower confidence in their digital literacy skills than younger adults. This digital skills gap can severely hinder an individual's prospects for career success and economic stability in the modern world.

In response to these persistent challenges, a variety of organizations, including libraries, non-profits, and government-backed initiatives, have intensified their efforts to equip older unemployed and underemployed workers with essential digital skills. These training courses often begin with fundamental computer literacy, such as navigating operating systems and using a mouse, and progress to more advanced applications like office productivity software, online communication tools, and even specialized digital workplace skills. Programs like AARP Foundation's Digital Skills Ready@50+™ offer free, on-demand training to help older adults find and secure jobs, change careers, or explore entrepreneurship. Organizations like the National Council on Aging and Cyber-Seniors also collaborate with partners like AT&T to provide in-person workshops and online curricula, focusing not only on job-related skills but also on enhancing quality of life by enabling

communication with friends and family via email and video conferencing, and promoting online safety.

The emphasis on technology's potential to bridge the digital divide continues to inspire hope and optimism for a more inclusive future. By investing in digital literacy and access for older adults, society aims to ensure that this valuable segment of the workforce can remain economically engaged and socially connected, contributing their experience and wisdom in an increasingly digital world.

The Digital Divide Abroad

The culprits contributing to the digital divide in developed countries, such as the United States, primarily include affordability barriers, a lack of digital literacy and skills, and persistent geographic disparities in infrastructure. While overall internet adoption is high, significant segments of the population, particularly lower-income households and rural residents, still struggle to access or afford reliable high-speed internet. Additionally, a reluctance or inability to adopt new technology, often tied to age and prior educational experiences, remains a significant factor.

In economically developing countries, the digital divide is compounded by fundamentalinfrastructure challenges. Internet service relies on widespread, stable networks capable of handling large data volumes, and consistent electronic

access to the outside world requires reliable data connections and, often, consistent electricity. Therefore, in many low-income countries, a substantial portion of residents still lack access to computers and the internet, cutting them off not only from information but also from the vast opportunities of the global digital economy. For instance, in early 2024, the International Telecommunication Union estimated that only 27% of the population in low-income countries was online, compared to 93% in high-income countries.

Internet Connectivity by Country (2024-2025)

Country	Population (millions)	Internet Users (millions)	Percent Connected
China	1,416	1,110	78.4%
India	1,464	806	55.1%
United States	347	332	95.7%
Indonesia	286	212	74.1%
Brazil	213	183	85.9%
Japan	123	109	88.6%
Norway	5.5	5.4	99.0%
United Arab Emirates	11.1	11.0	99.0%
Burundi	13.2	1.8	13.6%
Central African Republic	5.9	0.8	13.6%

Source: Data primarily sourced from Exploding Topics' " Countries with the Highest Number of Internet Users (2025) ," supplemented by World Population Review and DevelopmentAid for population figures and consistency.

Indonesia serves as a compelling case study of a developing nation actively working to bridge this gap. As the world's fourth-largest country by population, Indonesia has made

significant strides in digital connectivity. As of January 2025, Indonesia had approximately 212 million internet users, representing an internet penetration rate of around 74.6%**.** This is a substantial increase over previous decades and is attributable to broad mobile phone coverage, which has been a significant advantage for rural access to information. The Indonesian government, alongside various organizations, continues to pursue ambitious digitalization agendas, including expanding 4G networks and the early rollout of 5G, to ensure widespread high-speed internet access across the archipelago. This ongoing digital integration is crucial for Indonesia to emerge as a fully digital market for global services.

The economic and political benefits of widespread internet connectivity to nations like Indonesia are immense. Digital inclusion can drive economic growth by fostering e-commerce, enabling remote work, and improving access to education and healthcare. Numerous global initiatives and organizations, such as the International Telecommunication Union and the Alliance for Affordable Internet, actively work to reduce connectivity costs and expand infrastructure worldwide. The principle that increased digital integration can lead to broader economic prosperity and even contribute to stability by offering new opportunities and reducing social exclusion remains a key tenet in international development efforts.

The Bottom Billion

When addressing the global digital divide, the question of which population should receive priority has proven to be a complex and contentious issue. As of early 2025, an estimated 6 billion people are online, representing approximately 75% of the world's population. This means that roughly 2.3 billion people remain offline, a significant portion of whom reside in low-income countries and rural areas. The discussion of bridging the digital divide must, therefore, quickly address a complicated question: Where to build the bridge?

While some organizations continue to highlight the potential of focusing on the next billion—countries like Indonesia that have made significant strides in mobile connectivity yet still have substantial populations lacking access to comprehensive, high-speed internet and useful digital technologies—other organizations and initiatives take a different approach. The emphasis has broadened from merely providing access to ensuring meaningful connectivity, which includes affordable devices, relevant content, digital literacy, and safe online environments.



The One Laptop per Child project aims to put one of these XO computers in the hands of many children in developing countries. **Source**: One Laptop per Child – Papua New Guinea: Gaire #5 – CC BY 2.0.

Many believe that everyone in the world can benefit from technology if it is deployed correctly and sustainably. The One Laptop per Child (OLPC) initiative, launched in 2005, famously sought to achieve exactly what its name implies with a low-cost laptop design running on free software and requiring very little energy. OLPC promoted the idea that learning to use technology needed recalibration toward learning *through* technology. The organization aimed to establish localized networks with expansion potential, utilizing its XO laptop to connect with neighbors and create numerous small networks across a relatively wide wireless range. This approach aimed to provide remote educational opportunities for children in developing countries, demonstrating that direct leaps to wireless internet access could be more cost-effective than traditional connective technologies like phone lines.However, long-term research on the OLPC program, for example, studies in Peru up to 2024, has indicated that while it pioneered low-cost devices and brought attention to digital

inclusion in education, it did not consistently show significant positive impacts on academic outcomes, often due to challenges with teacher training, maintenance, and integration into local educational systems. OLPC, Inc., while still operating, has largely shifted its focus away from laptop design and creation due to the program's shortcomings.

Modern strategies for universal internet access and digital inclusion are multifaceted. These often involve government initiatives, such as the U.S. Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment program and the Digital Equity Act (terminated by Donald Trump in May 2025), which allocate billions to expand infrastructure and promote digital literacy, particularly in underserved areas. Public-private partnerships are also crucial, involving collaborations between governments, telecom companies, and non-profits to invest in infrastructure and offer affordable internet plans. Satellite internet technologies like Starlink are increasingly being deployed to provide connectivity to remote and rural areas where traditional infrastructure is challenging to build. Beyond mere access, there is a strong emphasis on providing training and education to ensure individuals can effectively use digital tools for employment, education, healthcare, and civic participation. Finally, recognizing that one-size-fits-all approaches are often ineffective, modern initiatives prioritize understanding local needs and designing culturally relevant, sustainable solutions.

The debate over prioritization continues, but there is a growing consensus that addressing the digital divide requires a holistic approach that simultaneously tackles access, affordability, digital literacy, and relevant content, ensuring that connectivity truly translates into economic and social empowerment for all.

13.5 INFORMATION ECONOMY



Source: Image by nattanan on Pixabay.

When examining the modern theory of the information economy, the insights articulated by Carl Shapiro, an economics professor at the University of California, Berkeley, and Hal Varian, now chief economist at Google, in their 1998 publication *Information Rules: A Strategic Guide to the Network Economy*, remain remarkably prescient. Their profound yet

straightforward argument, that "Technology changes. Economic laws do not," continues to mirror a fundamental truth that underpins today's digital landscape.

While the underlying economic laws are constant, the operational fundamentals of an information business diverge significantly from those of most traditional enterprises. For instance, the cost of producing a single sandwich remains relatively consistent, per unit, whether one makes one or a thousand. Information, however, operates on a different cost structure. Consider a piece of software, a streaming movie, or an online news article: the initial costs for research, development, content creation, and platform infrastructure far exceed the negligible marginal costs of producing and distributing each additional copy. This characteristic of high upfront costs and near-zero marginal costs strongly supports the potential for large corporations to achieve immense market dominance. The confluence of these two cost dynamics creates a robust economy of scale, inherently favoring larger competitors who can leverage their initial investment across a vast user base.

Furthermore, economists refer to information as an experience good, meaning that consumers must directly engage with the product or service to ascertain its value fully. This presents a unique challenge: how can individuals truly know, for example, that a movie features high-quality acting and an engaging plot before they have watched it? Branding is a crucial solution to this dilemma. While judging a movie

before viewing it may not seem easy, a consumer's perception of its value is significantly enhanced by knowing that a renowned director made it or that it features popular performers. Marketers adeptly use movie trailers, extensive press coverage, social media buzz, influencer reviews, and personalized recommendations on streaming platforms to communicate this branding message, hoping to persuade audiences to engage with the films they promote.

Audiences and businesses alike place significant weight on associated switching costs when evaluating the value of information technology. When economists analyze switching costs, they account for the difference in the total cost of transitioning from one technology or platform to another. If this difference—which for information technology can include the effort and expense of migrating all relevant data, learning new interfaces, or losing established network effects—is less than the perceived benefits of the new system, then switching makes economic sense. A classic example involves the shift in music consumption: many people moved their music collections from vinyl LPs to compact discs starting in the 1980s. For consumers to switch systems, which involved purchasing a CD player and stereo equipment, they also faced the significant task of rebuilding their entire music collection in the new format. Fortunately for the CD player, the substantial increase in convenience and audio quality motivated a mass consumer migration. However, as anyone who frequents thrift stores or garage sales can attest, those

older technologies often persist, and the enduring appeal of the media compelled some people to keep them around, especially given the modern resurgence of vinyl, which now, in fact, outsells CDs in some markets. In contemporary terms, similar switching costs are evident when users consider moving between cloud storage providers, operating systems, or even deeply integrated social media platforms, where the effort of transferring digital assets and social connections can be a considerable deterrent.

Regulation of the Information Economy

When examining the modern information economy, a



Source: Umasankar Arumugam, Seal of the Federal Communications Commission, public domain.

basic understanding of the interaction between government and media over time

provides an essential framework for understanding the system. Public policy and governmental intervention often add layers of complexity to information economics, but for compelling reasons. Unlike typical goods and services, the information economy has many significant side effects, or externalities. For example, while the consequences of one hamburger chain outcompeting or acquiring all other hamburger chains would certainly be drastic for hamburger enthusiasts, it would not be altogether disastrous; having only one type of hamburger harms few people, and the public would still have many other fast-food options. On the contrary, the consequences of monopolization by a single media company could be profoundly damaging

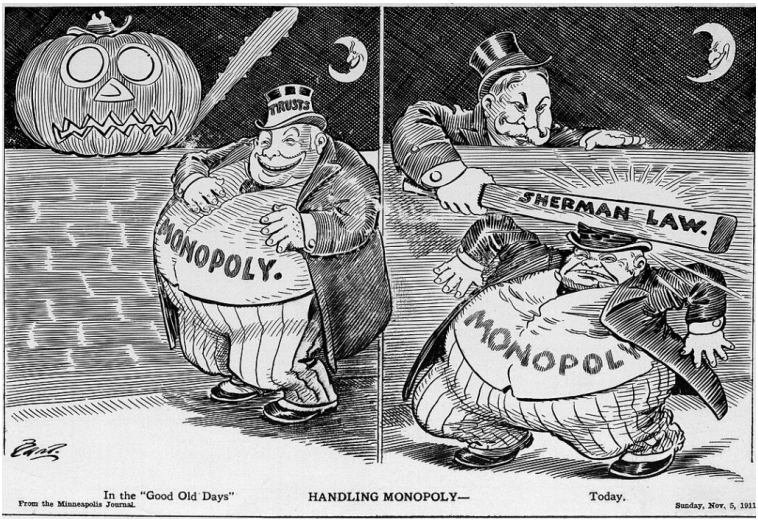
. Because widely distributed information can directly influence public policy and public opinion, those in charge of the government have a vested interest in ensuring its fair distribution and preventing undue concentration of power.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is the primary body that regulates media in America. Established by the Communications Act of 1934, the FCC is charged with "regulating interstate and international communications" across nearly every medium, including radio, television, wire, satellite, and cable, with the notable exception of print. The FCC aims to maintain a nonpartisan, or at least bipartisan, outlook, with no more than three of its five commissioners

belonging to the same political party. While the FCC controls many crucial aspects of communication—such as ensuring electronic devices do not emit radio waves that interfere with other essential tools—some of its most important and contentious responsibilities relate directly to the media landscape.

As the guardian of the public interest, the FCC consistently advocates for more competition among media companies. For instance, in the contemporary digital age, concerns often revolve around the power of major broadband providers and streaming platforms. The public good is not served if consumers lose their ability to choose when a service provider restricts access
to content only the provider owns, especially if consumers have no other viable options. In other words, actions that serve the public good do not concern themselves with the results of competition, but rather with its *process*. The FCC protects consumers' ability to choose from a wide variety of media products
, and competition among media producers hopefully results in better products for consumers, as the FCC enforces and regulates policies that provide fair conditions for all content to succeed and reach audiences. This includes ongoing debates and potential regulatory actions concerning issues like net neutrality, ensuring open access to internet content, and scrutinizing large mergers that could significantly reduce

consumer choice or stifle innovation in the evolving digital media ecosystem.



The Sherman Antitrust Act reshaped American commerce by giving the government broad legal authority to break up corporate monopolies, promote competitive markets, and curb anti-competitive trade practices. **Source**: Bartholomew, Charles Lewis 'Bart', 1869-1949, Handling Monopoly – DPLA – 09bac79b018343ce1035c289a0fb575a , cropped, CC0 1.0.

A Brief History of Antitrust Legislation

The government employs antitrust legislation to maintain healthy competition in the information marketplace. The seminal Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890 helped establish

modern U.S. antitrust law. Although initially intended to dissolve the monopolistic enterprises of late-19th-century industrialists
such as Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller, the law's basic principles have consistently applied to media and technology companies throughout history and into the present day. The antitrust enforcement framework has also evolved since the original Sherman Act. At the same time, the Office of the Attorney General initially brought antitrust lawsuits after the act's passage; this responsibility shifted to the Department of Justice's dedicated Antitrust Division in 1933 under President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890 outlined several provisions and objectives that legislators deemed necessary to foster a competitive marketplace. For example, Section 2 of the act states that "Every person who shall monopolize, or attempt to monopolize, or combine or conspire with any other person or persons, to monopolize any part of the trade or commerce among the several States...shall be deemed guilty of a felony." This establishment of monopolization as a felony significantly altered the status quo; before, free-market capitalism faced little to no explicit punishment for actions deemed detrimental to the public good, making the Sherman Antitrust Act an early proponent of the welfare of people at large by seeking to ensure fair market conditions.

Two additional pieces of legislation, the

Clayton Antitrust Act of 1914 and the Celler-Kefauver Act of 1950, refined the Sherman Antitrust Act to make the system of antitrust enforcement work more effectively. For instance, the Clayton Act makes it unlawful for one company to "acquire…the whole or any part of the stock" of another company when the result would substantially lessen competition or tend to create a monopoly. More than just breaking up existing trusts, the Clayton Act thus seeks to prevent anticompetitive practices before they fully take hold. The Celler-Kefauver Act further strengthened antitrust legislation by making it more difficult for corporations to circumvent these rules. Concurrently, the Clayton Act allowed the government to regulate the purchase of a competitor's stock, and the Celler-Kefauver Act extended this oversight to include the acquisition of a competitor's assets, thereby closing a significant loophole and providing regulators with more comprehensive tools to address potential monopolistic behavior in all its forms. These foundational laws continue to underpin current antitrust challenges against dominant firms in the digital economy.

Deregulation and the Telecommunications Act of 1996



Source: Office of Congressman Ed Markey, President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore present Ed Markey with the electronic pen used to sign the Telecommunications Act of 1996, public domain.

Although the government in the early part of the 20th century broke up trusts and kept monopolies in check, the media industry, particularly in the latter part of the century, still progressed steadily toward conglomeration, in which companies joined together to form larger, more diversified corporations. Widespread deregulation, the removal of legal regulations on an industry, took place during the 1980s, primarily driven by free-market economists who argued that it would foster more competition in the information marketplace. However, possibly due in large part to the media economy's inherent focus on economies of scale, this often did not occur in practice. Companies became increasingly conglomerated, with corporations that were predecessors of today's major media and telecom entities growing significantly.

The Telecommunications Act of 1996 is widely considered a pivotal moment that accelerated this trend of media

consolidation. Although touted as a way to let "any communications business compete in any market against any other" and to foster competition, this act, in practice, significantly relaxed media ownership rules, leading to an unprecedented wave of mergers and acquisitions across radio, television, and telephone industries. For example, within five years of the Act, the number of radio station owners declined sharply, even as the total number of stations increased, raising concerns about homogenized content and reduced local programming.

Since 2010, the long-term effects of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 continue to be debated and analyzed, especially in the context of the rapidly evolving digital economy. While the Act did spur investment in infrastructure and the rollout of new services, critics argue it contributed to a less diverse media landscape and concentrated power in the hands of a few large conglomerates. The rise of internet-based services and streaming platforms has introduced new forms of competition. Still, it has also led to new forms of market concentration, with tech giants now holding significant sway over information distribution. Modern discussions of media regulation often revisit the legacy of the 1996 Act, examining how its principles apply to issues such as net neutrality, data privacy, and the market dominance of platforms that control both content and distribution. Regulatory bodies, including the FCC, continually review media ownership rules to adapt to the

digital age, balancing the goals of fostering innovation and competition with the public interest in diverse and accessible information.

Media Conglomerates and Vertical Integration

The extension of corporate abilities to vertically integrate, facilitated by the Telecommunications Act of 1996, was a primary driver of this increased conglomeration. Vertical integration has proven particularly useful for media companies due to their high fixed costs and low marginal costs. For example, a television company that both produces and distributes content can run the same program on two different channels for nearly the same price as broadcasting it on a single channel. Because of the localized nature of broadcast media, two broadcast television channels will likely reach different geographical areas. This results in cost savings for the company, but also somewhat decreases local diversity in media broadcasting.

The Telecommunications Act of 1996 made some changes to the authority of these local markets. For instance, Section 253 outlines that no state may prohibit "the ability of any entity to provide any interstate or intrastate telecommunications service." Thus, because state and local governments cannot prohibit any company from entering a

marketplace, this limits the extent of the local market that any one company can reach. In addition, the Telecommunications Act initially capped the share of the U.S. television audience that any one company could hold at 35 percent. However, this national cap was subsequently increased to 39 percent. Furthermore, additional legislation and FCC rulings have allowed greater flexibility in local market ownership, including permitting a single entity to own multiple television stations in a single market, thereby diluting the effect of some initial rulings aimed at limiting concentration.

Despite the fragmentation of audiences across numerous streaming services and digital platforms, traditional linear broadcast networks like CBS, NBC, and ABC may be declining in popularity. However, their news and sports programming still provides advertisers with an opportunity
to reach a wide audience. While viewership may have declined from its peak, these networks continue to offer a means of reaching a genuinely mass television audience in the country, particularly for live events, national news, and major sporting events. With this enduring reach and relaxed ownership rules, vertically integrated media conglomerates can use their content across traditional broadcast and newer digital channels, maximizing their economies of scale and maintaining strong influence in today's media landscape.



Disney leverages vertical integration by creating intellectual property through its film studios and then maximizing revenue across every step of the supply chain, from theatrical releases and home streaming to theme parks (like Disney World shown above), consumer merchandise, and cruise lines. **Source**: Backattaxk251, Cinderella Castle January 2021, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Corporate Advantages of Vertical Integration

In the contemporary media landscape, major players like Disney exemplify the power of extensive vertical integration, utilizing both administrative and content integration. Administrative integration refers to the potential for divisions within a single company to share a common higher-level management structure, thereby increasing operational

efficiency. For example, Disney manages vast enterprises like theme parks and movie studios. At the same time, these two industries may not have obvious content connections, but both function as large, multinational ventures. Placing these diverse divisions under a single corporate umbrella lets them share structural similarities, accounting practices, and other administrative resources that benefit many industries.

Content integration is especially important for media companies; it means using the same content across multiple platforms and business units. Disney's theme parks, for instance, would lose much of their charm and meaning without iconic characters like Mickey Mouse or Cinderella's castle; the synergistic integration of Disney's theme parks with its animated characters and stories proves immensely profitable for both. Behind the scenes, Disney reaps excellent benefits from its consolidation. For example, Disney can release a major film through Walt Disney Studios, then immediately promote its stars and content on news programs airing on Disney-owned broadcast television network ABC, or feature exclusive sneak peeks on its ESPN channels. A prime illustration of this synergy is the promotion of major film franchises such as Star Wars and the Marvel Cinematic Universe. For instance, trailers for the film *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* famously debuted during a high-profile broadcast of Monday Night Football on ESPN, reaching a massive, engaged audience directly within Disney's ecosystem. Beyond the ABC broadcast network and ESPN,

Disney also uses its extensive portfolio of cable channels (e.g., Disney Channel, FX, National Geographic) and, crucially, its direct-to-consumer streaming services like Disney+ and Hulu to market its movies and products to targeted demographics. Unlike a competitor that might not wish to promote Disney's films, Disney's ownership of numerous media outlets and platforms allows it to reach a vast, diverse audience, creating unparalleled promotional opportunities and reinforcing its brand across a wide array of consumer touchpoints.

Ethical Issues of Vertical Integration

However, this high level of vertical integration raises several ethical concerns. In the context of a media conglomerate, for example, there is a potential for perceived or actual influence over editorial content. A company like Disney, which owns both production studios and numerous distribution outlets, including broadcast networks, cable channels, and streaming services, could prioritize or promote its own studio movies or series across its various platforms. This creates the potential for a conflict of interest, in which journalistic independence or objective content curation might be compromised to serve corporate business goals. Therefore, this potential for misused trust and skewed information could subtly or overtly influence audiences.



The cast of *30 Rock*, seen here receiving a Peabody Award, often satirized its network owners, General Electric. **Source**: Peabody Awards, 30 Rock (8182881704), (cropped), CC BY 2.0.

In many ways, the extensive consolidation of media companies often occurs behind the scenes, with varying levels of consumer awareness regarding the full scope of their vertically integrated holdings. While some consumers may not track every corporate acquisition, public discourse around the power of large technology and media companies has increased, particularly with the rise of direct-to-consumer streaming services that aggregate content from various owned subsidiaries. This direct branding of content under a single corporate umbrella (e.g., Disney+ featuring content from Disney, Pixar, Marvel, *Star Wars*, and *National Geographic*) makes the extent of vertical integration more apparent than in previous eras. Of course, this rule of subtle integration has had its exceptions; the NBC sitcom *30 Rock* famously and frequently delved into the comedic troubles of running a satirical sketch-comedy show (a parody of NBC's *Saturday Night Live*) under the ownership of General Electric, which was NBC's real-life owner at the time. Today, NBCUniversal is fully owned by Comcast (though the two companies are

in the process of separating into two independent publicly traded entities

), demonstrating the continued evolution of these massive media structures. The ethical challenge persists in ensuring that the pursuit of synergistic corporate advantages does not inadvertently narrow diverse viewpoints or blur the line between independent journalism and corporate promotion.

The Issues of the Internet

Although many media companies have grown into larger businesses than ever before through consolidation, many have nevertheless faced significant challenges in the digital age. The pervasive availability of instant, often free, online content is a primary factor in this decline. This transformation is evident across various sectors: from the



Craigslist (pictured) and Facebook Marketplace systematically dismantled the lucrative print classified advertising market that had long served as a vital financial backbone for local newspapers. **Source**: DoomLover2010, Craigslist menu, CC BY-SA 4.0 .

dramatic shift of classified advertising revenue away from newspapers to free online services like Craigslist or Facebook Marketplace, to the fundamental change in music consumption from physical sales (vinyl records, CDs) to digital downloads and, predominantly, streaming. The internet has fundamentally reshaped the economics of legacy media outlets, forcing them to adapt or face obsolescence.

Media companies continue to grapple with the implications of an open and interconnected internet, particularly concerning the ease with which digital files can be replicated and distributed globally. Traditional music companies, which historically derived the vast majority of their revenue from selling physical music formats, found themselves at a significant disadvantage. They incur substantial expenses to discover, sign, and promote musicians, as well as to produce and record music. Meanwhile, modern consumers, who may pay as little as nothing (through illicit file sharing) or a low subscription fee (for streaming services), can access and share music files with unprecedented ease.

The Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) of 1998 remains a cornerstone of U.S. copyright law in the digital realm. A key provision of the DMCA, known as the "safe harbor" (Section 512), exempts Internet Service Providers (ISPs) from direct liability for copyright infringement committed by their users, provided they meet certain conditions. These conditions include expeditiously removing

infringing content upon receipt of a proper takedown notice from copyright holders and implementing a policy to terminate repeat infringers. While this framework encourages ISPs to cooperate with copyright owners, it also means ISPs are generally not required to monitor their networks for infringing activity proactively. With providers shielded mainly from direct liability and media consumption, particularly streaming, a major driver of high-speed internet subscriptions, ISPs' primary incentive is to provide robust and reliable internet access. This dynamic can create a complex environment in which the lines between legal downloads and illegal sharing are constantly blurred, and copyright holders bear the primary responsibility for identifying and reporting infringement.

Digital Downloads, DRM, and Streaming

Although media companies have steadily grown into larger businesses through consolidation, many have nevertheless faced significant economic challenges. The widespread availability of instant, often free, online content is a primary factor in this transformation. This shift is evident across various sectors: from the dramatic decline in classified advertising revenue for newspapers, which migrated to free online services, to the fundamental change in music consumption. The internet has profoundly reshaped the

economics of legacy media outlets, forcing them to adapt or face obsolescence.

The music industry, in particular, experienced a seismic shift. While large music companies traditionally generated the vast majority of their revenue from selling physical music formats such as vinyl records and compact discs, they found themselves at a severe disadvantage with the advent of digital file sharing. These companies incurred substantial expenses to discover, sign, produce, and market musicians, yet early digital consumers could share and distribute files with little to no cost. Media companies feared an unregulated internet because it enabled other parties to replicate digital files and distribute them worldwide, undermining their traditional business models. The DMCA, with its safe-harbor provisions, further complicated matters by generally exempting ISPs from direct liability for user-generated copyright infringement, provided they adhere to notice-and-takedown procedures. With providers largely freed from direct liability and media consumption a driving factor in the rise of high-speed internet services, ISPs had little inherent incentive to actively deter file sharing beyond what was legally mandated.



Digital Rights Management encompasses access control technologies used by publishers and copyright holders to limit the use, modification, and distribution of copyrighted digital content and software. **Source**: Noah Hall, DRM lemez, CC BY 2.0.

While music companies eventually found some success selling music through digital outlets, they were not the pioneers. Instead, technology companies like Apple and Amazon recognized a massive market for digital downloads coupled with a need for a user-friendly, legitimate delivery system. They created platforms that revolutionized these services. Consumers, already accustomed to downloading MP3s, readily adopted this new model. However, record companies initially insisted on including Digital Rights Management (DRM) protection, viewing the lack of such protection in standard MP3s as a significant vulnerability to their intellectual property.

Apple provided a pivotal solution that struck a compromise between consumer accessibility and rights control. Steve Jobs' motivation for creating iTunes and the iPod was multifaceted. He observed the rampant music piracy fueled by platforms like Napster and recognized that consumers desired easy access to digital music. Rather than fighting this trend, he sought to

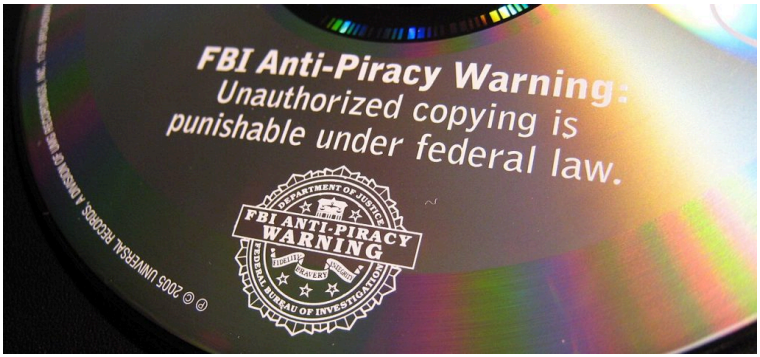
provide a legal, convenient, and aesthetically pleasing alternative

that would entice users away from illicit downloads. His vision was to create a seamless, integrated ecosystem of hardware (the iPod) and software (iTunes) that offered a superior user experience. He famously convinced major record labels to sell individual songs for 99 cents, a price point that made legal downloads more appealing than purchasing entire CDs. This strategy, initially involving DRM-locked tracks that would primarily play on Apple devices, aimed to provide a controlled environment that appeased the record companies while still offering consumers the digital convenience they craved. This inflexibility, while a limitation, also offered a small benefit by enabling Apple to secure lower per-track prices than physical CDs.

This compromise, while selling millions of iPods and digital tracks, did not entirely satisfy the record companies, who saw their album sales decline as consumers opted for single downloads. However, the landscape has dramatically shifted since the era dominated by digital downloads. While digital music sales increased significantly from $330 million in 2004 to $3.78 billion by 2008, the true innovation and monetary growth in digital music since 2010 has come from streaming services.

Today, streaming is the dominant format, accounting for the vast majority of music industry revenue globally. Streaming services alone

account for nearly 70 percent of the industry's total revenue, with paid music streaming subscriptions exceeding 837 million worldwide. Digital downloads have declined significantly, and while physical sales (especially vinyl) have seen a niche resurgence, streaming remains the primary mode of consumption. Innovations in digital music distribution since 2010 have focused on AI-driven personalized playlists, high-fidelity audio options, direct-to-fan platforms for independent artists, and the integration of music into social media platforms like TikTok, which now play a significant role in music discovery and virality. The industry continues to evolve, with new challenges and opportunities emerging around fair artist compensation, data analytics, and immersive audio experiences.



Source: Bizmac, Fbi anti piracy warning, cropped, CC BY 2.0 .

Piracy

The music industry has historically attributed a significant portion of its revenue decline to piracy. Cary Sherman, former president of the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), famously stated in 2003 that "There's no minimizing the impact of illegal file-sharing. It robs songwriters and recording artists of their livelihoods, and it ultimately undermines the future of music itself." While the RIAA continues its anti-piracy efforts, focusing on unauthorized distribution and stream-ripping services, the industry's narrative has evolved.

Economists, however, have often viewed the matter with more nuance. Early studies, such as the 2007 research by economists at Harvard Business School and the University of North Carolina, found that the impact of digital downloads on sales was "statistically indistinguishable from zero," suggesting a more complex relationship than a direct one-to-one loss. Modern research from entities like MUSO in 2024 indicates that while overall piracy may have seen some fluctuations
, it persists, driven by factors such as fragmented content access, which requires multiple subscriptions for legal content, demand for digital-first formats, and economic disparities. Some studies still estimate significant annual losses to the U.S. economy and job losses due to music piracy.

Innovations in combating piracy since 2010 have moved

beyond traditional lawsuits against individual file-sharers, which the RIAA largely ceased in 2008. The focus has shifted to content recognition technologies, where advanced AI-powered systems and acoustic fingerprinting are now widely used by platforms such as YouTube's Content ID to automatically identify and manage copyrighted material, enabling rights holders to monetize, block, or track infringing content. The widespread availability and affordability of streaming services, such as Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, and YouTube Music, have been the most effective deterrents to casual piracy. The ease of access, personalized playlists, and curated experiences offered by these platforms often outweigh the perceived benefits of illegal downloads.

Furthermore, direct-to-fan models, exemplified by platforms like Bandcamp and SoundCloud, empower independent artists to distribute their music directly, often offering flexible pricing, merchandise, and direct engagement, creating new revenue streams that bypass traditional gatekeepers and sometimes reduce the incentive for piracy. Emerging technologies like blockchain are being explored for secure tracking of ownership and provenance of digital music files, and digital watermarking embeds unique identifiers into files to trace unauthorized copies. As direct downloads declined, stream-ripping, which involves converting audio from streaming video or audio platforms into downloadable

files, became a new piracy challenge, and anti-piracy efforts now actively target these services.

Services like Netflix, while primarily video streaming platforms, offer a pertinent example of how digital media companies have cracked down on widespread account sharing. These services have implemented measures to curb the number of simultaneous logins or require users to periodically verify their primary household location, thereby restricting how many different households can access a single account. While primarily driven by business models and intellectual property concerns, such policies reflect the industry's evolving strategies to convert unauthorized access into paid subscriptions. While piracy remains a challenge, the music industry has moved beyond punitive measures to a dual approach: strong enforcement of large-scale infringement and legal services that are convenient, affordable, and feature-rich to meet consumer demand.

Regardless of the precise economic impact, two things have become clear in the digital music landscape: consumers are willing to pay for digital music, and digital distribution is here to stay, albeit primarily through streaming rather than downloads.

13.6 GLOBALIZATION OF MEDIA



Source: Image by geralt on Pixabay.

The media industry plays a crucial role in advancing globalization, understood as the spread of global trade and cultural exchange that often disregards traditional political borders. As previously discussed, the inherently low marginal costs of media content mean that reaching a broader international market can yield significantly higher profit margins for media companies. Because information primarily exists as digital, intangible data rather than a physical, tangible commodity, media companies generally incur inconsequential shipping and distribution

costs when disseminating content across the globe, a stark contrast to nearly all other industries. This digital nature allows for near-instantaneous global delivery. Finally, the inherent worldwide appeal and reach of compelling media content allow its relevance to span across many different countries and cultures. Modern technology, particularly the ubiquity of high-speed internet, enables quick communication, facilitates fast, coordinated digital distribution, and supports highly efficient global marketing strategies, all of which have profoundly accelerated globalization, especially for globalized media, allowing it to take hold on an unprecedented scale. This is vividly demonstrated by the global reach of streaming services, which launch content simultaneously in dozens or hundreds of countries
, and by social media platforms, which allow content, trends, and narratives to go viral across continents within hours.

Globalized Culture, Globalized Markets



The critically acclaimed historical K-drama *My Dearest* demonstrates the global reach of Korean television as international streaming platforms distributed its poignant tale of war and romance worldwide, fueling the expanding global influence of Hallyu. **Source**: Korea MBC TV, Korean drama My Dearest, CC BY-SA 4.0.

A significant amount of globalized media content continues to originate from the West, particularly the United States, which holds

roughly $649 billion in the global media and entertainment market

. However, the global media landscape is increasingly diversified by content from regions like East Asia (e.g., K-pop , anime, K-dramas) and India (Bollywood). Driven by advertising, U.S. culture and media often exhibit a strong consumerist bent, encouraging the ever-increasing consumption of goods as an economic virtue. This dynamic can lead foreign cultures to increasingly adopt consumerist ideals, thereby not only providing content to a foreign country but also potentially creating demand for U.S. products and ideologies. Critics frequently express concern that this phenomenon could contribute to a one-way transmission of ideas and values, potentially resulting in the displacement or marginalization of indigenous cultures

.

Globalization, while fundamentally an economic trend involving the lowering of trade barriers, carries profound cultural implications. Just as the transfer of industry and technology often encourages outside influence through the influx of foreign money into an economy, the transfer of culture opens up these same markets to new influences. As globalization takes hold and a particular community becomes more economically integrated with global systems, it may also come to adopt and personalize global cultural values. The

outcome of this cultural spread is a complex interplay that can result in homogenization, where local culture becomes more like a dominant global culture (often Western); heterogenization, where aspects of international culture come to exist alongside local culture, leading to increased diversity and new hybrid forms; or, most commonly in modern academic thought, a dynamic process of **hybridization** or **glocalization**, where global cultural elements are adapted, reinterpreted, and integrated into local contexts, creating unique cultural blends.

Understanding the global media landscape is a complex but crucial task. Due to inherent linguistic and cultural differences, the globalization of media often follows a model distinct from that of other products. At a basic level, much media content is deeply rooted in specific languages and cultural nuances and, as such, does not always translate seamlessly or resonate universally across foreign countries without adaptation. Thus, media globalization frequently occurs on a more structural and organizational level, involving broader "ways of organizing and creating media." In this sense, a major global media company can maintain a globally integrated corporate structure while simultaneously operating many culturally specific brands, producing and distributing localized content tailored to diverse markets worldwide. This strategic approach, which balances global

efficiencies with local relevance, is key to navigating the complexities of the contemporary global media landscape.

Vertical Integration and Globalization

Because globalization has as much to do with a media company's corporate structure as with the products it produces, vertical integration in multinational media companies is a necessary aspect of studying globalized media. Many large media companies practice extensive vertical integration: major news organizations handle their reporting, digital publishing, and distribution across various platforms; television and streaming companies control their own content production, broadcasting, and direct-to-consumer delivery; and even many film studios now have parent conglomerates that manage international production, marketing, and global distribution.

A media company often benefits greatly from this combination of vertical integration and globalization. Due to the widespread appeal of certain cultural content, particularly from the U.S. and, increasingly, from other global hubs like East Asia, media outlets can leverage many of the same underlying production and digital distribution structures with minimal changes across international markets. Because modern media needs to react quickly to current events and trends, a vertically integrated company can execute this

strategy on a global rather than a purely localized scale; different branches of the company can readily handle diverse markets while sharing resources and data-driven insights. Furthermore, the high production values necessary for compelling content, whether initially conceived for a single country or multiple, are essentially the same for global distribution. This synergy allows, for example, a single film studio or streaming content producer to invest in higher-budget movies and series, knowing they can maximize returns by distributing that content globally through their integrated channels, reaching a vast worldwide audience and building global franchises.

Foreign Markets and *Titanic*



The movie *Titanic*, which became the world's highest-grossing movie of all time until *Avatar* surpassed it, earned twice as much internationally as domestically. **Source**: Scott Smith – Best In Film: American Film Institute Showcase – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

One should not overlook the reciprocal influence of foreign culture on American culture. While the United States indeed continues to be a major exporter of its cultural products worldwide, particularly through its dominant media industries, what Americans consider their own culture is now increasingly tailored not only to the tastes of U.S. citizens but also to those of global audiences. Foreign markets offer enormous potential for securing profits, often surpassing domestic revenue. If a movie performs exceptionally well abroad, it can significantly compensate for a weaker showing in the United States and, in a feedback loop, even drive renewed interest in the film domestically.

James Cameron's 1997 film *Titanic* remains a seminal example of a movie strategically marketed to appeal to a global audience. As one

of the most expensive movies ever produced at the time, with an official budget of around $200 million, its financial success was heavily predicated on international performance. Indeed, only about one-third of the *Titanic*'s total box office receipts came from the domestic market. While *Titanic* became the highest-grossing film of its era, its current domestic gross is just $213 million more than *Star Wars'* domestic gross. The difference showed up in the foreign market, where *Titanic* has grossed an astounding $1.6 billion, propelling its worldwide total to nearly $2.2 billion and solidifying its status as a global phenomenon.



Although Denis Villeneuve's Blade Runner 2049 underperformed at the domestic box office, international ticket sales generated over $167 million overseas, accounting for nearly two-thirds of the film's worldwide total. **Source**: Brecht Bug, Blade Runner 2049 Billboard 42nd St 2017 NYC 1598, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

A more contemporary illustration of this phenomenon can be seen in Denis Villeneuve's 2017 film, *Blade Runner 2049*. A visually stunning and critically acclaimed sequel to a cult classic, *Blade Runner 2049* was a high-budget production, costing between $150 million and $185 million. Despite strong critical reviews, it significantly underperformed at the domestic box office, grossing around $92 million in the United States and Canada. However, its international performance was more robust, bringing in approximately $167 million. This meant that roughly 65% of its total worldwide gross of $259 million came from foreign markets. While the film ultimately failed to break even on its substantial budget, its reliance on international

audiences to generate the majority of its revenue perfectly exemplifies how studios now routinely design and market tentpole films with a primary focus on global appeal and simultaneous worldwide releases, even for niche or more contemplative genres. The film's dystopian future, prosperous with diverse cultural influences and universal themes, resonated with audiences beyond North America.

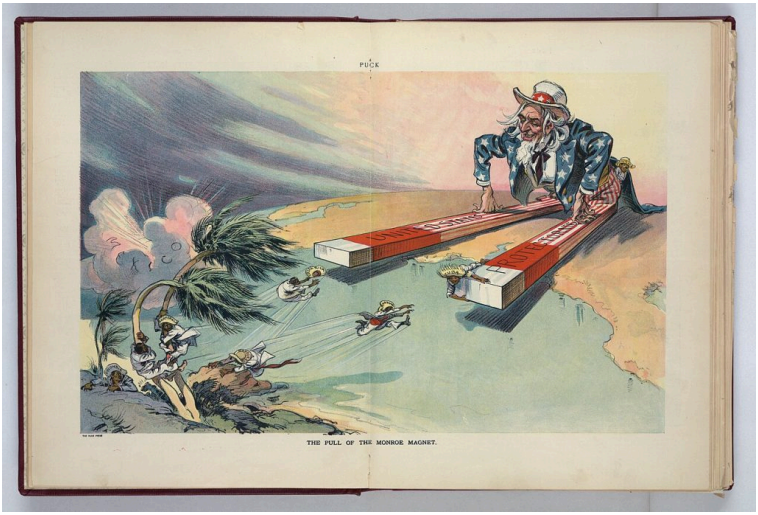
One reason U.S. studios can consistently make these kinds of arrangements is their well-developed and deeply integrated ties with the global movie industry. Hollywood studios have extensive agreements with theater chains worldwide to screen their films, and increasingly, they leverage their global streaming platforms for direct distribution. By contrast, the foreign market for films from many other countries, such as French cinema, is not nearly as globally established and often relies on partial government subsidies to support local productions. Historically, debates have arisen, with Hollywood lobbying organizations like the Motion Picture Association engaging with bodies such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) to challenge these subsidies as unfair trade restrictions. However, the WTO's stance on "electronic transmissions" and cultural goods remains a complex area of international trade law.

In many ways, the dominance of global media, particularly from major studios, continues to present

legitimate concerns about the potential endangerment or marginalization of indigenous cultures and local film industries

. However, simple concerns over the one-way transfer of culture do not represent the only, or even the biggest, worries caused by the pervasive spread of global cultural products and values. The conversation now also encompasses issues of market access, fair compensation for local creators, and the need for diverse representation within globally distributed content.

13.7 CULTURAL IMPERIALISM



While the Monroe Doctrine originally aimed to limit European military influence in the Western Hemisphere, critics argue it ultimately laid the groundwork for American cultural imperialism, projecting U.S. political, economic, and media dominance across Latin America. **Source**: Keppler, Udo J., 1872-1956, artist, The pull of the Monroe magnet – Kep. LCCN2011649618 cropped, public domain.

Understanding the roots of cultural imperialism is crucial. It predates the United States' emergence as a global power. In

its broadest sense, imperialism denotes a nation's assertion of control or dominant influence over another, whether through direct political and economic means or more subtle cultural penetration. Just as imperial Britain economically dominated its American colonies, it also wielded significant cultural influence. While the cultural landscape of the colonies was a blend of nationalities—with many Dutch and German settlers—the ruling majority of ex-Britons generally ensured that British culture, including its language, legal systems, and social norms, prevailed.

Today, cultural imperialism is often used to describe the United States' pervasive role as a cultural superpower throughout the world. However, this narrative is increasingly nuanced by the rise of other cultural powerhouses. American movie studios, for instance, have historically achieved far greater global success than many of their foreign counterparts, not only due to their sophisticated business models and vast financial resources but also because the concept of Hollywood itself has become a defining trait of the modern worldwide movie business. Beyond traditional nation-states, multinational, nongovernmental corporations now play a pivotal role in driving global culture through their vast reach and integrated media empires.

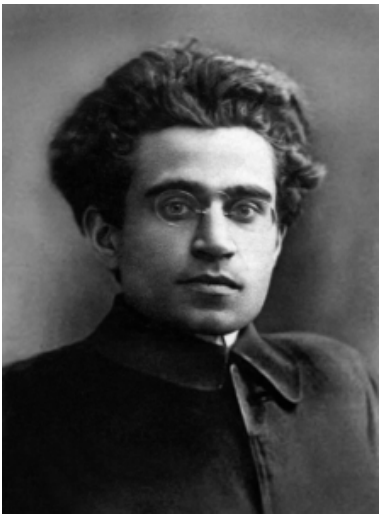
This phenomenon is neither entirely good nor entirely bad. On the one hand, foreign cultural institutions and local media producers can adopt successful American business and production models, leading to higher-quality local content

and more efficient distribution. Furthermore, global corporations are increasingly willing to localize content and invest in diverse storytelling that resonates with specific markets, understanding that cultural relevance often translates to greater profit. This has led to the emergence of globally successful films and series that blend local narratives with international production values, usually seen in the rise of non-Western media such as K-dramas, anime , and Bollywood films, which now boast massive global fan bases and significant cultural influence. For example, Netflix, while an American company, invests heavily in local productions worldwide, such as the South Korean series *Squid Game*, which became a global phenomenon, demonstrating a more reciprocal, albeit still commercially driven, cultural exchange.

However, cultural imperialism also carries potential adverse effects. Concerns persist about the homogenization of culture , in which local traditions, languages, and artistic expressions may be diminished or displaced by dominant global forms. This can manifest as the spread of Western ideals of beauty, consumerist lifestyles, or specific social norms, potentially leading to a decline in the distinctiveness of indigenous cultures worldwide. The pervasive nature of global media can have a quick and profound impact, shaping aspirations and values in ways that challenge local identities. The ongoing debate centers on striking a balance in which global cultural

flows enrich rather than erode local diversity, fostering a truly multicultural global landscape.

Cultural Hegemony



Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci developed the theory of cultural hegemony to explain how the ruling class maintains power not through force alone, but by shaping societal values, norms, and beliefs so that its worldview becomes accepted as natural common sense. **Source**: Unknown author, Gramsci, public domain.

Understanding the roots of cultural imperialism is crucial, and its theoretical foundations can be traced back to thinkers such as Italian philosopher and critic Antonio Gramsci. Strongly influenced by the theories and writings of Karl Marx, Gramsci originated the concept of **cultural hegemony** to describe the subtle yet powerful dominance of one group over another,

not primarily through force, but through the widespread acceptance of its worldview. Unlike Marx, who mainly focused on economic class struggle and believed that the workers of the world would eventually unite and overthrow capitalism through revolution, Gramsci argued that culture and the media exert such a profound influence on society that they can persuade subordinate groups, including workers, to consent to and even embrace a system that ultimately does not provide them with economic or social advantages. This consent is achieved when the dominant group's values, norms, and beliefs become internalized as common sense or the natural order of things, even by those who are disadvantaged.

The argument that media can influence culture and politics is vividly evident in the persistent narrative of the American Dream. This rags-to-riches tale suggests that through hard work and talent, anyone can achieve a successful life regardless of their starting point. While individuals may indeed find truth in this adage, contemporary research indicates that such stories often represent the exception rather than the rule, and that systemic inequalities related to class, race, and gender significantly impact social mobility. Moreover, recent studies show that while many young people still aspire to aspects of the American Dream (such as financial security and happiness), they are increasingly skeptical of its achievability, often citing economic barriers and expressing a desire for more realistic portrayals of financial struggles in the media.

Social media, in particular, is now seen as a more influential source for shaping perceptions of the American Dream than traditional media like TV or movies.

Marx's ideas about power dynamics remained central to Gramsci's beliefs, but Gramsci expanded the scope of power beyond the purely economic. According to Gramsci's notion, the hegemons of capitalism—those who control capital and the means of production—can assert economic power. In contrast, the hegemons of culture can assert cultural power. This concept of culture, rooted in the Marxist idea of class struggle, posits that one group dominates another, leading to ideological conflict. Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony is highly relevant in the modern day, not just because of the historical dynamic of a local property-owning class oppressing people with low incomes, but even more so due to the concern that rising globalization, particularly through dominant media flows and digital platforms, will permit one culture (or a set of dominant cultural values) to so completely assert its power that it drives out or significantly marginalizes all competitors. This is often seen in debates surrounding cultural homogenization versus heterogenization, where the pervasive reach of global media conglomerates can subtly shape global consumer preferences, social norms, and even political discourse, making the dominant cultural worldview appear universal and natural.



McDonald's has opened up many culturally specific versions of its chain, all employing its famous Golden Arches.
Source: Silar, 02016 McDonalds Mc Drive E462 A4 DK 52 Bielsko-Biała, cropped, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Spreading American Tastes Through McDonaldization

The possibility that dominant global tastes and standardized systems will crowd out local cultures worldwide is a key concern of cultural imperialism. The concept of McDonaldization, coined by sociologist George Ritzer in his influential 1993 book *The McDonaldization of Society*, applies not just to its namesake, McDonald's, with its franchises in seemingly every country, but to any industry that adopts the principles of the fast-food industry on a large scale. Rooted in Max Weber's theory of rationalization, McDonaldization

describes a process in which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are increasingly dominating sectors of society worldwide.

Companies employing McDonaldization take four core aspects of business to the extreme: efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control. These represent key drivers of rationalized systems in modern free markets. Efficiency involves optimizing processes to complete tasks rapidly and with minimal effort, as seen in innovations such as drive-thru windows and self-checkout systems. Calculability emphasizes quantitative aspects over qualitative ones, focusing on speed and volume, often highlighted by slogans like " billions served" or by large portion sizes. Predictability ensures that products and services remain consistent across locations and over time, offering a uniform experience for consumers regardless of where they are. Finally, the company exerts control over employees through standardized procedures and automation and over customers through limited options and environments designed to encourage quick consumption. Applying these concepts, initially optimized for financial markets, to cultural and human domains such as food, education, or even healthcare, McDonaldization enforces general standards and consistency across a global industry.

Unsurprisingly, McDonald's continues to serve as the prime example of this concept. With more than



Source: Copyright© McDonald's Corporation, I'm lovin' it McDonalds, public domain.

44,000 restaurants in more than 100 countries, it remains one of the largest and most globally recognized fast-food chains. While the company has increasingly adapted its menu and practices to local tastes—for example, Indian restaurants offer pork-free and beef-free options such as the McAloo Tikki, and many global locations feature unique regional items—the same fundamental principles of efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control still apply in culturally specific ways. The consistent branding, from the iconic Golden Arches to global marketing campaigns, contributes to its widespread recognition. According to Eric Schlosser in*Fast Food Nation,* the consistent branding of the company, from the "I'm lovin' it" slogan to the Golden Arches, makes McDonald's "more widely recognized than the Christian cross." More importantly,

McDonald's underlying business model remains remarkably consistent across countries. In other words, wherever a consumer travels within a reasonable range, the menu options and the resulting product, while locally flavored, adhere to a predictable standard of service and quality.

Beyond fast food, McDonaldization is evident in numerous other sectors in the 21st century. In education, McUniversities offer standardized curricula, online courses, and large lecture halls, prioritizing efficiency and calculability (e.g., GPA) over personalized learning. The retail sector, with its large big-box stores and e-commerce giants like Amazon, emphasizes efficiency in delivery, calculability in pricing, predictability in product availability, and control over the customer journey. Healthcare, too, can show signs of McDonaldization through standardized procedures, an emphasis on quantifiable outcomes, and streamlined patient flows, sometimes at the expense of individualized care. In entertainment, the proliferation of formulaic movie sequels, reality TV shows, and algorithm-driven content on streaming platforms can be seen as prioritizing predictability and mass consumption. Even in travel, budget airlines and global hotel chains offer standardized services and predictable experiences across diverse locations. While McDonaldization offers benefits such as convenience, affordability, and consistency, critics argue it can lead to dehumanization, reduced quality as quantity is prioritized, a loss of local distinctiveness, and a sense of an iron cage in which rationalized systems increasingly constrain

individuals. This ongoing process highlights the complex interplay between global economic forces and cultural landscapes.

McDonaldizing Media in the Digital Age

The media operates in an uncanny way similar to the fast-food industry, particularly through the lens of McDonaldization. Just as the automation of fast food—from freeze-dried French fries to pre-wrapped salads—attempts to lower a product's marginal costs and increase profits, media outlets increasingly seek a certain degree of consistency and replicability. This allows them to broadcast and sell the same or highly similar products worldwide with minimal changes, maximizing reach and revenue. This principle is profoundly evident in the digital age, where streaming services and global content platforms leverage algorithms, data analytics, and standardized production workflows to deliver predictable content experiences to vast, diverse audiences

.

However, the idea that the media unequivocally spreads a singular, dominant culture remains a subject of c onsiderable controversy. In his influential book *Cultural Imperialism*, John Tomlinson argues that exported American culture is not necessarily imperialist in the traditional sense,

as it does not primarily seek to impose a cultural agenda by coercion. Instead, he posits that its primary driver is generating revenue from the artistic and entertainment elements it can sell worldwide. According to Tomlinson, "No one really disputes the dominant presence of Western multinational, and particularly American, media in the world: what is doubted is the cultural implications of this presence." He suggests that audiences are not passive recipients but actively interpret and integrate global media into their local contexts, leading to cultural hybridization rather than outright replacement.



Driven by transnational media, advertising, and fashion industries, the global diffusion of Western beauty standards has created a homogenized global aesthetic that often marginalizes traditional cultural ideals and drives billions in global cosmetic consumption. **Source**: Robert Bejil from Bakersfield, Ca, USA, Cowgirl Christine 2, cropped, CC BY 2.0.

Despite Tomlinson's nuanced perspective, the byproducts of dominant cultural exports, particularly from Western media, have undeniably spread worldwide. American cultural mores, such as the Western standard of beauty, have increasingly permeated global media, amplified by social media platforms and the pervasive reach of entertainment industries. As early as 1987, Nicholas Kristof wrote in *The New York Times* about a young Chinese woman who planned to have an operation to make her eyes look rounder, more like the eyes of Caucasian women.

Western styles—"newfangled delights like nylon stockings, pierced ears and eye shadow"—also began to replace the austere blue tunics of Mao-era China. The pervasiveness of cultural influence proves difficult to track, however, as the young Chinese woman says that she wanted to have the surgery not because of Western looks but because "she thinks they are pretty." While this example is decades old, the influence persists, with global beauty industries still heavily promoting Eurocentric ideals. However, there is a growing counter-movement towards celebrating diverse beauty standards, often driven by social media influencers and more inclusive marketing campaigns

.

The pervasiveness of cultural influence, however, proves difficult to track definitively. As the young Chinese woman in Kristof's article stated, she wanted the surgery not because of Western looks *per se* but because "she thinks they are pretty." This highlights the complex interplay between external influence and individual agency, in which cultural elements are often adopted because they are perceived as desirable or aspirational in local contexts, rather than solely due to overt imposition. In the contemporary media landscape, the McDonaldization of content is also challenged by the rise of non-Western media powerhouses such as K-Pop, Bollywood , and Nollywood, which demonstrate that cultural flows are increasingly multi-directional, creating a dynamic global

cultural mosaic rather than a simple one-way street of cultural dominance.

Cultural Imperialism, Resentment, and the Complexities of Global Conflict

Not everyone views the spread of American tastes and cultural products as a negative occurrence. Indeed, during the early 21st century, a significant strand of United States foreign policy was predicated on the idea that spreading freedom, democracy, and free-market capitalism through cultural influence



After September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush framed the issue of terrorism as a cultural conflict as much as a military one. **Source**: White House photo by Eric Draper, President George W. Bush addressing the nation and a joint session of Congress on September 20, public domain.

around the world could encourage hostile countries, or those perceived as breeding grounds for extremism, to adopt American ways of living. The underlying hope was that such cultural integration would foster shared values, leading these nations to join the United States in the fight against global terrorism and tyranny. This approach, often termed soft power, aimed to achieve foreign policy goals through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion.

However, as history has shown, this plan did not succeed as simplistically as hoped, and its effectiveness remains a subject of ongoing debate and critical assessment. The idea that other local beliefs *need* to change, or that one cultural system is inherently superior and should be universally adopted, can provoke strong resentment rather than fostering an alliance.

Speaking after the devastating attacks of September 11, 2001, then-President George W. Bush famously presented two seemingly simple ideas to the U.S. populace: "They [terrorists] hate our freedoms," and "I ask your continued participation and confidence in the American economy." These twin ideals of personal freedom and economic activity, often encapsulated in the American Dream narrative, are among the United States' prime cultural exports. Yet, for many cultures, these ideals may clash with deeply held communal values, religious traditions, or different understandings of societal well-being. The perception that these values are being imposed, rather than merely offered, can fuel anti-Western sentiment.

Academic discourse on the link between cultural imperialism and phenomena like radicalization or terrorism is complex and cautious, avoiding direct causal claims. While cultural grievances or perceived assaults on traditional ways of life can contribute to a sense of humiliation, injustice, or alienation, they are rarely the sole or primary drivers of terrorism. Instead, radicalization is understood as a multifaceted process influenced by a complex interplay of social, political, economic, historical, and psychological factors. These can include political oppression, economic inequality, lack of opportunity, historical grievances, discrimination, and the manipulation of ideology by extremist groups. Cultural factors, such as the perceived global dominance of Western commercial culture, which some traditional societies view as deeply offensive or at odds with their values, can certainly contribute to resentment. However, it's crucial to recognize that terrorism emerges from a confluence of grievances and motivations, often exploited by leaders who provide a narrative that justifies violence.

In contemporary global dynamics, resistance to perceived American or Western cultural dominance takes many forms, ranging from cultural protectionist policies (like quotas for local media content) to the resurgence and global spread of non-Western cultural products. While these demonstrate a

more multi-directional flow of culture, the underlying tension between globalizing forces and the preservation of local identities remains a critical aspect of international relations and cultural studies. The question of whether one culture should actively seek to transform another, even with purportedly benevolent intentions, remains a profound ethical and practical challenge in an interconnected world.



Bollywood musicals often feature large-scale dance numbers with challenging choreography. **Source**: Bollywood Hungama, Vidya Balan dancing on stage of Didi No 1, (cropped), CC BY 3.0.

Freedom, Democracy, and Rock 'n' Roll

The spread of culture works in mysterious ways, often defying simple explanations of imposition or unidirectional flow.

Hollywood, for instance, probably does not operate with a master plan to export the American way of life globally and systematically displace local cultures. Similarly, American music may not necessarily be a direct progenitor of democratic government or economic cooperation in other nations. Instead, local cultures actively engage with and respond to the external influences of global media and democratic ideals in myriad complex and dynamic ways.

Some local cultures around the world have adopted Western-style business models and media production techniques to such an extent that they have created vibrant hybrid cultures of their own. India's Bollywood film industry serves as a prime example of this phenomenon. Combining traditional Indian music and dance with elements of American-style filmmaking, India's cinema studios are incredibly prolific, consistently releasing far more films each year than the major Hollywood studios, often exceeding 1,500 to 2,000 annually (with Bollywood, which specifically refers to the Hindi-language industry based in Mumbai, responsible for 200-350 of these titles). India's largest film industry expertly blends melodrama with elaborate musical interludes, where songs are typically lip-synced by actors but sung by popular playback singers. The widespread dissemination of these pop songs often occurs well before a movie's release, strategically building hype and simultaneously entering multiple media markets, from radio and streaming to physical album sales. While Hollywood

studios have attempted similar cross-promotional marketing tactics, Bollywood has arguably mastered the art of multi-platform integration. The music and dance numbers themselves often resemble cinematic forms of music videos, simultaneously promoting the soundtrack and adding spectacle and variety to the film's narrative. These numbers also frequently feature a mix of different Indian national languages and a fusion of Western dance music with Indian classical singing, representing a distinct departure from conventional Western media formats.

While the concept of cultural imperialism might suggest a one-way imposition that causes resentment in many parts of the world, this idea often fails to account for the agency of local cultures fully. It assumes that native cultures are helpless in the face of the perceived crushing power of American cultural influence. However, evidence suggests a more nuanced reality in which local cultures actively adapt and reinterpret global media models, tailoring their methods to fit their corporate structures, aesthetic preferences, and cultural narratives, rather than simply adopting a foreign template wholesale. This process, often termed cultural hybridization, demonstrates that cultural exchange is a dynamic, two-way street. While economic and cultural aspects of globalization are interconnected, the evidence does not support the notion that a foreign power can unilaterally crush a native culture. Instead, it highlights a continuous process of negotiation, adaptation, and creative synthesis, where local cultures demonstrate

remarkable resilience and innovation in shaping global media landscapes.

CHAPTER 14: ETHICS OF MASS MEDIA



Source: Nick Youngson, Code-of-ethics, CC BY-SA 3.0.

14.1 Ethics of Mass Media
14.2 History of Ethics and Their Application to Mass Media
14.3 Ethical Issues in Mass Media
14.4 News Media and Ethics
14.5 Ethical Considerations of the Online World

14.1 ETHICS OF MASS MEDIA



Pikesville High School found itself in a whirlwind of controversy when a PE teacher produced a deepfake audio recording implicating that the school principal held racist views. **Source**: Wallstreethotrod at English Wikipedia, Pikesville High School 2, public domain.

In January 2024, an audio clip began circulating within the community of Pikesville High School in Maryland that seemed to capture the school's principal, Eric Eiswert, making a series of racist and antisemitic remarks. In the

recording, a voice identical to Eiswert's expressed profound frustration with the testing abilities of specific student groups and disparaged Jewish faculty members. The clip spread rapidly across social media, leading to an immediate and fierce public outcry. Principal Eiswert was placed on administrative leave, his home required police protection due to the intensity of public anger, and the school fell into a state of total social disruption. It appeared to be a definitive case of professional misconduct until investigators discovered a disturbing truth: the principal had never uttered those words.

The recording was a synthetic vocal clone created by the school's athletic director, Dazhon Darien, using generative artificial intelligence. Driven by a personal grievance over an internal investigation into the mishandling of school funds, Darien used a simple AI tool to mimic Eiswert's cadence and tone, producing a deepfake nearly indistinguishable to the human ear. Eiswert eventually sued the school system, while Darien was sentenced to four months in jail for making the deepfake recording. This incident serves as a stark reminder that in the modern media landscape, the tools of communication can be weaponized with terrifying precision. While the technology was new, the crisis it created was a classic problem of media ethics, forcing a reconsideration of the traditional boundaries of truth, verification, and the potential for irreparable harm.

The Pikesville case highlights why ethics—the system of moral principles that guide what should be done rather than

simply what is legal—serves as the bedrock of any functioning media system. Media professionals often navigate gray areas where the law is silent or slow to react. For instance, the individuals and news outlets that shared the Pikesville recording were not necessarily breaking the law, but they were faced with a profound ethical choice. They had to balance the public's perceived need to know about a leader's character against the ethical duty to verify information before amplifying it. When media consumers and producers fail to uphold standards of accuracy and accountability, the consequences are not merely digital; they result in real-world trauma, lost livelihoods, and the erosion of community trust.

This chapter explores how media ethics provides a framework for making these difficult decisions. It moves beyond simple questions of right and wrong to examine the professional codes of conduct that govern journalism, advertising, and public relations. By applying classical ethical theories—such as the golden mean, the Categorical Imperative , and utilitarianism—it is possible to evaluate modern challenges, including the rise of AI-generated content, the ethics of sensationalism, and the need for transparency when the lines between personal opinion and professional reporting blur. Analyzing the fallout from the Pikesville deepfake invites a broader look at how creators' and media consumers' habits shape a society that embraces or shuns ethical considerations.

14.2 HISTORY OF ETHICS AND THEIR APPLICATION TO MASS MEDIA



Source: Tumisu, Ethics-RIGHT AND WRONG, cropped, CC0 1.0

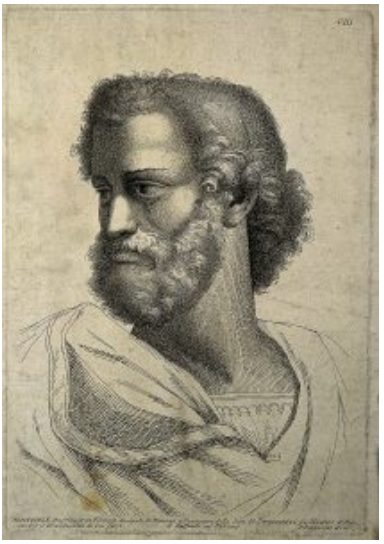
A Brief History of the Study of Ethics

The study of ethics, particularly in the context of mass

communication, necessitates a clear understanding of its distinction from morals. While often used interchangeably, these terms possess nuanced differences. **Morals** refer to an individual's code of behavior, usually deeply rooted in religious beliefs, philosophical principles, or cultural upbringing. These define right and wrong in ways that may or may not be entirely rational or universally applicable. For instance, a moral might dictate always telling the truth, even if it causes harm, or never consuming certain foods based on religious dietary laws, regardless of nutritional benefit. These are personal guiding principles.

Ethics, in contrast, represents a more rational and systematic way of deciding what is good for individuals or society as a whole. It provides a framework for choosing between competing moral principles or navigating situations where there isn't a clear right or wrong answer. Ethics seeks to establish shared principles that can be applied consistently within a given context, such as a profession or a society.

One of the foundational thinkers in Western ethics is Aristotle, who argued that the ultimate goal of all human effort is "the good," which he equated with happiness or *eudaimonia* (flourishing). For Aristotle, achieving this ultimate good involves



Aristotle. **Source**: anonymous, Aristotle. Line engraving by P. Fidanza after Raphael Sanzio Wellcome V0000205 , CC BY 4.0.

striking a balance between excess and defect, a concept he famously labeled the **golden mean**. To behave ethically, according to Aristotle, individuals must first know what they are doing, meaning they act intentionally and with awareness. Secondly, they must select their action for moral reasons, choosing a path they believe is right. Thirdly, they must act out of good character, meaning their actions stem from ingrained virtues rather than fleeting impulses. In essence, a person's character and virtuous intent determine the ethical quality of their actions.

In mass communication, Aristotle's golden mean suggests:

- A journalist, when reporting on a sensitive issue, should aim for the mean between being overly sensational (excess) and being overly bland or secretive (defect), striving for balanced and comprehensive reporting.
- An advertiser should find the mean between deceptive exaggeration (excess) and entirely unengaging, factual presentation (defect), aiming for persuasive but truthful communication.
- A social media manager navigating public feedback should seek the mean between ignoring criticism (defect) and engaging in an overly defensive or aggressive response (excess), opting instead for a measured, empathetic, and constructive dialogue.



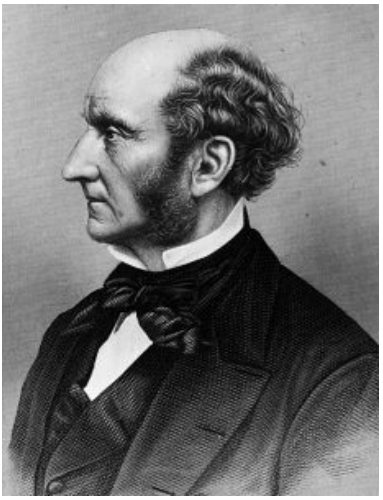
Immanuel Kant. **Source**: Johann Gottlieb Becker (1720-1782), Immanuel Kant – Gemaelde 1, public domain.

Another influential philosopher is Immanuel Kant, who posited that morality lies in the act itself, not in the character of the person performing it or in its intended outcome. Since people possess the ability to reason, Kant believed they could base their actions on pure moral reasoning, obliging them to act morally regardless of personal desires or consequences. He referred to this as the **Categorical Imperative**: a universal moral law that cannot depend on individual inclinations, goals, or purposes. It encourages one to act for the benefit of others first and not for personal gain. A key aspect of the Categorical Imperative is considering what would happen if everyone acted as they wished, asserting that one cannot justify unethical behavior by its potentially desirable outcomes

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In mass communication, applying Kant's Categorical Imperative means:

- A news organization should never publish deliberately false information, even if it could lead to a desired outcome like increased readership, because if all news organizations did this, trust in journalism would collapse.
- An advertising agency should not use deceptive marketing tactics, even if they result in higher sales, because if all advertisers engaged in deception, the entire system of commercial communication would become meaningless and distrusted.
- A social media platform should not secretly collect and sell user data without consent, even if it leads to better targeted ads and profits, because if all platforms did this without transparency, user privacy would be completely eroded, and user trust would vanish.



John Stuart Mill. **Source**: anonymous, JohnStuartMill, public domain.

John Stuart Mill, a proponent of **utilitarianism**, offered a different ethical framework based on the principle of utility: the greatest good for the greatest number, or that which causes the least pain is best. This consequentialist philosophy holds that the morality of an action is determined by its outcomes, specifically by its ability to produce the greatest happiness or well-being for the greatest number of people. Utilitarianism strongly influences fields such as public policy and public health.

In mass communication, utilitarianism can be seen in:

- Social Marketing campaigns that use advertising and marketing techniques to persuade people to change harmful behaviors or adopt beneficial ones, such as public health campaigns advocating for vaccination, seatbelt use, or smoking cessation. These campaigns aim to improve public health and well-being for the largest number of people.
- A newspaper deciding to publish a

sensitive story that might cause pain to a few individuals but serves a larger public good by exposing corruption or providing vital information.

- A media company choosing to implement accessibility features (e.g., closed captions, audio descriptions) on all its content, even if it's costly, because it benefits a large population of users with disabilities, thus promoting the "greatest good."



John Rawls. **Source**: English: Published by the Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. Photograph taken by Alec Rawls, John's son. The portrait was uncredited on the original dust jacket, but Alec is identified as its photographer on the copyright page of the 1994 German-language first edition of the book John Rawls by Thomas Pogge., John Rawls (1971 photo portrait) , public domain.

John Rawls, a modern philosopher, introduced the concept of the **veil of ignorance** as a thought experiment for determining justice. Rawls argued that justice emerges when people make decisions about societal

rules without considering their status or position within the system, or knowing where they fall (e.g., rich or poor, healthy or sick, powerful or powerless). This theoretical veil forces decision-makers to be impartial, leading to rules that are fair to everyone, since they wouldn't know whether an unfair system would disadvantage them.

In mass communication, the veil of ignorance has many applications:

- When developing journalistic ethics guidelines, if journalists were to decide rules of reporting from behind a veil where they don't know if they'll be the subject of a story, the reporter, or the editor, they might create rules that protect privacy and ensure fair treatment for all parties.
- A social media company designing its content moderation policies might use the veil of ignorance to ensure rules are applied equally to all users, regardless of their celebrity status or political affiliation, thus fostering a truly equitable platform.
- If media executives and policymakers were behind a veil of ignorance—not knowing if they would be born into a wealthy family with high-speed fiber internet or a rural, low-income household with no digital access—they would be more likely to design systems that prioritize universal access. This perspective encourages media organizations to keep essential news and

educational resources outside of expensive paywalls, ensuring that the least advantaged in society are not systematically barred from the information necessary for civic participation.

While the aforementioned theories rely heavily on universal rules or calculated outcomes, the **ethics of care** suggests that ethical decision-making should be rooted in relationships and the specific context of those involved. Developed largely by feminist philosophers like Carol Gilligan, this framework shifts the focus from "What is the rule?" to "How can I maintain the connection and minimize the vulnerability of those involved?"



Carol Gilligan. **Source**: Deror avi ; cropped by User:Ravit, Carol Gilligan P1010970 – cropped , CC BY-SA 3.0.

In mass communication, the ethics of care is applied when:

- A photojournalist decides not to publish a graphic image of a grieving family, prioritizing the family's emotional

well-being over the newsworthiness of the shot.

- A documentary filmmaker maintains an ongoing dialogue with their subjects to ensure they feel represented and respected, rather than just treated as data points.
- A social media community manager prioritizes the safety of a harassed user over the platform's engagement metrics.



Jürgen Habermas. **Source**: English: photographer: Wolfram Huke at en.wikipedia , http://wolframhuke.de, JuergenHabermas retouched, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Beyond these, Jürgen Habermas's philosophy and concept of the **public sphere** are highly relevant to mass communication. Habermas argued that a healthy democracy relies on a public sphere where individuals can come together to freely and rationally discuss

issues of common concern, uncoerced by state or corporate power. In this ideal space, rational-critical debate leads to informed public opinion.

In mass communication, this plays out in the *perfect* function of independent journalism, investigative reporting, and open public forums (both online and offline) that facilitate robust, fact-based discussions. For example, a quality news program hosting a town hall debate where diverse viewpoints are respectfully aired, or a meticulously researched investigative series uncovering systemic problems, embodies Habermas's ideal of fostering a rational public discourse necessary for democratic functioning. When mass media fail in this role by becoming sensationalist, partisan, or controlled by vested interests, they undermine the very public sphere that Habermas deemed essential.

To apply these diverse philosophies to real-world dilemmas, media professionals often use the **Potter Box**. This is a four-stage model for analytical ethical decision-making that requires the user to move through a specific process:

- **Definition:** Laying out the objective facts of the situation without judgment.
- **Values:** Identifying the competing values at play (e.g., the public's right to know vs. an individual's right to privacy).
- **Principles:** Applying the philosophical frameworks

discussed above (e.g., Aristotle's golden mean or Kant's Categorical Imperative) to see what each would suggest.

- **Loyalties:** Determining to whom the decision-maker owes their primary allegiance (e.g., the employer, the subscribers, or the general public).

By using this model, media practitioners ensure they are not making gut decisions, but are instead engaging in a systematic, defensible ethical process.



Source: Cropped image by thintallbayo on Pixabay.

Beyond Gut Feeling: Bok's Blueprint for Right Decisions

The **Bok Model** provides a practical, three-step framework for ethical decision-making, instrumental in complex situations where moral choices are not immediately apparent. Developed by the philosopher Sissela Bok, this model emphasizes a process of thoughtful deliberation and consensus-seeking. Its components and application are highly relevant to mass media, which frequently grapple with ethical dilemmas.

Central to this model is Bok's **principle of veracity**, which states that truthful communication is the default setting for human interaction. She argues that because lies can destroy the trust necessary for society to function
, any departure from the truth carries a heavy burden of proof. An ethical media professional must demonstrate that no other truthful alternative was available before resorting to deception or withholding information.

The first component of the Bok Model asks a person to consult their conscience. This initial step requires the individual facing the ethical dilemma to engage in self-

reflection. It asks: "What does my conscience tell me is right?" This internal deliberation is about acknowledging one's immediate feelings, intuitions, and personal moral code regarding the situation. It's a quick, gut-level check, but not the final determinant. For a journalist, this might mean an immediate discomfort with publishing sensitive private information, even if it's legally obtained.

The second component is to seek expert advice for alternatives. This involves moving beyond personal feelings and engaging with others to gain perspective and identify potential solutions or alternative courses of action. It asks: "Is there another way to achieve the goal that is less ethically problematic?" This step encourages consultation with colleagues, mentors, legal counsel, ethical committees, or anyone with relevant experience or knowledge. The goal is to explore all possible options and anticipate potential consequences, ensuring that the decision is not made in a vacuum. This would involve discussing with editors, legal teams, and perhaps even privacy experts to understand the implications of publishing or withholding the information, and to explore alternative ways to convey the core message without compromising privacy.

The third and final component is to hold a public discussion with the parties involved. This step externalizes the decision-making process. It asks: "How would this decision appear if it were made public? Can I explain and justify it to all affected parties?" This involves imagining a public forum where all stakeholders – those who will be affected by the decision – are present. The individual must be prepared to articulate the reasoning behind their chosen course of action and defend it against scrutiny. This step forces transparency and accountability. For the journalist, this might mean considering how the source, the subject of the story, the readers, and even other media professionals would react to the decision, and whether the justification for the chosen path withstands ethical scrutiny from all perspectives.



Whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg leaked the top-secret Pentagon Papers in 1971, exposing decades of hidden military operations and official deception regarding the Vietnam War to the American press. **Source**: Gotfryd, Bernard, photographer, Daniel Ellsberg at 1972 press conference (cropped 3), public domain.

The Pentagon Papers provide a compelling historical example of the application of the Bok Model in mass media. In 1971, military analyst Daniel Ellsberg leaked a highly classified Pentagon study detailing the history of U.S. political and military involvement in Vietnam to *The New York Times*. The ethical dilemma for *The New York Times* was immense: publish documents deemed secret by the government, risking legal repercussions and accusations of endangering national

security, or withhold information crucial to the public's understanding of the Vietnam War.

Applying the Bok Model, the editors and publishers at *The New York Times* undoubtedly felt a strong moral imperative to inform the public of the truth about the war, given the perceived government deception. Their conscience would likely have urged them towards publication, as they believed it was their duty to the public. Before publishing, *The New York Times* engaged in extensive internal deliberation. They consulted their legal team, who warned of potential legal action and injunctions. They likely debated various alternatives: publishing only select portions, paraphrasing, or seeking government authorization (which they knew would be denied). They weighed the risks of prosecution against the public's right to know and the documents' historical significance.

The *Times* had to consider how its decision would be viewed by the government (which would oppose it), the public (who would likely welcome the transparency, but some might fear national security implications), other media organizations (who would scrutinize their

actions), and its staff. They had to be prepared to publicly defend their choice in court and the court of public opinion. Their eventual decision to publish and their subsequent legal battle that reached the Supreme Court (which affirmed the press's right to publish classified information in this context) demonstrate their readiness to defend their ethical choice publicly. The perceived public benefit of understanding the government's actions outweighed the risks and potential harm, aligning with a utilitarian outcome guided by an ethical process.

While the *Times* had weeks to deliberate in 1971, modern media professionals often apply the Bok Model within hours or minutes. Whether deciding to signal-boost an unverified video from a conflict zone or determining whether an AI-generated image is too misleading to share, the process remains the same: the practitioner must still justify the choice to an imagined public forum, even if the deadline is the next refresh of a social media feed.



The death of Princess Diana sparked intense global debates regarding journalistic ethics, forcing a critical reckoning over aggressive paparazzi tactics, media intrusion into personal privacy, and public consumption of sensationalized news. **Source**: jeanne rené, Princess Diana 1961- 1997, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Media Ethics: Balancing Freedom, Public Interest, and Privacy

The U.S. Constitution's First Amendment guarantees the freedom of the press, a principle widely regarded as a cornerstone of democratic society. This freedom from government censorship allows news media to act as a

watchdog, keeping citizens informed about the state of their society. However, a critical ethical tension persists: When does the press take this freedom too far? The 1997 death of Princess Diana remains a landmark case, as investigations revealed that paparazzi vehicles were aggressively pursuing her car before the fatal crash
. While that tragedy sparked international outrage, the public's appetite for celebrity content has not diminished. Instead, the digital age has seen a proliferation of citizen paparazzi and an ever-accelerating news cycle that tests the boundaries of privacy every hour.

Tabloid-style tactics are not confined to the entertainment industry, and their application in politics can manipulate the democratic process. A prominent example is the catch-and-kill scandal involving the *National Enquirer* and its parent company, American Media Inc. (now the McClatchy Media Company**).** This practice involved purchasing the exclusive rights to negative stories about a political candidate—not to publish them, but to bury them. During the 2016 and 2024 legal proceedings involving Donald Trump and his former lawyer, Michael Cohen, details emerged regarding payments made to individuals, such as Karen McDougal, to suppress their accounts. This was not merely celebrity gossip; it was a strategic effort to withhold information from voters. Such cases raise profound

questions about journalistic integrity and the public's right to a transparent information environment.

As privacy advocates argue for stricter boundaries, a legal-ethical divide emerges. While the Constitution protects the press, the courts have generally agreed that



TMZ founder Harvey Levin has defended aggressive celebrity coverage by arguing that high-profile public figures surrender a degree of privacy expectation in exchange for fame, wealth, and public attention. **Source**: SupportPDX, Harvey Levin 2010, CC BY 2.0.

individuals enjoy certain privacy rights. However, media outlets often argue that because celebrities and politicians are public figures, they essentially become public property. Former *Us Weekly* editor-in-chief Janice Min once likened a celebrity to an elected official, suggesting that if they

benefit from public attention, they must accept being a "public commodity." Similarly, TMZ founder Harvey Levin famously characterized celebrity "train-wrecks" as high-value content for his audience.

However, modern perspectives are shifting, particularly through the lens of an ethics of care. In recent years, a retrospective look at the media's treatment of figures like Britney Spears has led to a widespread critique of how tabloid culture ignores the mental health and human rights of its subjects. Media consumers and creators are increasingly distinguishing between what interests the public (sensationalism and curiosity) and the public interest (information vital to society's functioning). As law professor Patrick J. Alach has argued, if social value is the standard for newsworthiness, it is difficult to justify the relentless pursuit of a celebrity's private dining habits or personal struggles.

As digital archives become permanent, a new ethical dilemma has emerged regarding the shelf life of a person's mistakes. Traditionally, a small-town news story about a minor arrest would fade away as physical newspapers were recycled. Today, that same story remains at the top of a Google search for decades, potentially preventing a person from finding employment or housing long after they have paid their debt to society. The right to be forgotten is an ethical (and, in some regions, legal) principle that holds that individuals should be able to request the removal of outdated, irrelevant, or non-

newsworthy information from search engines. Ethically, journalists must balance the duty of maintaining an accurate historical record with the ethics of care, considering whether the continued availability of a minor, old story serves a genuine public interest or causes unnecessary, lifelong harm.

Today, the challenge of ethically releasing content is compounded by the DeuxMoi effect—the rise of anonymous social media accounts that enable anyone with a smartphone to serve as a decentralized surveillance network. Mainstream news services, despite their sideways glances at tabloid tactics, often find themselves prowling these sites to stay competitive. In this hyper-competitive, real-time environment, the shelf life of breaking news has grown increasingly shorter. This pressure forces a constant re-evaluation of ethical boundaries: Is the goal to be the first to post a viral leak, or to be the most responsible in determining if that leak serves a legitimate social purpose?

Key Takeaway: The **Legal** Right to Privacy vs. the **Ethical** Duty to Privacy

The LEGAL Standard: Can the person be sued for publishing the content? (***Includes***: Intrusion, Public

Disclosure of Private Facts, False Light, and Misappropriation).

The ETHICAL Standard: Should the person publish the content? (***Includes***: Does it serve a higher purpose? Does it cause unnecessary harm? Is it truthful?)

The Importance of Truth in Mass Communication Messages

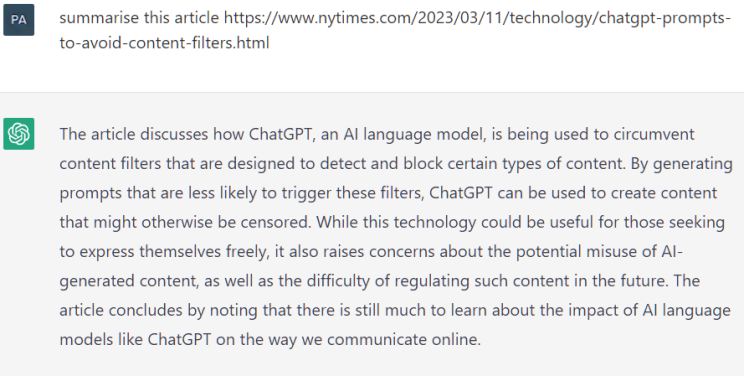
Journalists have historically championed their unwavering commitment to truth-telling, often citing it as the cornerstone of their profession. This obligation is deeply embedded in journalistic codes of ethics, emphasizing accuracy, fairness, and impartiality. For example, during the Watergate scandal in the 1970s, *Washington Post* reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein meticulously pursued leads and corroborated information, despite immense pressure and attempts by the Nixon administration to obfuscate. Their relentless pursuit of the truth, which ultimately led to the President's resignation, stands as a testament to this perceived journalistic duty. Another instance can be seen in the reporting following the September 11th attacks; news organizations around the globe prioritized factual reporting and verification

amidst chaos and misinformation, working to provide the public with accurate information about the unfolding tragedy.

Despite these historical claims and examples, the news media today often contend with pervasive public distrust and low esteem for their truthfulness. For instance, a 2023 Gallup/Knight Foundation survey found that 50% of Americans believe news organizations intend to mislead, misinform, or persuade them, while only 25% believe news organizations do not intend to deceive. Furthermore, the Reuters Institute's Digital News Report 2024 indicates that trust in news remains low globally, with less than half (40%) of respondents across 47 markets saying they trust most news most of the time. These figures underscore a significant challenge for the media, suggesting that the public perceives a considerable gap between journalistic ideals and actual practice.

Several factors contribute to this erosion of trust. Many editors voice concerns that the relentless pace of online news dissemination often leads to a breakdown in traditional journalistic safeguards, such as rigorous sourcing, thorough fact-checking, and prudent caution. In the race to be first, newsrooms can sometimes prioritize speed over accuracy, making them more susceptible to errors or the spread of unverified information. The constant demand for fresh content in the 24/7 news cycle, fueled by internet platforms,

creates an environment where quick publication can take precedence over meticulous verification.



An example of a ChatGPT hallucination. When prompted to "summarize an article" with a story that doesn't exist but whose URL contains meaningful keywords in its slug, the chatbot generated a response that seems valid at first glance. **Source**: ChatGPT, ChatGPT hallucination, public domain.

In modern times, the race to release information first has been complicated by the integration of generative AI in newsrooms. While AI can speed up data analysis, it also introduces hallucinations—confidently stated falsehoods generated by algorithms. Furthermore, the rise of pink-slime journalism—automated websites that churn out low-quality, AI-generated local news to capture ad revenue—has made it harder for citizens to distinguish between verified reports and machine-generated fabrications.

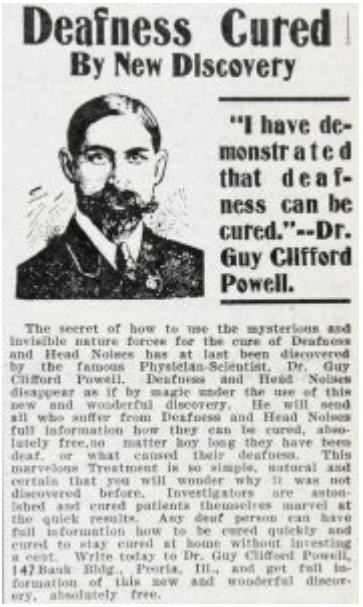
Adding to these internal pressures, external forces also blur

the lines. Critics often point to the increasing influence of media conglomerates, promotional partnering, and cross-ownership as factors that compromise journalistic integrity. When a handful of large corporations own diverse media outlets—from newspapers and television stations to film studios and digital platforms—there's a concern that editorial independence can be compromised to serve corporate interests. Similarly, promotional partnerships can lead news outlets to feature content that is essentially paid advertising disguised as editorial, further blurring the line between independent reporting and commercial messaging. This interconnectedness can make it difficult for the public to discern unbiased news from content driven by financial or corporate agendas
, thereby contributing to the widespread skepticism about the truthfulness of media output.

Traditionally, newsrooms maintained a metaphorical wall of separation between the editorial staff and the advertising department. Today, that wall is crumbling under the pressure of **native advertising**. These are highly produced segments or articles that mimic the style, tone, and typeface of the news organization but are actually paid for by a brand. Ethically, this creates a transparency gap; even if the information is technically true, the *intent* is hidden, leading many readers to feel deceived once they realize they are consuming an advertisement.

While corporate ownership creates macro ethical issues,

individual media practitioners must also navigate micro conflicts of interest. A **conflict of interest** occurs when a professional has a personal, financial, or political interest that could interfere with their ability to provide an unbiased report. For a journalist, this might mean refusing to report on a company where they own significant stock, or declining a junket—a free trip or expensive gift—from a movie studio they are assigned to review. In the influencer economy, this is particularly murky. If a tech reviewer receives a free $2,000 laptop from a manufacturer, can they truly provide a neutral review? Ethical practice requires disclosure at a minimum but often necessitates recusal, in which the professional steps away from the story entirely to maintain the integrity of the message.



Deafness Cured
By New Discovery

"I have demonstrated that deafness can be cured."--Dr. Guy Clifford Powell.

The secret of how to use the mysterious and invisible nature forces for the cure of Deafness and Head Noises has at last been discovered by the famous Physician-Scientist, Dr. Guy Clifford Powell. Deafness and Head Noises disappear as if by magic under the use of this new and wonderful discovery. He will send all who suffer from Deafness and Head Noises full information how they can be cured, absolutely free,no matter hoy long they have been deaf, or what caused their deafness. This marvelous Treatment is so simple, natural and certain that you will wonder why it was not discovered before. Investigators are astonished and cured patients themselves marvel at the quick results. Any deaf person can have full information how to be cured quickly and cured to stay cured at home without investing a cent. Write today to Dr. Guy Clifford Powell, 147 Bank Bldg., Peoria, Ill., and get full information of this new and wonderful discovery, absolutely free.

Truth in advertising requires businesses to convey accurate, non-misleading information in their promotional claims, serving as a critical ethical and legal standard designed to protect consumers and maintain market trust.
Source: English: Dr. Guy Clifford Powell, Cure for Deafness (1907) (ADVERT 353) , public domain.

But how does telling the truth apply to advertising? The principle of truth in advertising is a cornerstone of ethical marketing, raising the question of how important it is that advertising claims be genuinely valid. While an advertiser's ultimate goal is to persuade, there's a

delicate balance between persuasive communication and misleading consumers. The level of scrutiny applied to advertising claims often varies by product category, reflecting the potential for harm or significant consumer impact.

Specifically, factual claims about prescription drugs are held to a significantly higher standard due to their direct impact on public health and safety. Pharmaceutical advertisers, for instance, must provide scientific evidence to substantiate claims about a drug's efficacy, side effects, and approved uses. Food advertising also faces additional scrutiny. Food labeling, including nutritional claims, organic certifications, or health benefits, is subject to strict regulations to prevent consumers from making ill-informed decisions that could affect their well-being. Furthermore, subjective claims such as "the best" or "most effective" often require robust documentation, compelling advertisers to provide consumer surveys, market share data, or independent testing results to back them up.

However, the line between permissible persuasion and outright deception has moved from the physical world into the digital one. In the past, advertisers used techniques such as using acrylic ice cubes or motor oil instead of syrup to make food look more appealing in photographs. Today, the concern centers on AI-enhanced and filtered imagery. In the beauty and fashion industries, the use of skin-smoothing AI filters or digital body-slimming can be considered deceptive because it misrepresents the actual results of a product, such as a

foundation or a skincare line. While a glossy, high-contrast photo is a form of visual persuasion, many consumers and regulatory bodies now argue that using digital tools to erase pores or wrinkles crosses into ethical—and sometimes legal—misrepresentation. Several countries have already begun requiring digitally altered labels on advertisements to protect consumers from unrealistic and unachievable beauty standards. The regulatory bodies, primarily the Federal Trade Commission and the Food and Drug Administration in the United States, are tasked with enforcing regulations on deceptive advertising, aiming to protect consumers from practices likely to mislead a reasonable consumer acting reasonably under the circumstances.

This regulatory environment also recognizes a specific type of advertising language known as **puffery**. Puffery involves making extravagant, unprovable claims. It's often considered a defense to false advertising claims when no reasonable consumer would take the claim literally. Puffery operates in an ethical and



P.T. Barnum's iconic slogan "The Greatest Show on Earth" stands as a classic example of puffery, using exaggerated, non-verifiable hyperbole that consumers recognize as theatrical promotional flair rather than a literal objective claim. **Source**: Boston Public Library, The Barnum & Bailey greatest show on earth – Charles 1st, CC BY 2.0.

legal gray area, relying on the understanding that consumers expect a certain level of hyperbole in advertising.

Historically, puffery has been used in various contexts. Consider P.T. Barnum's circus advertising, where his shows were promoted as "The Greatest Show on Earth." No one expected his circus to be the single most outstanding performance in the history of the planet; it was an extravagant claim designed to excite and attract. Modern puffery is frequently seen in the influencer economy. When a beauty influencer claims a skincare product provides a "flawless, ethereal glow," they are using subjective, non-provable language. However, the ethical line is crossed if the influencer uses a digital beauty filter to create that glow, as this moves from the subjective praise of puffery to a misleading representation of the product's actual effects.

In all these instances, the claims are designed to create a positive impression and evoke emotion. Still, they lack specific, testable facts, distinguishing them from potentially deceptive advertising that asserts false objective claims.

The Ethical Duty of Representation

The social responsibility theory of the press suggests that media organizations have a moral obligation to provide a truthful, comprehensive, and intelligent account of the day's events in a context that gives them meaning. This includes an

ethical duty regarding representation. When media outlets consistently rely on stereotypes or ignore the voices of marginalized communities, they fail their ethical duty to reflect society accurately. For mass media professionals, this means moving beyond tokenism and ensuring that diverse perspectives are included in every stage of production—from the sources quoted in a news story to the actors cast in a commercial. Ethical representation is not just about being polite; it is about the fundamental journalistic principle of accuracy. If a newsroom reports only on a specific neighborhood when a crime occurs, it provides an inaccurate and ethically flawed portrait of that community.

14.3 ETHICAL ISSUES IN MASS MEDIA

In the competitive and rapidly changing world of mass media communications, media professionals—overwhelmed by deadlines, bottom-line imperatives, and corporate interests—can easily lose sight of the ethical implications of their work. Ethics, in this context, refers to the moral principles that govern a person's or group's behavior, particularly concerning what is considered right or wrong in their professional conduct and its impact on society. It involves making reasoned judgments about how media content is created, disseminated, and consumed, as well as the profound responsibilities that come with shaping public discourse.

Historically, scholars like Sherri Burr noted that because broadcast television was piped directly into the vast majority of American homes, it served as the primary vehicle for depicting cultural images. Today, this influence is no longer centralized in a few broadcast networks; instead, it is distributed across a pervasive ecosystem of personalized feeds and ubiquitous digital connectivity. The ethical responsibility has shifted from a handful of network executives to a vast array of

algorithm designers, streaming platforms, and independent influencers

. This algorithmic curation often creates echo chambers, where users are primarily exposed to perspectives that reinforce their existing biases, making the ethical duty of accuracy and diversity even more difficult to uphold. Given the immense influence mass media now has on cultural perceptions, public opinion, and individual attitudes, the creators and disseminators of content face an increasingly complex landscape of ethical issues that demand careful, ongoing consideration.

Group	**% of U.S. Population (2023/24 Census)**	**Historical Media Status**
White (Non-Hispanic)	58%	The invisible default
Hispanic/ Latino	20%	Underrepresented/ hyper-sexualized
Black/African American	13%	Hyper-visible in crime/sports tropes
Asian American	6%	Model minority/ perpetual foreigner
Indigenous/ MENA/Other	~3%	Invisible or antagonistic

Stereotypes, Prescribed Roles, and Public Perception

While the U.S. population grows increasingly diverse, mainstream mass media have historically struggled to reflect this reality, often relegating minority characters to underrepresented or heavily stereotyped, two-dimensional roles

. For instance, while progress has been made, African Americans can still be typecast in roles that lean into tropes of criminality or exceptional athleticism, rather than showcasing a full spectrum of professions and personalities. Similarly, Latino characters have often been confined to roles such as gang members, domestic workers, or hyper-sexualized figures. In contrast, Asian characters have frequently been limited to stereotypes of academic overachievers, martial arts experts, or perpetual foreigners. These depictions not only lack depth but also reinforce harmful generalizations, often denying these communities opportunities to portray complex characters with a full range of human emotions, motivations, and behaviors. Likewise, Indigenous/Native American populations have historically been relegated to historical Western tropes or portrayed as noble savages, largely ignoring modern Indigenous life

. Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) characters have also faced a persistent terrorist/oil sheik binary. The ethical push for self-representation in these communities has led to a rise in **consultative producing**, where writers' rooms hire cultural experts to ensure nuances of language and custom are not sacrificed for copy-paste stereotypes. Census data show that while people of color make up over 40% of the U.S. population, they frequently hold fewer than 25% of lead film roles and even fewer showrunner or executive positions.

Furthermore, the stereotyping of women, the LGBTQ+ community, and individuals with disabilities in mass media has also raised significant concerns. Women, despite increasing representation, still face portrayals that can be overtly sexualized, confined to domestic roles, or depicted as overly emotional or competitive. LGBTQ+ characters, while more visible, can fall into tropes like the "gay best friend" or face narratives centered solely on their identity struggles rather than their multifaceted lives. Individuals with disabilities are often subjected to inspiration-porn narratives, depicted as objects of pity or as bitter and isolated, rather than as fully integrated members of society with diverse experiences.



D.W. Griffith's 1915 film *The Birth of a Nation* weaponized deeply racist stereotypes, the widespread use of blackface, and white supremacist propaganda, degrading Black Americans while glorifying the Ku Klux Klan and inflicting lasting cultural harm. **Source**: D. W. Griffith creator QS:P170,Q51123, Birth-of-a-nation-klan-and-black-man , public domain.

The word stereotype originated in the printing industry as a method of making identical copies, and the practice of stereotyping people mirrors this principle: a system that reproduces a simplified, often distorted image of the other. As seen in historical examples like D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, a film that notoriously relied on racial stereotypes to portray Southern Whites as victims in the American Civil War, stereotypes—especially those disseminated through mass

media—become a powerful form of social control, shaping collective perceptions and individual identities.

While the term stereotype originated in the printing press, its modern equivalent is found in machine learning. Algorithms used by social media and streaming platforms often rely on collaborative filtering, which groups users by perceived traits. Ethically, this can lead to digital redlining, in which certain groups are shown less aspirational content or excluded from job and housing advertisements based on proxy data such as race or ZIP code. Thus, stereotyping is no longer just a narrative choice; it is embedded in the very code that delivers media to our screens.

In American mass media, the non-Hispanic White male has historically represented the default viewpoint; he has often stood as the central figure in TV narratives and provided the dominant perspective on everything from trends to current events to politics. This pervasive centering has usually made White maleness an invisible category, giving the impression of representing the universal or normal human experience, thereby marginalizing other lived realities.

In response to this persistent lack of authentic and diverse representation in mainstream media, independent creators from these underrepresented communities have increasingly leveraged digital platforms to build niche audiences and provide content that genuinely reflects their experiences. For example, African American creators found early success with web series like Issa Rae's *Awkward Black Girl*, which paved

the way for more nuanced portrayals of Black professional life. Similarly, Asian American, Latina, and LGBTQ+ creators have utilized short-form vertical video on platforms like TikTok and Instagram to bypass traditional gatekeepers. Creators with disabilities, such as Shane Burcaw of *Squirmy and Grubs* and Lauren "Lolo" Spencer of *Sitting Pretty Lolo*, share their lived experiences to challenge tropes of inspiration and advocate for genuine accessibility. These independent voices are challenging traditional media narratives and directly serving audiences long starved for authentic portrayals, signaling a decisive shift in how content is created and consumed in the 21st century.



The 1940 movie serial *Flash Gordon Conquers the Universe* reflects 1930s "Yellow Peril" fears. It models the villain Ming the Merciless on evil masterminds like Fu Manchu, using stereotypical Asian-inspired robes, hair, and arched collars while being played by a non-Asian actor, Charles Middleton. **Source**: unknown (Henry MacRae Prod. / Universal Pictures), Flash Gordon Conquers the Universe (1940) 1, public domain.

The Unseen Fight: Breaking the Mold for Asian Talent in Hollywood

In the sprawling narrative of Hollywood, Asian actors

have historically faced a narrow set of stereotypes that significantly limited their opportunities and the complexity of the roles they could inhabit. From the early 20th century, depictions usually veered into the Yellow Peril trope, portraying Asian men as sinister villains; Asian women were relegated to the Dragon Lady and submissive China Doll archetypes. These one-dimensional portrayals were not only inaccurate; they also severely constrained performers' artistic range and perpetuated harmful societal biases. Early Hollywood even resorted to yellowface—casting white actors in Asian roles—further erasing authentic Asian presence on screen.

While yellowface has largely been relegated to history, it has been replaced by the modern ethical dilemma of **whitewashing**. This occurs when a character originally written as Asian is recast with a white actor to increase perceived marketability. High-profile examples, such as Scarlett Johansson's casting in *Ghost in the Shell* and Tilda Swinton's casting in *Doctor Strange*, sparked intense ethical debates. Critics argue that this practice not only robs Asian actors of rare lead opportunities but also strips the narrative of its cultural specificity and authenticity

.

The ethical concern regarding these tropes stems from the invisibility gap. According to a 2023 report from the



Bruce Lee. **Source**: National General Pictures, Bruce Lee 1973 (cropped), public domain.

Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, while Asian Americans make up roughly 7% of the U.S. population, 3.4% of top-grossing films still featured only one or no Asian characters in a primary role. Ethically, this lack of representation constitutes a symbolic annihilation, in which a group is rendered invisible or insignificant in cultural consciousness.

The emergence of martial arts films in the mid-20th century, particularly with the rise of Bruce Lee, marked a pivotal moment. Lee shattered many existing stereotypes by presenting a powerful, masculine, and dignified Asian hero.

However, his immense impact inadvertently led to a new form of typecasting known as the kung fu trap. As Hollywood recognized the commercial appeal of martial arts, Asian actors often found themselves pigeonholed into action-hero or model-minority roles—intelligent but lacking social skills, or hardworking but devoid of leadership qualities. This persistent typecasting reflected a reluctance to see Asian actors as versatile performers capable of embodying everyday individuals or complex dramatic figures.



Michelle Yeoh. **Source**: Harald Krichel creator QS:P170,Q640, Michelle Yeoh-2268, CC BY-SA 4.0.

This was the landscape that greeted Michelle Yeoh as she transitioned from Asian cinema to Hollywood. While her roles in *Tomorrow Never Dies* and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* showcased her incredible physical abilities, Yeoh consistently sought more diverse characters, demonstrating her

range in films such as *Memoirs of a Geisha* and *Crazy Rich Asians*. Her relentless pursuit of depth culminated in her starring performance in *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. In this film, Yeoh plays Evelyn Wang, an immigrant laundromat owner grappling with family dysfunction and financial woes. While the film incorporates her martial arts background, it is fundamentally a story about an ordinary woman, allowing her to transcend the action-star label.

Michelle Yeoh's historic win of the Academy Award for Best Actress in 2023—the first for an Asian person in a lead category—signaled a significant shift in the recognition of Asian talent. Her win, alongside Ke Huy Quan's Best Supporting Actor win, validated Asian narratives and demonstrated that universally resonant stories can be told with predominantly Asian casts. This success also highlights a broader ethical shift toward inclusive production. The film's impact is often attributed to the directors working closely with the cast to ensure the immigrant experience was portrayed with nuance rather than cliché. This underscores that media ethics is not just about who is on screen, but who is in the writer's room and the

director's chair, ensuring that stories are told *with* a community rather than merely *about* them.

Minority Exclusion and Stereotypes

In the fall of 1999, the Big Four television networks released a slate of 26 new programs that featured zero African Americans in leading roles. This prompted immediate protests and boycotts from the NAACP



While aimed at highlighting civil rights struggles, *The Help* faced widespread criticism for reinforcing white savior tropes and relying on flattened stereotypes of Black domestic workers whose complex lives were centered primarily around serving white families. **Source**: MOVIES FOREVER, HISTORIAS CRUZADAS – THE HELP cropped, CC BY-NC 2.0.

and the National Council of La Raza (now UnidosUS). Under intense public pressure, networks created high-level diversity executive positions to oversee progress. While the creation of VP of Diversity roles was a milestone, the ethics of these positions have come under scrutiny. Following a surge in hiring in 2020, many media companies saw an exodus of those serving in diversity and inclusion roles. By 2024 and 2025, they began eliminating these roles or reducing their budgets. This check-the-box approach to ethics suggests that, for many media conglomerates, diversity initiatives may be treated as a public-relations response to social pressure rather than a permanent structural commitment to equity.

While the U.S. population has become more than 40% non-White, the ethical struggle for representation persists—now split between a more inclusive streaming landscape and a lagging traditional media sector. Recent data from the UCLA Hollywood Diversity Report 2024 reveals this stark divide. In 2023, streaming platforms reached a landmark: people of color made up 45% of lead actors, marking the first time they reached proportional representation. Conversely, theatrical films and broadcast television remained under 25%. This suggests that while digital-first platforms have embraced diversity to cater to a global, younger audience, legacy media structures remain tethered to outdated casting models. The ethical concern is not merely about who is on screen, but who

holds the greenlight power; behind the scenes, people of color still account for less than 30% of directors, writers, and show creators, often resulting in stories that lack cultural nuance.

Media professionals, as creators and disseminators of content, bear significant responsibility for shaping public perceptions. As media ethicist Leonard M. Baynes argued, "Since we live in a relatively segregated country...broadcast television and its images and representations are very important because television can be the common meeting ground for all Americans." This sentiment remains profoundly relevant in the digital age, where the media's influence is even more pervasive. Historians and social scientists have drawn clear correlations between mass media portrayals of minority groups and public perceptions
of these groups. For example, in 1999, after hundreds of complaints by African Americans that they could not get taxis to pick them up, the city of New York launched a crackdown, threatening to revoke the licenses of cab drivers who refused to stop for African American customers. When interviewed by reporters, many cab drivers blamed their actions on fears of being robbed or of being asked to drive to dangerous neighborhoods
—fears often fueled by negative media portrayals. This correlation between media imagery and real-world safety persists in the age of ride-sharing apps. While digital platforms

intended to reduce bias through blind matching, studies of algorithmic bias have shown that drivers may still cancel rides in certain neighborhoods based on racialized perceptions of danger cultivated by local news crime blotters and sensationalist social media accounts like *Nextdoor*.



Both the original 1961 film and stage adaptations of *West Side Story* have faced criticism for reinforcing flattened Latino stereotypes by leaning into exaggerated accents, gang caricatures, and uniform depictions of Puerto Rican immigrants written primarily through a non-Latino lens. **Source**: From West Side Story, George Chakiris in West Side Story , public domain.

Racial stereotypes also continue to infiltrate news reporting. Journalists, editors, and reporters are still predominantly White. According to the 2019 Newsroom Diversity Survey by the News Leaders Association, people of color constituted 21.9% of newsroom employees in U.S. print and online newsrooms.

While an improvement over earlier decades, this figure still falls short of reflecting the U.S. population's diversity, particularly in leadership and decision-making roles. In the news media, racial minorities can still be disproportionately cast in the role of villains or troublemakers, or their stories are framed through a lens of crime or poverty, which in turn shapes public perceptions about these groups. Media critics Robert Entman and Andrew Rojecki point out that images of African Americans on welfare, African American violence, and urban crime in African American communities "facilitate the construction of menacing imagery." Similarly, studies have shown that when news outlets do cover Latino issues, the portrayals can often be negative or simplistic, focusing on immigration or crime rather than the community's diverse contributions and concerns. Furthermore, journalists and reporters have been criticized for a tendency toward reductive presentations of complex issues involving minorities, such as the religious and racial tensions fueled by events like the September 11 attacks. By reducing these conflicts to opposing frames—simplified and often polarized perspectives—
the news media can inadvertently help create a greater sense of separation
between diverse communities and the dominant culture.

Since the late 1970s, major professional journalism organizations in the United States—such as the Newspaper

Association of America (now the News/Media Alliance), News Leaders Association (formerly the American Society of News Editors), Society for Professional Journalists, and Radio Television Digital News Association—have consistently included greater ethnic diversity as a primary goal or ethical imperative. However, progress has been slow. The American Society of Newspaper Editors famously delayed the target year to achieve newsroom parity with U.S. demographics to 2025; it is clear the industry fell significantly short of this goal, and as newsrooms shrink due to economic pressures, the "last in, first out" phenomenon often hits minority journalists hardest, stagnating diversity efforts. Ethically, this failure has prompted a shift in focus: rather than just counting heads in the room, media advocates are now prioritizing equity in power, questioning why newsroom leadership remains overwhelmingly White even when entry-level staff is more diverse.

Because mainstream media has historically failed to provide consistent, authentic representation, many minorities have turned to platforms where they control the narrative. Legacy networks like Univision and BET paved the way, while the modern landscape is defined by an explosion of independent digital content on platforms like Substack and Patreon. From ALLBLK to hyper-local newsletters and TikTok creators, these platforms thrive because they offer the cultural nuance that legacy media has struggled to provide.

While some critics argue that niche media might erode a

common cultural ground, their growth underscores a vital ethical truth: when mainstream sources fail to be inclusive, the audience will seek out—or create—the authenticity they deserve. This shift demonstrates that in a hyper-competitive media environment, diversity is no longer just an ethical imperative; it is a mechanical necessity for survival.



Tyler Perry. **Source**: AMFM STUDIOS LLC, Tyler Perry Interview 2016, CC BY 3.0.

Building His Own Hollywood: Tyler Perry's Blueprint for Black Media

Tyler Perry's journey from a struggling playwright to a media mogul is a testament to his unique vision, entrepreneurial spirit, and unwavering commitment to an often-underserved audience. His contributions to mass media extend

across theater, film, and television, fundamentally altering the landscape of Black representation and independent production. While he first cultivated a loyal following through the Chitlin' Circuit of Black theaters with his iconic character, Madea, his current influence is global, solidified by massive multi-year production deals with streaming giants like Netflix and Amazon.

One of Perry's most significant contributions is his d istinctive and highly efficient business model. Unlike traditional Hollywood productions that involve lengthy development cycles and multiple layers of approval, Perry operates at remarkable speed and with remarkable autonomy. This self-sufficient approach culminated in the establishment of Tyler Perry Studios (TPS) in Atlanta, Georgia. Opened in 2019 on a 330-acre former military base, TPS is one of the largest film production studios in the United States, making Perry the first African American to own a major film studio outright. This ownership provides Perry with unparalleled creative freedom and the infrastructure to produce a vast amount of content independently.

However, in 2024, Perry made headlines by halting a planned $800 million expansion of his Atlanta

studio. This decision was a direct response to the rapid advancement of generative AI video technologies. Perry expressed ethical concerns that AI could soon render massive physical sets and large crews obsolete, potentially decimating the very jobs he worked to create. This AI freeze serves as a case study in how media moguls must weigh the efficiency of new technology against the social responsibility of maintaining human employment in the creative arts.

Beyond his projects, Perry has played a crucial role in creating opportunities for Black talent, both in front of and behind the camera. He has often asserted that his productions have helped create more Black millionaires than any studio in Hollywood combined. Yet, his single-author production model has sparked an ethical debate regarding labor and mentorship. By writing and directing almost every episode of his series himself—often without a traditional writers' room—he has been criticized by the WGA and industry peers for gatekeeping opportunities. Critics argue that a true blueprint for Black media should involve passing the pen to a new generation of writers to ensure a diversity of voices and higher production standards.

Perry's work also remains the subject of a significant quality-versus-quantity debate. While fans adore characters like Madea for being relatable matriarchs,

critics, including filmmaker Spike Lee, have accused the work of relying on simplistic melodrama or buffoonery that can reinforce negative stereotypes. Perry consistently defends these choices, emphasizing that he creates content for an audience that mainstream media ignores. This tension raises an ethical question for creators: is the primary duty to achieve prestige and high production values, or to provide rapid, accessible representation for an underserved community?

Tyler Perry's impact on the industry is an enduring legacy of total ownership. By owning his own studio, he has bypassed traditional Hollywood gatekeepers and demonstrated the immense commercial power of authentic Black storytelling. While his artistic style and labor practices remain subjects of debate, his ability to challenge industry structures has paved the way for independence and equity in the digital age.

Femininity in Mass Media



The Donna Reed Show reinforced mid-century female stereotypes by depicting the ideal woman almost exclusively as a submissive, impeccably dressed homemaker whose primary fulfillment stemmed from domestic chores and supporting her husband and children. **Source**: ABC Television, Shelley Fabares Paul Petersen Donna Reed Show 1962, public domain.

In the classic ABC sitcom *The Donna Reed Show*, actress Donna Reed portrayed a stay-at-home mother who filled her days with household chores, cooking, decorating, and community activities, all while impeccably dressed in pearls, heels, and stylish dresses. While such a traditional portrayal of femininity undoubtedly feels dated to modern audiences, stereotyped gender roles, though evolving, continue to thrive in various forms of mass media.

Women are still frequently represented in roles that, even if

not overtly subordinate, often align with traditional feminine attributes—emotional, nurturing, domestic, or sweet-natured. Conversely, if women deviate from these norms, they may still be portrayed as unattractively masculine, overly aggressive, crazy, or cruel. In TV dramas and sitcoms, women continue to be disproportionately cast in roles such as mothers, nurses, secretaries, and homemakers. However, there's a growing presence of women in professional and leadership roles. By contrast, men in film and television appear in their home environments less frequently than women do. They are generally characterized by attributes such as dominance, aggression, action, physical strength, and ambition. While there's an increasing push for more nuanced male characters, traditional masculinity often remains the default. Similarly, in legacy news media, men predominantly serve as authorities on specialized topics such as business, politics, and economics. At the same time, women reporters have historically been more likely to cover softer news, such as human-interest stories or lifestyle beats—though this trend is slowly shifting as more women occupy diverse beats and leadership positions.

Not only does the traditionally White male perspective often get presented as the standard, authoritative one, but the media itself frequently produces content that embodies the **male gaze**. This concept, coined by feminist film critic Laura Mulvey in 1975, refers to the way women and the world are depicted in visual arts and literature from a masculine, heterosexual perspective, often presenting women as sexual objects for the pleasure of a male viewer. This involves the camera (and thus the audience) lingering on female bodies, focusing on their physical



Film theorist Laura Mulvey coined the concept of the "male gaze" to explain how cinema presents women on screen through the perspective of a heterosexual male viewer, positioning female characters as passive objects of visual pleasure. **Source**: Mariusz Kubik, Laura Mulvey Fot Mariusz Kubik July 24 2010 02, CC BY 3.0.

appearance, and framing their narratives and value primarily in terms of their attractiveness to men. Media commentator Nancy Hass's observation that "shows that don't focus on men have to feature the sort of women that guys might watch" succinctly captures this pervasive dynamic. Feminist critics have long expressed concerns about how film, television, and print media define women by their sexuality, often

at the expense of their intelligence, leadership qualities, or multifaceted personalities

. In recent years, a counter-movement known as the female gaze has emerged, prioritizing a woman's perspective by focusing on her emotional journey and agency rather than her status as a visual object.

Inundated by images that conform to unrealistic beauty standards, women and girls can internalize at an early age that their value depends significantly on their physical attractiveness. This pressure is exacerbated by media portrayals featuring models who appear unrealistically thin (studies have shown models can be 23 percent thinner than the average woman), and the widespread use of digital editing programs like Photoshop, real-time AI Filters, and Facetune apps to conceal perceived flaws and blemishes. These tools allow creators to alter their appearance instantly, erasing pores and changing bone structure in videos that appear candid. This has led to digital dysmorphia, in which viewers—and the creators

themselves—become dissatisfied with their physical faces when compared with their AI-perfected digital versions.

This constant exposure contributes to body dissatisfaction and, in severe cases, has been correlated with the routine diagnosis of eating disorders in girls at increasingly younger ages, sometimes as early as eight or nine. Furthermore, ageism remains a significant issue for women in media; while the majority of female characters on television are often in their 20s and 30s, the percentage of female characters plummets significantly in their 40s and beyond. In contrast, male characters remain prominently featured at older ages. This pressure to embody a youthful ideal often leads older actresses to undergo surgical enhancements to maintain their careers.

A prominent modern example of this double standard occurred in 2022, when veteran news anchor Lisa LaFlamme was abruptly ousted from her position. Public outcry followed reports that a senior executive had questioned who approved her decision to "let her hair go grey" during the pandemic. This incident underscored that even for women at the pinnacle of journalism, the requirement to maintain a youthful, traditional aesthetic remains a significant, gendered barrier to career longevity that their male counterparts rarely face.



Actor and activist Geena Davis established the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media to collect data and advocate for increasing female representation, reducing gender stereotyping, and empowering women both on and off screen in Hollywood. **Source**: David Shankbone creator QS:P170,Q12899557, Geena Davis at the 2009 Tribeca Film Festival, CC BY 3.0.

In addition to the prevalence of gender stereotypes, a disproportionate ratio of men to women has historically worked in the mass media, both in front of and behind the scenes. While women slightly outnumber men in the general population, their representation in creative and leadership roles has lagged. According to the

Center for the Study of Women in Television & Film's 2024 *Celluloid Ceiling* report, women comprised only 16% of directors and 20% of writers on the top 250 films. For streaming television series, women accounted for 36% of creators, 32% of directors, and 34% of writers. These figures, while showing some incremental gains over decades, still indicate a significant disparity. Communications researcher Martha Lauzen's argument remains highly relevant: "When women have more powerful roles in the making of a movie or TV show, we know that we also get more powerful female characters on-screen, women who are more real and more multi-dimensional."

The #MeToo movement, which gained significant momentum in 2017 following revelations of widespread sexual harassment and assault in Hollywood and beyond, has had a profound impact on discussions surrounding gender in media. By empowering survivors to share their stories and holding influential individuals accountable, the movement forced a reckoning with deeply entrenched patriarchal structures and abusive workplace cultures. In the media industry, #MeToo led to the downfall of numerous prominent figures, from executives and producers to actors and journalists, who had previously operated with impunity.

The movement has spurred significant shifts, including increased awareness of gender-based discrimination and

harassment, a greater emphasis on workplace safety and accountability, and a renewed push for diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. While progress is ongoing and challenges persist, #MeToo has undeniably contributed to a more critical examination of gender dynamics on screen and behind the scenes, encouraging the creation of more nuanced female characters, promoting female storytellers, and fostering environments where women feel safer to work and speak out. It has highlighted the interconnectedness of representation, power, and ethical conduct in the mass media.

Sexual Content in Public Communication

The representation of sex in entertainment presents a complex web of ethical considerations, prompting crucial discussions around



Just like modern times, sexual imagery was used to advertise goods and services. **Source**: A.J.Co. (Lifetime: na (–work for hire for Andrew Jergens Co, Cincinnati), 1916-skin-touch-soap-ad, public domain.

artistic intent versus gratuitousness and exploitation. The challenge lies in discerning whether sexual acts depicted in the media serve a narrative purpose, develop characters, or explore profound themes, or if they are merely included for shock value, titillation, or to exploit performers. This distinction is vital for maintaining ethical standards within the industry.

Beyond the portrayal of the acts themselves, the ethics of

sex in entertainment also extend to representation and societal impact. A significant concern is whether these depictions reinforce negative stereotypes, perpetuate harmful power dynamics, or normalize exploitation. For instance, if content consistently portrays women as mere objects of desire or in subordinate roles, it can subtly contribute to broader societal inequalities. This concern has led to evolving industry standards and practices, notably the widespread adoption of intimacy coordinators. These professionals are now common on film and television sets, working to ensure the safety, comfort, and agency of actors during scenes involving nudity, simulated sex, or intimate contact. Their role is to choreograph scenes with consent, establish boundaries, and ensure that the artistic vision is met without exploitation or discomfort for the performers.

In the realm of public communication, creators across all forms of media universally acknowledge that sexual content—whether explicitly displayed, subtly hinted at through innuendo, or overtly presented—is a powerful magnet for audience attention. The enduring advertising cliché, sex sells, manifests across the mass media through an inexhaustible array of products linked to erotic imagery or innuendo, from cosmetics and cars to hamburgers and beer. Most often, this sexualized advertising content features the female body, in part or in whole, in provocative or suggestive poses, sometimes with little or no logical connection to the product being sold. By linking these

disparate elements, advertisers effectively market the concept of desire itself, leveraging primal human attraction.



The timeless marketing principle "sex sells" has adapted to the social media era through strategically crafted thirst traps designed to tease audiences on mainstream platforms and channel them into paying subscribers on OnlyFans. **Source**: Gguillory25001, Ashley Guillory onlyfans creator 04, cropped, CC BY-SA 4.0.

The sex-sells model has shifted from traditional billboards to the subscription economy. Many social media influencers use thirst traps—highly sexualized photos on public platforms like Instagram—to funnel followers toward paid, adult-oriented sites like OnlyFans. This creates an ethical gatekeeping crisis, as these public-facing teasers are often accessible to minors, blurring

the lines between mainstream influence and adult entertainment.

Historically, filmmakers in the 1920s and 1930s also attracted audiences with content considered scandalous for their era. Before the strict 1934 Hays Code, which placed significant restrictions on indecent content in movies, films featured erotic dances, male and female nudity, references to homosexuality, and sexual violence. D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance* includes scenes with topless actresses, as does *Ben Hur*. In Warner Bros.' *Female*, the leading lady, the head of a major car company, engaged in sexual exploits with her male employees—a storyline that would never have passed the Hays Code a year later. Paramount Pictures even withdrew its 1932 comedy *Trouble in Paradise* from circulation after the institution of the Hays Code because of its frank discussion of sexuality. Similarly, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1931), which featured a prostitute as one of its main characters, was banned under the code. In the 1960s, as the sexual revolution led to increasingly permissive attitudes toward sexuality in American culture, the MPAA rating system replaced the Hays Code. This rating system, designed to warn parents about potentially objectionable material in films, effectively allowed filmmakers to include sexually explicit content without fear of widespread public protest, leading to a greater frequency of such content in cinema. The eventual dismantling of the Code and the

advent of the MPAA rating system were ethical shifts reflecting changing societal norms and a move towards viewer discretion.

Similarly, while a significant moment for Black representation in cinema, some Blaxploitation films from the 1970s present ethical dilemmas regarding sexual depiction. While empowering in their portrayal of strong Black protagonists, some films were



Melvin Van Peebles' groundbreaking 1971 film *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* ignited the Blaxploitation film movement, revolutionizing American cinema by demonstrating the commercial power of Black-led stories and empowering Black audiences with unprecedented depictions of systemic defiance. **Source**: Employee(s) of Cinemation Industries, Sweet sweetback poster, public domain.

criticized for exploiting Black female sexuality through gratuitous nudity and scenes that reinforced problematic stereotypes about hypersexuality or violence against women, particularly when such scenes felt unnecessary to the plot and served primarily for titillation. This highlights the ongoing tension between artistic freedom, commercial viability, and the ethical responsibility of representation.

Many media critics do not lament the mere appearance of sex in the media, but instead its often unrealistic and problematic portrayal. This can be harmful to society, as mass media act as important socialization agents, informing people about the norms, expectations, and values of their culture. Sex, as many films, TV shows, music videos, and song lyrics present it, often occurs frequently and casually, divorced from emotional depth or realistic consequences. Rarely do these media portrayals adequately address potential risks like sexually transmitted infections or unwanted pregnancies. Furthermore, actors and models depicted in sexual relationships in the media almost universally conform to narrow ideals of beauty—thinner, younger, and conventionally attractive characteristics than the average adult. This creates unrealistic expectations about the necessary ingredients for a satisfying sexual relationship and contributes to body image issues.

Madonna's "Like a Prayer" music video from 1989 sparked immense controversy and ethical debate, particularly regarding

its blending of religious iconography with overt sexual themes. The video featured Madonna dancing provocatively in a church, stigmata, and kissing a Black saint, leading to accusations of blasphemy and sexualizing religious symbols. Pepsi, which had a sponsorship deal with Madonna for the song, faced boycotts and ultimately pulled its advertising, illustrating the ethical tightrope corporations walk when associating with controversial artistic expressions that challenge societal norms, especially concerning sex and sacred imagery. The moral debate centered on artistic freedom versus religious offense and potential exploitation of religious symbols for commercial gain.

This outrage marketing continues in the digital age. In 2021, artist Lil Nas X sparked a similar ethical debate with his "Montero (Call Me By Your Name)" video, which blended hellish, biblical imagery with queer sexual themes—much like Madonna's deal with Pepsi. In addition, Lil Nas X's Satan Shoes collaboration with MSCHF resulted in a lawsuit from Nike. Ethically, these cases highlight how artists use sacred subversion to trigger the media's outrage algorithms, ensuring their content goes viral by offending traditional sensibilities.



Media critic Anita Sarkeesian became a central target of the #Gamergate harassment campaign after her web series, *Tropes vs. Women in Video Games*, exposed systemic misogyny in gaming culture and ignited a fierce debate over online hostility and gender representation in media. **Source**: Anita Sarkeesian, Anita Sarkeesian smiling, CC BY-SA 2.0.

Beyond the Joystick: Unmasking Online Misogyny in Gaming

The broader ethical discussion surrounding media and identity encompasses a wide range of issues, from the portrayal of sexuality to the exploitation of performers.

However, the intersection of gender and online harassment dramatically exploded into public consciousness with #Gamergate, a contentious online movement that began in 2014. While ostensibly centered on ethics in video game journalism, this phenomenon quickly devolved into widespread, vicious attacks on women in the gaming industry and digital media.

At the heart of the initial controversy was game developer Zoë Quinn. She became a primary target when an ex-boyfriend falsely accused her of using personal relationships to influence journalists—accusations that were quickly debunked. The disproportionate and venomous attacks directed at Quinn revealed deep-seated misogynistic undercurrents within a vocal segment of the gaming community. This was not merely a debate about journalistic standards; it was a furious backlash against women gaining visibility in a space traditionally dominated by men, fueled by a perceived threat to a male-centric gaming identity.

The harassment tactics employed during #GamerGate were severe and often terrifying. Targets, including Quinn, media critic Anita Sarkeesian, and developer Brianna Wu, faced relentless abuse such as **doxing** (publishing private home addresses) and **swatting**

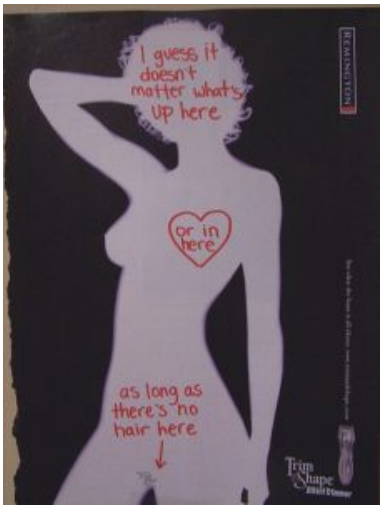
(making false police reports to provoke an armed response at a victim's home). Beyond the immediate harm to individuals, media ethicists view #GamerGate as a beta test for modern coordinated inauthentic behavior. The movement used anonymous message boards to organize dogpiling—a tactic in which hundreds of accounts flood a target's mentions to silence them. This created a playbook for digital authoritarianism and disinformation campaigns that would later be seen in global political elections.

In response to this onslaught, advocates for greater inclusivity—often labeled derogatorily as SJWs (Social Justice Warriors) or, more recently, woke—pushed for safer online spaces. The incident forced a global reckoning regarding platform ethics. For years, social media companies leaned on a hands-off approach, citing free speech. However, #GamerGate proved that unchecked harassment actually *stifles* speech by driving vulnerable voices out of the public square. This led to stronger community guidelines and a debate over whether platforms should be viewed as neutral utilities or as publishers with an ethical duty to curate a safe environment.

Regardless of its stated intentions, #GamerGate left an

indelible mark. It is widely viewed by researchers as a contributing factor to the rise of the alt-right and other extremist movements, due to its targeting of perceived cultural elites and its cultivation of an aggrieved, anti-establishment online identity. The cycle repeated as recently as 2024, with the Sweet Baby Inc. controversy, in which a narrative consulting firm was targeted using the same gatekeeping tactics established a decade prior. These events remain a stark reminder of how discussions around gender in media can escalate into real-world harm, requiring constant ethical vigilance from moderators, journalists, and developers alike.

The adverse effects these unrealistic portrayals have on women particularly concern social psychologists, as women's bodies frequently symbolize the primary means of



Sexual objectification: Women's bodies are often headless or dismembered into legs, breasts, or thighs in media portrayals (Adbusters). **Source**: Chelsea K – Adbust – CC BY-NC 2.0.

introducing sexual content into media targeted at both men and women. Media activist Jean Kilbourne points out that "women's bodies were often dismembered in ads–just legs or breasts or torsos were featured," which reinforces the message that women are objects rather than whole human beings. *Adbusters*, a magazine that critiques mass media, particularly advertising, frequently highlights the sexual objectification of women's bodies in its spoof advertisements, underscoring how advertising often sends unrealistic and harmful messages about women's bodies and sexuality. Additionally, many researchers

note that in women's magazines, advertising, and music videos, women often receive the implicit—and sometimes explicit—message that their primary concern should be attracting and sexually satisfying men. Furthermore, some studies suggest that the increase in entertainment featuring sexual violence may negatively affect how young men behave toward women.

Young women and men are especially vulnerable to the effects of media portrayals of sexuality. Psychologists have long noted that adolescents and children obtain much of their information and many of their opinions about sex through TV, film, and, increasingly, online media, including social media platforms. Research consistently indicates a high exposure to sexual content among adolescents, which can shape their attitudes toward sex and, in some cases, correlate with earlier initiation of sexual activity. Jean Kilbourne's argument remains poignant: sex in American media "has far more to do with trivializing sex than with promoting it. We are offered a pseudo-sexuality that makes it far more difficult to discover our own unique and authentic sexuality."

The #MeToo movement profoundly impacted how sexual content is created and managed within the entertainment industry. By exposing widespread patterns of sexual harassment, assault, and abuse of power

, #MeToo forced a critical re-evaluation of long-accepted

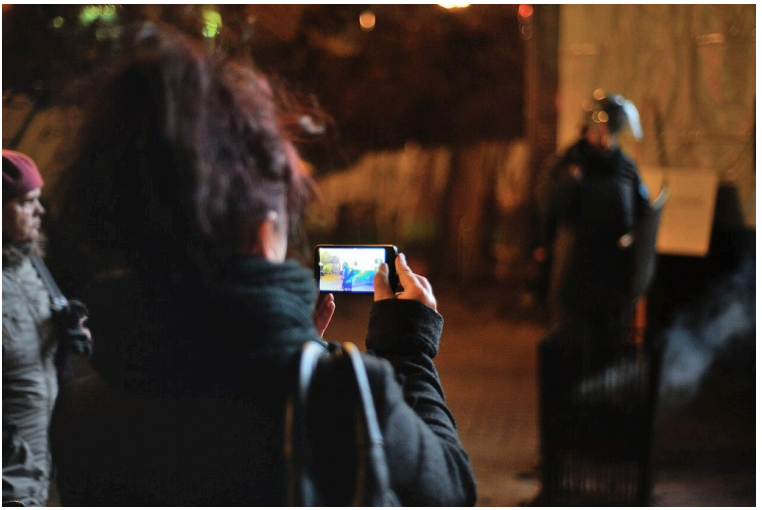
industry practices. It brought to light the vulnerability of actors, particularly women and marginalized individuals, during the filming of intimate scenes, where power imbalances could be exploited.

While #MeToo addressed physical safety on set, the 2020s introduced a new frontier of exploitation: non-consensual deepfake pornography. Using generative AI, bad actors can graft the faces of celebrities or private individuals onto sexual videos without their consent. Ethically, this represents the ultimate male gaze—the total theft of a person's likeness for sexual gratification. This has led to a push for new legal and ethical frameworks, such as the NO FAKES and TAKE IT DOWN acts, to protect an individual's right to their own digital identity.

Ethics in the Age of Algorithmic and Digital Interconnectivity

As the digital landscape matures, the ethical challenges facing media practitioners and consumers have moved beyond simple questions of accuracy or bias. The current era is defined by decentralized creation and automated distribution, in which millions of citizen journalists and opaque mathematical formulas have replaced traditional information gatekeepers.

This section explores three critical frontiers that define the modern ethical landscape.



While citizen journalism empowers everyday individuals to capture and share news instantly, it raises growing concerns that untrained reporters may lack professional standards, leading to the spread of unverified information, privacy violations, and unethical reporting. **Source**: Kuba Bożanowski from Warsaw, Poland, Female using a smartphone to take photographs, CC BY 2.0.

The Ethics of Tragedy Porn and Citizen Journalism

The democratization of media technology has fundamentally altered the role of the witness. For most of the 20th century, the ethical burden of capturing human suffering fell upon professional photojournalists. These individuals operated

under institutional codes of conduct, such as those provided by the National Press Photographers Association, which balance the public's right to know against a victim's right to privacy. However, in the 2020s, the ubiquitous smartphone has turned every bystander into a potential broadcaster. This shift has birthed a phenomenon known as tragedy porn—the recording and distribution of human suffering specifically for social capital, viral engagement, or monetary gain

.

Ethically, this practice directly violates the ethics of care, a moral theory that emphasizes the importance of interpersonal relationships and the humanity of the subject. In traditional journalism, a photo of a grieving individual is ideally framed to evoke empathy or demand policy change. In the hands of an untrained citizen journalist, that same image is often captured without consent and uploaded instantly to platforms like X or TikTok. The primary ethical failure here is the dehumanization of the subject. When a camera is used as a shield to avoid rendering aid—a phenomenon known as the bystander effect amplified by technology—the person in the frame ceases to be a human being in need and becomes a content asset.

Furthermore, the speed of digital distribution creates a unique ethical harm: notification trauma. Numerous families have learned of the death of a loved one by scrolling through a social media feed and seeing a viral video of an accident or crime scene before official authorities could contact them. This

real-time reporting lacks the ethical filter of delay for dignity. Professional newsrooms often wait to release names or specific imagery until the next of kin is notified; citizen journalists, incentivized by the first-to-post reward system of social media algorithms, have no such mandate.

The ethics of citizen journalism also intersect with the concept of vigilante media**.** This occurs in videos where citizens film others in private disputes. While sometimes used for accountability—as seen in the vital role of bystander video in documenting police misconduct—it is frequently used to ruin reputations over minor social infractions. The lack of due process in trial by social media means that a 15-second clip, stripped of context, can lead to permanent harassment for the subject.

To rectify this, media literacy education must advocate for a digital code of conduct for citizens. This includes the "Help First, Film Second" rule and a commitment to protecting victims' identities in sensitive moments. As the distinction between the press and the public continues to vanish, the moral responsibility of the journalist must be adopted by the individual holding the phone.



The explosive expansion of data centers has raised severe environmental concerns due to their massive electricity demands, heavy reliance on fossil fuels, strain on local water resources for cooling systems, and significant carbon footprint. **Source**: Chad Davis, Google Data Center, Council Bluffs Iowa (49062863796), cropped, CC BY 2.0.

Environmental Media Ethics

Digital media is often discussed in ethereal terms—the cloud, wireless, or virtual space. This language suggests a weightless existence, but the reality of modern media is profoundly physical and environmentally taxing. Environmental media ethics is the study of the moral obligations that media creators, tech conglomerates, and consumers have toward the planet. For decades, media ethics focused on the content of the message; today, it must also include the container and the conduit.

The most pressing ethical concern in this domain is the

carbon and water footprint of Artificial Intelligence and Data Centers

. Streaming 4K video to a global audience or training a Large Language Model requires staggering amounts of electricity. Data centers now account for nearly 3% of global electricity consumption, a figure that is rising as AI integration becomes standard. An ethical analysis must ask: Is the convenience of an AI-generated image or a personalized movie recommendation worth the depletion of local water tables used to cool the servers? Many of these digital factories are located in drought-prone regions, creating a conflict between the global demand for data and the local need for water.



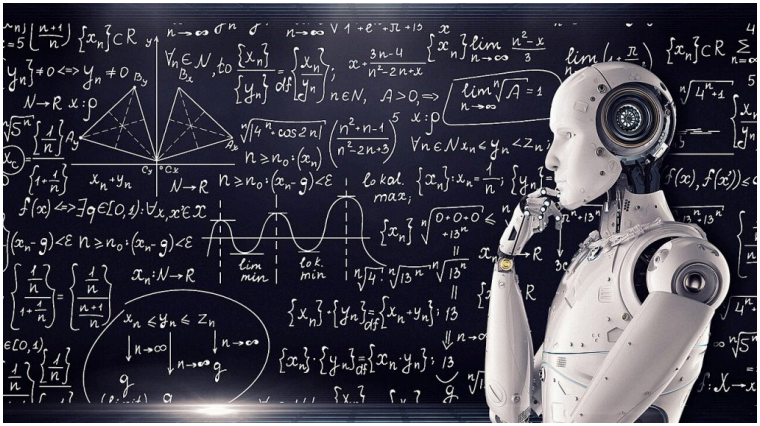
Driven by rapid technological turnover, shortened product lifespans, and skyrocketing consumer demand, global electronic waste has become the world's fastest-growing domestic waste stream, drastically outpacing official recycling infrastructure. **Source**: Curtis Palmer, Electronic waste, CC BY 2.0.

Beyond the infrastructure, the influencer economy drives a specific type of environmental harm known as **consumption-as-content**. On platforms like YouTube and TikTok, haul videos and unboxing videos rank among the most popular genres. These videos do not just entertain; they act as high-powered advertisements that foster a culture of planned obsolescence. Ethically, the influencer acts as a catalyst for a disposable lifestyle. When a creator promotes a new wardrobe every week, it demonstrates an ethical complicity in the environmental degradation caused by textile waste and exploitative labor practices.

Then there is the issue of electronic waste (e-waste). The media industry encourages a rapid upgrade cycle for smartphones, cameras, and monitors. Very little of this hardware is recycled responsibly; instead, much of it ends up in landfills in the Global South, where it leaks toxic chemicals into the soil. The ethical responsibility of the media

professional should include pursuing sustainable production. This involves using green sets, reducing travel through remote production, and using the platform to challenge, rather than champion, unbridled consumerism.

Ultimately, environmental media ethics demands a shift toward **slow media.** Just as the Slow Food movement challenged fast-food culture, slow media encourages valuing quality over quantity and recognizing that every click has a physical cost. Consumers have an ethical duty to be digital conservationists, choosing lower-resolution streams when possible and supporting creators who prioritize ecological transparency.



The integration of artificial intelligence into mass communication presents major ethical dilemmas surrounding copyright infringement, algorithmic bias, the automated spread of hyper-realistic misinformation, and the erosion of human editorial oversight. **Source**: https://www.vpnsrus.com/, Artificial Intelligence & AI & Machine Learning – 30212411048 , cropped, CC BY 2.0.

Algorithmic Radicalization

In the traditional media model, human beings acted as gatekeepers. Editors, producers, and publishers made choices in accordance with journalistic standards and community norms. Nowadays, a recommendation algorithm serves as the primary gatekeeper. These complex mathematical formulas determine what billions of people see on their feeds every second. However, these algorithms are

not programmed for truth or ethical balance; they are programmed to optimize engagement.

The ethical failure of engagement-based modeling lies in the fact that humans are neurologically wired to pay more attention to content that triggers fear, outrage, or curiosity. This has led to algorithmic radicalization. When a user engages with a relatively mainstream piece of content, the algorithm—seeking to keep the user on the platform—suggests a slightly more extreme version of that topic. Over time, this creates a rabbit-hole effect, where the user is fed a diet of increasingly polarized, conspiratorial, or extremist content.

Ethically, this represents a failure of institutional duty. Tech giants often argue that they are neutral platforms, simply providing the content users desire. However, media ethicists argue that these platforms are, in fact, choice architects. By deciding the order and prominence of information, they are shaping the user's reality. If an algorithm suggests harmful or self-harm content because it engages a vulnerable user, the platform is prioritizing profit over human safety.

This leads to the fragmentation of truth. When algorithms create filter bubbles, different segments of society no longer share a common set of facts. This is not just a social nuisance; it is a threat to the ethical functioning of democracy. Without a shared reality, civil discourse becomes impossible. The ethical focus has shifted to algorithmic transparency. Media advocates have demanded that companies allow independent audits of how their code prioritizes information.

There is also the ethical question of cognitive liberty. This involves the right to an unmanipulated mind. When algorithms use **dark patterns**—design choices that trick users into certain behaviors—they are infringing on individual autonomy. The media professional of the future must be more than a storyteller; they must be an algorithmic literacy specialist, helping audiences understand how they are being targeted. The industry's ethical imperative is to move toward value-sensitive design, in which the code's goal is to support the user's well-being rather than boost time on the device.

14.4 NEWS MEDIA AND ETHICS



The relentless 24/7 news cycle has transformed journalism into a continuous race for instant engagement, often prioritizing speed, sensationalism, and speculation over depth and thorough verification. **Source**: Image by signuversum on Pixabay.

Now more than ever, in an era dominated by a relentless 24/7 news cycle and the pervasive influence of social media, audiences expect news to arrive instantaneously. Journalists and news agencies face

unprecedented pressure to break stories rapidly, driven by intense competition from traditional outlets, digital-native competitors, and citizen journalists. In the current digital ecosystem, this pressure is intensified by recommendation algorithms. Platforms prioritize the earliest accounts of a story , rewarding the first to post with massive visibility while often burying slower, more meticulous reports. With this amplified demand for speed, upholding foundational standards of accuracy, fairness, and thorough verification becomes increasingly challenging.

This constant push-pull raises a critical question: What wins when ethical responsibility and bottom-line concerns conflict in the fast-paced world of news? As columnist Ellen Goodman observed decades ago, there has always been a fundamental tension in journalism between being first and being right. Her argument that "in today's amphetamine world of news junkies, speed trumps thoughtfulness too often" rings even truer in the current landscape, where the viral spread of unverified information can outpace careful reporting. The proliferation of user-generated content and the race to capture engagement often prioritize immediacy over meticulous fact-checking, contributing to the spread of misinformation and disinformation.

Furthermore, this haste often serves as a gateway to other ethical breaches, such as the use of unverified or manipulated imagery and the reliance on sensationalized headlines designed to stop a user's scroll. When speed is the primary metric of

success, publishers frequently discard the nuanced work of providing context and eliminating bias as a luxury. When reading the following sections, consider whether Goodman's prescient assessment of the news media's state continues to resonate in a hyper-connected, information-saturated environment where the mechanical need for speed has become an existential threat to journalistic integrity.



The continuous, four-day live television coverage of the assassination and funeral of President John F. Kennedy transformed broadcast journalism into the nation's primary real-time news source. It proved television's unique power to unite a grieving public in times of national crisis. **Source**: Walt Cisco, Dallas Morning News, JFK Motorcade GettyImages-517330536, public domain.

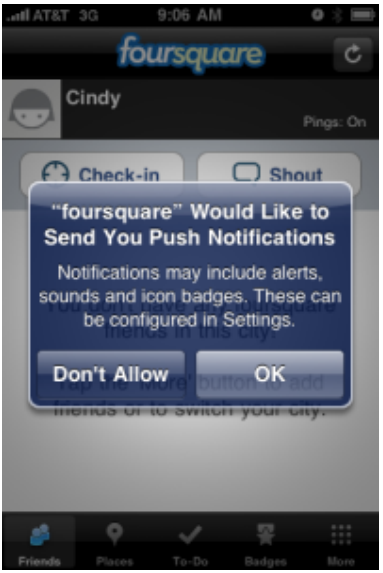
Immediate News Delivery

In 1916, a momentous event unfolded in the offices of *The New York American*. Technicians broadcast the first-ever breaking news coverage of an event: the (incorrect) results of the presidential election between Woodrow Wilson and Charles Evans Hughes. This historic broadcast marked a significant shift in how news was delivered, as American homes had previously received news once or twice a day in the form of a newspaper, with coverage lagging a day or more behind the incidents it reported. The advent of radio offered something newspapers could not: the immediate transmission of special events, a feature that would profoundly shape the future of news delivery.

For decades, the public turned to family radio for the latest news coverage. All of that changed, however, in 1963 with the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. CBS correspondent Dan Rather took television audiences live to "the corner window just below the top floor, where the assassin stuck out his .30-caliber rifle," and for the first time, people could see an event nearly as it occurred. This signified the beginning of round-the-clock news coverage, and the American public, while still relying on print news for detailed coverage, came to expect greater immediacy of major event reporting through TV and radio broadcasts.

Today, with the widespread availability of internet news and

the pervasive influence of social media, instant coverage has become the norm rather than the exception. The internet has largely replaced traditional TV and radio as the primary source for obtaining immediate information for many demographics. Digital platforms ensure that news—and often rumors or misinformation—circulate within seconds of an occurrence. Smartphone applications for outlets like *The New York Times* allow people to receive real-time alerts from almost anywhere, making news consumption a constant, on-demand experience.



While push notifications deliver instant alerts and vital updates, their constant pinging has fundamentally altered modern life by fragmenting human attention, fueling digital anxiety, and blurring the boundaries between urgent priorities and continuous distraction. **Source**: cindyli, foursquare>check in>push notification popup , CC BY-NC 2.0.

Through push notifications, news organizations can bypass traditional home pages and speak directly to a user's lock screen. Ethically, this creates a high-stakes environment where an alert sent to millions in error cannot be easily retracted. This pressure has led to the rise of the ghost alert, in which a notification is sent based on a rumor to capture the initial surge of traffic, with the actual story updated or corrected only after the user clicks through.

The development of the internet has democratized news media but fundamentally altered the structure of delivery. Traditional media outlets must now compete for a share of a fragmented audience. Online, newspapers can compete with broadcast media for immediate coverage by posting articles as soon as they are

written and supplementing them with multimedia content. The era of predictable deadlines has given way to a more agile, multi-platform landscape.

However, this shift has had a challenging effect on media revenues. News aggregators and social media platforms attract substantial traffic by compiling headlines from legacy news organizations. The revenue crisis has evolved into the rise of zero-click search. Search engines now use generative AI to summarize news stories directly in the user's feed, allowing readers to obtain the core facts of an event without ever clicking on the original news site. This constitutes a significant ethical dilemma, as platforms profit from newsrooms' expensive reporting without providing the traffic necessary to sustain them.

Reduced budgets, combined with increased pressure for immediacy, have altered how information gets reported. Newsrooms often prioritize producing first accounts quickly, allocating more resources to rapid distribution than to the painstaking process of gathering and verifying facts. Once a source releases news online, it spreads quickly, leaving staff less time for in-depth fact-checking and contextualization. This shift in focus has raised serious concerns about the overall quality and accuracy of news reporting.

As a result, certain stories may become viral sensations while other crucial investigative pieces go unnoticed. Algorithms now frequently dictate delivery speed and prioritize content that generates immediate emotional engagement. This

engagement trap incentivizes newsrooms to sensationalize breaking news to ensure visibility. Consequently, a meticulously verified but moderate report may become buried by a platform's code in favor of a faster, more inflammatory account.

While some digital-native organizations like *ProPublica* and *The Marshall Project* continue to invest in in-depth journalism through philanthropic funding, such ventures remain expensive. Most news organizations, strapped for funds (as illustrated by the graph below), know they must cater to the public demand for real-time updates. The ongoing tension between speed and accuracy remains the defining ethical struggle of modern journalism.



Source: ProPublica, ProPublica-logo-2026, public domain.

Funding Truth: ProPublica and the Philanthropic Future of Journalism

In an era when traditional newsrooms grapple with dwindling resources and the relentless demands of the 24/7 news cycle, *ProPublica* stands as a beacon of the resurgence of in-depth investigative journalism. Launched in 2008, this digital-native, nonprofit news organization has built a unique, impactful niche. It serves as a model for how philanthropic funding can sustain rigorous, public-interest reporting in the digital age.

ProPublica was the brainchild of Herbert and Marion Sandler, who committed an initial $10 million annually to the venture. Their mission was clear: to produce investigative journalism with moral force, shining a light on abuses of power and betrayals of public trust by government, business, and other institutions. This commitment to deep, often time-consuming investigations sets *ProPublica* apart from many news outlets increasingly pressured to prioritize speed and clicks. While the Sandlers founded the organization, its institutional stability is now maintained by a robust leadership team of veteran

editors and a board of directors committed to editorial independence.

From its inception, *ProPublica* adopted a digital-first model, recognizing the internet's potential for wide dissemination and innovative storytelling. Its strategy involved making its meticulously reported stories freely available to other news organizations, encouraging them to republish the content on their platforms. This collaborative approach, a significant departure from competitive, proprietary models, enabled ProPublica's work to reach vast audiences through partnerships with prominent outlets such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, NPR, and local news organizations. This strategy not only maximized the impact of their investigations but also helped to fill a growing void in investigative reporting as many traditional newsrooms cut back on such expensive endeavors.

ProPublica's funding model is primarily philanthropic, receiving significant support from major foundations such as the Knight Foundation and the MacArthur Foundation, as well as thousands of individual donors through a membership model. This heavy reliance on philanthropy introduces a unique ethical challenge: the potential for donor conflict of interest. To maintain credibility, ProPublica

implements a firewall policy that prohibits donors from seeing stories before publication or influencing editorial direction. Furthermore, the newsroom has established an ethical precedent by investigating industries or institutions associated with its own financial supporters, reinforcing the principle that in non-profit journalism, the moral force of the story must supersede the interests of the benefactor.

The impact of *ProPublica*'s work on journalism has been profound, inspiring the creation of other non-profit newsrooms such as *The Texas Tribune* and *The Marshall Project*. *ProPublica* measures its success not by clicks or ad revenue, but by the tangible impact its stories have—whether leading to policy changes, officials' resignations, or new legislation.

The organization has garnered numerous accolades, including multiple Pulitzer Prizes. Among its most profound stories are "The Deadly Choices at Memorial," which exposed harrowing medical decisions during Hurricane Katrina, and "An Unbelievable Story of Rape," which detailed the police mishandling of an investigation. More recently, the 2023–2024 "Friends of the Court" investigation serves as a premier case study in journalistic impact. By uncovering undisclosed luxury travel and real estate deals involving Supreme Court Justices, *ProPublica* triggered a national debate that culminated in the Supreme Court's 2023 decision to issue its first formal Code of Conduct. This outcome illustrates *ProPublica*'s primary ethical metric: success is measured by the tangible correction of systemic ethical failures within the highest levels of government.



A depiction of Leonard Leo, an American conservative lawyer and legal activist, created by the nonprofit group ProPublica. **Source**: ProPublica, ProPublica illustration of Leonard Leo, CC BY 3.0.

However, the success of the non-profit model has also brought new ethical and legal pressures. Critics have questioned whether high-impact investigative journalism constitutes political advocacy, which is restricted under tax-exempt status. This debate poses a fundamental question for the future of the industry: can a newsroom remain non-partisan while aggressively pursuing investigations that lead to the accountability of partisan officials? *ProPublica*'s survival depends on its ability to prove that its investigations are rooted in fact-based accountability, not political ideology. Its model serves as a vital blueprint for the future of news, proving that rigorous, public-interest reporting can thrive with dedicated support and a commitment to impact.

Social Responsibility of News Media



The social responsibility of a journalist is to serve the public interest by seeking and reporting the truth, holding powerful institutions accountable, and providing citizens with accurate, fair, and contextual information necessary for self-governance. **Source**: الاعلامی حموده, الاعلامی حموده, CC BY-SA 4.0.

The social responsibility of news media is a foundational principle of democratic societies, often articulated as the vital-information premise. The central purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with the accurate and reliable information they need to function in a free society. This principle serves as

the ethical bedrock for news reporting, guiding journalists in their crucial role within the public sphere.

A primary tenet of this responsibility is to present stories that genuinely meet citizens' needs. This necessitates an unwavering commitment to accuracy. Accuracy provides the foundation upon which everything else—context, interpretation, and debate—is built. This mandate has evolved into an active responsibility to fact-check. In an environment where deepfakes and AI-generated disinformation can go viral in seconds, news organizations must not only report the truth but also explicitly identify and debunk pervasive falsehoods that threaten public safety or democratic stability.

Presenting issues fairly is another critical component. This demands a rigorous avoidance of favoritism toward any organization, political group, or ideology. Journalists are expected to resist the temptation to inflate stories for sensation—a growing challenge in the attention economy. Transparency about sources is also vital. While every journalist possesses a unique perspective, news organizations must strive to maintain a clear distinction between objective news reports and subjective editorial content, avoiding false balance that gives disproportionate weight to fringe or debunked viewpoints.

Skepticism Required: The Carlson Ruling and the Shifting Sands of Media Truth



A Fox News protester. **Source**: Felton Davis, 17 FOX Lies (51266287287) , CC BY 2.0.

In a notable legal battle that illuminated the fine line between news and opinion in cable television, former Playboy model Karen McDougal filed a defamation lawsuit against Fox News and its then-top-rated host, Tucker Carlson. The suit stemmed from a December 2018 segment on *Tucker Carlson Tonight*, where Carlson discussed the catch-and-kill scheme involving payments made to McDougal and adult film actress Stormy Daniels to silence their

alleged affairs with Donald Trump before the 2016 presidential election

.

During the broadcast, Carlson stated, "Remember the facts of the story; these are undisputed. Two women approached Donald Trump and threatened to ruin his career and humiliate his family if he didn't give them money. Now, that sounds like a classic case of extortion." McDougal vehemently denied ever threatening Trump or engaging in extortion and argued that Carlson's characterization of her actions was false and defamatory, accusing her of a crime. She sought to hold Carlson and Fox News accountable for what she viewed as a baseless and damaging accusation.

Fox News's legal defense hinged on a crucial and widely discussed argument: that *Tucker Carlson Tonight* is fundamentally a commentary and opinion program, not a traditional news broadcast. Therefore, the defense contended, a reasonable viewer would not interpret Carlson's statements as factual assertions. The defense argued that Carlson's hyperbolic rhetoric and non-literal commentary were protected under the First Amendment as expressions of opinion, which are afforded greater legal latitude than statements of fact.



Karen McDougal. **Source**: Togienn, Karen McDougal_2011, CC BY-SA 4.0.

In September 2020, U.S. District Judge Mary Kay Vyskocil sided with Fox News, dismissing McDougal's lawsuit. In her ruling, Judge Vyskocil stated that "Given Mr. Carlson's reputation, any reasonable viewer arrives with an appropriate amount of skepticism about the statements he makes." She further

elaborated that Carlson's remarks were "rhetorical hyperbole and opinion commentary intended to frame a political debate, and as such, are not actionable as defamation." The judge noted that such increasingly barbed language is common in commentary on talk shows and that the program's general tenor should make it clear to viewers that Carlson is not stating facts.

This ruling created an ethical paradox. While Fox News legally branded Carlson's show as opinion to escape liability, the network simultaneously marketed him as a truth-teller to its audience. Ethically, this opinion shield allows networks to enjoy the high ratings of sensationalist rhetoric without the accountability of journalistic standards. It raises a fundamental question for media ethics: if a news organization argues in court that no reasonable viewer should take its host literally, is it still practicing journalism, or has it transitioned into pure entertainment?

However, the limits of this legal strategy were tested in 2023 during the *Dominion Voting Systems v. Fox News* lawsuit. Unlike the McDougal case, where Carlson's speech was deemed hyperbole, the court found that the repeated broadcasting of specific, false claims about election fraud crossed the line into factual assertion. Fox eventually settled for $787.5 million, the

largest media settlement in history. Together, these two cases define the legal boundaries of 21st-century media. While a host can ethically and legally share opinions about a person's character, they cannot present debunked conspiracies as news without facing steep financial penalties.

Following his 2023 departure from Fox News, Carlson transitioned to independent digital platforms, where he operates without the oversight of a traditional legal or editorial department. This shift illustrates a new ethical frontier: the rise of de-platformed influencers who continue to command massive audiences while being completely untethered from the institutional standards that govern broadcast television. The outcome of the Carlson case remains a significant point of contention regarding the nature of truth in a fractured, partisan media landscape.



Despite decades of diversity initiatives, American newsrooms remain disproportionately white compared to the nationwide population, leaving racial minority communities historically underrepresented in news coverage and editorial decision-making. **Source**: James Cridland from Brisbane, AU, RNW's newsroom – with the big central desk (4461774453), cropped, CC BY 2.0.

Journalism must also address the inherent complexity of multifaceted issues. In a media landscape where rapid reporting is the norm, audiences may find it tempting to gloss over nuances. However, oversimplifying issues to cater to public tastes or to craft a quick story can violate the premise of vital information, leaving citizens ill-equipped to engage with critical societal challenges.

Presenting diverse perspectives is equally fundamental. Democracy thrives on the broadest possible participation, making diversity within journalism paramount. This demands that newsroom staff represent the diverse races, genders, and backgrounds within society. According to the

2019 Newsroom Diversity Survey by the News Leaders Association, people of color constituted 21.9% of newsroom employees in U.S. print and online newsrooms. While an improvement from past decades, this figure still falls short of reflecting the nation's demographic makeup. Journalists should actively seek to speak for all groups in society, "not just those with attractive demographics," as the Committee of Concerned Journalists put it. Ignoring or underrepresenting certain citizens is a potent form of disenfranchisement. Furthermore, social responsibility includes a geographic dimension. The rise of **news deserts**—communities with no local source of reliable reporting due to newspaper closures—threatens the vital information that millions rely on, leading to decreased civic engagement and unmonitored local corruption.

Finally, a critical function of the news media, deeply rooted in the intentions of the U.S. Constitution's framers, is to monitor government and corporations. The press serves as a vital watchdog over those in positions of power. This role ensures that businesses conduct their affairs transparently and that government actions remain accountable to the public. The *Washington Post*'s investigation of the 1972 Watergate scandal remains the quintessential example of the media fulfilling this watchdog role. During Richard Nixon's presidency, *Post* journalists uncovered information linking government agencies and

officials to the break-in at the Democratic National Committee headquarters, part of an attempt to sabotage the Democratic campaign. Their persistent coverage increased public awareness and ultimately pressured the government, leading to investigations and prosecutions.

The modern watchdog function has expanded to include digital accountability. Today, news organizations fulfill their responsibility by investigating the algorithms of tech giants, scrutinizing how social media platforms handle user data, or exposing how AI models may exhibit bias in policing and healthcare. This ensures that even the most influential and technologically advanced entities operate with transparency and remain accountable to the public.

Characteristics of Reliable Journalism

When discussing the characteristics of reliable journalism, the foundational principles remain consistent, even as the media landscape rapidly evolves. While the pressure to be first is immense, many news organizations prioritize official confirmation over speed. For responsible journalists, ensuring accuracy remains a hallmark of the profession. This commitment has grown in importance in an age where the **verification gap**—the time between an event occurring and a journalist confirming its details

—is increasingly exploited by those spreading misinformation.

Various unions and associations worldwide have produced hundreds of journalistic codes of ethics. While they differ on specifics, they universally agree that the news media's top obligation is to report the truth. In journalism, truth is a practical concept: reporting facts as faithfully and accurately as possible. In modern times, this practical truth is achieved through verification architecture. This involves a multi-step process, such as geolocating social media footage and using forensic tools to detect AI-generated imagery. A reliable news organization does not just report what happened; it provides the digital evidence—the receipts—that allow a skeptical audience to verify the facts independently.

Along with an emphasis on truth, codes of ethics stress loyalty to citizens as a primary standard. A persistent tension exists between responsible journalism and the demands for profit, especially as media outlets face financial pressure from tech platforms. However, journalists must consistently prioritize the larger public interest above corporate or political pressures. Reliability is also built on a promise of sensitivity toward those involved in the news. Responsible journalists strive to balance the disclosure of newsworthy information with respect for individual privacy, never exposing private information solely for the sake of sensationalism.

Beyond the Textbook: Rethinking Infamous Media Ethics Cases



Brian Williams embellished his role in significant news stories while reporting for *NBC News*. **Source**: David Shankbone creator QS:P170,Q12899557, Brian Williams 2011 Shankbone , CC BY 3.0.

When discussing ethical breaches in journalism, the cases of Janet Cooke and Jayson Blair frequently emerge as textbook examples of plagiarism and fabrication. This prominence often raises a pertinent question: why are these cases so consistently highlighted when Black reporters constitute a relatively small proportion of the industry? According to a 2022 Pew Research survey of American journalists,

Black journalists make up only 6% of newsroom employees in U.S. print and online outlets. When two of the most frequently cited ethical villains come from a group that represents such a small fraction of the workforce, it suggests confirmation bias in journalism education.

Janet Cooke's 1980 fabrication of "Jimmy's World" and Jayson Blair's history of plagiarism at *The New York Times* were indeed high-profile deceptions. However, suggesting they are the definitively worst examples overlooks a broader history of misconduct by journalists of all backgrounds. To understand the spectrum of failure, one must categorize these breaches by their underlying cause rather than the identity of the reporter.

Ethical misconduct can fall under a wide spectrum of egregious activities. For instance, reporters such as Stephen Glass at *The New Republic* and Patricia Smith at *The Boston Globe* invented elaborate narratives, sources, and quotes to satisfy a personal desire for acclaim, damaging the credibility of their esteemed publications. Cases like Judith Miller's reporting on WMDs in Iraq or Sabrina Rubin Erdely's *Rolling Stone* story on campus sexual assault represent a breakdown of the gatekeeping process. In these

instances, the narrative was so compelling that editors bypassed standard verification protocols, leading to systemic misinformation. High-profile figures like *NBC News*' Brian Williams faced suspension for misremembering or embellishing his role in significant news events, demonstrating that even those at the pinnacle of the profession are susceptible to the pressure of maintaining a heroic public persona.

Recently, a new ethical frontier emerged: algorithmic fabrication. Several major news conglomerates faced backlash for publishing AI-generated content that hallucinated facts, quotes, and scores. These were not the deceptions of a single person but systemic fabrications caused by prioritizing automated cost-cutting over human editorial oversight.

Discussions on media ethics must present a comprehensive view of failures across the spectrum. By moving away from a narrow focus on individual rogues and toward an analysis of the structural, psychological, and technological pressures that lead to fabrication, the industry can ensure that the lessons learned are tied to universal principles of accountability rather than demographic profiles. Credible journalism depends on recognizing that the threat to truth can come from an

ambitious reporter, a negligent editor, or a faulty algorithm.

Sometimes the media must publicize details about individuals' private lives when it genuinely serves the common good. For example, in 2023, New York City Mayor Eric Adams faced intense scrutiny and ultimately an



Journalists faced ethical challenges when scrutinizing private details of Eric Adams' personal life—such as his residence, daily habits, and relationships—because reporting on those private matters was necessary to verify whether he satisfied legal residency requirements to serve as Mayor of New York City and maintained public transparency. **Source**: Office of U.S. House Speaker, Nancy Pelosi and Eric Adams at the Speaker's Balcony (cropped), public domain.

indictment for bribery and campaign finance offenses. Media

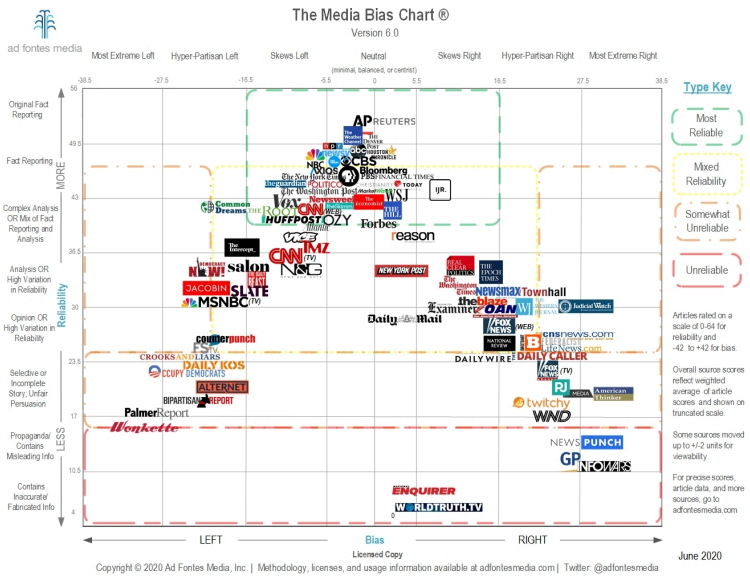
investigations, including those into his alleged acceptance of illegal campaign contributions and luxury travel, and his purported efforts to pressure city agencies on behalf of foreign nationals, brought to light details that, while personal, are directly related to his conduct in public office and potential abuses of power. Although the publicity surrounding these matters caused the mayor and his associates significant harm, releasing information about the alleged incidents, particularly regarding the misuse of influence and potential corruption, served the best interests of the citizens by ensuring accountability in governance.

The International Federation of Journalists offers three factors to serve as rough guidelines for determining whether a person's privacy is at risk of being violated: the individual's place in society, their reputation, and their public standing. Politicians, judges, and others in elected office often must forgo their expectations of privacy for the sake of democracy and accountability—the public's right to know if their elected officials engage in unethical or criminal conduct generally supersedes an individual's right to privacy.

Because the press must serve the best interests of citizens, journalists must act independently and strive for neutrality. While critics debate whether absolute objectivity exists—given that reporting always occurs through a lens of personal experience—responsible journalism requires journalists to mitigate personal biases and actively avoid favoritism. This

means seeking diverse sources and being transparent about a story's limitations.

The principle of journalistic independence remains essential to the media's watchdog role. Journalists must rigorously avoid conflicts of interest, whether financial or political. Reliable outlets now include disclosures informing readers whether they used AI to transcribe an interview, analyze a large dataset, or assist with drafting. By being open about the role of technology, journalists ensure that human editors remain the primary point of accountability. Finally, news media should foster an environment that allows for commentary and opposition, inviting the public to challenge narratives and offer alternative perspectives, which is crucial for maintaining trust in an engaged citizenry.



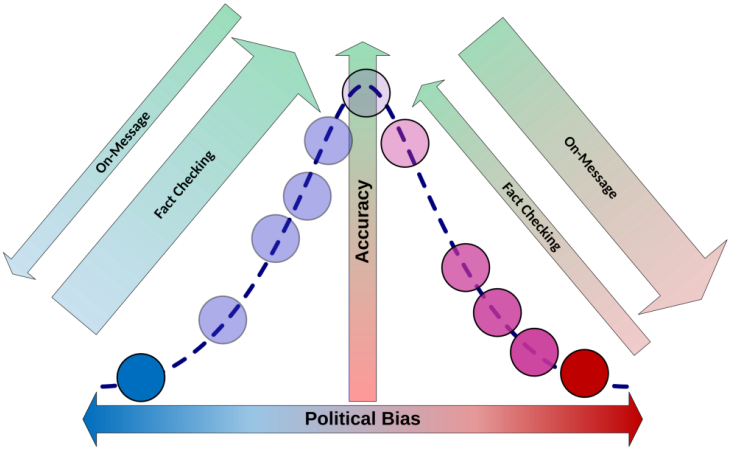
Ad Fontes Media Bias Chart from 2020, which categorizes media sources by political bias on the horizontal axis and reliability on the vertical axis. **Source**: Ad Fontes Media, Adfontesmedia, CC BY-SA 4.0.

The Effects of Bias in News Presentations

While the principles of ethical journalism require journalists to strive for neutrality, a degree of inherent bias is almost inevitable given the unique personal perspectives, experiences, and cultural backgrounds that each journalist brings to their work. This reality has become a central point of public discussion in the modern media landscape.

Political bias in contemporary practice manifests in several ways beyond simple partisan cheering. Organizations like AllSides and Ad Fontes Media use multi-partisan analyst teams to rate news sources across a spectrum, revealing consistent patterns in how bias operates. One common manifestation is through framing and emphasis, where outlets may highlight specific details of an economic policy—such as corporate profits versus worker wages—depending on their ideological leaning. Bias also appears in language and tone, where loaded or emotionally charged words signal a positive or negative stance toward specific political figures.

Nowadays, bias has also become increasingly mechanical. Through algorithmic capture, social media platforms track engagement and feed users content that aligns with their demonstrated preferences. This creates an automated echo chamber in which individuals rarely encounter opposing views. Ethically, this shifts the burden of neutrality from the human editor to the platform's code, which is often programmed for engagement rather than balance. Furthermore, the rise of AI-generated news introduces model bias, where algorithms may amplify historical prejudices present in their training data.



This Gaussian distribution of political bias illustrates how most individuals cluster around a moderate center point, with extreme partisan views occupying the narrow, symmetric tails at either end of the ideological curve. **Source**: user:JzG, Media bias 3, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Pew Research Center studies have examined perceptions of media bias, and their results consistently demonstrate a significant partisan divide in trust in news organizations. Republicans, in particular, are far more likely than Democrats to express distrust in national news outlets, often citing a belief that coverage unfairly favors one side or pushes a political agenda. This trust gap has widened over the past decade. A 2020 Pew study found that roughly eight-in-ten Americans (79%) believe news organizations tend to favor one side, with a vast majority of Republicans (91%) holding this view, compared to a still significant 69% of Democrats. Interestingly, Americans tend to blame news organizations themselves for

this perceived bias more than individual journalists, suggesting that systemic issues or editorial directives are at play. However, journalists must also contend with the hostile media effect, a psychological phenomenon in which partisans perceive neutral, balanced reporting as biased against their specific viewpoint.

These biases profoundly affect public opinion and contribute to political polarization. Nevertheless, journalists with integrity remain ethically bound to strive for fairness. This involves actively seeking out opposing views, citing sources transparently, and rigorously fact-checking.

In the modern era, the responsibility to navigate this landscape falls heavily on the public. Competent media consumers must employ critical analysis skills, such as cross-referencing stories from multiple sources with different perceived biases. This includes scrutinizing headlines for sensationalism, evaluating source credibility, and staying aware of one's own confirmation bias. Understanding these ethical obligations and the psychological factors at play is crucial for maintaining a well-informed citizenry in an increasingly fragmented and opinion-driven media environment.



Time magazine faced widespread public outrage in 1994 when it digitally darkened O.J. Simpson's police mugshot for its cover, creating a sinister image that sparked intense criticism over racial bias, media manipulation, and ethical journalistic standards. **Source**: Hendrik-Jan Grievink, Photoshop Reporters, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

The Ethics of Digital Photo Manipulation

The pervasive nature of digital technology has introduced complex ethical dilemmas into photojournalism, particularly regarding image manipulation. While editing has existed since the dawn of photography, modern tools offer unprecedented ease in altering images, blurring the line between enhancement and deception. The core ethical question is: how much manipulation is acceptable before an image ceases to be a truthful representation of reality?

In news and documentary photography, the expectation of

factual accuracy is paramount. Extensive manipulation—adding elements, altering colors to change the mood, or compositing different images—can fundamentally distort the truth and modify the historical record.

Historically, this began with darkroom techniques, such as the famous 1982 *National Geographic* cover, where the publication digitally moved the Pyramids of Giza closer together to fit a vertical layout

. While the magazine argued it was an aesthetic adjustment, it sparked a debate that helped define a stricter ethical boundary: even subtle layout changes can undermine an image's credibility as a factual record.

More recently, these ethical standards faced a high-profile test with the Princess of Wales photo controversy. Kensington Palace released a family portrait that was found to contain several digital edits, prompting major news agencies like the Associated Press to issue kill notices—formal retractions of the image. This underscored a critical modern reality: the public and major news outlets now have a zero-tolerance policy for manipulated images from official sources. Even innocent amateur retouching can fuel misinformation and damage the credibility of public institutions.

The most profound challenge today is integrating generative AI. Tools like Generative Fill can now seamlessly add or remove objects and people, creating a reality that never existed. To combat this, reliable newsrooms have adopted the

Content Credentials. These act as digital nutrition labels for images, recording metadata for every edit from the camera to the screen. By providing a verifiable history of an image, journalists can prove that a photo is a human-captured moment rather than an AI-generated fiction.

Ultimately, the integrity of an image is tied to its ability to convey an honest depiction of events. As manipulation tools become more powerful, the role of the photojournalist shifts from merely taking a picture to authenticating a reality, ensuring that the visual truth is preserved for the public interest.

The Ethics of Sensationalism



Known for its bold, punchy typography and sharp wordplay, the New York Post relies on aggressive sensationalism on its front-page covers to grab immediate newsstand attention, often provoking public debate through humor, outrage, and dramatic flair. **Source**: Bill Gracey, Headless Body in Topless Bar, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

The pervasive use of sensationalism—the focus on shocking or dramatic content to attract attention—has become a primary ethical concern in modern media. While it has always been a tool for attracting an audience, its current rise is driven by a fragmented media landscape where outlets must cut through the noise to survive. Increased viewership translates directly into higher advertising revenue, creating a financial incentive to prioritize grabbing readers' attention over presenting the facts.

Historically, sensationalism has deep roots in the media. The era of Yellow Journalism, particularly in the 1890s, stands out as one of the most notorious historical examples of rampant sensationalism. Characterized by exaggerated headlines, fabricated stories,

scare tactics, and often lurid illustrations, yellow journalism was epitomized by the circulation battle between William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal* and Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World*. These newspapers famously sensationalized events leading up to the Spanish-American War, with headlines like "Remember the Maine!" inciting public fervor. The ethical failure here was the deliberate distortion of truth and the use of emotional manipulation to sell newspapers, often at the expense of accurate reporting and thoughtful public discourse. This period highlights how intense competition can drive media outlets to abandon ethical standards in pursuit of profit and influence.

The mid-20th century saw the rise of paparazzi culture, where the focus shifted to celebrity scandals and private lives. The tragic death of Princess Diana in 1997 remains the most profound example of the consequences of this aggressive pursuit, sparking global debates about the boundary between public interest and prurient curiosity. This was followed by the infotainment era of cable news, where 24-hour channels turned serious legal proceedings—like the O.J. Simpson trial—into public spectacles to fill airtime.

Sensationalism has evolved into algorithmic outrage. Social media platforms are programmed to prioritize content that triggers high-arousal emotions, primarily anger and fear. This has given rise to rage-bait, where stories are intentionally framed to be as divisive as possible to ensure viral spread. Ethically, this creates a toxic environment: even legacy news

organizations are tempted to adopt tabloidization tactics, such as using sensationalized headlines, to compete with the sheer velocity of the attention economy.

The synthetic generation of sensationalism further amplifies the danger. Automated news sites now use AI to generate fabricated, dramatic stories and deepfake imagery to harvest ad revenue. Unlike the human deceptions of the past, AI allows for the mass production of sensationalism at zero cost, threatening to drown out verified reporting.

Ultimately, the drive for ratings and clicks means that outrage often takes precedence over in-depth analysis. This outrage economy contributes to the public's perception of bias and a lack of objectivity. For journalism to remain a social good, it must resist the mechanical urge toward the sensational, remembering that the ultimate goal of the profession is to enlighten the citizenry, not merely to entertain or infuriate them.



Source: Nick Youngson, Code-of-ethics, CC BY-SA 3.0

Beyond the Byline: The Ethical Pillars of Journalism

The Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) Code of Ethics serves as the cornerstone for ethical conduct in American journalism. It is not a set of enforceable laws, but rather a voluntary framework of principles designed to foster public trust and ensure responsible reporting. As media landscapes shift toward social media and artificial intelligence, the Code

serves as an essential moral compass built on four foundational pillars.

The first principle, **Seek Truth and Report It**, demands more than merely relaying facts; it requires accuracy, fairness, and thoroughness. Journalists must identify sources whenever feasible and provide the necessary context to prevent misinterpretation. In the modern landscape, this also requires algorithmic accountability. For example, in 2026, the *New York Times* published an article about Prime Minister Mark Carney securing a majority government that included a hallucinated quote from Carney. To fulfill the mandate of seeking truth, a human journalist must cross-reference AI output against original recordings, recognizing that the truth lies not just in the facts of the event but in the rigorous verification of the digital tools used to report it.

The second pillar, **Minimize Harm**, dictates that while the pursuit of truth is vital, it should not come at the cost of unnecessary suffering. Journalists must treat sources and subjects as human beings deserving of respect. In a digital environment, this involves protecting individuals from the internet's permanent nature. In 2021, the *Boston Globe* launched its

Fresh Start initiative, allowing people to petition to have their names removed from digital archives regarding minor crimes from years ago. The paper decided that the harm of a ten-year-old shoplifting story appearing as a top search result for a job seeker outweighed the public's need to know. This effort balances the duty to history with the ethical mandate to prevent lifelong, disproportionate digital stigma.

The third pillar, **Act Independently**, requires journalists to remain free of associations that compromise their integrity. This means refusing gifts, favors, or special treatment that could create a conflict of interest. In an era of affiliate marketing and sponsored content, this pillar is under constant pressure. Many digital news outlets, such as *The New York Times*' *Wirecutter*, earn commissions through affiliate links when readers buy recommended products. To operate independently, these newsrooms maintain a strict firewall between product testers and business teams. Ethical practice requires prominent disclosure to the audience, ensuring readers know that a recommendation is based on product quality rather than a financial kickback.

Finally, the pillar **Be Accountable and Transparent** calls on journalists to take responsibility for their work and be transparent about their processes.

Accountability means admitting mistakes and correcting them promptly and prominently. Modern newsrooms have moved away from stealth editing—the practice of fixing errors without notice—toward transparent correction logs. If an outlet misidentifies a person in a viral video, the Code requires it to issue a threaded correction on social media explaining exactly how the mistake occurred. This process moves the relationship with the audience from a "trust me" model to a "show me" model through open-source transparency.

The SPJ Code of Ethics is a living document, periodically updated to address the challenges of evolving technologies. Its application is a continuous process of ethical reasoning that requires journalists to make difficult decisions under pressure to serve the public interest responsibly. While perfect adherence may be elusive, the Code ensures that even in a world of rapid-fire digital content, the pursuit of truth remains rooted in human morality.



Launched by the BBC to combat online misinformation, BBC Verify uses investigative data techniques, open-source intelligence, and transparent video breakdowns to explain to audiences how journalists corroborate facts and uncover the truth. **Source**: Skykeeper848, Tom Edgington, BBC Verify, cropped, CC0 1.0.

The Ethics of Curation: Journalism in the Age of Open-Source Intelligence

In the traditional media model, journalists acted as gatekeepers, deciding which stories were important enough to reach the public. However, in a hyper-connected society, the public often sees raw footage of news events on social media before a reporter even arrives. This has transformed the ethical role of the journalist from a gatekeeper to a navigator and verifier. This paradigm shift, referred to as open-source

intelligence (OSINT) journalism, sees reporters use publicly available data—such as satellite imagery, social media posts, and digital ship-tracking logs—to piece together the truth about an event.

The ethical challenge of OSINT lies in the responsibility of curation. When a journalist chooses to share or boost a piece of user-generated content, they have essentially vouched for its authenticity. Ethically, a newsroom cannot simply say "this is trending on TikTok"; it must perform digital forensics. This includes geolocation (confirming a video's filming location) and chronolocation (confirming the time of day based on shadows or weather patterns). Failing to do this can lead to the Lindy Effect of misinformation, in which an unverified video is rebroadcast by legacy outlets, lending a false story institutional credibility.

Furthermore, the ethics of curation involve digital consent and the protection of victims. In the rush to report on breaking news, such as a natural disaster or a protest, journalists often scrape videos from private citizens' social media accounts. Ethically, journalists must consider the permanence of the record. Reposting a video of a bystander in a traumatic moment can subject that person to worldwide scrutiny or even physical danger without their consent. The SPJ principle of minimizing harm now dictates that journalists should attempt to contact uploaders

and consider blurring the faces of non-public figures to protect their privacy in the digital archive.

Finally, OSINT journalism introduces the risk of vicarious trauma. Journalists tasked with verifying hours of raw, often violent footage from war zones or crime scenes face significant psychological risks. Modern media ethics now suggest that news organizations have a duty of care to their staff and should implement protocols for the safe viewing of graphic content. As journalism becomes increasingly reliant on the digital trail left by citizens, the ethical weight shifts from simply finding the story to authenticating the experience while protecting both the subject and the reporter from the unique harms of the digital space.

14.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF THE ONLINE WORLD

Online media has undergone rapid evolution, with technology advancing at a pace that often outpaces legislation and policy's ability to keep up. This policy gap is most evident in the rise of generative AI and big data analytics, which have transformed personal information and creative works into foundational data for machines, all without a clear, pre-existing legal framework. This dynamic environment has brought to the forefront issues such as individuals' rights to privacy, copyright protections, and fair-use restrictions. These issues have become the subject of numerous court cases and public debates as lawmakers, judges, and civil liberties organizations grapple with the ever-changing landscape of technology. These challenges are no longer confined to the actions of individual bad actors; they have become increasingly embedded in the architecture of digital platforms themselves. While examining these ethical hurdles, the central question remains: What impact will this fast-paced media environment have on the future of individual autonomy and intellectual property?



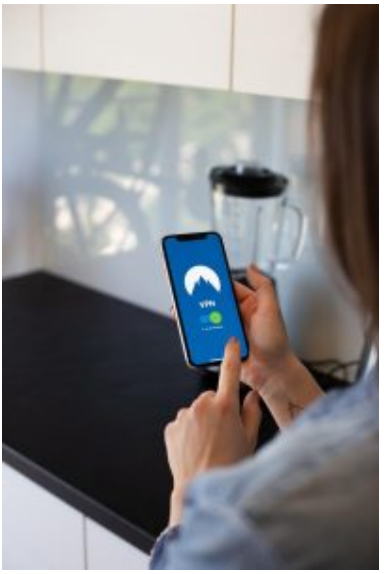
As modern digital devices continuously harvest location data, search history, and biometrics, growing concerns over data monetization, government surveillance, and corporate tracking have turned everyday smartphones and smart home tech into persistent vectors for private exposure. **Source**: Image by geralt on Pixabay.

Privacy and Surveillance

Concerns surrounding online privacy have intensified as the pervasive collection of personal information prompts a re-examination of whether digital surveillance infringes upon constitutional rights. While the U.S. Constitution does not explicitly guarantee a general right to privacy, the Bill of Rights establishes protections for the privacy of beliefs, the sanctity of the home, and the security of persons and possessions. Courts have interpreted the "right to liberty" clause as implicitly

guaranteeing personal privacy. However, these principles face complex challenges in the digital age, particularly regarding the tracking of internet searches and the use of personal data by large-scale AI models.

In defense of information collection, many online services argue that by using their platforms, individuals implicitly consent to the collection of their personal information. However, a significant portion of the public



Virtual Private Networks protect online privacy and security by encrypting internet traffic and routing it through a remote server, hiding a user's IP address and location from potential eavesdroppers. **Source**: Image by StefanCoders on Pixabay.

lacks the technical knowledge to protect their data adequately. As digital footprints expand, every action—from subscribing to a streaming service to searching a government

website—generates data that is meticulously stored. Cookies —small text files that web servers embed in users' hard drives— remain a tool for search engines and e-commerce giants to track browsing patterns, but **device fingerprinting** has made tracking easier in recent years. Unlike cookies, which a user can delete, fingerprinting collects a unique signature based on hardware and software settings , making it nearly impossible for an individual to remain truly anonymous.

Much of this information is collected without fully informed consent. Although terms of service agreements disclose these practices, consent fatigue is a major concern; few individuals have the time to comprehend the dense, legalistic language of these agreements. Users are often faced with an all-or-nothing decision: agree to the terms and forfeit privacy, or forgo the service entirely.

Internet users must also contend with the practice of combining online behavioral data with offline demographics to create intricate digital dossiers**.** Data brokers pool public records, purchase histories, and survey responses to provide a nearly complete picture of a person's life. This comprehensive profiling has been joined by the biometric frontier, where the collection of facial geometry, voiceprints, and iris scans via smart devices enables tracking of individuals in physical space. Ethically, this represents a point of no return, as biometric identifiers cannot be changed like a password.

The most significant modern shift is the move from recording history to predictive profiling. AI models now analyze digital footprints to predict future behavior—such as a person's likelihood of defaulting on a loan or their health risks. This algorithmic pre-judgment often replicates societal biases, leading to systems in which individuals are penalized for what a machine predicts they *might* do. Organizations like the Electronic Frontier Foundation continue to champion the necessity of stronger legal protections, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the California Consumer Privacy Act, which grant users greater control over their personal information.

The scope of surveillance ranges from employer monitoring to high-level government investigations. Legislation such as the USA PATRIOT Act and provisions of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, particularly Section 702 , allow authorities to compel internet service providers to disclose personal records. Authorities may access emails and web searches if they suspect a person of having a connection to foreign intelligence activities. Civil liberties organizations remain concerned that these expansive powers could serve as a backdoor to undisclosed surveillance that does not solely involve national security. The ongoing tension between security imperatives and the protection of individual privacy remains a central challenge in contemporary digital policy and law.



The right to be forgotten allows individuals to request the removal of personal data or outdated online search results from digital platforms under data privacy laws, balancing individual privacy rights with the public's right to access information. **Source**: Image by geralt on Pixabay.

The Ethics of Digital Permanence and the Right to be Forgotten

The digital age has effectively ended the natural forgetting that once characterized human history. The permanence of online records poses a unique ethical challenge for newsrooms: whether to unpublish older stories that continue to harm individuals long after the event has lost its news value. This tension is at the heart of the **right to be forgotten**, a legal concept established in the European Union through the GDPR. This right allows individuals to request that search engines remove links to personal information that is deemed inaccurate, inadequate, irrelevant, or excessive.

While the United States lacks a federal right to be forgotten due to strong First Amendment protections for the press, many American

newsrooms have developed their own ethical unpublishing policies

. Journalists must now weigh the public's right to a complete historical record against the digital stigma that can follow an individual. For example, if a person was arrested for a minor offense ten years ago but the charges were later dropped, should the original news report remain the first result when a potential employer searches their name?

Ethical decision-making in these cases often involves the Potter Box model or similar frameworks to balance loyalties to the truth, the audience, and the subject's future autonomy. Some newsrooms have moved toward de-indexing (hiding the story from search engines) rather than deleting the story entirely. This maintains the archives for historians while mitigating the immediate harm to the individual. As data-mining tools become more sophisticated, the ethical burden of journalism includes not only what is reported today but how those reports affect a person's right to start over tomorrow.

Fair Use and Plagiarism

The pervasive accessibility of information online has significantly amplified



Reaction videos occupy a contentious intersection with copyright law because creators use existing copyrighted content, relying on fair use defenses by adding transformatively critical, educational, or comedic commentary without substituting the market for the original work. **Source**: SkelBells, Clip from reaction video, CC BY 4.0.

concerns surrounding plagiarism and copyright infringement. The ease of replicating digital content across platforms often

blurs ethical and legal boundaries. While people may frequently confuse these two concepts, it is crucial to distinguish between the legal protection of property and the ethical obligation of attribution. Adding to the challenge, modern society has to contend with the rise ofsynthetic content. When AI models synthesize vast amounts of existing data to generate new works, they create a transparency gap that challenges traditional definitions of authorship. This section provides an overview of copyright law, its limitations through the fair use doctrine, and the evolving standards of intellectual honesty in a digital-first world.

Copyright Infringement

Copyright offers a form of protection provided by U.S. law, which automatically bestows upon the creator of an original artistic or intellectual work certain rights, including the right to distribute, copy, and modify the work. For example, if Marcus streams a movie through a licensed service like Netflix, he has not violated any laws because the platform has obtained a license. However, if they rip a digital copy of that movie and share it with others on a private server without permission, they have violated copyright law. This law applies to most books, songs, movies, art, and digital content.



Source: Google, Google Books logo 2020, public domain.

Digital Tomes, Legal Thorns: From Google Books to the AI Era

In 2004, Google embarked on an ambitious project to digitize millions of books from academic libraries, aiming to make them broadly accessible online. Since its inception, Google has scanned more than 40 million books. Public domain titles are available in full view, while books under copyright are typically presented as limited snippets. Google framed this as a monumental step toward the democratization of knowledge. However, this expansive project was met with fierce opposition from authors and publishers who argued that it constituted a massive copyright violation, leading to a decade of legal battles filed by the Authors Guild and the Association of American Publishers against Google starting in 2005.

The legal complexities peaked in 2011 when a federal judge rejected a proposed settlement that would

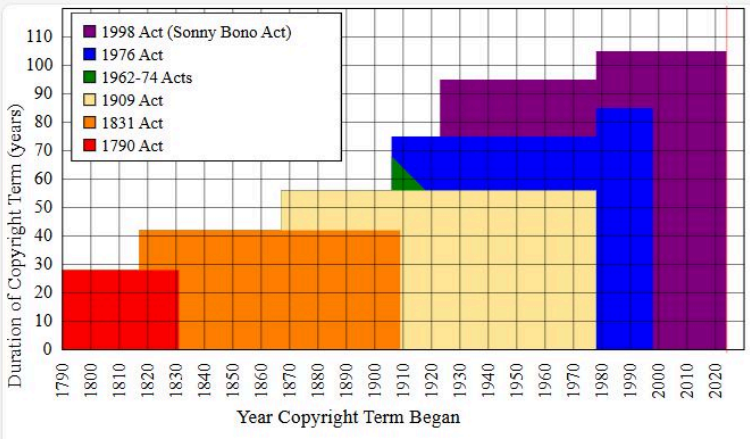
have granted Google a de facto monopoly over orphan works (copyrighted books with untraceable owners). Ultimately, the courts ruled in Google's favor in 2015, with the U.S. Second Circuit Court of Appeals stating that Google's snippet view was transformative fair use. The court argued that because Google provided a new way to search and analyze text without replacing the original book, it did not harm the authors' market. This ruling became a landmark, establishing that digitizing copyrighted material for the purpose of creating a searchable database is legally protected.

Recently, the saga has entered a new, more contentious chapter concerning AI training. The massive database of human knowledge Google created—and similar datasets scraped from across the web—became the textbooks used to train generative AI models. Authors now argue that the 2015 transformative use ruling should not apply here. They contend that while a search engine helps people *find* a book, an AI model uses that book to learn to replace the author, generating new stories or essays in the author's specific style. Two California district judges have since ruled that using books to train AI is fair use.

This modern tension has led to a new wave of high-profile lawsuits from journalists, novelists, and photographers against AI tech giants. The core ethical question has shifted toward whether the public good of

developing advanced AI justifies the unauthorized use of collective intellectual property. As the industry navigates this new era, the Google Books case remains the foundational precedent, illustrating that in the digital age, the line between accessing knowledge and appropriating labor remains in constant flux.

After a certain period, works enter the **public domain**. In the United States, anything published before January 1, 1931, is generally considered to be in the public domain. This includes a wealth of early 20th-century culture that any entity can now use or copy freely without fear of legal ramifications. While some creators intentionally place work in the public domain through licenses such as Creative Commons Zero, most works enter this space simply because their copyright terms have expired.



Changes in U.S. Copyright Law. **Source**: Tom Bell, Extended Tom Bell's graph showing extension of U.S. copyright term over time, CC BY-SA 3.0.

While copyright law provides robust protections, it incorporates the doctrine of **fair use.** This policy allows the public to use copyrighted material for specific transformative purposes, such as criticism, commentary, news reporting, teaching, or parody. When determining fair use, courts typically consider four factors:

1. The purpose and character of the use (commercial vs. nonprofit).
2. The nature of the copyrighted work.
3. The amount and substantiality of the portion used.
4. The effect of the use upon the potential market for the

original.

The distinction between fair use and infringement is not always clear. For one thing, courts have deliberately avoided issuing rigid guidelines that specify exact quantities—such as a specific number of words, lines of code, or musical notes—that people can use without permission. This ambiguity means that fair use determinations are highly fact-specific and often depend on the context and transformative nature of the new work. Nowadays, the first line of enforcement comes via an algorithm rather than a court . Platforms use automated content ID systems to scan for copyrighted material. Because these systems often struggle to distinguish between theft and transformative parody, many creators find their legitimate fair-use content flagged or removed by automated bots.

The following table highlights key legal battles that have shaped the boundaries of digital and artistic expression. The 2023 *Warhol v. Goldsmith* decision is particularly significant for modern media since it emphasized that the "purpose and character" of the use is critical; if a new work serves substantially the same commercial market as the original, the commercial nature of the use weighs heavily against a fair use claim. This has forced a re-evaluation of how digital creators license and attribute remixed content in an increasingly commercialized online environment.

Fair Use	Not Fair Use
Wright v. Warner Books Inc. **(1990)** The court considered whether a biographer's use of excerpts from Richard Wright's unpublished letters and journal entries in a biography constituted fair use. *Considerations*: The court ruled the copied material amounted to less than one percent of Wright's total letter material, and the biographer's purpose was to inform and provide critical commentary on Wright's life, which was considered a transformative use for scholarly and biographical purposes, weighing in favor of fair use despite the unpublished nature of the works.	***Castle Rock Entertainment Inc. v. Carol Publishing Group*** **(1998)** Carol Publishing Group published a book of trivia questions about the TV series *Seinfeld*, including direct quotes and questions based on characters and events from the show. *Considerations*: The court determined this was not fair use because the trivia book was largely derivative and directly competed with, or infringed upon, Castle Rock Entertainment's (the copyright holder's) ability to create its authorized trivia books or other derivative works from the series, as the purpose of the trivia book was primarily commercial and non-transformative, merely repackaging the original content.

Campbell v. Acuff-Rose Music, Inc. **(1994)**

The rap group 2 Live Crew created a parody of Roy Orbison's song "Oh, Pretty Woman."

Considerations:

The Supreme Court ruled that 2 Live Crew's commercial parody could be fair use, emphasizing the transformative nature of parody, which critiques or comments on the original work; although commercial and taking a recognizable portion, its parodic purpose weighed heavily in favor of fair use, requiring only enough of the original to "conjure up" the object of its satire.

Los Angeles News Service v. KCAL-TV Channel 9 **(1996)**

A TV news station used a 30-second segment of a four-minute video that depicted the beating of a Los Angeles man, with the copyright owned by the *Los Angeles News Service*.

Considerations:

The court found the news station's use was not fair because the 30-second segment constituted a significant portion of the total video, both quantitatively and qualitatively, and KCAL-TV profited directly from its use of the footage in its news broadcast, thereby infringing on the *Los Angeles News Service*'s ability to license and market the video itself.

Cariou v. Prince **(2013)**	***Dr. Seuss Enterprises, L.P. v. Penguin Books USA, Inc.*** **(1996)**
Artist Richard Prince created new artworks by significantly altering and incorporating photographs taken by Patrick Cariou depicting Rastafarians in Jamaica. *Considerations*: The Second Circuit Court of Appeals found many of Prince's works to be fair use because they were transformative, conveying a new message or aesthetic, as Prince's alterations, such as painting over the images or combining them with other elements, changed the original photographs' context and meaning, making them distinct from Cariou's original documentary purpose.	A book titled " The Cat NOT in the Hat! A Parody by Dr. Juice" was published, which mimicked Dr. Seuss's style and characters to comment on the O.J. Simpson murder trial. *Considerations*: The court ruled that this was not a fair use, primarily because it was not a true parody of Dr. Seuss's work. Instead, it used the recognizable style and characters to comment on an external event, finding it lacked sufficient transformative quality and could potentially harm the market for authorized derivative works, as it too closely resembled the original without offering genuine critical commentary on the original work.

Authors Guild v. Google **(2015)**	***Associated Press v. Fairey*** **(2011 settlement)**
Google scanned millions of copyrighted books to create a searchable database that displays snippets of text and links to purchase the books. *Considerations*: The Second Circuit and, subsequently, the Supreme Court (by denying certiorari) affirmed that Google's mass digitization project constituted fair use, finding the use highly transformative and that it created a new research tool that allowed users to search for information across a vast collection of books. The display of snippets was limited and did not substitute for the original books; it did not significantly harm the market.	Artist Shepard Fairey created his iconic "Hope" poster of Barack Obama using an Associated Press photograph as a source image without permission. *Considerations*: Though settled out of court, the legal arguments illustrate why it was likely not fair use: Fairey's use was commercial, and although he altered the image, the AP argued it was not sufficiently transformative to qualify as fair use, as it still directly exploited the recognizable core of their copyrighted photograph for a new commercial purpose without proper licensing, impacting the market for licensing the original picture.

Lenz v. Universal Music Corp. **(2016)**

Stephanie Lenz uploaded a 29-second home video of her toddler dancing to Prince's "Let's Go Crazy," prompting Universal Music to issue a takedown notice.

Considerations:

The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that copyright holders must consider fair use before sending a DMCA takedown notice, establishing that rights holders must make a reasonable, good-faith assessment of fair use and acknowledging that short, non-commercial uses, even of popular music, can fall under fair use.

Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. v. Goldsmith
(2023)

The Andy Warhol Foundation licensed one of Andy Warhol's "Prince Series" silkscreen prints, which was based on a copyrighted photograph of Prince taken by Lynn Goldsmith, for use on a magazine cover.

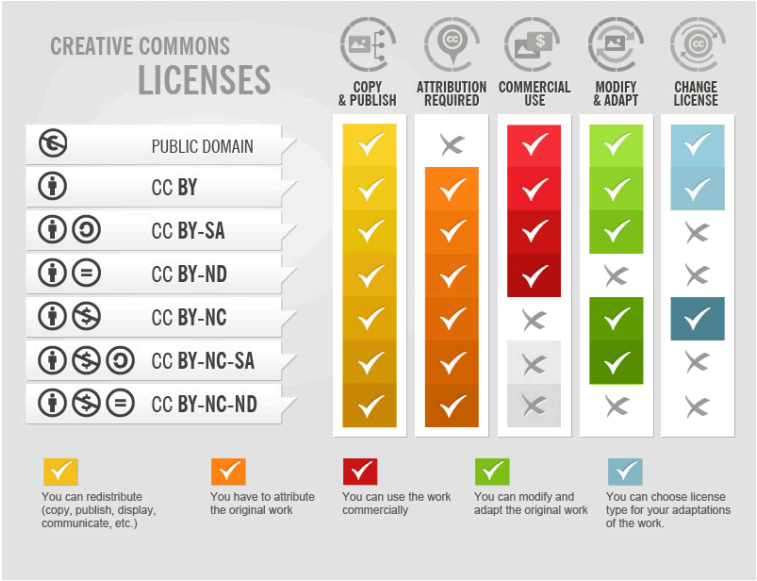
Considerations:

The Supreme Court ruled that the Foundation's commercial *licensing* of Warhol's Prince image for a magazine cover was not fair use, finding that while acknowledging Warhol's original artistic transformation of Goldsmith's photograph, the Court focused on the "purpose and character" of the *secondary use* (the commercial licensing), determining it was not sufficiently transformative from Goldsmith's original commercial licensing purpose to qualify as fair use, emphasizing that the commercial nature of the *use* weighed heavily against fair use when the new work served substantially the same commercial purpose as the original.

The Creative Commons and Open Education

The evolution of digital content creation has led to innovative approaches to intellectual property, notably with Creative Commons (CC) licenses and Open Educational Resources (OER). Both concepts emerged as responses to the traditional "all rights reserved" copyright system, which often felt restrictive in an age when digital replication and sharing are effortless.

Creative Commons was founded in 2001 to provide a middle ground between the stringent restrictions of traditional copyright and the public domain's total lack of rights. The organization developed a suite of standardized, free-to-use licenses that allow creators to specify exactly how others may use their work.



Creative Commons licenses offer a spectrum of "some rights reserved" options. JoKalliauer; foter, Creative Commons Licenses, CC BY-SA 3.0.

These licenses are also used to communicate with artificial intelligence. Creators can now embed metadata in their CC-licensed works to signal whether they consent to their data being used for AI training. This ensures that the spirit of sharing does not become a tool for unauthorized appropriation by large-scale tech corporations.

In parallel with the rise of Creative Commons, the OER movement has transformed the landscape of learning. OER refers to materials that permit free and perpetual permission for everyone to engage in the **5 Rs**:

1. **Retain:** The right to make, own, and control copies.
2. **Reuse:** The right to use the content in diverse ways.
3. **Revise:** The right to adapt, adjust, or modify the content.
4. **Remix:** The right to combine original or revised content with other material.
5. **Redistribute:** The right to share copies of the original or the remix with others.

The OER movement aims to make education more accessible by removing the financial barriers of traditional textbooks. Since the landmark MIT OpenCourseWare initiative in 2002, the ecosystem has expanded to include platforms like Project Gutenberg and Wikipedia, which collectively work to democratize access to knowledge. These resources foster collaboration essential for a well-informed global citizenry, enabling information to be updated and shared at the speed of the digital world.



Plagiarism is often framed as intellectual theft because it involves dishonestly appropriating another person's creative work or ideas and passing them off as one's own without proper attribution or permission. **Source**: Nina Paley creator QS:P170,Q3341944, ME 109 Thief, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Plagiarism

People sometimes confuse plagiarism with copyright violation, yet the two terms represent different failures. Copyright is a legal framework that protects property; plagiarism is an ethical violation involving the theft of credit. An individual can commit plagiarism without violating copyright law, for example, by presenting a 19th-century public-domain poem as their own. Conversely, a journalist can infringe on a copyright without being a plagiarist by correctly attributing a photograph they did not have the legal license to publish.

Plagiarism involves representing any work—whether created by another person or synthesized by artificial intelligence—as one's own original thought. The early days of the Internet sparked fears of excessive copying and pasting, but nowadays the primary challenge is the

use of undisclosed AI-generated content. Many students and professionals mistakenly believe that because they composed the prompt, the resulting AI output represents their original work. However, since AI models derive their outputs from vast amounts of existing human data, presenting those outputs without disclosure violates intellectual honesty.

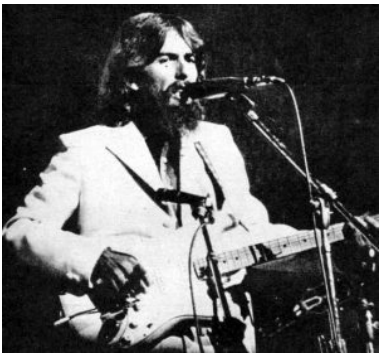
To address these challenges, the focus in academia and professional media has shifted toward process-based integrity . Rather than relying on unreliable AI-detection software, which can be easily bypassed or produce false positives, institutions now require creators to document their workflows. This audit trail demonstrates substantial human contribution through early drafts and research notes.

To maintain ethical standards in the digital age, creators should adopt a rigorous approach to transparency and documentation. This begins with maintaining a detailed audit trail that tracks a project's evolution, including records of any specific prompts provided to generative tools. Furthermore, the use of such technology is not a private matter; disclosure is mandatory and requires a clear statement of the extent to which artificial intelligence influenced the creative process. When these tools identify specific facts or quotations, responsibility lies with the human creator to locate and cite the original primary source rather than merely referencing the service itself. Ultimately, true authorship is defined by understanding; an idea should only be considered

one's own if it can be articulated independently of a machine's assistance.

A notable 2023 controversy involving prominent YouTube creators highlighted how failing to attribute research by smaller creators can lead to a complete loss of public trust and career-ending backlash. The most significant fallout involved James Somerton, a prominent creator in the LGBTQ+ film commentary space. An investigation by hbomberguy revealed that Somerton had built a career—and a lucrative Patreon following—by lifting entire scripts and narrative structures from queer authors and smaller journalists

. Instead of merely citing their work, he often read their prose verbatim while presenting it as his own original research. The backlash was near-instant: Somerton deleted his social media presence, deactivated his YouTube channel, and lost nearly all his financial support within days, as the community felt he had commodified and stolen the intellectual labor of marginalized writers.



George Harrison's iconic 1970 hit "My Sweet Lord" became the subject of a landmark copyright lawsuit after a judge ruled he had "subconsciously plagiarized" the musical structure of The Chiffons' 1963 song "He's So Fine." **Source**: Unknown author, George harrison en 1973, public domain.

This parallels the 1976 case of *Bright Tunes Music Corp. v. Harrisongs Music, Ltd.* The landmark legal battle established the consequential doctrine of subconscious plagiarism within copyright law. The case centered on George Harrison's 1970 hit "My Sweet Lord," which the publisher of The Chiffons' 1963 song "He's So Fine " alleged was a direct musical copy. While the court acknowledged that Harrison did not deliberately set out to steal the melody, the judge ruled that because Harrison had prior access to the earlier hit and the two songs were "virtually identical" in their musical motifs, he was legally liable for

infringement. This ruling fundamentally shifted the ethical and legal burden onto creators, showing that even unintentional mimicry drawn from memory can result in significant financial penalties and a finding of copyright infringement.

The integration of AI into content creation necessitates a re-evaluation of originality. The focus is shifting toward fostering responsible engagement with technology, where users understand that integrity means being transparent about the origins of information.

This chapter has outlined the key issues in media ethics—privacy, copyright, and plagiarism—and acknowledged that, while technology evolves at a staggering pace, the foundational need for truth, credit, and personal autonomy remains the bedrock of a free society.

CHAPTER 15: MEDIA AND GOVERNMENT



ID: 5960566. CC0.

15.1 Media and Government
15.2 Government Regulation of Media
15.3 The Law and Mass Media Messages
15.4 Censorship and Freedom of Speech
15.5 Ownership Issues in the Mass Media

15.6 Digital Democracy and Its Possible Effects
15.7 Media Influence on Laws and Government

15.1 MEDIA AND GOVERNMENT



The Cambridge Analytica Scandal was a massive data breach where the political consulting firm improperly harvested the personal information of tens of millions of Facebook users to build psychological profiles and micro-target voters during major elections. **Source**: Book Catalog, Cambridge analytica (27162728588), CC BY 2.0.

Media, Government, and Regulation in the Digital Era

The year 2018 marked a seismic shift in the relationship between digital media and government oversight when whistleblower Christopher Wylie exposed Cambridge Analytica's illicit harvesting of millions of Facebook users' data. This event laid bare the immense power of tech companies and the vulnerability of personal data, triggering a global demand for governmental protection in an increasingly digital world. This concern has evolved beyond mere privacy to include the ethics of algorithmic influence and the preservation of national security in a decentralized information landscape.

The dance between media and government in the United States is rooted in the First Amendment, which established a bulwark against government interference. In *Near v. Minnesota*, the Court struck down a state law that allowed for the suppression of "malicious, scandalous, and defamatory" newspapers, affirming that prior restraints are almost always unconstitutional. Decades later, in *New York Times Co. v. United States*, famously known as the Pentagon Papers case, the Court sided with newspapers publishing classified government documents, reiterating that the burden is exceptionally high for the government to justify censorship, even in matters of national security.

Historically, the government's regulatory approach has adapted based on the medium. The Communications Act of 1934 established the Federal Communications Commission to manage the scarcity of the broadcast spectrum and to require radio and television to operate in the public interest. This created a bifurcated landscape in which print media remained largely unregulated while broadcast media was subject to oversight for indecency and public necessity.

The digital age has blurred these distinctions. The Federal Trade Commission has increasingly stepped into the role of a digital watchdog, as seen in the $5 billion settlement with Meta in 2019. This trend is reinforced by global standards like Europe's General Data Protection Regulation and the California Consumer Privacy Act. Furthermore, the mid-2020s legal battles over the divestiture of foreign-owned platforms signaled a new era where the government views media through the lens of national security, suggesting that algorithmic control now constitutes a matter of sovereign stability.

A central battleground remains Section 230, the only component of the Communications Decency Act that wasn't struck down for First Amendment reasons in *Reno v. ACLU*. While it provides platforms with immunity for user-generated content, its role is under intense scrutiny. The debate centers on algorithmic accountability: should a platform be protected if its automated systems intentionally amplify harmful

misinformation? Critics argue that platforms are no longer neutral hosts but active curators that must be held responsible for the content they promote. Congress has filed several bills to repeal or rewrite Section 230 since 2000, including *Gonzalez v. Google LLC*, a 2023 case in which the U.S. Supreme Court declined to issue a definitive ruling on whether social media algorithms can be stripped of the protection.

Copyright protection also faces a transformation. The Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998 provided a safe harbor for service providers, but the rise of generative AI has tested these limits. Questions regarding authorship and ownership now dominate the legal discourse, as AI models are trained on vast datasets of copyrighted material. Lawmakers are currently grappling with whether AI-generated output can be copyrighted and how to ensure that human creators are compensated when their work is used to teach a machine. Under the current U.S. copyright framework, works generated purely by artificial intelligence without meaningful human authorship cannot be copyrighted. However, a person can claim copyright protection over their original, creative contributions if they heavily modify, edit, or arrange the AI output.

The relationship between media and the government continues to be redefined by technological advancements. As society demands greater transparency and accountability, past legal frameworks are being updated to protect the public

interest in a world where information is processed by algorithms as often as by human editors.

15.2 GOVERNMENT REGULATION OF MEDIA



Source: Noclip, Capitol Building Full View, public domain.

The U.S. federal government has regulated the media since the early 1900s, maintaining a relationship that evolves alongside technological advancements and societal shifts. While media in all their forms operate under governmental jurisdiction, regulatory efforts have transformed significantly as communication technologies expanded from the physical printing press to digital, algorithmically driven platforms. This oversight traditionally aimed to balance constitutional guarantees of free speech with public-interest concerns, such as consumer protection and competition.

In modern times, the definition of the public interest has

expanded to include algorithmic accountability and the mitigation of synthetic disinformation. The government no longer focuses solely on the scarcity of airwaves or the decency of broadcast content; it now grapples with a lag in the law, where the rapid integration of artificial intelligence into mass media often outpaces the development of formal policy. Consequently, modern regulation serves as a critical, if often reactive, framework designed to ensure that the speed of innovation does not compromise the foundational stability of democratic discourse.

Major Regulatory Agencies

Throughout the 20th century and into the 21st, three crucial U.S. regulatory agencies have shaped American media and its interactions with the public. The Federal Trade Commission, the Federal Radio Commission, and the Federal Communications Commission each emerged to solve specific crises—ranging from industrial monopolies to chaotic radio interference—and their mandates have adapted to address the complexities of the automated, AI-driven digital age.

Federal Trade Commission



Woodrow Wilson. **Source**: Harris & Ewing, Thomas Woodrow Wilson, Harris & Ewing bw photo portrait, 1919, public domain.

The first stirrings of the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) date back to 1903, when President Theodore Roosevelt established the Bureau of Corporations to investigate the practices of increasingly powerful American businesses and trusts. Recognizing the need for an agency with more sweeping powers to ensure fair competition, President Woodrow Wilson signed the FTC Act into law on September 26, 1914, creating an agency designed to "prevent unfair methods of competition in commerce." From its inception, the FTC absorbed the work and staff of the Bureau of Corporations, operating similarly but with additional regulatory authority.

While its early work focused on meatpacking and industrial trusts, the FTC has evolved into the primary regulator of the digital economy. Today, the agency serves as the lead enforcer

of consumer privacy, actively prosecuting tech giants for deceptive data practices and **dark patterns**—manipulative user interfaces designed to trick individuals into surrendering personal information.

The modern FTC also grapples with the rise of synthetic fraud. This involves using generative AI to create deceptive advertisements or voice clones for financial scams. By enforcing Section 5 of the FTC Act, the commission ensures that as media becomes more automated, businesses remain transparent about when a consumer interacts with an AI bot rather than a human.

Federal Radio Commission



Source: U.S. Federal government, Seal of the Federal Radio Commission, public domain.

The Federal Radio Commission (FRC) was a short-lived but vital body created by the Radio Act of 1927. Its primary purpose was to "bring order to the chaotic situation that developed as a result of the breakdown of earlier wireless acts passed during the formative years of wireless radio communication." In the early days of radio, the airwaves were a free-for-all, with stations broadcasting on overlapping frequencies, leading to widespread interference

and a poor listening experience. By assigning specific frequency ranges and power levels, the FRC established the public interest standard—the idea that the airwaves belong to the people and that broadcasters must earn the right to use them. In 1934, its responsibilities were absorbed into the Federal Communications Commission's broader mandate.

Federal Communications Commission



President Franklin D. Roosevelt established the Federal Communications Commission in 1934 as part of his New Deal legislation. **Source**: FDR Presidential Library & Museum – 61-406 – CC BY 2.0.

Created by the Communications Act in 1934 as part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal initiatives, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is

charged with regulating all interstate and international communications

by radio, television, wire, satellite, and cable in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. territories. Its overarching mission was to establish "a rapid, efficient, nationwide, and worldwide wire and radio communication service." Historically, the FCC enforced strict ownership rules to prevent media monopolies, though many of these thresholds have been relaxed in the era of global digital platforms.

In modern times, the FCC's focus has shifted from traditional broadcast decency to broadband equity. The agency has championed net neutrality and rules against digital discrimination, though federal courts recently blocked these specific enforcement efforts. Additionally, the FCC oversees satellite-based internet expansion to connect remote areas and prepares infrastructure for future 6G technology. These efforts aim to ensure that all communities have the high-speed connectivity required to participate in modern democracy.



Source: Cropped image by sergeitokmakov on Pixabay.

Regulation Today

The modern framework of media regulation in the United States is defined by the shifting responsibilities of the FCC and the FTC as they attempt to maintain order in an era dominated by global digital platforms. While the federal government has maintained jurisdiction over the media since the early 1900s, regulatory efforts have continuously evolved to balance constitutional guarantees of free speech with evolving concerns about consumer protection, competition, and content appropriateness.

The Structure and Purposes of the FCC

The FCC operates through various bureaus and offices with

specialized responsibilities, ranging from processing license applications and analyzing complaints to developing regulatory programs. The Media Bureau serves a particularly vital role by administering policy and licensing for electronic media, including cable, broadcast television, and radio. It bases its licensing decisions on whether a station has served the public interest, leading to critical rulings on matters such as educational children's programming and mandatory closed captioning to enhance accessibility.

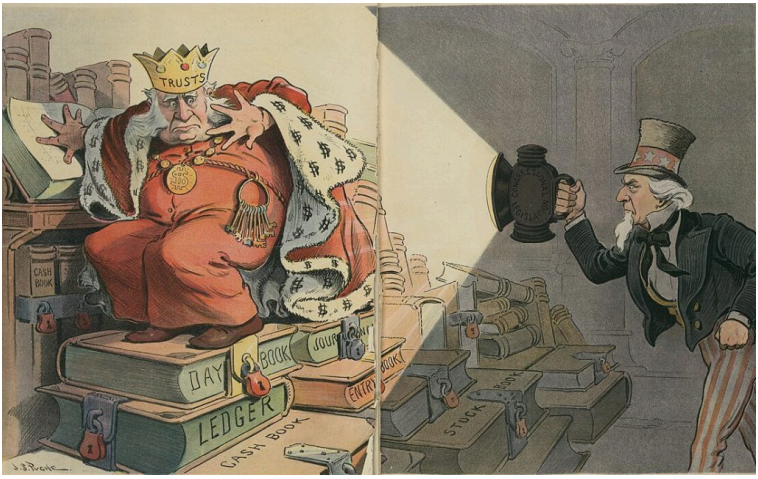
Oversight of the physical infrastructure of communication falls to the Wireline Competition Bureau and the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau. While the former focuses on wire-based transmission facilities and has historically addressed issues such as the throttling of online content, the latter manages the rapidly expanding mobile communications landscape. The Wireless Telecommunications Bureau primarily manages spectrum allocation and the deployment of 6G and future wireless technologies, ensuring reliable services across land, sea, and air. Furthermore, the newly established Space Bureau—which replaced the International Bureau—manages satellite and international communications, coordinating global frequency allocations and orbital assignments to prevent interference while connecting the globe for the public good.

The rise of the Space Bureau is particularly significant for the future of journalism, as the proliferation of low-Earth-orbit satellite constellations has effectively

ended the geographical localism that once defined media regulation. Because journalists can now broadcast high-definition video and data from virtually any point on Earth via satellite links that bypass terrestrial towers, the FCC's role has shifted. The agency now focuses on global spectrum management to ensure these satellite signals remain uninterrupted, enabling a truly borderless flow of information that has made it increasingly difficult for any single local or national government to switch them off.

The Structure and Purposes of the FTC

In contrast to the FCC's focus on infrastructure and licensing, the FTC is the primary regulator of business ethics in the media industry. Its mandate to eliminate unfair and deceptive practices has made it a formidable watchdog in advertising , privacy, and data security. A prominent example of its consumer protection efforts is the National Do Not Call Registry, which was adapted from landlines to include wireless phones as technology shifted. Today, the FTC is at the forefront of the digital economy, investigating major tech companies for data breaches, deceptive privacy policies, and anti-competitive practices that impact how media is distributed and consumed.



Source: Pughe, J. S. (John S.), 1870-1909, artist, The kind of anti-trust legislation that is needed – J.S. Pughe. LCCN2010651561, cropped, CC0 1.0

Role of Antitrust Legislation

The federal government has long regulated companies' business practices. Over the years, the government has passed several antitrust acts that discourage the formation of monopolies and preserve competition.

During the 1880s, the rise of powerful industrial trusts, such as Standard Oil, which monopolized industries by having stockholders transfer shares to a single board of trustees, spurred congressional action. The enactment of the Sherman Antitrust Act in 1890 was a landmark effort to dissolve such trusts. The Act declared illegal "every contract,

combination in the form of trust or otherwise, or conspiracy, in restraint of trade or commerce among the several states, or with foreign nations."

The Sherman Antitrust Act served as a crucial precedent for future antitrust regulation. The 1914 Clayton Antitrust Act and the 1950 Celler-Kefauver Act expanded on the principles outlined in the Sherman Act. The Clayton Act helped establish the foundation for many of today's business and media competition regulatory practices, providing businesses with fair warning about the dangers of anticompetitive practices and specifically prohibiting actions that may substantially lessen competition or tend to create a monopoly in any line of commerce.

The Clayton Act initially had a loophole: it prohibited mergers but allowed companies to buy competitors' individual assets, which could still lead to monopolies. The 1950 Celler-Kefauver Act closed this loophole by giving the government the power to block vertical mergers (in which two companies in the same business but at different levels, such as a content producer and a distribution platform, combine). It banned asset acquisitions that reduced competition.

These laws reflected growing concerns in the early and mid-20th century that the trend toward monopolization could lead to the extinction of competition and harm the public interest. These robust government regulations on businesses, including media companies, increased primarily until the 1980s, when the United States experienced a significant shift in

mindset and citizens began to call for less government power. The U.S. government responded by making deregulation the norm.

While antitrust laws manage the size of media companies, Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act serves as the primary regulatory shield for the digital age. This provision has historically granted platforms immunity from liability for content posted by their users, acting as a massive deregulatory force that allowed the social media era to flourish. However, this shield is under intense scrutiny. The FTC and federal courts are currently debating whether this immunity should still apply when platforms use generative AI to proactively create or significantly alter content, rather than merely hosting human users' original work.



Under President Ronald Reagan's administration, the Federal Communications Commission aggressively pursued media deregulation by eliminating long-standing policies like the Fairness Doctrine and easing ownership caps, which laid the groundwork for modern media consolidation and opinion-driven broadcasting. **Source**: U.S. National Archives, Ronald Reagan, CC0 1.0.

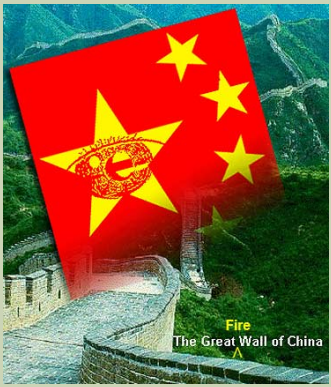
Move Toward Deregulation

Media deregulation began in the 1970s as the FCC shifted its approach to regulating radio and television. Initially aimed at clarifying laws to make the FCC run more efficiently and cost-effectively, deregulation truly took off with the arrival of the Reagan administration and its new FCC chairman, Mark Fowler, in 1981. The FCC began overturning existing rules and experienced an overall reduction in FCC oversight of station and network operations. Between 1981 and 1985, lawmakers significantly altered laws and regulations to grant more power to media licensees and reduce the FCC's power.

For example, they expanded television licenses from three to five years, and corporations were allowed to own more separate TV stations, eventually leading to the removal of national ownership caps in some areas.

This shift had a profound effect on the media landscape, facilitating massive consolidation and the rise of global conglomerates. Industries once dominated by regulated monopolies or diverse local owners saw the emergence of a few major players, such as Disney, Paramount Global, and Bertelsmann, which now own vast portfolios spanning film, television, publishing, and streaming. The debate over deregulation remains a central tension: while proponents believe less control fosters innovation, critics argue that excessive consolidation threatens the range of voices available to the public. As technologies and market structures continue to evolve, media regulation remains a fluid process that adapts to society's prevailing needs.

BEYOND THE FIREWALL: THE STRUGGLE FOR A GLOBAL WEB



The Great Firewall of China represents one of the world's most sophisticated digital censorship systems, employing IP blocking, DNS filtering, and deep packet inspection to restrict access to foreign websites and tightly control the flow of online information within the country. **Source**: Pip Wilson, Great Firewall of China, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

The federal government has maintained jurisdiction over media in various forms since the early 1900s, but the nature of this oversight has transformed as new communication technologies have emerged. While these regulatory efforts traditionally aimed to balance constitutional free speech with consumer protection and industry order, the digital age has shifted the battleground toward a high-stakes struggle for control over the flow of information. Internet censorship is no longer a localized issue restricted to authoritarian regimes; it is a pervasive global phenomenon that manifests through sophisticated legal, technical, and algorithmic filters even in established democracies.

Transparency initiatives such as Google's Transparency Report and the Lumen Database

provide critical insights into this evolving landscape, revealing that government requests for content removal and user data have reached record highs. Historically, nations such as Iran and Pakistan shut down entire platforms like YouTube during times of political unrest or religious controversy. However, modern censorship has become far more subtle and technologically advanced. Governments increasingly use bandwidth throttling to slow specific applications during elections, or leverage national laws to remove content deemed culturally or politically sensitive. This is evident in Germany's strict enforcement against extremist ideologies and Thailand's lèse-majesté laws regarding the monarchy. Even in nations with robust protections, such as the United States, agencies regularly compel tech companies to provide user information to law enforcement or to remove content related to national security threats and intellectual property infringement.

The rise of artificial intelligence has introduced a new frontier in this struggle for digital freedom. While platforms use AI-powered algorithms to automate content moderation and efficiently remove illegal material, these systems often suffer from algorithmic bias and lack transparency, leading to the accidental suppression of legitimate speech. Conversely, some governments have begun leveraging

AI for computational propaganda, using bot networks to generate large volumes of pro-state narratives. This censorship through noise does not necessarily involve deleting dissenting voices; instead, it seeks to flood the zone with synthetic disinformation until the truth becomes undetectable to the average user.

The emergence of the splinternet has further complicated the regulatory landscape. This term describes the fracturing of the global, open web into national silos as countries implement sovereign firewalls and local data storage requirements to decouple their digital space from the international network. These developments, alongside high-profile ownership disputes over foreign-owned platforms
, signal that digital media is now viewed primarily through the lens of national security. As censorship tactics grow in complexity—shifting from the surgical removal of text to the automated manipulation of information feeds—the public's awareness of these practices is essential to the ongoing global effort to preserve digital autonomy and access to information.

15.3 THE LAW AND MASS MEDIA MESSAGES

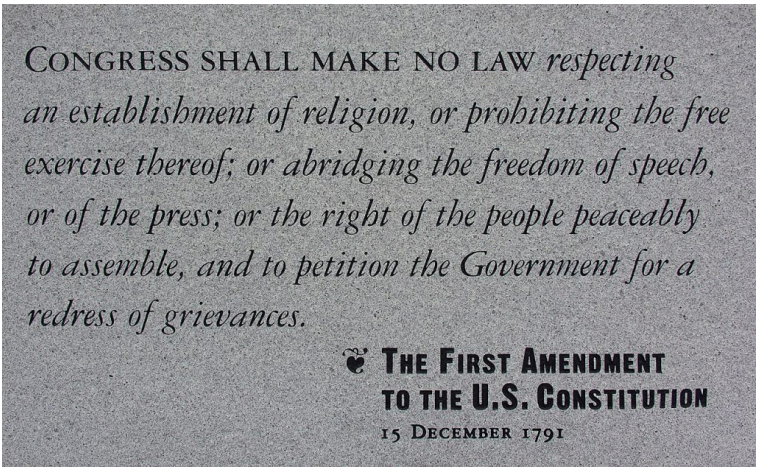


Source: Constitutional Convention, derivative image by Hidden Lemon, US Constitution Preamble, public domain.

The historical and philosophical framework of the First Amendment to the Constitution anchors the discourse on media law in the United States. While the formal regulation of media industries intensified in the early 1900s with the rise of radio and motion pictures, the freedom of the press—a right designed to ensure that information can flow to the public without government interference—remains the core of these legal protections. This constitutional mandate provides the necessary shield for journalists and citizens alike, forming the foundation for all subsequent laws regarding defamation, privacy, and copyright .

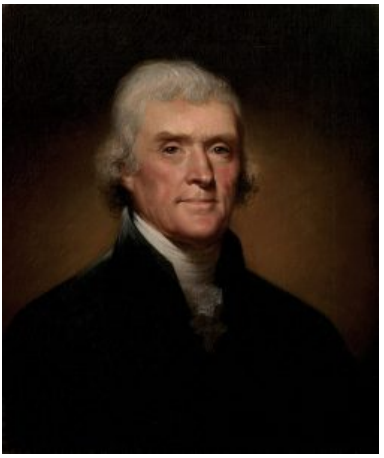
As the Fourth Estate of traditional journalism intertwines

with the decentralized Fifth Estate of digital creators and AI systems, the debate over who qualifies for press protections has become a central legal challenge. The evolution of media law transcends regulating physical newspaper distribution or broadcast frequency allocation; instead, it centers on applying fundamental liberties to the algorithms and digital networks that govern how information is created, consumed, and verified. An examination of the roots of the First Amendment provides a deeper understanding of how these enduring rights continue to shape the transparency and accountability of the modern information ecosystem.



Source: Ed Uthman, 保障言論自由的美國憲法第一修正案紀念碑 "The First Amendment to The U.S. Constitution" Monument in Independence National Historic Park in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, , CC BY-SA 2.0

The First Amendment



Thomas Jefferson, who once wrote, "Our liberty depends on the freedom of the press, and that cannot be limited without being lost." **Source**: Rembrandt Peale creator QS:P170,Q375926 , Official Presidential portrait of Thomas Jefferson (by Rembrandt Peale, 1800) , public domain.

A foundational tenet of modern governance posits that democracy cannot truly exist without open communication. This principle asserts that a robust and transparent exchange of ideas, information, and opinions is not merely beneficial but essential for a self-governing populace to make informed decisions. This open communication protects all forms of expression, even ideas that many find deeply offensive or repugnant.

Supporters of this principle rationalize that suppressing even offensive speech sets a dangerous precedent that can eventually lead to the silencing of dissenting or critical voices, thereby eroding the democratic process.

Thomas Jefferson articulated his support for the press by

stating, "Were it left for me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter." This quote encapsulates the deep-seated belief among the U.S. Founding Fathers that a free and unfettered press is indispensable for holding power accountable.

The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution enshrines this protection of speech. Historically, the full protections afforded by the First Amendment extend primarily to print media. The Supreme Court affirmed this broad protection for newspapers in its 1974 ruling in *Miami Publishing Co. v. Tornillo*, unanimously holding that a Florida statute requiring newspapers to provide opportunities for political candidates to reply to unfavorable coverage was unconstitutional. The Court reasoned that compelling newspapers to publish specific content infringed upon their editorial independence.

In stark contrast, television and radio broadcasters have historically faced more stringent regulations. This disparate treatment stems from the concept of spectrum scarcity—the idea that the broadcast airwaves represent a finite public resource. Because not everyone can broadcast due to limited frequency spectrum, the government issues licenses in the public interest . This debate has since shifted toward whether massive digital platforms—which function as the modern public square—

should be regulated more like newspapers (with total editorial control) or broadcasters (with public-interest obligations).

Prior Restraint and Modern Censorship

Prior restraint, or government censorship of speech before it occurs, stands as one of the most severe infringements on First Amendment freedoms. The Supreme Court views prior restraints with extreme skepticism, creating a very high bar for their use. 1931's foundational case, *Near v. Minnesota*, established that the government could exercise prior restraint only in rare and exceptional circumstances, such as suppressing military information during wartime or addressing obscenity.

The 1971 Pentagon Papers case rigorously tested the principle of prior restraint. The Nixon administration argued that publishing classified Vietnam policy reports posed a grave danger to national security. The Supreme Court ruled 6-3 that the government failed to meet the heavy burden of proof required to justify prior restraint, emphasizing that the public's need for an informed citizenry outweighed the government's desire for secrecy.

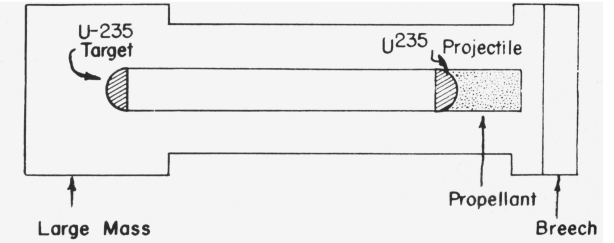


FIGURE 8–11.—An atomic bomb.

In 1979, *The Progressive* magazine attempted to publish an article detailing how a hydrogen bomb worked, claiming it was based on publicly available information. The U.S. government, however, sought to prevent its publication, arguing it would aid nuclear proliferation. A

district court issued a restraining order against the magazine, citing national security concerns. Before courts could hear the case, other authors independently published much of the same information contained in *The Progressive* article, rendering the original order moot. The governm

Nowadays, the government frequently attempts prior restraint by proxy through non-disclosure agreements and pre-publication reviews. A prominent example involved efforts to seize profits from the memoir *Permanent Record* by former NSA contractor Edward Snowden. Furthermore, the modern press faces a chilling effect not just from legal threats, but from algorithmic suppression. This occurs when journalists refrain from covering sensitive topics because they fear social media algorithms will shadow-ban or de-prioritize their content, effectively silencing them without a formal court order. This undermines the media's role as the Fourth Estate, an independent watchdog over the three branches of government.

ent eventuall y dropped its case, and the article was publishe d. U.S. Military, Blueprint abomb , public domain .

The Courtroom Conundrum: Press Rights vs. Fair Trials


Dorothy Kilgallen Shocked: Believes Reversal Likely

Journal-American 7 THE SPORTS FACTS

Sheppard Case Jury In Doubt Till Last Day

Held at Gunpoint 24 Hours by Her Rejected Suitor

Father Goes Free In Slaying of Girl

Newspaper report of the guilty verdict issued against Dr. Sam Sheppard in his first trial. In an opinion piece that runs under Sheppard's photo, journalist Dorothy Kilgallen wrote, "It may be a correct verdict—he may be guilty—but in my opinion it was a verdict wrongly arrived at and therefore frightening." **Source**: Waring Waning, Kilgallen Sheppard, CC0 1.0.

The fundamental rights enshrined in the U.S. Constitution often intersect and conflict, creating complex legal and ethical dilemmas for the modern judiciary. One of the most prominent areas of friction arises between the First Amendment's guarantee of a free press and the Sixth Amendment's guarantee of a fair trial. This tension surfaces because extensive pretrial media coverage—now amplified by viral social media algorithms—can make it exceptionally difficult

to find an impartial jury. When potential jurors have already exposed themselves to speculative news reports, inflammatory social media discussions, or AI-generated summaries of a case, they have severely compromised their ability to remain objective.

A landmark case illustrating this conflict is the 1966 decision in *Sheppard v. Maxwell*. Dr. Sam Sheppard was convicted of murdering his wife in a 1950s trial characterized by pervasive and prejudicial media coverage. The Supreme Court ultimately overturned his conviction, ruling that the trial judge had failed to protect the defendant from a carnival atmosphere of publicity. This established a crucial precedent: while the First Amendment prevents a judge from directly stopping the press from reporting, the judge remains legally obligated to mitigate the effects of that reporting to ensure a fair trial.

To achieve this balance, judges utilize several procedural tools. These include issuing gag orders to prevent trial participants from speaking to the media, sequestering the jury to isolate them from outside influence, or changing the venue to a location less affected by the local news cycle.

The always-on nature of digital media has tested these tools. Judges must now contend with social media

algorithms that continuously feed potential jurors content that reinforces specific biases long before a trial begins. A notable example of this occurred during the 2024 hush-money trial of President Donald Trump in New York. The presiding judge, Juan Merchan, faced the daunting task of vetting hundreds of potential jurors in a media environment where it was virtually impossible to find a citizen who had not been exposed to relentless, often polarized, social media commentary. Unlike the historical challenge of avoiding a specific newspaper headline, the court had to evaluate how algorithmic grooming—the process by which apps like TikTok or X (formerly Twitter) serve users content based on their political leanings—might have subconsciously hardened a juror's opinion. This case demonstrated that in the digital age, a fair trial requires the court to account for the invisible influence of a juror's personalized data profile, a far more complex hurdle than the circus atmosphere of the analog past.

The debate over cameras in the courtroom further reflects this struggle for judicial integrity. Following the chaotic 1935 trial of Bruno Hauptmann for the Lindbergh kidnapping, courts largely banned cameras to

prevent a circus atmosphere that threatened the dignity of the law. However, as technology made cameras smaller and less intrusive, many state courts began allowing them at the judge's discretion. The debate has evolved from the physical presence of cameras to the ethics of livestreaming. While advocates argue that live video provides necessary transparency and public education, critics point to the gamification of justice, in which trials are clipped into viral sound bites for social media engagement.

Despite the trend toward openness in state courts, the U.S. Supreme Court continues to prohibit cameras, relying instead on audio recordings and transcripts. This persistent divide underscores the ongoing challenge of protecting press freedom while ensuring that the pursuit of justice remains untainted by public sentiment and technological disruption.



The Supreme Court's ruling in *Valentine v. Chrestensen* arose when an entrepreneur tried to bypass a municipal ban on distributing commercial advertising handbills in public streets by adding a political protest to his promotional pamphlet, prompting the Court to hold that commercial speech could not claim First Amendment protection merely by attaching a non-commercial message. **Source**: Yaffa, Jews for Jesus in Tel Aviv, cropped, CC BY-SA 2.0

The First Amendment and Commercial Speech

Commercial speech, defined as speech proposing a commercial transaction, receives less protection under the First Amendment than political or artistic expression. The Supreme Court established this in 1942's *Valentine v. Chrestensen*, where it ruled that the First Amendment did not protect "purely commercial advertising." The Court would provide

more guidance on analyzing commercial speech in 1980, when it articulated a four-part test for regulating commercial speech in

Central Hudson Gas and Electric Corp. v. Public Service Commission

. If the commercial speech concerns lawful activity and is non-misleading, it must meet three additional requirements to qualify: the government must have a substantial interest, the regulation must directly and materially advance that interest, and the regulation must be narrowly tailored.

The regulation of commercial speech focuses heavily on public health and digital transparency. While the government has banned broadcast tobacco advertisements since 1971, the modern challenge involves marijuana and vaping products. Though legalized in many states, these products remain federally illegal, creating a complex patchwork where they can be promoted locally but face severe restrictions on federally regulated digital and broadcast channels.

Furthermore, the FTC now aggressively regulates stealth marketing. In 2025, the commission issued record fines against influencers and AI-driven virtual humans who failed to clearly disclose paid partnerships. Beyond government action, public opinion serves as a powerful informal regulator. Many companies choose to abandon advertising campaigns in the wake of public outcry

over perceived insensitivity or cultural appropriation,

demonstrating that brand reputation often dictates the limits of commercial speech more effectively than the law itself.

Media Law in the United States

Traditionally, media law was segmented into telecommunications law for broadcast and print law for publications. These distinctions have almost entirely dissolved due to media convergence. Digital platforms now function as broadcasters, publishers, and telecommunications hubs simultaneously. Modern media law focuses on five key pillars: privacy, defamation, intellectual property, freedom of information, and political fairness.

Privacy and the Digital Self

Privacy law addresses an individual's right to control their personal information. In 1974, Congress passed the Privacy Act, which "protects records that can be retrieved by personal identifiers such as a name, Social Security number, or other identifying number or symbol." Journalists, however, primarily navigate state-level torts like intrusion upon seclusion, false light, and public disclosure of private facts. The challenge intensified in 2025 with the rise of digital twins. Under the proposed

NO FAKES Act, celebrities and private citizens alike now have stronger protections against the unauthorized use of AI to replicate their voices or likenesses—a modern evolution of appropriation of likeness. Journalists must ensure that even accurate information serves a legitimate public concern to avoid privacy litigation.

Libel and Slander

Defamation involves false statements that harm a reputation—**libel** for written/broadcast media and **slander** for spoken words. Following *New York Times Co. v. Sullivan*, public figures must prove **actual malice**, meaning the publisher knew the information was false or acted with reckless disregard for its truth. This reckless disregard standard now applies to media organizations that fail to fact-check AI-generated summaries. The 2023 *Dominion v. Fox News* settlement remains a primary warning: spreading demonstrably false claims, even under the guise of opinion or reporting on others, carries massive financial risk.



Engraving of Andrew Hamilton defending John Peter Zenger in court. **Source**: [Andrew Hamilton defending John Peter Zenger in court, 1734-1735, unknown artist, John Peter Zenger trial, public domain.

The Truth Shall Set You Free: America's Libel Legacy

The bedrock of American libel law, which stands in stark contrast to the legal traditions of many other nations, is rooted in the 1735 colonial trial of John Peter Zenger, publisher of the *New York Weekly Journal*. New York Governor William Cosby threw Zenger in jail for seditious libel

after he printed articles accusing the governor of corruption and the subversion of the judiciary. Under the prevailing English common law of the time, the veracity of the statements meant nothing; any published criticism that diminished the authority of the government constituted a crime. However, Zenger's attorney, Andrew Hamilton, presented a revolutionary defense: he argued that the statements were true and, therefore, could not be libelous. The jury's not-guilty verdict symbolically established truth as a definitive defense in American jurisprudence, a principle that remains a major point of divergence from countries like England, where a person can still sue another for damaging their reputation even with factual statements, provided they lack sufficient public interest.

In the modern digital era, the truth defense faces a unique challenge from synthetic media. The proliferation of deepfake audio and video has made it increasingly difficult to determine what constitutes a factual statement. American courts grapple with whether a platform or a creator can be held liable for the technical truth when an AI agent generates a quote that sounds like something a public figure would say, even if the public figure never actually said it. This highlights the ongoing importance of the Zenger

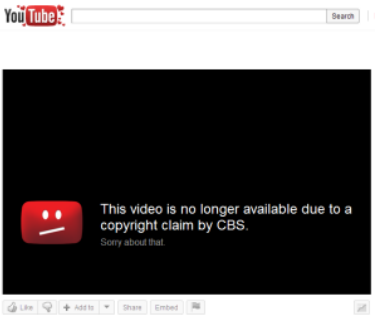
precedent. In the U.S., the burden remains on the plaintiff to prove a statement is false, a high bar that protects journalists and citizens from the libel tourism seen in other parts of the world.

Beyond truth, American law recognizes privilege as a vital safeguard for transparency. This doctrine provides **absolute privilege** to officials participating in government meetings, court proceedings, or legislative debates, ensuring they can speak freely without the threat of defamation suits. For example, a senator's speech on the floor of Congress or a witness's testimony in a trial is protected, even if someone later discovers the statements are damaging or inaccurate. This protection ensures the effective functioning of public institutions, allowing for the uninhibited investigation of the public's business. Journalists have **qualified privilege** to cover parties with absolute privilege, protecting them from legal ramifications for publishing privileged comments.

The final pillar of libel defense is the protection of opinion. Because opinions are subjective interpretations rather than factual assertions, they are inherently neither true nor false and thus cannot be libelous. The legal challenge often involves distinguishing between a subjective belief and a hidden

factual claim. While a critic's statement that a film is "unwatchable garbage" expresses a protected opinion, a claim that the director "embezzled funds to pay for the production" is a factual assertion subject to libel laws. This distinction has become complicated by influencer culture and social media reviews, where the line between personal opinion and professional endorsement consistently gets blurred. Protecting the right to express a viewpoint, however controversial, remains a cornerstone of American public discourse, ensuring that spirited debate can continue without the constant fear of litigation.

Copyright and Intellectual Property



YouTube is not obligated to remove content from its platform unless it receives notice from a valid copyright holder. **Source**: Charlene McBride, YouTube copyright claim (cropped), CC BY 2.0.

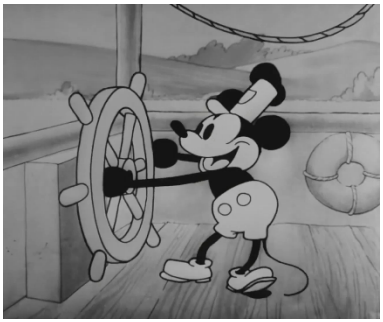
Copyright law grants creators exclusive rights to their original works, a protection that is now tested by the frictionless sharing of the digital age. The Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998 remains a cornerstone of this landscape, providing a safe harbor for platforms like YouTube and TikTok. This provision protects service providers from liability for user-posted copyright infringements, provided they maintain a prompt notice-and-takedown process. However, this shield has faced scrutiny; courts have begun to re-evaluate whether platforms should lose safe harbor if their own AI

algorithms
actively suggest or modify infringing content to increase user engagement
.

The music industry saw its own legal rebirth with the Music Modernization Act (MMA) of 2018. This legislation brought U.S. copyright law into the streaming era by creating the Mechanical Licensing Collective (MLC), which ensures songwriters and publishers receive accurate royalty payments from digital services. The MMA serves as the primary framework for addressing the AI cover phenomenon. The MLC and performance rights organizations like ASCAP and BMI are currently establishing how to split royalties when an AI-generated vocal clone performs a songwriter's work, ensuring the human creator remains the primary beneficiary of the intellectual property.

The Public Domain

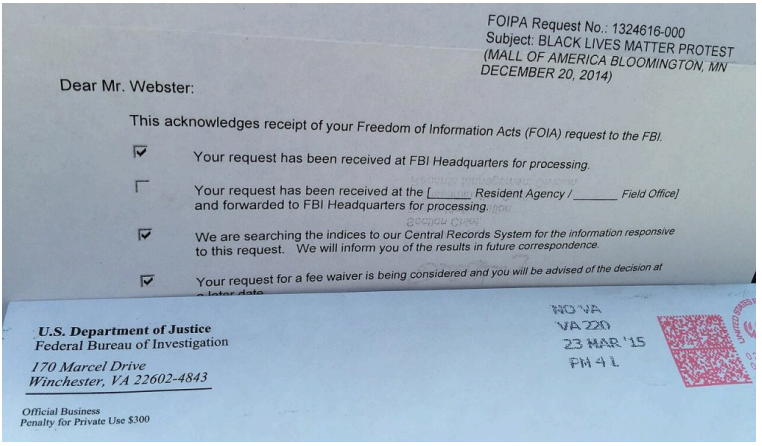
Beyond protected works lies the **public domain**, the body of creative material free from intellectual property restrictions. The entry of iconic characters, such as the 1928 *Steamboat Willie* version of Mickey Mouse, into the public domain in 2024 sparked a new era of creative reinterpretation. Similarly, in 2024, the original version of Tigger from A.A. Milne's *The House at Pooh Corner* joined other Winnie-the-Pooh characters (like Pooh and Piglet, whose 1926 versions



The iconic 1928 animated short film *Steamboat Willie* officially entered the U.S. public domain on January 1, 2024, freeing the earliest version of Mickey Mouse for artists, filmmakers, and the public to adapt, remix, and reuse without Disney's permission. **Source**: Walt Disney creator QS:P170,Q8704Ub Iwerks creator QS:P170,Q336424, Excerpt from Steamboat Willie (1928), used as part of Walt Disney Animation Studios Logo , public domain.

entered the public domain in 2022) in the public domain. This has also led to independent horror films and other creative works that reimagine these classic characters in ways previously impossible due to copyright restrictions.

Major publishers are currently litigating whether tech companies can use copyrighted journalism and books to train large language models under fair use, or if these companies must negotiate licensing fees similar to those established by the MMA for music.



Activists and journalists involved with the Black Lives Matter movement have strategically leveraged the Freedom of Information Act to uncover police department internal records, track federal surveillance practices, and bring public accountability to instances of police misconduct across the United States. **Source**: Tony Webster from Portland, Oregon, FBI Freedom of Information Act FOIA Response Letter (17488892322), cropped, CC BY 2.0.

Freedom of Information Act

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), signed into law in 1966 by President Lyndon B. Johnson, was a significant step towards promoting government transparency. By requiring full or partial disclosure of U.S. government information and documents, FOIA plays a crucial role in helping the public, including journalists, track the government's actions, from local campaign expenditures to the management of federal tax revenues. This information is vital for news media, ensuring they are well-informed and able to hold the government accountable. While FOIA covers a wide range of federal agencies, some offices are exempt, including those of the current President, Congress, and the judicial branch. Despite these exemptions and the often-complex procedures for accessing information, FOIA remains a powerful tool for transparency. Journalists often receive benefits such as fee waivers and expedited processing due to the public-interest nature of their requests.

FOIA faces a growing crisis as public officials increasingly adopt encrypted, self-deleting messaging apps to conduct government business outside the reach of federal transparency mandates. While FOIA ensures the public's right to access agency records, the use of platforms like Signal and WhatsApp by figures such

as JD Vance, Pete Hegseth, and Marco Rubio creates a digital black hole where records vanish before they can be archived or requested. This practice gained national attention during the investigation into New York City Mayor Eric Adams, whose reliance on Signal's disappearing messages feature led to accusations that he intentionally bypassed the Freedom of Information Law to shield high-level policy discussions from oversight.

These cases highlight a critical loophole in the current legal framework. While FOIA technically covers any record created by an agency, it remains largely powerless against the automated destruction of data. This tension reached a boiling point in 2025 during litigation against the CIA, in which a federal judge had to determine whether the use of disappearing settings by intelligence officials constituted an illegal circumvention of the Federal Records Act. In journalism and media law, these examples signify a shift in which the right to know is no longer just a matter of filing a request, but a fight against the technical settings of a politician's smartphone, fundamentally altering the media's ability to hold the Fourth Estate accountable in a digital democracy.

The Equal Time Rule

Rules governing political communication in broadcast media aim to ensure fairness. The **Equal Time Rule**, enshrined in

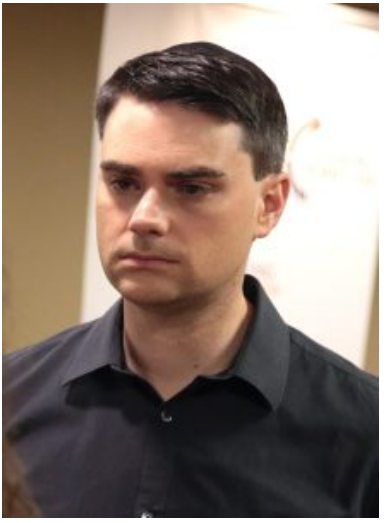
Section 315 of the Communications Act of 1934, requires radio and television stations to provide equal airtime opportunities to all legally qualified political candidates. This means if one candidate uses a station's facilities, their opponents must be offered comparable time at the same rate. Passed by Congress in 1927 as the equal opportunity requirement, it represented the first major federal broadcasting law, reflecting early fears that broadcasters could manipulate elections. While the law ensures equal access to airtime, it does not regulate campaign funding, leaving well-funded candidates at an advantage because they can afford to pay for airtime. Exemptions exist for bona fide news programs, interviews, and documentaries, allowing media outlets to report on a candidate's activities without covering every opponent's. Presidential debates also fall under this exemption, often leading to the exclusion of third-party candidates. Section 315 also prohibits media from censoring what a candidate says or presents on air
, a principle that has led to controversies when stations are compelled to air controversial campaign ads.

The Equal Time Rule faced a high-profile test in late 2024 when Kamala Harris made a surprise cameo on*Saturday Night Live* (*SNL*) just days before the presidential election. Because *SNL* is an entertainment program aired on the licensed broadcast network NBC, Harris's 90-second appearance alongside her impersonator, Maya Rudolph, triggered federal

requirements to provide comparable airtime to her opponent. FCC Commissioner Brendan Carr publicly criticized the move as a blatant effort to evade election laws, prompting NBC to file a notice of compliance with the commission. To balance the scales, the network provided Donald Trump with roughly 60 seconds of free airtime during a high-visibility NASCAR post-race broadcast and an NFL game the following day. This resolution illustrated the rule's mechanical function: it does not require the broadcaster to provide the same type of content (a comedy sketch), but rather to provide equivalent time and placement to ensure that no candidate gains an unfair advantage on the public airwaves. In early 2026, it was announced that the FCC was investigating *The View* for violating the Equal Time Rule after it invited Democratic Senate candidate James Talarico to appear on the program.

The Fairness Doctrine

The **Fairness Doctrine**, enacted in 1949, was a separate FCC policy that required broadcasters to present controversial issues of public importance in a fair and balanced manner. The FCC thus instituted the Fairness Doctrine to "ensure that all coverage of controversial issues by a broadcast station be



Conservative commentator Ben Shapiro and his platform *The Daily Wire* represent the type of ideologically driven online media ecosystem that flourished following the repeal of the Fairness Doctrine. **Source**: Gage Skidmore from Peoria, AZ, United States of America, Ben Shapiro with attendee (42913515531) (cropped), CC BY-SA 2.0.

balanced and fair." The FCC viewed station licensees as public trustees with an obligation to provide a reasonable opportunity for discussion of contrasting points of view on controversial issues and to actively seek out issues important to their community.

However, some journalists and critics argued that the Fairness Doctrine infringed on First Amendment rights and led to a chilling effect on speech, as broadcasters might avoid controversial topics altogether to avoid the burden of finding opposing viewpoints. The Reagan administration dissolved the doctrine during its 1980s deregulatory efforts. The absence of the Fairness Doctrine means that news organizations, particularly on cable television and the internet, are no longer legally obligated to present all sides of an issue. This has contributed to the rise of highly partisan news outlets , such as Fox News and MS NOW, which often cater to specific political viewpoints without a legal requirement for balance. When a news organization fails to present all sides of an issue, it can lead to a more polarized media landscape, in which audiences are exposed primarily to information that confirms their existing biases, potentially hindering informed public discourse and contributing to societal division.

Shield Laws

The concept of shield laws provides crucial protection for journalists,

safeguarding the confidential relationships between reporters and their sources

. These laws grant journalists a privilege, akin to attorney-client or doctor-patient confidentiality, exempting them from being compelled to testify in court about their stories and, crucially, about the identities of their confidential sources. The rationale behind shield laws is that without such protection, sources, particularly those exposing wrongdoing or sensitive information, would be less willing to come forward, thereby hindering the press's ability to inform the public and hold power accountable.



Investigative reporter Judith Miller spent 85 days in jail in 2005 for refusing to name her confidential source in the Valerie Plame leak case, highlighting the absence of a federal shield law to protect journalists from contempt of court charges. **Source**: Ben P L from Provo, USA, Judy Miller (32595090148), CC BY-SA 2.0.

While many U.S. states have enacted shield laws that provide varying degrees of protection to journalists within their jurisdictions, there is currently no federal shield law. This absence at the federal level means that journalists covering federal investigations or facing federal subpoenas lack a consistent, nationwide legal protection for their sources. The consequences of this gap can be severe, as dramatically illustrated by the case of *New York Times* reporter Judith Miller. In 2005, Miller was jailed for 85 days for refusing to testify before a federal grand jury about her confidential source in the investigation into the leak of CIA operative Valerie Plame's identity (the Plamegate scandal involving Scooter Libby, then-chief of staff to Vice President

Dick Cheney). Her incarceration highlighted the legal vulnerability of journalists operating without federal shield law protection and underscored the tension between press freedom and the government's investigative powers.

The evolving media landscape has further complicated the application of shield laws, prompting a pressing debate: should shield laws protect bloggers and other nontraditional journalists? The question is tricky to answer definitively, as courts across the country have reached different conclusions, creating a patchwork of legal interpretations. Some courts apply a functional definition, extending protections to anyone engaging in journalistic activity, regardless of their professional affiliation or platform. Others maintain a stricter view, limiting protection to individuals working for established news organizations. This ambiguity poses a significant challenge, particularly as the lines blur between professional journalists, independent bloggers, citizen reporters, and online content creators.

For instance, the question of whether an entity that operates like WikiLeaks would receive shield law protection is particularly contentious. Given its structure and modus operandi of publishing leaked classified information, some legal arguments could be made for its journalistic function, potentially bringing it under the umbrella of shield-law protections in certain interpretations. However, the American government would likely strongly oppose such a designation,

viewing whistle-blowing sites as a threat to national security rather than as a protected journalistic endeavor. The lack of a clear, comprehensive federal shield law leaves this critical question open to ongoing legal battles and interpretation, with significant implications for how information flows in the digital age.

15.4 CENSORSHIP AND FREEDOM OF SPEECH



Attempts to censor material, such as banning books, often generate considerable controversy and debate. **Source**: Timberland Regional Library – Banned Books Display At The Lacey Library – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Censorship and freedom of speech are the primary forces shaping the modern media landscape. Censorship involves the suppression or removal of content deemed objectionable by

an authority, ranging from the automated shadow-banning of a social media post to the formal removal of books from public libraries. While historically associated with totalitarian regimes, modern censorship often manifests as a complex negotiation between government pressure and the private content moderation policies of digital platforms.

In the United States, the First Amendment serves as the definitive shield against government interference, stating that "Congress shall make no law... abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press." This protection is not limited to spoken words; it encompasses a broad spectrum of expression, including visual art, symbolic gestures, and—increasingly—the algorithmic outputs of generative AI.

Historically, the limits of this protection have been defined by the Supreme Court through evolving standards of public safety. The 1919 case *Schenck v. United States* established the famous "clear and present danger" test, which famously used the analogy of falsely shouting "fire" in a crowded theater to justify limits on speech that could cause immediate harm. While the modern legal benchmark has since shifted to the stricter "incitement to imminent lawless action" test established in *Brandenburg v. Ohio*, the "clear and present danger" philosophy remains a foundational concept in debates over where a citizen's rights end and public safety begins. Other landmark cases, such as *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, have extended

these protections to corporate political spending. At the same time, recent rulings in 2024 have focused on jawboning—the practice of government officials pressuring social media companies to censor content. As people navigate a landscape where the lines between human and machine speech are blurring, these foundational principles remain the primary check against the erosion of open communication in a digital democracy.



Mary Beth and John Tinker protested the Vietnam War by wearing armbands in school, which led to their suspension. They sued the school board, resulting in a landmark ruling for student rights.
Source: UPI,
Mary and John Tinker show black armbands, public domain.

From Disruption to Discipline: The Evolving Lines of Student Expression

The scope of student rights has been significantly shaped by a legal journey that began with affirming free speech and gradually introduced context-, location-, and professional-standards-based limitations. In 1969's *Tinker v. Des Moines*, the Supreme Court established the legal baseline, famously declaring that students do not "shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate" after students were suspended for wearing black armbands to protest the Vietnam War. The ruling held that speech can be restricted only if it "substantially disrupts" the educational environment. This ruling set a high bar for censorship, protecting symbolic and passive protest as a fundamental right of student citizens.

Subsequent rulings, however, introduced significant limitations to this broad protection. In the 1988 case *Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier*, the Court allowed administrators to censor school-sponsored newspapers if the censorship is "reasonably related to legitimate

pedagogical concerns," effectively shifting the status of school media from a public forum to a supervised learning experience. This authority expanded further in 2007 with *Morse v. Frederick*, where the Court ruled that schools could punish speech—even when it occurred slightly off campus—if it could reasonably be viewed as promoting illegal drug use, a decision famously sparked by a "BONG HiTS 4 JESUS" banner displayed during a school-sanctioned event.

The most critical precedent for the digital age is the 2021 ruling in *Mahanoy Area School District v. B.L.*, referred to as the "Snapchat Cheerleader" case. After a student posted a vulgar message to Snapchat while off-campus and on a weekend, the Supreme Court ruled 8-1 in her favor, establishing that schools have diminished authority over off-campus speech. The Court emphasized that a school rarely stands *in loco parentis* when a student is at home. However, it maintained that administrators can still intervene in cases involving severe cyberbullying or direct threats to school safety.

The digital boundary becomes even more complex in graduate and professional programs where professionalism is often used as a standard for discipline. In 2025, the University of Tennessee Health Science Center reached

a $250,000 settlement with pharmacy student Kimberly Diei after attempting to expel her for personal, sex-positive social media posts made under a pseudonym. A federal appeals court reaffirmed that even graduate students retain the right to personal expression outside their clinical duties, signaling a major legal trend: universities cannot invoke professionalism as a catch-all to censor students' private lives.

Despite these protections, organizations such as the Student Press Law Center report an increase in indirect censorship, in which administrators use budget cuts or the reassignment of faculty advisers as retaliatory measures against student newsrooms. These evolving tactics demonstrate that while the schoolhouse gates have expanded to include digital spaces, the struggle for student editorial independence remains a central conflict in modern media law.

Classifying Material as Indecent, Obscene, or Profane

The legal definition of **obscenity** has long been a complex

and contentious area in American law. Its elusive nature was famously encapsulated by Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart, who stated in 1964, "I'll know it when I see it." This highlights the difficulty of providing a precise definition of content, as society's norms are constantly reevaluated.

The first significant attempt to define obscenity came in 1957 with *Roth v. United States*, which established that for material to be obscene, the "average person" applying "contemporary community standards" must find that the "dominant theme" appeals to "prurient" (shameful or morbid) interests. However, this left significant ambiguity. In 1973, the Court refined this into the Miller Test, which remains the prevailing standard. Based on the ruling of *Miller v. California*, a work is obscene only if:

1. The average person, applying contemporary community standards, finds the work appeals to prurient interests.
2. The work depicts sexual conduct in a "patently offensive" way as defined by state law.
3. The work lacks Serious Literary, Artistic, Political, or Scientific value (the SLAPS test).

This SLAPS criterion offers the most vital protection for media professionals. It ensures that sexual health information, scientific diagrams, and classic literature—even if sexually explicit—cannot be legally banned. The SLAPS test is the

primary defense for AI-generated art and controversial journalism that explores sexual themes.

The *Miller* decision affirmed that states could ban specific types of content, with child pornography being the most unequivocal example of material that



Women protesting against deepfake pornography. **Source**: C.Suthorn / cc-by-sa-4.0 / commons.wikimedia.org (Note the three necessary links to author, licence and image file in the attribution), Petition Deepfake Pornos stoppen – HateAid Berlin 2023-10-17 17 , CC BY-SA 4.0.

receives absolutely no First Amendment protection and remains universally prohibited. This particular category distinguishes itself from other forms of obscenity due to the inherent exploitation and harm to minors involved in its

creation. The ongoing application of the *Miller* test continues to shape legal battles over censorship, content moderation on online platforms, and the boundaries of free expression in contemporary society, as it adapts to new media and evolving public standards.

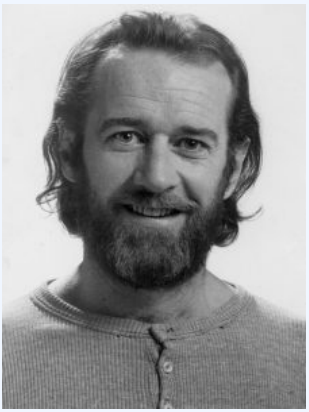
The crisis of AI-generated non-consensual intimate imagery (NCII) has grown in the past decade. Unlike traditional obscenity, which focuses on the prurient interest of the average person, NCII laws focus on the lack of consent and the harm to the victim. The proposed Federal DEFIANCE Act would provide victims of deepfake pornography the right to sue creators and distributors for damages. In these cases, defendants could argue that their AI art has artistic value under the Miller Test. However, the judiciary has largely rejected this, ruling that violating an individual's likeness and privacy outweighs any claim to artistic expression. This marks a major shift in media law: the First Amendment does not grant a right to use another person's face for sexually explicit content, regardless of whether an algorithm rather than a camera created the image.

FCC Regulation: Indecency vs. Profanity

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulates broadcast media differently from how the courts treat obscenity. While obscene material is never protected by the First Amendment, indecent and profane material receives some protection but is channeled to the safe harbor period (10 p.m. to 6 a.m.). Indecent material describes sexual or excretory

organs in a patently offensive way, while profanity covers "grossly offensive" language.

The Seven Words That Shaped Broadcast Law



George Carlin. **Source**: Little David Records, George Carlin 1975 (Little David Records) Publicity (cropped), public domain.

The groundbreaking 1978 Supreme Court case *Federal Communications Commission v. Pacifica Foundation* stands as a pivotal moment in the history of media

regulation, stemming from the provocative comedy of George Carlin. Carlin, a master satirist, became the accidental figurehead in the debate over indecent content on public airwaves after a New York radio station broadcast his monologue, "Filthy Words," at 2:00 p.m. on a Tuesday. In his routine, Carlin humorously yet explicitly enumerated and dissected words like "shit," "piss," "fuck," "cunt," "cocksucker," "motherfucker," and "tits," exploring their absurdity and the societal taboos surrounding them. A father who heard the broadcast while driving with his young son complained to the FCC, triggering a legal battle that would define the boundaries of broadcast speech for the next five decades.

In the case, the Supreme Court ruled 5-4 in favor of the FCC, establishing a critical distinction between obscenity, which receives no First Amendment protection, and indecency, which is protected but can be regulated in specific contexts. Justice John Paul Stevens argued that broadcast media possess a "uniquely pervasive presence" and are "uniquely accessible to children." These factors justified the creation of a **safe harbor period**, which today remains the hours between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m., when broadcasters are permitted to air indecent material because children are less likely to be in the audience.

This ruling only applies to traditional over-the-air broadcast television and radio; it has never applied to cable networks or streaming services.

The legacy of the *Pacifica* decision has grown increasingly complex in the digital age. In the 2012 case *FCC v. Fox Television Stations*, the Supreme Court ruled that the FCC's policy on "fleeting expletives"—brief, accidental uses of profanity during live broadcasts—was "void for vagueness." While the Court did not overturn *Pacifica*, it signaled that the government must provide clear notice before punishing broadcasters for spontaneous speech. The pervasive rationale of the original ruling is under intense scrutiny. Legal scholars argue that because audiences now intentionally select content via digital apps and on-demand services, the idea that broadcast is uniquely accessible to children is becoming a legal relic. George Carlin's comedic exploration of taboo words inadvertently cemented a framework that continues to govern the public airwaves, even as the technology used to reach those airwaves outpaces the law.

In the contemporary media environment, the rise of social media has introduced new complexities. While the FCC does not regulate the internet, the Supreme Court's 2024 ruling

in*Moody v. NetChoice*established that private platforms have a First Amendment right to moderate content. This means platforms like X or Meta can censor users by deplatforming them or labeling content as misinformation because, as private entities, they exercise their own editorial discretion to shape their community standards.

Scenario	Legal Classification
A live news broadcast where a bystander shouts a slur.	**Fleeting Profanity**
A streaming series featuring graphic, non-simulated sex.	**Protected Speech**
A website hosting non-consensual deepfake pornography.	**Obscenity/Criminal**
A student newspaper publishing an article on "Safe Sex."	**Protected Speech**

Deepfakes and the Malice Standard

The most volatile frontier of speech classification involves AI-generated content. As deepfake technology becomes increasingly indistinguishable from reality, courts have debated whether these digital lies are protected as parody or constitute a new category of unprotected speech.

A pivotal test case emerged during the 2024 and 2025 election cycles when

AI-generated audio of political candidates was used to suppress voter turnout by misinforming voters about polling locations. Several states, including California and Minnesota, passed laws specifically criminalizing the distribution of materially deceptive political deepfakes within 90 days of an election. The legal debate hinges on the actual malice standard: if a creator uses AI to make a politician say something they never said, is it protected political satire, or is it a clear and present danger to the democratic process? So far, federal courts have generally protected AI content labeled as parody, but have allowed criminal charges when the content is used to commit fraud or interfere with voting rights.

Violence and Sex: From the Hays Code to Modern Taboos



As the chairman of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association, Will Hays oversaw the creation of the industry's self-censoring Hays Code. **Source**: Underwood & Underwood, Will-H-Hays, public domain.

The tension between creative expression and social morality did not spring up overnight. Even in early cinema, filmmakers explored themes that challenged societal norms. Edwin S. Porter's 1903 silent film *The Great Train Robbery*, for instance, captivated audiences with its depiction of frontier violence, culminating in the iconic shot of a gunman firing directly at the camera. This early cinematic foray into violent imagery demonstrated an immediate fascination that would persist and evolve. Similarly, D. W. Griffith's epic films, such as *The Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance*, contained overtly graphic portrayals of violence, which Griffith argued were necessary to convey the actual consequences of human actions. These examples highlight

that challenging content in visual media predates the modern era and has always been a point of cultural discussion.

However, as Hollywood's influence grew, so too did public and political concern over the moral implications of its content. This led to the 1930 Hays Code, a form of industry self-censorship designed to preempt government intervention, named after Will H. Hays, the chairman of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association (MPPDA), the industry's self-regulatory body. The code demonstrated the motion picture industry's commitment to the public
, stating:

> Motion picture producers recognize the high trust and confidence placed in them worldwide, which has made motion pictures a universal form of entertainment. Hence, though regarding motion pictures primarily as entertainment without any explicit purposes of teaching or propaganda, they know that the motion picture, within its field of entertainment, may be directly responsible for spiritual or moral progress, for higher types of social life, and for much correct thinking.

The code imposed stringent rules on depictions of violence, prohibiting graphic portrayals of crimes such as murder, theft, and acts of destruction like "dynamiting of trains, mines, buildings, etc." Similarly, it strictly regulated sexual content, demanding that "the sanctity of the institution of marriage and the home shall be upheld" and forbidding any implication

that "low forms of sex relationship are the accepted or common thing."

This era of rigidity, which saw TV couples sleeping in separate beds, finally collapsed in the 1960s as social standards evolved. Sophisticated rating systems have replaced the Hays Code, shifting the responsibility of censorship from the industry to the consumer.

Ratings Systems

The eventual decline of the Hays Code prompted the film industry to seek a new method of self-regulation, leading to the creation of the modern film rating system. In 1968, the Motion Picture Association, the successor to the MPPDA, introduced a voluntary ratings system designed to inform audiences about a film's content rather than forbidding its creation.

Film Ratings

The initial system comprised G (General Audiences), PG (Parental Guidance Suggested), R (Restricted to ages 17 or up unless accompanied by a parent), and X (Adults Only). The system faced a significant evolution in 1984 following public outcry over the intensity of films like *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*. This led to the

creation of the PG-13 rating to bridge the gap between PG and R. In 1990, the NC-17 rating replaced X to distinguish serious adult cinema from pornography.



Theater showing the X-rated film *The Cheerleaders* before the MPAA abandoned the rating. **Source**: Charles Steinhacker, Now playing 'The Cheerleaders — X rated', cropped, CC0 1.0.

From Art House to Adult Film: The X Rating's Transformation

The curious case of the X rating stands as a fascinating consequence of cinematic classification and a cautionary tale regarding trademark law. Initially conceived by the Motion Picture Association (MPA) in

1968, the X rating was not designed for pornography. It was introduced as part of a voluntary system—G, M, R, and X—to denote films strictly for adults. However, a critical legal oversight occurred: while the MPA trademarked the G, M, and R ratings, they left the X as an open, non-trademarked category. This created a vacuum that the burgeoning adult film industry quickly filled.

In its earliest years, the X rating was applied to mainstream films that pushed artistic boundaries. Critically successful movies like *Midnight Cowboy*, which won the Academy Award for Best Picture, and *A Clockwork Orange* initially received X ratings for mature themes and explicit content. However, the 1972 release of the hardcore adult film *Deep Throat* changed everything. The adult industry realized it could use the non-trademarked X as a marketing tool on its products. For pornographers, the X became an instantly recognizable brand that communicated the nature of their content without requiring explicit descriptions.

By the mid-1970s, the association between the X rating and hardcore pornography was so absolute that mainstream studios began to view the rating as a commercial poison. Theater chains

refused to screen X-rated films, and newspapers often refused to carry their advertisements. To avoid this stigma, filmmakers were forced to re-edit their work to secure an R rating, often at the expense of artistic integrity. In 1990, the MPA attempted to reclaim the adult category by introducing the NC-17 rating ("No Children under 17"). This was intended as the new X for serious cinema, such as *Showgirls* or *Henry & June*, but it largely failed to shed its historical stigma.

The NC-17 rating is widely considered a commercial death sentence, as major digital platforms and theater chains continue to restrict its distribution. Instead of seeking an adult-only rating, modern filmmakers have embraced the unrated loophole. By releasing a film without a rating, creators can bypass the MPA's strictures and market direct-to-consumer cuts via streaming services. Furthermore, the rise of TV-MA on platforms like HBO Max and Netflix has effectively rendered an X-equivalent unnecessary in the digital age. Thus, a rating system intended to help parents navigate the cinema ultimately created a cultural icon for the very industry it sought to distinguish itself from.

Television and Video Game Ratings

In the 1990s, the television industry introduced its voluntary rating system. Unlike film ratings, TV ratings are often assigned by the networks themselves.

Television Ratings System. Source: http://www.tvguidelines.org/ratings.htm

Rating	Meaning	Examples of Programs
Unrated	The First Amendment protects news programming	*CNN Newsroom*, *NBC Nightly News*, *CBS Evening News*
TV-Y	Appropriate for all children	*Bluey*, *Sesame Street*
TV-Y7	Designed for children ages seven and up	*SpongeBob SquarePants*, *Paw Patrol*, *Teen Titans Go!*
TV-Y7-FV	Directed toward older children; includes depictions of fantasy violence	*Pokémon Horizons: The Series*, *Miraculous: Tales of Ladybug & Cat Noir*, *Avatar: The Last Airbender*
TV-G	Suitable for general audiences; contains little or no violence, no strong language, and little or no sexual material	*America's Funniest Home Videos*, *Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives*, *The Great British Baking Show*

Rating	Meaning	Examples of Programs
TV-PG	Parental guidance suggested	*Abbott Elementary*, *Young Sheldon*, *The Mandalorian*
TV-14	Parents strongly cautioned; contains suggestive dialogue, strong language, and sexual or violent content.	*Grey's Anatomy*, *Stranger Things*
TV-MA	Mature audiences only	*The Last of Us*, *The Bear*

At the same time, the Entertainment Software Rating Board provides ratings for video games. They remain a critical wall against government regulation; in 2011, the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. EMA* that video games are protected speech, meaning the government cannot ban the sale of violent games to minors. The industry must regulate itself.

Video Game Ratings System. Source: http://www.esrb.org/ratings/ratings_guide.jsp

Rating	Meaning	Examples of Games
EC	Designed for early childhood, children ages three and older	*Peppa Pig: World Adventures*, *PAW Patrol Mighty Pups Save Adventure Bay*, *Bluey: The Videogame*
E	Suitable for everyone over the age of 6; contains minimal fantasy violence and mild language.	*Minecraft*, *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*, *Rocket League*
E 10+	Appropriate for ages 10 and older; may contain more violence and/or slightly suggestive themes.	*Super Mario Bros. Wonder*, *Lego Star Wars: The Skywalker Saga*, *Splatoon 3*
T	Content is appropriate for teens (ages 13 and older); may contain violence, crude humor, sexually suggestive themes, use of strong language, and/or simulated gambling.	*Marvel's Spider-Man 2*, *Hogwarts Legacy*, *Valorant*

Rating	Meaning	Examples of Games
M	Mature content for ages 17 and older; includes intense violence and/or sexual content.	*Baldur's Gate 3*, *Cyberpunk 2077*, *Helldivers 2*
AO	Adults (18+) only; contains graphic sexual content and/or profanity or prolonged violence (rare rating)	This rating is extremely rare, as major console manufacturers like Sony, Microsoft, and Nintendo generally refuse to allow AO-rated games on their platforms.

Despite these systems, debates regarding the impact of media violence persist. Games from the popular *Grand Theft Auto* series continue to be a lightning rod for criticism. However, most of the discussion has shifted toward the immersive nature of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality. Critics argue that the physical interactivity of VR violence warrants a more stringent classification than that of traditional 2D media. Furthermore, the portrayal of women in games remains a central point of contention, with ongoing scrutiny of hypersexualization and the male gaze. These discussions highlight the continuous negotiation between creative freedom and the potential

psychological impact of increasingly realistic, interactive entertainment.

15.5 OWNERSHIP ISSUES IN THE MASS MEDIA



Source: Image by TheDigitalArtist on Pixabay.

The rapid evolution of the internet has consistently challenged traditional notions of ownership and intellectual property, necessitating a continuous adaptation of legal frameworks. From its inception, the internet's inherent ability to facilitate the automated ingestion and widespread redistribution of information has presented unprecedented challenges for copyright protection. The U.S. government, through various legislative actions and international agreements, has played a crucial role in

establishing and enforcing intellectual property rights in this dynamic digital environment.

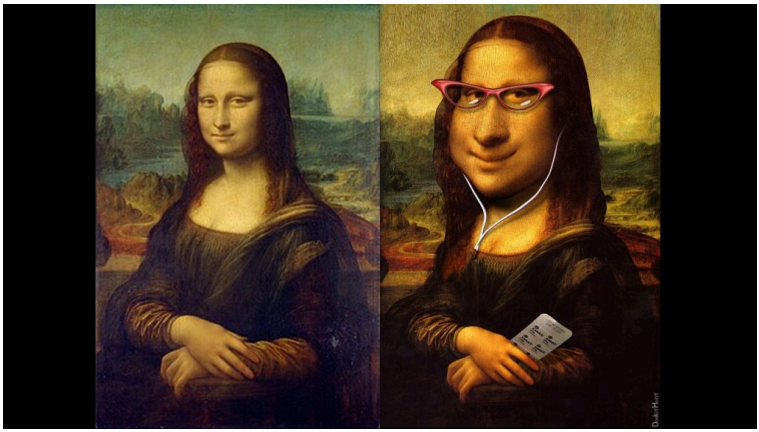
The definition of property has expanded beyond static files like PDFs and MP3s to include the very data used to train artificial intelligence models. As media continues to move toward a remix culture, the struggle remains: how to foster digital innovation and creativity while ensuring that the original creators receive credit and compensation for their labor in an increasingly automated world.

Media Consolidation

While digital property rights are essential, the ownership landscape is also shaped by the physical and corporate control of media outlets. Nowadays, a handful of massive conglomerates—such as Sinclair Broadcast Group, Nexstar, and investment firms like Alden Global Capital—own the majority of local television stations and newspapers in the United States. This trend, known as **media consolidation**, creates significant challenges for editorial independence. When a hedge fund or a single corporate entity acquires a local newsroom, it often results in news deserts where local reporting is replaced by centralized, homogenized content produced hundreds of miles away.

The legal counterweight to this concentration is antitrust law. Traditionally, the U.S. government used these laws to

prevent monopolies that could stifle competition. However, in the mid-2020s, federal regulators have increasingly focused on how consolidation impacts the marketplace of ideas. A news organization's ownership structure directly impacts operational realities, ranging from resource allocation and travel budgets to the editorial direction of lead stories.



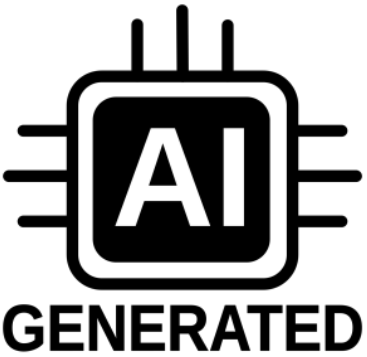
Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* next to a modern caricature, which demonstrates how public domain masterworks serve as foundational raw material for modern transformative art and visual commentary. **Source**: (left) Leonardo da Vinci creator QS:P170,Q762 C2RMF: Galerie de tableaux en très haute définition: image page, Mona Lisa, by Leonardo da Vinci, from C2RMF retouched, public domain. (right) DonkeyHotey, Mona Lisa – Caricature (6432459465), CC BY 2.0.

Online Creativity and Intellectual Property Rights

The Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998 (DMCA) remains the primary pillar of U.S. efforts to regulate online copyright, establishing a framework that includes a notice-and-takedown system to provide safe harbors for service providers. This system provides safe harbors for online service providers (such as YouTube or Meta), protecting them from liability for infringing content posted by their users, provided the platform removes the material upon notice from the copyright holder.

However, critics like the Electronic Frontier Foundation argue that the DMCA's anti-circumvention measures often stifle fair use—the legal doctrine that allows journalists and creators to use copyrighted material for criticism, commentary, and news reporting. The primary tension lies in automated enforcement. Algorithms can flag and remove legitimate news reports or satirical remixes because they cannot distinguish between copyright theft and a transformative use of media.

Copyright Protection in the AI Era



Source: Databases, AI-generated, CC0 1.0.

International cooperation through the World Intellectual Property Organization has further harmonized these digital laws, yet the focus has shifted toward the complex issue of data sovereignty. The central legal question today is whether the fair use doctrine allows artificial intelligence companies to scrape decades of journalism and artistic work to train large language models. Landmark litigation between the *New York Times* and OpenAI has explored whether training an AI constitutes a transformative learning experience or if the resulting output acts as a market substitute that steals subscribers. Furthermore, the 2025 ruling in *Bartz v. Anthropic* established that while

training on legally acquired content may be fair use, using pirated datasets crosses a definitive legal line.

News organizations now argue that this practice goes beyond the traditional DMCA framework, as the AI isn't just hosting a file but ingesting its value to create a competing product. Attempts have been made to embed AI-resistant code or blockchain-based tags to ensure creators are compensated when an algorithm uses their work. However, this is not a standard or widespread reality. Instead, creators rely on traditional legal lawsuits, direct enterprise licensing deals, and digital watermarking standards to address unauthorized AI scraping.

The Shift from Piracy to Stream-Ripping

The landscape of piracy itself has undergone a dramatic transformation since the era of peer-to-peer networks like Napster and LimeWire. While the Recording Industry Association of America once launched an aggressive campaign to combat music piracy by targeting individual uploaders, modern challenges have shifted to stream-ripping—the practice of using software to permanently save content from streaming platforms such as Spotify or Netflix—and to illegal IPTV services that broadcast live sports and news without authorization. The conflict

between major music labels and AI generators Suno and Udio highlights this shift, in which courts are deciding whether creating vocal clones constitutes a transformative act or a violation of the sonic fingerprints of human performers.

The legal focus has shifted from suing individual fans to targeting the infrastructure of piracy. However, this raises fundamental questions about the liability of digital platforms. As news organizations increasingly rely on third-party platforms to distribute their messages, the line between a neutral platform and an active distributor of infringing content remains the central legal conflict of the digital age.

Data Sovereignty and the Value Gap

The struggle for ownership culminates in the financial value gap between the journalists who produce the news and the tech giants that profit from its distribution. For decades, platforms like Google and Facebook have captured the lion's share of digital advertising revenue by displaying snippets of news content. In response, the proposed Journalism Competition and Preservation Act and similar global laws are designed to restore data sovereignty to newsrooms.

Laws like this grant news organizations a limited antitrust

exemption, allowing them to negotiate collectively with tech platforms for a share of the revenue generated by their reporting. This is a fundamental shift in the definition of ownership: it asserts that the *value* of a news story belongs to the creator, not just the platform that hosts the link. The success of these negotiations will likely determine the economic viability of independent journalism in the digital age.

The Law and Online Interactions

The legal landscape of online interactions is shaped primarily by Terms of Service (TOS) agreements and an evolving set of federal and state laws.

TOS Agreements

Terms of Service are legally binding contracts that users must agree to before accessing software or social media platforms. These documents delineate the rules of engagement, permissible conduct, and the responsibilities of both the user and the service provider. For example, platforms like YouTube or Meta have extensive agreements that govern everything from content moderation to data privacy. While these agreements are ubiquitous, many users

accept them without thorough review, potentially overlooking critical clauses regarding user-generated content, data use, dispute resolution, and liability limitations. Breaches of these terms can lead to account suspension or permanent termination, highlighting the substantial power service providers hold over our digital lives.



Portrait depicting Megan Meier, a 13-year-old girl who took her own life after a cyberbullying incident. **Source**: A Modern Alluring Girl In Green (Megan Meier). sheblum. CC BY-SA 3.0.

The Case of Megan Meier

The tragic case of Megan Meier in 2008 brought to the forefront the complex and often ambiguous legal landscape

governing online behavior, particularly concerning TOS violations and the application of existing laws to novel digital harms. Lori Drew, a 49-year-old woman, was accused of creating a fictitious MySpace profile of a teenage boy to cyberbully 13-year-old Megan Meier, who subsequently died by suicide. The genesis of this digital deception stemmed from Drew's desire to hear what Meier had said about her teenage daughter. Using the fake persona, Drew initially engaged in flirtatious exchanges with Meier to glean information about her social life. Later, the tone of the messages shifted dramatically, with the fabricated persona sending cruel messages, including the devastating assertion that "the world would be better off without you." Megan Meier tragically took her own life later that same day.

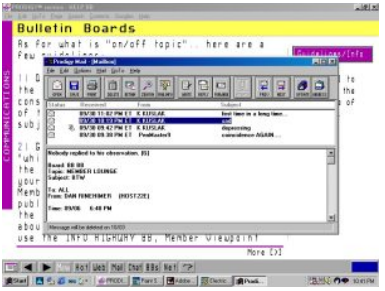
After Lori Drew's identity was revealed, Megan Meier's parents sought legal recourse. However, the absence of specific state laws in Missouri, where the tragedy occurred, to address cyberbullying or online harassment in such a context posed a significant challenge for prosecutors. This legal void led prosecutors to pursue charges in California, the state where MySpace's servers were located. Prosecutors decided that, since no laws were applicable in Missouri, Drew would face trial in California, where she was charged with TOS violations. Creating a false identity violated MySpace's terms of service, and as a result, she faced one count of conspiracy and three counts of unauthorized computer access.

The Computer Fraud and Abuse Act (CFAA), enacted in 1986, was initially designed to combat computer hacking and unauthorized access to government or financial computers. Its application in the Drew case, where the alleged offense was a violation of a website's TOS rather than a traditional hacking incident, was highly controversial. In 2008, a jury found Drew guilty of misdemeanor counts of "unauthorized access," but the ruling was subsequently overturned the following year. The judge expressed concerns that the CFAA was not intended to criminalize simple contractual violations on the internet, a sentiment that the Supreme Court finally codified in the 2021 case *Van Buren v. United States*.

While Lori Drew's conviction was ultimately overturned, the Megan Meier case had a profound impact. It served as a stark public awakening to the potential for severe real-world consequences stemming from online behavior and to the critical role of TOS agreements in attempting to govern it. The case spurred legislative action at both state and federal levels, prompting discussions about creating new laws specifically designed to address cyberbullying and other forms of online abuse. In modern times, these discussions have expanded to include protections against **doxing** (the malicious act of researching and publicly releasing private, identifying information) and **swatting** (the criminal act of making false, high-level emergency reports to dispatch armed law enforcement

to a victim's address), as legislatures continue to refine the balance between digital anonymity and personal accountability.

Section 230 and Platform Liability



The early online service provider Prodigy directly prompted the creation of Section 230 after a 1995 court ruling held it liable as a publisher for user-posted defamation simply because it attempted to moderate its message boards. **Source**: benj.edwards, mail, CC BY 2.0.

One of the most consequential pieces of legislation for online ownership is Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act. While traditional news organizations are legally responsible for every word they publish—meaning they can be sued for libel if they print a false statement—Section 230 provides a liability shield for interactive computer services like Meta, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube. Under this law, these platforms are

generally not treated as publishers of content provided by their users.

This law has reached a critical turning point due to the rise of generative AI. Courts are now debating whether a platform loses its Section 230 immunity when its own AI hallucinates or materially contributes to the creation of harmful content
. This creates a stark divide in the media industry: a student newspaper is held to a high standard of publisher liability, while the social media platform used to distribute that same newspaper is largely immune to the consequences of the comments and misinformation posted alongside it.

Crimes on the Internet

The rapid expansion of the internet has fundamentally reshaped how individuals interact, but it has also created new avenues for criminal activity. Despite a common misconception of inherent anonymity online, law enforcement agencies have progressively developed sophisticated methods to trace digital footprints,
demonstrating that the internet is not a shield against legal accountability. The ability to requisition Internet Protocol (IP) addresses and trace them back to specific devices has led to numerous prosecutions, mirroring enforcement efforts in more traditional contexts.

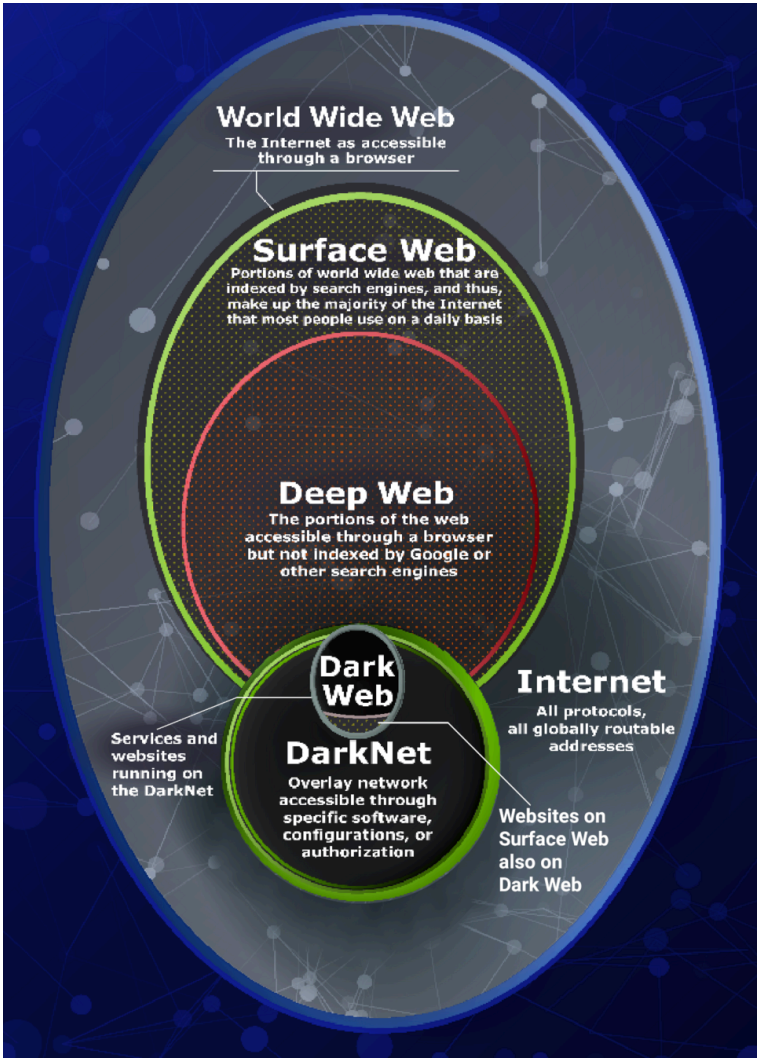
Online Hate Crimes and Anonymity

A landmark case that solidified the legal precedent for online hate crimes was the 1998 conviction of Richard Machado. At 21 years old, Machado was found guilty of sending racist death threats via email to 59 Asian students at the University of California, Irvine. Machado signed his emails "Asian Hater" and explicitly threatened the lives of the recipients. This case was crucial because it established that hostile communications sent over the internet carry the same legal weight and criminal penalties as threats conveyed through telephone calls or physical mail.

This principle was further underscored in 2009 when Walter Edward Bagdasarian was arrested for posting a racist threat on a Yahoo message board concerning then-presidential candidate Barack Obama. His post, which predicted a violent assassination attempt, exemplified how authorities could swiftly trace supposedly anonymous online activity using IP addresses. Though Bagdasarian's conviction was overturned, the case highlights that law enforcement treats digital threats with the same urgency as offline threats.

Jurisdictional and Technical Challenges

The evolving nature of internet law continues to grapple with complexities such as jurisdiction. If a podcast or news report is broadcast globally, it remains a matter of legal debate which national or regional laws apply in the event of a violation. Furthermore, the rise of virtual private networks (VPNs) adds a layer of complexity to tracing malicious actors. VPNs encrypt internet traffic and route it through servers in different locations, masking a user's actual IP address. While used for legitimate privacy and security, they are also exploited by individuals attempting to evade detection. However, advanced forensic techniques and international cooperation often allow authorities to pierce through these layers of anonymity.



Source: U.S. Department of Justice Inspector General Michael Evan Horowitz office, Deep web, dark web, and darknet as segments of the Internet , public domain.

The Dark Web and Opaque Digital Spaces

Even more challenging for law enforcement is the existence of the **dark web,** a hidden portion of the internet not indexed by standard search engines that requires specific software, such as Tor (otherwise known as The Onion Router), to access. While the dark web provides essential privacy for journalists and whistleblowers, it has also become a haven for markets dealing in illegal drugs, weapons, and stolen data.

The sophisticated encryption and layered routing used on the dark web make it significantly more difficult to identify users than on the surface web. This has compelled law enforcement agencies worldwide to invest heavily in specialized cybercrime units and international collaborations to combat criminal enterprises operating within these opaque digital spaces. As the internet grows, authorities must constantly adapt to address media issues within this rapidly shifting digital landscape.

15.6 DIGITAL DEMOCRACY AND ITS POSSIBLE EFFECTS

Digital democracy, frequently termed e-democracy, has transitioned from a novel experiment into the foundational infrastructure of modern political discourse and civic life. Leveraging digital platforms to involve citizens in governance is no longer an elective strategy but a mechanical necessity. This evolution has moved beyond early attempts to broaden participation and now focuses on the complex integration of AI-driven deliberation and data-driven accountability
. While belief in the internet's power to engage the public remains strong, the focus has shifted from the sheer quantity of engagement to the quality and representativeness of the data generated by these digital interactions.

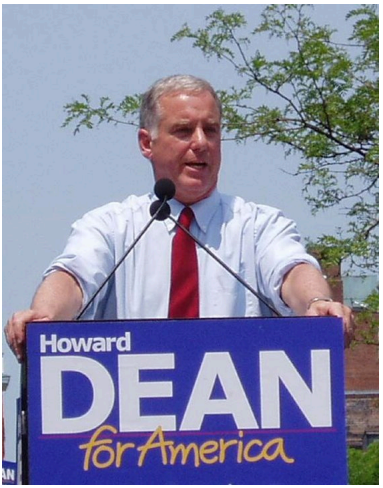
Modern election cycles continue to demonstrate how candidates harness the internet to transform campaign strategies, yet a tension between democratization and digital authoritarianism increasingly defines the landscape. While online political organizations can mobilize millions and raise unprecedented funds, they operate

within walled gardens governed by opaque algorithms. Consequently, digital democracy in the mid-2020s is characterized by a hybrid model: digital platforms serve as the default baseline for large-scale deliberation, while strategic offline engagement fosters the deep empathy and trust that automated systems often struggle to replicate.



Some called President Barack Obama "the digital candidate" for his use of digital technology during his 2008 presidential campaign. **Source**: Chris Murphy. The Graphic Design of Barack Obama. CC BY-NC-MD 2.0.

President Obama's Digital Campaign and Its Enduring Legacy



Howard Dean's 2004 presidential primary campaign pioneered digital democracy by leveraging small-dollar online fundraising, grassroots blogging, and decentralized Meetup.com organizing to bypass traditional party machinery and revolutionize political campaigning in the internet age. **Source**: John Hoke (johnhoke) from Albrightsville, PA, US, Howard Dean declaration of candidacy June 2003, cropped, CC BY-SA 2.0.

The 2008 presidential campaign of Barack Obama stands as a watershed moment in digital democracy, marking the point at which the internet moved from a niche fundraising tool to the

primary engine of political mobilization. While earlier candidates, such as Howard Dean, pioneered online community-building in 2004, the Obama campaign became the first to integrate digital strategy into every facet of its operations fully. As one writer puts it, "What is interesting about the story of his digital campaign is how digital was integrated fully into the Obama campaign, rather than being seen as an additional extra." Digital engagement was the foundational path to the nomination, favoring decentralization and peer-to-peer engagement over traditional top-down messaging.

The true innovation of the 2008 and 2012 campaigns lay in the marriage of big data and grassroots organizing. Through the development of internal databases such as Project Narwhal , the campaign tracked individual voter interactions across platforms, enabling micro-targeting previously unseen in American politics. By leveraging the then-emerging social graph of platforms like Facebook, the campaign empowered supporters to act as digital ambassadors, reaching out to their own personal networks rather than relying solely on television advertisements.

To understand the evolution of digital democracy, it is necessary to look at how the data-driven ground game pioneered by the Obama campaign became the standard for modern political strategy. Before Project Narwhal, a campaign's fundraising team, volunteer organizers, and voter registration staff often used separate

databases. Project Narwhal provided these teams with a 360-degree view of a voter, allowing them to know whether an individual had donated online, signed a petition at a rally, or responded to a canvasser's knock on their door.

This model has evolved into AI-driven voter modeling, where predictive algorithms replace simple database queries. Modern campaigns now use machine learning to analyze thousands of data points—from consumer habits to social media sentiment—to predict not just *if* a person will vote, but which specific message will be most persuasive to them at a given moment. This is known as dynamic micro-targeting. While the 2008 campaign relied on human ambassadors using digital tools to reach friends, contemporary efforts often use automated ambassadors or chatbots to conduct personalized outreach at a scale that would have been impossible during the Obama era.

The transition from the Obama-era manual data entry to the current state of automated behavioral analysis has changed the nature of political persuasion. In 2008, the goal was to use the internet to organize people; nowadays, the goal is often to use the internet to predict and influence individual behavior. This shift has raised significant ethical questions about data privacy and the psychological manipulation of the electorate, making the Obama legacy a point of both admiration for its efficiency and caution regarding its long-term impact on democratic norms.

The legacy of this digital-first approach is visible in every

modern campaign. The Obama team proved that the internet could be used to bypass traditional media gatekeepers, raise record-breaking amounts of small-dollar donations, and coordinate precise get-out-the-vote efforts on the ground. However, this legacy is complex. While it demonstrated the potential for mass civic engagement, it also established the technical blueprint for the data-intensive, algorithmically driven political landscape of the 2020s. Today's reliance on predictive modeling and digital surveillance in elections is the direct descendant of the innovations first deployed during the Obama era.

Evolving Digital Platforms and Outreach

The evolution of digital political engagement has shifted from reliance on centralized websites to a hyper-fragmented approach that prioritizes immediacy, algorithmic reach, and personalized dark-social communication.

Founded in 1998 during the Clinton impeachment crisis, MoveOn became a pioneer in digital political activism by using email campaigns, online petitions, and small-dollar fundraising to mobilize millions of progressive voters nationwide. **Source**: MoveOn.org, Moveon logo, public domain.

From Hubs to Landing Pages

In the early 2000s, websites like *MoveOn.org* and *MyBarackObama.com* served as central digital town squares. However, the campaign website's role has since evolved. A candidate's website is rarely a community forum; instead, it functions as a high-conversion transactional hub. These sites are optimized for mobile users to process donations via one-click services like ActBlue or WinRed quickly and to capture the data necessary for the campaign's predictive modeling. While they still host policy stances, their primary purpose is to act as the landing point for traffic generated by social media.

The Rise of Algorithmic Politics and Short-Form Video

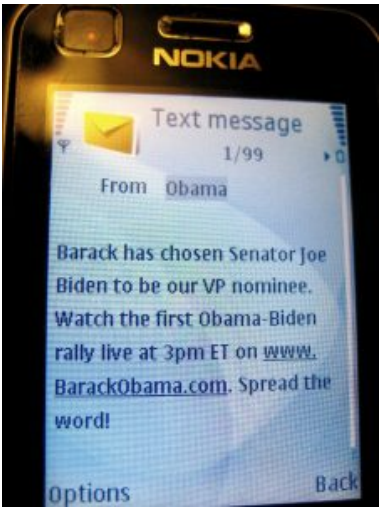
While Facebook had tremendous influence in the 2012 and 2016 elections, its dominance has been challenged by TikTok,

Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts. Modern outreach isn't just about building a following; it is about optimizing for the algorithm. Campaigns now produce short-form content—15- to 60-second clips—designed to go viral among non-political users.

For instance, during the 2024 and 2026 cycles, candidates have increasingly bypassed traditional town halls in favor of collabs with popular influencers. This creator economy strategy allows politicians to reach specific demographics—such as Gen Z or hobbyist communities—by borrowing the trust and authenticity of established digital creators. Unlike official campaign ads, these interactions often feel organic, making them highly effective at shaping public opinion.

Advanced Texting and AI Integration

Text messaging (SMS) has evolved from simple one-way updates to sophisticated AI-driven peer-to-peer campaigns. While the Obama campaign used SMS for breaking news—such as the



Barack Obama announced his selection of Joe Biden as his vice-presidential running mate in the 2008 election via text. **Source**: brownpau from Washington, DC, Obama Text Message Announcing Biden as his VP (2788253333) , CC BY 2.0.

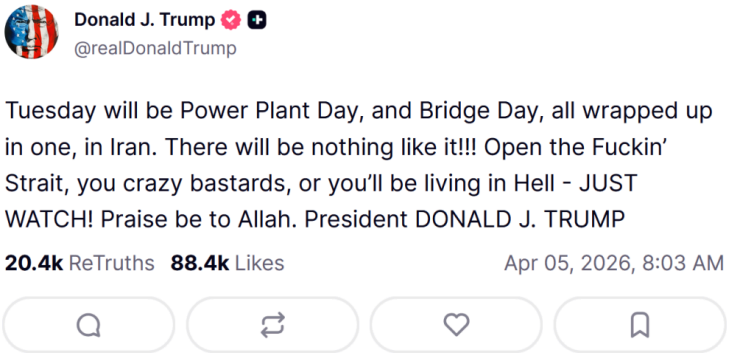
2008 announcement of Joe Biden as his running mate —modern campaigns use AI to scale personalized interactions. Automated systems can now send millions of texts that respond dynamically to voter questions about polling locations or policy stances. This immediate, high-touch communication is often the primary driver of record-breaking

fundraising surges, as seen in the 2024 cycle, where rapid-response text appeals generated hundreds of millions of dollars in small-dollar donations within hours of major political shifts.

Dark Social and Encrypted Outreach

While public platforms like X (formerly Twitter) remain important for the political press corps and real-time updates, a significant portion of modern outreach has shifted to encrypted messaging apps such as WhatsApp, Signal, and Telegram. This dark-social environment allows campaigns to foster highly motivated, private communities. In these spaces, supporters share viral memes and talking points that are shielded from public scrutiny and traditional fact-checking tools

. For example, political organizers frequently use WhatsApp groups to coordinate rapid-response efforts or to disseminate volunteer-led messaging that feels more personal than a standard email.



A Truth Social Post by Donald Trump on April 5, 2026.
Source: Donald Trump,
Trump Truth Social Post April 5 2026, public domain.

Alt-Tech and Platform Sovereignty

While mainstream platforms like TikTok and Instagram are used for broad outreach, the rise of alt-tech platforms has created a parallel digital ecosystem. President Donald Trump's use of Truth Social is the primary example of this shift. By moving his primary communications to a platform his own company controls, he bypassed the content moderation policies and shadow-banning algorithms of traditional Silicon Valley giants.

This represents a move toward platform sovereignty. In this model, political figures and movements no longer just rent space on a platform like Facebook; they seek to own the pipes through which their message flows. This allows for a direct, unfiltered pipeline to their most loyal supporters. For

media consumers, this fragmentation means political discourse is no longer happening in a single digital town square. Instead, it is split across multiple ideologically distinct platforms, which can further amplify the echo-chamber effect by ensuring users are never exposed to opposing viewpoints.

E-Democracy in the Age of AI and Deepfakes



The music video "Yes We Can ," created by the Black Eyed Peas will.i.am, had accumulated more than 20 million views leading up to the 2008 presidential election, demonstrating an example of digital campaigning used by supporters of political candidates. **Source**: NASA/ Aubrey Gemignani Aubrey Gemignani creator QS:P170,Q70751664, Will.i.am in 2018, public domain.

The broader concept of e-democracy extends beyond official campaign efforts to include grassroots movements and viral content created by supporters. In the early digital era, this was exemplified by user-generated music videos and interactive games. For instance, websites such as

Barackobamaisyournewbicycle.com and the song "Yes We Can " emerged during Obama's campaign and went viral.

However, supporter content has evolved into a sophisticated ecosystem of memetic warfare. Beyond rudimentary photo manipulation, groups now use generative AI to create viral memes, vocal clones of candidates for satirical parodies, and hyper-targeted video clips designed to trigger specific emotional responses. This shift illustrates the power of decentralized content in amplifying a message. Still, it also creates a landscape in which the line between an organic supporter and a state-sponsored bot is nearly impossible to discern.

However, the modern e-democracy landscape is significantly more complex, particularly with the advent of artificial intelligence and deepfakes. AI-powered analytics can now be used for highly sophisticated voter targeting and micro-targeting, enabling campaigns to deliver hyper-personalized messages based on vast datasets of individual preferences and behaviors. This raises concerns about privacy and the potential for manipulation.

The emergence of deepfakes—AI-generated, highly realistic audio and video—poses the most profound threat to contemporary democratic processes. Unlike the rudimentary photo manipulation of the past, modern deepfakes can generate audio of a candidate making inflammatory remarks or video of an election official destroying ballots.

Coupled with the liar's dividend, this has created a post-truth environment where voters are prone to dismissing any evidence that contradicts their existing beliefs. To combat this, modern newsrooms and campaigns have begun adopting



Jake Angeli, widely known as the "QAnon Shaman" for his horned fur hat and face paint, became one of the most prominent visual symbols of the QAnon conspiracy movement during the January 6, 2021, attack on the United States Capitol. **Source**: TheUnseen011191, Jake Angeli, PDM 1.0.

content-provenance standards that use cryptographic watermarking to provide a verifiable digital trail for authentic media.

Conspiracy theories thrive on the internet's interconnected nature, spreading rapidly from niche forums to mainstream platforms like

TikTok and X. From the real-world impact of movements like QAnon to unfounded claims about election technology, these narratives can mobilize populations on entirely false premises. The rise of generative hallucinations—in which AI models unintentionally fabricate biographical details or legal histories of political figures—adds another layer of complexity to the disinformation ecosystem.

Political discourse in the digital age offers unprecedented reach for candidates but also serves as fertile ground for rumors and misinformation that can erode public trust. The internet's rapid dissemination capabilities, driven by algorithmic recommendation engines, mean that claims can spread virally within minutes. Though legacy fact-checking organizations like PolitiFact and FactCheck.org remain vital, the speed of modern disinformation often outpaces traditional human verification.

Digital Democracy and the Digital Divide

While technology offers unparalleled opportunities for engagement, it also exacerbates societal inequalities through the digital divide. Matthew Hindman's question in *The Myth of Digital Democracy*—"Is the internet making politics less exclusive?"—remains a central conflict. While the internet empowers many, it creates significant barriers for those in connectivity deserts or with low digital literacy.

This has evolved into algorithmic redlining. Because campaigns use AI to maximize their return on investment, they may direct their digital outreach, town halls, and information exclusively toward high-propensity voters—those already statistically likely to vote. This leaves marginalized communities and younger, first-time voters in a digital dark spot, where they are less likely to see political ads or mobilization efforts simply because an algorithm determined they weren't profitable to reach.

The responsibility remains for policymakers to ensure that the promise of digital democracy extends to all. Fostering true inclusivity requires more than just providing internet access; it requires a commitment to algorithmic transparency and protections that ensure every segment of the population has an equal seat in the digital town square.

15.7 MEDIA INFLUENCE ON LAWS AND GOVERNMENT

The media, with its enduring voice and role in shaping public opinion, has consistently been a powerful force in politics. From the



In 2007, *The Washington Post* published a critical exposé on the Walter Reed Army Medical Center. In response to public outcry, the U.S. Army launched an investigation and began improving the facility. As demonstrated in this case, media coverage can have a direct impact on people's lives. **Source**: Max Borge – The Washington Post – CC BY-NC 2.0.

revolutionary pamphlets of the 18th century to the broadcast saturation of the 20th, political discourse has relied on media as its primary platform. Beyond acting as a watchdog, the media provides citizens with news coverage of systemic issues and offers public forums for debate. Consequently, media scrutiny—or its absence—can significantly shape the trajectory of governmental action.

A classic modern example occurred in 2007 when *The Washington Post* exposed substandard medical treatment at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, leading to high-level resignations and immediate reforms. In the 2020s, this watchdog role was revitalized by investigative outlets such as *ProPublica*, whose persistent reporting on judicial ethics led the U.S. Supreme Court to adopt its first formal Code of Conduct in 2023. These instances demonstrate the media's unique capacity to hold even the most insulated institutions accountable through public disclosure.

Nevertheless, the media's influence remains a subject of intense debate. Observers frequently question whether the media sets the government's agenda or if it is merely a willing participant in stories the government wants pursued. The collapse of local journalism further complicates this tension. The rise of news deserts—communities with no dedicated local reporting—has shown that when the media's voice is silenced, government accountability often vanishes, leading to increased local corruption and decreased civic participation.

Public skepticism of this influence has reached historic highs. Despite regulations like Section 315 of the Communications Act, which requires broadcast stations to provide equal opportunities to political candidates, trust in mass media remains at a nadir. Polls consistently show that less than a third of Americans trust the media to report news

fully, accurately, and fairly. This distrust is deeply partisan: while skepticism is nearly universal among Republicans, it has also grown significantly among Democrats and Independents. In an era of heightened polarization, the media must navigate a delicate balance: its reporting can spark a national reform movement, but it can also be dismissed as partisan noise by an increasingly cynical electorate.

Politics, Broadcast Media, and the Internet

Throughout their respective histories, radio, television, and the internet have fundamentally reshaped the democratic process. As technology evolved, citizens moved from being passive recipients of information to active participants who demand real-time analysis and direct access to leaders.

The Era of Audio and Video Trust

Radio was the first medium to break the newspaper publishers' monopoly. On November 2, 1920, KDKA in Pittsburgh broadcast the first election results, bringing the Harding-Cox race directly into American living rooms. This created a new demand for public speaking skills, most famously exemplified by Franklin D. Roosevelt's Fireside Chats.

Television took this a step further by emphasizing image and optics. The 1960 Nixon-Kennedy debates served as the definitive proof of how a candidate *looked*—Kennedy's tanned confidence versus Nixon's pale, sweat-prone appearance—could outweigh the substance of their arguments. In 1965, the Vietnam War became the first "living-room war."



In 1960, candidates John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon brought the presidential debate to television screens around the nation, marking a watershed moment in American political history. This inaugural televised debate, viewed by an estimated 70 million Americans, introduced a new dimension to political campaigning: visual appearance. **Source**: judy_and_ed – Replay – CC BY-NC 2.0.

Early in the war, the coverage often seemed mostly upbeat:

> It typically began with a battlefield roundup, written from wire reports based on the daily press briefing in Saigon,

> read by the anchor and illustrated with a battle map. A policy story from Washington would usually follow the battlefield roundup, and then a film report from the field.... As with most television news, the emphasis was on the visual and, above all, the personal: "American boys in action" was the story, and reports emphasized their bravery and skill in handling the technology of war.

However, in 1969, television coverage began to shift as journalists grew increasingly skeptical of the government's claims of progress, and stories placed greater emphasis on the human costs of war. While explicit gore typically remained off-screen, a few significant violent moments profoundly shook the country upon their broadcast. In 1965, CBS aired footage of U.S. Marines setting village huts on fire, which sparked outrage. Displays such as this altered America's perspective of the war, significantly contributing to the burgeoning antiwar sentiment.

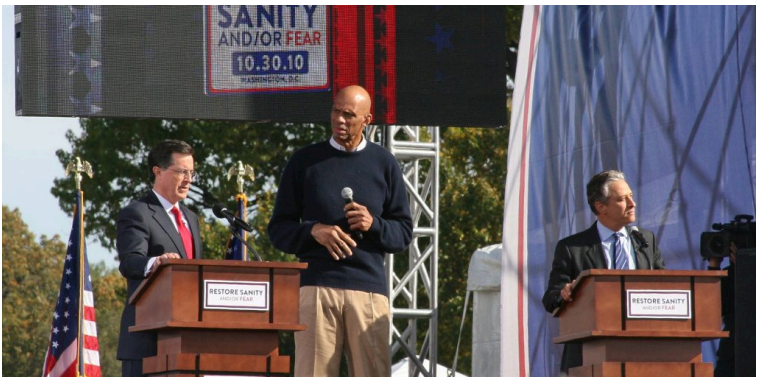
The 24/7 News Cycle and the Rise of Satire

Television news has undergone dramatic changes over the medium's history. For years, nightly news broadcasts dominated the political news cycle; then, round-the-clock cable news channels appeared. CNN debuted in 1980, with its founder, Ted Turner, famously stating, "We won't be signing off until the world ends. We'll be on, and we will cover the

end of the world live, and that will be our last event...and when the end of the world comes, we'll play 'Nearer, My God, to Thee' before we sign off."

The rise of 24-hour news stations, such as CNN, Fox News , and MS Now, has fundamentally reshaped the political landscape. These networks increased competition for viewership, leading to the targeting of specific demographics and the creation of shows appealing to particular political preferences. This intensified competition often fuels sensationalism and partisanship, as networks may filter out stories that do not support their political ideals, a practice known as gatekeeping, or engage in issue framing to reinforce political messages. For example, critics argue that networks on both the left and right selectively highlight or downplay certain aspects of stories to align with their editorial stance, contributing to a more polarized public.

High-profile journalists are increasingly leaving legacy institutions to launch independent, subscription-based newsletters (such as those on Substack). This creates a new form of media influence in which a single journalist can wield as much political sway as an entire editorial board.



The Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear was a large, satirical gathering held on October 30, 2010, on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., led by comedians Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert, aimed at highlighting political moderation and satirizing the extreme rhetoric prevalent in American media and politics. **Source**: Cliff, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear, CC BY 2.0.

In response to the pervasive nature of cable news, nightly network news programs have often changed their focus to emphasize more local stories or delve deeper into narratives that major national news programs might overlook. Additionally, the increasing popularity and influence of satirical news shows such as *The Daily Show* and *Last Week Tonight*, along with late-night talk show monologues on programs like *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* and "A Closer Look" on *Late Night with Seth Meyers*, have attracted younger generations to engage with politics. These shows use humor to dismantle complex policy issues, demonstrating that

comedy can often hold power more effectively than traditional objective reporting.

Satire's Serious Sway: The Evolution of the "John Oliver Effect"

John Oliver's *Last Week Tonight* has carved out a unique and impactful niche in the media landscape. While



John Oliver. **Source**: Neil Grabowsky / Montclair Film Festival, John Oliver, TTL 9409, CC BY 2.0.

ostensibly a comedy show, it provides deep dives into

systemic issues that have frequently sparked public discourse and influenced policy. This influence—dubbed the "John Oliver Effect"—refers to a phenomenon in which a comedic segment catalyzes tangible legislative or regulatory change.

The show's methodology involves taking a dry, complex topic—such as data brokers, redistricting, or structured settlements—and humanizing it through a blend of investigative rigor and absurdist humor. A landmark 2022 segment saw Oliver purchase and then forgive $15 million in medical debt for nearly 9,000 people, a move that highlighted the predatory nature of the debt-buying industry more effectively than years of standard reporting. This activist satire has become a blueprint for media influence, forcing policy conversations on topics like SLAPP suits (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation) and the bail system into the mainstream.

The landscape of serious satire was further reshaped in 2024 by the return of Jon Stewart to *The Daily Show*. Stewart's influence has often been more direct than Oliver's; his high-profile advocacy was instrumental in the passage of the PACT Act, which expanded healthcare for veterans exposed to toxic burn pits. Stewart's approach—utilizing viral,

shame-based confrontations with lawmakers—demonstrates that satirists in the 2020s are no longer just commentators; they are effective lobbyists for the public interest.

Satirical news programs have adapted to the modern news cycle by serving as de facto fact-checkers, using humor to dismantle claims and defend the rule of law in political discourse. While it is difficult to quantify the precise causal link between a comedy segment and a bill's passage, these programs serve as powerful agenda-setters. By dedicating significant airtime to issues ignored by traditional news outlets, they elevate overlooked problems into the public consciousness, forcing policymakers to confront them. This unique blend of investigative journalism and comedic delivery makes complex issues digestible, empowering the public to take action and, indirectly but significantly, influencing the trajectory of government policy.

The Digital Default and Algorithmic Influence

The online news landscape has diversified exponentially since 2010, and the internet is no longer just a source of news; it

is the infrastructure of politics. The direct-access model pioneered by Barack Obama and Donald Trump has evolved into a live-streamed democracy. Candidates now use platforms like TikTok, Truth Social, and Twitch to bypass traditional media entirely, speaking directly to niche audiences in real time.



The “Kamala Harris is brat” meme emerged in July 2024 after pop artist Charli XCX endorsed the Vice President on social media following Joe Biden’s withdrawal, prompting the campaign to embrace bright neon-green aesthetics and viral TikTok edits to engage younger voters. **Source**: Unknown author, Kamala IS brat, public domain.

The distinction between broadcast and online has virtually disappeared, replaced by a hybrid media ecosystem. Political events are now experienced through second-screening, in which the official broadcast serves as the background for a real-time, AI-augmented digital conversation. While this allows for instant fact-checking, it also accelerates the vibe-based nature of politics, where a candidate’s policy points are often overshadowed by a single viral meme-moment captured and distributed across social media within seconds of occurring.

Furthermore, the collapse of traditional local news has given rise to pink slime journalism—automated, partisan websites that mimic the appearance of local newspapers to disseminate targeted propaganda. This, combined with the

rise of independent, subscription-based newsletters, has created a two-tiered information system. Those with the means to pay for independent analysis are increasingly well-informed. At the same time, those relying on free, algorithmically driven social feeds are more susceptible to synthetic grassroots campaigns and automated misinformation that now define the digital frontier.

SOURCE EDITION - CHAPTERS 1-3

Based on the large number of changes made to the original text, the author of this version has preserved the original source material and its layout for comparison.

POP CULTURE MANIA

Figure 1.1



Paul Townsend – [1960s Beatlemania Fashion](#) – CC BY-ND 2.0.

Just as fans could purchase Jerry Lind hats, Beatles fans could purchase Beatle wigs (as pictured above).

In 1850, an epidemic swept America—but instead of leaving victims sick with fever or flu, this epidemic involved a rabid craze for the music of Swedish soprano Jenny Lind. American showman P. T. Barnum (who would later go on to found the circus now known as Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey), a shrewd marketer and self-made millionaire, is credited with spreading "Lindomania" through a series of astute show-business moves. Barnum promised Lind an unprecedented $1,000-a-night fee (the equivalent of $28,300 in 2009) for her entire 93-performance tour of the United States. Ever the savvy self-promoter, Barnum turned his huge

investment to his advantage by using it to create publicity—and it paid off. When the Swedish soprano's ship docked on U.S. shores, she was greeted by 40,000 ardent fans; another 20,000 swarmed her hotel (Barnum). Congress was adjourned specifically for Lind's visit to Washington, DC, where the National Theatre had to be enlarged to accommodate her audiences. A town in California and an island in Canada were named in her honor. Enthusiasts could purchase Jenny Lind hats, chairs, boots, opera glasses, and even pianos. Barnum's marketing expertise made Lind a household name and created an overwhelming demand for a singer previously unknown to American audiences.

The "Jenny rage" that the savvy Barnum was able to create was not a unique phenomenon, however; a little more than a century later, a new craze transformed some American teenagers into screaming, fainting Beatlemaniacs. Though other performers like Frank Sinatra and Elvis Presley were no strangers to manic crowds, the Beatles attracted an unprecedented amount of attention when they first arrived in the United States. When the British foursome touched down at New York's Kennedy Airport in 1964, they were met by more than 3,000 frenzied fans. Their performance on *The Ed Sullivan Show* was seen by 73 million people, or 40 percent of the U.S. population. The crime rate that night dropped to its lowest level in 50 years (Ehrenreich, et. al., 1992). Beatlemania was at such a fever pitch that *Life* magazine cautioned that "a Beatle who ventures out unguarded into the streets runs the

very real peril of being dismembered or crushed to death by his fans." The BBC publicized the trend and perhaps added to it by highlighting the paraphernalia for fans to spend their money on: "T-shirts, sweat shirts, turtle-neck sweaters, tight-legged trousers, night shirts, scarves, and jewelry inspired by the Beatles" were all available, as were Beatles-style mop-top wigs.

In the 21st century, rabid fans could turn their attention to a whole swath of pop stars in the making when the reality TV program *American Idol* hit the airwaves in 2002. The show was the only television program ever to have snagged the top spot in the Nielsen ratings for six seasons in a row, often averaging more than 30 million nightly viewers. Rival television network executives were alarmed, deeming the pop giant "the ultimate schoolyard bully," "the Death Star," or even "the most impactful show in the history of television," according to former NBC Universal CEO Jeff Zucker (Carter, 2007). New cell phone technologies allowed viewers to have a direct role in the program's star-making enterprise through casting votes, signing up for text alerts, or playing trivia games on their phones. In 2009, AT&T estimated that *Idol*-related text traffic amounted to 178 million messages (Poniewozik, 2009).

These three crazes all relied on various forms of media to create excitement. Whether through newspaper advertisements, live television broadcasts, or integrated Internet marketing, media industry tastemakers help shape

what we care about. For as long as mass media has existed in the United States, it's helped to create and fuel mass crazes, skyrocketing celebrities, and pop culture manias of all kinds. Even in our era of seemingly limitless entertainment options, mass hits like *American Idol* still have the ability to dominate the public's attention. In the chapters to come, we'll look at different kinds of mass media and how they have been changed by—and are changing—the world we live in.

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Distinguish between mass communication and mass media.
2. Identify key points in American media and culture.

Pop culture and American media are inextricably linked. Consider that Jenny Lind, the Beatles, and *American Idol* were each promoted using a then-new technology (photography for Lind, television for the Beatles, and the Internet and text messaging for *American Idol*).

MASS COMMUNICATION, MASS MEDIA, AND CULTURE

The chapters to come will provide an in-depth look at many

kinds of media, at how media trends are reshaping the United States' cultural landscape, and at how that culture shapes media in turn. These topics will be explored through an examination of mass media and mass communication both past and present—and speculation about what the future might look like.

First, it is important to distinguish between mass communication and mass media and to attempt a working definition of culture. Mass communication refers to information transmitted to large segments of the population. The transmission of mass communication may happen using one or many different kinds of media (singular medium), which is the means of transmission, whether print, digital, or electronic. Mass media specifically refers to a means of communication that is designed to reach a wide audience. Mass media platforms are commonly considered to include radio, newspapers, magazines, books, video games, and Internet media such as blogs, podcasts, and video sharing. Another way to consider the distinction is that a mass media message may be disseminated through several forms of mass media, such as an ad campaign with television, radio, and Internet components. Culture generally refers to the shared values, attitudes, beliefs, and practices that characterize a social group, organization, or institution. Just as it is difficult to pin down an exact definition of culture, cultures themselves can be hard to draw boundaries around, as they are fluid, diverse, and often overlapping.

FIGURE 1.2



Advances in media technology allowed for unprecedented voter participation in the 2007 CNN/YouTube® presidential debates.

lafra – The CNN + YouTube Debates – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Throughout U.S. history, evolving media technologies have

changed the way we relate socially, economically, and politically. In 2007, for example, a joint venture between the 24-hour news network CNN and the video-sharing site YouTube allowed voters to pose questions directly to presidential candidates in two televised debates. Voters could record their questions and upload them to YouTube, and a selection of these videos were then chosen by the debate moderators and played directly to the presidential candidates. This new format opened up the presidential debates to a much wider array of people, allowing for greater voter participation than has been possible in the past, where questions were posed solely by journalists or a few carefully chosen audience members.

In today's wired world of smartphones and streaming satellite feeds, our expectations of our leaders, celebrities, teachers, and even ourselves are changing in even more drastic ways. This book provides you with the context, tools, and theories to engage with the world of mass media through an examination of the history, theory, and effects of media practices and roles in America. This book also provides you with the framework to consider some of the crucial issues affecting media and culture in today's world.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Mass communication refers to a message transmitted to a large audience; the means of transmission is known as mass media. Many different kinds of mass media exist and have existed for centuries. Both the messages and the media affect culture, which is a diffused collection of behaviors, practices, beliefs, and values that are particular to a group, organization, or institution. Culture and media exert influence on each other in subtle, complex ways.
- The 2008 election is an example of how changes in media technology have had a major impact on society. But the influence goes both ways, and sometimes cultural changes impact how media evolves.

EXERCISES

Read the following questions about media and culture:

1. The second half of the 20th century included a huge increase in forms of media available, including radio,

cinema, television, and the Internet. But some form of mass communication has always been a part of U.S. history. What were the dominant forms of media present in the United States during the Industrial Revolution? World Wars I and II? Other important historical eras? How did these forms of media differ from the ones we have today? How did they help shape the way people interacted with and understood the world they lived in? How does mass communication differ from mass media?

2. Contemporary Americans have more means of getting information and entertainment than ever before. What are the major media present in the United States today? How do these forms of media interact with one another? How do they overlap? How are they distinct?

3. What is the role of media in American culture today?

    - Some people argue that high-profile cases in the 1990s, such as the criminal trial of O. J. Simpson, Bill Clinton's impeachment proceedings, and the first Persian Gulf War helped fuel the demand for 24-hour news access. What are some other ways that culture affects media?
    - Conversely, how does mass media affect culture? Do violent television shows and video games influence viewers to become more violent? Is the

Internet making our culture more open and democratic or more shallow and distracted?

4. Though we may not have hover cars and teleportation, today's electronic gadgets would probably leave Americans of a century ago breathless. How can today's media landscape help us understand what might await us in years to come? What will the future of American media and culture look like?
5. Write down some of your initial responses or reactions, based on your prior knowledge or intuition. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph. Keep the piece of paper somewhere secure and return to it on the last day of the course. Were your responses on target? How has your understanding of media and culture changed? How might you answer questions differently now?

1.3

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify four roles the media performs in our society.
2. Recognize events that affected the adoption of mass

media.

3. Explain how different technological transitions have shaped media industries.

In 2010, Americans could turn on their television and find 24-hour news channels as well as music videos, nature documentaries, and reality shows about everything from hoarders to fashion models. That's not to mention movies available on demand from cable providers or television and video available online for streaming or downloading. Half of U.S. households receive a daily newspaper, and the average person holds 1.9 magazine subscriptions (State of the Media, 2004) (Bilton, 2007). A University of California, San Diego study claimed that U.S. households consumed a total of approximately 3.6 zettabytes of information in 2008—the digital equivalent of a 7-foot high stack of books covering the entire United States—a 350 percent increase since 1980 (Ramsey, 2009). Americans are exposed to media in taxicabs and buses, in classrooms and doctors' offices, on highways, and in airplanes. We can begin to orient ourselves in the information cloud through parsing what roles the media fills in society, examining its history in society, and looking at the way technological innovations have helped bring us to where we are today.

WHAT DOES MEDIA DO FOR US?

Media fulfills several basic roles in our society. One obvious role is entertainment. Media can act as a springboard for our imaginations, a source of fantasy, and an outlet for escapism. In the 19th century, Victorian readers disillusioned by the grimness of the Industrial Revolution found themselves drawn into fantastic worlds of fairies and other fictitious beings. In the first decade of the 21st century, American television viewers could peek in on a conflicted Texas high school football team in *Friday Night Lights*; the violence-plagued drug trade in Baltimore in *The Wire*; a 1960s-Manhattan ad agency in *Mad Men*; or the last surviving band of humans in a distant, miserable future in *Battlestar Galactica*. Through bringing us stories of all kinds, media has the power to take us away from ourselves.

Media can also provide information and education. Information can come in many forms, and it may sometimes be difficult to separate from entertainment. Today, newspapers and news-oriented television and radio programs make available stories from across the globe, allowing readers or viewers in London to access voices and videos from Baghdad, Tokyo, or Buenos Aires. Books and magazines provide a more in-depth look at a wide range of subjects. The free online encyclopedia *Wikipedia* has articles on topics from

presidential nicknames to child prodigies to tongue twisters in various languages. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) has posted free lecture notes, exams, and audio and video recordings of classes on its OpenCourseWare website, allowing anyone with an Internet connection access to world-class professors.

Another useful aspect of media is its ability to act as a public forum for the discussion of important issues. In newspapers or other periodicals, letters to the editor allow readers to respond to journalists or to voice their opinions on the issues of the day. These letters were an important part of U.S. newspapers even when the nation was a British colony, and they have served as a means of public discourse ever since. The Internet is a fundamentally democratic medium that allows everyone who can get online the ability to express their opinions through, for example, blogging or podcasting—though whether anyone will hear is another question.

Similarly, media can be used to monitor government, business, and other institutions. Upton Sinclair's 1906 novel *The Jungle* exposed the miserable conditions in the turn-of-the-century meatpacking industry; and in the early 1970s, *Washington Post* reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein uncovered evidence of the Watergate break-in and subsequent cover-up, which eventually led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon. But purveyors of mass media may be beholden to particular agendas because of political slant, advertising

funds, or ideological bias, thus constraining their ability to act as a watchdog. The following are some of these agendas:

1. Entertaining and providing an outlet for the imagination
2. Educating and informing
3. Serving as a public forum for the discussion of important issues
4. Acting as a watchdog for government, business, and other institutions

It's important to remember, though, that not all media are created equal. While some forms of mass communication are better suited to entertainment, others make more sense as a venue for spreading information. In terms of print media, books are durable and able to contain lots of information, but are relatively slow and expensive to produce; in contrast, newspapers are comparatively cheaper and quicker to create, making them a better medium for the quick turnover of daily news. Television provides vastly more visual information than radio and is more dynamic than a static printed page; it can also be used to broadcast live events to a nationwide audience, as in the annual State of the Union address given by the U.S. president. However, it is also a one-way medium—that is, it allows for very little direct person-to-person communication. In contrast, the Internet encourages public discussion of issues and allows nearly everyone who wants a voice to have one. However, the Internet is also largely unmoderated. Users may

have to wade through thousands of inane comments or misinformed amateur opinions to find quality information.

The 1960s media theorist Marshall McLuhan took these ideas one step further, famously coining the phrase "the medium is the message (McLuhan, 1964)." By this, McLuhan meant that every medium delivers information in a different way and that content is fundamentally shaped by the medium of transmission. For example, although television news has the advantage of offering video and live coverage, making a story come alive more vividly, it is also a faster-paced medium. That means more stories get covered in less depth. A story told on television will probably be flashier, less in-depth, and with less context than the same story covered in a monthly magazine; therefore, people who get the majority of their news from television may have a particular view of the world shaped not by the *content* of what they watch but its *medium*. Or, as computer scientist Alan Kay put it, "Each medium has a special way of representing ideas that emphasize particular ways of thinking and de-emphasize others (Kay, 1994)." Kay was writing in 1994, when the Internet was just transitioning from an academic research network to an open public system. A decade and a half later, with the Internet firmly ensconced in our daily lives, McLuhan's intellectual descendants are the media analysts who claim that the Internet is making us better at associative thinking, or more democratic, or shallower. But McLuhan's claims don't leave much space for individual autonomy or resistance. In an essay about

television's effects on contemporary fiction, writer David Foster Wallace scoffed at the "reactionaries who regard TV as some malignancy visited on an innocent populace, sapping IQs and compromising SAT scores while we all sit there on ever fatter bottoms with little mesmerized spirals revolving in our eyes.... Treating television as evil is just as reductive and silly as treating it like a toaster with pictures (Wallace, 1997)." Nonetheless, media messages and technologies affect us in countless ways, some of which probably won't be sorted out until long in the future.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MASS MEDIA AND CULTURE

Until Johannes Gutenberg's 15th-century invention of the movable type printing press, books were painstakingly handwritten and no two copies were exactly the same. The printing press made the mass production of print media possible. Not only was it much cheaper to produce written material, but new transportation technologies also made it

easier for texts to reach a wide audience. It's hard to overstate the importance of Gutenberg's invention, which helped usher in massive cultural movements like the European Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation. In 1810, another German printer, Friedrich Koenig, pushed media production even further when he essentially hooked the steam engine up to a printing press, enabling the industrialization of printed media. In 1800, a hand-operated printing press could produce about 480 pages per hour; Koenig's machine more than doubled this rate. (By the 1930s, many printing presses could publish 3,000 pages an hour.)

This increased efficiency went hand in hand with the rise of the daily newspaper. The newspaper was the perfect medium for the increasingly urbanized Americans of the 19th century, who could no longer get their local news merely through gossip and word of mouth. These Americans were living in unfamiliar territory, and newspapers and other media helped them negotiate the rapidly changing world. The Industrial Revolution meant that some people had more leisure time and more money, and media helped them figure out how to spend both. Media theorist Benedict Anderson has argued that newspapers also helped forge a sense of national identity by treating readers across the country as part of one unified community (Anderson, 1991).

In the 1830s, the major daily newspapers faced a new threat from the rise of penny papers, which were low-priced broadsheets that served as a cheaper, more sensational daily

news source. They favored news of murder and adventure over the dry political news of the day. While newspapers catered to a wealthier, more educated audience, the penny press attempted to reach a wide swath of readers through cheap prices and entertaining (often scandalous) stories. The penny press can be seen as the forerunner to today's gossip-hungry tabloids.

FIGURE 1.3



THE NEW YORK HERALD.

WHOLE NO. 9230. NEW YORK, TUESDAY, DECEMBER 17, 1861.—TRIPLE SHEET. PRICE TWO CENTS.

NEWS FROM THE SOUTH.

The Defences of Norfolk and Portsmouth.

Brief of the Amended Constitution of Virginia.

Movements of the Rebel General Zollicoffer.

THE REBEL WAR TAX.

Rebel Editors Resign from Western Virginia to South Carolina.

MISCELLANEOUS NEWS.

THE UNITED STATES IN BLACK AND WHITE.

The Geographical Position of the Loyal and Rebel States—The Rebel States are in Black.

THE RHODE ISLAND TRAINING EXPEDITION.

The penny press appealed to readers' desires for lurid tales of murder and scandal.

Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

In the early decades of the 20th century, the first major nonprint form of mass media—radio—exploded in popularity. Radios, which were less expensive than telephones and widely available by the 1920s, had the unprecedented ability of allowing huge numbers of people to listen to the same event at the same time. In 1924, Calvin Coolidge's preelection speech reached more than 20 million people. Radio was a boon for advertisers, who now had access to a large and captive audience. An early advertising consultant claimed that the early days of radio were "a glorious opportunity for the advertising man to spread his sales propaganda" because of "a countless audience, sympathetic, pleasure seeking, enthusiastic, curious, interested, approachable in the privacy of their homes (Briggs & Burke, 2005)." The reach of radio also meant that the medium was able to downplay regional differences and encourage a unified sense of the American lifestyle—a lifestyle that was increasingly driven and defined by consumer purchases. "Americans in the 1920s were the first to wear ready-made, exact-size clothing...to play electric phonographs, to use electric vacuum cleaners, to listen to commercial radio broadcasts, and to drink fresh orange juice year round (Mintz, 2007)." This boom in consumerism put its

stamp on the 1920s and also helped contribute to the Great Depression of the 1930s (Library of Congress). The consumerist impulse drove production to unprecedented levels, but when the Depression began and consumer demand dropped dramatically, the surplus of production helped further deepen the economic crisis, as more goods were being produced than could be sold.

The post–World War II era in the United States was marked by prosperity, and by the introduction of a seductive new form of mass communication: television. In 1946, about 17,000 televisions existed in the United States; within 7 years, two-thirds of American households owned at least one set. As the United States' gross national product (GNP) doubled in the 1950s, and again in the 1960s, the American home became firmly ensconced as a consumer unit; along with a television, the typical U.S. household owned a car and a house in the suburbs, all of which contributed to the nation's thriving consumer-based economy (Briggs & Burke, 2005). Broadcast television was the dominant form of mass media, and the three major networks controlled more than 90 percent of the news programs, live events, and sitcoms viewed by Americans. Some social critics argued that television was fostering a homogenous, conformist culture by reinforcing ideas about what "normal" American life looked like. But television also contributed to the counterculture of the 1960s. The Vietnam War was the nation's first televised military conflict, and

nightly images of war footage and war protesters helped intensify the nation's internal conflicts.

Broadcast technology, including radio and television, had such a hold on the American imagination that newspapers and other print media found themselves having to adapt to the new media landscape. Print media was more durable and easily archived, and it allowed users more flexibility in terms of time—once a person had purchased a magazine, he or she could read it whenever and wherever. Broadcast media, in contrast, usually aired programs on a fixed schedule, which allowed it to both provide a sense of immediacy and fleetingness. Until the advent of digital video recorders in the late 1990s, it was impossible to pause and rewind a live television broadcast.

The media world faced drastic changes once again in the 1980s and 1990s with the spread of cable television. During the early decades of television, viewers had a limited number of channels to choose from—one reason for the charges of homogeneity. In 1975, the three major networks accounted for 93 percent of all television viewing. By 2004, however, this share had dropped to 28.4 percent of total viewing, thanks to the spread of cable television. Cable providers allowed viewers a wide menu of choices, including channels specifically tailored to people who wanted to watch only golf, classic films, sermons, or videos of sharks. Still, until the mid-1990s, television was dominated by the three large networks. The Telecommunications Act of 1996, an attempt to foster

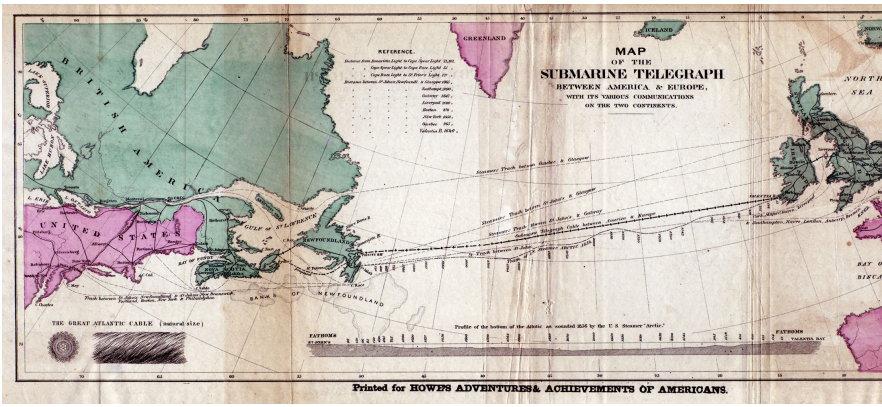
competition by deregulating the industry, actually resulted in many mergers and buyouts that left most of the control of the broadcast spectrum in the hands of a few large corporations. In 2003, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) loosened regulation even further, allowing a single company to own 45 percent of a single market (up from 25 percent in 1982).

TECHNOLOGICAL TRANSITIONS SHAPE MEDIA INDUSTRIES

New media technologies both spring from and cause social changes. For this reason, it can be difficult to neatly sort the evolution of media into clear causes and effects. Did radio fuel the consumerist boom of the 1920s, or did the radio become wildly popular because it appealed to a society that was already exploring consumerist tendencies? Probably a little bit of both. Technological innovations such as the steam engine, electricity, wireless communication, and the Internet have all had lasting and significant effects on American culture. As media

historians Asa Briggs and Peter Burke note, every crucial invention came with "a change in historical perspectives." Electricity altered the way people thought about time because work and play were no longer dependent on the daily rhythms of sunrise and sunset; wireless communication collapsed distance; the Internet revolutionized the way we store and retrieve information.

FIGURE 1.4



The transatlantic telegraph cable made nearly instantaneous communication between the United States and Europe possible for the first time in 1858.

Amber Case – 1858 trans-Atlantic telegraph cable route – CC BY-NC 2.0.

The contemporary media age can trace its origins back to the electrical telegraph, patented in the United States by Samuel Morse in 1837. Thanks to the telegraph, communication was no longer linked to the physical transportation of messages; it didn't matter whether a message needed to travel 5 or 500 miles. Suddenly, information from distant places was nearly as accessible as local news, as telegraph lines began to stretch across the globe, making their own kind of World Wide Web. In this way, the telegraph acted as the precursor to much of the technology that followed, including the telephone, radio, television, and Internet. When the first transatlantic cable was laid in 1858, allowing nearly instantaneous communication from the United States to Europe, the *London Times* described it as "the greatest discovery since that of Columbus, a vast enlargement...given to the sphere of human activity."

Not long afterward, wireless communication (which eventually led to the development of radio, television, and other broadcast media) emerged as an extension of telegraph technology. Although many 19th-century inventors, including Nikola Tesla, were involved in early wireless experiments, it was Italian-born Guglielmo Marconi who is recognized as the developer of the first practical wireless radio system. Many people were fascinated by this new invention. Early radio was used for military communication, but soon the technology entered the home. The burgeoning interest in radio inspired

hundreds of applications for broadcasting licenses from newspapers and other news outlets, retail stores, schools, and even cities. In the 1920s, large media networks—including the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) and the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS)—were launched, and they soon began to dominate the airwaves. In 1926, they owned 6.4 percent of U.S. broadcasting stations; by 1931, that number had risen to 30 percent.

FIGURE 1.5



Gone With the Wind defeated *The Wizard of Oz* to become the first color film ever to win the Academy Award for Best Picture in 1939.

Wikimedia Commons – public domain; Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

In addition to the breakthroughs in audio broadcasting, inventors in the 1800s made significant advances in visual media. The 19th-century development of photographic technologies would lead to the later innovations of cinema and television. As with wireless technology, several inventors independently created a form of photography at the same time, among them the French inventors Joseph Niépce and Louis Daguerre and the British scientist William Henry Fox Talbot. In the United States, George Eastman developed the Kodak camera in 1888, anticipating that Americans would welcome an inexpensive, easy-to-use camera into their homes as they had with the radio and telephone. Moving pictures were first seen around the turn of the century, with the first U.S. projection-hall opening in Pittsburgh in 1905. By the 1920s, Hollywood had already created its first stars, most notably Charlie Chaplin; by the end of the 1930s, Americans were watching color films with full sound, including *Gone With the Wind* and *The Wizard of Oz*.

Television—which consists of an image being converted to electrical impulses, transmitted through wires or radio waves, and then reconverted into images—existed before World War II, but gained mainstream popularity in the 1950s. In 1947, there were 178,000 television sets made in the United States;

5 years later, 15 million were made. Radio, cinema, and live theater declined because the new medium allowed viewers to be entertained with sound and moving pictures in their homes. In the United States, competing commercial stations (including the radio powerhouses of CBS and NBC) meant that commercial-driven programming dominated. In Great Britain, the government managed broadcasting through the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). Funding was driven by licensing fees instead of advertisements. In contrast to the U.S. system, the BBC strictly regulated the length and character of commercials that could be aired. However, U.S. television (and its increasingly powerful networks) still dominated. By the beginning of 1955, there were around 36 million television sets in the United States, but only 4.8 million in all of Europe. Important national events, broadcast live for the first time, were an impetus for consumers to buy sets so they could witness the spectacle; both England and Japan saw a boom in sales before important royal weddings in the 1950s.

FIGURE 1.6



In the 1960s, the concept of a useful portable computer was still a dream; huge mainframes were required to run a basic operating system.

Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

In 1969, management consultant Peter Drucker predicted that the next major technological innovation would be an electronic appliance that would revolutionize the way people lived just as thoroughly as Thomas Edison's light bulb had. This appliance would sell for less than a television set and

be "capable of being plugged in wherever there is electricity and giving immediate access to all the information needed for school work from first grade through college." Although Drucker may have underestimated the cost of this hypothetical machine, he was prescient about the effect these machines—personal computers—and the Internet would have on education, social relationships, and the culture at large. The inventions of random access memory (RAM) chips and microprocessors in the 1970s were important steps to the Internet age. As Briggs and Burke note, these advances meant that "hundreds of thousands of components could be carried on a microprocessor." The reduction of many different kinds of content to digitally stored information meant that "print, film, recording, radio and television and all forms of telecommunications [were] now being thought of increasingly as part of one complex." This process, also known as convergence, is a force that's affecting media today.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Media fulfills several roles in society, including the following:
    - entertaining and providing an outlet for the imagination,

    - educating and informing,
    - serving as a public forum for the discussion of important issues, and
    - acting as a watchdog for government, business, and other institutions.

- Johannes Gutenberg's invention of the printing press enabled the mass production of media, which was then industrialized by Friedrich Koenig in the early 1800s. These innovations led to the daily newspaper, which united the urbanized, industrialized populations of the 19th century.
- In the 20th century, radio allowed advertisers to reach a mass audience and helped spur the consumerism of the 1920s—and the Great Depression of the 1930s. After World War II, television boomed in the United States and abroad, though its concentration in the hands of three major networks led to accusations of homogenization. The spread of cable and subsequent deregulation in the 1980s and 1990s led to more channels, but not necessarily to more diverse ownership.
- Transitions from one technology to another have greatly affected the media industry, although it is difficult to say whether technology caused a cultural shift or resulted from it. The ability to make technology small and affordable enough to fit into the

home is an important aspect of the popularization of new technologies.

EXERCISES

Choose two different types of mass communication—radio shows, television broadcasts, Internet sites, newspaper advertisements, and so on—from two different kinds of media. Make a list of what role(s) each one fills, keeping in mind that much of what we see, hear, or read in the mass media has more than one aspect. Then, answer the following questions. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. To which of the four roles media plays in society do your selections correspond? Why did the creators of these particular messages present them in these particular ways and in these particular mediums?
2. What events have shaped the adoption of the two kinds of media you selected?
3. How have technological transitions shaped the industries involved in the two kinds of media you have selected?

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1.4

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify examples of convergence in contemporary life.
2. Name the five types of convergence identified by Henry Jenkins.
3. Recognize how convergence is affecting culture and society.

It's important to keep in mind that the implementation of new technologies doesn't mean that the old ones simply vanish into dusty museums. Today's media consumers still watch television, listen to radio, read newspapers, and become

immersed in movies. The difference is that it's now possible to do all those things through one device—be it a personal computer or a smartphone—and through the Internet. Such actions are enabled by media convergence, the process by which previously distinct technologies come to share tasks and resources. A cell phone that also takes pictures and video is an example of the convergence of digital photography, digital video, and cellular telephone technologies. An extreme, and currently nonexistent, example of technological convergence would be the so-called black box, which would combine all the functions of previously distinct technology and would be the device through which we'd receive all our news, information, entertainment, and social interaction.

KINDS OF CONVERGENCE

But convergence isn't just limited to technology. Media theorist Henry Jenkins argues that convergence isn't an end result (as is the hypothetical black box), but instead a process that changes how media is both consumed and produced. Jenkins breaks convergence down into five categories:

1. Economic convergence occurs when a company controls several products or services within the same industry. For example, in the entertainment industry a single company may have interests across many kinds of media. For example, Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation is involved in book publishing (HarperCollins), newspapers (*New York Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*), sports (Colorado Rockies), broadcast television (Fox), cable television (FX, National Geographic Channel), film (20th Century Fox), Internet (MySpace), and many other media.
2. Organic convergence is what happens when someone is watching a television show online while exchanging text messages with a friend and also listening to music in the background—the "natural" outcome of a diverse media world.
3. Cultural convergence has several aspects. Stories flowing across several kinds of media platforms is one component—for example, novels that become television series (*True Blood*); radio dramas that become comic strips (*The Shadow*); even amusement park rides that become film franchises (*Pirates of the Caribbean*). The character Harry Potter exists in books, films, toys, and amusement park rides. Another aspect of cultural convergence is participatory culture—that is, the way media consumers are able to annotate, comment on, remix, and otherwise influence culture in unprecedented

ways. The video-sharing website YouTube is a prime example of participatory culture. YouTube gives anyone with a video camera and an Internet connection the opportunity to communicate with people around the world and create and shape cultural trends.

4. Global convergence is the process of geographically distant cultures influencing one another despite the distance that physically separates them. Nigeria's cinema industry, nicknamed Nollywood, takes its cues from India's Bollywood, which is in turn inspired by Hollywood in the United States. *Tom and Jerry* cartoons are popular on Arab satellite television channels. Successful American horror movies *The Ring* and *The Grudge* are remakes of Japanese hits. The advantage of global convergence is access to a wealth of cultural influence; its downside, some critics posit, is the threat of cultural imperialism, defined by Herbert Schiller as the way developing countries are "attracted, pressured, forced, and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating centre of the system (White, 2001)." Cultural imperialism can be a formal policy or can happen more subtly, as with the spread of outside influence through television, movies, and other cultural projects.
5. Technological convergence is the merging of technologies such as the ability to watch TV shows

online on sites like Hulu or to play video games on mobile phones like the Apple iPhone. When more and more different kinds of media are transformed into digital content, as Jenkins notes, "we expand the potential relationships between them and enable them to flow across platforms (Jenkins, 2001)."

FIGURE 1.7



Nigeria's Nollywood produces more films annually than any other country besides India.

Paul Keller – nigerian VCDs at kwakoe – CC BY 2.0.

EFFECTS OF CONVERGENCE

Jenkins's concept of organic convergence is perhaps the most telling. To many people, especially those who grew up in a world dominated by so-called old media, there is nothing organic about today's media-dominated world. As a *New York Times* editorial recently opined, "Few objects on the planet are farther removed from nature—less, say, like a rock or an insect—than a glass and stainless steel smartphone (New York Times, 2010)." But modern American culture is plugged in as never before, and today's high school students have never known a world where the Internet didn't exist. Such a cultural sea change causes a significant generation gap between those who grew up with new media and those who didn't.

A 2010 study by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that

Americans aged 8 to 18 spend more than 7.5 hours with electronic devices each day—and, thanks to multitasking, they're able to pack an average of 11 hours of media content into that 7.5 hours (Lewin, 2010). These statistics highlight some of the aspects of the new digital model of media consumption: participation and multitasking. Today's teenagers aren't passively sitting in front of screens, quietly absorbing information. Instead, they are sending text messages to friends, linking news articles on Facebook, commenting on YouTube videos, writing reviews of television episodes to post online, and generally engaging with the culture they consume. Convergence has also made multitasking much easier, as many devices allow users to surf the Internet, listen to music, watch videos, play games, and reply to e-mails on the same machine.

However, it's still difficult to predict how media convergence and immersion are affecting culture, society, and individual brains. In his 2005 book *Everything Bad Is Good for You*, Steven Johnson argues that today's television and video games are mentally stimulating, in that they pose a cognitive challenge and invite active engagement and problem solving. Poking fun at alarmists who see every new technology as making children stupider, Johnson jokingly cautions readers against the dangers of book reading: It "chronically understimulates the senses" and is "tragically isolating." Even worse, books "follow a fixed linear path. You can't control their narratives in any fashion—you simply sit back and have the story dictated to you.... This risks instilling a general passivity

in our children, making them feel as though they're powerless to change their circumstances. Reading is not an active, participatory process; it's a submissive one (Johnson, 2005)."

A 2010 book by Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* is more pessimistic. Carr worries that the vast array of interlinked information available through the Internet is eroding attention spans and making contemporary minds distracted and less capable of deep, thoughtful engagement with complex ideas and arguments. "Once I was a scuba diver in a sea of words," Carr reflects ruefully. "Now I zip along the surface like a guy on a Jet Ski (Carr, 2010)." Carr cites neuroscience studies showing that when people try to do two things at once, they give less attention to each and perform the tasks less carefully. In other words, multitasking makes us do a greater number of things poorly. Whatever the ultimate cognitive, social, or technological results, convergence is changing the way we relate to media today.

VIDEO KILLED THE RADIO STAR: CONVERGENCE KILLS OFF OBSOLETE TECHNOLOGY—OR DOES IT?

When was the last time you used a rotary phone? How about a street-side pay phone? Or a library's card catalog? When you need brief, factual information, when was the last time you reached for a volume of *Encyclopedia Britannica*? Odds are it's been a while. All of these habits, formerly common parts of daily life, have been rendered essentially obsolete through the progression of convergence.

But convergence hasn't erased old technologies; instead, it may have just altered the way we use them. Take cassette

tapes and Polaroid film, for example. Influential musician Thurston Moore of the band Sonic Youth recently claimed that he only listens to music on cassette. Polaroid Corporation, creators of the once-popular instant-film cameras, was driven out of business by digital photography in 2008, only to be revived 2 years later—with pop star Lady Gaga as the brand's creative director. Several Apple iPhone apps allow users to apply effects to photos to make them look more like a Polaroid photo.

Cassettes, Polaroid cameras, and other seemingly obsolete technologies have been able to thrive—albeit in niche markets—both despite and because of Internet culture. Instead of being slick and digitized, cassette tapes and Polaroid photos are physical objects that are made more accessible and more human, according to enthusiasts, because of their flaws. "I think there's a group of people—fans and artists alike—out there to whom music is more than just a file on your computer, more than just a folder of MP3s," says Brad Rose, founder of a Tulsa, Oklahoma-based cassette label (Hogan, 2010). The distinctive Polaroid look—caused by uneven color saturation, underdevelopment or overdevelopment, or just daily atmospheric effects on the developing photograph—is emphatically analog. In an age of high resolution, portable printers, and camera phones, the Polaroid's appeal to some has something to do with ideas of nostalgia and authenticity. Convergence has transformed who uses these

media and for what purposes, but it hasn't eliminated these media.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Twenty-first century media culture is increasingly marked by convergence, or the coming together of previously distinct technologies, as in a cell phone that also allows users to take video and check e-mail.
- Media theorist Henry Jenkins identifies the five kinds of convergence as the following:

    1. Economic convergence is when a single company has interests across many kinds of media.
    2. Organic convergence is multimedia multitasking, or the natural outcome of a diverse media world.
    3. Cultural convergence is when stories flow across several kinds of media platforms and when readers or viewers can comment on, alter, or otherwise talk back to culture.
    4. Global convergence is when geographically distant cultures are able to influence one another.
    5. Technological convergence is when different kinds of technology merge. The most extreme example

of technological convergence would be one machine that controlled every media function.

- The jury is still out on how these different types of convergence will affect people on an individual and societal level. Some theorists believe that convergence and new-media technologies make people smarter by requiring them to make decisions and interact with the media they're consuming; others fear the digital age is giving us access to more information but leaving us shallower.

EXERCISES

Review the viewpoints of Henry Jenkins, Steven Johnson, and Nicholas Carr. Then, answer the following questions. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. Define convergence as it relates to mass media and provide some examples of convergence you've observed in your life.
2. Describe the five types of convergence identified by Henry Jenkins and provide an example of each type that you've noted in your own experience.

3. How do Steven Johnson and Nicholas Carr think convergence is affecting culture and society? Whose argument do you find more compelling and why?

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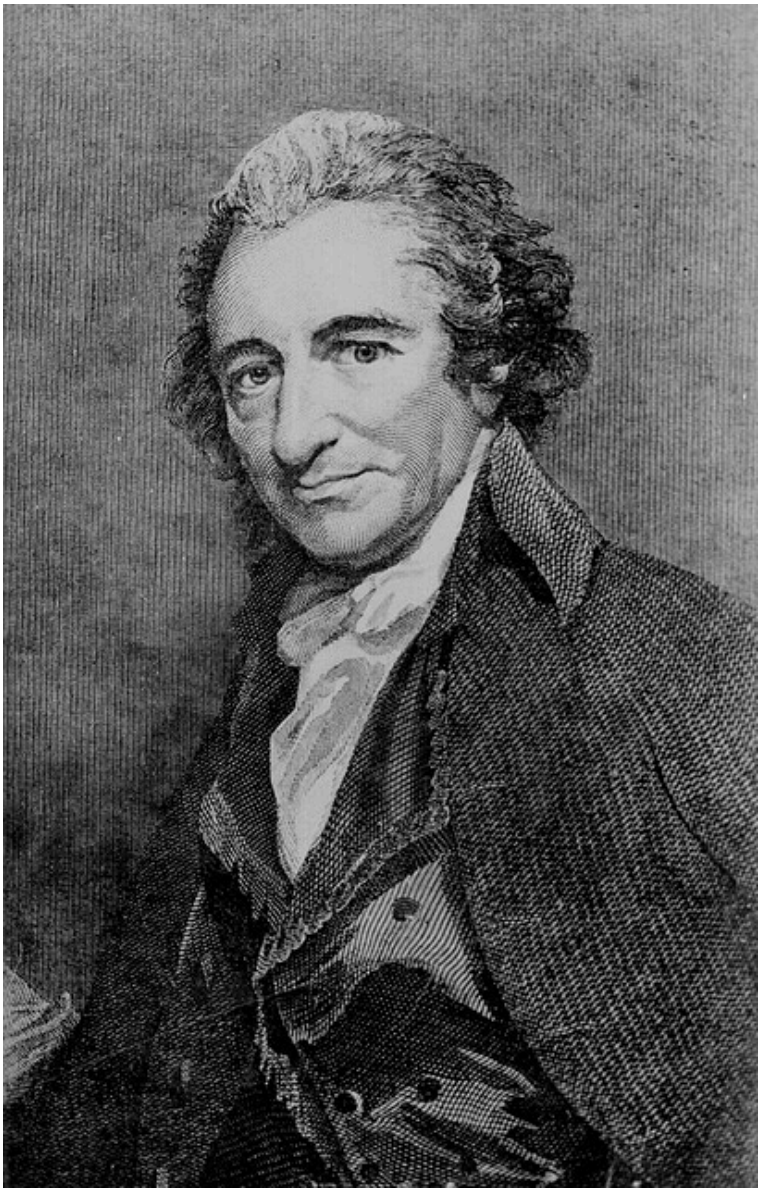
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify two limitations on free speech that are based on social values.
2. Identify examples of propaganda in mass media.
3. Explain the role of the gatekeeper in mass media.

In a 1995 *Wired* magazine article, "The Age of Paine," Jon Katz suggested that the Revolutionary War patriot Thomas Paine should be considered "the moral father of the Internet." The Internet, Katz wrote, "offers what Paine and his revolutionary colleagues hoped for—a vast, diverse, passionate, global means of transmitting ideas and opening minds." In fact, according to Katz, the emerging Internet era is closer in spirit to the 18th-century media world than to the 20th-

century's "old media" (radio, television, print). "The ferociously spirited press of the late 1700s...was dominated by individuals expressing their opinions. The idea that ordinary citizens with no special resources, expertise, or political power—like Paine himself—could sound off, reach wide audiences, even spark revolutions, was brand-new to the world (Creel, 1920)." Katz's impassioned defense of Paine's plucky independence speaks to the way social values and communication technologies are affecting our adoption of media technologies today. Keeping Katz's words in mind, we can ask ourselves additional questions about the role of social values in communication. How do they shape our ideas of mass communication? How, in turn, does mass communication change our understanding of what our society values?

FIGURE 1.8



Thomas Paine is regarded by some as the “moral father of the Internet”

because his independent spirit is reflected in the democratization of mass communication via the Internet.

Marion Doss – Thomas Paine, Engraving – CC BY-SA 2.0.

FREE SPEECH AND ITS LIMITATIONS

The value of free speech is central to American mass communication and has been since the nation's revolutionary founding. The U.S. Constitution's very first amendment guarantees the freedom of the press. Because of the First Amendment and subsequent statutes, the United States has some of the broadest protections on speech of any industrialized nation. However, there are limits to what kinds of speech are legally protected—limits that have changed over time, reflecting shifts in U.S. social values.

FIGURE 1.9



Artist Shepard Fairey, creator of the iconic Obama HOPE image, was sued by the Associated Press for copyright infringement; Fairey argued that his work was protected by the fair use exception.

Wikimedia Commons – public domain; Cliff – National Portrait Gallery Hangs Shepard Fairey's Portrait of Barack Obama – CC BY 2.0.

Definitions of obscenity, which is not protected by the First Amendment, have altered with the nation's changing social

attitudes. James Joyce's *Ulysses*, ranked by the Modern Library as the best English-language novel of the 20th century, was illegal to publish in the United States between 1922 and 1934 because the U.S. Customs Court declared the book obscene because of its sexual content. The 1954 Supreme Court case *Roth v. the United States* defined obscenity more narrowly, allowing for differences depending on community standards. The sexual revolution and social changes of the 1960s made it even more difficult to pin down just what was meant by community standards—a question that is still under debate to this day. The mainstreaming of sexually explicit content like *Playboy* magazine, which is available in nearly every U.S. airport, is another indication that obscenity is still open to interpretation.

Regulations related to obscene content are not the only restrictions on First Amendment rights; copyright law also puts limits on free speech. Intellectual property law was originally intended to protect just that—the proprietary rights, both economic and intellectual, of the originator of a creative work. Works under copyright can't be reproduced without the authorization of the creator, nor can anyone else use them to make a profit. Inventions, novels, musical tunes, and even phrases are all covered by copyright law. The first copyright statute in the United States set 14 years as the maximum term for copyright protection. This number has risen exponentially in the 20th century; some works are now copyright-protected for up to 120 years. In recent years, an

Internet culture that enables file sharing, musical mash-ups, and YouTube video parodies has raised questions about the fair use exception to copyright law. The exact line between what types of expressions are protected or prohibited by law are still being set by courts, and as the changing values of the U.S. public evolve, copyright law—like obscenity law—will continue to change as well.

PROPAGANDA AND OTHER ULTERIOR MOTIVES

Sometimes social values enter mass media messages in a more overt way. Producers of media content may have vested interests in particular social goals, which, in turn, may cause them to promote or refute particular viewpoints. In its most heavy-handed form, this type of media influence can become propaganda, communication that intentionally attempts to persuade its audience for ideological, political, or commercial purposes. Propaganda often (but not always) distorts the truth, selectively presents facts, or uses emotional appeals.

During wartime, propaganda often includes caricatures of the enemy. Even in peacetime, however, propaganda is frequent. Political campaign commercials in which one candidate openly criticizes the other are common around election time, and some negative ads deliberately twist the truth or present outright falsehoods to attack an opposing candidate.

Other types of influence are less blatant or sinister. Advertisers want viewers to buy their products; some news sources, such as Fox News or *The Huffington Post*, have an explicit political slant. Still, people who want to exert media influence often use the tricks and techniques of propaganda. During World War I, the U.S. government created the Creel Commission as a sort of public relations firm for the United States' entry into the war. The Creel Commission used radio, movies, posters, and in-person speakers to present a positive slant on the U.S. war effort and to demonize the opposing Germans. Chairman George Creel acknowledged the commission's attempt to influence the public but shied away from calling their work propaganda:

> In no degree was the Committee an agency of censorship, a machinery of concealment or repression.... In all things, from first to last, without halt or change, it was a plain publicity proposition, a vast enterprise in salesmanship, the world's greatest adventures in advertising.... We did not call it propaganda, for that word, in German hands, had come to be associated with deceit and corruption. Our effort was educational and informative throughout, for we had such

confidence in our case as to feel that no other argument was needed than the simple, straightforward presentation of the facts (Creel, 1920).

Of course, the line between the selective (but "straightforward") presentation of the truth and the manipulation of propaganda is not an obvious or distinct one. (Another of the Creel Commission's members was later deemed the father of public relations and authored a book titled *Propaganda*.) In general, however, public relations is open about presenting one side of the truth, while propaganda seeks to invent a new truth.

FIGURE 1.10



World War I propaganda posters were sometimes styled to resemble movie posters in an attempt to glamorize the war effort.

Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

GATEKEEPERS

In 1960, journalist A. J. Liebling wryly observed that "freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one." Liebling was referring to the role of gatekeepers in the media industry, another way in which social values influence mass communication. Gatekeepers are the people who help determine which stories make it to the public, including reporters who decide what sources to use and editors who decide what gets reported on and which stories make it to the front page. Media gatekeepers are part of society and thus are saddled with their own cultural biases, whether consciously or unconsciously. In deciding what counts as newsworthy, entertaining, or relevant, gatekeepers pass on their own values to the wider public. In contrast, stories deemed unimportant or uninteresting to consumers can linger forgotten in the back pages of the newspaper—or never get covered at all.

In one striking example of the power of gatekeeping, journalist Allan Thompson lays blame on the news media for its sluggishness in covering the Rwandan genocide in 1994. According to Thompson, there weren't many outside reporters in Rwanda at the height of the genocide, so the world wasn't forced to confront the atrocities happening there. Instead, the nightly news in the United States was preoccupied by the O. J. Simpson trial, Tonya Harding's attack on a fellow figure skater, and the less bloody conflict in Bosnia (where

more reporters were stationed). Thompson went on to argue that the lack of international media attention allowed politicians to remain complacent (Thompson, 2007). With little media coverage, there was little outrage about the Rwandan atrocities, which contributed to a lack of political will to invest time and troops in a faraway conflict. Richard Dowden, Africa editor for the British newspaper *The Independent* during the Rwandan genocide, bluntly explained the news media's larger reluctance to focus on African issues: "Africa was simply not important. It didn't sell newspapers. Newspapers have to make profits. So it wasn't important (Thompson, 2007)." Bias on the individual and institutional level downplayed the genocide at a time of great crisis and potentially contributed to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people.

Gatekeepers had an especially strong influence in old media, in which space and time were limited. A news broadcast could only last for its allotted half hour, while a newspaper had a set number of pages to print. The Internet, in contrast, theoretically has room for infinite news reports. The interactive nature of the medium also minimizes the gatekeeper function of the media by allowing media consumers to have a voice as well. News aggregators like Digg allow readers to decide what makes it on to the front page. That's not to say that the wisdom of the crowd is always wise—recent top stories on Digg have featured headlines like "Top 5 Hot Girls Playing Video Games" and "The girl who

must eat every 15 minutes to stay alive." Media expert Mark Glaser noted that the digital age hasn't eliminated gatekeepers; it's just shifted who they are: "the editors who pick featured artists and apps at the Apple iTunes store, who choose videos to spotlight on YouTube, and who highlight Suggested Users on Twitter," among others (Glaser, 2009). And unlike traditional media, these new gatekeepers rarely have public bylines, making it difficult to figure out who makes such decisions and on what basis they are made.

Observing how distinct cultures and subcultures present the same story can be indicative of those cultures' various social values. Another way to look critically at today's media messages is to examine how the media has functioned in the world and in the United States during different cultural periods.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- American culture puts a high value on free speech; however, other societal values sometimes take precedence. Shifting ideas about what constitutes obscenity, a kind of speech that is not legally protected by the First Amendment, is a good example of how cultural values impact mass communication—and of how those values change over time. Copyright law,

another restriction put on free speech, has had a similar evolution over the nation's history.

- Propaganda is a type of communication that attempts to persuade the audience for ideological, political, or social purposes. Some propaganda is obvious, explicit, and manipulative; however, public relations professionals borrow many techniques from propaganda and they try to influence their audience.
- Gatekeepers influence culture by deciding which stories are considered newsworthy. Gatekeepers can promote social values either consciously or subconsciously. The digital age has lessened the power of gatekeepers somewhat, as the Internet allows for nearly unlimited space to cover any number of events and stories; furthermore, a new gatekeeper class has emerged on the Internet as well.

EXERCISES

Please answer the following questions. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. Find an advertisement—either in print, broadcast, or online—that you have recently found to be

memorable. Now find a nonadvertisement media message. Compare the ways that the ad and the nonad express social values. Are the social values the same for each of them? Is the influence overt or covert? Why did the message's creators choose to present their message in this way? Can this be considered propaganda?

2. Go to a popular website that uses user-uploaded content (YouTube, Flickr, Twitter, Metafilter, etc.). Look at the content on the site's home page. Can you tell how this particular content was selected to be featured? Does the website list a policy for featured content? What factors do you think go into the selection process?
3. Think of two recent examples where free speech was limited because of social values. Who were the gatekeepers in these situations? What effect did these limitations have on media coverage?

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify recent cultural periods.
2. Identify the impact of the Industrial Revolution on the modern era.
3. Explain the ways that the postmodern era differs from the modern era.

TABLE 1.1 CULTURAL PERIODS

Modern Era	Early Modern Period (late 1400s–1700s)	Began with Johannes Gutenberg's invention of the movable type printing press; characterized by improved transportation, educational reform, and scientific inquiry.
	Late Modern Period (1700s–1900s)	Sparked by the Industrial Revolution; characterized by technical innovations, increasingly secular politics, and urbanization.
Postmodern Age (1950s–present)	Marked by skepticism, self-consciousness, celebration of differences, and the digitalization of culture.	

After exploring the ways technology, culture, and mass media have affected one another over the years, it may also be helpful to look at recent cultural eras more broadly. A cultural period is a time marked by a particular way of understanding the world through culture and technology. Changes in cultural

periods are marked by fundamental switches in the way people perceive and understand the world. In the Middle Ages, truth was dictated by authorities like the king and the church. During the Renaissance, people turned to the scientific method as a way to reach truth through reason. And, in 2008, *Wired* magazine's editor in chief proclaimed that Google was about to render the scientific method obsolete (Anderson, 2008). In each of these cases, it wasn't that the nature of truth changed, but the way humans attempted to make sense of a world that was radically changing. For the purpose of studying culture and mass media, the post-Gutenberg modern and postmodern ages are the most relevant ones to explore.

THE MODERN AGE

The Modern Age, or **modernity**, is the postmedieval era, a wide span of time marked in part by technological innovations, urbanization, scientific discoveries, and globalization. The Modern Age is generally split into two parts: the early and the late modern periods.

The *early modern period* began with Gutenberg's invention of the movable type printing press in the late 15th century and ended in the late 18th century. Thanks to Gutenberg's

press, the European population of the early modern period saw rising literacy rates, which led to educational reform. As noted in preceding sections, Gutenberg's machine also greatly enabled the spread of knowledge and, in turn, spurred the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation. During the early modern period, transportation improved, politics became more secularized, capitalism spread, nation-states grew more powerful, and information became more widely accessible. Enlightenment ideals of reason, rationalism, and faith in scientific inquiry slowly began to replace the previously dominant authorities of king and church.

Huge political, social, and economic changes marked the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the *late modern period*. The Industrial Revolution, which began in England around 1750, combined with the American Revolution in 1776 and the French Revolution in 1789, marked the beginning of massive changes in the world.

The French and American revolutions were inspired by a rejection of monarchy in favor of national sovereignty and representative democracy. Both revolutions also heralded the rise of secular society as opposed to church-based authority systems. Democracy was well suited to the so-called Age of Reason, with its ideals of individual rights and progress.

Though less political, the Industrial Revolution had equally far-reaching consequences. It did not merely change the way goods were produced—it also fundamentally changed the economic, social, and cultural framework of its time. The

Industrial Revolution doesn't have clear start or end dates. However, during the 19th century, several crucial inventions—the internal combustion engine, steam-powered ships, and railways, among others—led to innovations in various industries. Steam power and machine tools increased production dramatically. But some of the biggest changes coming out of the Industrial Revolution were social in character. An economy based on manufacturing instead of agriculture meant that more people moved to cities, where techniques of mass production led people to value efficiency both in and out of the factory. Newly urbanized factory laborers could no longer produce their own food, clothing, or supplies, and instead turned to consumer goods. Increased production led to increases in wealth, though income inequalities between classes also started to grow.

These overwhelming changes affected (and were affected by) the media. As noted in preceding sections, the fusing of steam power and the printing press enabled the explosive expansion of books and newspapers. Literacy rates rose, as did support for public participation in politics. More and more people lived in the city, had an education, got their news from the newspaper, spent their wages on consumer goods, and identified as citizens of an industrialized nation. Urbanization, mass literacy, and new forms of mass media contributed to a sense of mass culture that united people across regional, social, and cultural boundaries.

Modernity and the Modern Age, it should be noted, are

distinct from (but related to) the cultural movement of modernism. The Modern Era lasted from the end of the Middle Ages to the middle of the 20th century; modernism, however, refers to the artistic movement of late 19th and early 20th centuries that arose from the widespread changes that swept the world during that period. Most notably, modernism questioned the limitations of traditional forms of art and culture. Modernist art was in part a reaction against the Enlightenment's certainty of progress and rationality. It celebrated subjectivity through abstraction, experimentalism, surrealism, and sometimes pessimism or even nihilism. Prominent examples of modernist works include James Joyce's stream-of-consciousness novels, cubist paintings by Pablo Picasso, atonal compositions by Claude Debussy, and absurdist plays by Luigi Pirandello.

THE POSTMODERN AGE

Modernism can also be seen as a transitional phase between the modern and postmodern eras. While the exact definition and dates of the Postmodern Age are still being debated by cultural theorists and philosophers, the general consensus is that the Postmodern Age began during the second half of the 20th

century and was marked by skepticism, self-consciousness, celebration of difference, and the reappraisal of modern conventions. The Modern Age took for granted scientific rationalism, the autonomous self, and the inevitability of progress; the Postmodern Age questioned or dismissed many of these assumptions. If the Modern Age valued order, reason, stability, and absolute truth, the Postmodern Age reveled in contingency, fragmentation, and instability. The effect of technology on culture, the rise of the Internet, and the Cold War are all aspects that led to the Postmodern Age.

The belief in objective truth that characterized the Modern Age is one of the major assumptions overturned in the Postmodern Age. Postmodernists instead took their cues from Erwin Schrödinger, the quantum physicist who famously devised a thought experiment in which a cat is placed inside a sealed box with a small amount of radiation that may or may not kill it. While the box remains sealed, Schrödinger proclaimed, the cat exists simultaneously in both states, dead and alive. Both potential states are equally true. Although the thought experiment was devised to explore issues in quantum physics, it appealed to postmodernists in its assertion of radical uncertainty. Rather than there being an absolute objective truth accessible by rational experimentation, the status of reality was contingent and depended on the observer.

This value of the relative over the absolute found its literary equivalent in the movement of deconstruction. While Victorian novelists took pains to make their books seem more

realistic, postmodern narratives distrusted professions of reality and constantly reminded readers of the artificial nature of the story they were reading. The emphasis was not on the all-knowing author, but instead on the reader. For the postmodernists, meaning was not injected into a work by its creator, but depended on the reader's subjective experience of the work. The poetry of Sylvia Plath and Allen Ginsberg exemplify this, as much of their work is emotionally charged and designed to create a dialogue with the reader, oftentimes forcing the reader to confront controversial issues such as mental illness or homosexuality.

Another way the Postmodern Age differed from the Modern Age was in the rejection of what philosopher Jean-François Lyotard deemed "grand narratives." The Modern Age was marked by different large-scale theories that attempted to explain the totality of human experience, such as capitalism, Marxism, rationalism, Freudianism, Darwinism, fascism, and so on. However, increasing globalization and the rise of subcultures called into question the sorts of theories that claimed to explain everything at once. Totalitarian regimes during the 20th century, such as Adolf Hitler's Third Reich and the USSR under Joseph Stalin, led to a mistrust of power and the systems held up by power. The Postmodern Age, Lyotard theorized, was one of micronarratives instead of grand narratives—that is, a multiplicity of small, localized understandings of the world, none of which can claim an ultimate or absolute truth. An older man in Kenya, for

example, does not view the world in the same way as a young woman from New York. Even people from the same cultural backgrounds have different views of the world—when you were a teenager, did your parents understand your way of thinking? The diversity of human experience is a marked feature of the postmodern world. As Lyotard noted, "Eclecticism is the degree zero of contemporary general culture; one listens to reggae, watches a Western, eats McDonald's food for lunch and local cuisine for dinner, wears Paris perfume in Tokyo and retro clothes in Hong Kong; knowledge is a matter for TV games (Lyotard, 1984)."

Postmodernists also mistrusted the idea of originality and freely borrowed across cultures and genres. William S. Burroughs gleefully proclaimed a sort of call to arms for his generation of writers in 1985: "Out of the closets and into the museums, libraries, architectural monuments, concert halls, bookstores, recording studios and film studios of the world. Everything belongs to the inspired and dedicated thief (Burroughs,1993)." The feminist artist Barbara Kruger, for example, creates works of art from old advertisements, and writers, such as Kathy Acker, reconstructed existing texts to form new stories. The rejection of traditional forms of art and expression embody the Postmodern Age.

From the early Modern Age through the Postmodern Age, people have experienced the world in vastly different ways. Not only has technology rapidly become more complex, but culture itself has changed with the times. When reading

further, it's important to remember that forms of media and culture are hallmarks of different eras, and the different ways in which media are presented often tell us a lot about the culture and times.

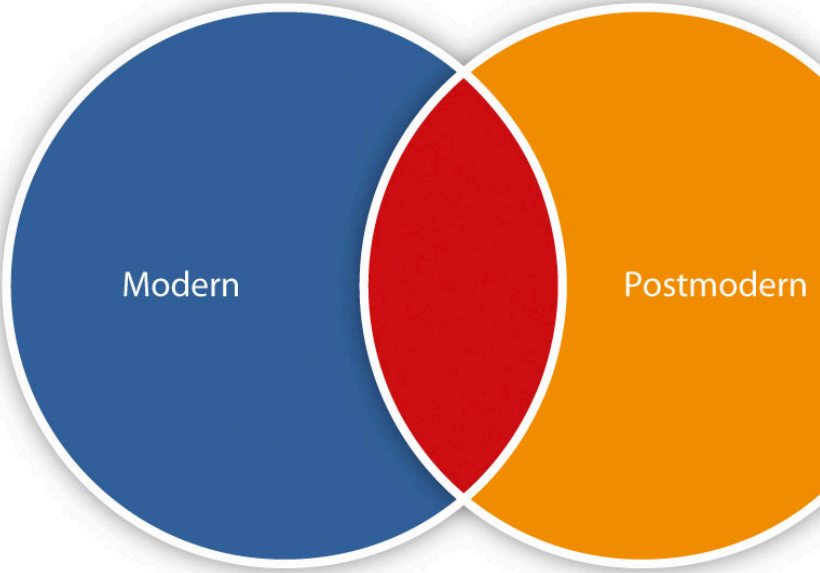
KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A cultural period is a time marked by a particular way of understanding the world through culture and technology. Changes in cultural periods are marked by fundamental changes in the way we perceive and understand the world. The Modern Age began after the Middle Ages and lasted through the early decades of the 20th century, when the Postmodern Age began.
- The Modern Age was marked by Enlightenment philosophy, which focused on the individual and placed a high value on rational decision making. This period saw the wide expansion of capitalism, colonialism, democracy, and science-based rationalism. The Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation, the American and French Revolutions, and World War I were all significant events that took place during the Modern Age. One of the most significant, however, was the Industrial Revolution; its emphasis on routinization and efficiency helped society restructure

itself similarly.

- Postmodernity differed from modernity in its questioning of reason, rejection of grand narratives, and emphasis on subcultures. Rather than searching for one ultimate truth that could explain all of history, the postmodernists focused on contingency, context, and diversity.

EXERCISES



Draw a Venn diagram of the two cultural periods discussed at length in this chapter. Make a list of the features, values, and events that mark each period. Then, answer the questions below. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. What defines a cultural period?
2. How do the two periods differ? Do they overlap in any ways?
3. What do you predict the next cultural era has in store? When will it begin?

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1.7

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Determine the influence of tastemakers in traditional media.
2. Identify the ways the digital age is undermining the traditional role of tastemakers.
3. Determine how Internet culture now allows creators

to bypass gatekeepers and determine the potential effects this will have.

Burroughs's jubilant call to bring art "out of the closets and into the museums" spoke to postmodernism's willingness to meld high and low culture (Leonard, 1997). And although the Postmodern Age specifically embraced popular culture, mass media and pop culture have been entwined from their very beginnings. In fact, mass media often determines what does and does not make up the pop culture scene.

TASTEMAKERS

Historically, mass pop culture has been fostered by an active and tastemaking mass media that introduces and encourages the adoption of certain trends. Although they are similar in some ways to the widespread media gatekeepers discussed in Section 1.4.3 "Gatekeepers", tastemakers differ in that they are most influential when the mass media is relatively small and concentrated. When only a few publications or programs reach millions of people, their writers and editors are highly

influential. *The New York Times*'s restaurant reviews used to be able to make a restaurant successful or unsuccessful through granting (or withdrawing) its rating.

Or take the example of Ed Sullivan's variety show, which ran from 1948 to 1971, and is most famous for hosting the first U.S. appearance of the Beatles—a television event that was at the time the most-watched TV program ever. Sullivan hosted musical acts, comedians, actors, and dancers and had the reputation of being able to turn an act on the cusp of fame into full-fledged stars. Comedian Jackie Mason compared being on *The Ed Sullivan Show* to "an opera singer being at the Met. Or if a guy is an architect that makes the Empire State Building....This was the biggest (Leonard, 1997)." Sullivan was a classic example of an influential tastemaker of his time. A more modern example is Oprah Winfrey, whose book club endorsements often send literature, including old classics like Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, skyrocketing to the top of *The New York Times* Best Sellers list.

FIGURE 1.11



For Elvis Presley's third appearance on *The Ed Sullivan show*, he was shown only from the waist up; Sullivan considered his dancing too scandalous for family viewing.

Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

Along with encouraging a mass audience to see (or skip) certain movies, television shows, video games, books, or fashion trends, people use tastemaking to create demand for new products. Companies often turn to advertising firms to

help create public hunger for an object that may have not even existed 6 months before. In the 1880s, when George Eastman developed the Kodak camera for personal use, photography was most practiced by professionals. "Though the Kodak was relatively cheap and easy to use, most Americans didn't see the need for a camera; they had no sense that there was any value in visually documenting their lives," noted *New Yorker* writer James Surowiecki (Surowiecki, 2003). Kodak became a wildly successful company not because Eastman was good at selling cameras, but because he understood that what he really had to sell was photography. Apple Inc. is a modern master of this technique. By leaking just enough information about a new product to cause curiosity, the technology company ensures that people will be waiting excitedly for an official release.

Tastemakers help keep culture vital by introducing the public to new ideas, music, programs, or products, but tastemakers are not immune to outside influence. In the traditional media model, large media companies set aside large advertising budgets to promote their most promising projects; tastemakers buzz about "the next big thing," and obscure or niche works can get lost in the shuffle.

A CHANGING SYSTEM FOR THE INTERNET AGE

In retrospect, the 20th century was a tastemaker's dream. Advertisers, critics, and other cultural influencers had access to huge audiences through a number of mass-communication platforms. However, by the end of the century, the rise of cable television and the Internet had begun to make tastemaking a more complicated enterprise. While *The Ed Sullivan Show* regularly reached 50 million people in the 1960s, the most popular television series of 2009—*American Idol*—averaged around 25.5 million viewers per night, despite the fact that the 21st-century United States could claim more people and more television sets than ever before (Wikipedia, 2012). However, the proliferation of TV channels and other competing forms of entertainment meant that no one program or channel could dominate the attention of the American public as in Sullivan's day.

TABLE 1.2 VIEWINGS OF

POPULAR TELEVISION BROADCASTS

Show/Episode	Number of Viewers	Percent of Households	Year
The Ed Sullivan Show / The Beatles' first appearance	73 million	45.1%	1964
The Ed Sullivan Show / Elvis Presley's first appearance	60 million	82.6%	1956
I Love Lucy / "Lucy Goes to the Hospital"	44 million	71.7%	1953
*M*A*S*H / Series finale*	106 million	60.2%	1983
Seinfeld / Series finale	76 million	41.3%	1998
American Idol / Season 5 finale	36 million	17%	2006

Meanwhile, a low-tech home recording of a little boy acting loopy after a visit to the dentist ("David After Dentist") garnered more than 37 million YouTube viewings in 2009 alone. The Internet appears to be eroding some of the tastemaking power of the traditional media outlets. No longer is the traditional mass media the only dominant force in

creating and promoting trends. Instead, information spreads across the globe without the active involvement of traditional mass media. Websites made by nonprofessionals can reach more people daily than a major newspaper. Music review sites such as Pitchfork keep their eyes out for the next big thing, whereas review aggregators like Rotten Tomatoes allow readers to read hundreds of movie reviews by amateurs and professionals alike. Blogs make it possible for anyone with Internet access to potentially reach an audience of millions. Some popular bloggers have transitioned from the traditional media world to the digital world, but others have become well known without formal institutional support. The celebrity-gossip chronicler Perez Hilton had no formal training in journalism when he started his blog, PerezHilton.com, in 2005; within a few years, he was reaching millions of readers a month.

E-mail and text messages allow people to transmit messages almost instantly across vast geographic expanses. Although personal communications continue to dominate, e-mail and text messages are increasingly used to directly transmit information about important news events. When Barack Obama wanted to announce his selection of Joe Biden as his vice-presidential running mate in the 2008 election, he bypassed the traditional televised press conference and instead sent the news to his supporters directly via text message—2.9 million text messages, to be exact (Covey). Social networking sites, such as Facebook, and microblogging services, such as

Twitter, are another source of late-breaking information. When Michael Jackson died of cardiac arrest in 2009, "RIP Michael Jackson" was a top trending topic on Twitter before the first mainstream media first reported the news.

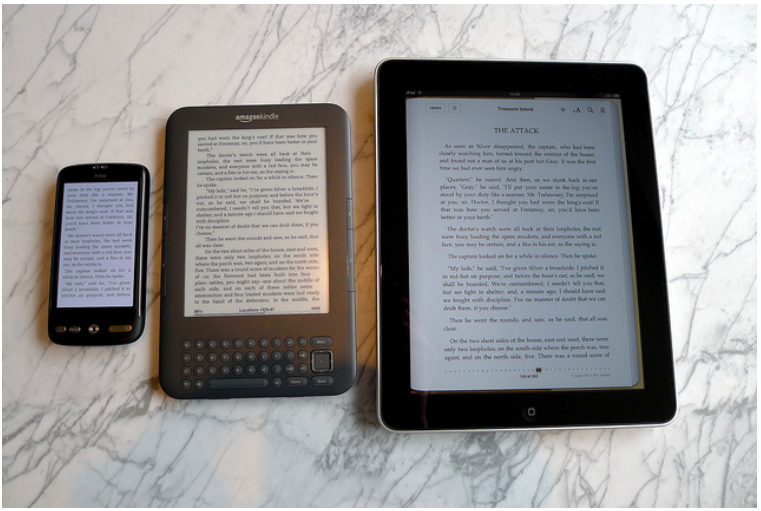
Thanks to these and other digital-age media, the Internet has become a pop culture force, both a source of amateur talent and a source of amateur promotion. However, traditional media outlets still maintain a large amount of control and influence over U.S. pop culture. One key indicator is the fact that many singers or writers who first make their mark on the Internet quickly transition to more traditional media—YouTube star Justin Bieber was signed by a mainstream record company, and blogger Perez Hilton is regularly featured on MTV and VH1. New-media stars are quickly absorbed into the old-media landscape.

GETTING AROUND THE GATEKEEPERS

Not only does the Internet give untrained individuals access to a huge audience for their art or opinions, but it also allows content creators to reach fans directly. Projects that may not

have succeeded through traditional mass media may get a second chance through newer medias. The profit-driven media establishment has been surprised by the success of some self-published books. For example, dozens of literary agents rejected first-time author Daniel Suarez's novel *Daemon* before he decided to self-publish in 2006. Through savvy self-promotion through influential bloggers, Suarez garnered enough attention to land a contract with a major publishing house.

FIGURE 1.12



E-readers offer authors a way to get around the traditional publishing industry, but their thousands of options can make choosing hard on readers.

Edvvc – eReader Comparison – CC BY 2.0.

Suarez's story, though certainly exceptional, reaches some of the questions facing creators and consumers of pop culture in the Internet age. Without the influence of an agent, editor, or PR company, self-published content may be able to hew closer to the creator's intention. However, much of the detailed marketing work must be performed by the work's creator instead of by a specialized public relations team. And with so many self-published, self-promoted works uploaded to the Internet every day, it's easy for things—even good things—to get lost in the shuffle.

Critic Laura Miller spells out some of the ways in which writers in particular can take control of their own publishing: "Writers can upload their works to services run by Amazon, Apple and... Barnes & Noble, transforming them into e-books that are instantly available in high-profile online stores. Or they can post them on services like Urbis.com, Quillp.com, or CompletelyNovel.com and coax reviews from other hopeful users (Miller, 2010)." Miller also points out that many of these companies can produce hard copies of books as well. While such a system may be a boon for writers who haven't had success with the traditional media establishment, Miller notes that it may not be the best option for readers, who "rarely complain that there isn't enough of a selection on Amazon or in their local superstore; they're more likely to ask for help in narrowing down their choices (Miller, 2010)."

The question remains: Will the Internet era be marked by a huge and diffuse pop culture, where the power of traditional mass media declines and, along with it, the power of the universalizing blockbuster hit? Or will the Internet create a new set of tastemakers—influential bloggers—or even serve as a platform for the old tastemakers to take on new forms?

DEMOCRATIZING TASTEMAKING

In 1993, *The New York Times* restaurant critic Ruth Reichl wrote a review about her experiences at the upscale Manhattan restaurant Le Cirque. She detailed the poor service she received when the restaurant staff did not know her and the excellent service she received when they realized she was a professional food critic. Her article illustrated how the power to publish reviews could affect a person's experience at a restaurant. The Internet, which turned everyone with the time and interest into a potential reviewer, allowed those ordinary people to have their voices heard. In the mid-2000s, websites such as Yelp and TripAdvisor boasted hundreds of reviews of restaurants, hotels, and salons provided by users. Amazon allows users to review any product it sells, from textbooks to bathing suits. The era of the democratized review had come, and tastemaking was now everyone's job.

By crowdsourcing (harnessing the efforts of a number of individuals online to solve a problem) the review process, the idea was, these sites would arrive at a more accurate description of the service in choice. One powerful reviewer would no longer be able to wield disproportionate power; instead, the wisdom of the crowd would make or break restaurants, movies, and everything else. Anyone who felt treated badly or scammed now had recourse to tell the world about it. By 2008, Yelp had 4 million reviews

However, mass tastemaking isn't as perfect as some people had promised. Certain reviewers can overly influence a product's overall rating by contributing multiple votes. One study found that a handful of Amazon users were casting hundreds of votes, while most rarely wrote reviews at all. Online reviews also tend to skew to extremes—more reviews are written by the ecstatic and the furious, while the moderately pleased aren't riled up enough to post online about their experiences. And while traditional critics are supposed to adhere to ethical standards, there's no such standard for online reviews. Savvy authors or restaurant owners have been known to slyly insert positive reviews or attempt to skew ratings systems. To get an accurate picture, potential buyers may find themselves wading through 20 or 30 online reviews, most of them from nonprofessionals. And sometimes those people aren't professionals for a reason. Consider these user reviews on Amazon of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: "There is really no point and it's

really long," "I really didn't enjoy reading this book and I wish that our English teacher wouldn't force my class to read this play," and "don't know what Willy Shakespeare was thinking when he wrote this one play tragedy, but I thought this sure was boring! Hamlet does too much talking and not enough stuff." While some may argue that these are valid criticisms of the play, these comments are certainly a far cry from the thoughtful critique of a professional literary critic.

These and other issues underscore the point of having reviews in the first place—that it's an advantage to have certain places, products, or ideas examined and critiqued by a trusted and knowledgeable source. In an article about Yelp, *The New York Times* noted that one of the site's elite reviewers had racked up more than 300 reviews in 3 years, and then pointed out that "By contrast, a *New York Times* restaurant critic might take six years to amass 300 reviews. The critic visits a restaurant several times, strives for anonymity and tries to sample every dish on the menu (McNeil, 2008)." Whatever your vantage point, it's clear that old-style tastemaking is still around and still valuable—but the democratic review is here to stay.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Traditionally, pop culture hits were initiated or driven by the active support of media tastemakers. When mass media is concentrated, people with access to platforms for mass communication wield quite a bit of power in what becomes well known, popular, or even infamous. Ed Sullivan's wildly popular variety TV show in the 1950s and 1960s served as a star-making vehicle and a tastemaker of that period.
- The digital age, with its proliferation of accessible media, has undermined the traditional role of the tastemaker. In contrast to the traditional media, Internet-based mass media are not limited by time or space, and they allow bloggers, critics, or aspiring stars to potentially reach millions without the backing of the traditional media industry.
- However, this democratization has its downsides. An abundance of mass communication without some form of filtration can lead to information overload. Additionally, online reviews can be altered or biased.

EXERCISES

Find a popular newspaper or magazine that discusses popular culture. Look through it to determine what pop culture movements, programs, or people it seems to be covering. Then, answer the following questions. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. What is the overall tone of this periodical? What messages does it seem to be promoting, either implicitly or explicitly?
2. What are tastemakers? How might they be influencing the articles in this newspaper or magazine?

Next, find a website that deals with popular culture and answer the questions below.

1. Are there differences between the traditional media's and the new media's approach to popular culture?
2. How does the website you chose undermine tastemakers and gatekeepers?

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Chapter 2: Media Effects

2.1 Mass Media and Its Messages
2.2 Media Effects Theories

2.3 Methods of Researching Media Effects
2.4 Media Studies Controversies

2.1 Mass Media and Its Messages

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Explain the different ways mass media affects culture.
2. Analyze cultural messages that the media send.
3. Explain the ways new media have affected culture.

When media consumers think of media messages, they may think of televised public service announcements or political advertisements. These obvious examples provide a venue for the transfer of a message through a medium, whether that message is a plea for fire safety or the statement of a political position. But what about more abstract political advertisements that simply show the logo of a candidate and a few simple words? Media messages can range from overt statements to vague expressions of cultural values.

Disagreements over the content of media messages certainly exist. Consider the common allegations of political bias against

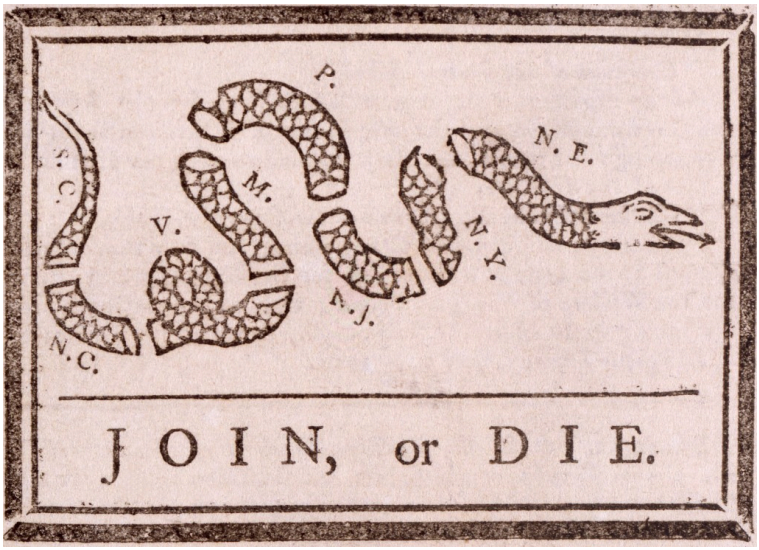
various news organizations. Accusations of hidden messages or agenda-driven content have always been an issue in the media, but as the presence of media grows, the debate concerning media messages increases. This dialogue is an important one; after all, mass media have long been used to persuade. Many modern persuasive techniques stem from the use of media as a propaganda tool. The role of propaganda and persuasion in the mass media is a good place to start when considering various types of media effects.

PROPAGANDA AND PERSUASION

Encyclopedia Britannica defines propaganda simply as the "manipulation of information to influence public opinion (Britannica Concise Encyclopedia)." This definition works well for this discussion because the study and use of propaganda has had an enormous influence on the role of persuasion in modern mass media. In his book *The Creation of the Media*, Paul Starr argues that the United States, as a liberal democracy, has favored employing an independent press as a public guardian, thus putting the media in an inherently

political position (Starr, 2004). The United States—in contrast to other nations where media are held in check—has encouraged an independent commercial press and thus given the powers of propaganda and persuasion to the public (Starr, 2004).

FIGURE 2.2



Benjamin Franklin used a powerful image of a severed snake to emphasize the importance of the colonies joining together during the American Revolution.

Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

Like any type of communication, propaganda is not inherently good or bad. Whether propaganda has a positive or negative effect on society and culture depends on the motivations of those who use it. People promoting movements as wide-ranging as Christianity, the American Revolution, and the communist revolutions of the 20th century have all used propaganda to disseminate their messages (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2006). Newspapers and pamphlets that glorified the sacrifices at Lexington and Concord and trumpeted the victories of George Washington's army greatly aided the American Revolution. For example, Benjamin Franklin's famous illustration of a severed snake with the caption "Join or Die" serves as an early testament to the power and use of print propaganda (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2006).

As you will learn in Chapter 4 "Newspapers", the penny press made newspapers accessible to a mass audience and became a force for social cohesion during the 1830s (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2006). Magazines adopted a similar format later in the 19th century, and print media's political and social power rose. In an infamous example of the new power of print media, some newspapers encouraged the Spanish-American War of 1898 by fabricating stories of Spanish atrocities and sabotage (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2006). For example, after the USS *Maine* sunk off the coast of Havana, Cuba, some

newspapers blamed the Spanish—even though there was no evidence—fueling the public's desire for war with Spain.

The present-day, pejorative connotation of propaganda stems from the full utilization of mass media by World War I–era governments to motivate the citizenry of many countries to go to war. Some media outlets characterized the war as a global fight between Anglo civilization and Prussian barbarianism. Although some of those fighting the war had little understanding of the political motivations behind it, wartime propaganda convinced them to enlist (Miller, 2005). As you will read in Chapter 12 "Advertising and Public Relations", World War I legitimized the advertising profession in the minds of government and corporate leaders because its techniques were useful in patriotic propaganda campaigns. Corporations quickly adapted to this development and created an advertising boom in the 1920s by using World War I propaganda techniques to sell products (Miller, 2005).

In modern society, the persuasive power of the mass media is well known. Governments, corporations, nonprofit organizations, and political campaigns rely on both new and old media to create messages and to send them to the general public. The comparatively unregulated nature of U.S. media has made, for better or worse, a society in which the tools of public persuasion are available to everyone.

MEDIA AND BEHAVIOR

Although the mass media send messages created specifically for public consumption, they also convey messages that are not properly defined as propaganda or persuasion. Some argue that these messages influence behavior, especially the behavior of young people (Beatty, 2006). Violent, sexual, and compulsive behaviors have been linked to media consumption and thus raise important questions about the effects of media on culture.

VIOLENCE AND THE MEDIA

On April 20, 1999, students Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold entered their Denver-area high school, Columbine High School, armed with semiautomatic weapons and explosives. Over the next few hours, the pair killed 12 classmates and one faculty member before committing suicide (Lamb, 2008). The tragedy and its aftermath captured national attention, and in the weeks following the Columbine High School shootings,

politicians and pundits worked to assign blame. Their targets ranged from the makers of the first-person shooter video game *Doom* to the Hollywood studios responsible for *The Matrix* (Brook, 1999).

However, in the years since the massacre, research has revealed that the perpetrators were actually attempting a terrorist bombing rather than a first-person shooter style rampage (Toppo, 1999). But did violent video games so desensitize the two teenagers to violence that they could contemplate such a plan? Did movies that glorify violent solutions create a culture that would encourage people to consider such methods? Because modern culture is so immersed in media, the issue becomes a particularly complex one, and it can be difficult to understand the types of effects that violent media produce.

FIGURE 2.3



The 1999 Columbine High School shooting led to greater debate and criticism over violent video games.

Mentat Kilbernes – Columbine Massacre RPG – CC BY-NC 2.0.

A number of studies have verified certain connections between violent video games and violent behavior in young people. For example, studies have found that some young people who play violent video games reported angry thoughts and aggressive feelings immediately after playing. Other studies, such as one

conducted by Dr. Chris A. Anderson and others, point to correlations between the amount of time spent playing violent video games and increased incidence of aggression (Anderson, 2003). However, these studies do not prove that video games cause violence. Video game defenders argue that violent people can be drawn to violent games, and they point to lower overall incidence of youth violence in recent years compared to past decades (Adams, 2010). Other researchers admit that individuals prone to violent acts are indeed drawn to violent media; however, they claim that by keeping these individuals in a movie theater or at home, violent media have actually contributed to a reduction in violent social acts (Goodman, 2008).

Whether violent media actually cause violence remains unknown, but unquestionably these forms of media send an emotional message to which individuals respond. Media messages are not limited to overt statements; they can also use emotions, such as fear, love, happiness, and depression. These emotional reactions partially account for the intense power of media in our culture.

SEX AND THE MEDIA

In many types of media, sexual content—and its strong emotional message—can be prolific. A recent study by researchers at the University of North Carolina entitled "Sexy Media Matter: Exposure to Sexual Content in Music, Movies, Television, and Magazines Predicts Black and White Adolescents' Sexual Behavior" found that young people with heavy exposure to sexually themed media ranging from music to movies are twice as likely to engage in early sexual behavior as young people with light exposure. Although the study does not prove a conclusive link between sexual behavior and sexually oriented media, researchers concluded that media acted as an influential source of information about sex for these youth groups (Dohney, 2006). Researcher Jane Brown thinks part of the reason children watch sexual content is related to puberty and their desire to learn about sex. While many parents are hesitant to discuss sex with their children, the media can act like a "super peer," providing information in movies, television, music, and magazines (Dohney, 2006). You will learn more about the impact of sexual content in the media in Chapter 14 "Ethics of Mass Media".

CULTURAL MESSAGES AND THE MEDIA

The media sends messages that reinforce cultural values. These values are perhaps most visible in celebrities and the roles that they adopt. Actors such as John Wayne and Marilyn Monroe came to represent aspects of masculinity and femininity that were adopted into mainstream culture during the mid-20th century. Throughout the 1990s, basketball player Michael Jordan appeared in television, film, magazines, and advertising campaigns as a model of athleticism and willpower. Singers such as Bob Dylan have represented a sense of freedom and rebellion against mainstream culture.

FIGURE 2.4



Tonto from *The Lone Ranger* reinforced cultural stereotypes about Native Americans. Do you think this type of characterization would be acceptable in modern television?

Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

Although many consider celebrity culture superficial and a poor reflection of a country's values, not all celebrities are simply entertainers. Civil rights leaders, social reformers, and other famous public figures have come to represent important cultural accomplishments and advancements through their representations in the media. When images of Abraham Lincoln or Susan B. Anthony appear in the media, they resonate with cultural and historical themes greatly separated from mere fame.

Celebrities can also reinforce cultural stereotypes that marginalize certain groups. Television and magazines from the mid-20th century often portrayed women in a submissive, domestic role, both reflecting and reinforcing the cultural limitations imposed on women at the time. Advertising icons developed during the early 20th century, such as Aunt Jemima and the Cream of Wheat chef, similarly reflected and reinforced a submissive, domestic servant role for African Americans. Other famous stereotypes—such as the Lone Ranger's Native American sidekick, Tonto, or Mickey Rooney's Mr. Yunioshi role in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*—also reinforced American preconceptions about ethnic predispositions and capabilities.

Whether actual or fictional, celebrities and their assumed roles send a number of different messages about cultural values. They can promote courageous truth telling, hide and

prolong social problems, or provide a concrete example of an abstract cultural value.

NEW MEDIA AND SOCIETY

New media—the Internet and other digital forms of communication—have had a large effect on society. This communication and information revolution has created a great deal of anguish about digital literacy and other issues that inevitably accompany such a social change. In his book on technology and communication, *A Better Pencil*, Dennis Baron discusses this issue:

For Plato, only speech, not writing, can produce the kind of back-and-forth—the dialogue—that's needed to get at the truth...the text, orphaned by its author once it's on the page, cannot defend itself against misreading.... These are strong arguments, but even in Plato's day they had been rendered moot by the success of the written word. Although the literacy rate in classical Greece was well below 10 percent, writing had become an important feature of the culture.

People had learned to trust and use certain kinds of writing—legal texts, public inscriptions, business documents, personal letters, and even literature—and as they did so, they realized that writing, on closer examination, turned out to be neither more nor less reliable or ambiguous than the spoken word, and it was just as real (Baron, 2009).

Baron makes the point that all communication revolutions have created upheavals and have changed the standards of literacy and communication. This historical perspective gives a positive interpretation to some otherwise ominous developments in communication and culture.

INFORMATION

The Internet has made an incredible amount of new information available to the general public. Both this wealth of information and the ways people process it are having an enormous effect on culture. New perceptions of information have emerged as access to it grows. Older-media consumption habits required in-depth processing of information through a particular form of media. For example, consumers read, watched, or viewed a news report in its entirety, typically

within the context of a news publication or program. Fiction appeared in book or magazine form.

Today, information is easier to access, thus more likely to traverse several forms of media. An individual may read an article on a news website and then forward part of it to a friend. That person in turn describes it to a coworker without having seen the original context. The ready availability of information through search engines may explain how a clearly satirical *Onion* article on the *Harry Potter* phenomenon came to be taken as fact. Increasingly, media outlets cater to this habit of searching for specific bits of information devoid of context. Information that will attract the most attention is often featured at the expense of more important stories. At one point on March 11, 2010, for example, *The Washington Post* website's most popular story was "Maintaining a Sex Life (Kakutani, 2010)."

Another important development in the media's approach to information is its increasing subjectivity. Some analysts have used the term cyberbalkanization to describe the way media consumers filter information. Balkanization is an allusion to the political fragmentation of Eastern Europe's Balkan states following World War I, when the Ottoman Empire disintegrated into a number of ethnic and political fragments. Customized news feeds allow individuals to receive only the kinds of news and information they want and thus block out sources that report unwanted stories or perspectives. Many cultural critics have pointed to this kind of information

filtering as the source of increasing political division and resulting loss of civic discourse. When media consumers hear only the information they want to, the common ground of public discourse that stems from general agreement on certain principles inevitably grows smaller (Kakutani, 2010).

LITERACY

On one hand, the growth of the Internet as the primary information source exposes the public to increased levels of text, thereby increasing overall literacy. Indeed, written text is essential to the Internet: Web content is overwhelmingly text-based, and successful participation in Internet culture through the use of blogs, forums, or a personal website requires a degree of textual literacy that is not necessary for engagement in television, music, or movies.

Critics of Internet literacy, however, describe the majority of forum and blog posts as subliterate, and argue that the Internet has replaced the printed newspapers and books that actually raised the standards of literacy. One nuanced look at the Internet's effect on the way a culture processes and perceives information states that literacy will not simply increase or

decrease, but will change qualitatively (Choney, 2010). Perhaps the standards for literacy will shift to an emphasis on simplicity and directness, for example, rather than on elaborate uses of language.

NEWS

FIGURE 2.5



President Barack Obama fired General Stanley McChrystal after a controversial *Rolling Stone* story in which McChrystal spoke poorly of the Obama administration was leaked on the Internet.

Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

Certainly, the Internet has affected the way that cultures consume news. The public expects to receive information quickly, and news outlets respond rapidly to breaking stories. On Monday, June 21, 2010, for example, a spokesperson for *Rolling Stone* magazine first released quotes from a story featuring General Stanley McChrystal publicly criticizing members of the Obama administration on matters of foreign policy. By that evening, the story had become national news despite the fact *Rolling Stone* didn't even post it to its website until Tuesday morning—some time after several news outlets had already posted the entire story on their own sites. Later that same day, McChrystal issued a public apology, and on Wednesday flew to Washington where President Barack Obama fired him. The printed *Rolling Stone* issue featuring the article hit newsstands Friday, 2 days after McChrystal had been replaced (Timpane, 2010).

CONVERGENCE CULTURE

The term *convergence* can hold several different meanings. In

his book *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, Henry Jenkins offers a useful definition of convergence as it applies to new media:

"By convergence, I mean the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want (Jenkins, 2006)."

A self-produced video on the YouTube website that gains enormous popularity and thus receives the attention of a news outlet is a good example of this migration of both content and audiences. Consider this flow: The video appears and gains notoriety, so a news outlet broadcasts a story about the video, which in turn increases its popularity on YouTube. This migration works in a number of ways. Humorous or poignant excerpts from television or radio broadcasts are often posted on social media sites and blogs, where they gain popularity and are seen by more people than had seen the original broadcast.

Thanks to new media, consumers now view all types of media as participatory. For example, the massively popular talent show *American Idol* combines an older-media format—television—with modern media consumption patterns by allowing the home audience to vote for a favorite contestant. However, *American Idol* segments regularly appear on YouTube and other websites, where people who may never have seen the show comment on and dissect them.

Phone companies report a regular increase in phone traffic following the show, presumably caused by viewers calling in to cast their votes or simply to discuss the program with friends and family. As a result, more people are exposed to the themes, principles, and culture of *American Idol* than the number of people who actually watch the show (Jenkins, 2006).

New media have encouraged greater personal participation in media as a whole. Although the long-term cultural consequences of this shift cannot yet be assessed, the development is undeniably a novel one. As audiences become more adept at navigating media, this trend will undoubtedly increase.

BERT IS EVIL

FIGURE 2.6



Jughead – evil bert – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

In 2001, high school student Dino Ignacio created a collage of *Sesame Street* character Bert with terrorist Osama bin Laden as part of a series for his website. Called "Bert Is Evil," the series featured the puppet engaged in a variety of illicit activities. A Bangladesh-based publisher looking for images of bin Laden found the collage on the Internet and used it in an anti-American protest poster, presumably without knowledge of who Bert was. This ended up in a CNN report on anti-American protests, and public outrage over the use of Bert made Ignacio's original site a much-imitated cult phenomenon.

The voyage of this collage from a high school student's website to an anti-American protest poster in the Middle East to a cable television news network and finally back to the Internet provides a good illustration of the ways in which content migrates across media platforms in the

modern era. As the collage crossed geographic and cultural boundaries, it grew on both corporate and grassroots media. While this is not the norm for media content, the fact that such a phenomenon is possible illustrates the new directions in which media is headed (Jenkins, 2006).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Propaganda and persuasion have long been a part of the interactions between media and culture.
- Most studies on media and behavior do not establish direct links between the two but do reveal important correlations among media, violence, and sexual behavior.
- Through the media, celebrities have come to signify important cultural values and tendencies, and they transmit specific cultural messages.
- New digital forms of media have revolutionized the way people access and consume media content. Rather than simply replacing old media, however, new forms of media encourage participatory media consumption and content migration.

EXERCISES

1. Celebrities can represent cultural values and principles when they are portrayed in the media. The same celebrity can represent very different things depending on the form of media and its portrayal of that person. Find a celebrity magazine, such as *People* or *Us Weekly*, either online or in print, and choose one of the celebrities mentioned. Then, answer the following questions:

    - How is this celebrity portrayed in the magazine?
    - What kind of roles does the celebrity take in other forms of media, such as television or film?
    - How do these portrayals associate with specific cultural values?

2. Explain how the media has affected culture. Be sure to discuss the following topics and to provide examples of each.

    - Propaganda and persuasion
    - Behavior
    - Cultural messages

3. How has new media affected literacy and information

consumption? How is this different from older forms of media?

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2.2 Media Effects Theories

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify the basic theories of media effects.
2. Explain the uses of various media effects theories.

Early media studies focused on the use of mass media in propaganda and persuasion. However, journalists and researchers soon looked to behavioral sciences to help figure out the effect of mass media and communications on society. Scholars have developed many different approaches and theories to figure this out. You can refer to these theories as you research and consider the media's effect on culture.

Widespread fear that mass-media messages could outweigh other stabilizing cultural influences, such as family and community, led to what is known as the direct effects model of media studies. This model assumed that audiences passively accepted media messages and would exhibit predictable reactions in response to those messages. For example, following the radio broadcast of *War of the Worlds* in 1938 (which was a fictional news report of an alien invasion), some people panicked and believed the story to be true.

CHALLENGES TO THE DIRECT EFFECTS THEORY

The results of the *People's Choice Study* challenged this model. Conducted in 1940, the study attempted to gauge the effects of political campaigns on voter choice. Researchers found that voters who consumed the most media had generally already decided for which candidate to vote, while undecided voters generally turned to family and community members to help them decide. The study thus discredited the direct effects model and influenced a host of other media theories (Hanson, 2009). These theories do not necessarily give an all-encompassing picture of media effects but rather work to illuminate a particular aspect of media influence.

MARSHALL MCLUHAN'S INFLUENCE ON MEDIA STUDIES

During the early 1960s, English professor Marshall McLuhan wrote two books that had an enormous effect on the history of media studies. Published in 1962 and 1964, respectively, the *Gutenberg Galaxy* and *Understanding Media* both traced the history of media technology and illustrated the ways these innovations had changed both individual behavior and the wider culture. *Understanding Media* introduced a phrase that McLuhan has become known for: "The medium is the message." This notion represented a novel take on attitudes toward media—that the media themselves are instrumental in shaping human and cultural experience.

His bold statements about media gained McLuhan a great

deal of attention as both his supporters and critics responded to his utopian views about the ways media could transform 20th-century life. McLuhan spoke of a media-inspired "global village" at a time when Cold War paranoia was at its peak and the Vietnam War was a hotly debated subject. Although 1960s-era utopians received these statements positively, social realists found them cause for scorn. Despite—or perhaps because of—these controversies, McLuhan became a pop culture icon, mentioned frequently in the television sketch-comedy program *Laugh-In* and appearing as himself in Woody Allen's film *Annie Hall*.

The Internet and its accompanying cultural revolution have made McLuhan's bold utopian visions seem like prophecies. Indeed, his work has received a great deal of attention in recent years. Analysis of McLuhan's work has, interestingly, not changed very much since his works were published. His supporters point to the hopes and achievements of digital technology and the utopian state that such innovations promise. The current critique of McLuhan, however, is a bit more revealing of the state of modern media studies. Media scholars are much more numerous now than they were during the 1960s, and many of these scholars criticize McLuhan's lack of methodology and theoretical framework.

Despite his lack of scholarly diligence, McLuhan had a

great deal of influence on media studies. Professors at Fordham University have formed an association of McLuhan-influenced scholars. McLuhan's other great achievement is the popularization of the concept of media studies. His work brought the idea of media effects into the public arena and created a new way for the public to consider the influence of media on culture (Stille, 2000).

AGENDA-SETTING THEORY

In contrast to the extreme views of the direct effects model, the agenda-setting theory of media stated that mass media determine the issues that concern the public rather than the public's views. Under this theory, the issues that receive the most attention from media become the issues that the public discusses, debates, and demands action on. This means that the media is determining what issues and stories the public thinks about. Therefore, when the media fails to address a

particular issue, it becomes marginalized in the minds of the public (Hanson).

When critics claim that a particular media outlet has an agenda, they are drawing on this theory. Agendas can range from a perceived liberal bias in the news media to the propagation of cutthroat capitalist ethics in films. For example, the agenda-setting theory explains such phenomena as the rise of public opinion against smoking. Before the mass media began taking an antismoking stance, smoking was considered a personal health issue. By promoting antismoking sentiments through advertisements, public relations campaigns, and a variety of media outlets, the mass media moved smoking into the public arena, making it a public health issue rather than a personal health issue (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). More recently, coverage of natural disasters has been prominent in the news. However, as news coverage wanes, so does the general public's interest.

FIGURE 2.7



Through a variety of antismoking campaigns, the health risks of smoking became a public agenda.

Quinn Dombrowski – Weapons of mass destruction – CC BY-SA 2.0.

Media scholars who specialize in agenda-setting research study the salience, or relative importance, of an issue and then attempt to understand what causes it to be important. The relative salience of an issue determines its place within the public agenda, which in turn influences public policy creation. Agenda-setting research traces public policy from its roots as an agenda through its promotion in the mass media and finally to its final form as a law or policy (Dearing & Rogers, 1996).

USES AND GRATIFICATIONS THEORY

Practitioners of the uses and gratifications theory study the ways the public consumes media. This theory states that consumers use the media to satisfy specific needs or desires. For example, you may enjoy watching a show like *Dancing With the Stars* while simultaneously tweeting about it on Twitter with your friends. Many people use the Internet to seek out entertainment, to find information, to communicate with like-minded individuals, or to pursue self-expression. Each of these uses gratifies a particular need, and the needs determine the way in which media is used. By examining factors of different groups' media choices, researchers can determine the motivations behind media use (Papacharissi, 2009).

A typical uses and gratifications study explores the motives for media consumption and the consequences associated with use of that media. In the case of *Dancing With the Stars* and Twitter, you are using the Internet as a way to be entertained and to connect with your friends. Researchers have identified a number of common motives for media consumption. These include relaxation, social interaction, entertainment, arousal, escape, and a host of interpersonal and social needs. By examining the motives behind the consumption of a particular

form of media, researchers can better understand both the reasons for that medium's popularity and the roles that the medium fills in society. A study of the motives behind a given user's interaction with Facebook, for example, could explain the role Facebook takes in society and the reasons for its appeal.

Uses and gratifications theories of media are often applied to contemporary media issues. The analysis of the relationship between media and violence that you read about in preceding sections exemplifies this. Researchers employed the uses and gratifications theory in this case to reveal a nuanced set of circumstances surrounding violent media consumption, as individuals with aggressive tendencies were drawn to violent media (Papacharissi, 2009).

SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

Another commonly used media theory, symbolic interactionism, states that the self is derived from and develops through human interaction. This means the way you act toward someone or something is based on the meaning you

have for a person or thing. To effectively communicate, people use symbols with shared cultural meanings. Symbols can be constructed from just about anything, including material goods, education, or even the way people talk. Consequentially, these symbols are instrumental in the development of the self.

This theory helps media researchers better understand the field because of the important role the media plays in creating and propagating shared symbols. Because of the media's power, it can construct symbols on its own. By using symbolic interactionist theory, researchers can look at the ways media affects a society's shared symbols and, in turn, the influence of those symbols on the individual (Jansson-Boyd, 2010).

One of the ways the media creates and uses cultural symbols to affect an individual's sense of self is advertising. Advertisers work to give certain products a shared cultural meaning to make them desirable. For example, when you see someone driving a BMW, what do you think about that person? You may assume the person is successful or powerful because of the car he or she is driving. Ownership of luxury automobiles signifies membership in a certain socioeconomic class. Equally, technology company Apple has used advertising and public relations to attempt to become a symbol of innovation and nonconformity. Use of an Apple product, therefore, may have a symbolic meaning and may send a particular message about the product's owner.

Media also propagate other noncommercial symbols.

National and state flags, religious images, and celebrities gain shared symbolic meanings through their representation in the media.

SPIRAL OF SILENCE

The spiral of silence theory, which states that those who hold a minority opinion silence themselves to prevent social isolation, explains the role of mass media in the formation and maintenance of dominant opinions. As minority opinions are silenced, the illusion of consensus grows, and so does social pressure to adopt the dominant position. This creates a self-propagating loop in which minority voices are reduced to a minimum and perceived popular opinion sides wholly with the majority opinion. For example, prior to and during World War II, many Germans opposed Adolf Hitler and his policies; however, they kept their opposition silent out of fear of isolation and stigma.

Because the media is one of the most important gauges of public opinion, this theory is often used to explain the interaction between media and public opinion. According to the spiral of silence theory, if the media propagates a particular

opinion, then that opinion will effectively silence opposing opinions through an illusion of consensus. This theory relates especially to public polling and its use in the media (Papacharissi).

MEDIA LOGIC

The media logic theory states that common media formats and styles serve as a means of perceiving the world. Today, the deep rooting of media in the cultural consciousness means that media consumers need engage for only a few moments with a particular television program to understand that it is a news show, a comedy, or a reality show. The pervasiveness of these formats means that our culture uses the style and content of these shows as ways to interpret reality. For example, think about a TV news program that frequently shows heated debates between opposing sides on public policy issues. This style of debate has become a template for handling disagreement to those who consistently watch this type of program.

Media logic affects institutions as well as individuals. The modern televangelist has evolved from the adoption of

television-style promotion by religious figures, while the utilization of television in political campaigns has led candidates to consider their physical image as an important part of a campaign (Altheide & Snow, 1991).

CULTIVATION ANALYSIS

The cultivation analysis theory states that heavy exposure to media causes individuals to develop an illusory perception of reality based on the most repetitive and consistent messages of a particular medium. This theory most commonly applies to analyses of television because of that medium's uniquely pervasive, repetitive nature. Under this theory, someone who watches a great deal of television may form a picture of reality that does not correspond to actual life. Televised violent acts, whether those reported on news programs or portrayed on television dramas, for example, greatly outnumber violent acts that most people encounter in their daily lives. Thus, an individual who watches a great deal of television may come to view the world as more violent and dangerous than it actually is.

Cultivation analysis projects involve a number of different

areas for research, such as the differences in perception between heavy and light users of media. To apply this theory, the media content that an individual normally watches must be analyzed for various types of messages. Then, researchers must consider the given media consumer's cultural background of individuals to correctly determine other factors that are involved in his or her perception of reality. For example, the socially stabilizing influences of family and peer groups influence children's television viewing and the way they process media messages. If an individual's family or social life plays a major part in her life, the social messages that she receives from these groups may compete with the messages she receives from television.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The now largely discredited direct effects model of media studies assumes that media audiences passively accept media messages and exhibit predictable reactions in response to those messages.
- Credible media theories generally do not give as much power to the media, such as the agenda-setting theory, or give a more active role to the media consumer, such as the uses and gratifications theory.
- Other theories focus on specific aspects of media

influence, such as the spiral of silence theory's focus on the power of the majority opinion or the symbolic interactionism theory's exploration of shared cultural symbolism.

- Media logic and cultivation analysis theories deal with how media consumers' perceptions of reality can be influenced by media messages.

EXERCISES

1. Media theories have a variety of uses and applications. Research one of the following topics and its effect on culture. Examine the topic using at least two of the approaches discussed in this section. Then, write a one-page essay about the topic you've selected.
    - Media bias
    - Internet habits
    - Television's effect on attention span
    - Advertising and self-image
    - Racial stereotyping in film
2. Many of the theories discussed in this section were developed decades ago. Identify how each of these

theories can be used today? Do you think these theories are still relevant for modern mass media? Why?

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2.3 Methods of Researching Media Effects

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify the prominent media research methods.
2. Explain the uses of media research methods in a research project.

Media theories provide the framework for approaching questions about media effects ranging from as simple as how 10-year-old boys react to cereal advertisements to as broad as how Internet use affects literacy. Once researchers visualize a project and determine a theoretical framework, they must choose actual research methods. Contemporary research methods are greatly varied and can range from analyzing old newspapers to performing controlled experiments.

CONTENT ANALYSIS

Content analysis is a research technique that involves analyzing the content of various forms of media. Through content analysis, researchers hope to understand both the people who created the content and the people who consumed it. A typical content analysis project does not require elaborate experiments. Instead, it simply requires access to the appropriate media to analyze, making this type of research an easier and inexpensive alternative to other forms of research involving complex surveys or human subjects.

Content analysis studies require researchers to define what types of media to study. For example, researchers studying violence in the media would need to decide which types of media to analyze, such as television, and the types of formats to examine, such as children's cartoons. The researchers would then need to define the terms used in the study; media violence can be classified according to the characters involved in the violence (strangers, family members, or racial groups), the type of violence (self-inflicted, slapstick, or against others), or the context of the violence (revenge, random, or duty-related). These are just a few of the ways that media violence could be studied with content-analysis techniques (Berger, 1998).

ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

Any study that analyzes older media must employ archival research, which is a type of research that focuses on reviewing historical documents such as old newspapers and past publications. Old local newspapers are often available on microfilm at local libraries or at the newspaper offices. University libraries generally provide access to archives of national publications such as *The New York Times* or *Time*; publications can also increasingly be found in online databases or on websites.

Older radio programs are available for free or by paid download through a number of online sources. Many television programs and films have also been made available for free download, or for rent or sale through online distributors. Performing an online search for a particular title will reveal the options available.

Resources such as the Internet Archive (www.archive.org) work to archive a number of media sources. One important role of the Internet Archive is website archiving. Internet archives are invaluable for a study of online media because they store websites that have been deleted or changed. These archives have made it possible for Internet content analyses that would have otherwise been impossible.

SURVEYS

Surveys are ubiquitous in modern life. Questionaires record data on anything from political preferences to personal hygiene habits. Media surveys generally take one of the following two forms.

A descriptive survey aims to find the current state of things, such as public opinion or consumer preferences. In media, descriptive surveys establish television and radio ratings by finding the number of people who watch or listen to particular programs. An analytical survey, however, does more than simply document a current situation. Instead, it attempts to find out why a particular situation exists. Researchers pose questions or hypotheses about media, and then conduct analytical surveys to answer these questions. Analytical surveys can determine the relationship between different forms of media consumption and the lifestyles and habits of media consumers.

Surveys can employ either open-ended or closed-ended questions. Open-ended questions require the participant to generate answers in their own words, while closed-ended questions force the participant to select an answer from a list. Although open-ended questions allow for a greater variety of answers, the results of closed-ended questions are easier to tabulate. Although surveys are useful in media studies, effective use requires keeping their limitations in mind.

SOCIAL ROLE ANALYSIS

As part of child rearing, parents teach their children about social roles. When parents prepare children to attend school for example, they explain the basics of school rules and what is expected of a student to help the youngsters understand the role of students. Like the role of a character in a play, this role carries specific expectations that differentiate school from home. Adults often play a number of different roles as they navigate between their responsibilities as parents, employees, friends, and citizens. Any individual may play a number of roles depending on his or her specific life choices.

Social role analysis of the media involves examining various individuals in the media and analyzing the type of role that each plays. Role analysis research can consider the roles of men, women, children, members of a racial minority, or members of any other social group in specific types of media. For example, if the role children play in cartoons is consistently different from the role they play in sitcoms, then certain conclusions might be drawn about both of these formats. Analyzing roles used in media allows researchers to gain a

better understanding of the messages that the mass media sends (Berger, 1998).

DEPTH INTERVIEWS

The depth interview is an anthropological research tool that is also useful in media studies. Depth interviews take surveys one step further by allowing researchers to directly ask a study participant specific questions to gain a fuller understanding of the participant's perceptions and experiences. Depth interviews have been used in research projects that follow newspaper reporters to find out their reasons for reporting certain stories and in projects that attempt to understand the motivations for reading romance novels. Depth interviews can provide a deeper understanding of the media consumption habits of particular groups of people (Priest, 2010).

RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

Rhetorical analysis involves examining the styles used in media and attempting to understand the kinds of messages those styles convey. Media styles include form, presentation, composition, use of metaphors, and reasoning structure. Rhetorical analysis reveals the messages not apparent in a strict reading of content. Studies involving rhetorical analysis have focused on media such as advertising to better understand the roles of style and rhetorical devices in media messages (Gunter, 2000).

FOCUS GROUPS

Like depth interviews, focus groups allow researchers to better understand public responses to media. Unlike a depth interview, however, a focus group allows the participants to establish a group dynamic that more closely resembles that of normal media consumption. In media studies, researchers can employ focus groups to judge the reactions of a group to specific media styles and to content. This can be a valuable

means of understanding the reasons for consuming specific types of media.

FIGURE 2.8



Focus groups are effective ways to obtain a group opinion on media.

Wikimedia Commons – CC BY-SA 3.0.

EXPERIMENTS

Media research studies also sometimes use controlled experiments that expose a test group to an experience involving media and measure the effects of that experience. Researchers then compare these measurements to those of a control group that had key elements of the experience removed. For example, researchers may show one group of children a program with three incidents of cartoon violence and another control group of similar children the same program without the violent incidents. Researchers then ask the children from both groups the same sets of questions, and the results are compared.

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

In participant observation, researchers try to become part of the group they are studying. Although this technique is typically associated with anthropological studies in which a researcher lives with members of a particular culture to gain a

deeper understanding of their values and lives, it is also used in media research.

Media consumption often takes place in groups. Families or friends gather to watch favorite programs, children may watch Saturday morning cartoons with a group of their peers, and adults may host viewing parties for televised sporting events or awards shows. These groups reveal insights into the role of media in the lives of the public. A researcher might join a group that watches football together and stay with the group for an entire season. By becoming a part of the group, the researcher becomes part of the experiment and can reveal important influences of media on culture (Priest).

Researchers have studied online role-playing games, such as *World of Warcraft*, in this manner. These games reveal an interesting aspect of group dynamics: Although participants are not in physical proximity, they function as a group within the game. Researchers are able to study these games by playing them. In the book *Digital Culture, Play, and Identity: A World of Warcraft Reader*, a group of researchers discussed the results of their participant observation studies. The studies reveal the surprising depth of culture and unwritten rules that exist in the *World of Warcraft* universe and give important interpretations of why players pursue the game with such dedication (Corneliussen & Rettberg, 2008).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Media research methods are the practical procedures for carrying out a research project. These methods include content analysis, surveys, focus groups, experiments, and participant observation.
- Research methods generally involve either test subjects or analysis of media. Methods involving test subjects include surveys, depth interviews, focus groups, and experiments. Analysis of media can include content, style, format, social roles, and archival analysis.

EXERCISES

Media research methods offer a variety of procedures for performing a media study. Each of these methods varies in cost; thus, a project with a lower budget would be prohibited from using some of the more costly methods. Consider a project on teen violence and video game use. Then answer the following short-response questions. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. Which methods would a research organization with a low budget favor for this project? Why?
2. How might the results of the project differ from those of one with a higher budget?

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2.4 Media Studies Controversies

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Explain some of the major objections to specific media theories.
2. Identify ways media studies are used to support political opinions.
3. Differentiate between proper and improper use of media studies.

Important debates over media theory have questioned the foundations and hence the results of media research. Within academia, theories and research can represent an individual's lifework and livelihood. As a result, issues of tenure and position, rather than issues of truth and objectivity, can sometimes fuel discussion over theories and research.

PROBLEMS WITH METHODOLOGY AND THEORY

Although the use of advanced methodologies can resolve many of the questions raised about various theories, the fact remains that the use of these theories in public debate generally follows a broader understanding. For example, if a hypothetical study found that convicted violent offenders had aggressive feelings after playing the video game *Doom*, many would take this as proof that video games cause violent acts without considering other possible explanations. Often, the nuances of these studies are lost when they enter the public arena.

ACTIVE VERSUS PASSIVE AUDIENCE

A significant division among media studies theorists is the belief that audiences are passive or active. A passive audience , in the most extreme statement of this position, passively

accepts the messages that media send it. An active audience, on the other hand, is fully aware of media messages and makes informed decisions about how to process and interact with media. Newer trends in media studies have attempted to develop a more complex view of media audiences than the active versus passive debate affords, but in the public sphere, this opposition frames many of the debates about media influence (Heath & Bryant, 2000).

ARGUMENTS AGAINST AGENDA-SETTING THEORY

A number of criticisms have dogged agenda-setting theory. Chief among these is that agenda-setting studies are unable to prove cause and effect; essentially, no one has truly shown that the media agenda sets the public agenda and not the other way around. An agenda-setting study could connect the prevalence of a topic in the media with later changes in public policy and may conclude that the media set this agenda. However, policy

makers and lobbyists often conduct public relations efforts to encourage the creation of certain policies. In addition, public concern over issues generates media coverage as well, making it difficult to tell if the media is responding to public desire for coverage of an issue or if it is pushing an issue on its own agenda (Kwansah-Aidoo, 2005).

ARGUMENTS AGAINST USES AND GRATIFICATIONS THEORY

The general presuppositions of the uses and gratifications theory have drawn criticism. By assuming that media fulfill a functional purpose in an individual's life, the uses and gratifications theory implicitly justifies and reaffirms the place of media in the public sphere. Furthermore, because it focuses on personal, psychological aspects of media, the theory cannot question whether media is artificially imposed on an individual. Studies involving the uses and gratifications theory

are often sound methodologically, but the overall assumptions of the studies are left unquestioned (Grossberg, et. al., 2006).

ARGUMENTS AGAINST SPIRAL OF SILENCE THEORY

Although many regard the spiral of silence theory as useful when applying its broadest principles, it is weak when dealing with specifics. For example, the phenomenon of the spiral of silence is most visible in individuals who are fearful of social isolation. Those who are less fearful are less likely to be silent if public opinion turns against them. Nonconformists contradict the claims of the spiral of silence theory.

Critics have also pointed out that the spiral of silence theory relies heavily on the values of various cultural groups. A public opinion trend in favor of gun control may not silence the consensus within National Rifle Association meetings. Every individual is a part of a larger social group with specific values. Although these values may differ from widespread public

opinion, individuals need not fear social isolation within their particular social group (Gastil, 2008).

ARGUMENTS AGAINST CULTIVATION ANALYSIS THEORY

Critics have faulted cultivation analysis theory for relying too heavily on a broad definition of violence. Detractors argue that because violence means different things to different subgroups and individuals, any claim that a clear message of violence could be understood in the same way by an entire culture is false. This critique would necessarily extend to other studies involving cultivation analysis. Different people understand media messages in varying ways, so broad claims can be problematic. Cultivation analysis is still an important part of media studies, but critics have questioned its unqualified validity as a theory (Shanahan & Morgan, 1999).

POLITICS AND MEDIA STUDIES

Media theories and studies afford a variety of perspectives. When proponents of a particular view employ those theories and studies, however, they are often oversimplified and can result in contradictory claims. In fact, when politicians and others employ media studies to validate a political perspective, this is a common result.

MEDIA BIAS

A good example of the ways that media can bolster political opinion is through coverage, which leads to the debate over media bias. One 1985 study found that journalists were more likely to hold liberal views than were members of the public. Over the years, many have cited this study to support the opinion that the media holds a liberal bias. However, another study found that between the years of 1948 and 1990, 78 percent of newspaper presidential endorsements were for Republicans (Hanson).

Media favoritism again became a source of contention during the 2008 presidential race. A random sampling of campaign coverage in the run-up to the election found that 82 percent of stories featured Barack Obama, while only 52 percent discussed John McCain (Raasch, 2008). Allegations that the media favored Obama seemed to bolster the idea of a liberal bias. But other studies belied this belief. Research conducted during the election showed that favorable media coverage of Obama occurred only after his poll numbers rose, hinting that the media were reacting to public opinion rather than attempting to influence it (Reuters, 2008).

FIGURE 2.9



Allegations of media bias are a recurring theme in political debates.

The Weekly Bull – BBC – Report the Truth on Gaza protest – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

MEDIA DECENCY

Decency standards in media have long been an issue, and they continue to change in ways that are not necessarily predictable. Once banned in the United States for obscenity, James Joyce's *Ulysses* is now considered a classic of modern literature, while many schools have banned children's classic *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* for its use of ethnic slurs. Because of the regulatory powers that government possesses over the media, decency is also an inherently political issue. As media studies have progressed, they have increasingly appeared in the debates over decency standards. Although media studies cannot prove a word or image is indecent, they can help discern the impact of that word or image and, thus, greatly influence the debate.

Organizations or figures with stated goals often use media studies to support those aims. For example, the Parents Television Council reported on a study that compared the ratio of comments about nonmarital sex to comments about marital sex during the hours of 8 p.m. to 9 p.m. The study employed content analysis to come up with specific figures; however, the Parents Television Council then used those findings to make broad statements, such as "the institution of marriage is regularly mocked and denigrated (Rayworth, 2008)." Because content analysis does not analyze the effect on audiences or analyze how material is presented, it does not offer a scientific way to judge whether a comment is mocking

and denigrating marriage, so such interpretations are arguably unsupported by the research. For example, researchers performing a content analysis by documenting the amount of sex or violence on television are not analyzing how this content is interpreted by the audience. They are simply noting the number of instances. Equally, partisan groups can use a number of different linguistic turns to make media studies fit their agenda.

Media studies involving violence, pornography, and profanity are inherently politically charged, and politicians have also conducted their own media studies. In 2001, for example, a Senate bill aimed at Internet decency that had little support in Congress came to the floor. One of the sponsoring senators attempted to increase interest by bringing a file full of some of the most egregious pornographic images he could find to the Senate floor. The bill passed 84 to 16 (Elmer-Dewitt, 2001).

JACK THOMPSON VERSUS VIOLENT VIDEO GAMES

One of the most outspoken critics of violent video games is the now-disbarred lawyer Jack Thompson. Despite questionable use of media research, Thompson has made many claims referencing research. In an interview with *CBS News*, Thompson stated that "hundreds of studies" existed that proved the link between violent video games and real violence. Later in the interview, he listed increasing school murder statistics as proof of the effects of violent video games (Vitka, 2005). In light of the media effects theories elucidated in this chapter, Thompson was obviously not being honest about the findings of video game–violence research and was making claims that no media effects scholar could confidently make.

Thompson initiated several lawsuits against *Grand Theft Auto* video game developer Take 2 Interactive, claiming that

the company should be held liable for encouraging violent actions by minors. His lawsuits were thrown out of court, and he eventually came to a settlement with Take 2 Interactive—who had countersued—to drop all litigation (Jones, 2007). Thompson's frivolous use of the legal system caused the state of Alabama to revoke his license to practice law in 2005, and, in 2008, the Florida Supreme Court disbarred him for life (Hefflinger, 2008).

Jack Thompson's actions may seem extreme, but he represents a common pattern of media study misrepresentation. Pundits, social reformers, and politicians frequently use the results of media studies to support their agenda without regard for accuracy. The use of media research to lend credence to a political opinion is widespread even as the public struggles to understand the effects of new media on culture.

MEDIA CONSOLIDATION

Although media consolidation will be discussed in more depth in later chapters, the topic's intersection with media studies results deserves a place here. Media consolidation occurs when large media companies buy up smaller media outlets. Although government regulation has historically stymied this trend by prohibiting ownership of a large number of media outlets, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has loosened many of the restrictions on large media companies in recent years.

Media studies often prove vital to decisions regarding media consolidation. These studies measure the impact that consolidation has had on the media's public role and on the content of local media outlets to compare it with that of conglomerate-owned outlets. The findings often vary depending on the group conducting the test. Other times tests are ignored entirely.

In 2003, the FCC loosened restrictions on owning multiple media outlets in the same city, citing studies that the agency had developed to weigh the influence of particular media outlets such as newspapers and television stations (Ahrens, 2003). In 2006, however, reports surfaced that a key study had been discarded during the 2003 decision. The study showed an increase in time allocated for news when TV stations were owned locally, thus raising questions about whether media

consolidation was a good thing for local news (MSNBC, 2006).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Audience interpretation is vital to media studies. Media theories generally fall between the active and passive audience interpretations. Agenda-setting theory favors the passive audience interpretation, and consequently must prove that the public is affected by media agendas. The uses and gratifications theory favors the active audience, and consequently justifies the place of media in the public sphere.
- In politics, media studies are often used to support various opinions. Among the more prominent media studies employed are those that deal with media bias, violence in the media, and indecency.
- The use of media studies in public debate has led to subjective studies that have a predetermined outcome. Many studies conducted by special interest groups use definitions that favor their perspectives. Politicians often copy the style, rather than the substance, of a media study in an attempt to give authority to their points of view.

EXERCISES

Media studies are often used to support specific opinions, regardless of whether their results justify such a use. Studies are also conducted with predetermined outcomes that support a specific view. With this in mind, answer the following short-response questions. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. How are media studies used to support political opinions? Give two examples.
2. What kind of guidelines should be used to ensure clear and objective use of media studies?
3. Identify weaknesses of popular media theories discussed in this section.

END-OF-CHAPTER ASSESSMENT

Review Questions

1. Section 1

    1. List three historical events that have relied on

propaganda.
2. Provide three examples of cultural messages that the media sends.
3. How have new media affected older forms of media?

2. Section 2

    1. How does agenda-setting theory differ from direct effects theory?
    2. Use the spiral of silence to explain an actual lapse in media coverage.
    3. Why would uses and gratifications theory be an appropriate theory for a study of Internet purchasing habits?

3. Section 3

    1. Name the different types of media analysis techniques and explain their uses.
    2. Explain the differences among a survey, a depth interview, and a focus group.
    3. What resources would be important for a project analyzing the historical representation of women in advertising?

4. Section 4

    1. Explain the opposition between theories of passive

and active media audiences.

2. How are media studies commonly misused to support political opinions?
3. How might media studies be used in a study on indecency?

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. The media has become an ever-increasing part of modern life. How do you think the media and its messages have affected you personally?
2. Media studies attempt to understand the role that the media plays in culture and in individual lives. Given the criticisms of particular media theories, what do you think the limitations of media studies are? Consider the media theories discussed in this chapter. Which ones do you find the most convincing and why? Which ones do you find least convincing?
3. Among the methods used to analyze audiences, which do you think would guarantee the most accurate results? How does this affect your opinion of studies that use other results?

CAREER CONNECTION

Media studies are used in a variety of professions and capacities. These range from university researchers to small-time music groups that want to assess their online presence. A number of online research tools exist that can help organizations and individuals learn more about the effect of media on important issues and topics.

List two or three prospective careers and think of one way that media studies could be beneficial in each. Search for online media research tools that would assist you in a media research project involving your chosen careers. Answer the following questions:

- What kind of project would be beneficial to you in this field?
- How would you set up the project to ensure usable and accurate results?
- How would you present the results of your studies to clients, employees, and investors?

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Chapter 3: Books

3.1 Books
3.2 History of Books
3.3 Books and the Development of U.S. Popular Culture
3.4 Major Book Formats
3.5 Current Publishing Trends
3.6 The Influence of New Technology

3.1 Books

A LOST GENERATION OF READERS?

FIGURE 3.1



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In 2004, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) released a report that it said represented "a national crisis." What was under such dire peril that it threatened to "impoverish both cultural and civic life," as NEA Chairman Dana Gioia put it? Reading—or, more aptly put, not reading.

According to the report, *Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America*, less than half the population engaged in any literary reading in 2002, a record low since the survey's beginnings in 1982 (National Endowment for the Arts, 2004).

The report, which asked respondents whether they had read any literary fiction (novels, short stories, plays, or poetry) over the past year showed especially stark numbers among the youngest adults. Those aged 18–24 saw a rate of decline 55 percent greater than the total adult population. (Books read for school or work weren't counted in the survey, which was examining Americans' leisure reading habits.) According to the NEA, the overall 10 percent drop in literary readers represented a loss of 20 million potential readers, most of them young. In 1982, young adults (people aged 18–34) were most likely to engage in literary reading; by 2002, they were the least likely group. Based on this, the report asks, "Are we losing a generation of readers (National Endowment for the Arts, 2004)?"

Despite these facts, the publishing industry's releasing more books than ever before. In 2003, just 1 year after the NEA issued its gloomy warning about the state of reading, 175,000 new titles were published in the United States—a 19 percent jump from the year before (Bowker, 2004). Since the early part of the 21st century, the U.S. publishing industry has had an average annual monetary growth rate of 1.1 percent; however, net sales have dropped from $26 billion to $23 billion in the past year (Association of American Publishers, 2009).

Meanwhile, as the NEA report notes, 24 percent of Americans' recreational spending went to electronics, while books accounted for only 5.6 percent in 2002. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the households that watched television more read less. The report warned that "at the current rate of loss, literary reading as a leisure activity will virtually disappear in half a century (National Endowment for the Arts)."

As a response to the alarming statistics, in 2006 the NEA launched its Big Read program, essentially a city-wide book club in which community members are encouraged to read the same book at the same time. The NEA provided publicity, funding for kickoff parties, and readers' guides. The residents of Tampa, Florida, read *The Joy Luck Club* and were accorded a visit by author Amy Tan, and the residents of Washington, DC, chose Ernest J. Gaines's *A Lesson Before Dying* with hopes that it would spur conversations about race, justice, and violence. The Big Read's DC program director said that he hoped the book got young people talking, noting that the book raises all sorts of relevant questions, such as "Do we offer second chances for people after making mistakes, especially youth in DC? What about youth in the justice system? So many people who have been through the juvenile justice system will testify a book set them free," he claimed (Brown, 2010).

When the NEA's 2008 numbers were released, many people were again surprised. The statistics showed that the decline in reading had reversed, the first such increase in 26 years. Once

again, the change was most significant among young adults, who had a 21 percent increase from 2002 (Rich, 2009). The NEA credited the "millions of parents, teachers, librarians, and civic leaders [who] took action... [to ensure that] reading became a higher priority in families, schools, and communities (Rich, 2009)." Another factor may have been in play, however; the 2008 study was the first to include online reading. To understand what books mean in the present world of e-readers and digital libraries, it helps to examine how they functioned in the past and to consider how they might change in the future.

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3.2 History of Books

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify the material and cultural origins of the book in ancient and medieval times.
2. Indicate the influence of mechanical movable type on modern society.
3. Explain the evolution of contemporary copyright law and of the contemporary publishing industry.

ANCIENT BOOKS

Most historians trace the origins of the book back to the ancient Egyptians, whose papyrus scrolls looked very different from the books we're accustomed to today. From the time they first developed a written script, around 3000 BCE, Egyptians wrote on many different surfaces, including metal, leather, clay, stone, and bone. Most prominent, though, was the practice of using reed pens to write on papyrus scrolls. In many ways, papyrus was an ideal material for the Egyptians. It was made using the tall reeds that grew plentifully in the Nile Valley. Individual sheets of papyrus were glued or sewn together to make scrolls. A standard scroll was around 30 feet long and 7 to 10 inches wide, while the longest Egyptian scroll ever found stretched over 133 feet, making it almost as long as the Statue of Liberty when it was rolled all the way out (Harry Ransom Center).

By the 6th century BCE, papyrus was the most common writing surface throughout the Mediterranean and was used by the Greeks and Romans. Because papyrus grew in Egypt, the Egyptians had a virtual monopoly over the papyrus trade. Many ancient civilizations housed their scrolls in large libraries, which acted as both repositories of knowledge and displays of political and economic power. The Royal Library of Alexandria boasted around half a million scrolls in its collection; some scholars claim that this was between 30 and

70 percent of all books in existence at the time (Kelly, 2006). But other powerful entities in the ancient world were growing tired of the Egyptians' monopoly over the papyrus trade.

Parchment was made from treated animal skins that were scraped thin to create a flexible, even surface. Parchment had several advantages over papyrus: It was more durable, both sides could be written on, and its trade wasn't monopolized by the Egyptians. Its spread coincided with another crucial development in the history of the book. Between the 2nd and 4th centuries, the Romans began sewing folded sheets of papyrus or parchment together, and binding them between wooden covers. This form, called the codex, has essentially the same structure as today's books. The codex was much more user-friendly than was the papyrus scroll: more portable, easier to store and handle, and less expensive to produce. It also allowed readers to quickly flip between sections. While reading a scroll was a two-handed activity, a codex could be propped open in front of a reader, allowing for note taking. Traditions changed slowly in the ancient world, however, and the scroll remained the dominant form for secular works for several centuries. The codex was the preferred form for early Christian texts, and the spread of Christianity eventually brought about the dominance of the codex; by the 6th century CE, it had almost entirely replaced the scroll.

FIGURE 3.2



The earliest known printed books were created using woodblock printing.

vlasta2 – Korean Wood Block – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

The next major innovation in the history of books, the use of block printing on paper, began in Tang Dynasty China around 700 CE, though it wouldn't arrive in Europe for nearly 800 years. The first known examples of text printed on paper are tiny, 2.5-inch-wide scrolls of Buddhist prayers commissioned by Japan's Empress Shōtoku in 764 CE. The earliest example of a dated, printed book is a Buddhist text called the *Diamond Sutra* (868 CE). Woodblock printing was a meticulous process that involved carving an entire page of text onto a wooden block, then inking and pressing the block to print a page.

In medieval Europe, however, scribes were still laboriously copying texts by hand. Book culture in the Middle Ages was dominated by monasteries, which became centers of intellectual life. The largest monasteries had rooms called scriptoria where monks copied, decorated, and preserved both religious and secular volumes. Many of the classical texts we have today owe their preservation to diligent medieval monks, who thought of scholarship, even the study of secular and pre–Christian writers, as a way to become closer to God. The hand-copied books produced in the Middle Ages were much more ornate than the mass-produced books of today. These were illuminated manuscripts that included painted

embellishments that were added on to the handwritten books. The word *illuminate* comes from the Latin *illuminare*, which means to *light up*, and some medieval books were literally made to shine through applications of gold or silver decorations. Other ornate additions included illustrations, decorative capital letters, and intricately drawn borders. The degree of embellishment depended on the book's intended use and the wealth of its owner. Medieval manuscripts were so highly valued that some scribes placed so-called book curses at the front of their manuscripts, warning that anyone who stole or defaced the copy would be cursed. Written in a copy of the Vulgate Bible, for example, is this warning: "Whoever steals this book let him die the death; let be him be frizzled in a pan; may the falling sickness rage within him; may he be broken on the wheel and be hanged (Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries)."

Though illuminated books were highly prized, they were also expensive and labor-intensive to create. By the end of the Middle Ages, the papal library in Avignon, France, held only a few thousand manuscripts compared to the nearly half-million texts found at the Library of Alexandria in ancient times (Fischer, 2004). Bookmaking in the Western world became somewhat less expensive when paper emerged as the primary writing surface. Making paper from rags and other fibers, a technique that originated in 2nd-century China, reached the Islamic world in the 8th century and led to a flowering of book culture there. By the 12th century, Marrakesh, in modern-day

Morocco, was said to have had a street lined with a hundred booksellers. But it wasn't until the 14th century that paper manufacturing began in earnest in Europe.

GUTENBERG'S INDUSTRY-CHANGING INVENTION

Papermaking coincided with another crucial step forward in the history of books: Johannes Gutenberg's invention of mechanical movable type in 1448. Though the simple act of crafting small, movable letters may seem mundane in the contemporary world of digital devices and microchips, it is difficult to overstate the importance of Gutenberg's invention and the effect it had on the world. The Biography Channel and A&E both named Gutenberg as the single most influential person of the second millennium, ahead of Shakespeare, Galileo, and Columbus, and *Time* magazine cited movable type as the single most important invention of the past 1,000

years. Through his invention, Gutenberg indisputably changed the world.

Much of Gutenberg's life is shrouded in mystery. It is known that he was a German goldsmith and book printer and that he spent the 1440s collecting investors for a mysterious project. That invention turned out to be the printing press, which combined existing technologies—such as the screw press, which was already used for papermaking—with his own innovation—individual metal letters and punctuation marks that could be independently rearranged—to revolutionize how books were made. Though Gutenberg probably printed other, earlier materials, it was the Bible he printed in 1455 that brought him renown. In his small print shop in his hometown of Mainz, Germany, Gutenberg used his movable type press to print 180 copies of the Bible, 135 on paper and 45 on vellum (Harry Ransom Center). This book, commonly called the Gutenberg Bible, ushered in Europe's so-called Gutenberg Revolution and paved the way for the commercial mass printing of books. In 1978, the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center of the University of Texas at Austin purchased a complete copy of the Gutenberg Bible for $2.4 million.

Over the next few centuries, the printing press changed nearly everything about how books were made, distributed, and read. Printing books was a vastly swifter system than handwriting books was, and paper was much less expensive to produce than parchment. Before the printing press, books

were generally commissioned and then copied. The printing press meant that multiple identical editions of the same book could be printed in a relatively short time, while it probably would've taken a scribe at least a year to handwrite the Bible. As Gutenberg's invention led to more and more printing shops springing up all over Europe, the very idea of what a book looked like began to change. In medieval times, books were the valuable, rare product of hundreds (if not thousands) of hours of work, and no two were the same. After Gutenberg, books could be standardized, plentiful, and relatively cheap to produce and disseminate. Early printed books were made to look like illuminated manuscripts, complete with hand-drawn decorations. However, printers soon realized the economic potential of producing multiple identical copies of one text, and book printing soon became a speculative business, with printers trying to guess how many copies a particular book could sell. By the end of the 15th century, 50 years after Gutenberg's invention of movable type, printing shops had sprung up throughout Europe, with an estimated 300 in Germany alone. Gutenberg's invention was a resounding success, and the printing and selling of books boomed. The Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center estimates that before the invention of the printing press, the total number of books in all of Europe was around 30,000. By 1500 CE, the book was thriving as an industrial object, and the number of books in Europe had grown to as many as 10 to 12 million (Jones, 2000).

EFFECTS OF THE MASS PRODUCTION OF BOOKS

The post–Gutenberg world was revolutionized by the advent of the printed book. One thing that did not substantially change, however, was the form of the book itself. Despite minor tweaks and alterations, the ancient form of the codex remained relatively intact. What did rapidly evolve was the way books were produced and distributed and the way information circulated through the world.

Simply put, the mechanical reproduction of books meant that there were more books available at a lower cost, and the growth of international trade allowed these books to have a wider reach. The desire for knowledge among the growing middle class and the new availability of classical texts from ancient Greece and Rome helped fuel the Renaissance, a period of celebration of the individual and of a turn toward humanism. For the first time, texts could be widely dispersed,

allowing political, intellectual, religious, and cultural ideas to spread widely. Also for the first time, many people could read the same books and be exposed to the same ideas at the same time, giving rise to mass media and mass culture. Science was revolutionized as well. For example, standardized, widely dispersed texts meant that scientists in Italy were exposed to the theories and discoveries of scientists in England. Because of improved communication, technological and intellectual ideas spread more quickly, enabling scientists from disparate areas to more easily build on the breakthroughs and successes of others.

As the Renaissance progressed, the size of the middle class grew, as did literacy rates. Rather than a few hundred precious volumes housed in monastery or university libraries, books were available to people outside monastic or university settings, which meant that more books were available to women. In effect, the mass production of books helped knowledge become democratized. However, this spread of information didn't proceed without resistance. Thanks in part to the spread of dissenting ideas, the Roman Catholic Church, the dominant institution of medieval Europe, found its control slipping. In 1487, only a few decades after Gutenberg first printed his Bible, Pope Innocent VIII insisted that all books be prescreened by church authorities before they were allowed to be printed (Green & Karolides, 2005). One book the church banned was the Bible printed in any language other than Latin—a language that few people outside of clerical or

scholarly circles understood. In 1517, Martin Luther instigated the Protestant Reformation. He challenged the church's authority by insisting that people had the right to read the Bible in their own language. The church rightly feared the spread of vernacular Bibles; the more people who had access to the text, the less control the church was able to exert over how it was interpreted. Since the church's interpretation of the Bible dictated in no small part the way many people lived their lives, the church's sway over the hearts and minds of the faithful was severely undermined by accessible printed Bibles and the wave of Protestantism they encouraged. The Catholic Church's attempt to control the printing industry proved impossible to maintain, and over the next few centuries, the church would see its power decline significantly, as it was no longer the sole keeper of religious knowledge as it had been throughout the Middle Ages.

The Bible wasn't the only text that was beginning to be published in languages other than Latin. The Renaissance saw a growing interest in texts published in the vernacular, the speech of the "common people." As books became more available to the middle class, people wanted to read books written in their native tongue. Early well-known works in the vernacular included Dante's *Divine Comedy* (first printed in Italian in 1472) and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (published in Middle English in the 15th century). Genres with popular appeal, such as plays and poetry, became increasingly widespread. In the 16th and 17th centuries, inexpensive

chapbooks (the name derives, appropriately enough, from *cheap books*) became popular. Chapbooks were small and cheaply printed, and they often included popular ballads, humorous stories, or religious tracts. The proliferation of chapbooks showed just how much the Gutenberg Revolution had transformed the written word. In just a few hundred years, many people had access to reading material, and books would no longer be considered sacred objects.

Because of the high value placed on human knowledge during the Renaissance, libraries flourished during this time period. As they had been in ancient Egypt, libraries were once again a way of displaying national power and wealth. The German State Library in Berlin was founded in 1661, and other European centers soon followed, such as the National Library of Spain in Madrid in 1711 and the British Library (the world's largest) in London in 1759. Libraries were also associated with universities, clubs, and museums; however, these were often only for subscribers. The United Kingdom's Public Libraries Act of 1850 fostered the development of free, public lending libraries. After the American Civil War, public libraries flourished in the newly reunified United States, helped by fundraising and lobbying by women's clubs. Philanthropist Andrew Carnegie helped bring the Renaissance ideals of artistic patronage and democratized knowledge into the 20th century when he helped found more than 1,700 public libraries between 1881 and 1919 (Krasner-Khait, 2001).

HISTORY OF DOCUMENT CONTROL

While Gutenberg's invention of the printing press ushered in an age of democratized knowledge and incipient mass culture, it also transformed the act of authorship, making writing a potentially profitable enterprise. Before the mass production of books, authorship had few financial rewards (unless a generous patron got involved). As a consequence, pre-Renaissance texts were often collaborative, and many books didn't even list an author. The earliest concept of the copyright, from the time of the scriptoria, was who had the right to copy a book by hand. The printed book, however, was a speculative commercial enterprise, in that large numbers of identical copies could be sold. The explosive growth of the European printing industry meant that authors could potentially profit from the books they made and then wrote if their legal rights were recognized. In contemporary terms, copyright allows a person the right to exclude others from copying, distributing, and selling a work. This is a right usually

given to the creator, although that right can be sold or otherwise transferred. Works not covered by copyright or for which the copyright has expired are part of the public domain , which means that they are essentially public property and can be used freely by anyone without permission or royalty payments.

The origins of contemporary copyright law are usually traced back to the Statute of Queen Anne. This law, enacted in England in 1710, was the first to recognize the legal rights of authors, though in an incomplete manner. It granted a book's publisher 14 years of exclusive rights and legal protection, renewable for another 14-year term if the author was still living. Anyone who infringed on a copyrighted work paid a fine, half of which went to the author and half to the government. Early copyright was intended to limit monopoly and censorship, to provide a sense of stability to authors, and to promote learning by ensuring that documents would be widely accessible.

The United States established its first copyright law not long after the Declaration of Independence. The U.S. Constitution granted Congress the power "to promote the progress of science and useful arts, by securing for limited times to authors and inventors the exclusive right to their respective writings and discoveries" in Article I, Section 8, Clause 8. The first federal copyright law, the Copyright Law of 1790, was modeled on the Statute of Queen Anne and it similarly

granted exclusive rights for 14 years, renewable for 14 more if the author was living at the end of the first term.

The "limited times" mentioned in the Constitution have steadily lengthened since the 18th century. The Copyright Act of 1909 allowed for an initial 28-year term of copyright, which was renewable for one additional 28-year term. The Copyright Act of 1976, which preempted the 1909 act, extended copyright protection to "a term consisting of the life of the author and 50 years after the author's death," was substantially longer than the original law's potential 56-year term. In 1998, copyright was extended even further, to 70 years after the author's death. The 1998 law, called the Copyright Term Extension Act, also added a 20-year extension to all currently copyrighted works. This automatic extension meant that no new works would enter the public domain until 2019 at the earliest. Critics of the Copyright Term Extension Act called it the "Mickey Mouse Protection Act" because the Walt Disney Company lobbied for the law (Krasniewicz, 2010). Because of the 20-year copyright extension, Mickey Mouse and other Disney characters remained out of the public domain, which meant that they were still the exclusive property of Disney.

The 1976 law also codified the terms of fair use for the first time. Fair-use law specifies the ways in which a work (or parts of a work) under copyright could legally be used by someone other than the copyright holder for "purposes such as criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching (including multiple copies for classroom use), scholarship, or research,

is not an infringement of copyright." That is, a book review quoting snippets of a book, or a researcher citing someone else's work is not infringing on copyright. Given an Internet culture that thrives on remixes, linking, and other creative uses of source material, the boundaries of the legal definition of fair use have met with many challenges in recent years.

HISTORY OF THE BOOK-PUBLISHING INDUSTRY

With the exception of self-published works, the author isn't the person in charge of producing the book or sending it out into the world. These days, the tasks of editing, designing, printing, promoting, and distributing a book generally fall to the book's publisher. Although authors are usually the ones with their names prominently displayed on the spine, a published book is actually the product of many different kinds of labor by many different people.

Early book printers acted as publishers, because they

produced pages and sold them commercially. In England, the Stationer's Company, which was essentially a printer's guild, had a monopoly over the printing industry and was also allowed to censor texts. The Statute of Queen Anne, the 1710 copyright law, came about partially as a result of some of these early publishers overstepping their bounds.

In the 19th-century United States, publishers fulfilled many roles, and it was not uncommon for one company to print, wholesale, and even retail their own books. Although bookstores and printers existed in the United States, the Northeast emerged as the nation's publishing epicenter, with hotspots in Philadelphia, New York, and Boston. During the 1800s, the U.S. book industry swiftly expanded. In 1820, the books manufactured and sold in the United States totaled about $2.5 million; by 1850, even though the price of books had dropped substantially, sales figures had quintupled (Howe, 2007). Technological advances in the 19th century, including machine-made paper and the Linotype typesetting machine, made book publishing simpler and more profitable. Many of today's large publishing companies were created in the 19th century; for example, Houghton Mifflin originated in 1832; Little, Brown & Company formed in 1837; and Macmillan was founded in Scotland in 1843 and opened its U.S. branch in 1869. By the turn of the century, New York was the center of publishing in the United States.

The rapid growth of the publishing industry and evolving intellectual property laws meant that authors could make

money from their writing during this period. Perhaps it's no surprise, then, to learn that the first literary agents also emerged in the late 19th century. Literary agents act as intermediaries between the author and the publisher, negotiating contracts and parsing difficult legal language. The world's first literary agent, A. P. Watt, worked in London in 1881 and essentially defined the role of the contemporary literary agent—he got paid to negotiate on behalf of the author. A former advertising agent, Watt decided to charge based on commission, meaning that he would take in a set percentage of his clients' earnings. Watt set the fee as 10 percent, which is still considered standard today.

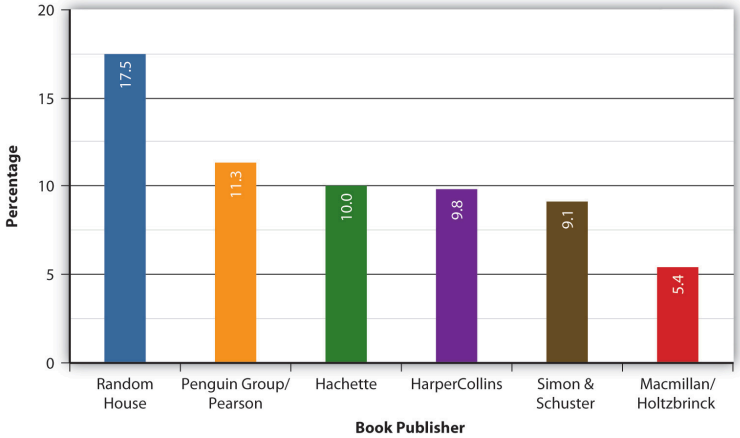
The biggest change to hit publishing in the first half of the 20th century was the increasing popularity of the paperback book. Books covered in less expensive, less durable paper existed since Renaissance chapbooks were invented, but they were usually crudely printed works that were meant only as passing entertainment. In 1935, the publishing industry was changed forever when Penguin Books Ltd., a paperback publisher, launched in England, ushered in the so-called paperback revolution. Instead of being crude and cheaply made, Penguin titles were simple but well designed. Though Penguin sold paperbacks for only 25¢, it concentrated on providing works of literary merit, thus fundamentally changing the idea of what quality books should look like. Some early Penguin titles included Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* and Dashiell Hammett's *The Thin Man*. In

the decades that followed, more and more paperback publishing companies were launched by people hoping to capitalize on Penguin's success. The first U.S.-based paperback company was Pocket Books, founded in 1939. By 1960, paperbacks were outselling hardbacks in the United States (Ogle, 2003).

The second half of the 20th century was marked by the consolidation of the U.S. book-publishing industry and by a larger trend toward media consolidation. Between 1960 and 1989, about 578 mergers and acquisitions occurred in the U.S. book industry; between 1990 and 1995, 300 occurred; and between 1996 and 2000, nearly 380 occurred (Greco, 2005). This was just a part of the larger international trend toward mass media consolidation, where large international media empires acquired smaller companies in many different industries. For example, the German media company Bertelsmann AG had acquired Bantam Books, Doubleday, and Random House; London-based Pearson owned Viking, Penguin, Putnam, and the Dutton Group; and AOL Time Warner owned Little, Brown and Company and Warner Books. Because publicly traded companies have obligations to their shareholders, the publishing industry found itself pressured to turn increasingly high profits. By 2010, roughly 60 percent of all books sold in the United States were published by six large publishing houses, often referred to as the Big Six (see Figure 3.3) (Hyatt, 2010). In the first years of

the third millennium, book publishing was an increasingly centralized, profit-driven industry.

FIGURE 3.3



The Big Six control more than 60 percent of the book market (Hyatt, 2010).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Papyrus scrolls were the earliest forms of books,

superseded in the 6th century by the codex. The codex was more portable, sturdier, and easier to store, which made it a more popular format. During the Middle Ages, books were handwritten on parchment and then painstakingly decorated. At this time, monasteries were the centers of intellectual life, and most book copying happened in their scriptoria. Until the invention of mechanical movable type, books were expensive and not widely available.

- The Gutenberg Revolution changed how information circulated around the globe. The invention of mechanical movable type made books much cheaper and quicker to produce, which led to the swifter spread of ideas. Access to classical texts spurred the European Renaissance and led to higher literacy rates among women. With millions of books circulating in the world, popular literature soon emerged, sometimes in the form of inexpensive chapbooks.
- Copyright law was originally meant to protect authors from censorship and to allow them to profit from their work. The first copyright law was England's Statute of Queen Anne in 1710. In the 20th century, American copyright law steadily increased the terms of protection for works under copyright.
- The publishing industry arose to help authors produce and distribute copies of their work. Early printers acted as wholesale booksellers. In the 20th century,

paperback books revived the publishing industry by making high literature available in an inexpensive, portable format. By the turn of the century, book publishing was dominated by six publishing companies, themselves part of large media conglomerations.

EXERCISES

Questions about the exact extent of fair use of copyrighted materials have been especially relevant in recent years because of the popularity of using and manipulating copyrighted materials on the Internet. Go on a website with user-uploaded content (such as YouTube or *Wikipedia*) and find examples of works that use copyrighted content in a way that you think is justified under fair use. Then, find examples of works that you think do not use copyrighted content in a way permitted by fair use. Answer the following questions when you have completed your research:

- What is the difference between the two examples you found?
- What criteria did you use to make your decision?

- What objections might be made by someone who could classify the works differently than you did?
- How does current fair-use law differ from ancient, medieval, and modern copyright laws?

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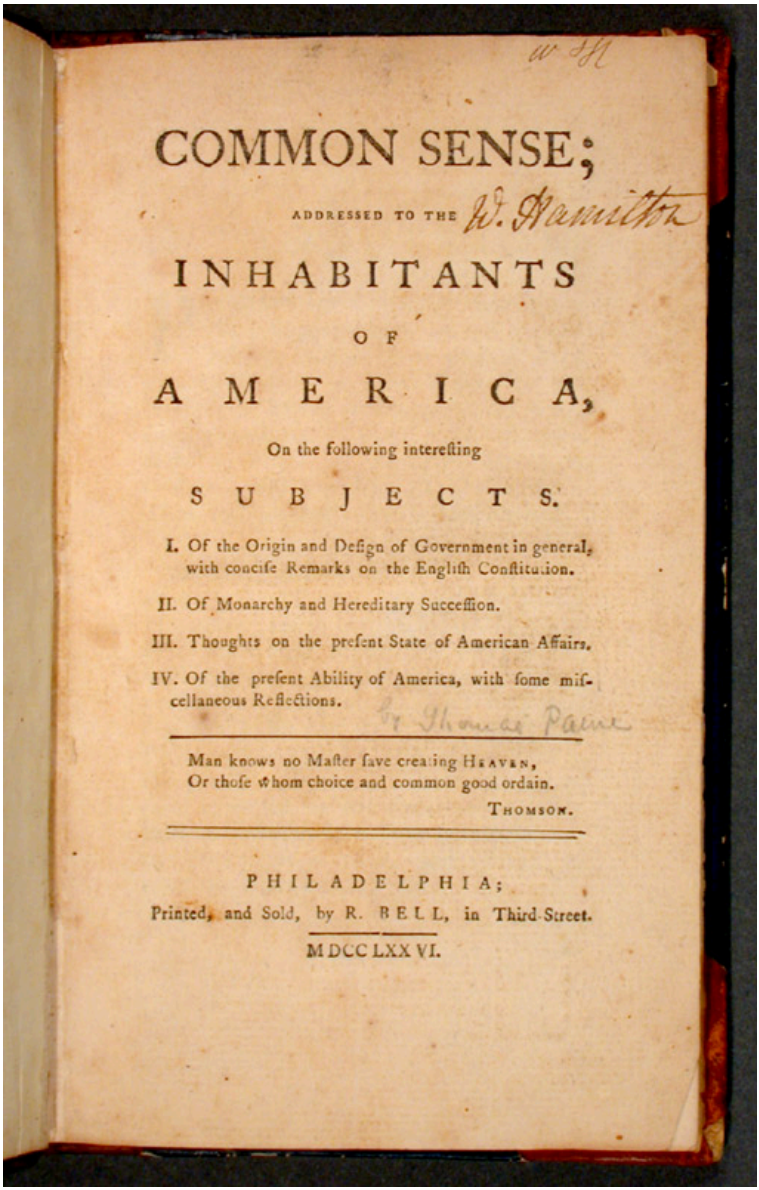
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3.3 Books and the Development of U.S. Popular Culture

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify the change in women's roles after the American Revolution and how it impacted early U.S. literature.
2. Name some distinctive aspects of American style used by 19th-century writers.
3. Identify popular works of 20th-century fiction.

FIGURE 3.4



COMMON SENSE;

ADDRESSED TO THE

INHABITANTS

OF

AMERICA,

On the following intereſting

SUBJECTS.

I. Of the Origin and Deſign of Government in general, with conciſe Remarks on the Engliſh Conſtitution.

II. Of Monarchy and Hereditary Succeſſion.

III. Thoughts on the preſent State of American Affairs.

IV. Of the preſent Ability of America, with ſome miſcellaneous Reflections.

Man knows no Maſter ſave creating HEAVEN,
Or thoſe whom choice and common good ordain.

THOMSON.

PHILADELPHIA;
Printed, and Sold, by R. BELL, in Third-Street.

MDCCLXXVI.

Common Sense, a pamphlet published anonymously in

1776, argued for the American colonies' independence from Britain.

Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

At the turn of the 18th century, the American colonies could only claim about 250 published books (Baym, 2007). In 2010 alone, more than 288,000 new titles were published. As the United States has grown and developed, books have grown and developed along with it. Sometimes books have amplified differences within the nation, sometimes their authors have worked to proclaim a distinctive American style; sometimes the authors have tried to expose hypocrisies in government and society, and sometimes the authors have celebrated America's multifaceted population. Throughout the history of the United States, books have influenced American popular culture and have been influenced by it as well.

In the years leading up to the American Revolution, newspapers and pamphlets were the publication method of choice because they could be quickly printed and were ideal for circulating short political and news items at a moment of rapid change. Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, first published anonymously in 1776, could be considered America's first best seller. As literacy rates soared in post-independence America and the nation became more stable, the market for longer books increased. William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy: or, The Triumph of Nature*, published in 1789, is considered

the first American novel. Brown's epistolary novel, which is a novel made up of letters of correspondence, warned about the dangers of seduction. Brown's novel shares some features with a novel published 2 years later, *Charlotte Temple* by Susannah Rowson, another cautionary tale about a woman falling prey to seduction.

Though women were often the subjects of popular novels, they were increasingly the audience as well. Eighteenth-century Americans were influenced by Enlightenment values, which maintained that a strong nation needed an educated, moral population. Although the public realm of education, employment, and politics was dominated by men, women had control over the domestic sphere and the education of the next generation. The 18th-century idea that American women should educate their children for the good of the emerging nation, sometimes called republican motherhood, helped to legitimize, expand, and improve women's education. Women's literacy rates rose sharply during this period, and more and more books were tailored to women's interests, as women tended to have more leisure time for reading. Authors such as Frances Burney and Mary Wollstonecraft wrote about issues facing women of the period, and openly criticized the fixed role of females in society.

However, in these early years of the American novel, some people found the form potentially dangerous and subversive because it was too entertaining and it appealed to people's, especially women's, imaginations. A character in *The Boarding*

School by Hannah Webster Foster, a popular writer of the time period, espouses this particular viewpoint:

Novels, are the favorite and the most dangerous kind of reading, now adopted by the generality of young ladies.... Their romantic pictures of love, beauty, and magnificence, fill the imagination with ideas which lead to impure desires, a vanity of exterior charms, and a fondness for show and dissipation, by no means consistent with that simplicity, modesty, and chastity, which should be the constant inmates of the female breast (Foster, 2010).

Part of the perceived threat of novels was their widespread popularity with many different kinds of people. An early biography of Susannah Rowson characterized the wide readership of her novel:

It has stolen its way alike into the study of the divine and into the workshop of the mechanic, into the parlor of the accomplished lady and the bed-chamber of her waiting maid, into the log-hut on the extreme border of modern civilization and into the forecastle of the whale ship on the lonely ocean. It has been read by the grey bearded professor after his 'divine Plato'; by the beardless clerk after balancing his accounts at night, by the traveler waiting for the next conveyance at the village inn; by the school girl stealthfully in her seat at school (Darnton, 1996).

These popular 18th-century novels were preoccupied with providing moral guidance and cautionary tales to the citizens of the newly formed United States. Questions of freedom and

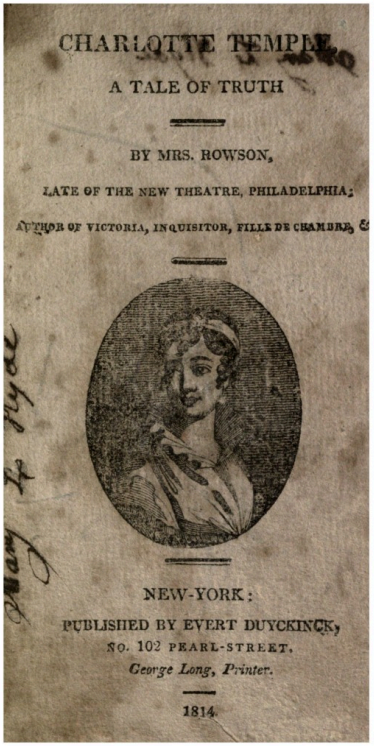
responsibility were paramount as the emerging nation attempted to establish a uniquely American literature.

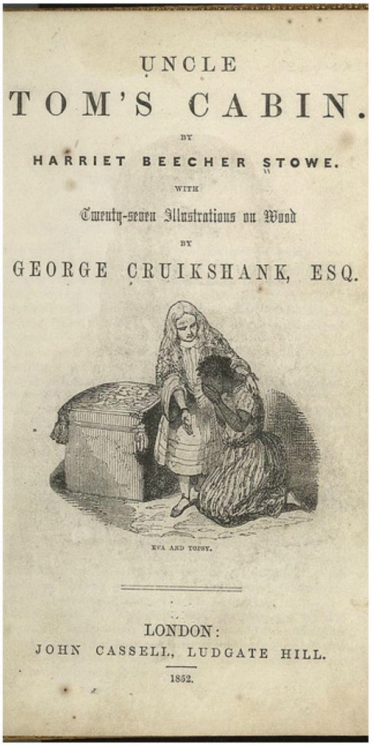
BOOKS IN THE 1800S—HOW *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN* HELPED START A WAR

Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* became the most popular book in the 1800s until *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published (Winship, 2009). Written by abolitionist and preacher Harriet Beecher Stowe in 1852—9 years before the beginning of the Civil War—*Uncle Tom's Cabin* was a smash hit by any definition. An impassioned critique of slavery that tugged on readers' emotions, the novel sold 300,000 copies in its first year and became the century's second-best-selling book after the Bible (PBS, 1862). Stowe's novel has been credited with heightening tensions between the North and the South. The novel was not only popular domestically. The first London edition sold 200,000 copies in a year, and the book was the first American novel to be translated into Chinese (PBS, 1862). The absence

of international copyright law meant that Stowe was not compensated for most of these translations. Many unauthorized stage versions of the play were produced as well, causing historians to theorize that more people saw theatrical adaptations of the play than read the book. As with today's stage and film adaptations of books, some of these versions of Stowe's story were faithful to the novel, while others changed the story's ending or even twisted the story to make it pro-slavery. In the early 1900s, nine silent film versions of the novel were released, making *Uncle Tom's Cabin* the most-filmed story of the silent film era. With her book, Stowe helped establish the political novel as an important touchstone of American literature.

FIGURE 3.5





Before strict copyright law, many different versions of Stowe's novel cropped up.

Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

Other 19th-century writers in the United States concentrated on developing a uniquely American style, a mode of self-expression distinct from European models. James Fenimore Cooper, author of *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), wrote adventure stories that celebrated the American frontier,

championing a theme that would intrigue U.S. writers for centuries to come. Poet Walt Whitman wrote *Leaves of Grass* (1855), a collection of poems that shocked readers with its frank sexuality and fresh use of language. In contrast to most other English-language poets at the time, Whitman wrote in free verse, mimicking the rhythms of actual speech in his poems. He was purposefully informal; he valued everyday speech; he spoke openly about sexual themes; and he was an important figure in establishing an American idiom that was open, informal, and focused on the experiences of common people. Washington Irving, author of the now-iconic short stories "Rip Van Winkle" (1819) and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (1820), helped establish satire and wit as important aspects of the emerging American style.

Mark Twain famously used humor in his many works of journalism, travel writing, and fiction. Twain's characters' voices are funny, irreverent, and full of off-the-wall idioms and odd regional coinages. This passage, from the first chapter of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), shows Twain's use of distinctively American speech patterns: "The Widow Douglas she took me for her son, and allowed she would sivilize me; but it was rough living in the house all the time, considering how dismal regular and decent the widow was in all her ways; and so when I couldn't stand it no longer I lit out (Twain, 1912)." Twain was also one of the first writers to use a then-newfangled invention—the typewriter.

Edgar Allan Poe is best known for writing macabre stories

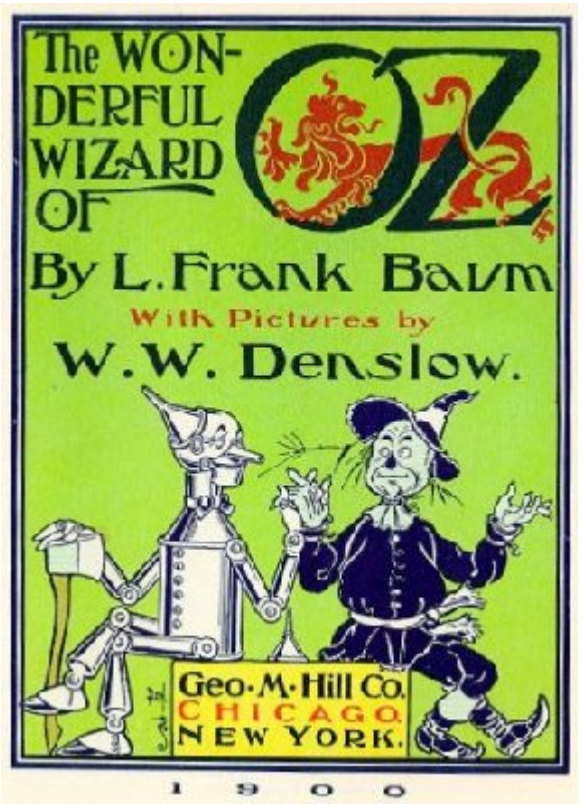
and poems like "The Raven" (1845), "The Cask of Amontillado" (1846), and "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843). A master of the Gothic genre, Poe is also credited with writing the first detective story, 1841's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." (Some people also credit Poe with the invention of the horror story and the science fiction story.) In this and other stories, Poe established many of the classic features of detective stories, including Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes tales: a brilliant, crime-solving detective who works outside the standard police system; the detective's assistant or friend, who serves as narrator; and an emphasis on analysis and solving a crime through reason. Poe had such a strong effect on the mystery genre that the Mystery Writers of America annually give out the Edgar Awards, named in honor of Poe.

At the end of the 1800s, American literature could be broadly categorized as reflecting an interest in the natural landscape, preoccupation with questions of identity (both of the individual and the nation), an interest in humor or satire, a pride in common speech, and an interest in politics. An emerging interest in what we now call genre fiction was increasing and would become a fully fledged movement as the 20th century progressed.

TWENTIETH CENTURY AND BEYOND

The production of books in the 1900s was cheaper than ever because of improved technology. The 20th century saw a multiplicity of genres that began to better reflect the diversity of experiences and interests in the United States. Furthermore, the paperback revolution eroded the distinction between high and low art. By the end of the century, however, books were facing competition for attention with films, television, video games, and the Internet.

FIGURE 3.6



L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* was the basis for the famous 1939 movie *The Wizard of Oz*.

Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

In 1900, L. Frank Baum published *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, a novel set in the fantastical world of Oz. It became the best-selling children's book for the next 2 years and went on to spawn 13 sequels. Baum's book is considered part of the so-

called golden age of children's literature, which is considered to have begun with Lewis Carroll's *Adventures of Alice in Wonderland* (1865) and ended with A. A. Milne's Winnie-the-Pooh books (1924–1928). Along with children's literature, other kinds of genre fiction saw their birth or growth in the 20th century. Owen Wister's *The Virginian* (1902) and Zane Grey's *Riders of the Purple Sage* (1912) established the Western as a uniquely American genre that would influence the popular Wild West films of the 1920s and beyond. Other genres including science fiction, horror, mystery, and romance sprung up out of the late-19th and early-20th dime novels, named for their cheap cost and known for their sensational, quickly written stories. The dime novel gave way to the even-cheaper pulp magazines and books, inexpensive publications named for the cheap pulp paper they were printed on. Pulp stories were generally sensational and featured sordid tales of murder, prostitution, and gangster violence; others told fantastical stories of aliens or monsters. The pulps were gleefully low culture and were quite popular with readers. Conan the Barbarian, Tarzan, Zorro, and The Shadow all made their first appearances as characters in early pulps. The paperback revolution of the 1930s, 40s, and 50s gave genre stories a wider reach in a more durable format.

While many 19th-century U.S. writers worked to create a distinctive American style, some 20th-century writers aimed to debunk American myths. After World War II, the United States' emerged as a dominant world power. Some writers

became preoccupied with critiquing American society and government. Dissatisfied with the widespread 1950s ideals of conformity and homogeneity, Beat Generation authors wrote in a freewheeling, informal style and proudly described their drug use and sexual exploits. Touchstone works of the Beat Generation include Allen Ginsberg's *Howl and Other Poems* (1956), Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957), and William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* (1959). These books celebrated road trips, drug trips, spiritual yearning, distrust of the mass media, and gleeful obscenity, and they helped pave the way for the hippie movement of the 1960s.

After the end of the Cold War in 1991, American literature saw an upswing in books that expressed the diversity of voices and experiences of late-20th-century America. Jhumpa Lahiri and Amy Tan wrote about the immigrant experience; Sherman Alexie and Louise Erdrich penned acclaimed novels about Native American life; and Toni Morrison explored the political and historical dimensions of slavery and race in the United States. Sometimes called multicultural literature, these and other books were celebrated as a way to promote cross-cultural understanding by examining the different value systems, histories, traditions, and speech patterns of people in America.

The 21st-century market has so far been dominated by several massively popular novel franchises—such as *Left Behind*, *Harry Potter*, *The Twilight Saga*, and *The Da Vinci Code*—that have collectively sold hundreds of millions of copies. These haven't only been popular as books; they've also

spawned equally lucrative films and merchandise tie-ins. Consumers who are so inclined can purchase *Twilight Saga* wall decals, *Harry Potter* earrings, or *Da Vinci Code* board games. In some ways, such novel franchises harken back to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the 19th century, which was a multiplatform success popular on the page, stage, and screen.

FIGURE 3.7

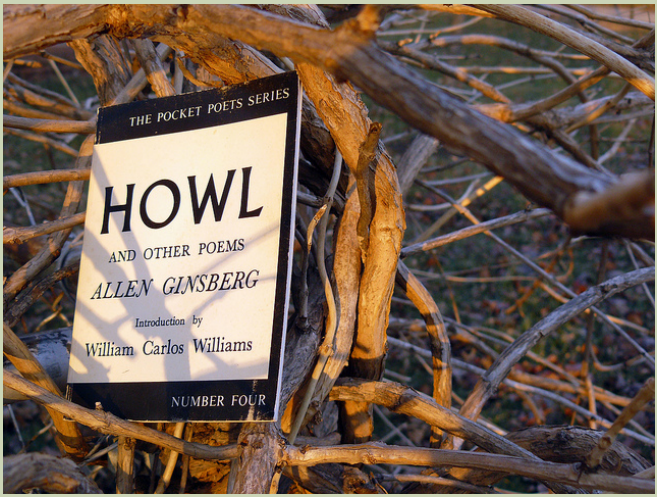

SPICY MYSTERY
STORIES
HER
DEMON LOVER
by Morgan Lafay

Pulp publications captured readers with their lurid, colorful covers.

Will Hart – 077 Spicy Mystery Stories 1976 Odyssey Publications Includes Tailor Made Dummy by E. Hoffman Price – CC BY 2.0.

DEFINING OBSCENITY: "HOWL" GOES ON TRIAL

FIGURE 3.8



"Howl" marked a turning point in United States obscenity laws.

Maddie Keating – two – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Allen Ginsberg's poem "Howl" met with strong reactions, both positive and negative, when it was released by City Lights Books in 1956. Ginsberg's poem was instantly notorious for its descriptions of sexual acts, both heterosexual and homosexual, drug use, mental hospitals, and antiestablishment conspiracies. Many readers were shocked by Ginsberg's words; however, that was precisely his intent. He once described "Howl" as "an emotional time bomb that would continue exploding in

U.S. consciousness in case our military-industrial-nationalist complex solidified (Ginsberg, 1995)." In 1957, U.S. customs officials seized a shipment of copies of the book on the grounds of obscenity, but soon after dropped their charges. However, the poem's legal struggles weren't over; that same year, the California police sent plainclothes officers to City Lights Bookstore to buy a copy and then promptly arrested the salesclerk and the store owner on charges of obscenity.

The "Howl" trial came in the same year as several other landmark Supreme Court cases that liberalized the legal definition of obscenity in the United States. Before 1957, a more strict definition held that any material with a possible immoral influence was obscene. This stance led to a ban on works by authors such as James Joyce and D. H. Lawrence. Under the new law, a work would be judged by "community standards" and could only be judged obscene if its "dominant theme taken as a whole appeals to the prurient interest." In other words, books could no longer be deemed obscene on the basis of a single four-letter word. It also meant that the poem's obscenity would have to be judged against the relatively liberal standards of San Francisco, where the police sting operation had taken place.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) leapt to City Lights' defense, and the presiding judge overturned the obscenity charge, citing the poem's "redeeming social importance." In hindsight, the judge seems undoubtedly correct about the poem's social importance. "Howl" and the

obscenity rulings of 1957 marked a crucial bridge between the post–World War II years of enthusiastic patriotism and social conformity and the 1960s ethos of free love and antigovernment sentiment. By the time of Ginsberg's death in 1997, *Howl and Other Poems* had sold more than 800,000 copies (Raskin, 2006).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- After the Revolutionary War, the United States was preoccupied with questions of self-determination. Many popular books reflected similar concerns about freedom through stories that explored the dangers of seduction for women. During this time, the ideals of republican motherhood also boosted literacy rates for women, although reading novels was still seen by some as a potentially subversive activity.
- During the 19th century, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was a national sensation that heightened divisions between the North and South and that may have hastened the outbreak of the Civil War. The book was also popular as a stage play and, later, as a silent film. Other American writers of this period tried to establish a distinctive American voice, whether through political

engagement, satire, interest in the natural world, or use of regional dialects and idioms.

- In the 20th century, genre fiction came to prominence through popular, sensational pulp novels. Genres such as children's literature, science fiction, mystery, and romance were given a boost beginning in the 1930s by the spread of the paperback book. The second half of the 20th century was marked by writers who challenged conformist ideas of the United States. The Beat Generation risked jail time for obscenity, while multicultural literature celebrated a multiplicity of voices and viewpoints.
- The 21st century has so far been dominated by a number of novel franchises with massive sales and multiple marketing tie-ins.

EXERCISES

Consider a novel or book from any era in U.S. history that has made an impression on you. Research this book on the Internet to discover how it played a part in shaping U.S. popular culture, how culture shaped the book in question, or both. Then, answer the following questions:

- What was the social or cultural climate at the time of its publication?
- What was the initial critical reception? Did opinions of the book change over time?
- At what point was the book most popular?
- Does the book belong to a larger movement? Was it a reaction against a political moment or literary movement that came before?

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3.4 Major Book Formats

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Determine the role of hardcover books in the publishing industry.
2. Identify the differences in the two major formats of paperback books.
3. Recognize the changes that e-books bring to the publishing industry.

From ancient Egyptian papyrus scrolls to scrollable 21st-century e-books, a book can come in many different formats. However, in some ways, it seems like the more things change,

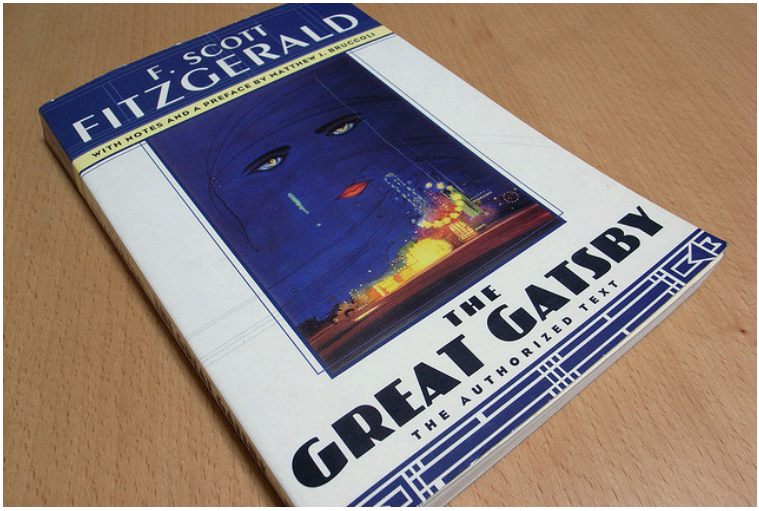
the more they stay the same. In the same way that early printed books were painstakingly illuminated to look more like medieval books, today's e-books use e-paper technology to mimic the look of a printed page. Even the hardcover books we're familiar with today are direct descendants of the ancient codex.

HARDCOVER

While the first codices enclosed bound papers between wooden covers (the word *codex* means *block of wood* in Latin), contemporary hardcover book covers are usually made of cardboard sheathed in cloth, paper, or leather. The printed pages of the book are either sewn or glued to the cover. Until the early 1800s, most books were sold unbound. A buyer would purchase a sheath of printed papers that would be bound either by the bookseller or by a commissioned bindery. British publisher William Pickering is considered the first publisher to issue books in uniform cloth bindings in 1820. About a decade later, dust jackets, the detachable outer covers that sheathe most hardback books today, arrived on the scene. Dust jackets were initially meant only as a protective covering

for the binding, but soon they became a place where designers could create a colorful and distinctive cover for a book.

FIGURE 3.9



Original dust jackets are especially important for book collectors—a first edition of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* without the dust jacket sells for around $3000; with the dust jacket intact, it can go for more than $30,000.

yoppy – The Great Gatsby – CC BY 2.0.

The durability of hardcover books makes them attractive to both authors and book purchasers. However, the competitive economics of today's publishing industry means that some books are never issued in hardcover. Because hardcover books are more expensive to produce and almost always cost more than their paperback equivalents, publishers tend to reserve the format for books that they expect will sell well.

Based on projected sales, publishers must decide how big of a print run to order for a new hardcover book. A book's print run refers to all the copies made in one setup of the printing apparatus. A failed book may only have one, while a successful book may have 50 or more printings. Figuring out how many copies of a book to print is an inexact science, as publishers must essentially guess how well a book will sell. There is no standard size for a print run. The U.K. edition of the first *Harry Potter* book had an initial print run of only 500 copies; the U.S. print run of the seventh and final book in the series was a record-breaking 12 million. When an initial print run is sold out, the book is either reprinted (these copies are considered a second printing) or is considered out of print. The contemporary publishing industry will often issue a first-run hardcover printing, followed by subsequent paperback editions.

PAPERBACK

Inexpensive paper-bound books have been around for centuries in formats like the chapbook, the British penny dreadful, and the American dime novel. However, the hardcover book, whether as an ancient codex or its contemporary equivalent, was the dominant format in the book world for thousands of years. The introduction of a new format in the 1930s, the paperback, was considered revolutionary. The so-called paperback revolution began during the Great Depression, when paperbacks were marketed as inexpensive alternatives to hardcover editions. Penguin Books, Ltd., the first majorly successful paperback publishing company, kept prices low by ordering large print runs and selling books in nontraditional retailers, such as Woolworth's drugstores. Penguin also broke the traditional paperback mold by avoiding pulp fiction entertainment novels and instead printing books that were both cheap and intellectually stimulating. Donald Porter Geddes, the editor of Pocket Books, the first paperback publishing house in the United States, spelled out this new approach to bookselling in 1944: "The best books apparently have the greatest appeal to the greatest number of people...the larger American public need no longer suffer from the delusion that it is intellectually inferior, or, from a literary point of view, lacking in any aspect in good taste, judgment, and appetite (Ogle, 1960)." By 1960,

when paperback books first outsold hardcovers, these early paperback innovators were proved right.

While paperback publishing first issued only reprints of books that had already been issued in hardcover, paperback originals, books that had their initial print run as a paperback edition, emerged in the 1950s. Paperback originals were another step in helping to remove the stigma from the paperback book. In 1999, Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Interpreter of Maladies* was the first paperback original to win the Pulitzer Prize for fiction.

Today's books published in paperback are traditionally divided into two broad categories: mass-market paperbacks and trade paperbacks. Mass-market paperbacks are small, inexpensive editions that are sometimes issued after a hardcover edition, although many genre novels are printed only in mass-market paperback editions. Trade paperbacks are larger and generally of better quality. They're often printed on higher-quality paper (sometimes acid-free paper). If the trade paperback follows a hardcover release, the paperback will be the same size as the hardcover and will have the same pagination and page layout as the hardcover edition.

Traditionally, hardcover books have been seen as more prestigious than paperbacks, though that stereotype may be beginning to change. In recent years, some publishers of literary fiction were seeing 50 to 75 percent of the hardcover books they shipped to bookstores returned to them unsold. As a response, certain publishers opted to release books with

uncertain sales potential as trade paperbacks, bypassing the hardcover format entirely. "Getting somebody to spend $22 on a book by an author who they've never heard of is hard, but getting them to spend $13.95 on a paperback is much easier," Random House's Jane von Mehren told *The New York Times* in 2006 (Wyatt, 2006). Some publishers are concerned that book reviewers don't take trade paperback editions as seriously, but that too may be slowly changing. Another publishing strategy is to release hardcover and trade paperback editions simultaneously rather than delaying the paperback edition for several months (or even years, in the case of exceptionally popular books). Such a technique is intended to drive up sales, taking advantage of initial publicity to capture readers who may be unwilling to pay the full hardcover price for a book.

Whatever the concerns that publishers may have about issuing paperbacks, the format is still dominant in the U.S. publishing industry. According to the American Association of Publishers (AAP), 35 percent of the books sold in 2009 were trade paperbacks; 35 percent hardcovers; 21 percent mass market paperbacks; 2 percent audio books; 2 percent e-books; and 5 percent "other (Eco-Libris)."

E-BOOKS

The hardcover book's expensive, durable binding seemed to say that it was an object intended for posterity. If paperback books disrupted the traditional concept of books by making them cheaper and more portable, then the e-book is poised to cause an even greater change in how readers interact with a text. E-books, also known as electronic or digital books, are the digital media equivalent of printed books. That is, they are books read on the screen of an electronic device, whether a cell phone, personal computer, or dedicated e-book reader.

E-books differ from their print equivalents in many significant ways. For one, there's no physical production cost, which means that e-books are generally less expensive than traditional books. There's also no cost to store or transport e-books. Because an e-book's publisher doesn't need to order a set print run, a text issued as an e-book doesn't ever have to go out of print. E-books also appeal to readers who want instant gratification. Instead of having to travel to a brick-and-mortar bookstore or wait for a delivery, a reader can download an e-book in a matter of minutes.

Early e-books were mostly technical manuals or digitized versions of works in the public domain. As the Internet took off and as electronic devices became increasingly mobile, book publishers began to issue digital editions of their works. In the first decade of the 21st century, various companies began

issuing software and hardware platforms for electronic books, each competing for dominance in this emerging market.

Although e-books make up only a small percentage of total book sales, that number is growing. Dan Brown's *The Lost Symbol*, the follow up to his massively popular novel *The Da Vinci Code*, sold more copies as a Kindle e-book than as a hardcover in the first few days after its September 2009 release. However, e-book successes have led to a threat that faces many kinds of digital content: online piracy. Only a few days after its initial release, Brown's novel had been illegally downloaded more than 100,000 times. Some authors and publishers are concerned that Internet users expect free content and will find a way around spending money on e-books. American novelist Sherman Alexie recently voiced some of these anxieties, "With the open-source culture on the Internet, the idea of ownership—of artistic ownership—goes away (Frisch, 2010)." Other prominent authors have reacted to the e-book in various ways. In 2000, Stephen King published his novella *Riding the Bullet* as a digital file that could only be read on a computer; in contrast, J. K. Rowling has stated that the *Harry Potter* novels won't ever be released as e-books (McHugh, 2005). However, piracy has struck Rowling's novels as well. Every *Harry Potter* novel is available in pirated form, either as a scanned copy or one that was manually typed out by fans.

Another concern with e-books is the possibility of digital decay. All an e-book is, after all, is a collection of data saved to a disk. It turns out that digital formats tend to decay

much faster than their physical counterparts (Bollacker, 2010). The swift turnover of digital devices is another concern; the possibility exists that a book bought on a Kindle device in 2010 will be not be compatible with an equivalent device in 2035 or even 2015.

E-book sales still make up a small part of the overall book market, 3 to 5 percent by most estimates, but their sales increased by 177 percent in 2009. *The New Yorker* cites a projection that e-books will someday account for between 25 and 50 percent of all book sales (Auletta, 2010). And with newer models of e-book readers, such as the iPad, boasting full color screens and the ability to embed web links and video in a book's text, e-books may fundamentally reshape how people read in the future.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Hardcover books are a direct descendant of the ancient codex. Because they are more durable and more expensive, they are considered more prestigious than paperback books. Traditionally, publishers order an initial print run in hardcover, followed by a paperback release.
- Paperback books are popular because they are more portable and less expensive than their hardcover

equivalents are. Books issued in paperback can be either mass market paperbacks or trade paperbacks, which are pricier and higher quality. To stay competitive and to attract customers, publishers are releasing some novels simultaneously in hardcover and paperback; other books skip hardcover and are released as paperback originals.

- Although they make up only 3 to 5 percent of current sales, e-books have the potential to transform the book market. Gaining currency with customers only in recent years, the e-book has the advantage of being cheaper and more portable than even most paperbacks. Some concerns with e-books include the prevalence of piracy and the potential for digital decay.

EXERCISES

Create a list of the three book formats mentioned in this section, and then answer the following questions:

- What are the features, advantages, and drawbacks of each format?
- How do they differ? How are they the same?
- What type of person might each format appeal to?

- Which format do you prefer the most, and why?

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3.5 Current Publishing Trends

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Indicate the effect of blockbuster syndrome on the publishing industry.
2. Recognize how book superstores have changed the business of bookselling.
3. Identify the causes and results of price wars in the book industry.

The last few decades have seen a sharp rise in electronic entertainment. In 2009, the average American spent 56 percent of his or her free time watching TV, and less than 7 percent of his or her free time reading (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). Video game sales rose 19 percent in 2008 alone and have continued to climb (MSNBC, 2009). In a world full of diverting entertainments, each clamoring for people's time, the publishing industry is endeavoring to do everything it can to capture readers' attention.

BLOCKBUSTER SYNDROME

Imagine this scenario: A young author has spent the last few years slaving over his novel, rewriting and revising until the whole thing is polished, exciting, and fresh. He sends out his manuscript and is lucky enough to find a literary agent eager to support his work. The agent sells the book to a publisher, netting the author a decent advance; the book goes on to get great reviews, win some awards, and sell 20,000 copies. To most people, this situation sounds like a dream come true. But in an increasingly commercialized publishing industry, with a focus on finding the next blockbuster, this burgeoning author could be at risk of not getting his contract renewed.

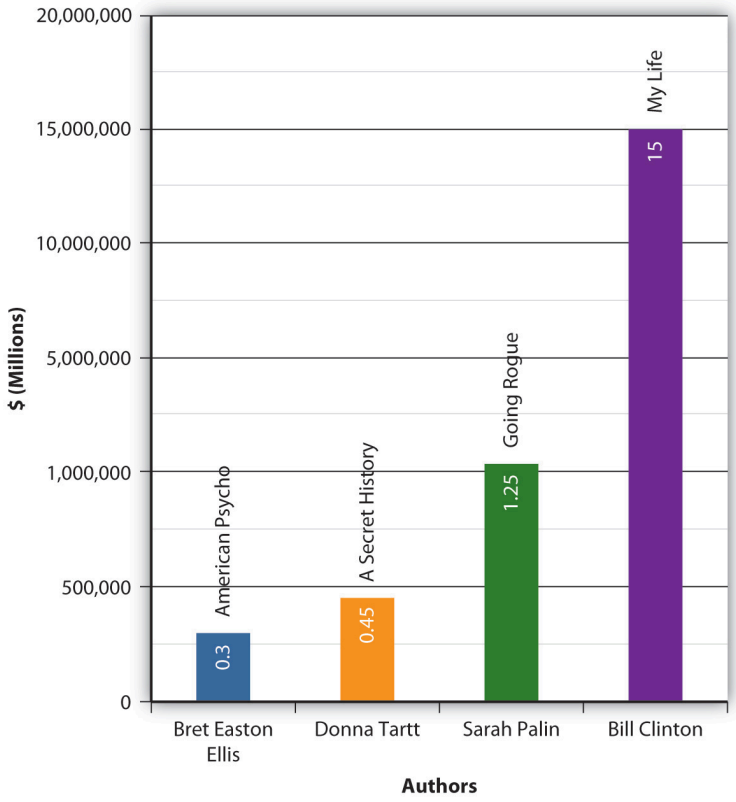
In an industry increasingly dominated by large media corporations with obligations to stockholders, publishers feel pressured to turn a profit. As a result, they tend to bank on sure-fire best sellers, books that are expected to sell millions (or tens of millions) of copies, regardless of literary merit. The industry's growing focus on a few best-selling authors, called blockbuster syndrome, often means less support and less money for the vast majority of writers who don't sell millions of copies.

An advance is a sum of money paid to the author in expectation of future royalties. Royalties are a percentage of the book's sale price. So if a publisher gives an author a $10,000

advance, the author has immediate access to that money, but the first $10,000 worth of royalties goes to the publisher. After that, the author accumulates royalties for every book sold. In this way, an advance is a cross between a loan and a gamble. If the book doesn't sell well, the author doesn't have to pay back the advance; however, he or she won't earn any additional money from royalties. However, as many as three-quarters of books don't earn back their advances, meaning that their authors aren't making any money from sales at all.

Publishers and writers are notoriously hush-hush about the actual sums of advances. A recent *New York Times* article estimated an average advance to be around $30,000, though actual figures vary widely. Keeping in mind that a book may take years to write, it's clear that many authors are barely eking out a living from their books.

FIGURE 3.10 ALL ADVANCES AREN'T EQUAL



Bret Easton Ellis, *American Psycho*: $300,000 (Benatar, 1990).

Donna Tartt, *A Secret History*: $450,000 (Allen, 1992)

Sarah Palin, *Going Rogue*: $1.25 million (Rosen, 2009)

Bill Clinton, *My Life*: $15 million (McIntire, 2008)

These days, though, most of the media attention is focused on the few books each year that earn their authors huge advances and go on to sell massive numbers of copies—the

blockbusters. But the focus on blockbusters can have a damaging effect on emerging writers. Because publishing is a gamble, advances to new or unproven writers are generally low. Additionally, because a publishing house wants to recoup its initial investment, a book that earned an author a big advance will probably get a big publicity budget. Unfortunately, the flip side is also true; a small advance equals a small publicity budget, which can trap many authors in a vicious circle. In most cases, a book without much promotion won't have the chance to become a hit. If the book isn't a hit, the publisher can justify an even lower advance for the next book and a lower budget for promotion. The result is that many books by emerging authors get lost in the shuffle. "It used to be that the first book earned a modest advance, then you would build an audience over time and break even on the third or fourth book," Morgan Entrekin, the publisher of Grove/Atlantic, told *The New York Times*. "Now the first book is expected to land a huge advance and huge sales.... Now we see a novelist selling 9,000 hardcovers and 15,000 paperbacks, and they see themselves as a failure (Bureau of Labor Statistics)."

Potential blockbusters come at a high price for the publisher as well. They threaten to eat up publicity budgets and dominate publishers' attention. An extremely large advance will only pay off if a massive number of copies sell, which makes the publishing houses less likely to take a gamble on unconventional books. This can also lead to a glut of similar books being pushed by publishers. After Dan Brown's huge

success with *The Da Vinci Code* in 2003, publishers rushed to capitalize on its success by releasing similar art history–conspiracy–mystery thrillers, few of which interested readers.

To a certain extent, focusing on blockbusters has worked for the publishing industry. Today's best sellers sell more copies than best sellers did 10 years ago and make up a larger share of the market. However, overall book sales have remained relatively flat over the past 8 years (Association of American Publisher, 2011). In other words, it's not that more books are being sold; it's just that more of the sales are taken up by a few heavily promoted blockbusters. However, the blockbuster syndrome threatens to damage the industry in other ways. In a best-seller-driven system, literature becomes a commodity, with little value placed on a book's artistic merit. Instead, the primary concern is whether or not it will sell.

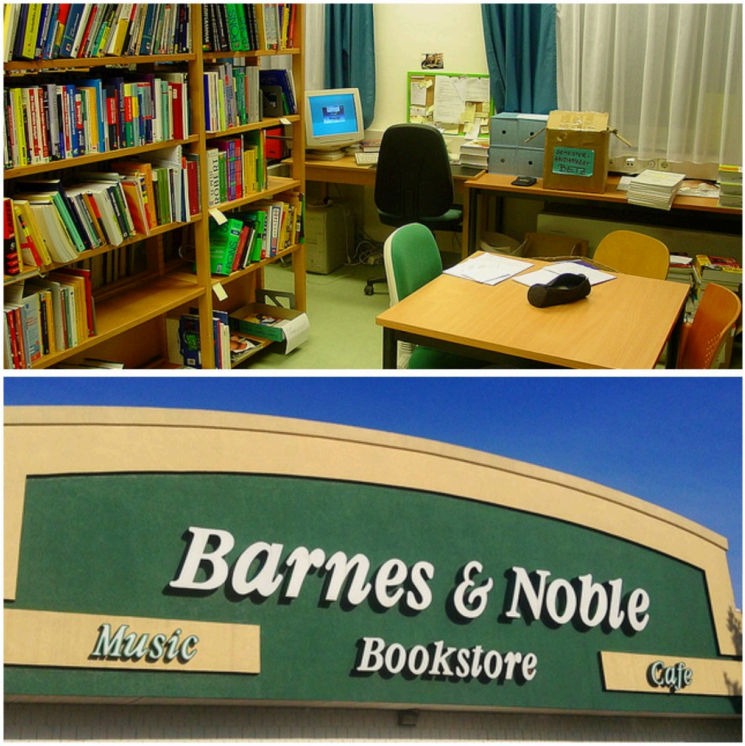
AUTHORS SAY "NO" TO BLOCKBUSTER SYNDROME

Discontented with the industry's focus on blockbusters at the expense of other books, some authors are taking control of publishing their materials. John Edgar Wideman, a celebrated author who has been a finalist for the National Book Award and is the only writer to have twice won the International PEN/Faulkner Award, had published more than 20 books through the traditional publishing system. But by the time he was looking for a home for his new collection of short stories, *Briefs: Stories for the Palm of the Mind*, he was ready for something new. "The blockbuster syndrome is a feature of our social landscape that has gotten out of hand," Wideman said. "Unless you become a blockbuster, your book disappears quickly. It becomes not only publish or perish, but sell or perish (Reid, 2010)." Wideman eventually decided to team up with self-

publishing service Lulu, which meant that he gave up a traditional contract and advance payment in favor of greater control and a higher percentage of royalties. Other authors are turning away from the Big Six publishers and seeking out independent publishing houses, which often offer a different model. McSweeney's offers low advances and splits all profits with the author evenly. Vanguard offers no advances, but gives authors high royalties and guarantees a high marketing budget. These nontraditional systems allow authors more flexibility at a time when the publishing industry is facing rapid change. As Wideman puts it, "I like the idea of being in charge. I have more control over what happens to my book. And I have more control over whom I reach (Reid, 2010)."

RISE (AND FALL?) OF BOOK SUPERSTORES

FIGURE 3.11



Small independent bookstores find it hard to compete with multibillion-dollar corporations.

library_mistress – My first library workplace – CC BY-SA 2.0; Mike Mozart – Barnes & Noble Book Store – CC BY 2.0.

In the late 20th century, a new group of colossal bookstores reshaped the retail sale of books in the United States. Two of the most well-known and prevalent book retailers, Barnes & Noble and Borders (the largest and second-largest book retailers in the United States, respectively) expanded extensively by building book superstores in the late 1980s and early 1990s. These large retail outlets were different from traditional, smaller bookstores in several ways. They often sold many products other than books, including calendars, paper goods, and gifts. Many also housed in-store cafes, allowing patrons to browse books and sip lattes under the same roof. They were also physically bigger, and such megastores drew customers because of their wide selection and their ability to offer books at deeply discounted prices.

Many independent bookstores couldn't compete with the large chains' discounts, wide selection, and upscale atmosphere. According to *Publishers Weekly*, independent booksellers' share of the book market fell from 58 percent in 1972 to 15.2 percent in 1999. The American Booksellers Association (ABA), a trade association of bookstores, notes that its membership peaked at 5,200 in 1991; by 2005, that

number had declined by 65 percent to 1,791. The decline of the independent bookstore coincided with the consolidation of the publishing industry, and some supporters of independent bookstores see a link between the two. Richard Howorth—owner of Square Books—an independent bookstore in Oxford, Mississippi, told *Mother Jones* magazine that "when the independent bookselling market was thriving in the '70s and '80s, more books were being published, more people were reading books, the sales of books were higher, and publishers' profit margins were much greater. With the rise of the corporate retailing powers and the consolidation in publishing, all of those things have declined (Gurwitt, 2000)." Book superstores emphasized high turnover and high-volume sales, placing a higher emphasis on best sellers and returning some mass market paperbacks to publishers after only 6 weeks on the shelves.

In more recent years, the book superstores have been under threat themselves. In 2009, large retailers like Target, Wal-Mart, and Costco sold more books than both independent and chain bookstores combined: nearly 45 percent of the market (Auletta). These stores didn't specialize in books and tended to offer only a few heavily promoted blockbuster titles. Large discount stores were able to negotiate favorable deals with publishers, allowing them to discount books even further than the book superstores in some cases. In more recent years, book superstores have also faced a threat from the increasing number of books purchased online. By 2010, Amazon, the

largest online bookseller, accounted for around 15 to 20 percent of book sales in the United States.

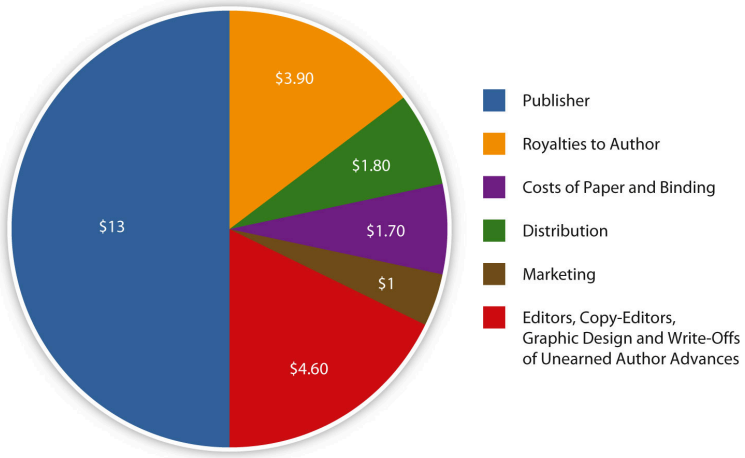
The shift away from independent bookstores and toward bigger retailers, such as book superstores or nonspecialized retailers like Wal-Mart, has benefited the industry in some ways, most notably by making books cheaper and more widely available. Mega best sellers, such as the *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* series, were able to set sales records at least in part because the books were available for purchase in malls, convenience stores, supermarkets, and other nontraditional venues. However, overall book sales have not risen. And though consumers may be paying less for the books they're buying through these retailers, something may be lost as well. Jonathan Burnham, a publisher from HarperCollins, discussed the value of independent bookstores with *The New Yorker*, noting how they are similar to community centers: "There's a serendipitous element involved in browsing.... We walk in and know the people who work there and like to hear their reading recommendations."

PRICE WARS

Part of the reason book superstores were able to crowd out smaller, independent retailers was their ability to offer significant discounts on a book's cover price. Because the big chains sell more books, they can negotiate better deals with publishers and then pass the discounts to their customers. Not surprisingly, deep discounts appeal to customers, which is one reason the book superstores gained such a large share of the market in the 1990s. The superstores are able to sell books at such a sharp discount, sometimes even half of the listed price, because their higher sales numbers gives them bargaining power with the publishers. Independent bookstores buying the books at a normal wholesale rate (usually half the list price) are at a disadvantage; they can't offer deep discounts and, as a result, they must charge higher prices than the superstores. This deep discount policy is one reason best-seller sales have risen over the past decade (book superstores usually slash the prices of best sellers and new releases only). However, large discounts encourage high-volume selling, and emphasizing on high-volume selling encourages safe publishing choices. That is, the bookstores are able to make up for the big discounts only by selling tons of copies, and the books most likely to sell this well are blockbuster works by known-quantity authors. The threat of deep discounting to independent bookstores and its effect on the publishing industry has led some European

countries to regulate prices. For example, bookstores in France are prohibited from discounting more than 5 percent, and in Germany, price slashing can only happen 9 months after a book's release.

FIGURE 3.12



Why do books cost so much?

The brick-and-mortar bookstores aren't the only book discounters in the mix. Wal-Mart and other discount retailers sell more copies of the few books they offer at their stores, so they can negotiate even more favorable terms with publishers.

Amazon, which dominates online book sales, routinely discounts books 20 percent or more.

Recently, other online retailers have been battling with Amazon for online bookselling profits. In October 2009, as retailers were preparing for the holiday season, Amazon and Wal-Mart were preparing to compete for sales. When Wal-Mart announced that it would lower preorder prices for 10 highly anticipated hardcover books to only $10, Amazon responded by matching that price the next day. Wal-Mart then lowered its price to $9, and Amazon followed. Unwilling to give up the fight, Wal-Mart lowered its prices by a penny, listing the 10 books at $8.99. Then another online retailer, Target, joined the fray, matching Wal-Mart's price. Wal-Mart dropped its list prices again by a penny, listing the books at $8.98 (Gregory, 2009).

While there's something almost comical about major retailers duking it out over pennies, it's also a situation that looked quite sobering to book retailers, from the independents to the large chains. The startling thing about the price wars among Amazon, Target, and Wal-Mart was that no one involved expected to make any money from these deeply discounted books. At $9 or less, these books were almost certainly selling at below retail value, perhaps by quite a lot.

If a book's list price is $35, its wholesale price is usually around half of that, in this case $17. If that book is priced at $9, that means an $8 loss to the retailer per copy. Although at first this seems like blatantly bad business, it works because all

of these retailers are in the business of selling much more than just books. Large online retailers use the deep discounts to lure customers to their websites in hopes that these customers will purchase other items. These book sales are valuable as a way to drive traffic to the retailer's website. However, booksellers whose main business is still selling books, such as local independent bookstores, don't have this luxury.

E-books have also entered into the retail struggle. Because there are no printing costs, e-books are relatively cheap to make, and consumers expect to see the savings on their end. However, book publishers still sell the books to distributors at wholesale prices—about half of the retail value of the hardcover version. To tempt buyers, companies such as Amazon charge only $9.99 for the average e-title, once again taking a loss (Stone & Rich, 2009). Many hope to make up for it with device sales—consumers are more likely to spend hundreds of dollars on an inexpensive reader to access cheaper books. While major retailers may eventually profit from this method of sales, many wonder how long it will last. Author David Baldacci argues that a book industry based solely on profit isn't sustainable. In the end, he argues, "there won't be anyone selling [books] anymore because you just can't make any money (Rich, 2009)."

The inclination to focus only on net profits is indicative of a larger trend in the book industry. Retailers are getting larger, consumer prices are getting lower, and popular books are receiving the majority of attention. While this has positive

short-term results for consumers and large retailers, the effects are devastating for most authors and smaller bookstores. Although, in the end, the introduction of e-books may be no more harmful to the industry than the explosion of paperbacks was in the early 1900s, the larger emphasis on quantity over quality threatens the literary value and sustainability of books.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Blockbuster syndrome refers to the publishing industry's focus on books with best-seller potential at the expense of works that may not sell as well. Fueled by high advances that depend on high publicity budgets for high sales, less-popular authors often get lost in the shuffle. Such a system evaluates books on the basis of their commercial potential instead of their literary merit. Fed up with what they see as the industry's exclusive focus on blockbusters, some authors are turning away from the Big Six publishers and are opting for different publishing models.
- Book superstores rose to prominence in the 1990s because their low prices, large selection, and upscale atmosphere made them popular with book buyers. As a result, large numbers of independent bookstores closed. In recent years, the book superstores have been

losing market share to large retailers such as Wal-Mart and Costco. These stores don't focus on selling books, and so they only have the shelf space for a few best sellers, thus helping to fuel the blockbuster syndrome. Additionally, brick-and-mortar stores are coming under threat from Amazon and other online retailers.

- Stores that sell a large volume of books are able to negotiate favorable terms with book publishers and they are then able to pass along deep discounts to their customers. Smaller independent bookstores are not able to do this, and so are less economically competitive. Recent price wars have erupted among online retailers like Amazon, Wal-Mart, and Target, who competed to sell books and e-books at prices so low they amounted to a net loss per sale. Retailers used these sales to drive business to their websites and to encourage customers to buy other products.

EXERCISES

Examine a recent list of best sellers (some lists to consider include those by *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, Book Sense, or *The Washington Post*). Complete a web search for the top-10 authors to see if they have published books

previously and if their previous books were also on best-seller lists. Some questions to consider: Are the books part of a series or novel franchise? Do the books have film tie-ins? What conclusions can you draw from your research?

Write down two books, one a current or recent best seller and the other a book that was published at least 5 years ago. Look up the books' prices on Amazon and note both the list price and Amazon's sale price. Then find the price of the same book at a local chain bookstore and an independent bookseller. What factors might account for any differences in pricing? How might these prices have changed in recent years?

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3.6 The Influence of New Technology

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Determine the benefits and drawbacks of digital libraries.
2. Define *print-on-demand* and *self-publishing*.

The book industry has changed enormously since its creation. From the invention of the papyrus scroll to the introduction of the e-book, new technologies continuously affect how people view and experience literature. With the advent of digital media, old-media industries, such as the book industry, must find ways to adapt. Some fear that this new technology will destroy the industry, while others maintain that it works to the industry's advantage. However, one thing is clear—digital technology promises to reshape the publishing industry as we know it.

E-BOOKS

The first e-book readers were related to the personal digital assistant (PDA) devices, pocket-sized electronics that could store and display large amounts of text, that became popular in the 1990s. However, early e-book readers lingered on the market, popular in certain techy niches but unable to gain traction with the wider population. Early e-readers had minimal battery life and text that was difficult to read. Through the 2000s, technological advances allowed for smaller and sleeker models, the Apple iPhone and the iPad helped make readers more comfortable with reading on a small screen. The second half of the decade saw the release of many e-readers. The technology got a boost when Oprah Winfrey praised the Kindle on her show in October 2008. By that holiday season, e-book reader sales were booming, and it wasn't just the technologically savvy individuals who were interested anymore. Despite being criticized by some as providing an inferior reading experience to dedicated e-readers, the Apple iPad has been a powerful driving force behind e-book sales—more than 1.5 million books were downloaded on the Apple iPad during its first month of release in 2010 (Maneker, 2010).

E-books make up less than 5 percent of the current book market, but that number is growing. At the beginning of 2010, Amazon had about 400,000 titles available for the Kindle

device. Some devices offer wireless accessibility, meaning that an e-reader doesn't have to be connected to a computer to access titles; an open Wi-Fi connection is all it needs. With access to a dazzling array of books available with just a few clicks, it's no wonder the contemporary consumer seems enamored with the e-book. An e-book reader has the space to store thousands of titles in an object smaller and lighter than the average hardcover novel. And though the devices themselves can be expensive, e-books are usually cheaper than their hardcopy equivalents; sometimes they're even free. Thanks to efforts like the Gutenberg Project and Google Books (see the following section), more than a million public domain titles are available as free e-books.

Anything that gets people excited about books and reading should be good for the publishing industry, right? Unfortunately for U.S. publishers, it's not that simple. Some publishers worry that e-book sales may actually end up hurting their bottom lines. During the Kindle's first year, Amazon essentially set the standard price for bestselling or new release e-books at $9.99. Since Amazon was acting as a wholesaler and buying these books for half the publisher's list price—generally around $25 for a new hardcover—the company was selling these titles at a loss. However, for Amazon, a short-term loss might have had long-term payoffs. At the start of 2010, the company controlled a 90 percent share of the e-book market. Faced with e-books that cost less than $10, traditional

publishers worried that consumers would avoid purchasing a new hardcover priced at $25 (or even a $13 trade paperback).

FIGURE 3.13



Most e-readers are the size and shape of one hardcover book. ndh – Kobo eReader – CC BY-NC 2.0.

In January 2010, the conflict between Amazon and the

publishing establishment came to a head. Macmillan, one of the six major publishing companies in the United States, suggested a new business model to Amazon, one that resembled the deal that the Big Six publishers had worked out with Apple for e-book sales on the Apple iPad. Essentially, Amazon had been able to buy books from publishers at wholesale rates—half the hardcover list price—and then set whatever retail price it wanted. This allowed Amazon to choose to sell books at a loss in the hope of convincing more people to buy Kindles. Macmillan proposed a system in which Amazon would act more as a commission-earning agent than a wholesaler. In Macmillan's proposed model, the publisher would set the retail price and take 70 percent of each sale, leaving 30 percent for the retailer. Macmillan couldn't force Amazon to agree to this deal, but the publisher could strike a hard bargain: If Amazon refused Macmillan's offer, it could still sell Macmillan titles under the wholesale model, but the publisher would delay e-book editions for 7 months after hardcover releases. What followed was a standoff. Amazon didn't just reject Macmillan's proposal; it removed the "buy" button from all Macmillan books listed on its website (including print books), essentially refusing to sell Macmillan titles. However, after a few days, Amazon capitulated and agreed to Macmillan's terms, but not before issuing a strongly worded press release claiming that they agreed to sell Macmillan's titles "at prices we believe are needlessly high for e-books," because "Macmillan has a monopoly over their own

titles (Rich & Stone, 2010)." Still, Macmillan and the other publishers seem to have won this battle: Amazon agreed that e-books for most new fiction and nonfiction books for adults will be priced at $12.99 to $14.99, though best sellers will still be $9.99 (Rich & Stone, 2010).

But the $10 book may be the least of the publishing industry's worries. At the start of 2010, more than half of the bestselling titles on Kindle were free. Some of these were public domain novels such as *Pride and Prejudice*, but many others were books by living authors being promoted by publishers by giving away the book. The industry hasn't yet come to a consensus about the utility of free e-books. Some publishers consider it a practice that devalues books in the eyes of customers. "At a time when we are resisting the $9.99 price of e-books," David Young of the Hachette Book Group told *The New York Times*, "it is illogical to give books away for free (Rich, 2010)." Other publishers consider free e-books a promotional tool to build word-of-mouth and to introduce readers to new authors.

Other e-books emerge from outside the traditional publishing system. Four of the five bestselling novels in Japan in 2007 were cell phone novels, books that were both written and intended to be read on cell phones. Cell-phone novels are traditionally written by amateurs who post them on free websites. Readers can download copies at no cost, which means no one is making much of a profit from this new genre. Although the phenomenon has not caught on in the United

States yet, the cell phone novel is feared by some publishers as a further sign of the devaluation of books in a world where browsers expect content to be free.

With e-book sales expected to triple by 2015, it's hard to say what such a quickly growing industry will look like in the future (McQuivy, 2010). Some people have theorized that e-readers will lead to an increasing popularity of the short story, which can be bought and read in short increments. Others have claimed that they'll destroy the book industry as we know it. Whatever the future of books looks like, everything—from the way books are produced to the way we read them—continues to change rapidly because of new technologies.

DIGITIZING LIBRARIES

The idea of a digitized library has been around since the early years of the Internet. A digital library stores its materials in a digital format, accessible by computers. Some digital libraries can be accessed locally; others can be accessed remotely through a computer network. Michael Hart founded Project Gutenberg, the oldest digital library, in 1971, 3 years before the

Internet went live. Hart's initial goal was to make 10,000 of the most-consulted books publicly available and free by the end of the century. The forward-thinking Hart named his project after the inventor of the movable type printing press, perhaps realizing that book digitization had the potential to revolutionize the way humans produce and read books as much as Gutenberg's invention had centuries earlier. At first, the process was slow for Hart and his fellow book-digitizing volunteers because they were forced to copy text manually until 1989. In the early 1990s, scanners and text-recognition software allowed them to somewhat automate the process.

Fast-forward to 2010. Project Gutenberg's free online library boasts more than 30,000 public domain works available for free download. Stanford University uses a robotic page-turning scanner machine to digitize 1,000 book pages an hour. Stanford's partner in digital library production is Google Books, which has scanned over 10 million books since it began Google Books in 2004. A Chinese company claims to have digitized more than half of all books that have been published in Chinese since 1949. In 2006, *The New York Times* estimated that humans have published at least 32 million books throughout history; the huge push for book digitization makes it seem entirely possible that nearly all known books could be digitized within 50 years (Kelly).

Some liken the prospect of these widely accessible, easily searchable, free libraries to the proliferation of free libraries in the 19th century, which led to a surge in literacy rates. One of

Project Gutenberg's stated goals is "to break down the bars of ignorance and illiteracy" through its library of digitized books (Hart & Newby, 2004). Digital libraries make a huge selection of texts available to people with Internet access, giving them the amazing potential to democratize knowledge. As Bill McCoy, the general manager of Adobe's e-publishing business, told *The New York Times* in 2006, "Some of us have thousands of books at home, can walk to wonderful big-box bookstores and well-stocked libraries and can get Amazon.com to deliver next day. The most dramatic effect of digital libraries will be not on us, the well-booked, but on the billions of people worldwide who are underserved by ordinary paper books (Hart & Newby, 2004)." Digitized libraries can make fragile materials available to browsers without damaging originals; academic libraries are also able to share important texts without shipping books across the country.

Google Books, the largest online library, is not run by an academic institution, though it does claim several as partners. The bulk of free digital books available from Google Books or elsewhere come from the public domain, which constitutes approximately 15 percent of all books. Google Books has made over a million of these titles fully and freely searchable and downloadable. Other works in the Google Books digital library include in-print texts whose publishers have worked out a deal with Google. Some of these titles have their full text available online; others allow only a limited number of page previews. As part of its partnership with publishers, a Google Books

search result will often provide links to the publisher's website and to booksellers.

Google Books ran into trouble, however, when it began to digitize the millions of books with unclear legal status, such as out-of-print works that weren't yet in the public domain. Many of these are considered orphan works, meaning that no one is exactly sure who owns their copyright. In 2004, the site announced plans to scan these texts and to make them searchable, but it would only show sentence-long snippets to searchers. Copyright holders could ask Google to remove these snippets at any time. Google claimed that this digitization plan would benefit authors, whose books would no longer linger in out-of-print limbo; it would also help researchers and readers, who would be able to locate (and perhaps purchase) previously unavailable works.

Publishers and authors did not agree with Google. Many objected to Google's plan to scan first and look into copyright ownership later; others saw Google's profiting from works still under copyright as a clear violation of intellectual property law. In 2005, the Authors Guild of America and the American Association of Publishers (AAP) sued Google for "massive copyright infringement." Google argued that it was essentially creating a massive online card catalog; the Authors Guild and AAP alleged that Google was attempting to monopolize information and profit from it. In 2008, Google agreed to a $125 million settlement with the publishers and the Authors Guild. Some of that money would go directly to copyright

holders; some would pay for legal fees; and some would go to found the Book Rights Registry, an independent nonprofit association that would ensure content users (like Google) are paying copyright owners. Copyright owners would get money from Google and from potential book sales; Google would get money from advertisers, book sales, and institutional subscriptions by libraries.

Still, not everyone agreed with the decision. The Open Book Alliance was formed by a diverse partnership of organizations, including Amazon, Internet Archive, and the National Writers Union, who fear that Google's proprietary control of so much copyrighted material was an antitrust violation. As the group states on its website:

> We will assert that any mass book digitization and publishing effort be open and competitive. The process of achieving this promise must be undertaken in the open, grounded in sound public policy and mindful of the need to promote long-term benefits for consumers rather than isolated commercial interests. The Open Book Alliance will counter Google, the Association of American Publishers and the Authors' [sic] Guild's scheme to monopolize the access, distribution and pricing of the largest digital database of books in the world.

Another concern, which was mentioned earlier, in the digital library world is digital decay. One librarian at Harvard University told *The New York Times* that "we don't really have any methodology [to preserve digital material] as of yet.... We just store the disks in our climate-controlled stacks, and we're

hoping for some kind of universal Harvard guidelines (Cohen, 2010)."

PRINT-ON-DEMAND AND SELF-PUBLISHING

Part of what made Gutenberg's printing press so revolutionary was that it allowed books to be mass produced. In medieval times, readers often commissioned a scribe to copy a text by hand, a process that could take months or even years. But despite their many conveniences, printed books carry their own risks for authors and publishers. Producing books in bulk means that publishers are taking a gamble, attempting to publish enough books to satisfy demand, but not so many that unwanted copies linger in warehouses. When a book doesn't sell as much as expected, the publisher may end up taking a loss if the costs of publishing the book exceed the revenue from its sale. Interestingly, modern technology has made it feasible for some authors and publishers to turn to an updated version of the medieval model of producing books on demand for specific customers, allowing them to avoid the risk of carrying

a large inventory of books that may or may not sell. Print-on-demand, a system in which a book is printed only after an order is received, and the increasing trend of self-publishing may reshape the industry in the 21st century.

Self-publishing—a system that involves an author, not a third-party company, being in charge of producing and publishing a work—is not a new concept. Many authors self-published works in their lifetimes, including Virginia Woolf and Oscar Wilde. More recently, popular books like *The Joy of Cooking* and the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series had their origins in self-publishing. Many authors also self-publish when they're unable to get support from the traditional publishing world. Daniel Suarez's techno-thriller *Daemon* was rejected by 48 agents before he opted for self-publishing. After creating interest on blogs, Suarez eventually got a two-book deal with Dutton, an imprint of Random House (McHugh, 2008). Additionally, self-publishing can be an attractive option for authors who want control over their own content. Instead of leaving decisions up to the publisher, authors can control their own editing, designing, and marketing.

One major challenge for authors who choose to strike out on their own is the stigma that's sometimes attached to self-published books. Until recent years, most self-published authors went through the so-called vanity presses, which charge writers a premium for published copies of their books. As the name implies, these types of self-publishing ventures were often seen as preying on writers' need to see their own

work in print. To justify the cost of printing, a minimum order of a thousand copies was standard, and unless authors were able to find an audience, they had little hope of selling them all. Because there was no quality control and vanity presses would usually publish anyone with money, some readers were skeptical of self-published books. Major retailers and distributors generally refused to carry them, meaning that authors had to rely on their own marketing efforts to sell the books. Before the advent of the Internet, this usually meant either selling copies in person or relying on mail-order catalogs, neither of which is a very reliable way to sell enough copies to recoup costs.

However, beginning in the early 2000s, self-publishing has changed dramatically. Advances made in publishing technology have made it easier for self-published books to more closely resemble traditionally published ones. Free professional typesetting software has allowed writers to format their text for the page; Adobe Photoshop and similar programs have made image editing and graphic design feasible for amateurs and professionals. The Internet has revolutionized marketing and distribution, allowing authors of books about niche subjects to reach a worldwide audience. As a result, many new Internet-based self-publishing companies have sprung up, offering a variety of services. Some companies, such as Lulu Enterprises and CreateSpace, feature a low-cost service without many bells and whistles; others offer a package of services that may include professional editing, cover design,

and marketing. The process has become streamlined as well. For example, to publish a book with Lulu, an author just has to upload a PDF of a properly formatted text file; decide what size, paper, and binding options to use; and make a cover using a premade template. Self-published books are generally quicker to produce and allow an author a higher share of the royalties, though it usually costs more on a per-book basis. As a result, self-published books often have a higher list price.

Whereas vanity publishers were stigmatized for charging authors sometimes thousands of dollars to publish their books, creating a book using the services of Lulu or CreateSpace doesn't cost the author anything. That's because users who upload their content aren't creating an actual, physical copy of a book; instead, they're essentially making a potential volume. With print-on-demand technology, books aren't printed until an order is placed, which significantly lowers the financial risk for self-publishers. Print-on-demand is especially useful for books with a limited or niche audience. Print-on-demand isn't only being used by self-publishers; both small presses and academic publishers are using the technology for older books without much of an audience. With print-on-demand, books that may only sell a few dozen copies a year can stay in print without the publisher having to worry about printing a full run of copies and being stuck with unsold inventory.

Although some self-published authors manage to find a huge audience, most don't. Bob Young, the founder of Lulu, told the *London Times* that his goal is to publish 1 million

books that each sell 100 copies, rather than 100 books that sell 1 million copies each (Whitworth, 2006). Lulu and other enterprising self-publishers disrupt the traditional notion of the publishing house, which acted as a sort of gatekeeper for the book industry—ushering a few talented, lucky writers in and keeping others out. In the world of self-publishing, there are no barriers—anyone with a book in a PDF file can whip up a nice-looking paperback in under 1 hour. This has democratized the industry, allowing writers who had been rejected by the traditional publishers to find their own audience. But it has also meant that a lot of writing with little literary merit has been published as well. Additionally, if a best seller in the Lulu world is a book that sells 500 copies, as Bob Young told the *London Times*, then few authors are going to be able to make a living through self-publishing. Indeed, most of the self-publishing success stories involve writers whose self-published efforts sold well enough to get them a book deal with one of the traditional publishing houses, a sign that for better or for worse, the traditional publishing model still has the social cachet and sales to dominate the industry.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- E-books have been increasing in popularity with

customers since the 1990s. However, the publishing industry is worried that setting the price for e-books at $9.99, as Amazon initially did for most titles, would turn consumers away from buying more expensive physical books. Amazon lost money on every $9.99 e-book but hoped that the low prices would act as an incentive to buy its e-book reader, the Kindle device. In 2010, Macmillan and other publishers forced Amazon to change its pricing model to give publishers more control over e-book prices.

- Digital libraries began with Project Gutenberg in 1971. Digitized books allow anyone with an Internet connection access to millions of volumes, and some advocates hope that digital libraries will lead to a rise in global literacy rates. Millions of books in the public domain are available for free download. Google Books, the largest digital library, has run into trouble with its plan to digitize as many books as possible, even books under current copyright. The Open Book Alliance accuses Google of monopolizing copyrighted content to make a profit.
- Self-publishing used to carry a social stigma as well as a high cost. Thanks to print-on-demand services, self-publishing is an increasingly popular option for amateur and professional writers. It appeals to authors who may have a niche audience or who want more control over their work. Print-on-demand makes it

possible for books to never go out of print.

EXERCISES

Go to the website of a company that specializes in print-on-demand or self-publishing services and examine some of the books featured there. Then, answer the following questions:

- How do these books look similar in form and content to books you'd expect to find in your local bookstore? How do they look different?
- How do prices differ from some of the major retail chains? Are the prices more similar to e-book, paperback, or hardcover prices?
- Would you be willing to purchase a book on one of these sites? Why or why not?

END-OF-CHAPTER ASSESSMENT

Review Questions

1. Section 1

    1. What ancient book form did the codex replace, and why was the codex an improvement on that form?
    2. What is mechanical movable type, and how did it lead to the Gutenberg Revolution?
    3. What is copyright, and how has its legal interpretation changed over time?
    4. How has the publishing industry evolved since the invention of the printing press?

2. Section 2

    1. How was 18th-century literature affected by the changing role of women during this period?
    2. What are some of the ways that authors tried to create a distinctive American style in the 19th century?
    3. What changes in American society were reflected by 20th-century literature?

3. Section 3

    1. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of hardcover books?
    2. What are the two kinds of paperback books, and how do they differ?
    3. What is an e-book, and how is it different from

hardcopy books?

4. Section 4

    1. What is blockbuster syndrome, and how does it affect the publishing industry?
    2. What factors led to the rise and decline of book superstores?
    3. How do price wars affect the publishing industry?

5. Section 5

    1. What are some ways that e-books are changing the publishing industry?
    2. What are the benefits and drawbacks of digital libraries?
    3. What is print-on-demand, and how does it influence the book industry?

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. One of the initial intentions of copyright law was to protect artists while also allowing a free market of ideas. Is copyright a good way to protect authors and their control over their work? Do you think copyright

law means the same now as it did in the past? What are some concerns that are changing the meaning of copyright protection?

2. If the Gutenberg Revolution was a time when advances in technology led to rapid changes in culture and society, will e-books and digital libraries lead to a similarly revolutionary change in the way we live our lives? Why or why not?
3. The publishing industry is facing a time of rapid change. What are some factors threatening the traditional publishing mode, and what are some ways the industry could respond to these potential dangers?
4. What impact do blockbuster books have on the book industry? And on readers?
5. Some people argue that e-books will destroy the publishing industry, while others think that they'll be its savior. How have e-books begun to transform the publishing industry, and what impact do you think they will have in the future?

CAREER CONNECTION

Publishing a book is no longer a simple thing. Authors have to contend with questions about copyright, movie rights, e-

books, and blog publicity. In confusing times, literary agents act as writers' sidekicks. They discover new writers and then help those writers negotiate an increasingly complex market.

Read the article "A Book in You" from *The New Yorker* (http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2004/05/31/040531ta_talk_radosh), which discusses a literary agent who specializes in signing book deals with bloggers. Now, explore literary agent Betsy Lerner's blog at http://betsylerner.wordpress.com. After exploring for a bit, read the "About Me" section (the link is at the top). These two sites will help you answer the following questions:

1. Why does Kate Lee think that blogs are a good place to look for new authors to represent?
2. What can you tell about Betsy Lerner's attitude about the publishing industry from her blog? What about her attitude toward the writers she works with? What does she appear to find rewarding about her job?
3. Based on Betsy Lerner's blog, identify the daily work required to be an agent. What aspects of the job appear challenging and engaging? What seems to take up the most time?

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SOURCE EDITION - CHAPTERS 4-6

Chapter 4: Newspapers

4.1 Newspapers
4.2 History of Newspapers
4.3 Different Styles and Models of Journalism
4.4 How Newspapers Control the Public's Access to Information and Impact American Pop Culture
4.5 Current Popular Trends in the Newspaper Industry
4.6 Online Journalism Redefines News

4.1 Newspapers

NEWSPAPER WARS

FIGURE 4.1



The two major newspapers, the *The Wall Street Journal* and the *The New York Times*, battle for their place in the print world.

dennis crowley – Wall Street Journal – CC BY 2.0; Aaron Edwards – no-more-war – CC BY-NC 2.0.

On April 26, 2010, *Wired* magazine proclaimed that a "clash of the titans" between two major newspapers, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times*, was about to take place in

the midst of an unprecedented downward spiral for the print medium (Burskirk, 2010). Rupert Murdoch, owner of *The Wall Street Journal*, had announced that his paper was launching a new section, one covering local stories north of Wall Street, something that had been part of *The New York Times*' focus since it first began over a century before. *New York Times* Chairman Arthur Sultzberger Jr. and CEO Janet Robinson pertly responded to the move, welcoming the new section and acknowledging the difficulties a startup can face when competing with the well-established *New York Times* (Burskirk, 2010).

Despite *The New York Times*' droll response, Murdoch's decision to cover local news indeed presented a threat to the newspaper, particularly as the two publications continue their respective moves from the print to the online market. In fact, some believe that *The Wall Street Journal*'s decision to launch the new section has very little to do with local coverage and everything to do with the Internet. Newspapers are in a perilous position: Traditional readership is declining even as papers are struggling to create a profitable online business model. Both *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times* are striving to remain relevant as competition is increasing and the print medium is becoming unprofitable.

In light of the challenges facing the newspaper industry, *The Wall Street Journal*'s new section may have a potentially catastrophic effect on *The New York Times*. *Wired* magazine described the decision, calling it "two-pronged" to "starve the

enemy and capture territory (Burskirk, 2010)." By offering advertising space at a discount in the new Metro section, *The Journal* would make money while partially cutting *The Times* off from some of its primary support. *Wired* magazine also noted that the additional material would be available to subscribers through the Internet, on smartphones, and on the iPad (Burskirk, 2010).

Attracting advertising revenue from *The New York Times* may give *The Wall Street Journal* the financial edge it needs to lead in the online news industry. As newspapers move away from print publications to online publications, a strong online presence may secure more readers and, in turn, more advertisers—and thus more revenue—in a challenging economic climate.

This emerging front in the ongoing battle between two of the country's largest newspapers reveals a problem the newspaper industry has been facing for some time. New York has long been a battleground for other newspapers, but before Murdoch's decision, these two papers coexisted peacefully for over 100 years, serving divergent readers by focusing on different stories. However, since the invention of radio, newspapers have worried about their future. Even though readership has been declining since the 1950s, the explosion of the Internet and the resulting accessibility of online news has led to an unprecedented drop in subscriptions since the beginning of the 21st century. Also hit hard by the struggling economy's reluctant advertisers, most newspapers have had to

cut costs. Some have reinvented their style to appeal to new audiences. Some, however, have simply closed. As this struggle for profit continues, it's no surprise that *The Wall Street Journal* is trying to outperform *The New York Times*. But how did newspapers get to this point? This chapter provides historical context of the newspaper medium and offers an in-depth examination of journalistic styles and trends to illuminate the mounting challenges for today's industry.

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4.4 How Newspapers Control the Public's Access to Information and Impact American Pop Culture

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe two ways that newspapers control stories.
2. Define watchdog journalism.
3. Describe how television has impacted journalistic styles.

Since 1896, *The New York Times* has printed the phrase "All the News That's Fit to Print" as its masthead motto. The phrase itself seems innocent enough, and it has been published for such a long time now that many probably skim over it without giving it a second thought. Yet, the phrase represents an interesting phenomenon in the newspaper industry: control. Papers have long been criticized for the way stories are presented, yet newspapers continue to print—and readers continue to buy them.

"ALL THE NEWS THAT'S FIT TO PRINT"

In 1997, *The New York Times* publicly claimed that it was "an independent newspaper, entirely fearless, free of ulterior influence and unselfishly devoted to the public welfare (Herman, 1998)." Despite this public proclamation of objectivity, the paper's publishers have been criticized for choosing which articles to print based on personal financial gain. In reaction to that statement, scholar Edward S. Herman wrote that the issue is that *The New York Times* "defin[es] public welfare in a manner acceptable to their elite audience and advertisers (Herman, 1998)." *The New York Times* has continually been accused of determining what stories are told. For example, during the 1993 debate over the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), *The New York Times* clearly supported the agreement. In doing so, the newspaper exercised editorial control over its publication and the information that went out to readers.

However, *The New York Times* is not the only newspaper to face accusations of controlling which stories are told. In his review of *Read All About It: The Corporate Takeover of America's Newspapers*, Steve Hoenisch, editor of *Criticism.com*, offers these harsh words about what drives the stories printed in today's newspapers:

I've always thought of daily newspapers as the guardians of our—meaning the public's—right to know. The guardians of truth, justice, and public welfare and all that. But who am I fooling? America's daily newspapers don't belong to us. Nor, for that matter, do they even seek to serve us any longer. They have more important concerns now: appeasing advertisers and enriching stockholders (Hoenisch).

More and more, as readership declines, newspapers must answer to advertisers and shareholders as they choose which stories to report on.

However, editorial control does not end there. Journalists determine not only what stories are told but also how those stories are presented. This issue is perhaps even more delicate than that of selection. Most newspaper readers still expect news to be reported objectively and demand that journalists present their stories in this manner. However, careful public scrutiny can burden journalists, while accusations of controlling information affect their affiliated newspapers. However, this scrutiny takes on importance as the public turns to journalists and newspapers to learn about the world.

Journalists are also expected to hold themselves to high standards of truth and originality. Fabrication and plagiarism are prohibited. If a journalist is caught using these tactics, then his or her career is likely to end for betraying the public's trust and for damaging the publication's reputation. For example, *The New York Times* reporter Jayson Blair lost his job in 2003 when his plagiary and fabrication were discovered,

and *The New Republic* journalist Stephen Glass was fired in 1998 for inventing stories, quotes, and sources.

Despite the critiques of the newspaper industry and its control over information, the majority of newspapers and journalists take their roles seriously. Editors work with journalists to verify sources and to double-check facts so readers are provided accurate information. In this way, the control that journalists and newspapers exert serves to benefit their readers, who can then be assured that articles printed are correct.

THE NEW YORK TIMES REVISITS OLD STORIES

Despite the criticism of *The New York Times*, the famous newspaper has been known to revisit their old stories to provide a new, more balanced view. One such example occurred in 2004 when, in response to criticism on their

handling of the Iraq War, *The New York Times* offered a statement of apology. The apology read:

> We have found a number of instances of coverage that was not as rigorous as it should have been. In some cases, information that was controversial then, and seems questionable now, was insufficiently qualified or allowed to stand unchallenged. Looking back, we wish we had been more aggressive in re-examining the claims as new evidence emerged—or failed to emerge (New York Times, 2004).

Although the apology was risky—it essentially admitted guilt in controlling a controversial story—*The New York Times* demonstrated a commitment to ethical journalism.

WATCHDOG JOURNALISM

One way that journalists control stories for the benefit of the public is by engaging in watchdog journalism. This form of

journalism provides the public with information about government officials or business owners while holding those officials to high standards of operation. Watchdog journalism is defined as:

> (1) independent scrutiny by the press of the activities of government, business and other public institutions, with an aim toward (2) documenting, questioning, and investigating those activities, to (3) provide publics and officials with timely information on issues of public concern (Bennett & Serrin, 2005).

One of the most famous examples of watchdog journalism is the role that Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein of *The Washington Post* played in uncovering information about the Watergate break-in and scandal that ultimately resulted in President Richard Nixon's resignation. Newspapers and journalists often laud watchdog journalism, one of the most important functions of newspapers, yet it is difficult to practice because it requires rigorous investigation, which in turn demands more time. Many journalists often try to keep up with news as it breaks, so journalists are not afforded the time to research the information—nor to hone the skills—required to write a watchdog story. "Surviving in the newsroom—doing watchdog stories—takes a great deal of personal and political skill. Reporters must have a sense of guerilla warfare tactics to do well in the newsroom (Bennett & Serrin, 2005)."

To be successful, watchdog journalists must investigate

stories, ask tough questions, and face the possibility of unpopularity to alert the public to corruption or mismanagement while elevating the public's expectations of the government. At the same time, readers can support newspapers that employ this style of journalism to encourage the press to engage in the challenging watchdog form of journalism. As scholars have observed, "Not surprisingly, watchdog journalism functions best when reporters understand it and news organizations and their audiences support it (Bennett & Serrin, 2005)."

IMPACT OF TELEVISION AND THE INTERNET ON PRINT

Newspapers have control over which stories are told and how those stories are presented. Just as the newspaper industry has changed dramatically over the years, journalistic writing styles have been transformed. Many times, such changes mirrored a trend shift in readership; since the 1950s, however, newspapers

have had to compete with television journalism and, more recently, the Internet. Both television and the Internet have profoundly affected newspaper audiences and journalistic styles.

CASE STUDY: *USA TODAY*

USA Today, founded in 1982 and known for its easy-to-read stories, is but one example of a paper that has altered its style to remain competitive with television and the Internet. In the past, newspapers placed their primary focus on the written word. Although some newspapers still maintain the use of written narration, many papers have shifted their techniques to attract a more television-savvy audience. In the case of *USA Today*, the emphasis lies on the second track—the visual story—dominated by large images accompanied by short written stories. This emphasis mimics the television presentation format, allowing the paper to cater to readers with short attention spans.

A perhaps unexpected shift in journalistic writing styles that derives from television is the more frequent use of present

tense, rather than past tense, in articles. This shift likely comes from television journalism's tendency to allow a story to develop as it is being told. This subtle but noticeable shift from past to present tense in narration sometimes brings a more dramatic element to news articles, which may attract readers who otherwise turn to television news programs for information.

Like many papers, *USA Today* has redesigned its image and style to keep up with the sharp immediacy of the Internet and with the entertainment value of television. In fact, the paper's management was so serious about their desire to compete with television that from 1988 to 1990 they mounted a syndicated television series titled *USA Today: The Television Show* (later retitled *USA Today on TV)* (Internet Movie Database). Despite its short run, the show demonstrated the paper's focus on reaching out to a visual audience, a core value that it has maintained to this day. Today, *USA Today* has established itself as a credible and reliable news source, despite its unorthodox approach to journalism.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Newspapers control which stories are told by selecting which articles make it to print. They also control how

stories are told by determining the way in which information is presented to their readers.

- Watchdog journalism is an investigative approach to reporting that aims to inform citizens of occurrences in government and businesses.
- Television has not only contributed to the decline of readership for newspapers but has also impacted visual and journalistic styles. Newspapers, such as *USA Today*, have been profoundly affected by the television industry. *USA Today* caters to television watchers by incorporating large images and short stories, while primarily employing the present tense to make it seem as though the story is unfolding before the reader.

EXERCISES

Please respond to the following writing prompts. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. Compare the journalistic styles of *USA Today* and *The Wall Street Journal*. Examine differences in the visual nature of the newspapers as well as in the journalistic style.
2. How has television affected these particular

newspapers?

3. What noticeable differences do you observe? Can you find any similarities?
4. How did each newspaper cover events differently? How did each newspaper's coverage change the focus and information told? Did you find any watchdog stories, and, if so, what were they?

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4.6 Online Journalism Redefines News

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe two ways in which online reporting may outperform traditional print reporting.
2. Explain the greatest challenges newspapers face as they transition to online journalism.

The proliferation of online communication has had a profound effect on the newspaper industry. As individuals turn to the Internet to receive news for free, traditional newspapers struggle to remain competitive and hold onto their traditional readers. However, the Internet's appeal goes beyond free content. This section delves further into the Internet and its influence on the print industry. The Internet and its role in media are explored in greater detail in Chapter 11 "The Internet and Social Media" of this textbook.

COMPETITION FROM BLOGS

Weblogs, or blogs, have offered a new take on the traditional world of journalism. Blogs feature news and commentary entries from one or more authors. However, journalists differ on whether the act of writing a blog, commonly known as blogging, is, in fact, a form of journalism.

Indeed, many old-school reporters do not believe blogging ranks as formal journalism. Unlike journalists, bloggers are not required to support their work with credible sources. This means that stories published on blogs are often neither verified

nor verifiable. As Jay Rosen, New York University journalism professor, writes, "Bloggers are speakers and writers of their own invention, at large in the public square. They're *participating* in the great game of influence called public opinion (Rosen, 2004)." Despite the blurry lines of what constitutes "true" journalism—and despite the fact that bloggers are not held to the same standards as journalists—many people still seek out blogs to learn about news. Thus, blogs have affected the news journalism industry. According to longtime print journalist and blogger Gina Chen, "Blogging has changed journalism, but it is not journalism (Chen, 2009)."

ADVANTAGES OVER PRINT MEDIA

Beyond the lack of accountability in blogging, blogs are free from the constraints of journalism in other ways that make them increasingly competitive with traditional print publications. Significantly, Internet publication allows writers to break news as soon as it occurs. Unlike a paper that

publishes only once a day, the Internet is constantly accessible, and information is ready at the click of a mouse.

In 1998, the Internet flexed its rising journalistic muscle by breaking a story before any major print publication: the Bill Clinton/Monica Lewinsky scandal. The *Drudge Report*, an online news website that primarily consists of links to stories, first made the story public, claiming to have learned of the scandal only after *Newsweek* magazine failed to publish it. On January 18, 1998, the story broke online with the title "*Newsweek* Kills Story on White House Intern. Blockbuster Report: 23-year-old, Former White House Intern, Sex Relationship with President." The report gave some details on the scandal, concluding the article with the phrase "The White House was busy checking the *Drudge Report* for details (Australian Politics, 1998)." This act revealed the power of the Internet because of its superiority in timeliness, threatening the relevancy of slower newspapers and news magazines.

Print media also continuously struggle with space constraints, another limit that the Internet is spared. As newspapers contemplate making the transition from print to online editions, several editors see the positive effect of this particular issue. N. Ram, editor in chief of *The Hindu*, claims, "One clear benefit online editions can provide is the scope this gives for accommodating more and longer articles.... There need be no space constraints, as in the print edition (Viswanathan, 2010)." With the endless writing space of the Internet, online writers have the freedom to explore topics

more fully, to provide more detail, and to print interviews or other texts in their entirety—opportunities that many print journalists have longed for since newspapers first began publishing.

Online writing also provides a forum for amateurs to enter the professional realm of writing. With cost-cutting forcing newspapers to lay off writers, more and more would-be journalists are turning to the Internet to find ways to enter the field. Interestingly, the blogosphere has launched the careers of journalists who otherwise may never have pursued a career in journalism. For example, blogger Molly Wizenberg founded the blog *Orangette* because she didn't know what to do with herself: "The only thing I knew was that, whatever I did, it had to involve food and writing (Wyke, 2009)." After *Orangette* became a successful food blog, Wizenberg transitioned into writing for a traditional media outlet: food magazine *Bon Appetit*.

ONLINE NEWSPAPERS

With declining readership and increasing competition from blogs, most newspapers have embraced the culture shift and have moved to online journalism. For many papers, this has meant creating an online version of their printed paper that readers will have access to from any location, at all times of the day. By 2010, over 10,000 newspapers had gone online. But some smaller papers—particularly those in two-paper communities—have not only started websites, but have also ceased publication of their printed papers entirely.

One such example is Seattle's *Post-Intelligencer*. In 2009, the newspaper stopped printing, "leaving the rival *Seattle Times* as the only big daily in town (Folkenflik, 2009)." As Steve Swartz, president of Hearst Newspapers and owner of the *Post-Intelligencer*, commented about the move to online-only printing, "Being the second newspaper in Seattle didn't work. We are very enthusiastic, however, about this experiment to create a digital-only business in Seattle with a robust community website at its core (Folkenflik, 2009)." For the *Post-Intelligencer*, the move meant a dramatic decrease in its number of staff journalists. The printed version of the paper employed 135 journalists, but the online version, Seattlepi.com, employs only two dozen. For Seattlepi.com, this shift has been doubly unusual because the online-only newspaper is not really like a traditional

newspaper at all. As Swartz articulated, "Very few people come to our website and try to re-create the experience of reading a newspaper—in other words, spending a half-hour to 45 minutes and really reading most of the articles. We don't find people do that on the Web (Folkenflik, 2009)." The online newspaper is, in reality, still trying to figure out what it is. Indeed, this is an uncomfortable position familiar to many online-only papers: trapped between the printed news world and the online world of blogs and unofficial websites.

During this transitional time for newspapers, many professional journalists are taking the opportunity to enter the blogosphere, the realm of bloggers on the Internet. Journalist bloggers, also known as beatbloggers, have begun to utilize blogs as "tool[s] to engage their readers, interact with them, use them as sources, crowdsource their ideas and invite them to contribute to the reporting process," says beatblogger Alana Taylor (Taylor, 2009). As beatblogging grows, online newspapers are harnessing the popularity of this new phenomenon and taking advantage of the resources provided by the vast Internet audience through crowdsourcing (outsourcing problem solving to a large group of people, usually volunteers). Blogs are becoming an increasingly prominent feature on news websites, and nearly every major newspaper website displays a link to the paper's official blogs on its homepage. This subtle addition to the web pages reflects the print industry's desire to remain relevant in an increasingly online world.

Even as print newspapers are making the transformation to the digital world with greater or less success, Internet news sites that were never print papers have begun to make waves. Sites such as *The Huffington Post*, *The Daily Beast*, and the *Drudge Report* are growing in popularity. For example, *The Huffington Post* displays the phrase "The Internet Newspaper: News, Blogs, Video, Community" as its masthead, reiterating its role and focus in today's media-savvy world (Huffington Post). In 2008, former *Vanity Fair* editor Tina Brown cofounded and began serving as editor in chief of *The Daily Beast*. On *The Daily Beast*'s website, Brown has noted its success: "I revel in the immediacy, the responsiveness, the real-time-ness. I used to be the impatient type. Now I'm the serene type. Because how can you be impatient when everything happens right now, instantly (Brown, 2009)?"

Some newspapers are also making even more dramatic transformations to keep up with the changing online world. In 2006, large newspaper conglomerate GateHouse Media began publishing under a Creative Commons license, giving noncommercial users access to content according to the license's specifications. The company made the change to draw in additional online viewers and, eventually, revenue for the newspapers. Writer at the Center for Citizen Media, Lisa Williams, explains in her article published by *PressThink.org*:

GateHouse's decision to CC license its content may be a response to the cut-and-paste world of weblogs, which frequently quote and

point to newspaper stories. Making it easier—and legal—for bloggers to quote stories at length means that bloggers are pointing their audience at that newspaper. Getting a boost in traffic from weblogs may have an impact on online advertising revenue, and links from weblogs also have an impact on how high a site's pages appear in search results from search engines such as Google. Higher traffic, and higher search engine rankings build a site's ability to make money on online ads (Williams, 2006).

GateHouse Media's decision to alter its newspapers' licensing agreement to boost advertising online reflects the biggest challenge facing the modern online newspaper industry: profit. Despite shrinking print-newspaper readership and rising online readership, print revenue remains much greater than digital revenue because the online industry is still determining how to make online newspapers profitable. As one article notes:

> The positive news is that good newspapers like *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Financial Times*, and *The Wall Street Journal* now provide better, richer, and more diverse content in their Internet editions.... The bad news is that the print media are yet to find a viable, let alone profitable, revenue model for their Internet journalism (Viswanathan, 2010).

The issue is not only that information on the Internet is free but also that advertising is far less expensive online. As National Public Radio (NPR) reports, "The online-only plan for newspapers remains an unproven financial model; there are

great savings by scrapping printing and delivery costs, but even greater lost revenues, since advertisers pay far more money for print ads than online ads (Folkenflik)."

FIGURE 4.11



Sources of Newspaper Revenue

Despite these challenges, newspapers both in print and online continue to seek new ways to provide the public with accurate, timely information. Newspapers have long been adapting to cultural paradigm shifts, and in the face of losing print newspapers altogether, the newspaper industry continues to reinvent itself to keep up with the digital world.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Print newspapers face increasing challenges from online media, particularly amateur blogs and professional online news operations.
- Internet reporting outperforms traditional print journalism both with its ability to break news as it happens and through its lack of space limitations. Still, nonprofessional Internet news is not subject to checks for credibility, so some readers and journalists remain skeptical.
- As newspapers move to online journalism, they must determine how to make that model profitable. Most online newspapers do not require subscriptions, and advertising is significantly less expensive online than it is in print.

EXERCISES

Please respond to the following writing prompts. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. Choose a topic on which to conduct research. Locate a blog, a print newspaper, and an online-only newspaper that have information about the topic.
2. What differences do you notice in style and in formatting?
3. Does one appeal to you over the others? Explain.
4. What advantages does each source have over the others? What disadvantages?
5. Consider the changes the print newspaper would need to make to become an online-only paper. What challenges would the print newspaper face in transitioning to an online medium?

END-OF-CHAPTER ASSESSMENT

Review Questions

1. Section 1

    1. Which European technological advancement of the 1400s forever changed the print industry?
    2. Which country's "weeklies" provided a stylistic format that many other papers followed?
    3. In what ways did the penny paper transform the

newspaper industry?

4. What is sensationalism and how did it become a prominent style in the journalism industry?

2. Section 2

    1. What are some challenges of objective journalism?
    2. What are the unique features of the inverted pyramid style of journalistic writing?
    3. How does literary journalism differ from traditional journalism?
    4. What are the differences between consensus journalism and conflict journalism?

3. Section 3

    1. In what two ways do newspapers control information?
    2. What are some of the defining features of watchdog journalism?
    3. Using *USA Today* as a model, in what tangible ways has television affected the newspaper industry and styles of journalism?

4. Section 4

    1. What are a few of the country's most prominent newspapers, and what distinguishes them from one another?

2. Name and briefly describe three technological advances that have affected newspaper readership.

5. Section 5

    1. In what ways might online reporting benefit readers' access to information?
    2. Why are print newspapers struggling as they transition to the online market?

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. Have sensationalism or yellow journalism retained any role in modern journalism? How might these styles impact current trends in reporting?
2. Do a majority of today's newspapers use objective journalism or interpretive journalism? Why might papers tend to favor one style of journalism over another?
3. In what ways has watchdog journalism transformed the newspaper industry? What are the potential benefits and pitfalls of watchdog journalism?
4. Explore the challenges that have arisen due to the growing number of newspaper chains in the United

States.

5. How has the Internet altered the way in which newspapers present news? How are print newspapers responding to the decline of subscribers and the rise of online readers?

CAREER CONNECTION

Although modern print newspapers increasingly face economic challenges and have reduced the number of journalists they have on staff, career opportunities still exist in newspaper journalism. Those desiring to enter the field may need to explore new ways of approaching journalism in a transforming industry.

Read the articles "Every Newspaper Journalist Should Start a Blog," written by Scott Karp, found at http://publishing2.com/2007/05/22/every-newspaper-journalist-should-start-a-blog/ , and "Writing the Freelance Newspaper Article," by Cliff Hightower, at http://www.fmwriters.com/Visionback/Issue32/Writefreenewspaper.htm .

Think about these two articles as you answer the following questions.

1. What does Scott Karp mean when he says that a blog entails "embracing the power and accepting the responsibility of *being* a publisher"? What should you do on your blog to do just that?
2. According to Karp, what is "the fundamental law of the web"?
3. Karp lists two journalists who have shown opposition to his article. What are the criticisms or caveats to Karp's main article that are discussed?
4. Describe the three suggestions that Cliff Hightower provides when thinking about a career as a freelance writer. How might you be able to begin incorporating those suggestions into your own writing?
5. What two texts does Hightower recommend as you embark on a career as a freelance writer?

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4.5 Current Popular Trends in the Newspaper Industry

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify newspapers with high circulations.
2. Describe the decline of the newspaper industry.

Popular media such as television and the Internet have forever changed the newspaper industry. To fully understand the impact that current technology is having on the newspaper industry, it is necessary to first examine the current state of the industry.

MAJOR PUBLICATIONS IN THE U.S. NEWSPAPER INDUSTRY

Although numerous papers exist in the United States, a few major publications dominate circulation and, thus, exert great influence on the newspaper industry. Each of these newspapers has its own unique journalistic and editorial style, relying on different topics and techniques to appeal to its readership.

USA TODAY

USA Today currently tops the popularity chart with a daily circulation of 2,281,831 (Newspapers). This national paper's easy-to-read content and visually focused layout contribute to its high readership numbers. Although the paper does not formally publish on weekends, it does have a partner paper titled *USA Weekend*. *USA Today* consists of four sections: news, money, sports, and life; for the ease of its readers, the newspaper color-codes each section. Owned by the Gannett

Company, the paper caters to its audience by opting for ease of comprehension over complexity.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Established in the late 1800s, *The Wall Street Journal* closely trails *USA Today*, with a circulation of 2,070,498 (Newspapers). In fact, *USA Today* and *The Wall Street Journal* have competed for the top circulation spot for many years. An international paper that focuses on business and financial news, *The Wall Street Journal* primarily uses written narration with few images. Recent changes to its layout, such as adding advertising on the front page and minimizing the size of the paper slightly to save on printing costs, have not dramatically shifted this long-standing focus. The paper runs between 50 and 96 pages per issue and gives its readers up-to-date information on the economy, business, and national and international financial news.

THE NEW YORK TIMES

The New York Times is another major publication, with circulation at 1,121,623 (Newspapers). Founded in 1851, the New York City–based paper is owned by the New York Times Company, which also publishes several smaller regional papers. The flagship paper contains three sections: news, opinion, and features. Although its articles tend to be narrative-driven, the paper does include images for many of its articles, creating a balance between the wordier layout of *The Wall Street Journal* and the highly visual *USA Today*. *The New York Times* publishes international stories along with more local stories in sections such as Arts, Theater, and Metro. The paper has also successfully established itself on the Internet, becoming one of the most popular online papers today.

LOS ANGELES TIMES

The *Los Angeles Times*—currently the only West Coast paper to crack the top 10 circulation list—has also contributed much to the newspaper industry. First published in 1881, the

California-based paper has a distribution of 907,977 (Newspapers). Perhaps the most unique feature of the paper is its Column One, which focuses on sometimes-bizarre stories meant to engage readers. Known for its investigative journalistic approach, the *Los Angeles Times* demands that its journalists "provide a rich, nuanced account" of the issues they cover (Los Angeles Times, 2007). By 2010, the paper had won 39 Pulitzer Prizes, including five gold medals for public service (Los Angeles Times).

THE WASHINGTON POST

First published in 1877, *The Washington Post* is Washington, DC's oldest and largest paper, with a daily circulation of 709,997 (Top 10 US Newspapers by Circulation). According to its editors, the paper aims to be "fair and free and wholesome in its outlook on public affairs and public men (Washington Post)." In this vein, *The Washington Post* has developed a strong investigative journalism style, perhaps most exemplified by its prominent investigation of the Watergate Scandal.

The paper also holds the principle of printing articles fit "for

the young as well as the old (Washington Post)." In 2003, *The Washington Post* launched a new section called the *Sunday Source* which targets the 18- to 34-year-old age group in an attempt to increase readership among younger audiences. This weekend supplement section focused on entertainment and lifestyle issues, like style, food, and fashion. Although it ceased publication in 2008, some of its regular features migrated to the regular paper. Like the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post* holds numerous Pulitzer Prizes for journalism.

CHICAGO TRIBUNE

One other major publication with a significant impact on the newspaper industry is the *Chicago Tribune*, wielding a circulation of 643,086. First established in 1847, the paper is often remembered for famously miscalling the 1948 presidential election with the headline of "Dewey Defeats Truman."

FIGURE 4.10



The *Chicago Tribune*'s inaccurate declaration of the results of the tight 1948 presidential election has become one of the most famous headlines of all time.

Despite this error, the *Chicago Tribune* has become known for its watchdog journalism, including a specific watchdog section for issues facing Chicago, like pollution, politics, and more. It proudly proclaims its commitment "to standing up for your interests and serving as your watchdog in the corridors of power (Chicago Tribune)."

Dave Winer – Dewey Defeats Truman – CC BY-SA 2.0.

DECLINING READERSHIP AND DECREASING REVENUES

Despite major newspapers' large circulations, newspapers as a whole are experiencing a dramatic decline in both subscribers and overall readership. For example, on February 27, 2009, Denver's *Rocky Mountain News* published its final issue after nearly 150 years in print. The front-page article "Goodbye, Colorado" reflected on the paper's long-standing history with the Denver community, observing that "It is with great sadness that we say goodbye to you today. Our time chronicling the life of Denver and Colorado, the nation and the world, is over (Rocky Mountain News, 2009)."

READERSHIP DECLINE

The story of *Rocky Mountain News* is neither unique nor entirely unexpected. For nearly a half-century, predictions of the disappearance of print newspapers have been an ongoing refrain. The fear of losing print media began in the 1940s with the arrival of the radio and television. Indeed, the number of daily papers has steadily decreased since the 1940s; in 1990, the number of U.S. dailies was just 1,611. By 2008, that number had further shrunk to 1,408 (Newspaper Association of America). But the numbers are not as clear-cut as they appear. As one report observed, "The root problems go back to the late 1940s, when the percentage of Americans reading newspapers began to drop. But for years the U.S. population was growing so much that circulation kept rising and then, after 1970s, remained stable (State of the Media, 2004)." During the 1970s when circulation stopped rising, more women were entering the workforce. By the 1990s when "circulation began to decline in absolute numbers," the number of women in the workforce was higher than had ever been previously experienced (State of the Media, 2004). With women at work, there were fewer people at home with leisure time for reading daily papers for their news. This, combined with television journalism's rising popularity and the emergence of the Internet, meant a significant decrease in newspaper

circulation. With newer, more immediate ways to get news, the disconnect between newspapers and consumers deepened.

Compounding the problem is newspapers' continuing struggle to attract younger readers. Many of these young readers simply did not grow up in households that subscribed to daily papers and so they do not turn to newspapers for information. However, the problem seems to be more complex "than fewer people developing the newspaper habit. People who used to read every day now read less often. Some people who used to read a newspaper have stopped altogether (State of the Media, 2004)."

Yet the most significant challenge to newspapers is certainly the Internet. As print readership declines, online readership has grown; fast, free access to breaking information contributes to the growing appeal of online news. Despite the increase in online news readers, that growth has not offset the drop in print readership. In 2008, the Pew Research Center conducted a news media consumption survey in which only

39 percent of participants claimed to having read a newspaper (either print or online) the day before, showing a drop from 43 percent in 2006. Meanwhile, readership of print newspapers fell from 34 percent to 25 percent in that time period (Dilling, 2009).

The study also observed that younger generations are primarily responsible for this shift to online reading. "The changes in reader habits seem to be similar amongst both Generation X and Y demographics, where marked increases

in consulting online news sources were observed (Dilling, 2009)." Baby boomers and older generations do, for the most part, still rely on printed newspapers for information. Perhaps this distinction between generations is not surprising. Younger readers grew up with the Internet and have developed different expectations about the speed, nature, and cost of information than have older generations. However, this trend suggests that online readership along with the general decline of news readers may make printed newspapers all but obsolete in the near future.

JOINT OPERATING AGREEMENTS

As readership began to decline in the 1970s and newspapers began experiencing greater competition within individual cities, Congress issued the Newspaper Preservation Act authorizing the structure of joint operating agreements (JOAs). The implementation of JOAs means that two newspapers could "share the cost of business, advertising, and circulation operations," which helped newspapers stay afloat

in the face of an ever-shrinking readership (Milstead, 2009). The Newspaper Preservation Act also ensured that two competing papers could keep their distinct news divisions but merge their business divisions.

At its peak, 28 newspaper JOAs existed across the United States, but as the industry declines at an increasingly rapid rate, JOAs are beginning to fail. With today's shrinking pool of readers, two newspapers simply cannot effectively function in one community. In 2009, only nine JOAs continued operations, largely because JOAs "don't eliminate the basic problem of one newspaper gaining the upper hand in circulation and, hence, advertising revenue (Milstead, 2009)." With advertising playing a key role in newspapers' financial survival, revenue loss is a critical blow. Additionally, "in recent years, of course, the Internet has thrown an even more dramatic wrench into the equation. Classified advertising has migrated to Internet sites like craigslist.org while traditional retail advertisers...can advertise via their own web sites (Milstead, 2009)." As more advertisers move away from the newspaper industry, more JOAs will likely crumble. The destruction of JOAs will, in turn, result in the loss of more newspapers.

NEWSPAPER CHAINS

As newspapers diminish in number and as newspaper owners find themselves in financial trouble, a dramatic increase in the consolidation of newspaper ownership has taken place. Today, many large companies own several papers across the country, buying independently owned papers to help them stay afloat. The change has been occurring for some time; in fact, "since 1975, more than two-thirds of independently owned newspapers...have disappeared (Free Press)." However, since 2000, newspaper consolidation has increased markedly as more papers are turning over control to larger companies.

In 2002, the 22 largest newspaper chains owned 39 percent of all the newspapers in the country (562 papers). Yet those papers represent 70 percent of daily circulation and 73 percent of Sunday. And their influence appears to be growing. These circulation percentages are a full percentage point higher than 2001 (State of the Media, 2004).

Among the 22 companies that own the largest percentage of the papers, four chains stand out: Gannett, the Tribune Company, the New York Times Company, and the McClatchy Company. Not only do these companies each own several papers across the country, but they also enjoy a higher-than-normal profit margin relative to smaller chains.

RECENT OWNERSHIP TRENDS

In addition to consolidation, the decline of print newspapers has brought about several changes in ownership as companies attempt to increase their revenue. In 2007, media mogul Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation purchased *The Wall Street Journal* with an unsolicited $5 billion bid, promising to "pour money into the *Journal* and its website and use his satellite television networks in Europe and Asia to spread *Journal* content the world over (Ahrens, 2007)." Murdoch has used the buyout to move the paper into the technological world, asking readers and newspapers to embrace change. In 2009, he published an article in *The Wall Street Journal* assuring his readers that "the future of journalism is more promising than ever—limited only by editors and producers unwilling to fight for their readers and viewers, or government using its heavy hand either to overregulate or subsidize us (Murdoch, 2009)." Murdoch believes that the hope of journalism lies in embracing the changing world and how its inhabitants receive news. Time will tell if he is correct.

Despite changes in power, the consolidation trend is leveling off. Even large chains must cut costs to avoid shuttering papers entirely. In January 2009, the newspaper industry experienced 2,252 layoffs; in total, the U.S.

newspaper industry lost 15,114 jobs that year (Murdoch, 2009). With the dual challenges of layoffs and decreasing readership, some in the journalism industry are beginning to explore other options for ownership, such as nonprofit ownership. As one article in the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* puts it, "It may be time for a more radical reinvention of the daily newspaper. The answer for some newspapers may be to adopt a nonprofit ownership structure that will enable them to seek philanthropic contributions and benefit from tax exemptions (Stehle, 2009)."

It is clear that the newspaper industry is on the brink of major change. Over the next several years, the industry will likely continue to experience a complete upheaval brought on by dwindling readership and major shifts in how individuals consume news. As newspapers scramble to find their footing in an ever-changing business, readers adapt and seek out trustworthy information in new ways.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Some key players in the U.S. newspaper market include the *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times, The Washington Post*, and the *Chicago Tribune*.
- Although readership has been declining since the

invention of the radio, the Internet has had the most profound effect on the newspaper industry as readers turn to free online sources of information.
- Financial challenges have led to the rise of ever-growing newspaper chains and the creation of JOAs. Nevertheless, newspapers continue to fold and lay off staff.

EXERCISES

Please respond to the following writing prompts. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. Pick a major national event that interests you. Then, select two papers of the six discussed in this section and explore the differences in how those newspapers reported on the story. How does the newspaper's audience affect the way in which a story is presented?
2. Spend some time exploring websites of several major newspapers. How have these papers been responding to growing online readership?

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4.3 Different Styles and Models of Journalism

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Explain how objective journalism differs from story-

driven journalism.
2. Describe the effect of objectivity on modern journalism.
3. Describe the unique nature of literary journalism.

Location, readership, political climate, and competition all contribute to rapid transformations in journalistic models and writing styles. Over time, however, certain styles—such as sensationalism—have faded or become linked with less serious publications, like tabloids, while others have developed to become prevalent in modern-day reporting. This section explores the nuanced differences among the most commonly used models of journalism.

OBJECTIVE VERSUS STORY-DRIVEN JOURNALISM

In the late 1800s, a majority of publishers believed that they would sell more papers by reaching out to specific groups. As

such, most major newspapers employed a partisan approach to writing, churning out political stories and using news to sway popular opinion. This all changed in 1896 when a then-failing paper, *The New York Times*, took a radical new approach to reporting: employing objectivity, or impartiality, to satisfy a wide range of readers.

THE RISE OF OBJECTIVE JOURNALISM

At the end of the 19th century, *The New York Times* found itself competing with the papers of Pulitzer and Hearst. The paper's publishers discovered that it was nearly impossible to stay afloat without using the sensationalist headlines popularized by its competitors. Although *The New York Times* publishers raised prices to pay the bills, the higher charge led to declining readership, and soon the paper went bankrupt. Adolph Ochs, owner of the once-failing *Chattanooga Times*, took a gamble and bought *The New York Times* in 1896. On August 18 of that year, Ochs made a bold move and announced that the paper would no longer follow the sensationalist style that made Pulitzer and

Hearst famous, but instead would be "clean, dignified, trustworthy and impartial (New York Times, 1935)."

This drastic change proved to be a success. *The New York Times* became the first of many papers to demonstrate that the press could be "economically as well as ethically successful (New York Times, 1935)." With the help of managing editor Carr Van Anda, the new motto "All the News That's Fit to Print," and lowered prices, *The New York Times* quickly turned into one of the most profitable impartial papers of all time. Since the newspaper's successful turnaround, publications around the world have followed *The New York Times*' objective journalistic style, demanding that reporters maintain a neutral voice in their writing.

THE INVERTED PYRAMID STYLE

One commonly employed technique in modern journalism is the inverted pyramid style. This style requires objectivity and involves structuring a story so that the most important details are listed first for ease of reading. In the inverted pyramid

format, the most fundamental facts of a story—typically the who, what, when, where, and why—appear at the top in the lead paragraph, with nonessential information in subsequent paragraphs. The style arose as a product of the telegraph. The inverted pyramid proved useful when telegraph connections failed in the middle of transmission; the editor still had the most important information at the beginning. Similarly, editors could quickly delete content from the bottom up to meet time and space requirements (Scanlan, 2003).

The reason for such writing is threefold. First, the style is helpful for writers, as this type of reporting is somewhat easier to complete in the short deadlines imposed on journalists, particularly in today's fast-paced news business. Second, the style benefits editors who can, if necessary, quickly cut the story from the bottom without losing vital information. Finally, the style keeps in mind traditional readers, most of who skim articles or only read a few paragraphs, but they can still learn most of the important information from this quick read.

FIGURE 4.8


Most important information leads the story
Subsequent paragraphs give additional facts
The least important information closes the story

INTERPRETIVE JOURNALISM

During the 1920s, objective journalism fell under critique as the world became more complex. Even though *The New York Times* continued to thrive, readers craved more than dry, objective stories. In 1923, *Time* magazine launched as the first major publication to step away from simple objectivity to try to provide readers with a more analytical interpretation of the news. As *Time* grew, people at some other publications took notice, and slowly editors began rethinking how they might reach out to readers in an increasingly interrelated world.

During the 1930s, two major events increased the desire for a new style of journalism: the Great Depression and the Nazi threat to global stability. Readers were no longer content with the who, what, where, when, and why of objective journalism. Instead, they craved analysis and a deeper explanation of the chaos surrounding them. Many papers responded with a new type of reporting that became known as interpretive journalism.

Interpretive journalism, following *Time*'s example, has grown in popularity since its inception in the 1920s and 1930s, and journalists use it to explain issues and to provide readers with a broader context for the stories that they encounter. According to Brant Houston, the executive director of Investigative Reporters and Editors Inc., an interpretive

journalist "goes beyond the basic facts of an event or topic to provide context, analysis, and possible consequences (Houston, 2008)." When this new style was first used, readers responded with great interest to the new editorial perspectives that newspapers were offering on events. But interpretive journalism posed a new problem for editors: the need to separate straight objective news from opinions and analysis. In response, many papers in the 1930s and 1940s "introduced weekend interpretations of the past week's events...and interpretive columnists with bylines (Ward, 2008)." As explained by Stephen J. A. Ward in his article, "Journalism Ethics," the goal of these weekend features was to "supplement objective reporting with an informed interpretation of world events (Ward, 2008)."

COMPETITION FROM BROADCASTING

The 1930s also saw the rise of broadcasting as radios became common in most U.S. households and as sound–picture recordings for newsreels became increasingly common. This broadcasting revolution introduced new dimensions to

journalism. Scholar Michael Schudson has noted that broadcast news "reflect[ed]...a new journalistic reality. The journalist, no longer merely the relayer of documents and messages, ha[d] become the interpreter of the news (Schudson, 1982)." However, just as radio furthered the interpretive journalistic style, it also created a new problem for print journalism, particularly newspapers.

Suddenly, free news from the radio offered competition to the pay news of newspapers. Scholar Robert W. McChesney has observed that, in the 1930s, "many elements of the newspaper industry opposed commercial broadcasting, often out of fear of losing ad revenues and circulation to the broadcasters (McChesney, 1992)." This fear led to a media war as papers claimed that radio was stealing their print stories. Radio outlets, however, believed they had equal right to news stories. According to Robert W. McChesney, "commercial broadcasters located their industry next to the newspaper industry as an icon of American freedom and culture (McChesney, 1992)." The debate had a major effect on interpretive journalism as radio and newspapers had to make decisions about whether to use an objective or interpretive format to remain competitive with each other.

The emergence of television during the 1950s created even more competition for newspapers. In response, paper publishers increased opinion-based articles, and many added what became known as op-ed pages. An op-ed page—short for *opposite the editorial page*—features opinion-based

columns typically produced by a writer or writers unaffiliated with the paper's editorial board. As op-ed pages grew, so did interpretive journalism. Distinct from news stories, editors and columnists presented opinions on a regular basis. By the 1960s, the interpretive style of reporting had begun to replace the older descriptive style (Patterson, 2002).

LITERARY JOURNALISM

Stemming from the development of interpretive journalism, literary journalism began to emerge during the 1960s. This style, made popular by journalists Tom Wolfe (formerly a strictly nonfiction writer) and Truman Capote, is often referred to as *new journalism* and combines factual reporting with sometimes fictional narration. Literary journalism follows neither the formulaic style of reporting of objective journalism nor the opinion-based analytical style of interpretive journalism. Instead, this art form—as it is often termed—brings voice and character to historical events,

focusing on the construction of the scene rather than on the retelling of the facts.

IMPORTANT LITERARY JOURNALISTS

FIGURE 4.9



The works of Tom Wolfe are some of the best examples of literary journalism of the 1960s.

erin williamson – tom wolfe – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Tom Wolfe was the first reporter to write in the literary journalistic style. In 1963, while his newspaper, New York's *Herald Tribune*, was on strike, *Esquire* magazine hired Wolfe to write an article on customized cars. Wolfe gathered the facts but struggled to turn his collected information into a written piece. His managing editor, Byron Dobell, suggested that he type up his notes so that *Esquire* could hire another writer to complete the article. Wolfe typed up a 49-page document that described his research and what he wanted to include in the story and sent it to Dobell. Dobell was so

impressed by this piece that he simply deleted the "Dear Byron" at the top of the letter and published the rest of Wolfe's letter in its entirety under the headline "There Goes (Varoom! Varoom!) That Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby." The article was a great success, and Wolfe, in time, became known as the father of new journalism. When he later returned to work at the *Herald Tribune*, Wolfe brought with him this new style, "fusing the stylistic features of fiction and the reportorial obligations of journalism (Kallan, 1992)."

Truman Capote responded to Wolfe's new style by writing *In Cold Blood*, which Capote termed a "nonfiction novel," in 1966 (Plimpton, 1966). The tale of an actual murder that had taken place on a Kansas farm some years earlier, the novel was based on numerous interviews and painstaking research. Capote claimed that he wrote the book because he wanted to exchange his "self-creative world...for the everyday objective world we all inhabit (Plimpton, 1966)." The book was praised for its straightforward, journalistic style. *New York Times* writer George Plimpton claimed that the book "is remarkable for its objectivity—nowhere, despite his involvement, does the author intrude (Plimpton, 1966)." After *In Cold Blood* was finished, Capote criticized Wolfe's style in an interview, commenting that Wolfe "[has] nothing to do with creative journalism," by claiming that Wolfe did not have the appropriate fiction-writing expertise (Plimpton, 1966). Despite the tension between these two writers, today

they are remembered for giving rise to a similar style in varying genres.

THE EFFECTS OF LITERARY JOURNALISM

Although literary journalism certainly affected newspaper reporting styles, it had a much greater impact on the magazine industry. Because they were bound by fewer restrictions on length and deadlines, magazines were more likely to publish this new writing style than were newspapers. Indeed, during the 1960s and 1970s, authors simulating the styles of both Wolfe and Capote flooded magazines such as *Esquire* and *The New Yorker* with articles.

Literary journalism also significantly influenced objective journalism. Many literary journalists believed that objectivity limited their ability to critique a story or a writer. Some claimed that objectivity in writing is impossible, as all journalists are somehow swayed by their own personal histories. Still others, including Wolfe, argued that objective journalism conveyed a "limited conception of the 'facts,'"

which "often effected an inaccurate, incomplete story that precluded readers from exercising informed judgment (Kallan)."

ADVOCACY JOURNALISM AND PRECISION JOURNALISM

The reactions of literary journalists to objective journalism encouraged the growth of two more types of journalism: advocacy journalism and precision journalism. Advocacy journalists promote a particular cause and intentionally adopt a biased, nonobjective viewpoint to do so effectively. However, serious advocate journalists adhere to strict guidelines, as "an advocate journalist is not the same as being an activist" according to journalist Sue Careless (Careless, 2000). In an article discussing advocacy journalism, Careless contrasted the role of an advocate journalist with the role of an activist. She encourages future advocate journalists by saying the following:

A journalist writing for the advocacy press should practice the same skills as any journalist. You don't fabricate or falsify. If you do you will destroy the credibility of both yourself as a working journalist and the cause you care so much about. News should never be propaganda. You don't fudge or suppress vital facts or present half-truths (Careless, 2000).

Despite the challenges and potential pitfalls inherent to advocacy journalism, this type of journalism has increased in popularity over the past several years. In 2007, *USA Today* reporter Peter Johnson stated, "Increasingly, journalists and talk-show hosts want to 'own' a niche issue or problem, find ways to solve it, and be associated with making this world a better place (Johnson, 2007)." In this manner, journalists across the world are employing the advocacy style to highlight issues they care about.

OPRAH WINFREY: ADVOCACY JOURNALIST

Television talk-show host and owner of production company Harpo Inc., Oprah Winfrey is one of the most successful, recognizable entrepreneurs of the late-20th and early-21st centuries. Winfrey has long been a news reporter, beginning in the late 1970s as a coanchor of an evening television program. She began hosting her own show in 1984, and in 2010, the *Oprah Winfrey Show* was one of the most popular TV programs on the air. Winfrey had long used her show as a platform for issues and concerns, making her one of the most famous advocacy journalists. While many praise Winfrey for using her celebrity to draw attention to causes she cares about, others criticize her techniques, claiming that she uses the advocacy style for self-promotion. As one critic writes, "I'm not sure how Oprah's endless self-promotion of how she spent millions

on a school in South Africa suddenly makes her 'own' the 'education niche.' She does own the trumpet-my-own-horn niche. But that's not 'journalism (Schlussel, 2007).'"

Yet despite this somewhat harsh critique, many view Winfrey as the leading example of positive advocacy journalism. Sara Grumbles claims in her blog "Breaking and Fitting the Mold": "Oprah Winfrey obviously practices advocacy journalism.... Winfrey does not fit the mold of a 'typical' journalist by today's standards. She has an agenda and she voices her opinions. She ha[d] her own op-ed page in the form of a million dollar television studio. Objectivity is not her strong point. Still, in my opinion she is a journalist (Grumbles, 2007)."

Regardless of the arguments about the value and reasoning underlying her technique, Winfrey unquestionably practices a form of advocacy journalism. In fact, thanks to her vast popularity, she may be the most compelling example of an advocacy journalist working today.

Precision journalism emerged in the 1970s. In this form, journalists turn to polls and studies to strengthen the accuracy of their articles. Philip Meyer, commonly acknowledged as the father of precision journalism, says that his intent is to "encourage my colleagues in journalism to apply the principles of scientific method to their tasks of gathering and presenting

the news (Meyer, 2002)." This type of journalism adds a new layer to objectivity in reporting, as articles no longer need to rely solely on anecdotal evidence; journalists can employ hard facts and figures to support their assertions. An example of precision journalism would be an article on voting patterns in a presidential election that cites data from exit polls. Precision journalism has become more popular as computers have become more prevalent. Many journalists currently use this type of writing.

CONSENSUS VERSUS CONFLICT NEWSPAPERS

Another important distinction within the field of journalism must be made between consensus journalism and conflict journalism. Consensus journalism typically takes place in smaller communities, where local newspapers generally serve as a forum for many different voices. Newspapers that

use consensus-style journalism provide community calendars and meeting notices and run articles on local schools, events, government, property crimes, and zoning. These newspapers can help build civic awareness and a sense of shared experience and responsibility among readers in a community. Often, business or political leaders in the community own consensus papers.

Conversely, conflict journalism, like that which is presented in national and international news articles in *The New York Times*, typically occurs in national or metropolitan dailies. Conflict journalists define news in terms of societal discord, covering events and issues that contravene perceived social norms. In this style of journalism, reporters act as watchdogs who monitor the government and its activities. Conflict journalists often present both sides of a story and pit ideas against one another to generate conflict and, therefore, attract a larger readership. Both conflict and consensus papers are widespread. However, because they serve different purposes and reach out to differing audiences, they largely do not compete with each other.

NICHE NEWSPAPERS

Niche newspapers represent one more model of newspapers. These publications, which reach out to a specific target group, are rising in popularity in the era of Internet. As Robert Courtemanche, a certified journalism educator, writes, "In the past, newspapers tried to be everything to every reader to gain circulation. That outdated concept does not work on the Internet where readers expect expert, niche content (Courtemanche, 2008)." Ethnic and minority papers are some of the most common forms of niche newspapers. In the United States—particularly in large cities such as New York—niche papers for numerous ethnic communities flourish. Some common types of U.S. niche papers are papers that cater to a specific ethnic or cultural group or to a group that speaks a particular language. Papers that cover issues affecting lesbians, gay men, and bisexual individuals—like the *Advocate*—and religion-oriented publications—like *The Christian Science Monitor*—are also niche papers.

THE UNDERGROUND PRESS

Some niche papers are part of the underground press. Popularized in the 1960s and 1970s as individuals sought to publish articles documenting their perception of social tensions and inequalities, the underground press typically caters to alternative and countercultural groups. Most of these papers are published on small budgets. Perhaps the most famous underground paper is New York's Pulitzer Prize–winning *Village Voice*. This newspaper was founded in 1955 and declares its role in the publishing industry by saying:

> The *Village Voice* introduced free-form, high-spirited and passionate journalism into the public discourse. As the nation's first and largest alternative newsweekly, the Voice maintains the same tradition of no-holds-barred reporting and criticism it first embraced when it began publishing fifty years ago (Village Voice).

Despite their at-times shoestring budgets, underground papers serve an important role in the media. By offering an alternative perspective to stories and by reaching out to niche groups through their writing, underground-press newspapers fill a unique need within the larger media marketplace. As journalism has evolved over the years, newspapers have adapted to serve the changing demands of readers.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Objective journalism began as a response to sensationalism and has continued in some form to this day. However, some media observers have argued that it is nearly impossible to remain entirely objective while reporting a story. One argument against objectivity is that journalists are human and are, therefore, biased to some degree. Many newspapers that promote objectivity put in place systems to help their journalists remain as objective as possible.
- Literary journalism combines the research and reporting of typical newspaper journalism with the writing style of fiction. While most newspaper journalists focus on facts, literary journalists tend to focus on the scene by evoking voices and characters inhabiting historical events. Famous early literary journalists include Tom Wolfe and Truman Capote.
- Other journalistic styles allow reporters and publications to narrow their editorial voice. Advocacy journalists encourage readers to support a particular cause. Consensus journalism encourages social and economic harmony, while conflict journalists present information in a way that focuses on views outside of the social norm.

- Niche newspapers—such as members of the underground press and those serving specific ethnic groups, racial groups, or speakers of a specific language—serve as important media outlets for distinct voices. The rise of the Internet and online journalism has brought niche newspapers more into the mainstream.

EXERCISES

Please respond to the following writing prompts. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. Find an objective newspaper article that includes several factual details. Rewrite the story in a literary journalistic style. How does the story differ from one genre to the other?
2. Was it difficult to transform an objective story into a piece of literary journalism? Explain.
3. Do you prefer reading an objective journalism piece or a literary journalism piece? Explain.

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4.2 History of Newspapers

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe the historical roots of the modern newspaper industry.
2. Explain the effect of the penny press on modern journalism.
3. Define sensationalism and yellow journalism as they relate to the newspaper industry.

Over the course of its long and complex history, the newspaper has undergone many transformations. Examining newspapers' historical roots can help shed some light on how and why the newspaper has evolved into the multifaceted medium that it is today. Scholars commonly credit the ancient Romans with publishing the first newspaper, *Acta Diurna*, or *daily doings*, in 59 BCE. Although no copies of this paper have survived, it is widely believed to have published chronicles of events, assemblies, births, deaths, and daily gossip.

In 1566, another ancestor of the modern newspaper appeared in Venice, Italy. These *avisi*, or gazettes, were handwritten and focused on politics and military conflicts. However, the absence of printing-press technology greatly

limited the circulation for both the *Acta Diurna* and the Venetian papers.

THE BIRTH OF THE PRINTING PRESS

FIGURE 4.2



Johannes Gutenberg's printing press exponentially

increased the rate at which printed materials could be reproduced.

Milestoned – Printing press – CC BY 2.0.

Johannes Gutenberg's printing press drastically changed the face of publishing. In 1440, Gutenberg invented a movable-type press that permitted the high-quality reproduction of printed materials at a rate of nearly 4,000 pages per day, or 1,000 times more than could be done by a scribe by hand. This innovation drove down the price of printed materials and, for the first time, made them accessible to a mass market. Overnight, the new printing press transformed the scope and reach of the newspaper, paving the way for modern-day journalism.

EUROPEAN ROOTS

The first weekly newspapers to employ Gutenberg's press emerged in 1609. Although the papers—*Relations: Aller Furnemmen*, printed by Johann Carolus, and *Aviso Relations over Zeitung*, printed by Lucas Schulte—did not name the

cities in which they were printed to avoid government persecution, their approximate location can be identified because of their use of the German language. Despite these concerns over persecution, the papers were a success, and newspapers quickly spread throughout Central Europe. Over the next 5 years, weeklies popped up in Basel, Frankfurt, Vienna, Hamburg, Berlin, and Amsterdam. In 1621, England printed its first paper under the title *Corante, or weekely newes from Italy, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Bohemia, France and the Low Countreys*. By 1641, a newspaper was printed in almost every country in Europe as publication spread to France, Italy, and Spain.

FIGURE 4.3



Newspapers are the descendants of the Dutch *corantos* and the German pamphlets of the 1600s.

POP – Ms. foliation? and pamphlet number – CC BY 2.0.

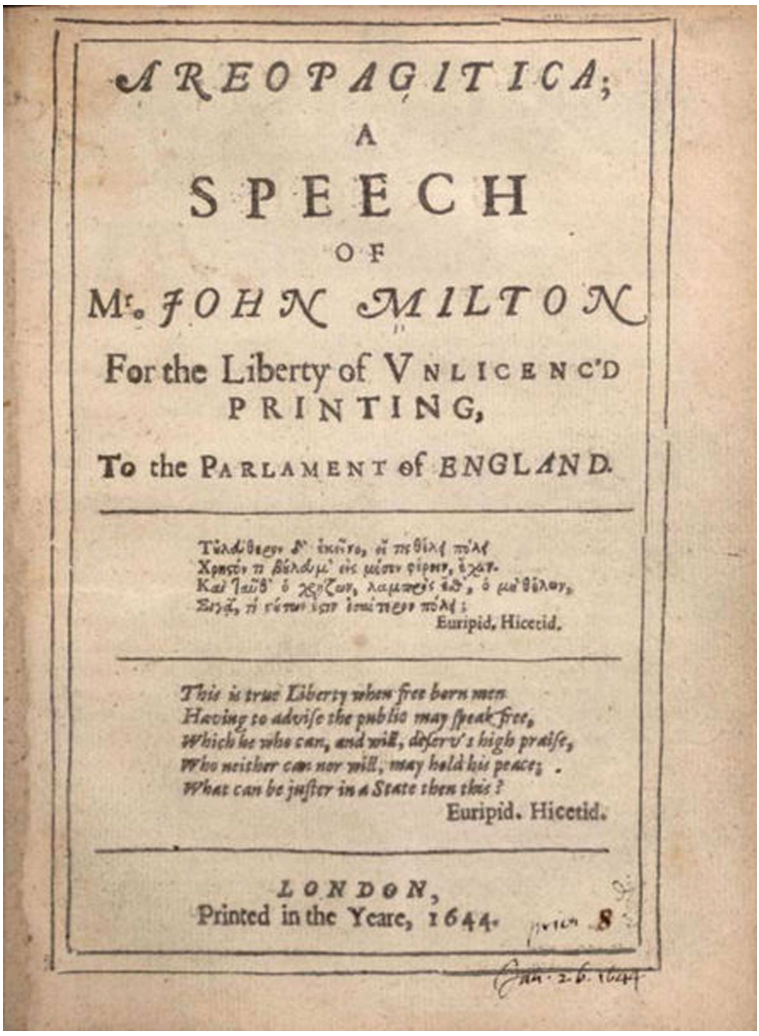
These early newspapers followed one of two major formats. The first was the Dutch-style *corantos*, a densely packed two- to four-page paper, while the second was the German-style pamphlet, a more expansive 8- to 24-page paper. Many publishers began printing in the Dutch format, but as their popularity grew, they changed to the larger German style.

GOVERNMENT CONTROL AND FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

Because many of these early publications were regulated by the government, they did not report on local news or events. However, when civil war broke out in England in 1641, as Oliver Cromwell and Parliament threatened and eventually overthrew King Charles I, citizens turned to local papers for coverage of these major events. In November 1641, a weekly paper titled *The Heads of Severall Proceedings in This Present Parliament* began focusing on domestic news (Goff, 2007). The paper fueled a discussion about the freedom of the press

that was later articulated in 1644 by John Milton in his famous treatise *Areopagitica*.

FIGURE 4.4



AREOPAGITICA;

A

SPEECH

OF

Mr. JOHN MILTON

For the Liberty of VNLICENC'D PRINTING,

To the PARLAMENT of ENGLAND.

Τὼλὰθεςν δ' ἐκεῖνο, οὗ πεθὶλ πὰλ
Χρηςὸν π βέλλμ' εἰς μέσον φέρη, ἔχει.
Καὶ ταῦθ' ὁ χρῄζων, λαμπρὸς ἐν, ὁ μὴ θέλων,
Σιγᾷ, τί γένοι' ἂν ἰσοπολιτεςὸν πόλει;
Euripid. Hicetid.

This is true Liberty when free born men
Having to advise the public may speak free,
Which he who can, and will, deserv's high praise,
Who neither can nor will, may hold his peace;
What can be juster in a State then this?
Euripid. Hicetid.

LONDON,
Printed in the Yeare, 1644.

Jan. 23. 1644

John Milton's 1644 *Areopagitica*, which criticized the British Parliament's role in regulating texts and helped pave the way for the freedom of the press.

Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

Although the *Areopagitica* focused primarily on Parliament's ban on certain books, it also addressed newspapers. Milton criticized the tight regulations on their content by stating, "Who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's image; but he who destroys a good book, kills reason itself, kills the image of God, as it were in the eye (Milton, 1644)." Despite Milton's emphasis on texts rather than on newspapers, the treatise had a major effect on printing regulations. In England, newspapers were freed from government control, and people began to understand the power of free press.

Papers took advantage of this newfound freedom and began publishing more frequently. With biweekly publications, papers had additional space to run advertisements and market reports. This changed the role of journalists from simple observers to active players in commerce, as business owners and investors grew to rely on the papers to market their products and to help them predict business developments. Once publishers noticed the growing popularity and profit potential of newspapers, they founded daily publications. In 1650, a German publisher began printing the world's oldest surviving daily paper, *Einkommende Zeitung*, and an English publisher followed suit in 1702 with London's *Daily Courant*. Such daily publications, which employed the relatively new format of headlines and the embellishment of illustrations, turned papers into vital fixtures in the everyday lives of citizens.

COLONIAL AMERICAN NEWSPAPERS

Newspapers did not come to the American colonies until September 25, 1690, when Benjamin Harris printed *Public Occurrences, Both FORREIGN and DOMESTICK*. Before fleeing to America for publishing an article about a purported Catholic plot against England, Harris had been a newspaper editor in England. The first article printed in his new colonial paper stated, "The Christianized Indians in some parts of Plimouth, have newly appointed a day of thanksgiving to God for his Mercy (Harris, 1690)." The other articles in *Public Occurrences*, however, were in line with Harris's previously more controversial style, and the publication folded after just one issue.

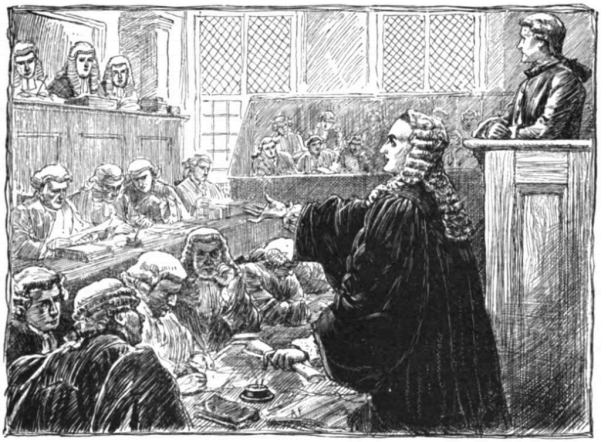
Fourteen years passed before the next American newspaper, *The Boston News-Letter*, launched. Fifteen years after that, *The Boston Gazette* began publication, followed immediately by the *American Weekly Mercury* in Philadelphia. Trying to avoid following in Harris's footsteps,

these early papers carefully eschewed political discussion to avoid offending colonial authorities. After a lengthy absence, politics reentered American papers in 1721, when James Franklin published a criticism of smallpox inoculations in the *New England Courant*. The following year, the paper accused the colonial government of failing to protect its citizens from pirates, which landed Franklin in jail.

After Franklin offended authorities once again for mocking religion, a court dictated that he was forbidden "to print or publish *The New England Courant*, or any other Pamphlet or Paper of the like Nature, except it be first Supervised by the Secretary of this Province (Massachusetts Historical Society)." Immediately following this order, Franklin turned over the paper to his younger brother, Benjamin. Benjamin Franklin, who went on to become a famous statesman and who played a major role in the American Revolution, also had a substantial impact on the printing industry as publisher of *The Pennsylvania Gazette* and the conceiver of subscription libraries.

THE TRIAL OF JOHN PETER ZENGER

FIGURE 4.5



The New York Weekly Journal founder John Peter Zenger brought controversial political discussion to the New York press.

Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

Boston was not the only city in which a newspaper discussed

politics. In 1733, John Peter Zenger founded *The New York Weekly Journal*. Zenger's paper soon began criticizing the newly appointed colonial governor, William Cosby, who had replaced members of the New York Supreme Court when he could not control them. In late 1734, Cosby had Zenger arrested, claiming that his paper contained "divers scandalous, virulent, false and seditious reflections (Archiving Early America)." Eight months later, prominent Philadelphia lawyer Andrew Hamilton defended Zenger in an important trial. Hamilton compelled the jury to consider the truth and whether or not what was printed was a fact. Ignoring the wishes of the judge, who disapproved of Zenger and his actions, the jury returned a not guilty verdict to the courtroom after only a short deliberation. Zenger's trial resulted in two significant movements in the march toward freedom of the press. First, the trial demonstrated to the papers that they could potentially print honest criticism of the government without fear of retribution. Second, the British became afraid that an American jury would never convict an American journalist.

With Zenger's verdict providing more freedom to the press and as some began to call for emancipation from England, newspapers became a conduit for political discussion. More conflicts between the British and the colonists forced papers to pick a side to support. While a majority of American papers challenged governmental authorities, a small number of Loyalist papers, such as James Rivington's *New York Gazetteer*,

gave voice to the pro-British side. Throughout the war, newspapers continued to publish information representing opposing viewpoints, and the partisan press was born. After the revolution, two opposing political parties—the Federalists and the Republicans—emerged, giving rise to partisan newspapers for each side.

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS IN THE EARLY UNITED STATES

In 1791, the nascent United States of America adopted the First Amendment as part of the Bill of Rights. This act states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceable to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances (Cornell University Law School)." In this one sentence, U.S. law formally guaranteed freedom of press.

However, as a reaction to harsh partisan writing, in 1798, Congress passed the Sedition Act, which declared that "writing, printing, uttering, or publishing any false, scandalous and malicious writing or writings against the government of the United States" was punishable by fine and imprisonment (Constitution Society, 1798). When Thomas Jefferson was elected president in 1800, he allowed the Sedition Act to lapse, claiming that he was lending himself to "a great experiment...to demonstrate the falsehood of the pretext that freedom of the press is incompatible with orderly government (University of Virginia)." This free-press experiment has continued to modern times.

NEWSPAPERS AS A FORM OF MASS MEDIA

As late as the early 1800s, newspapers were still quite expensive to print. Although daily papers had become more common and gave merchants up-to-date, vital trading information,

most were priced at about 6 cents a copy—well above what artisans and other working-class citizens could afford. As such, newspaper readership was limited to the elite.

THE PENNY PRESS

All that changed in September 1833 when Benjamin Day created *The Sun*. Printed on small, letter-sized pages, *The Sun* sold for just a penny. With the Industrial Revolution in full swing, Day employed the new steam-driven, two-cylinder press to print *The Sun*. While the old printing press was capable of printing approximately 125 papers per hour, this technologically improved version printed approximately 18,000 copies per hour. As he reached out to new readers, Day knew that he wanted to alter the way news was presented. He printed the paper's motto at the top of every front page of *The Sun*: "The object of this paper is to lay before the public, at a price within the means of every one, all the news of the day, and at the same time offer an advantageous medium for advertisements (Starr, 2004)."

The *Sun* sought out stories that would appeal to the new mainstream consumer. As such, the paper primarily published human-interest stories and police reports. Additionally, Day

left ample room for advertisements. Day's adoption of this new format and industrialized method of printing was a huge success. The *Sun* became the first paper to be printed by what became known as the penny press. Prior to the emergence of the penny press, the most popular paper, New York City's *Courier and Enquirer*, had sold 4,500 copies per day. By 1835, *The Sun* sold 15,000 copies per day.



THE SUN.

Number 384.] NEW-YORK, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 1833. [Price One Cent.

PUBLISHED DAILY,
BY BENJ. H. DAY & GEORGE W. WISNER,
[Office 168 William street.]

[From the Mirror of Fahsy.]

LES RAMASTIQUES.

The Ramastiques are strangers, who, like many others of the same genus, earn their scanty subsistence by the sagacity of their shapes. The promises of their industry implies an association of three persons, or at least two. This is their mode of proceeding, when they meet to appropriate to themselves the property of another. Three days break they go and commence their observation on the road, near some of the barriers, and then examine very carefully all persons and goers, until they pounce upon one of those individuals whose physiognomy and costume portray excessive simplicity. These men is a credulous and avaricious fellow: whether country man or not, such a one, whether coming or going, is always the individual they would fain get hold of, always presuming that he is not in want of money. If they meet down a kind of this fashion, one of them, generally the most insinuating of the three, accosts him, and pumps him in that neat and delicate way, that, by the application of some half dozen questions, brings them to the desirable knowledge of what may be the state of the financial department, the exchequer, or the sumpsimus fist. This information obtained, a telegraphic dexterity informs the confidant of the state of things. If they be favorable, a second stranger, who has gone on forward, lets fall a box, a purse, or a parcel, in such a way that the stranger cannot help remarking the circumstance. He makes his comment out aloud, but at the moment when he stoops to pick it up, his new acquaintance cries "hallow." They stop to see in what consists the treasure—it is generally a precious jewel, a rich ring, brilliant stud or button, earrings, &c. A writing always accompanies the gem; what does it contain? The gold seldom knows how to read, and of course his "new fledged comrade" knows no better than himself, and yet the paper may contain some necessary and useful information, but on whom to address it? they fear to commit any indiscretion. In the mean time they continue walking, and suddenly, as a matter of a course they see a man reading the posting bills, and nothing could be better for their purpose.

"Parbleu," says the comrade, we could not have met with a better person; here is a gentleman who will relieve us from our embarrassment, show him the paper, he will tell us the meaning of it; but let us be particularly careful not to speak to him of what we have found, for he might put in his claim to a share."

The stranger is delighted, promises prudence, and they go up to the reader, who, with much complaisance, complies with the request, and reads:

"Sir,—I send your ring set with fresh brilliants, for which you entrust his gold an two thousand seven hundred and twenty-five francs, for which this is a receipt.

"Raimbaud Jeweller."

Two thousand seven hundred and twenty-five francs! We may judge how the sound of such a sum, the half of which was to come to him, sounds musically in the ravished ear. The obliging reader (who in the third assumption does not fail to emphasize the figures; they think him for his complaisance, and go on their way.

The next step to be taken is on the subject of the jewel: Shall they return it? certainly not. If it belonged to a rich Jew,all very well; but whoever can purchase diamonds is a rich man, and what is a rich man not ten thousand seven hundred and twenty-five francs?—trifle, which he cares nothing about losing. If they will not return it, it is plain that they will keep it—but is it saying well where it is spoke.—But where can they sell it? to a jeweller? perhaps the proprietor of the jewel has already run about his bills, and then some jeweller's are on functions; the best way will be not to sell it for some time—The rich comprehends all these maxims perfectly. If it were possible, they would divide it on the spot and part good friends, but a division is impossible, and yet each wishes to go on his business. Finally, the situation begins to be quite unpleasant, and on both sides they begin to research their heads to produce an idea.

"If I had money," says the Ramastique, "I would willingly give it to you, but I have not a penny.—What can we do?"—then pausing for a moment, he resumes.

"Listen, you seem a good honest fellow, and I think I can trust you; advance to me a few hundred francs, and me when you have sold the thing, you can hand me over the residue, of course keeping back the interest of the sum you may advance to me. Of course you will leave me your address."

A proposition of the kind is nearly refused—the rustic, saddened by the appearance of a gain, of which he conceives the after-thought, enquires his name with pleasure: if it be not sufficiently stacked, he does not hesitate to add his watch. There were some who had given all, even to the buckles of their shoes. The bargain concluded, they separate with a promise to see each other again, although they have secretly determined not to do anything of the kind if they can avoid it. Out of twenty countrymen thus deceived, eighteen at least give a false name and a false address; and we cannot be astonished, because in this case, to be made a dupe, it is necessary first to be a rogue.

The Ramastiques are most frequently Jews, whose wives also follow this line of business. They usually frequent markets, where they prey on the credulity of farmers and cooks, who come from the provinces, and have not rubbed off the dust. A chain of brass exceedingly well gilt, as not to be with difficulty known from the real metal, composes the object with which they deceive the unsuspecting fools. One of the victims, a cooks-Mrs, some fine day to the police-office to make his complaint; they had stripped her of all her money, her ear-rings, her shawl, and her basket, containing the day's provisions, but on the possession of fifteen francs, which she was to take to them. As she was in earnest, she hastened back to keep her promise; but on her return she found neither woman, basket, nor provisions. Then only she had her suspicions aroused, which the confessions of a goldsmith, consulted too late, fully confirmed.

At a certain epoch, the Ramastiques were so numerous that they caused themselves at once in all quarters of the city. I have received on the same morning one and with, who came to complain of having been duped by Ramastiques, the husband in the fashionable Saint-Honore, the wife on the market of the Innocents.

"Never was such a fool as you," said the head of the family, the lord and master, to his unfortunate moiety, "to give your gold chain and ten francs for a copper chain."

"You are a bigger fool yourself! You have certainly a right to talk! go and take your pic to the Mont de Piete, a bit of trumpery glass! and it was please, my gentleman, you were not content with giving the money which you had about you, but must return to the house to get sixty francs, which were all we possessed, two table spoons and your watch."

"I did when I liked: it is no business of yours."

"It is just as you say, but I see that you have been gulled."

"Gulled, gulled! very fine, madam; I have not always allowed myself to be gulled by gossips, and had you not been gossiping according to custom—"

"If you had paused as your way, without stopping to chatter with the first comer—"

"I chatter! you, I chatter about my affairs, and you?—"

"Ah! your affairs are well attended to."

"As well as yours, I hope. Go away with you: when you get a gold chain again it shall be your own good

Years was not that went these times would use. I gave it you for your birth-day present, too, and you ought to be content with it; but you shall long for one three times before you get it."

"How well off we could be when we went to know the best!"

"Hold your tongue, you are a fool!"

"Ah, that's very fine! very fine, indeed! They taught you; so much the better, my dear! I only regret one thing, and that is, that they did not pay more out of you."

"Parbleu! you only let me what I knew before! It is not cruelly that I have just perceived that you cared very little about the interest of the house."

The couple left the office quarrelling. I know not how long the dispute lasted, but it is only reasonable to suppose that reflection terminated their mutual reproaches. Heaven forbid that, in hazard the reconciliation, they have not been compelled to come to blows!

When these Ramastiques are together, each of them has a costume adapted to the part he has to play. The one who accosts, is generally clad as a workman, a mason, boxmaker, carpenter: sometimes he affects the German or Italian accent, and appears to express himself in French with some difficulty. If he is old, he is a jolly fellow; if young, he is a coquette. The last pardant flower of the fellow-genus is to be distinguished by the length and width of his trowsers, one of the legs of which serve as the conductor of the object to make it reach the ground. The reader is generally more respectably dressed than the two others: it is he who puts on the duck coat and velvet collar, and is decked in a long sapped hat.

For a long time the Ramastiques were handed over to the correctional police, and the sentences of punishment which they underwent was five years' imprisonment. It seems to me that some distinction should be made with them, and that, when the swindling had been effected by aid of a forged writing, the offence assumed a graver character, and fell under the cognizance of the Court of Assizes.

I determined on availing myself of the first opportunity to present to the judicial authorities some observations on this head, and it was not slow to present itself. I apprehended the two silliest persons of the Quartier-St. Baboe, alias Marquis, and his accomplice. When I first gave my opinion, it was disregarded: they persisted in wishing to pass sentence upon the offenders according to the custom which those had consecrated; but I attacked to the charge with vigor, and the two sharpers, taken before a jury, were convicted, as forgers, to solitary imprisonment, and to be branded.

Dentical and Capital—An observer remarks that there are in France 1,200,000 physicians, and by another no less exact calculation, he has found the sick 1,200,027 in number. Again, there are 1,200,000 advocates, and sure 900,000 causes to plead; whence he concludes that neither the 300,000 unemployed advocates fill sick for want of work, there would be 300,000 physicians obliged to go with their arms crossed.

Fashions—In part of Surrey the waists of the ladies are distinguished by wearing a full blown or bladder stuff round their necks. The fabrical hears think that their dress is complete when they have a tail of fluttered birds, which wings on the nape of the neck. In the reign of Charles the Sixth of France, Queen Isabel of Bavaria, young and beautiful, displays a luxury unknown in former times; no more had ever before appeared so richly dressed. But her introduced the fashion of short waistcoat and neck; heart shaped bonnets were then in vogue; the two opposite extremities of the heart were gradually lengthened, till, at last, they formed a kind of horns. Juvenal des Ursins, on the subject, "the women are not great economists in dress, and wear horns of wonderful length and size, having on either side, two of such monstrous dimensions that it was impossible for them to pass through a door with them on. About this time the Carmelite Closter, a celebrated preacher, exercised his talents against these horns. The size of the horns continued increasing, and, to accommodate the fair wearers, the door ways were widened and heightened.

FIGURE 4.6

Benjamin Day's *Sun*, the first penny paper. The emergence of the penny press helped turn newspapers into a truly mass medium.

Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

Another early successful penny paper was James Gordon Bennett's *New York Morning Herald*, which was first published in 1835. Bennett made his mark on the publishing industry by offering nonpartisan political reporting. He also introduced more aggressive methods for gathering news, hiring both interviewers and foreign correspondents. His paper was the first to send a reporter to a crime scene to witness an investigation. In the 1860s, Bennett hired 63 war reporters to cover the U.S. Civil War. Although the *Herald* initially emphasized sensational news, it later became one of the country's most respected papers for its accurate reporting.

GROWTH OF WIRE SERVICES

Another major historical technological breakthrough for newspapers came when Samuel Morse invented the telegraph. Newspapers turned to emerging telegraph companies to receive up-to-date news briefs from cities across the globe. The significant expense of this service led to the formation of the Associated Press (AP) in 1846 as a cooperative arrangement of five major New York papers: the *New York Sun*, the *Journal of Commerce*, the *Courier and Enquirer*, the *New York Herald*, and the *Express*. The success of the Associated Press led to the development of wire services between major cities. According to the AP, this meant that editors were able to "actively collect news as it [broke], rather than gather already published news (Associated Press)." This collaboration between papers allowed for more reliable reporting, and the increased breadth of subject matter lent subscribing newspapers mass appeal for not only upper- but also middle- and working-class readers.

YELLOW JOURNALISM

In the late 1800s, *New York World* publisher Joseph Pulitzer developed a new journalistic style that relied on an intensified use of sensationalism—stories focused on crime, violence, emotion, and sex. Although he made major strides in the newspaper industry by creating an expanded section focusing on women and by pioneering the use of advertisements as news, Pulitzer relied largely on violence and sex in his headlines to sell more copies. Ironically, journalism's most prestigious award is named for him. His *New York World* became famous for such headlines as "Baptized in Blood" and "Little Lotta's Lovers (Fang, 1997)." This sensationalist style served as the forerunner for today's tabloids. Editors relied on shocking headlines to sell their papers, and although investigative journalism was predominant, editors often took liberties with how the story was told. Newspapers often printed an editor's interpretation of the story without maintaining objectivity.

At the same time Pulitzer was establishing the *New York World*, William Randolph Hearst—an admirer and principal competitor of Pulitzer—took over the *New York Journal*. Hearst's life partially inspired the 1941 classic film *Citizen Kane*. The battle between these two major New York newspapers escalated as Pulitzer and Hearst attempted to outsell one another. The papers slashed their prices back down to a penny, stole editors and reporters from each other, and

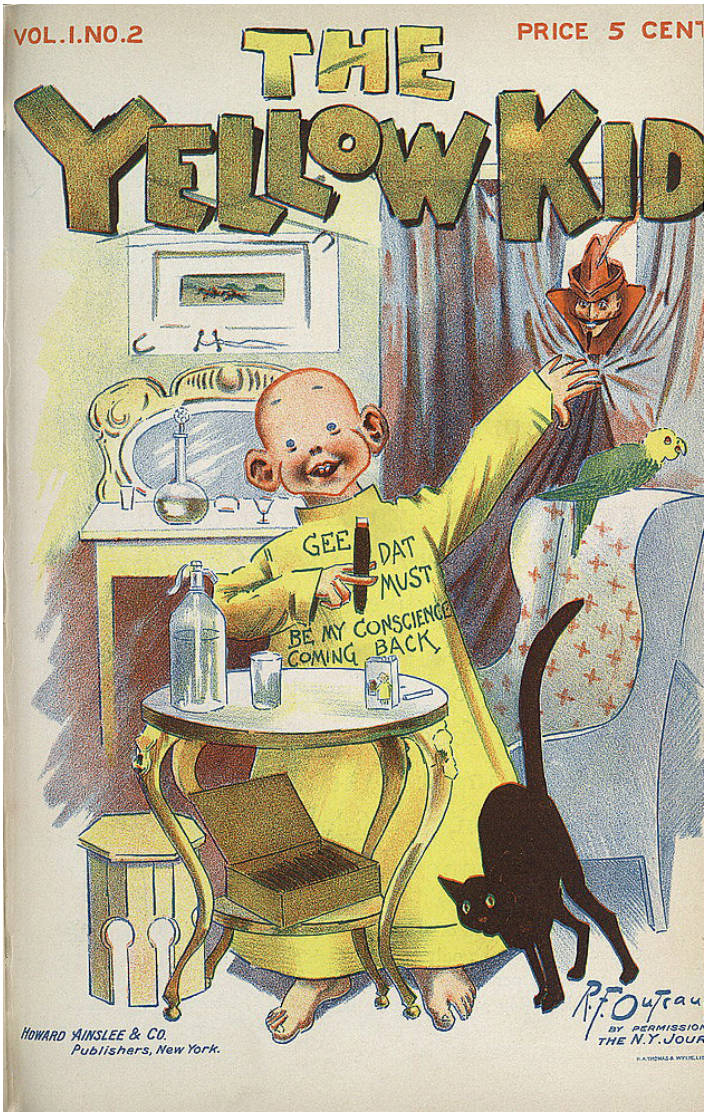
filled their papers with outrageous, sensationalist headlines. One conflict that inspired particularly sensationalized headlines was the Spanish-American War. Both Hearst and Pulitzer filled their papers with huge front-page headlines and gave bloody—if sometimes inaccurate—accounts of the war. As historian Richard K. Hines writes, "The American Press, especially 'yellow presses' such as William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal* [and] Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* ... sensationalized the brutality of the reconcentrado and the threat to American business interests. Journalists frequently embellished Spanish atrocities and invented others (Hines, 2002)."

COMICS AND STUNT JOURNALISM

As the publishers vied for readership, an entertaining new element was introduced to newspapers: the comic strip. In 1896, Hearst's *New York Journal* published R. F. Outcault's the *Yellow Kid* in an attempt to "attract immigrant readers who otherwise might not have bought an English-language paper (Yaszek, 1994)." Readers rushed to buy papers featuring

the successful yellow-nightshirt-wearing character. The cartoon "provoked a wave of 'gentle hysteria,' and was soon appearing on buttons, cracker tins, cigarette packs, and ladies' fans—and even as a character in a Broadway play (Yaszek, 1994)." Another effect of the cartoon's popularity was the creation of the term *yellow journalism* to describe the types of papers in which it appeared.

FIGURE 4.7



R. F. Outcault's the *Yellow Kid*, first published in William Randolf Hearst's *New York Journal* in 1896.

Pulitzer responded to the success of the *Yellow Kid* by introducing stunt journalism. The publisher hired journalist Elizabeth Cochrane, who wrote under the name Nellie Bly, to report on aspects of life that had previously been ignored by the publishing industry. Her first article focused on the New York City Lunatic Asylum on Blackwell Island. Bly feigned insanity and had herself committed to the infamous asylum. She recounted her experience in her first article, "Ten Days in a Madhouse." "It was a brilliant move. Her madhouse performance inaugurated the performative tactic that would become her trademark reporting style (Lutes, 2002)." Such articles brought Bly much notoriety and fame, and she became known as the first stunt journalist. Although stunts such as these were considered lowbrow entertainment and female stunt reporters were often criticized by more traditional journalists, Pulitzer's decision to hire Bly was a huge step for women in the newspaper business. Bly and her fellow stunt reporters "were the first newspaperwomen to move, as a group, from the women's pages to the front page, from society news into political and criminal news (Lutes, 2002)."

Despite the sometimes questionable tactics of both Hearst and Pulitzer, each man made significant contributions to the growing journalism industry. By 1922, Hearst, a ruthless publisher, had created the country's largest media-holding company. At that time, he owned 20 daily papers, 11 Sunday

papers, 2 wire services, 6 magazines, and a newsreel company. Likewise, toward the end of his life, Pulitzer turned his focus to establishing a school of journalism. In 1912, a year after his death and 10 years after Pulitzer had begun his educational campaign, classes opened at the Columbia University School of Journalism. At the time of its opening, the school had approximately 100 students from 21 countries. Additionally, in 1917, the first Pulitzer Prize was awarded for excellence in journalism.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Although newspapers have existed in some form since ancient Roman times, the modern newspaper primarily stems from German papers printed in the early 1600s with Gutenberg's printing press. Early European papers were based on two distinct models: the small, dense Dutch *corantos* and the larger, more expansive German weeklies. As papers began growing in popularity, many publishers started following the German style.
- The *Sun*, first published by Benjamin Day in 1833, was the first penny paper. Day minimized paper size, used a new two-cylinder steam-engine printing press, and slashed the price of the paper to a penny so more

citizens could afford a newspaper. By targeting his paper to a larger, more mainstream audience, Day transformed the newspaper industry and its readers.

- Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst were major competitors in the U.S. newspaper industry in the late 1800s. To compete with one another, the two employed sensationalism—the use of crime, sex, and scandal—to attract readers. This type of journalism became known as yellow journalism. Yellow journalism is known for misleading stories, inaccurate information, and exaggerated detail.

EXERCISES

Please respond to the following writing prompts. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. Examine one copy of a major daily newspaper and one copy of a popular tabloid. Carefully examine each publication's writing style. In what ways do the journals employ similar techniques, and in what ways do they differ?
2. Do you see any links back to the early newspaper trends that were discussed in this section? Describe

them.

3. How do the publications use their styles to reach out to their respective audiences?

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Chapter 5: Magazines

5.1 Magazines
5.2 History of Magazine Publishing
5.3 The Role of Magazines in the Development of American Popular Culture
5.4 Major Publications in the Magazine Industry
5.5 How Magazines Control the Public's Access to Information
5.6 Specialization of Magazines
5.7 Influence of the Internet on the Magazine Industry

5.1 Magazines

CHANGING TIMES, CHANGING TASTES

FIGURE 5.1



Jessica Spengler – 365.26: Magazines – CC BY 2.0.

On October 5, 2009, publisher Condé Nast announced that the November 2009 issue of respected food magazine *Gourmet* would be its last. The decision came as a shock to many readers who, since 1941, had believed that "*Gourmet* was to food what *Vogue* is to fashion, a magazine with a rich history and a perch high in the publishing firmament (Clifford, 2009)." Although Condé Nast folded three other publications—parenting magazine *Cookie* and bridal magazines *Elegant Bride* and *Modern Bride*—the elimination of *Gourmet* received the most attention because of the publication's long history and popularity. Although some

readers were angry about the sudden print halt, some understood that the closure was simply a reflection of a changing market.

Magazine publishers have been struggling with competition for advertising dollars for years. The magazine industry took a dramatic hit from the financial crisis that began in the fall of 2007, with many publications folding altogether, several moving to online-only models, and nearly all implementing mass layoffs to cut costs (Vocus Research). The crisis forced the high-end retailers that support Condé Nast magazines to slash their advertising budgets, and the subsequent decline in advertising revenue put the Condé Nast publications in jeopardy (Gross, 2009).

Although this appears to be grim news for an industry that has survived since the 17th century, magazines may not be truly obsolete. Many analysts are hopeful that the magazine industry, with its long, complex past, is simply in a slump. According to the Magazine Publishers of America, some 7,383 magazines appeared in publication in 2008 (Association of Magazine Media). The following year, media private-equity firm Veronis Suhler Stevenson predicted that magazine ad revenues would stabilize in 2013 (Clifford, 2009). Former *Newsweek* financial writer Daniel Gross—though admittedly biased—believes that the industry will strengthen. He describes the panic of some who refer to the demise of print media as symptoms of an "irrational depression surrounding print (Gross)." Yet even he admits that he may

be mistaken in his belief that the current downward trend is just a bump in the road. As Gross stated, "If I'm wrong, I may have to eat my words. And I'll be doubly sad because I won't have *Gourmet* to tell me what wine goes best with them (Gross)." So, many have begun to wonder, what will the future of the magazine business hold?

If *Gourmet*'s closure is any indication, the magazines of the future will be a product of cross-media integration, particularly between print and television. "Advertising support for luxurious magazines like *Gourmet* has dwindled, while grocery store advertisers have continued to buy pages at more accessible, celebrity-driven magazines like *Every Day with Rachel Ray*, which specializes in 30-minute meals, and *Food Network Magazine* (Clifford)." This trend suggests that the best—and perhaps only—way for magazines to remain viable is to gain an audience via another medium and then use that celebrity-driven status to sell the print product.

The magazine industry may change drastically over the next several years. This evolution may be affected by a number of variables, such as the Internet, a new generation of readers, the fluctuation of advertising costs, and the recovery from the 2008 recession. What remains to be seen is whether the magazine industry can continue to be a dominant force in American culture in the midst of these changes.

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5.2 History of Magazine Publishing

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe the European roots of the modern magazine.
2. Identify the changes that took place in magazine printing in the 1830s United States.
3. Describe the trends in journalism that arose during the 20th century.

Like the newspaper, the magazine has a complex history shaped by the cultures in which it developed. Examining the industry's roots and its transformation over time can contribute to a better understanding of the modern industry.

EARLY MAGAZINES

After the printing press became prevalent in Europe, early publishers began to conceptualize the magazine. Forerunners of the familiar modern magazine first appeared during the 17th century in the form of brochures, pamphlets, and almanacs. Soon, publishers realized that irregular publication schedules required too much time and energy. A gradual shift then occurred as publishers sought regular readers with specific interests. But the early magazine was unlike any other previous publication. It was not enough of a news source to be a newspaper, but it could not be considered pleasure reading either. Instead, early magazines occupied the middle ground between the two (Encyclopedia Britannica).

GERMANY, FRANCE, AND THE NETHERLANDS LEAD THE WAY

German theologian and poet Johann Rist published the first true magazine between 1663 and 1668. Titled *Erbauliche Monaths-Unterredungen*, or *Edifying Monthly Discussions*, Rist's publication inspired a number of others to begin printing literary journals across Europe: Denis de Sallo's French *Journal des Sçavans* (1665), the Royal Society's English *Philosophical Transactions* (1665), and Francesco Nazzari's Italian *Giomale de'letterati* (1668). In 1684, exiled Frenchman Pierre Bayle published *Novelles de la République des Lettres* in the Netherlands to escape French censorship. Profoundly affected by a general revival of learning during the 1600s, the publications inspired enthusiasm for education.

Another Frenchman, Jean Donneau de Vizé, published the first "periodical of amusement," *Le Mercure Galant* (later renamed *Mercure de France*), in 1672, which contained news, short stories, and poetry. This combination of news and pleasurable reading became incredibly popular, causing other publications to imitate the magazine (Encyclopedia Britannica). This lighter magazine catered to a different reader

than did the other, more intellectual publications of the day, offering articles for entertainment and enjoyment rather than for education.

With the arrival of the 18th century came an increase in literacy. Women, who enjoyed a considerable rise in literacy rates, began reading in record numbers. This growth affected the literary world as a whole, inspiring a large number of female writers to publish novels for female readers (Wolf). This influx of female readers also helped magazines flourish as more women sought out the publications as a source of knowledge and entertainment. In fact, many magazines jumped at the chance to reach out to women. The *Athenian Mercury*, the first magazine written specifically for women, appeared in 1693.

BRITISH MAGAZINES APPEAR

Much as in newspaper publication, Great Britain closely followed continental Europe's lead in producing magazines. During the early 18th century, three major influential

magazines published regularly in Great Britain: *Robinson Crusoe* author Daniel Defoe's the *Review*, Sir Richard Steele's the *Tatler*, and Joseph Addison and Steele's the *Spectator*.

All three of these publications were published either daily or several times a week. While they were supplied as frequently as newspapers, their content was closer to that of magazines. The *Review* focused primarily on domestic and foreign affairs and featured opinion-based political articles. The *Spectator* replaced the *Tatler*, which published from 1709 to 1711. Both *Tatler* and *Spectator* emphasized living and culture and frequently used humor to promote virtuous behavior (Wolf). *Tatler* and *Spectator*, in particular, drew a large number of female readers, and both magazines eventually added female-targeted publications: *Female Tatler* in 1709 and *Female Spectator* in 1744.

AMERICAN MAGAZINES

The first American magazines debuted in 1741, when Andrew Bradford's *American Magazine* and Benjamin

Franklin's *General Magazine* began publication in Philadelphia a mere 3 days apart from each other. Neither magazine lasted long, however; *American Magazine* folded after only 3 months and *General Magazine* after 6. The short-lived nature of the publications likely had less to do with the outlets themselves and more to do with the fact that they were "limited by too few readers with leisure time to read, high costs of publishing, and expensive distribution systems (Straubbhaar, et. al., 2009)." Regardless of this early setback, magazines began to flourish during the latter half of the 18th century, and by the end of the 1700s, more than 100 magazines had appeared in the nascent United States. Despite this large publication figure, typical colonial magazines still recorded low circulation figures and were considered highbrow.

MASS-APPEAL MAGAZINES

All this changed during the 1830s when publishers began taking advantage of a general decline in the cost of printing and mailing publications and started producing less-expensive magazines with a wider audience in mind. Magazine style also

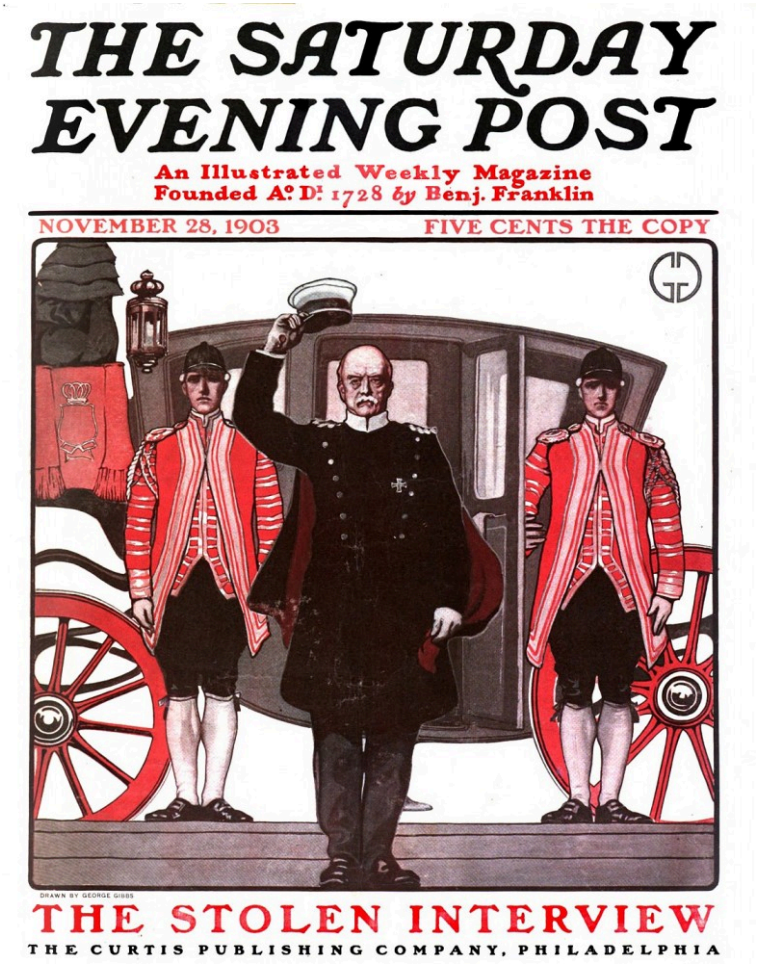
transformed. While early magazines focused on improvement and reason, later versions focused on amusement. No longer were magazines focused on the elite class. Publishers took advantage of their freshly expanded audience and began offering family magazines, children's magazines, and women's magazines. Women's publications again proved to be a highly lucrative market. One of the earliest American women's magazines was *Godey's Lady's Book*, a Philadelphia-based monthly that printed between 1830 and 1898. This particular magazine reached out to female readers by employing nearly 150 women.

THE SATURDAY EVENING POST

The first truly successful mass circulation magazine in the United States was *The Saturday Evening Post*. This weekly magazine first began printing in 1821 and remained in regular print production until 1969, when it briefly ceased circulation. However, in 1971 a new owner remodeled the magazine to focus on health and medical breakthroughs. From the time of its first publication in the early 1800s, *The Saturday Evening*

Post quickly grew in popularity; by 1855, it had a circulation of 90,000 copies per year (Saturday Evening Post). Widely recognized for transforming the look of the magazine, the publication was the first to put artwork on its cover, a decision that *The Saturday Evening Post* has said "connected readers intimately with the magazine as a whole (Saturday Evening Post)." Certainly, *The Saturday Evening Post* took advantage of the format by featuring the work of famous artists such as Norman Rockwell. Using such recognizable artists boosted circulation as "Americans everywhere recognized the art of the *Post* and eagerly awaited the next issue because of it (Saturday Evening Post)."

FIGURE 5.3



The Saturday Evening Post popularized the use of artwork on its cover, setting a standard for other publications to follow. Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

But *The Saturday Evening Post* did not only feature famous artists; it also published works by famous authors including F. Scott Fitzgerald, Sinclair Lewis, and Ring Lardner. The popularity of these writers contributed to the continuing success of the magazine.

YOUTH'S COMPANION

Another early U.S. mass magazine was *Youth's Companion*, which published between 1827 and 1929 when it merged with *The American Boy*. Based in Boston, Massachusetts, this periodical featured fairly religious content and developed a reputation as a wholesome magazine that encouraged young readers to be virtuous and pious. Eventually, the magazine sought to reach a larger, adult audience by including tame entertainment pieces. Nevertheless, the magazine in time began featuring the work of prominent writers for both children and adults and became "a literary force to be reckoned with (Nineteenth-Century American Children and What They Read)."

PRICE DECREASES ATTRACT LARGER AUDIENCES

While magazines such as *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Youth's Companion* were fairly popular, the industry still struggled to achieve widespread circulation. Most publications cost the then-hefty sum of 25 or 35 cents per issue, limiting readership to the relative few who could afford them. This all changed in 1893 when Samuel Sidney McClure began selling *McClure's Magazine*, originally a literary and political magazine, at the bargain price of only 15 cents per issue. The trend caught on. Soon, *Cosmopolitan* (founded 1886) began selling for 12.5 cents, while *Munsey Magazine* (1886–1929) sold for only 10 cents. All three of these periodicals were widely successful. Frank A. Munsey, owner of *Munsey Magazine*, estimated that between 1893 and 1899 "the ten-cent magazine increased the magazine-buying public from 250,000 to 750,000 persons (Encycopaedia Britannica)." For the first time, magazines could be sold for less than they cost to produce. Because of greater circulation, publications could charge more for advertising space and decrease the cost to the customer.

By 1900, advertising had become a crucial component of the magazine business. In the early days of the industry, many

publications attempted to keep advertisements out of their issues because of publishers' natural fondness toward literature and writing (Encycopaedia Britannica). However, once circulation increased, advertisers sought out space in magazines to reach the larger audience. Magazines responded by raising advertising rates, ultimately increasing their profitability. By the turn of the 20th century, advertising became the norm in magazines, particularly in some women's magazines, where advertisements accounted for nearly half of all content.

EARLY 20TH-CENTURY DEVELOPMENTS

The arrival of the 20th century brought with it new types of magazines, including news, business, and picture magazines.

In time, these types of publications came to dominate the industry and attract vast readerships.

NEWSMAGAZINES

As publishers became interested in succinctly presenting the fresh increase of worldwide information that technology made available during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, they designed the newsmagazine. In 1923, *Time* became the first newsmagazine that focused on world news. *Time* first began publication with the proposition that "people are uninformed because no publication has adapted itself to the time which busy men are able to spend simply keeping informed (Encycopaedia Britannica)." Although the periodical struggled during its early years, *Time* hit its stride in 1928 and its readership grew. The magazine's signature style of well-researched news presented in a succinct manner contributed greatly to its eventual success.

Several other newsmagazines came onto the market during this era as well. *Business Week* was founded in 1929 with a focus on the global market. *Forbes*, currently one of the most popular financial magazines, began printing in 1917 as a biweekly publication. In 1933, a former *Time* foreign editor

founded *Newsweek*, which now has a circulation of nearly 4 million readers. Today, *Newsweek* and *Time* continue to compete with each other, furthering a trend that began in the early years of *Newsweek*.

PICTURE MAGAZINES

Photojournalism, or the telling of stories through photography, also became popular during the early 20th century. Although magazines had been running illustrations since the 19th century, as photography grew in popularity so did picture magazines. The most influential picture magazine was Henry Luce's *Life*, which regularly published between 1936 and 1972. Within weeks of its initial publication, *Life* had a circulation of 1 million. In Luce's words, the publication aimed "to see life; to see the world; to witness great events; to watch the faces of the poor and the gestures of the proud; to see strange things (Encycopaedia Britannica)." It did not disappoint. Widely credited with establishing photojournalism, *Life* captured the attention of many on first read. With 96 large-format glossy pages, even the inaugural issue sold out. The opening photograph depicted an

obstetrician holding a newborn baby with the caption "Life begins."

While *Life* was the most influential picture magazine, it was certainly not the only photo-centric publication. Popular biweekly picture magazine *Look* printed between 1937 and 1971, claiming to compete with *Life* by reaching out to a larger audience. Although *Look* offered *Life* stiff competition during their almost identical print runs, the latter magazine is widely considered to have a greater legacy. Several other photo magazines—including *Focus*, *Peek*, *Foto*, *Pic*, and *Click*—also took their inspiration from *Life*.

INTO THE 21ST CENTURY

During the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the advent of online technology began to greatly affect both the magazine industry and the print media as a whole. Much like newspaper publishers, magazine publishers have had to rethink their

structure to reach out to an increasingly online market. The specifics of the changes made to the magazine industry will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The first magazine was published in Germany during the 17th century. The success of this publication led to the introduction of magazines across Europe. During the 17th and 18th centuries, publishers founded several different types of periodicals aimed at diverse audiences, including the elite and women.
- The 1830s triggered the arrival of mass circulation magazines in the United States. Publishers began offering less expensive magazines to a wider audience, promoting greater consumption of the print media.
- The introduction of newsmagazines and picture magazines dramatically changed the U.S. magazine industry during the early 20th century. Today, newsmagazines such as *Time* and *Newsweek* continue to dominate the magazine industry.

EXERCISES

Select a magazine that you enjoy reading and research its history. Then, answer the following writing prompts.

1. When was it founded, and by whom? Is the magazine similar to the early European and U.S. magazines? Why or why not?
2. How have its articles, photographs, and advertisements changed over the years? What changes in printing technologies in the 1830s had a direct influence on the way the magazine looks now?
3. Based on the way the magazine has adapted to trends in journalism during the 20th century, how do you predict the magazine will evolve in the future?

5.3 The Role of Magazines in the Development of American Popular Culture

Learning Objectives

Identify the change in regional and widespread advertising that occurred in the early 1900s.

Describe the backlash against pulp magazines in the 1930s.

Although magazines' great contributions to the development of culture and popular trends are today widely acknowledged, the industry has not always been influential. Because of the

significant costs associated with printing and mailing publications, magazines originally reached out only to regional audiences. Not until these expenses declined and advertising revenues increased were magazines able to justify the cost of mass circulation.

Advertising for a National Market

The late 19th century brought with it an increase in mass circulation for the U.S. magazine industry. This meant that magazines that had once targeted only a small part of the country suddenly began reaching a nationwide audience. In addition to the obvious benefit of increased magazine revenue, this shift to broad circulation caused an interesting phenomenon: the introduction of national trends. For the first time in U.S. history, mass circulation allowed news, stories, consumer goods, and fashions to be diffused and advertised to widespread, rather than regional, audiences. Mass circulation of magazines united the country as geographically diverse consumers read the same stories and saw the same advertisements.

Due to this growth in readership, advertisements became increasingly vital to the magazine industry. Advertisers sought to reach a large audience, and magazines willingly afforded them that opportunity, selling advertising space at higher rates. One business manager of Scribner's Monthly, an early popular magazine, solicited advertisements by discussing the readership boom:

The publishers of Scribner's Monthly will insert in each

number of the magazine certain pages devoted to advertisements of a character likely to interest magazine readers. These will not increase the postage, while they will add materially to the ability of the publishers to render their magazines readable and attractive. The press of advertisements upon our first number shows how quickly the claims of the new monthly upon the business public are recognized. Our edition will be very large, and it will have a national circulation. It is now well understood that a first-class popular magazine furnishes to all men who seek a national market the very best medium for advertising that exists (Ohmann, 1996).

That national market was an entirely new one for publishers and advertisers. By the 1930s, market research had become the norm for periodicals as magazines—and advertisers—worked to better understand what readers wanted in their publications. However, market research has its limits; many publishers instead embraced the potential of magazines to simply tell people what they want or need, thus solidifying the role of the magazine as a driver of popular culture. As one editor of Vogue articulated: "If we find out what people want, it's already too late (Encyclopaedia Britannica)."

Popular Literature in Magazines

Magazines offered a place not only for advertisers but also for authors and poets to reach a large audience. Several publications regularly hired both new and established authors to write stories. As circulation increased, so did the desire for these authors to publish their work.

Literary magazines enjoyed a boom during the 19th century, publishing some of the period's most important fiction. At one point or another, nearly every important American writer contributed to literary magazines; for example, Edgar Allan Poe, Mark Twain, Walt Whitman, and Ernest Hemingway all published in periodicals throughout their careers. Even writers working outside the country such as Ezra Pound and James Joyce sought out U.S. magazines to publish works that had been banned elsewhere.

Just as magazines offered authors a chance to display their writing to a large audience, they also allowed readers a taste of available literature. Even today, magazines print portions of books, which give readers a preview of the complete text. Portions of literary classics including Uncle Tom's Cabin, Walden, Moby-Dick, Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn, and Ulysses all made their debuts in magazines. Some novels—such as Edgar Rice Burroughs's Tarzan of the Apes, John Hersey's Hiroshima, and Ernest Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea—even appeared in magazines in full before being published in book form. The opportunity to publish in magazines has been invaluable for authors, but literary publications have also proved essential for the development of American culture. In publishing literary texts, journals have promoted now-classic stories, like the previously mentioned examples, that have defined American literary history and have shaped the U.S. story.

Pulp Magazines

During the late 1800s, a new type of magazine was established: the pulp magazine, an all-fiction publication named for its rough wood-pulp paper. At the time, dime novels did not qualify for the same inexpensive postal rates that magazines did—but the pulps did. Suddenly, individuals had the opportunity to read popular genre fiction in these cheap magazines, like Adventure, Horror Stories, Startling Stories, and Weird Tales.

Figure 5.4

5.3.0

Although pulp magazines first began publishing in 1896, they truly gained popularity during the early 20th century.

Terry McCombs – Pulp Heroes III: The Ladies – CC BY-NC 2.0.

Commonly acknowledged to be the invention of Frank Munsey, the pulps got their start as adventure magazines, but they eventually diverged into several categories such as love, detective, and western. The fiction stories did remarkably well until the mid-1930s, when newspaper comics first offered competition by printing collections on the same pulp paper. In 1937, however, the two genres collided with Detective Comics (where Batman made his first appearance), and the industry experienced a major boom. Although intended for children, the violent, horror-soaked comics drew a large adult audience. However, the graphic content of the pulp strips caused a stir, with the public divided on the nature of this new media. Defenders of the comics called them harmless, while critics

thought they would provoke people to mimic the violent subject matter (Encyclopaedia Britannica). Just as legislators struggle today with debates over censorship of TV, music, and the Internet, they did so with pulp comics as well. Negative backlash against pulp comics was encouraged through several articles published by child psychologist Fredric Wertham, who alleged that comics were leading children into lives of crime (Coville). In response to the controversy, an industry group known as the Association of Comics Magazine Publishers established a Publishers Code in 1948 with the aim of regulating the content of pulp comics. The Publishers Code was not well enforced, however; many publishers chose to ignore the code, and thus the controversy continued to rage. When Senate hearings raised the threat of government regulation in 1954, the pulp comics industry opted for self-censorship, and as a result the much stricter Comics Code Authority was established to control what material reached consumers.

In spite of the controversy surrounding the magazines, the industry flourished, and eventually new forms of pulp magazines emerged. Amazing Stories offered science fiction, and hand-drawn pinups filled so-called "Girlie Pulps," which found an audience despite experiencing a setback in 1934 when police seized 10,000 copies and burned them. Even though both new genres attracted outcry from the public for their indecency, the pulps continued to grow in popularity. Many have argued that the difficulties of the Great Depression

and the uncertainty of a looming world war made 1930s audiences ripe for the entertainment offered by fictional heroes, giving the pulp genre a ready audience.

Entertainment Magazines

The success of the pulps encouraged another major transformation in mainstream journalism: the rise of entertaining fan magazines. Typically focused on television, film, and music, fan magazines emerged as national entertainment during the early 20th century. During the early years of motion pictures, magazines such as Photoplay, Picture Play, Movie Mirror, and Movieland began publication, offering subscribers behind-the-scenes glimpses of well-known films. These periodicals were so successful that, as radio and television became popular, similar magazines came into existence to cover these new media. Television- and radio-focused magazines also provided weekly timetables of programs for their viewers and listeners. Although the emphasis of the fan magazine has changed over the years, even today much of the magazine industry is dominated by entertainment publications, like Entertainment Weekly, Rolling Stone, and TV Guide. In addition to providing entertainment news to readers, these publications are also useful to celebrities and media producers as a platform to market their new products.

Teen Magazines

During the 1940s, many publishers began pursuing teenagers, a previously ignored demographic. Seventeen magazine hit

shelves in 1944, setting the stage for later publications such as Tiger Beat and Teen People. These magazines targeted young women, offering stories on fashion, makeup, celebrity news, and lifestyles. Since their beginnings, teen magazines have kept their articles relatively brief, instead reaching their target audiences with bright and bold photos. Tiger Beat, for example, is known for its collaged covers featuring a popular teen celebrity of the moment. Teen magazines influence popular culture not only through their reporting on celebrities, but also through their articles on celebrity fashion, which readers use to adopt fashion trends worn by celebrities. Like entertainment magazines, teen magazines are also useful marketing tools for celebrities and other media producers.

During their early years, most teen magazines sought out readers in their late teens, even offering articles on colleges. Today, however, to reach a wider audience, these same magazines intentionally target the preteen market by featuring younger actors and including more teenage celebrity gossip. In doing so, the magazine industry continues to influence younger and younger audiences, thus making a greater impact on American popular culture.

Figure 5.5

5.3.1

First popularized during the 1940s, teen magazines today target both tween and teenage audiences, bringing popular culture to the young.

shuttergrl – September 1975 – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Do Magazine Images Negatively Influence Teenage Girls?

In 2006, the Madrid fashion show made headlines by banning overly thin models to project an image of beauty and health. According to fashion show organizers, "models had to be within a healthy weight range. That means a 5-foot-9 woman would need to be at least 125 pounds (Hellmich, 2006)." The debate over thin models has been around since the 1960s when model Twiggy entered the field. Since then, extremely thin models have ruled the runway despite claims to the contrary: Most American runway models measure within an inch or two of 6 feet tall, but weigh between just 120 and 124 pounds. With images of these models everywhere, many are growing concerned about their effect on American youths, especially teen girls.

Studies have shown that images of ultra-thin models distort women's views of health and beauty, leading to depression, extreme dieting, and eating disorders. In one study, 69 percent of girls said that fashion models influence their idea of the perfect body shape, despite the fact that most models weigh 23 percent less than the average female (Healthy Place). Another study showed that 68 percent of Stanford University undergraduate and graduate students felt worse about themselves after looking through a women's magazine (Healthy Place). Even more worrisome is the fact that young girls are being negatively affected by magazine images. "The number one wish for girls 11 to 17 is to be thinner, and girls as

young as 5 have expressed fears of getting fat. Eighty percent of 10-year-old girls have dieted (Healthy Place)."

Some companies are fighting the trend of using super-thin models in their advertising. In 2004, Dove launched its Dove Campaign for Real Beauty; the company claims the goal of the ad campaign is to "help free ourselves and the next generation from beauty stereotypes (Dove)." Dove's ads feature women of many shapes, sizes, and ethnicities in little more than their undergarments. Dove has stated that it plans to continue using "real women" in marketing campaigns (Morrell, 2007).

Celebrity Magazines

Celebrity gossip is not just reserved for teen audiences. A stroll through a supermarket checkout lane reveals the vast assortment of celebrity magazines—also known as gossip magazines—that target adults. First popularized during the 1970s, these celebrity magazines offer readers an inside perspective on the lives of the famous. Many magazines publish gossip stories that humanize celebrities by featuring them in a negative light. Despite the best efforts of celebrities and their agents, placement in these magazines can make or break celebrities' reputations and foster much drama within the celebrity community. Because of intense competition for stories, celebrity magazines may pay large sums of money to celebrities or other sources for exclusive stories and photos. Celebrity magazines will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

Key Takeaways

When magazines began distributing nationwide, advertising underwent significant changes. Advertisers took advantage of the widespread audience and started marketing national trends. Advertising costs skyrocketed, as individuals across the country would now see and be influenced by the ads in magazines.

During the 20th century, new types of magazines—such as literary magazines, pulp magazines, fan magazines, teen magazines, and celebrity magazines—all contributed to shared pop culture.

Exercises

Look through a teen magazine like Seventeen or CosmoGIRL! and examine the models present in them. Then, answer the following writing prompts.

Do you see any images that might negatively affect young readers? Do you see any images that promote a healthy body image? How might magazines alter their advertisements and articles to more positively affect young audiences?

How does this magazine differ from the magazines in the early 1900s? What advertising differences do you see?

How might the backlash against pulp magazines in the 1930s have contributed to the rise of teen magazines?

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5.4 Major Publications in the Magazine Industry

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. List the top three highest circulation journals.
2. Discuss the controversial transformation of *Cosmopolitan* magazine.

Magazines have evolved significantly since their inception. Magazines have affected the world by bringing news, entertainment, literature, and photography to their readers. Additionally, the magazine industry has profoundly affected U.S. popular culture. As magazines have developed over time, individual publications have targeted specific groups and have found particular niches. This section explores a number of popular periodicals and their effect on their target audiences.

HIGH-CIRCULATION MAGAZINES

The top 10 highest circulating magazines in the United States differ greatly in style and audience. From *AARP* to *Better Homes and Gardens*, from *National Geographic* to *Family Circle*, the list demonstrates the wide pool of readers and interests attracted to the medium. This section will explore the top three publications: *AARP The Magazine*, *AARP Bulletin*, and *Reader's Digest*.

AARP THE MAGAZINE AND *AARP BULLETIN*

Some may be surprised to learn that the two magazines with the highest circulation in the United States are not ones readily available to buy at a newsstand or grocery store: *AARP The Magazine* and *AARP Bulletin*. Published by the nonprofit organization AARP (formerly known as the American

Association of Retired Persons), both are automatically sent to the organization's more than 40 million members.

A bimonthly publication that is "geared exclusively towards 50+ Americans seeking to enhance their quality of life as they age (AARP)," *AARP The Magazine* publishes lifestyle articles and includes sections dedicated to health, money, work, relationships, and travel, among others. Its mission statement reads:

> *AARP The Magazine* provides three editorial versions targeted to different life stages (50–59, 60–69, 70+) to empower readers with editorial written just for them. Annual editorial packages, strong service journalism, and celebrity profiles will be presented in a warm, vibrant and inviting format to encourage readers to reflect, engage and enjoy (AARP).

AARP also publishes *AARP Bulletin*, which is "a monthly news publication that reaches influential consumers and policymakers (AARP)." Rather than presenting lifestyle stories, this publication focuses on news stories of interest to its target audience.

> *AARP Bulletin* chronicles and interprets important social issues that affect 50+ Americans. News, balanced analysis and concise stories, in an accessible format, motivates these influential readers to engage in public policy on health care, financial well-being and consumer protection (AARP).

READER'S DIGEST

Reader's Digest boasts the third-highest circulation among U.S. magazines. First published in 1922 as a "digest of condensed articles of topical interest and entertainment value taken from other periodicals (Encyclopaedia Britannica)," this famous pocket-sized journal was first produced on a low budget by a husband and wife team who believed the magazine would sell despite numerous rejections from magazine publishers (Encyclopaedia Britannica). They were right. *Reader's Digest* was an almost immediate success and now regularly outsells competitors. The monthly magazine has subscribers around the globe and seeks to "create products that inform, enrich, entertain and inspire people of all ages and cultures around the world (Reader's Digest)."

NEWS MAGAZINES

As discussed earlier in this chapter, newsmagazines became

popular during the 1920s. Today, newsmagazines make up a large portion of magazine sales, with multiple news periodicals ranking in the top 30 for circulation. Over time, a number of newsmagazines have established themselves in the industry, including *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News & World Report*.

NEWSWEEK

Newsweek's initial February 1933 issue was called *News-Week* and featured seven different photographs from the week's news on its cover. The weekly publication currently "offers comprehensive coverage of world events with a global network of correspondents, reporters and editors covering national and international affairs, business, science and technology, society and the arts and entertainment (Newsweek, 2007)." Relying on a wide array of reporters, *Newsweek* also uniquely publishes a reader-penned section titled "My Turn." The magazine has been hugely successful over the years and holds more prestigious National Magazine Awards than any other newsweekly.

The magazine has not been without its trials, however. In November of 2009 *Newsweek* published an article discussing Sarah Palin's book, *Going Rogue: An American Life*. The cover

of that issue featured a photo of Palin that had been used in an issue of *Runner's World* with Palin in running attire. The words "How Do You Solve a Problem Like Sarah?" were splayed across the photograph.

FIGURE 5.6



Sarah Palin was the subject of a controversial cover of *Newsweek*, published in November 2009, that earned the magazine much criticism.

FairbanksMike – Saying Goodbye – CC BY 2.0.

The cover caused a popular backlash, with readers calling it sexist and unfair. One reader suggested that *Newsweek* would never print a photograph of Barack Obama in such attire. In response, *Newsweek* published a photo of President Obama in his swim trunks in its following issue, although this photo was smaller and on an inside page rather than on the cover.

TIME

Time has remained an influential publication during the decades since its inception. Today, the publication prides itself on its "rare convergence of incisive reporting, lively writing and world-renowned photography," which combined have earned it the praise of being "journalism at its best (Time)." The magazine is divided into four main sections: Briefing, The Well, Life, and Arts. Briefing includes concise stories on major news events in the United States and other countries. The

Well section features longer articles, including the cover story and articles on world and business. Life contains stories on health, science, technology, and the environment. Finally, Arts consists of reviews of theater, film, literature, music, exhibits, and architecture. Like *Newsweek*, *Time* has won numerous awards and prides itself on being "the guide through chaos" in an era of information overload (Time).

U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT

Created through the merger of a newspaper and a magazine, *U.S. News & World Report* has gained great prestige over the years. In 1933—the same year that *Newsweek* debuted—journalist David Lawrence began publishing a weekly newspaper called the *United States News*. Six years later, he founded a weekly magazine titled *World Report*. In 1948, the two weeklies merged to create the new *U.S. News & World Report*. The magazine's focus is similar to those of *Time* and *Newsweek*, but *U.S. News & World Report* concentrates more on political, economic,

health, and education stories, perhaps in part because it is based in Washington, DC. Although for most of its long history the magazine published weekly, in 2008 it announced its transition to a monthly printing schedule, vowing to concentrate on its website.

The magazine is perhaps best known for its annual ranking of U.S. colleges. This ranking began in 1983 and has since evolved to include newsstand books of *America's Best Colleges* and *America's Best Graduate Schools*. Since the ranking system began, students turn to the publication for information about the strengths and weaknesses of institutions of higher learning.

WOMEN'S MAGAZINES

Female readers have been important to the magazine industry since the early 19th century, initially because women were not traditionally part of the workforce and were believed to have more leisure time to read. This lucrative market has only grown over time. In an increasingly online era, many

magazines have sought ways to expand their scope to reach a larger audience. Yet others, such as *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *Better Homes and Gardens*, have maintained their original scope and have still managed to turn profits. These three periodicals are part of the "Seven Sisters," a group of magazines traditionally targeted at women.

LADIES' HOME JOURNAL

Ladies' Home Journal began in 1879 as a column for women published in the *Tribune and Farmer* newspaper. The wife of the publisher was not entirely impressed with her husband's column and so began writing it herself (Aliperti). The column grew in popularity so rapidly that, by 1883, Louisa Knapp Curtis had published her first major supplement called the *Ladies Home Journal and Practical Housekeeper*. Today, the publishers of the *Ladies' Home Journal* state that it is "a unique lifestyle magazine dedicated to the millions of American women who want to look good, do good and feel great (Meredith)." Ranked twelfth in circulation, the magazine presently has a readership of nearly 4 million (Echo Media).*Ladies' Home Journal* focuses on style, health, relationships, and food. Perhaps its most recognizable feature

is a column titled "Can This Marriage Be Saved?", which made its debut in 1953. The regular column features stories of real-life couples struggling in their marriages, offers advice from marriage and family therapists, and projects the outcomes.

GOOD HOUSEKEEPING

In May of 1885, *Good Housekeeping* began publishing with the intention of providing "information about running a home, a broad range of literary offerings, and opportunities for reader input (Library of Congress)." Fifteen years later, the magazine founded the Good Housekeeping Research Institute. The research institute includes a product-evaluation laboratory where a staff of scientists, engineers, nutritionists, and researchers evaluate a wide variety of products. The magazine then reports their findings to its readers to "improve the lives of consumers and their families through education and product evaluation (Good Housekeeping)." The magazine describes itself as:

Devoted to contemporary women. Monthly articles focus on food, fitness, beauty, and childcare using the resources of the Good

Housekeeping Institute. From human interest stories and social issues to money management and travel, the magazine will encourage positive living for today's woman (Good Housekeeping Magazine, 2010).

With over 4.6 million readers, *Good Housekeeping* currently ranks ninth highest in U.S. circulation (Echo Media).

BETTER HOMES AND GARDENS

Making its print debut in 1922, *Better Homes and Gardens* entered the industry later than its counterparts. Currently, the magazine is ranked fifth in circulation in the United States with a readership of more than 7.6 million (Echo Media). Since its inception, the publication has focused on home and gardening style and decorations. Its positioning statement reads:

For the woman who reads *Better Homes and Gardens*, home is where she creates her life story. It's her haven, where she raises her family, entertains friends, and celebrates life's big—and

small—accomplishments. It's where she indulges her dreams and builds a world of her own. Home is her emotional center—it's where life happens. *Better Homes and Gardens* recognizes this and inspires her with infinite possibilities for creativity and self-expression. Each issue delivers smart, approachable editorial on design and individual style, decorating and gardening, food and entertaining, and personal and family well-being. *Better Homes and Gardens* helps her bridge the gap between dreaming and doing (Meredith).

The monthly magazine is divided into six sections: Food and Nutrition, Home, Health, Family, Gardening, and Lifestyle.

COSMOPOLITAN

First published in 1886, the female-targeted *Cosmopolitan* has changed dramatically over time from its original intent of being a "first-class family magazine (Mott, 1957)." In the first issue, the editor told readers that "there will be a department devoted exclusively to the interests of women, with articles on fashions, on household decoration, on cooking, and the care and management of children, etc., also a department for the younger members of the family (Mott, 1957)." Just 2 years

later, however, the original publishing company went out of business, and after several publisher changes *Cosmopolitan* was eventually purchased by newspaper mogul William Randolph Hearst in 1905.

The magazine became more successful during the 1960s when Helen Gurley Brown "transformed an antiquated general-interest mag called *Cosmopolitan* into the must-read for young, sexy single chicks (Benjamin)." Brown transformed the magazine from the family-focused publication it was to the somewhat controversial read with an emphasis on sex, work, and fashion that it is today. The magazine describes the transformation saying:

> Over the years, *Cosmo* has not only become the number-one-selling monthly magazine on the newsstand, but it has also served as an agent for social change, encouraging women everywhere to go after what they want (whether it be in the boardroom or the bedroom) (Benjamin).

In 1965, *Cosmopolitan* revamped its journal with Brown's vision in mind. The first retooled issue had an article about birth-control pills, then a relatively new and controversial innovation. The magazine's provocative articles attracted a large readership, but many found it offensive. Conservatives believed that the content was too racy, while some feminists thought it was too focused on beauty and pleasing men (Benjamin). Yet the publishers of *Cosmopolitan* believed that they were introducing a new form of feminism (Benjamin).

Brown argued that "*Cosmo* is feminist in that we believe women are just as smart and capable as men are and can achieve anything men can. But it also acknowledges that while work is important, men are too. The *Cosmo* girl absolutely loves men (Benjamin)!"

Today, *Cosmopolitan* continues to attract readers by maintaining the same ideals that Brown put forth in the 1960s. Nearly 30 percent of every issue is dedicated to relationships, sex especially. The rest provides articles on beauty, fashion, entertainment, health and fitness, and self-improvement.

MEN'S MAGAZINES

Just as women's magazines have existed for much of the history of the medium, over the years many magazines have been devoted to male readers. One of the most enduring and popular of those magazines is *Sports Illustrated*.

SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

When *Time* cocreator Henry Luce launched *Sports Illustrated* in 1954, his staff was doubtful about its chances. Spectator sports had not yet reached the level of popularity they have today, and the new magazine failed to make a profit for its first 12 years of publication. As television brought spectator sports to the growing suburbs, however, their popularity quickly rose, and *Sports Illustrated* became a success. Managing editor Andre Laguerre assembled a staff of talented, loyal writers and instituted the extensive use of color photographs, developing the basis for the format the magazine still uses.

In 1964, Laguerre initiated the *Sports Illustrated* Swimsuit Edition as a way of increasing sales during the winter months when there are fewer developments in sports. Putting model Babette March on the cover in a bikini helped the magazine sell, and the swimsuit edition became an annual tradition. Filled with pictures of models in revealing swimwear, the issue generates its share of controversy but is consistently the best-selling issue of the magazine each year.

CELEBRITY MAGAZINES

Despite being criticized at times for their less-than-sophisticated approach to journalism, celebrity magazines bring in enormous profits and help shape U.S. pop culture, fueling the obsession some Americans have with the mundane day-to-day details of the lives of celebrities. Three of the most prominent celebrity magazines currently publishing are *People*, *OK!*, and *Us Weekly*.

PEOPLE

Since it first began publishing as a spin-off of *Time* magazine's "People" section in 1974, *People* has been a leading celebrity magazine. The publication sets itself apart from other celebrity gossip magazines by publishing human-interest stories alongside photos and articles about celebrities. The publishers of *People* state that they avoid pure Hollywood gossip articles and they refuse to publish stories without some sort of verification (Moni). This editorial slant is unique among celebrity magazines, and, as such, the publication frequently receives exclusive interviews and photo shoots with celebrities.

The somewhat more respectful relationship between the publishers and some celebrities has helped *People* become the most popular celebrity magazine in circulation, ranking thirteenth overall with a verified readership of over 3.6 million in 2010 (Moni).

OK!

A British-run magazine that began publishing in 1993, *OK!* claims to "bring you the truth and the inside scoop about celebrities (OK Magazine)." Known for its exclusive interviews that often lead to public announcements on pregnancies and engagements, *OK!* initially had a policy to print only positive celebrity profiles (Search). That policy changed in 2007 thanks to an erratic interview with pop singer Britney Spears, which was so surprising that the magazine decided to break with tradition and publish it anyway (Search). In 2008, Spears agreed to a second interview with the publication in which she discussed her previous behavior, leading to a more positive profile of the singer. The widely successful magazine has readers around the world along with several branch publications.

US WEEKLY

Founded in 1977, *Us Weekly* followed the format of a bimonthly entertainment news and review magazine until 2000, when it switched formats to become a weekly leader in celebrity news and style. The publication "delivers a mass audience of young, educated, and affluent adults who are compelled by breaking celebrity news, Hollywood style and the best in entertainment (Us Weekly)." *Us Weekly* has become known for its fashion sections such as "Who Wore It Best?," a reader poll comparing two celebrities wearing the same outfit, and "Fashion Police," in which comedians comment on celebrity fashion mishaps and successes. With a circulation of nearly 2 million in December 2010, *Us Weekly* prides itself on being a leader in the celebrity magazine industry (Us Weekly).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *AARP The Magazine*, *AARP Bulletin*, and *Reader's Digest* boast the three highest U.S. circulations among contemporary magazines.
- Women's magazines, such as *Cosmopolitan*, make up a large portion of the medium.

EXERCISES

Study the top 10 highest circulating magazines, which were outlined in this section: http://www.magazine.org/CONSUMER_MARKETING/CIRC_TRENDS/ABC2009TOTALrank.aspx . Then, answer the following writing prompts.

1. Why might these magazines rank higher in circulation than others? What themes, audiences, and differences set these apart?
2. Is any controversy surrounding them comparable to the controversy surrounding the

modern *Cosmopolitan*?

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5.5 How Magazines Control the Public's Access to Information

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe how the formats of newspapers and magazines differ.
2. Explain the impact of advertisements on story.

Magazines control the public's access to information in a variety of ways. Like the newspaper industry, the magazine industry not only dictates which stories get told, but also how those stories are presented. Although significant similarities between the newspaper and magazine industries' control over information exist, some notable differences within the industries themselves deserve exploration.

FORMAT

In general, the format of most magazines allows for a more in-depth discussion of a topic than is possible in the relatively constrained space available in newspapers. Most large newspapers, such as *The Washington Post* or the *Los Angeles Times*, generally cap even their longest articles at 1,000 words (State of the Media, 2004). Magazines, however, frequently allow for double that word count when publishing articles of great interest (State of the Media, 2004). Length, however, varies from magazine to magazine and story to story. Coverage of the war in Iraq offers a good example of this variance. Researchers studied magazine coverage of Iraq over a period of 4 weeks in 2003 by examining the difference in reporting among *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News & World Report*.

In these four issues, the war in Iraq accounted for more than a fifth (22 percent) of all stories and roughly a third (32 percent) of all the space. These stories were also more likely than others to be long and in depth.... There were also differences in the way that the three magazines covered the situation. *Time* devoted the most space to the war, 37 percent, compared to the 34 percent for *Newsweek* and 24 percent for *U.S. News*. And again, *Time* had more long stories (seven stories in the four issues studied were more than 2,000 words). *Newsweek* ran six long stories in the four issues studied and *U.S. News* ran two long stories (State of the Media, 2004).

Although these differences might not appear that great, the results reflect editorial choice and, therefore, the power the magazine industry has over information control.

CHOICE TO PUBLISH

Just as newspapers do, magazines control which stories reach the public by deciding which articles to include in their publications. As might be expected, the choice of stories depends on the political climate and on global events.

Leading newsmagazines *Time* and *Newsweek* both underwent major transitions in their content during the late 20th century. Between the 1970s and 1990s, both greatly increased science articles, entertainment articles, and stories on personal health. Interestingly, despite both publications' stated commitment to news, a dramatic decrease took place in articles on domestic- and foreign-government affairs. Whether these changes reflected a change in reader interest or an alteration in the editors' perspectives remains unclear; however, these shifts demonstrate that what is published is entirely up to the magazine and its editorial staff, as they are the ones who have the final word.

ADVERTISERS' INFLUENCE

Magazines derive approximately half of their income from advertisers (Cyber College, 2010). With such a large stake in the magazine industry, advertisers can play a major role in deciding which stories are printed. Because magazines are so dependent on advertisers for their revenue, they are cautious about the content they place in their pages.

Magazines tend to shy away from controversial content that can turn off advertisers. Recently, a large American auto manufacturer sent a memo to about 50 magazines asking that their ad agency be notified if future issues of the magazine contained articles that addressed political, sexual, or social issues that might be seen as provocative, controversial, or offensive (Cyber College, 2010).

The balance that magazines must maintain to keep advertisers happy is a delicate one. With ad prices driving the magazine industry, many publications are forced to satisfy advertisers by avoiding potentially controversial stories.

Another anecdote about advertisers controlling stories illustrates how some publishers must conform to advertiser demands.

In an even more blatant attempt to influence magazine content, another large corporation informed a number of magazine publishers that the content of their magazines would be carefully monitored for several months and that a large advertising contract would be awarded to the publication that portrayed their industry in the most favorable light (Cyber College).

With stories such as these, it may seem easy to paint the advertising industry as an evil, controlling entity that seeks to keep stories from the public. While advertisers may exhibit some control over stories, they also have a lot at stake.

As online media grows, today many advertisers are pulling their expensive print ads in favor of cheaper, web-based advertisements (Knarr). Advertising revenue has decreased steadily since the 1990s, mirroring the rise in online readership (HighBeam Business). This drop in advertising may, in fact, force magazines to give advertisers more control over their content to avoid losing further funding. While it may be difficult to precisely pin down the level of influence advertisers exert over magazine content, evidence suggests they do exert some control.

EDITORIAL LEANINGS

Each magazine has its own editorial slant, which helps determine which stories get published and how those stories are presented. A 2003 study examining leading newsmagazines *Time*, *Newsweek*, *and U.S. News & World Report* verified these differences by demonstrating variations in how the publications presented their articles to the reading public.

U.S. News & World Report...is the most information-laden, the most likely to publish highly traditional hard news topics and the most likely to report in a neutral manner—a more straightforward accounting of the facts of events with less of a writer's "take" or opinion on what those events mean. *Newsweek* is lighter, more oriented toward lifestyle and celebrity coverage, and more likely to publish stories that contain an emotional component. *Time* magazine is something of a hybrid between the two. Its content is more like *U.S. News*'—neutral and information driven. Its covers, on the other hand, look a good deal more like *Newsweek*'s—highlighting lifestyle and entertainment(State of the Media).

These distinctions among the three publications may seem slight, but they have an effect on the information contained between their covers. However, these editorial leanings do not make one magazine more prestigious or valid than the

others; *U.S. News & World Report* may offer facts and figures about a particular event, while *Newsweek* may provide the human side of the story. Readers should understand, though, that several variables affect the articles that they see in each publication.

ONLINE NEWS SOURCES

The Internet has significantly changed the way that the public receives information. The advent of online news sources has somewhat lessened the control that magazines have over information. Today, several online-only magazines provide, for little to no cost, news and coverage that would have previously been available only through print publications. Online-only magazines include *Slate*, which offers a daily digest of information from newspapers around the globe, and *Salon*, which provides readers many stories for free and more in-depth coverage for a subscription cost. Like their print counterparts, online magazines rely on revenue from advertisers, but because that advertising is less costly,

advertisers may have less of a stake in online content. All these factors contribute to changing perspectives on the way that information is being controlled in the journalism industry.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- In general, magazine formats offer more space for coverage than newspapers. This increased space permits greater coverage and can give readers more in-depth information about events.
- Advertisers, which provide approximately half of all magazine revenue, maintain some control over the magazine industry by threatening to pull ads from magazines that print stories that are considered too racy, too political, or not consistent with their beliefs.

EXERCISES

Select a current major news event that interests you. Read an article from a major newspaper and an article from a magazine on the event. Then, answer the following writing prompts.

1. How do the articles differ? How are they similar?
2. What advertisements surround the article? How might they affect the story or reveal who the target audience is?
3. Do you think that this audience has an effect on the way the story is covered? Why or why not?

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5.6 Specialization of Magazines

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify different types of specialized magazines.
2. Recognize ways that advertisers benefit from the specialization of magazines.

Over the last century, magazines have slowly moved into more specialized, fragmented groupings. This transformation from general-interest to niche publications began with the popularization of television. To survive the threat posed by the success of broadcast media, print publications worked to stand out from their competitors by developing market niches. During this transition, magazine editors found that by

specializing they were also appealing to advertisers hoping to reach specific audiences. No longer were ads just going out to the general public. Instead, advertisers could target groups by gender, age, race, class, and social and cultural interests (Cambell, et. al.).

From the medical field to the auto industry, specialization has become necessary to compete in an ever-growing market. Yet the trend is perhaps most obvious in mass media and in the publishing industry in particular. "In 2006, the Magazine Publishers of America trade organization listed more than 40 special categories of consumer magazines (Cambell, et. al.)." This wide variety of niche publications reflects the increasing specificity of markets and audiences. "In publishing, demand for specialized magazines and books can be evidenced by looking at the magazine rack. [There are] magazines focusing on photography to cars, to economics and foreign affairs and more (Hess, 2007)." Specialization is likely to increase, rather than decrease. "Market fragmentation has and probably will continue to proliferate. Customization and individualization will probably be the continuing trend (Hess, 2007)."

PROFESSIONAL TRADE PUBLICATIONS

Nearly every trade group produces some sort of professional publication for its members. Many trade organizations even have their own libraries that house publications solely dedicated to their specific groups. For example, if a person wishes to find information on agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting organizations, the National Agricultural Library in Beltsville, Maryland, near Washington, DC, might offer a starting point. This library is one of four national libraries of the United States and has one of the world's largest agricultural information collections and links a nationwide network of state land-grant and U.S. Department of Agriculture field libraries (Career Resource Library). This is but one example of the array of trade-group publications available. Resources such as the Career Resource Library are also available to those who wish to browse publications by trade groups.

SCHOLARLY PUBLICATIONS

Academic journals have, in some form, been around since the early years of magazine publication. During the 17th century, the *Universal Historical Bibliothèque* became the first journal to invite scholarly contributions. Today, hundreds of scholarly journals exist, such as the *American Economic Review* and *The Journal of Marriage and Families*, and every academic field has its own array of journals to which scholars can contribute. Most university libraries allow students and faculty access to these journals via library databases.

In every academic field, journals are ranked based on the types of articles they publish and on their selectiveness. Most academic journals use a peer-reviewing process to determine which articles are printed. During this process, a panel of readers reviews an anonymous article and then decides whether to accept the paper, accept with changes, or reject it altogether. Scholarly publication is essential for graduate students and university faculty members alike as they seek to disseminate their ideas and progress in their careers.

RELIGIOUS GROUPS

With faith at the center of many individuals' lives, it is hardly surprising that there are hundreds of magazines dedicated to religious groups. From *Christianity Today* to *Catholic Digest*, Christian publications make up the largest group of religious magazines. But Christianity is not the only faith represented in periodicals. *Kashrus Magazine* targets the Jewish community, and *Shambhala Sun* is affiliated with the Buddhist faith. Additionally, certain magazines, such as *CrossCurrents*, are designed for people of all faiths. The magazine's publishers state that *CrossCurrents* serves as "a global network for people of faith and intelligence who are committed to connecting the wisdom of the heart and the life of the mind (Cross Currents)."

POLITICAL GROUPS

Political groups also have capitalized on the magazine industry. Whether liberal or conservative, most people can find a publication that reflects their political opinions. Two such

magazines are *The American Prospect* and *The American Conservative*. *The American Prospect* targets Democrats with "thoughtful views of America's progressive liberal Democratic issues, ideas, politics and policy (All You Can Read)." Conversely, *the American Conservative* is aimed at right-leaning individuals. Edited by well-known conservatives Pat Buchanan and Taki Theodoracopulos, this biweekly "is dedicated to reigniting the conservative conversation, engaging the neo-conservative agenda through its espousal of traditional conservative themes (All You Can Read)."

PULP AND GENRE FICTION MAGAZINES

Although today not as many pulp magazines publish as did at the style's height of popularity, during the 1930s, this unique niche still plays an important role in the magazine industry. One such example is *Asimov's Science Fiction*, a science fiction magazine founded in 1977 and still popular today. Founded because "one of science fiction's most influential and prolific writers, Isaac Asimov wanted to provide a home for new SF

(science fiction) writers—a new magazine that young writers could break into. *Asimov's Science Fiction* remains that home, as well as the publisher of some of the field's best known authors (Asimov's Science Fiction)." True to its original intention, the magazine publishes stories of varying lengths for the avid science fiction fan.

FIGURE 5.7



Asmiov's Science Fiction is a modern pulp magazine reaching out to sci-fi readers around the globe.

Tim Cox – Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine – CC BY-NC 2.0.

Another modern example of a genre magazine is *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*. First launched in 1941 to "raise the sights of mystery writers generally to a genuine literary form," to "encourage good writing among our colleagues by offering a practical market not otherwise available," and to "develop new writers seeking expression in the genre (The Mystery Place)," the journal has published a large number of now famous writers including Rudyard Kipling, William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, Norman Mailer, and Alice Walker. Today, the publication prides itself on being "on the cutting edge of crime and mystery fiction, offering readers the very best stories being written in the genre anywhere in the world (The Mystery Place)." Though pulp and genre fiction magazines tend to have a fairly low circulation—*Asimov's* circulation in 2009 was about 17,000—the caliber of the authors they often attract gives these publications a great degree of influence within their respective niches (Anders, 2009).

HOBBY AND INTEREST MAGAZINES

Perhaps the most populated classification is that of hobby and special-interest magazines, a reflection of the wide array of hobbies and interests that different individuals enjoy. Within this classification of journals, one can find magazines on such topics as sports (*Sports Illustrated*), wellness (*Health)*, cooking (*Bon Appétit*), home decoration and renovation (*This Old House*), and travel and geography (*National Geographic*).

Readers interested in specific hobbies can generally find a magazine that caters to them. Photographers, for example, can subscribe to the *British Journal of Photography*, the world's longest-running photography magazine, in publication since 1854. This journal prints "profiles of emerging talent alongside star names, a picture-led Portfolio section, business analysis and detailed technology reviews (British Journal of Photography)." Music enthusiasts can choose from an array of publications ranging from more general ones such as *Spin* and the *International Early Music Review* to highly specific such as the *Journal of the International Double Reed Society* and *Just Jazz Guitar*. There are also magazines entirely devoted to crafting, such as *Creating Keepsakes* for scrapbook enthusiasts, and for pet ownership, such as the appropriately named *Pet*.

Fashion has provided a highly lucrative and visible interest magazine market. Founded in 1892, the most famous fashion

magazine is *Vogue*. "*Vogue* has been America's cultural barometer, putting fashion in the context of the larger world we live in—how we dress, live, socialize; what we eat, listen to, watch; who leads and inspires us (Vogue)." The magazine has a huge following, with a circulation topping 1.2 million readers. *Vogue*'s mission statement declares an intent to lead the way in the fashion magazine industry, reading:

> *Vogue*'s story is the story of women, of culture, of what is worth knowing and seeing, of individuality and grace, and of the steady power of earned influence. For millions of women each month, *Vogue* is the eye of the culture, inspiring and challenging them to see things differently, in both themselves and the world (Vogue).

Despite *Vogue*'s high circulation, most special-interest magazines have a smaller readership. This can be worrisome for editors charged with adding more subscriptions to make a larger profit. However, the appeal of such specific audiences generates more revenue from advertisers, who can purchase magazine space knowing that their ads are reaching a targeted audience.

VOGUE CROSSES MEDIA LINES

In recent years, *Vogue* has served as inspiration for two major films: *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006) and *The September Issue* (2009). Based on Lauren Weisberger's novel of the same name, *The Devil Wears Prada* is a feature film about a young woman living in New York dreaming of becoming a magazine writer. She lands a job as the assistant to the city's most ruthless magazine editor, Miranda Priestly—played by Meryl Streep—who runs *Runway* magazine, a fictionalized version of *Vogue*. This coming-of-age story highlights the work that goes into producing a magazine of such prestige. Streep was nominated for an Oscar award for her performance and, appropriately for a film about fashion, the costume designer was also nominated for Best Achievement in Costume Design.

The September Issue is a documentary

chronicling *Vogue* editor in chief Anna Wintour's preparation for the 2007 fall fashion issue. Wintour, the editor upon whom Streep's character in *The Devil Wears Prada* was loosely based (Zeitchik, 2011), is well known for being a powerful influence on the fashion industry and a demanding editor. The film, however, humanizes her, while still demonstrating her obsession with fashion and with perfection in her magazine.

The success of both films reveals a fascination with the fashion and publishing industries. The fact that these two films would be released as the magazine industry is in decline is surprising but perhaps reflects an interest in journalism from a younger audience. The use of publishing as a topic in the film medium shows how magazines, though struggling, remain relevant and how special-interest magazines, like those in fashion, can transcend the medium and cross over into other mass media.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Niche publications include magazines that cater to hobbyists in such diverse fields as sports, crafts, music,

and even pets. Some modern niche publications hearken back to the pulp magazines of the 1930s.

- Although niche markets for magazines mean fewer readers, advertisers often prefer to publish ads in these more specialized publications because their ads will reach a more targeted demographic, thus ensuring that nearly everyone reading the journal will have an interest in their product.

EXERCISES

Consider the specialized magazines discussed in this section, as well as others you are familiar with, and identify whether or not you are among the target audience for each. Then, read a copy of a magazine targeting a specialized group or demographic you are not a part of. For example, if you're a man, examine a copy of *Cosmopolitan*, or if you have no interest in fashion, look through an issue of *Vogue*. Then, answer the following writing prompts.

1. What do you learn about the subject from one edition of one magazine?
2. How do the articles reach out to the target demographic?

3. How are the advertisements doing the same?

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5.7 Influence of the Internet on the Magazine Industry

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe how print magazines have adapted to an online market.
2. Indicate a unique benefit of print magazines archiving back issues on their websites.

In March of 2010, *Consumerist* published a story titled "Print edition of *TV Guide* tells me to go online to read most of cover story." According to the article, *TV Guide* printed a story listing "TV's Top 50 Families," but shocked readers by including only the top 20 families in its print version. To discover the rest of the list, readers needed to go online (Villarreal, 2010). As dismayed as some readers were, this story reflects an ongoing trend in magazine journalism: the move toward online reporting.

Just like their newspaper cousins, magazines have been greatly affected by the influence of the Internet. With so much information available online, advertisers and readers are accessing content on the Internet, causing declines in both

revenue and readership. These changes are forcing magazines to adapt to an increasingly online market.

ONLINE-ONLY MAGAZINES

In 1995, *Salon* launched the first major online-only magazine at http://www.salon.com. "Salon, the award-winning online news and entertainment website, combines original investigative stories, breaking news, provocative personal essays and highly respected criticism along with popular staff-written blogs about politics, technology and culture (Salon)." Like many print magazines, the site divides content into sections including entertainment, books, comics, life, news and politics, and technology and business. With an average of 5.8 million monthly unique visitors, this online magazine demonstrates the potential successes of Internet-based publications (Salon).

Other online-only magazines include *Slate* and *PC Magazine*. All three magazines, like most online publications, support themselves in part through ads that appear alongside articles and other content. Founded in 1996, *Slate* is a "general

interest publication offering analysis and commentary about politics, news, and culture (Slate)." Considering itself "a daily magazine on the Web," *Slate* offers its readers information on news and politics, arts, life, business, technology, and science via online articles, podcasts, and blogs (Slate). The successful magazine has been recognized with numerous awards for its contributions to journalism.

PC Magazine differs somewhat from *Slate* or *Salon* in that it was originally a print publication. First published in 1982, the computer magazine published hard-copy issues for over 15 years before announcing in 2008 that its January 2009 issue would be its last printed edition. In an open letter to its readers, *PC Magazine* discussed the transition:

> Starting in February 2009, *PC Magazine* will become a 100-percent digital publication. So, in addition to our popular network of Websites...we'll offer *PC Magazine Digital Edition* to all of our print subscribers. The *PC Magazine Digital Edition* has actually been available since 2002. So for thousands of you, the benefits of this unique medium are already clear. And those benefits will continue to multiply in the coming months, as we work hard to enhance your digital experience (Ulanoff, 2008).

While it is perhaps fitting that this computer-focused publication is one of the first print magazines to move to an entirely online form, its reasons for the transition were financial rather than creative. In describing the decision, Jason Young, chief executive of Ziff Davis Media, said, "The viability

for us to continue to publish in print just isn't there anymore (Clifford, 2008)." Unfortunately for the magazine industry, Young's sentiment reflects a trend that has been building for some time. Several other publications have followed in *PC Magazine*'s footsteps, making the move from print to online-only. Journals such as *Elle Girl* and *Teen People* that were once available in print can now be viewed only via the Internet. As printing costs rise and advertising and subscription revenues decrease, more magazines will likely be making similar shifts.

MAGAZINE-LIKE WEBSITES

In recent years, websites that function much as magazines once did without officially being publications themselves have become an increasingly popular online model. For example, Pitchfork Media is an Internet publication on the music industry. Established in 1995, the site offers readers criticism and commentary on contemporary music and has many of the same features as a traditional music magazine: reviews, news, articles, and interviews. Whether the site is capitalizing on the success of print magazines by following their format or if it is

simply responding to its readers by providing them with an accessible online experience is a debatable point. Of course, the website also has many features that would not be available in print, such as a streaming playlist of music and music videos. This hybrid of magazine-like content with new-media content offers a possible vision of the digital future of print publications.

PRINT MAGAZINES WITH ONLINE PRESENCES

Indeed, most print magazines have created websites. Nearly every major print publication has a site available either for free or through subscription. Yet there are intrinsic differences between the print and online media. Bernadette Geyer, author of a poetry chapbook, *What Remains*, discusses the practical contrasts between online and print journals saying:

I will read a print journal cover to cover because I can bookmark where I left off.... Simply taking all of the content of what would have been a print issue and putting it online with links from a Table of Contents is all well and good in theory, but I have to ask, how many people actually sit and read all of the contents of an online journal that publishes several authors/genres per issue (Geyer, 2010)?

Her question is a good one, and one which most magazines have already asked themselves. In light of this dilemma, magazines with online editions have sought ways to attract readers who may not, in fact, read much. Most websites also include online-only content such as blogs, podcasts, and daily news updates that, naturally, are not available in print form. The additional features on magazines' websites likely stem from a need to attract audiences with shorter attention spans and less time to devote to reading entire articles.

Another way that magazines court online readers is by offering back-issue content. Readers can browse old articles without having to remember in which issue the content first appeared. The cost for this varies from publication to publication. For example, CooksIllustrated.com reprints recipes from previous issues as part of a paid online membership service, while CookingLight.com offers back issues for free. Some magazines have online archive collections, though those collections generally do not print entire articles or complete issues. *Time*, for example, offers "hand-picked covers and excerpts from the best articles on a wide variety of subjects (Time)." *Time* suggests that one should "use them

as chronological guides to *Time*'s past coverage of a person, event, or topic (Time)." Still, even without the entire collection online, there is a distinct benefit of being able to search back for articles from 1923 from a computer.

IS PRINT DEAD?

The question *Is print dead?* has dominated the magazine and newspaper industries for several years. In 2008, *The New York Times* printed an article titled "Mourning Old Media's Decline," in which author David Carr describes multiple announcements of job loss in the print industry. Thousands of individuals working at magazines and newspapers faced layoffs because of reduced subscriber and advertiser demand. "Clearly the sky is falling," he writes, "The question now is how many people will be left to cover it (Carr, 2008)." At the same time, Carr articulates the shift in readership from print to web, saying, "The paradox of all these announcements is that newspapers and magazines do not have an audience problem—newspaper Web sites are a vital source of news, and growing—but they do have a consumer problem (Carr, 2008)." With a majority of magazines and newspapers now

available for free online, one has to wonder how the industry will stay afloat. Although advertisements pay for a portion of the cost of running a magazine, it may not be enough.

The debate over whether print is still viable is a heated one that is infiltrating the magazine industry. At a 2006 magazine editorial meeting, *Glamour*'s editor in chief, Cindi Leive, claimed that she "loves this question.... Is print dead? Discuss (Benkoil & Stableford, 2006)!" The editor in chief of *More* magazine responded to the statement saying, "It's what we talk about all day long (Benkoil & Stableford, 2006)." But for as many people who are fighting for the print industry to remain profitable, there is an equally vocal group arguing for the elimination of the print medium altogether. In a 2005 published debate on the topic, former print editor-turned-blogger Jeff Jarvis squared off against John Griffin, president of the National Geographic Society's magazine group. Jarvis claimed, "Print is not dead. Print is where words go to die." But Griffin countered, "Actually print is where words go to live—we're still reading the ancient Greeks (Jarvis & Griffin, 2005)."

Regardless of your position, the fact that the print industry is facing hardships is unquestionable. Magazines are rethinking their marketing strategies to remain viable in an increasingly online world. But many are hopeful that journals will find a way to publish both in print and on the Internet. After all, "There's something special and unique, even luxurious about reading a big, glossy magazine.... Or, in the words of *Marie*

Claire editor Joanna Coles, 'As long as people take baths, there will always be a monthly magazine (Benkoil & Stableford).'"[1]

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Print journals are adapting to an increasingly online market by offering web-only features such as blogs, podcasts, and daily news updates. Regularly updating websites may help publications remain relevant as more readers turn to the Internet to receive information.
- As more magazines archive back issues on their websites, readers benefit by being able to search for old articles and, sometimes, entire editions. Many back issues are offered for free, but some publications require a subscription fee for this perk.

1. Benkoil and Stableford, "Is Print Dead? Discuss!"

EXERCISES

Explore the website of one of your favorite magazines. Consider how the site maintains the look and feel of its print edition, and how the site distinguishes itself from its original print version. Then, answer the following writing prompts.

1. Has it successfully adapted to the online market? Why or why not?
2. Does the website offer an archive of back issues? If so, describe the archive's features and identify its pros and cons.

END-OF-CHAPTER ASSESSMENT

Review Questions

1. Section 1
    1. What medium "came to occupy the large middle groups...between the book and the newspaper (Encyclopaedia Britannica)"?

2. How did magazines first evolve and diffuse?
3. How and why did early magazines target women?
4. What was the first truly successful U.S. mass magazine?
5. Name one early successful newsmagazine and one successful picture magazine.

2. Section 2

    1. How did the advent of nationwide magazine circulation affect American culture?
    2. Describe the controversy surrounding early pulp magazines.

3. Section 3

    1. What are the three highest circulating magazines in the United States today?
    2. What are some long-running, influential women's magazines?
    3. Why did feminists speak out against the 1960s transformation of *Cosmopolitan* magazine?

4. Section 4

    1. How does format play a role in the way stories are presented?
    2. Why do advertisers attempt to control which stories are published and how they are presented?

5. Section 5

    1. List four specializations in the magazine industry.
    2. How do advertisers benefit from specialization?

6. Section 6

    1. Explain *PC Magazine*'s move to an online-only market.
    2. How do print magazines remain relevant in an increasingly online world?
    3. What role do advertisers play in the way the Internet is affecting the magazine industry?

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. What major contributions did *The Saturday Evening Post* offer to the magazine industry?
2. How did pulp magazines move the U.S. journalism industry forward? Are there any modern examples of publications that are doing the same?
3. Describe the differences among current celebrity magazines. How might so many journals of similar style and repute remain competitive in today's

declining market?

4. What is an editorial slant and how does it play a role in industry control?
5. Describe what brought about the need for niche magazines and discuss how niche magazines stay afloat despite smaller audiences.
6. Discuss the debate over the question *Is print dead*? Explain both sides of the argument.

CAREER CONNECTION

Specialization in the magazine industry has provided magazines and advertisers the ability to seek out target audiences, bettering a publication's chances of remaining competitive in a declining market. Choose a specialization that interests you. Select two magazines where you might like to work within that specialization. Look through the website for each magazine, looking specifically at job opportunities and staff positions. Use the information you find to answer the following questions.

1. What entry-level positions are available at each magazine?
2. How might one move up within the company?

3. What is the company's mission statement and how might you use that information to better prepare yourself for a job in the industry?
4. What tools might you need to acquire before applying for a position?
5. What surprised you in your research?

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Chapter 6: Music

6.1 Music
6.2 The Evolution of Popular Music
6.3 The Reciprocal Nature of Music and Culture
6.4 Current Popular Trends in the Music Industry
6.5 Influence of New Technology

6.1 Music

FROM SOCIAL NETWORKING TO STARDOM

FIGURE 6.1



Justin Higuchi – Colbie Caillat 9/27/2013 #7 – CC BY 2.0.

In 2006, Californian vocalist Colbie Caillat was an aspiring singer-songwriter. Although her audio engineer father, Ken Caillat, coproduced one of the biggest selling albums of all time, Fleetwood Mac's *Rumours*, Colbie had never considered booking a studio, much less campaigning for a record deal. She considered her music to be a hobby rather than a career choice (Waco Tribune-Herald, 2010). Fast-forward a year later and Caillat's debut album, *Coco*, was at No. 5 on the *Billboard 200* album chart, on its way to achieving platinum status. How did an unknown artist from Malibu, California, become a

best-selling star in so little time? Caillat's success can be attributed, in part, to the social networking website MySpace.

Hugely popular among teens and young adults in the mid-2000s, MySpace enables people to set up a personal profile on which they can post original music for the public to listen to and comment on. One of Caillat's friends thought that her music merited a wider audience and set up a page on which Caillat could post her tunes. Six months later, Caillat was the MySpace website's top unsigned artist (Colbie Caillat). The site enables people to "friend" artists or performers whose music they enjoy. As Caillat's friend count climbed to 100,000, music labels began to notice. In 2007, she signed with Universal Records and released her debut album, *Coco*. Boosted by the online success of the single "Bubbly," *Coco* reached No. 5 on the Billboard chart and established Caillat as a bona fide pop star. She has since won a Grammy award for "Lucky," her duet with Jason Mraz, toured with artists such as the Goo Goo Dolls and John Mayer, and in 2009, released a second successful album, *Breakthrough*. The combined sales of Caillat's first two albums are upward of 4 million copies worldwide.

Caillat's story highlights one area in which the Internet is changing the face of the music industry. Aspiring artists no longer need to rely on expensive publicists, recording studios, or contacts within the industry; they can connect directly with fans to sell their music. Social networking sites, like MySpace, and virtual worlds, like Second Life, make it easier for fans to

search for new music and easier for artists to communicate with fans. In fact, MySpace has been so influential that it teamed with several major labels to create the MySpace music website. Generating a buzz on social networking sites is sometimes enough to achieve fame and stardom. Of course, for every Colbie Caillat, there are thousands of unknown singers and bands trying to promote their music online with little or no success. Despite this, it's clear that social networking sites have taken some control away from record labels and placed it in the hands of the artists themselves.

Artists are also using social networking sites to develop a more intimate relationship with fans. In the past couple of years, the Twitter social networking website has become hugely popular among musicians and fans alike. The microblogging service enables users to send a tweet message—a short post of 140 characters or less that is displayed on the author's profile page and delivered to his or her subscribers. Musicians such as John Mayer, Alicia Keys, Britney Spears, and Lily Allen regularly post on Twitter, providing their fans with real-time updates about their daily lives and promoting their musical endeavors.

Social networking sites are just the latest technological development in the music business. An in-depth look at the history and evolution of popular music throughout the last century will help explain some of the current processes and trends in the industry.

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6.2 The Evolution of Popular Music

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Assess the impact of three technologies that changed the face of the music industry.
2. Determine the influences and characteristics of each genre of popular music.
3. Describe the evolution of pop music throughout the

last century.

The first stirrings of popular or pop music—any genre of music that appeals to a wide audience or subculture—began in the late 19th century, with discoveries by Thomas Edison and Emile Berliner. In 1877, Edison discovered that sound could be reproduced using a strip of tinfoil wrapped around a rotating metal cylinder. Edison's phonograph provided ideas and inspiration for Berliner's gramophone, which used flat discs to record sound. The flat discs were cheaper and easier to produce than were the cylinders they replaced, enabling the mass production of sound recordings. This would have a huge impact on the popular music industry, enabling members of the middle class to purchase technology that was previously available only to an elite few. Berliner founded the Berliner Gramophone Company to manufacture his discs, and he encouraged popular operatic singers such as Enrico Caruso and Dame Nellie Melba to record their music using his system. Opera singers were the stars of the 19th century, and their music generated most of the sheet music sales in the United States. Although the gramophone was an exciting new development, it would take 20 years for disc recordings to rival sheet music in commercial importance (Shepherd, 2003).

In the late 19th century, the lax copyright laws that existed in the United States at the beginning of the century were strengthened, providing an opportunity for composers,

singers, and publishers to work together to earn money by producing as much music as possible. Numerous publishers began to emerge in an area of New York that became known as Tin Pan Alley. Allegedly named because the cacophony of many pianos being played in the publishers' demo rooms sounded like people pounding on tin pans, Tin Pan Alley soon became a prolific source of popular music, with its publishers mass-producing sheet music to satisfy the demands of a growing middle class. Whereas classical artists were exalted for their individuality and expected to differ stylistically from other classical artists, popular artists were praised for conforming to the tastes of their intended audience. Popular genres expanded from opera to include vaudeville—a form of variety entertainment containing short acts featuring singers, dancers, magicians, and comedians that opened new doors for publishers to sell songs popularized by the live shows—and ragtime, a style of piano music characterized by a syncopated melody.

FIGURE 6.2



For most of the 20th century, gramophone records were the primary medium used for commercial music reproduction.

Science Museum London – EMG Mark Xb handmade gramophone, c 1934. – CC BY-SA 2.0.

The Tin Pan Alley tradition of song publishing continued throughout the first half of the 20th century with the show tunes and soothing ballads of Irving Berlin, Cole Porter, and George Gershwin, and songwriting teams of the early 1950s, such as Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller. By hiring songwriters to compose music based on public demand and mainstream tastes, the Tin Pan Alley publishers introduced the concept of popular music as we know it.

THE ROARING 1920S: RADIO VERSUS RECORDS

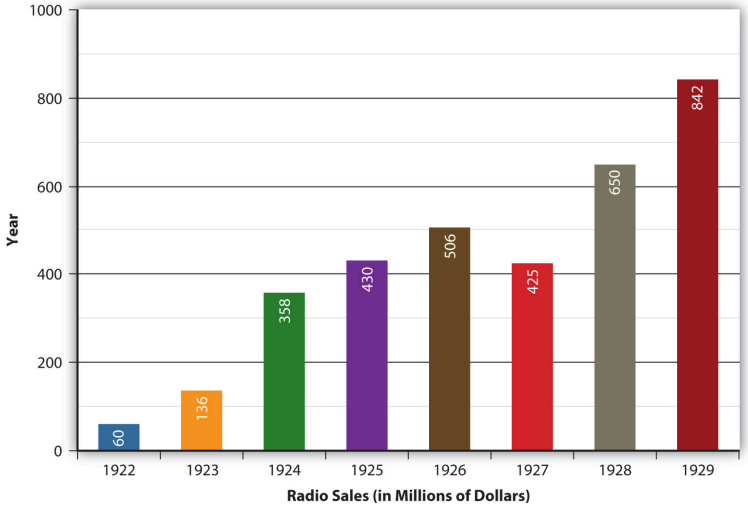
In the 1920s, Tin Pan Alley's dominance of the popular music industry was threatened by two technological developments: the advent of electrical recording and the rapid growth of radio.

During the early days of its development, the gramophone was viewed as a scientific novelty that posed little threat to sheet music because of its poor sound quality. However, as inventors improved various aspects of the device, the sales of

gramophone records began to affect sheet music sales. The Copyright Act of 1911 had imposed a royalty on all records of copyrighted musical works to compensate for the loss in revenue to composers and authors. This loss became even more prominent during the mid-1920s, when improvements in electrical recording drastically increased sales of gramophones and gramophone records. The greater range and sensitivity of the electrical broadcasting microphone revolutionized gramophone recording to such an extent that sheet music sales plummeted. From the very beginning, the record industry faced challenges from new technology.

Composers and publishers could deal with the losses caused by an increase in gramophone sales because of the provisions made in the Copyright Act. However, when radio broadcasting emerged in the early 1920s, both gramophone sales and sheet-music sales began to suffer. Radio was an affordable medium that enabled listeners to experience events as they took place. Better yet, it offered a wide range of free music that required none of the musical skills, expensive instruments, or sheet music necessary for creating one's own music in the home, nor the expense of purchasing records to play on the gramophone. This development was a threat to the entire recording industry, which began to campaign for, and was ultimately granted, the right to collect license fees from broadcasters. With the license fees in place, the recording industry eventually began to profit from the new technology.

FIGURE 6.3



Radio sales dramatically increased throughout the 1920s because radios were an affordable way to listen to free music and live events.

THE 1930S: THE RISE OF JAZZ AND BLUES

The ascendance of Tin Pan Alley coincided with the emergence of jazz in New Orleans. An improvisational form of music that was primarily instrumental, jazz incorporated a variety of styles, including African rhythms, gospel, and blues. Established by New Orleans musicians such as King Oliver and his protégé, Louis Armstrong, who is considered by many to be one of the greatest jazz soloists in history, jazz spread along the Mississippi River by the bands that traveled up and down the river playing on steamboats. During the Prohibition era in the 1920s and early 1930s, some jazz bands played in illegal speakeasies, which helped generate the genre's reputation for being immoral and for threatening the country's cultural values. However, jazz became a legitimate form of entertainment during the 1930s, when White orchestras began to incorporate jazz style into their music. During this time, jazz music began to take on a big band style, combining elements of ragtime, Black spirituals, blues, and European music. Key figures in developing the big jazz band included bandleaders Duke Ellington, Coleman Hawkins, and Glenn Miller. These big band orchestras used an arranger to limit improvisation by assigning parts of a piece of music to various band members. Although improvisation was allowed during solo performances, the format became more

structured, resulting in the swing style of jazz that became popular in the 1930s. As the decade progressed, social attitudes toward racial segregation relaxed and big bands became more racially integrated.

At the heart of jazz, the blues was a creation of former Black slaves who adapted their African musical heritage to the American environment. Dealing with themes of personal adversity, overcoming hard luck, and other emotional turmoil, the blues is a 12-bar musical form with a call-and-response format between the singer and his guitar. Originating in the Mississippi Delta, just upriver from New Orleans, blues music was exemplified in the work of W. C. Handy, Ma Rainey, Robert Johnson, and Lead Belly, among others. Unlike jazz, the blues did not spread significantly to the Northern states until the late 1930s and 1940s. Once Southern migrants introduced the blues to urban Northern cities, the music developed into distinctive regional styles, ranging from the jazz-oriented Kansas City blues to the swing-based West Coast blues. Chicago blues musicians such as Muddy Waters were the first to electrify the blues through the use of electric guitars and to blend urban style with classic Southern blues. The electric guitar, first produced by Adolph Rickenbacker in 1931, changed music by intensifying the sound and creating a louder volume that could cut through noise in bars and nightclubs (Rickenbacker, 2010). By focusing less on shouting, singers could focus on conveying more emotion and

intimacy in their performances. This electrified form of blues provided the foundations of rock and roll.

FIGURE 6.4



The Chicago blues, characterized by the use of electric

guitar and harmonica, provided the foundations of rock and roll. Muddy Waters was one of the most famous Chicago blues musicians.

Nesster – Muddy Waters at Newport 1960 – CC BY-SA 2.0.

The 1920s through the 1950s is considered the golden age of radio. During this time, the number of licensed radio stations in the United States exploded from five in 1921 to over 600 by 1925 (Salmon, 2010). The introduction of radio broadcasting provided a valuable link between urban city centers and small, rural towns. Able to transmit music nationwide, rural radio stations broadcasted local music genres that soon gained popularity across the country.

THE 1940S: TECHNOLOGY PROGRESSES

Technological advances during the 1940s made it even easier

for people to listen to their favorite music and for artists to record it. The introduction of the reel-to-reel tape recorder paved the way for several innovations that would transform the music industry. The first commercially available tape recorders were monophonic, meaning that they only had one track on which to record sound onto magnetic tape. This may seem limiting today, but at the time it allowed for exciting innovations. During the 1940s and 1950s, some musicians—most notably guitarist Les Paul, with his song "Lover (When You're Near Me)"—began to experiment with overdubbing, in which they played back a previously recorded tape through a mixer, blended it with a live performance, and recorded the composite signal onto a second tape recorder. By the time four-track and eight-track recorders became readily available in the 1960s, musicians no longer had to play together in the same room; they could record each of their individual parts and combine them into a finished recording.

FIGURE 6.5



Reel-to-reel tape recorders and magnetic tape not only helped artists experiment with overdubbing, but they also were a compact method for reproducing and preserving audio.

Stuart Blacklock – Leevers Rich series D2B – CC BY-ND 2.0.

While the reel-to-reel recorders were in the early stages of development, families listened to records on their gramophones. The 78 revolutions per minute (rpm) disc had been the accepted recording medium for many years despite the necessity of changing the disc every 5 minutes. In 1948, Columbia Records perfected the 12-inch 33 rpm long-playing (LP) disc, which could play up to 25 minutes per side and had a lower level of surface noise than the earlier (and highly

breakable) shellac discs (Lomax, 2003). The 33 rpm discs became the standard form for full albums and would dominate the recorded music industry until the advent of the compact disc (CD).

During the 1940s, a mutually beneficial alliance between sound recording and radio existed. Artists such as Frank Sinatra and Ella Fitzgerald profited from radio exposure. Until this time, music had primarily been recorded for adults, but the popularity of Sinatra and his contemporaries revealed an entirely untapped market: teenagers. The postwar boom of the 1930s and early 1940s provided many teenagers spending money for records. Radio airplay helped to promote and sell records and the recording artists themselves, which in turn stabilized the recording industry. The near riots caused by the appearance of New Jersey crooner Frank Sinatra in concert paved the way for mass hysteria among Elvis Presley and Beatles fans during the rock and roll era.

THE 1950S: THE ADVENT OF ROCK AND ROLL

New technology continued to develop in the 1950s with the introduction of television. The new medium spread rapidly, primarily because of cheaper mass-production costs and war-related improvements in technology. In 1948, only 1 percent of America's households owned a television; by 1953 this figure had risen to nearly 50 percent, and by 1978 nearly every home in the United States owned a television (Genova). The introduction of television into people's homes threatened the existence of the radio industry. The radio industry adapted by focusing on music, joining forces with the recording industry to survive. In an effort to do so, it became somewhat of a promotional tool. Stations became more dependent on recorded music to fill airtime, and in 1955 the Top 40 format was born. Playlists for radio stations were based on popularity (usually the *Billboard* Top 40 singles chart), and a popular song might be played as many as 30 or 40 times a day. Radio stations began to influence record sales, which resulted in increased competition for spots on the playlist. This ultimately resulted in payola—the illegal practice of receiving payment from a record company for broadcasting a particular song on the radio. The payola scandal came to a head in the 1960s, when Cleveland, Ohio, DJ Alan Freed and eight other disc jockeys were accused of taking money for airplay. Following

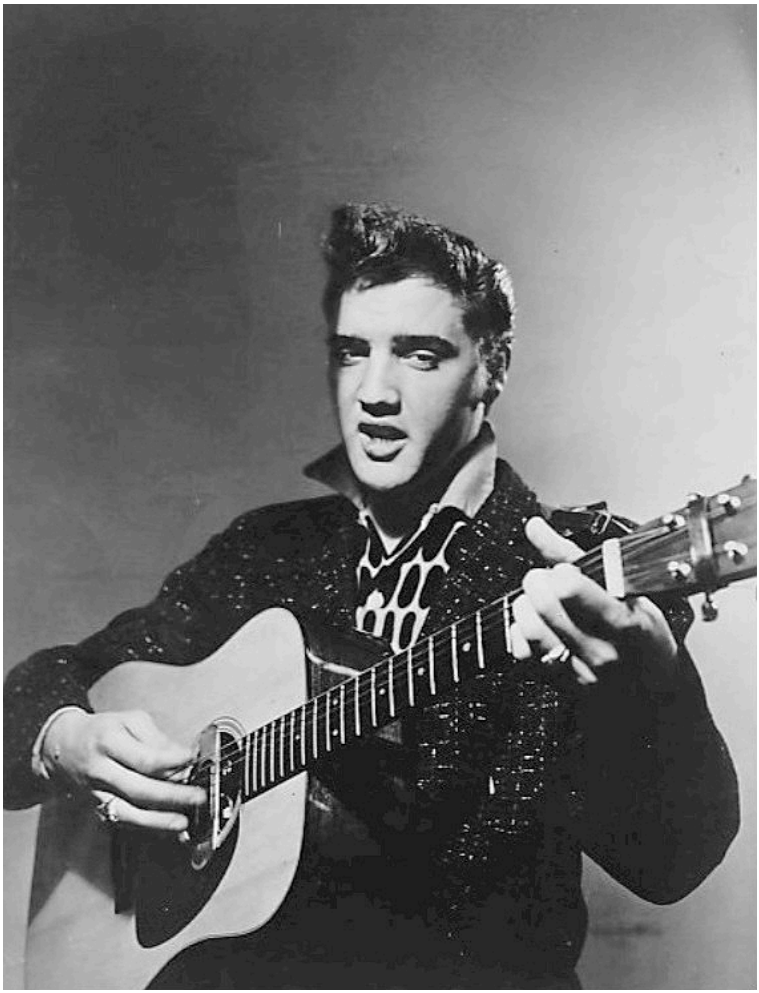
Freed's trial, an antipayola statute was passed, making payola a misdemeanor crime.

Technology wasn't the only revolution that took place during the 1950s. The urban Chicago blues typified by artists such as Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, and B. B. King surged in popularity among White and Black teenagers alike. Marketed under the name rhythm and blues, or **R&B**, the sexually suggestive lyrics in songs such as "Sexy Ways" and "Sixty Minute Man" and the electrified guitar and wailing harmonica sounds appealed to young listeners. At the time, R&B records were classified as "race music" and their sales were segregated from the White music records tracked on the pop charts (Szatmary, 2010). Nonetheless, there was a considerable amount of crossover among audiences. In 1952, the Dolphin's of Hollywood record store in Los Angeles, which specialized in R&B music, noted that 40 percent of its sales were to White individuals (Szatmary, 2010).

Although banned from some stations, others embraced the popular new music. In 1951, Freed started a late-night R&B show called *The Moondog Rock & Roll House Party* and began referring to the music he played as rock and roll (History Of Rock). Taking its name from a blues slang term for sex, the music obtained instant notoriety, gaining widespread support among teenage music fans and widespread dislike among the older generation (History Of Rock). Frenetic showmen Little Richard and Chuck Berry were early pioneers of rock and roll, and their wild stage performances became characteristic of

the genre. As the integration of White and Black individuals progressed in the 1950s with the repeal of segregation laws and the initiation of the civil rights movement, aspects of Black culture, including music, became more widely accepted by many White individuals. However, it was the introduction of a White man who sang songs written by Black musicians that helped rock and roll really spread across state and racial lines. Elvis Presley, a singer and guitarist, the "King of Rock and Roll," further helped make music written by Black individuals acceptable to mainstream White audiences and also helped popularize rockabilly—a blend of rock and country music—with Black audiences during the mid-1950s. Heavily influenced by his rural Southern roots, Presley combined the R&B music of bluesmen B. B. King, John Lee Hooker, and Howlin' Wolf with the country-western tradition of Roy Acuff, Ernest Tubb, and Jimmie Rodgers, and added a touch of gospel (Elvis). The reaction Presley inspired among hordes of adolescent girls—screaming, crying, rioting—solidified his reputation as the first true rock and roll icon.

FIGURE 6.6



Elvis Presley brought the style of R&B bluesmen to mainstream audiences in the 1950s.

Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

THE 1960S: ROCK AND ROLL BRANCHES OUT FROM R&B

Prior to 1964, rock and roll was primarily an American export. Although U.S. artists frequently reached the top of the charts overseas, few European artists achieved success on this side of the Atlantic. This situation changed almost overnight with the arrival of British pop phenomenon the Beatles. Combining elements of skiffle—a type of music played on rudimentary instruments, such as banjos, guitars, or homemade instruments—doo-wop, and soul, the four mop-haired musicians from Liverpool, England, created a genre of music known as Merseybeat, named after the River Mersey. The Beatles' genial personalities and catchy pop tunes made them an instant success in the United States, and their popularity was heightened by several appearances on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. When the Beatles arrived in New York in 1964, they were met by hundreds of reporters and police officers and

thousands of fans. Their appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show* a few days later was the largest audience for an American television program, with approximately one in three Americans (74 million) tuning in (Gould, 2007). *Beatlemania*—the term coined to describe fans' wildly enthusiastic reaction to the band—extended to other British bands, and by the mid-1960s, the Kinks, the Zombies, the Animals, Herman's Hermits, and the Rolling Stones were all making appearances on the U.S. charts. The Rolling Stones' urban rock sound steered away from pop music and remained more true to the bluesy, R&B roots of rock and roll. During their first appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, the Stones were lewd and vulgar, prompting host Ed Sullivan to denounce their behavior (although he privately acknowledged that the band had received the most enthusiastic applause he had ever seen) (Ed Sullivan). The British Invasion transformed rock and roll into the all-encompassing genre of rock, sending future performers in two different directions: the melodic, poppy sounds of the Beatles, on the one hand, and the gritty, high-volume power rock of the Stones on the other.

FIGURE 6.7



After the Rolling Stones' first appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, host Ed Sullivan apologized to the viewing audience for the band's lewd behavior.

Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

The branching out of rock and roll continued in several other directions throughout the 1960s. Surf music, embodied by artists such as the Beach Boys, Jan and Dean, and Dick Dale, celebrated the aspects of youth culture in California. With their twanging electric guitars and glossy harmonies, the surf groups sang of girls, beaches, and convertible cars cruising along the West Coast. In Detroit, some Black performers were developing a sound that would have crossover appeal with both Black and White audiences. Combining R&B, pop, gospel, and blues into a genre known as soul, vocalists such as James Brown, Aretha Franklin, Otis Redding, and Wilson Pickett sang about the lives of Black Americans. Producer and songwriter Berry Gordy Jr. developed soul music through the creation of his Motown label, which would become one of the most successful businesses owned by a Black individual in American history (Notable Biographies). Capitalizing on the 1960s girl-group craze, Gordy produced hits by the Marvelettes, Martha and the Vandellas, and, most successfully, Diana Ross and the Supremes. For his bands, he created a slick, polished image designed to appeal to the American mainstream.

In the late 1960s, supporters of the civil rights movement—along with feminists, environmentalists, and Vietnam War protesters—were gravitating toward folk music, which would become the sound of social activism. Broadly

referring to music that is passed down orally through the generations, folk music retained an unpolished, amateur quality that inspired participation and social awareness. Carrying on the legacy of the 1930s labor activist Woody Guthrie, singer-songwriters such as Joan Baez; Peter, Paul, and Mary; and Bob Dylan sang social protest songs about civil rights, discrimination against Black Americans, and the Cuban Missile Crisis. Having earned himself a reputation as a political spokesperson, Dylan was lambasted by traditional folk fans for playing an electric guitar at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival. However, his attempt to reach a broader crowd inspired the folk rock genre, pioneered by the Los Angeles band the Byrds (PBS). Even though many fans questioned his decision to go electric, Dylan's poetic and politically charged lyrics were still influential, inspiring groups like the Beatles and the Animals. Protest music in the 1960s was closely aligned with the hippie culture, in which some viewed taking drugs as a form of personal expression and free speech. Artists such as Jimi Hendrix, Jefferson Airplane, the Grateful Dead, and the Doors believed that the listening experience could be enhanced using mind-altering drugs (Rounds, 2007). This spirit of freedom and protest culminated in the infamous Woodstock festival in the summer of 1969, although the subsequent deaths of many of its stars from drug overdoses cast a shadow over the psychedelic culture.

THE 1970S: FROM GLAM ROCK TO PUNK

After the Vietnam War ended, college students began to settle down and focus on careers and families. For some, selfish views took the place of concern with social issues and political activism, causing writer Tom Wolfe to label the 1970s the "me" decade (Wolfe, 1976). Musically, this ideological shift resulted in the creation of glam rock, an extravagant, self-indulgent form of rock that incorporated flamboyant costumes, heavy makeup, and elements of hard rock and pop. A primarily British phenomenon, glam rock was popularized by acts such as Slade, David Bowie, the Sweet, Elton John, and Gary Glitter. It proved to be a precursor for the punk movement in the late 1970s. Equally flamboyant, but rising out of a more electronic sound, disco also emerged in the 1970s. Popular disco artists included KC and the Sunshine Band, Gloria Gaynor, the Bee Gees, and Donna Summer, who helped to pioneer its electronic sound. Boosted by the success of 1977 film *Saturday Night Fever*, disco's popularity spread across the country. Records were created especially for discos, and record companies churned out tunes that became huge hits on the dance floor.

Reacting against the commercialism of disco and corporate rock, punk artists created a minimalist, angry form of rock that returned to rock and roll basics: simple chord structures,

catchy tunes, and politically motivated lyrics. Like the skiffle bands of the 1950s, the appeal of punk rock was that anyone with basic musical skills could participate. The punk rock movement emerged out of CBGB, a small bar in New York City that featured bands such as Television, Blondie, and the Ramones. Never a huge commercial success in the United States, punk rock exploded in the United Kingdom, where high unemployment rates and class divisions had created angry, disenfranchised youths (BBC). The Sex Pistols, fronted by Johnny Rotten, developed an aggressive, pumping sound that appealed to a rebellious generation of listeners, although the band was disparaged by many critics at the time. In 1976, British music paper *Melody Maker* complained that "the Sex Pistols do as much for music as World War II did for the cause of peace (Gray, 2001)." Punk bands began to abandon their sound in the late 1970s, when the punk style became assimilated into the rock mainstream.

FIGURE 6.8



Even though the Sex Pistols were severely criticized in the 1970s, their music went on to inspire countless acts and helped develop the underground music scene in England and the United States.

nico7martin – Sex Pistols – CC BY 2.0.

THE 1980S: THE HIP-HOP GENERATION

Whereas many British youths expressed their displeasure through punk music, many disenfranchised Black American youths in the 1980s turned to hip-hop—a term for the urban culture that includes break dancing, graffiti art, and the musical techniques of rapping, sampling, and scratching records. Reacting against the extravagance of disco, many poor urban rappers developed their new street culture by adopting a casual image consisting of T-shirts and sportswear, developing a language that reflected the everyday concerns of the people in low-income, urban areas, and by embracing the low-budget visual art form of graffiti. They described their new culture as hip-hop, after a common phrase chanted at dance parties in New York's Bronx borough.

The hip-hop genre first became popular among Black youths in the late 1970s, when record spinners in the Bronx and Harlem started to play short fragments of songs rather than the entire track (known as sampling) (Demers, 2003). Early hip-hop artists sampled all types of music, like funk, soul, and jazz, later adding special effects to the samples and experimenting with techniques such as rotating or scratching records back and forth to create a rhythmic pattern. For example, Kool Moe Dee's track "How Ya Like Me Now" includes samples from James Brown's classic funk song "Papa's

Got a Brand New Bag." The DJs would often add short raps to their music to let audiences know who was playing the records, a trend that grew more elaborate over time to include entire spoken verses. Artists such as Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five added political and social commentary on the realities of life in low-income, high-crime areas—a trend that would continue with later rappers such as Public Enemy and Ice-T.

FIGURE 6.9



Early hip-hop artists, like Run-D.M.C., opposed the clean-cut, polished world of soul and pop by embracing political lyrics that were inspired by everyday life.

SoulRider.222 – RUN DMC – CC BY-ND 2.0.

In the early 1980s, a second wave of rap artists brought inner-city rap to American youths by mixing it with hard guitar rock. Pioneered by groups such as Run-D.M.C. and the Beastie Boys, the new music appealed to Black and White audiences alike. Another subgenre that emerged was gangsta rap, a controversial brand of hip-hop epitomized by West Coast rappers such as Ice Cube and Tupac Shakur. Highlighting violence and gang warfare, gangsta rappers faced accusations

that they created violence in inner cities—an argument that gained momentum with the East Coast–West Coast rivalry of the 1990s.

THE 1990S: NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN HIP-HOP, ROCK, AND POP

Hip-hop and gangsta rap maintained their popularity in the early 1990s with artists such as Tupac Shakur, the Notorious B.I.G., Dr. Dre, Eazy-E, Ice Cube, and Snoop Dogg at the top of the charts. West Coast rappers such as Tupac Shakur and Snoop Dogg favored gangsta rap, while East Coast rappers, like the Notorious B.I.G. and Sean Combs, stuck to a traditional hip-hop style. The rivalry culminated with the murders of Shakur in 1996 and B.I.G. in 1997.

FIGURE 6.10



The shooting deaths of gangsta rappers Tupac Shakur and the Notorious B.I.G. caused a shift in the hip-hop industry toward less violent music.

Tupac Amaru Shakur – Notorious BIG & 2Pac – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Along with hip-hop and gangsta rap, alternative rock came to the forefront in the 1990s with grunge. The grunge scene emerged in the mid-1980s in the Seattle area of Washington State. Inspired by hardcore punk and heavy metal, this subgenre of rock was so-called because of its messy, sludgy, distorted guitar sound, the disheveled appearance of its pioneers, and the disaffected nature of the artists. Initially

achieving limited success with Seattle band Soundgarden, Seattle independent label Sub Pop became more prominent when it signed another local band, Nirvana. Fronted by vocalist and guitarist Kurt Cobain, Nirvana came to be identified with Generation X—the post–baby boom generation, many of whom came from broken families and experienced violence both on television and in real life. Nirvana's angst-filled lyrics spoke to many members of Generation X, launching the band into the mainstream. Ironically, Cobain was uncomfortable and miserable, and he would eventually commit suicide in 1994. Nirvana's success paved the way for other alternative rock bands, including Green Day, Pearl Jam, and Nine Inch Nails. More recently, alternative rock has fragmented into even more specific subgenres.

FIGURE 6.11



Britney Spears was one of the driving forces behind the teen-pop phenomenon of the late 1990s, paving the way for pop stars Christina Aguilera and Pink.

Britney Spears – Britney Spears toxic (Bbspears) – CC BY-SA 2.0.

By the end of the 1990s, mainstream tastes leaned toward pop music. A plethora of boy bands, girl bands, and pop starlets emerged, sometimes evolving from gospel choir groups, but more often than not created by talent scouts. The groups were aggressively marketed to teen audiences. Popular bands included the Backstreet Boys, 'N Sync, and the Spice Girls. Meanwhile, individual pop acts from the MTV generation

such as Madonna, Michael Jackson, and Prince continued to generate hits.

THE 2000S: POP STAYS STRONG AS HIP-HOP OVERTAKES ROCK IN POPULARITY

The 2000s began right where the 1990s left off, with young singers such as Christina Aguilera and Destiny's Child ruling the pop charts. Pop music stayed strong throughout the decade with Gwen Stefani, Mariah Carey, Beyoncé, Katy Perry, and Lady Gaga achieving mainstream success. By the end of the decade, country artists, like Carrie Underwood and Taylor Swift, transitioned from country stars to bona fide pop stars. While rock music started the decade strong, by the end of the 2000s, rock's presence in mainstream music had waned, with a few exceptions such as Nickelback, Linkin Park, and Green Day.

FIGURE 6.12



Taylor Swift's 2008 album *Fearless* went multiplatinum, and hits like "You Belong to Me" and "Love Story" helped her go from country star to mainstream pop star.

VersusLiveQuizShow – Taylor Swift (2007) – CC BY-SA 2.0.

Unlike rock music, hip-hop maintained its popularity, with more commercial, polished artists such as Kanye West, Jay-Z, Lupe Fiasco, and OutKast achieving enormous success. While

some gangsta rappers from the 1990s—like Dr. Dre and Snoop Dogg—softened their images, other rappers—such as 50 Cent and Eminem—continued to project a tough image and to use violent lyrics. An alternative style of hip-hop emerged in the 2000s that infused positive messages and an element of social conscience to the music that was missing from early hip-hop tracks. Artists such as Common, Mos Def, and the Black Eyed Peas found success even though they didn't represent traditional stereotypes of hip-hop.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Popular music as we know it originated out of the Tin Pan Alley tradition that emerged at the beginning of the 20th century in which composers, singers, and publishers worked together to create hit songs. The primary difference between popular music and classical music is that, whereas classical artists were exalted for their individuality and expected to differ stylistically from other classical composers, popular artists were praised for conforming to the tastes of their intended audience.
- Technological developments played a vital role in bringing popular music to people's homes. The invention of the phonograph and gramophone in the

late 19th century enabled the reproduction and mass distribution of sound recordings for the first time. The invention of the reel-to-reel tape recorder and the development of vinyl records in the 1940s drastically improved this process. The postwar prevalence of radio hugely impacted popular music, with radio airplay of popular songs promoting record sales.

- Throughout the last century, tastes in popular music have evolved to encompass a wide variety of styles. People who enjoyed opera at the turn of the 20th century saw the rise of vaudeville and ragtime in the Tin Pan Alley era. Jazz and blues emerged from New Orleans and the Mississippi Delta during the 1930s, and musical styles adapted as people migrated to Northern urban areas. Rhythm and blues laid the groundwork for rock and roll that shook up popular music in the 1950s. Popular music diversified in the 1960s to encompass surf, folk, and soul music. In the 1970s, glam rock and disco became popular, and punk rockers revolted against the excesses of these styles. Hip-hop dominated the 1980s, and its popularity continued into the 1990s and 2000s. Pop was also successful in the 1990s and 2000s, while mainstream interest in alternative rock waned at the end of the 2000s.

EXERCISE

Choose a decade between 1900 and 2010. Research a technological development that took place during this time that influenced pop music—for example, the development of the electric guitar and its influence on rock and roll. Consider how this development influenced trends within the industry.

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6.3 The Reciprocal Nature of Music and Culture

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1. Identify ways in which culture and music have influenced each other.

The tightknit relationship between music and culture is almost impossible to overstate. For example, policies on immigration, war, and the legal system can influence artists and the type of music they create and distribute. Music may then influence cultural perceptions about race, morality, and gender that can, in turn, influence the way people feel about those policies.

CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON MUSIC

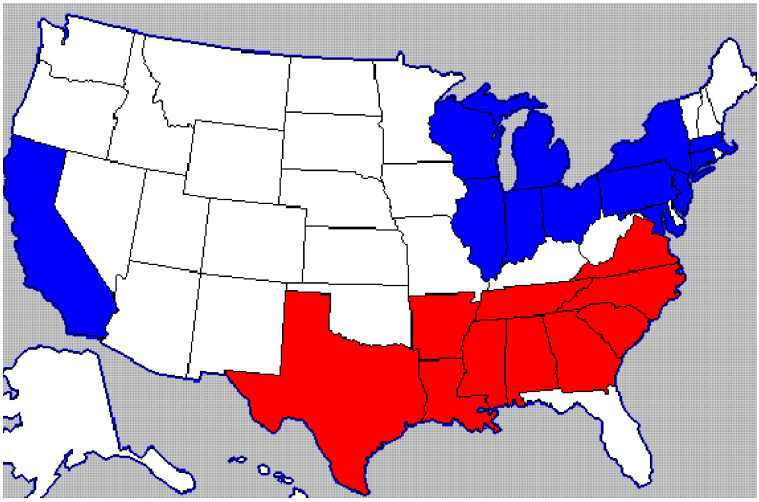
The evolution of popular music in the United States in the 20th century was shaped by a myriad of cultural influences. Rapidly shifting demographics brought previously independent cultures into contact and also created new cultures and subcultures, and music evolved to reflect these changes. Among the most important cultural influences on music are migration, the evolution of youth culture, and racial integration.

MIGRATION

One of the major cultural influences on the popular music industry over the past century is migration. In 1910, 89 percent of Black Americans still lived in the South, most of them in rural farming areas (Weingroff, 2011). Three years later, a series of disastrous events devastated the cotton industry. World cotton prices plummeted, a boll weevil beetle infestation destroyed large areas of crops, and in 1915, flooding

destroyed many of the houses and crops of farmers along the Mississippi River. Already suffering from the restrictive "Jim Crow" laws that segregated schools, restaurants, hotels, and hospitals, Black sharecroppers began to look to the North for a more prosperous lifestyle. Northern states were enjoying an economic boom as a result of an increased demand for industrial goods because of the war in Europe. They were also in need of labor because the war had slowed the rate of foreign immigration to Northern cities. Between 1915 and 1920, as many as 1 million Black individuals moved to Northern cities in search of jobs, closely followed by another million throughout the following decade (Nebraska Studies, 2010). The mass exodus of Black farmers from the South became known as the Great Migration, and by 1960, 75 percent of all Black Americans lived in cities (Emerging Minds, 2005). The Great Migration had a huge impact on political, economic, and cultural life in the North, and popular music reflected this cultural change.

FIGURE 6.13



During the Great Migration, the 12 states in blue had the largest population growth of Black individuals, while the states in red had the 10 largest net losses (Martin).

Some of the Black individuals who moved to Northern cities came from the Mississippi Delta, home of the blues. The most popular destination was Chicago. Delta-born pianist Eddie Boyd later told *Living Blues* magazine, "I thought of coming to Chicago where I could get away from some of that racism and where I would have an opportunity to, well, do something with my talent.... It wasn't peaches and cream, man, but it was a hell of a lot better than down there where I was born (Szatmary)." At first, the migrants brought their style of country blues to the city. Characterized by the guitar and the harmonica, the Delta blues was identified by its rhythmic structure and strong vocals. Migrant musicians were heavily

influenced by Delta blues musicians such as Charley Patton and legendary guitarist Robert Johnson. However, as the urban setting began to influence the migrants' style, they started to record a hybrid of blues, vaudeville, and swing, including the boogie-woogie and rolling-bass piano. Mississippi-born guitarist Muddy Waters, who moved to Chicago in the early 1940s, revolutionized the blues by combining his Delta roots with an electric guitar and amplifier. He did so partly out of necessity, since he could barely make himself heard in crowded Chicago clubs with an acoustic guitar (Chicago Blues Guitar). Waters's style was peppier and more buoyant than the sullen country blues. His plugged-in electric blues became the hallmark of the Chicago blues style, influencing countless other musicians and creating the underpinnings of rock and roll. Other migrant bluesmen helped to create regional variations of the blues all around the country, including John Lee Hooker in Detroit, Michigan, and T-Bone Walker in Los Angeles, California.

YOUTH CULTURE

Prior to 1945, most music was created with adults in mind,

and teenage musical tastes were barely a consideration. Young adults had few freedoms—most males were expected to join the military or get a job to support their fledgling families, while most females were expected to marry young and have children. Few young adults attended college, and personal freedom was limited. Following World War II, this situation changed drastically. A booming economy helped create an American middle class, which created an opening for a youth consumer culture. Unsavory memories of the war discouraged some parents from forcing their children into the military, and many emphasized enjoying life and having a good time. As a result, teenagers found they had a lot more freedom. This new liberalized culture allowed teenagers to make decisions for themselves, and, for the first time, many had the financial means to do so. Whereas many adults enjoyed the traditional sounds of Tin Pan Alley, teens were beginning to listen to rhythm and blues songs played by radio disc jockeys such as Alan Freed. Increased racial integration within the younger generation made them more accepting of Black musicians and their music, which was considered "cool," and provided a welcome escape from the daunting political and social tension caused by Cold War anxieties. The wide availability of radios, juke boxes, and 45 rpm records exposed this new style of rock and roll music to a broad teenage audience.

FIGURE 6.14



The popularity of *American Bandstand* made host Dick Clark an influential tastemaker in pop music.

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Once teenagers had the buying power to influence record sales, record companies began to notice. Between 1950 and 1959, record sales in the United States skyrocketed from $189 million to nearly $600 million (Szatmary). The 45 rpm vinyl records that were introduced in the late 1940s were an affordable option for teens with allowances. Dick Clark, a radio presenter in Philadelphia, soon tuned in to the new

teenage tastes. Sensing an opportunity to tap in to a potentially lucrative market, he acquired enough advertising support to turn local hit music telecast *Bandstand* into a national television phenomenon.

FIGURE 6.15



Teen heartthrob Fabian was molded to fit teenage musical tastes in order to maximize record sales.

Otto Caldwell – Fabian Forte – CC BY-NC 2.0.

The result was the launch of *American Bandstand* in 1957, a music TV show that featured a group of teenagers dancing to current hit records. The show's popularity prompted record producers to create a legion of rock and roll acts specifically designed to appeal to a teenage audience, including Fabian and Frankie Avalon (Grimes, 2011). During its almost 40-year run, *American Bandstand* was a prominent influence on teenage fashions and musical tastes and, in turn, reflected the contemporary youth culture.

RACIAL INTEGRATION

Following the Great Migration, racial tensions increased in Northern cities. Whereas many Northerners had previously been unconcerned with the issue of race relations in the South, they found themselves confronted with the very real issue of having to compete for jobs with Black migrant workers. Black workers found themselves pushed into undesirable neighborhoods, often living in crowded, unsanitary slums where they were charged exorbitant rates by unscrupulous

landlords. During the 1940s, racial tensions boiled over into race riots, most notably in Detroit. The city's 1943 riot caused the deaths of 34 people, 25 of whom were Black (Gilcrest, 1993).

Frustrated with inequalities in the legal system that distinguished Black and White individuals, members of the civil rights movement pushed for racial equality. In 1948, an executive order granted by President Harry Truman integrated the military. The move toward equality gained further momentum in 1954, with the U.S. Supreme Court decision to end segregation in public schools in the landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education*. The civil rights movement escalated throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s, aided by highly publicized events such as Rosa Parks's refusal to give up her seat on a bus to a White passenger in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955. In 1964, Congress passed the most sweeping civil rights legislation since the Civil War, forbidding discrimination in public places and authorizing financial aid to enable school desegregation.

Although racist attitudes did not change overnight, the cultural changes brought on by the civil rights movement laid the groundwork for the creation of an integrated society. The Motown sound developed by Berry Gordy Jr. in the 1960s both reflected and furthered this change. Gordy believed that by coaching talented but unpolished Black artists, he could make them acceptable to mainstream culture. He hired a professional to head an in-house finishing school, teaching his

acts how to move gracefully, speak politely, and use proper posture (Michigan Rock and Roll Legends). Gordy's commercial success with gospel-based pop acts such as the Supremes, the Temptations, the Four Tops, and Martha and the Vandellas reflected the extent of racial integration in the mainstream music industry. Gordy's most successful act, the Supremes, achieved 12 No. 1 singles on the *Billboard Hot 100* chart.

FIGURE 6.16



The commercial success of Motown girl group the Supremes reflected changing attitudes toward race in the United States.

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MUSICAL INFLUENCES ON CULTURE

Even though pop music is frequently characterized as a negative influence on society, particularly with respect to youth culture, it also has positive effects on culture. Many artists in the 1950s and 1960s pushed the boundaries of socially acceptable behavior with sexually charged movements and androgynous appearances. Without these precedents, acts like the Rolling Stones or David Bowie may have never made the transition into mainstream success.

On the other hand, over the past 50 years, critics have

blamed rock and roll for juvenile delinquency, heavy metal for increased teenage aggression, and gangsta rap for a rise in gang warfare among young urban males. One recent study claimed that youths who listen to music with sexually explicit lyrics were more likely to have sex at an early age, stating that exposure to lots of sexually degrading music gives teens "a specific message about sex (MSNBC, 2006)." In addition to its effects on youth culture, popular music has contributed to shifting cultural values regarding race, morality, and gender.

RACE

As the music of Chuck Berry and Little Richard gained popularity among White teens in the United States during the 1950s, most of the new rock acts were signed to independent labels, and larger companies such as RCA were losing their share of the market.

To capitalize on the public's enthusiasm for rock and roll and to prevent the loss of further potential profits, big record companies signed White artists to cover the songs of Black artists. The songs were often censored for the mainstream market by the removal of any lyrics that referenced sex, alcohol, or drugs. Pat Boone was the most successful cover artist of

the era, releasing songs originally sung by artists such as Fats Domino, the El Dorados, Little Richard, and Big Joe Turner. Releasing a cover of a Black performer's song by a White performer was known as hijacking a hit, and this practice usually left black artists signed to independent labels broke. Because large companies such as RCA could widely promote and distribute their records—six of Boone's recordings reached the No. 1 spot on the Billboard chart—their records frequently outsold the original versions. Many White artists and producers would also take writing credit for the songs they covered and would buy the rights to songs from Black writers without giving them royalties or songwriting credit. This practice fueled racism within the music industry. Independent record producer Danny Kessler of Okeh Records said, "The odds for a black record to crack through were slim. If the black record began to happen, the chances were that a white artist would cover—and the big stations would play the white records.... There was a color line, and it wasn't easy to cross (Szatmary)."

Although cover artists profited from the work of Black R&B singers, occasionally they also helped to promote the original recordings. Many teenagers who heard covers on mainstream radio stations sought out the original artists' versions, increasing sales and prompting Little Richard to refer to Pat Boone as "the man who made me a millionaire (Crane, 2005)." Benefiting from covers also worked both ways. In 1962, soul singer Ray Charles covered Don Gibson's hit "I

Just Can't Stop Loving You," which became a hit on country and western charts and furthered mainstream acceptance of Black musicians. Other Black artists to cover hits by White performers included Otis Redding, who performed the Rolling Stones hit "Satisfaction," and Jimi Hendrix, who covered Bob Dylan's "All Along the Watchtower."

HIJACKING HITS

Releasing cover versions of hit songs was fairly standard practice before the 1950s because it was advantageous for songwriters and producers to have as many artists as possible sing their records to maximize royalties. Several versions of the same song often appeared in the music charts at the same time. However, the practice acquired racial connotations during the 1950s when larger music labels hijacked R&B hits, using their financial strength to promote the cover version at the expense of the original recording, which often exploited Black talent. As a result, many 1950s R&B artists lost out on royalties.

Two contemporary Black performers who were victims of this practice were R&B singer LaVern Baker and blues singer Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup. Baker, who was signed with then small-time label Atlantic Records, had been promoted as a pop singer. Because her songs appealed to mainstream audiences, they were ideal for covering, and industry giant Mercury Records took full advantage of this. When Baker released her 1955 hit "Tweedle Dee," Mercury immediately put out its own version, a note-for-note cover sung by White pop singer Georgia Gibbs. Atlantic could not match Mercury's marketing budget, and Gibbs's version outsold Baker's recording, causing her to lose an estimated $15,000 in royalties (Parales, 1997).

Around the same time, Arthur Crudup was producing hits such as "So Glad You're Mine," "Who's Been Foolin' You," "That's All Right Mama," and "My Baby Left Me," which were subsequently released by performers such as Elvis Presley, Creedence Clearwater Revival, and Rod Stewart for huge financial gain, Crudup's songs made everybody rich—except him. This realization caused him to quit playing altogether in the late 1950s. A later attempt to collect back royalties was unsuccessful (Stanton, 1998). Baker filed a lawsuit in an attempt to revise the Copyright Act of 1909, making it illegal to copy an arrangement verbatim without permission. The lawsuit was unsuccessful, and Gibbs continued to cover Baker's songs (Dahl).

MORALITY

When Elvis Presley burst onto the rock and roll scene in the mid-1950s, many conservative parents of teenagers all over the United States were horrified. With his gyrating hips and sexually suggestive body movements, Presley was viewed as a threat to the moral well-being of young women. Television critics denounced his performances as vulgar, and on a 1956 appearance on the *Ed Sullivan Show*, cameras filmed him only from the waist up. One critic for the *New York Daily News* wrote that popular music "has reached its lowest depths in the 'grunt and groin' antics of one Elvis Presley (Collins, 2002)." Despite the critics' opinions, Presley immediately gained a fan base among teenage audiences, particularly adolescent girls, who frequently broke into hysterics at his concerts. Rather than tone down his act, Presley defended his movements as manifestations of the music's rhythm and beat

and continued to gyrate on stage. Liberated from the constraints imposed by morality watchdogs, Presley set a precedent for future rock and roll performers and marked a major transition in popular culture.

In addition to decrying raunchy onstage performances by rock and roll artists, moralists in the conservative Eisenhower era objected to the sexually suggestive lyrics found in original rock and roll songs. Big Joe Turner's version of "Shake, Rattle, and Roll" used sexual phrases and referred to the bedroom, while Little Richard's original version of "Tutti Frutti" contained the phrase "tutti frutti, loose booty (Hall & Hall, 2006)." Although many of these lyrics were sanitized for mainstream White audiences when they were rereleased as cover versions, the idea that rock and roll was a threat to morality had been firmly implanted in many people's minds.

Ironically, many of the controversial key figures in the rock and roll era came from extremely religious backgrounds. Presley was a member of the evangelical First Assembly of God Church, where he acquired his love of gospel music (History Of Rock). Similarly, Ray Charles soaked up gospel influences from his local Baptist church (Walk Of Fame). Jerry Lee Lewis came from a strict Christian background and often struggled to reconcile his religious beliefs with the moral implications of the music he created. During a recording session in 1957, Lewis argued with manager Sam Phillips that the hit song "Great Balls of Fire" was too "sinful" for him to record (History, 1957). The religious backgrounds of the rock and

roll pioneers both influenced and challenged moral norms. When Ray Charles recorded "I Got a Woman" in 1955, he reworded the gospel tune "Jesus Is All the World to Me," drawing criticism that the song was sacrilegious. Despite the objections, Charles's style caught on with other musicians, and his experimentation with merging gospel and R&B resulted in the birth of soul music.

GENDER

While Presley was revolutionizing people's notions of sexual freedom and expression, other performers were changing cultural norms regarding gender identity. Dressed in flamboyant clothing with a pompadour hairstyle and makeup, Little Richard was an exotic, androgynous performer who blurred traditional gender boundaries and shocked 1950s audiences with his blatant campiness. Between his wild onstage antics, bisexual tendencies, and love of post-concert orgies, the self-proclaimed "King and Queen of Rock and Roll" challenged many social conventions of the time (Buckley, 2003). Little Richard's flamboyant, gender-bending appearance was so outrageous that it was not taken seriously

during the 1950s—he was considered an entertainer whose androgynous look bore no relevance to the real world. However, Richard paved the way for future entertainers to shift cultural perceptions of gender. Later musicians such as David Bowie, Prince, and Boy George adopted his outrageous style, frequently appearing on stage wearing glittery costumes and heavy makeup. The popularity of these 1970s and 1980s pop idols, along with other gender-bending performers such as Annie Lennox and Michael Jackson, helped make androgyny more acceptable in mainstream society.

FIGURE 6.17



Gender-bending performers such as Little Richard, David Bowie, Boy George, and Prince helped to change social attitudes toward androgyny.

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The relationship between music and culture is reciprocal. Cultural influences on music include factors such as migration, youth culture, and racial integration. Musical influences on culture include factors such as racism within the music industry, content of particular genres of music that push conventional ideas of morality, and the physical appearance of individual performers.
- The mass migration of Southern Black individuals to urban areas during the early 20th century brought the blues to the North. Influenced by their new urban setting, migrant musicians incorporated new styles, including vaudeville and swing, into their music. Muddy Waters began playing electric guitar to make himself heard in the Chicago clubs and inadvertently created a new style known as Chicago blues.
- Young people in the 1950s had increased financial and personal freedom, giving them the power to influence record sales. Record companies began marketing rock and roll records specifically to teens, and the popularity of the new genre was enhanced by radio airplay and TV shows such as *American Bandstand*.
- The civil rights movement helped bring about

desegregation in the 1950s. Although racial tensions persisted and race riots occurred in several Northern cities, racial integration gradually took place. The move toward integration was furthered and reflected by the Motown sound created by Berry Gordy Jr. Motown had crossover appeal among Black and White audiences, illustrated by the mainstream success of groups such as the Supremes.

- Large record companies fueled racism in the music industry by hijacking the hits of Black performers and releasing censored cover versions by White artists. The practice cost Black artists royalties. Although many performers were angered by the trend, some believed it helped popularize their original recordings.
- Rock and roll music was denounced for its negative impact on morality. Elvis Presley's "vulgar" onstage gyrations outraged critics in the conservative Eisenhower era. Sexually suggestive song lyrics were also held responsible by many for a decline in moral values, although they were often censored cover versions.
- Gender-bending performers such as Little Richard, David Bowie, and Annie Lennox helped normalize androgyny in American culture.

EXERCISE

Choose a genre of popular music from the last century. Using the ideas in this section as a starting point, examine ways in which your chosen genre has influenced aspects of culture and ways in which cultural aspects have affected the genre's development.

- Which factors have played the biggest roles? Are they interrelated?

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6.4 Current Popular Trends in the Music Industry

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Assess the influence of the major record labels in the music industry.
2. Describe the role played by independent labels in the music industry.

In Weezer's 2008 song "Pork and Beans," vocalist Rivers Cuomo sings, "Timbaland knows the way to reach the top of the charts/Maybe if I work with him I can perfect the art (AOL Music Sessions)." The lyrics, a reference to hip-hop producer Timbaland's multiple high-profile collaborations, are an angry reaction to a meeting between Cuomo and record executives at the band's Geffen label. During the meeting, the executives told the band members they needed to write more commercial material, prompting a defiant (though commercially successful) response (Reesman, 2008). The incident is a reflection of the balance between commercial success and artistic expression in the music industry. Record labels need artists that inspire the record-buying public, while

artists need the financial backing and expertise of record labels and their marketing teams. In recent years, tensions between artists and their labels have been heightened by the cost-cutting measures that have taken place at many companies due to the impact of online file sharing on profits.

THE INFLUENCE OF MAJOR RECORD LABELS

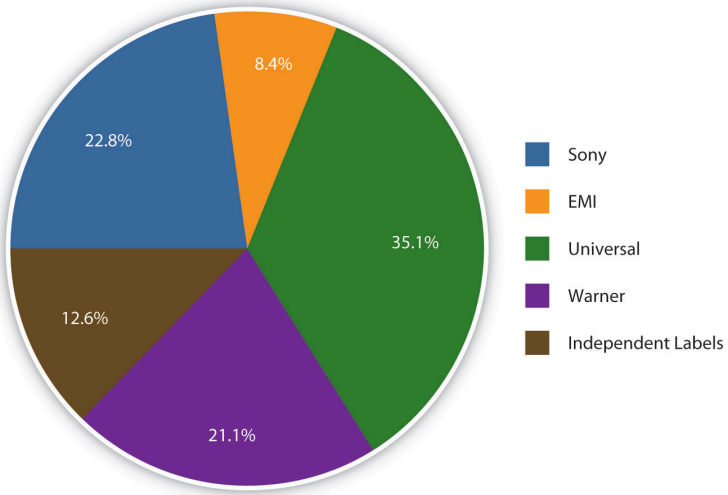
During the 1990s, the record industry was booming. Music lovers were busy replacing their cassette tapes and vinyl records with CDs, and sales were high. In 1999, the total revenue from music sales and licensing peaked at $14.6 billion (Goldman, 2010). Ten years later, record label executives were not as successful. Revenue had plunged to $6.3 billion, with the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) reporting declining revenue in nine of the 10 previous years, with album sales dropping an average of 8 percent every year (Goldman, 2010). Why the drastic decline? Experts agree that the primary culprit is the growing popularity of digital music, which initially began through peer-to-peer file sharing—the process

of swapping media files over the Internet—such as the Napster service.

Despite a massive loss in profits over the past decade, the global music business still comprises a powerful oligopoly—a market condition in which a few firms dominate most of an industry's production and distribution. The global reach of these few companies means that they have the promotion and marketing muscle to determine which types of music reach listeners' ears and which become obsolete. Each of the major record labels has a strong infrastructure that oversees every aspect of the music business, from production, manufacture, and distribution to marketing and promotion.

Between 1950 and 1980, a large number of major record labels and numerous independent labels competed for a share of the musical pie. Gradually, the larger labels began buying up the independent labels, and then started trying to purchase each other. By the late 1990s, only six major labels remained: Warner, Universal, Sony, BMG, EMI, and Polygram. In 1998, Universal acquired Polygram, and 6 years later Sony and BMG merged. Sony later bought out BMG to obtain sole ownership of the company. Currently, the music industry is dominated by the so-called Big Four: Sony Music Entertainment, EMI, Universal Music Group, and Warner Music Group. The Big Four control over 85 percent of the U.S. recording music industry (Copynot). Figure 6.11 shows a graph of the current distribution of market share.

FIGURE 6.18



Four major music labels control over 85 percent of the U.S. recording music industry.

Data courtesy of The Nielsen Company

SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT

In 2004, Japanese-owned Sony Music Entertainment (part of Sony) and German-owned BMG Entertainment (part of Bertelsmann) merged to create Sony BMG. The joint venture was a bid to overcome weak retail sales, online file sharing, and fierce competition from rival forms of media (Reuters, 2003). Independent music companies opposed the merger in Europe, arguing that it created a market imbalance, but the European Commission upheld its decision to allow the consolidation. In 2008, Sony bought out BMG's 50 percent stake for $1.2 billion (Kaplan). The company now has full ownership of the second-largest record label in the world. Subsidiary labels owned by Sony include Arista, Columbia, Epic, Jive, RCA, and Zomba, and the company represents numerous artists, including Alicia Keys, Ke$ha, and Sade.

EMI GROUP

The EMI Group is a British company, most famous for introducing the Beatles to the world through its Parlaphone subsidiary. Originally formed in 1931, through a merger of the UK Columbia Gramophone Company and the Gramophone Company, the money-losing company was taken over in 2007 by private equity firm Terra Firma Capital Partners Ltd. for $6.5 billion (Chassany, 2009). In an attempt to return the company to profit following the deal, Terra Firma head Guy Hands began slashing costs, eliminating more than 1,000 jobs in the process (Finch, et. al., 2008). Following the takeover, several high-profile artists quit the label, including Radiohead, who described the new management structure as "a confused bull in a china shop (Chassany, 2009)." As of 2010, the struggling company, which represents artists such as Coldplay, Lily Allen, and Pink Floyd, faces being taken over by its bankers after failing to secure a deal to sell its North American distribution rights to one of the other major labels (Dailynews, 2010).

WARNER MUSIC GROUP

Originally launched as Warner Bros. Records in 1958, the Warner Music Group gained momentum during the 1960s and 1970s with the purchase of several important new labels, including Elektra and Atlantic. Like the other major labels, the company began to suffer from declining sales due to the advent of free online music swapping. In 2004, Time Warner decided to abandon its record label and offloaded its music division to an investor group so that it could focus on more profitable areas, such as Time Warner Cable. The $2.6 billion deal included more than 800 artists, including Linkin Park, Metallica, and Kid Rock, as well as the group's publishing arm, Warner/Chapell Music, which owned more than a million copyrights (Vise, 2003).

After a brief period of independence, Warner Music Group went public in 2005, making the company the only stand-alone music company to be publically traded in the United States. To prepare for its public offering, the company made around $250 million in cuts through layoffs and consolidation (Leeds, 2005). The move caused concern among the label's artists that investors' interests would take priority over performers' interests and prompted rock-rap group Linkin Park to demand an early release from its contract with Warner. Guitarist Brad Delson characterized the company as "bad news," adding, "We don't want to be around to see what

happens (Leeds, 2005)." The band eventually worked out a lucrative new deal with the company. As of 2010, Warner Music Group is considering the possibility of purchasing EMI should the struggling company fail to meet its debt repayments (Sibun, 2010).

UNIVERSAL MUSIC GROUP

The largest of the Big Four record labels, Universal Music Group established itself as an industry giant in 1998, with the merger of PolyGram and Universal. Both companies already owned numerous subsidiaries, and the merger of the two entertainment conglomerates created the largest music company in the world. Wholly owned by French international media firm Vivendi since 2006, the company has gone on to acquire BMG Music Publishing and Univision Music Group, among smaller labels. Its acquisition of U.K. labels Sanctuary Music Group and V2 in 2007 drew criticisms from the independent sector that the recording giant was heading toward a monopoly (Sherwin, 2007). The Association of

Independent Music claimed that the deals would "further marginalize a vibrant independent sector, serving to stifle competition and narrow consumer choice (Sibun, 2010)." Despite the objections, both deals went ahead.

Universal Music Group's catalog of artists includes U2, Amy Winehouse, Lady Gaga, Taylor Swift, and the Black Eyed Peas. Despite its powerful status, the company has suffered from declining sales of physical products along with the rest of the music industry. As of 2010, UMG plans to lure customers back to purchasing physical CDs by lowering prices to under $10 (the average price of a digitally purchased album) (Swindle, 2010).

INDEPENDENT RECORD LABELS: A SMALLER SHARE OF THE PIE

In addition to the four major record labels, independent production companies, or indie record labels, operate without

the financial assistance of one of the Big Four (although in recent years, the definition has shifted to incorporate indies that are partially owned by one of the major labels). Ranging from small grassroots or garage labels to large, profitable businesses, indie labels typically produce music that is less commercially viable and more eclectic than the music produced by the larger mainstream companies.

INDIE ORIGINS

Independent labels have played a small but significant role in the music industry for as long as there has been a market. When patents held on sound recording technologies entered the public market in the 1920s, opportunities arose for small recording companies to enter the business. To avoid competing with larger firms such as RCA and Edison, the new independent companies focused on neglected areas of the music industry, such as folk, gospel, and rural blues. When the major labels decided during World War II to abandon then-unprofitable music recorded by Black artists, the independent labels quickly rushed in to fill the void, enjoying a boom during the rock and roll era when R&B music soared in popularity. Between 1955 and 1959, the U.S. market share

of the major companies had dropped from 78 percent to 44 percent, while the market share of independent companies rose from 22 percent to 56 percent (History Of Rock, 2009). Sun Records played a particularly important role in the development of both rock and roll and country music by releasing records by Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Johnny Cash, and Roy Orbison.

During the 1970s punk era, indie labels profited from the antimainstream, anticorporate attitude of many punk rock bands, which disassociated themselves from the major labels. The indie-rock movement grew throughout the 1980s and 1990s, with labels such as Sub Pop, I.R.S., and Epitaph and epitomized by the music of the Smiths, the Stone Roses, R.E.M., and the Jesus and Mary Chain. This movement was known as "college rock," which would later become alternative rock. However, as alternative rock grew in popularity, grunge bands such as Nirvana, Soundgarden, and Pearl Jam broke into the mainstream. This attracted the attention of major record labels, which began to look at the music with a commercially oriented approach. Many artists found themselves faced with a dilemma: stay true to their indie roots or "sell out" to a major record label in the hope of financial gain.

THE PRESSURE TO SELL OUT: NIRVANA

When Seattle grunge band Nirvana began to achieve success in the late 1980s, they were signed to independent label Sub Pop. Popular among college students, the band's 1989 album *Bleach* sold well enough for the band to consider moving to a bigger label. Amid rumors that Sub Pop was planning on signing as a subsidiary of a major record company because of financial difficulties, the band decided to cut out the middleman and seek a new contract itself (Norris, 2004). Signing with DGC Records (an imprint of Geffen), Nirvana released *Nevermind* in 1991 and found itself thrust into the mainstream. Within 9 months of its release, the album had sold more than 4 million copies (compared to 30,000 copies of *Bleach*), knocked Michael Jackson's *Dangerous* from the top of the *Billboard* chart, and placed Nirvana at the forefront of public attention.

For Sub Pop, Nirvana's success was both a blessing and a curse. Under severe financial stress, the label had begun layoffs in the spring of 1991, reducing its staff of 25 to a core group of five employees (Sub Pop Records, 2008). With the royalties it received from *Nevermind*, along with the buyout from Nirvana's contract, and potential royalties from any future albums, Sub Pop was pulled back from the brink of collapse. However, the carefully crafted niche that Sub Pop had found in the music industry vanished. Eager to discover the next big thing in grunge, major labels began scoping out Seattle bands, offering them large advances against which the smaller independent companies could not compete. Sub Pop chief Bruce Pavitt said of one band, "I was told by our head A&R agent that they would be happy with a $5,000 advance. Two months later we were giving them a check for $150,000 (Sub Pop Records, 2008)." In 1995, the company sold 49 percent of its shares to Warner Bros in exchange for financial backing.

Nirvana had equally ambivalent feelings about the transition from a small independent label to a major record company. At a concert shortly after the band signed their deal with DGC, lead singer Kurt Cobain declared to the crowd, "Hello, we're major-label corporate rock sellouts (Kunkel, 2007)." Having spent several years among the anticommercial, do-it-yourself grunge crowd in Seattle, the band's members were uncomfortable with their new position as wealthy rock stars.

ADVANTAGES OF INDIE LABELS

Although they frequently lose their talent to industry heavyweights, indie labels hold several advantages over major record companies. They are generally smaller, enabling them to respond to changing popular musical tastes more quickly than can large companies with more cumbersome processes and procedures in place. This enables them to pick up on emerging trends and bring them to market quickly. Although unable to compete with the distribution and promotion power of the major labels, indie labels can focus on niche markets, tapping into regional trends. For example, hip-hop's initial commercial successes in the late 1970s and early 1980s came through small independent labels such as Tommy Boy and Sugar Hill. Realizing that record executives would find the raw street version of hip-hop unworkable, the labels came

up with the idea of using house bands to play with emcees to improve the commercial viability of the genre. An early example of this process was Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight," which was a worldwide hit (Anderson, 2006).

FIGURE 6.19



Artists who have switched from an independent label to a major label midway through their careers include Green Day, Nirvana, and Death Cab for Cutie.

FoolOnTheHill301 – Green Day Background – CC BY 3.0; José Luis Merizalde – Nirvana Set Box – CC BY-NC 2.0; Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

The nature of the independent production process may also prove advantageous. A shorter path from creation of the music

to distribution and promotion makes it easier to maintain the artist's original vision. For this reason, many artists prefer to work with independent labels, believing the final product to be more authentic. This argument is also used by some fans of independent labels, who trust companies that only produce one brand of music to adhere to a consistent sound and musical style.

VANITY LABELS

A popular trend among major record labels is to allow high-profile recording artists to front their own indie labels with the financial backing of the larger company. Frequently referred to as vanity labels, these are spin-offs of the parent company that enable artists to run "a label within a label" and release music by other performers that they admire. Examples include Madonna's Maverick, Trent Reznor's Nothing, and Michael Jackson's MJJ. Allowing an artist to create a vanity label benefits a major record label in several ways: It encourages artists to remain with the parent company for longer than they may have otherwise done, it reduces the amount of promotional effort required by the label because fans are likely

to be attracted to new music based on the recommendation of favorite artists, and it increases the likelihood that bands in niche genres will become big moneymakers for the company.

However, vanity label projects often prove risky and unsuccessful because the label provides all of the money while the proven artist is responsible for developing new acts, and recent losses in the music industry have caused major labels to cut funding for artist-run ventures. For example, Mariah Carey's label, Crave, ended up dissolving less than a year after it opened. In 2004, Universal Records President Monte Lipman commented, "Back in the day, when the industry was a lot healthier, it was 'OK, here's $2–$3million. Go start your label and let us know when you're ready to start your first act.' Those days are absolutely over (First Coast News, 2004)."

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The global music business constitutes a powerful oligopoly—a market condition in which a few firms dominate most of an industry's production and distribution. Major record labels make up over 85 percent of the music industry. Currently, the four major record labels (known as the Big Four) are EMI, Sony Music Entertainment, Universal Music Group, and Warner Music Group.

- Indie record labels are smaller labels that operate without financial assistance from the Big Four and typically produce less commercially viable music. Although they do not have the marketing and promotional power of the major labels, indies have several advantages. They are smaller and more flexible than major labels, enabling them to respond more quickly to trends in the industry. Indies are also able to tap into niche markets, and their simple structure often means that the music stays closer to the artist's original vision. Major labels often allow high-profile stars to set up their own indie labels, known as vanity labels because they reflect the personal musical tastes of the high-profile artist.

EXERCISE

Draw a T-chart. Label the left-hand column *Major Record Labels* and the right-hand column *Independent Record Labels*. Using the information in this chapter, your own knowledge, and further Internet research, list the advantages held by each type of label in the music industry. Consider the size and structure of each type of company,

financial issues, artist preferences, and the impact of digital distribution.

Major Record Labels	Independent Record Labels
• Larger labels have money for wider promotion and distribution.	• Smaller labels can react quickly to emerging trends.

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6.5 Influence of New Technology

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Determine the difference between illegal file sharing and legitimate digital downloads.
2. Identify ways in which digital music sales have influenced the music industry.

3. Identify ways in which the Internet has enabled artists to sell music directly to fans.

In the mid-1990s, CD sales were booming. Cassette tapes were all but obsolete, and record companies were reaping the benefits of sales to consumers who wanted their music collections in the latest technological format. This boom was a familiar step in the evolution of technology. In past decades, records seemed to have an ironclad lock on sales, but they were eventually passed by cassette sales. Cassettes, as previously mentioned, were then passed by CD sales. However, despite a few advantages in quality and convenience, there were several areas in which CDs were lacking. They were expensive for consumers to purchase, and consumers had to buy a full album even if they were only interested in listening to one or two songs on it because every album came as a complete package.

At the height of the CD revolution, new digital technology was being developed that would eliminate these disadvantages and revolutionize digital music storage. In 1989, German company Fraunhofer-Gesellshaft discovered how to compress digital audio to approximately one-tenth the size of the original audio with almost no discernible loss in quality to the average listener. Small enough to be transmitted over a modem, the so-called MP3 files (the *MP* stands for *Moving Pictures Experts Group*, which is the group that sets the

standard for audio and video compression and transmission, and the *3* refers to the most popular layer or scheme with the standard) could be downloaded onto a website or FTP site in a relatively short amount of time. Initially done only by a tech-savvy elite, the process of downloading and sharing audio files was a painstaking process because MP3 files were not in one centralized location. Peer-to-peer file sharing—the process in which two or more computer systems are connected over the Internet for the purpose of sharing music or video files—became a worldwide phenomenon in 1999 with the development of centralized online file-sharing system Napster.

FILE SHARING: FROM ILLEGAL DOWNLOADING TO DIGITAL MUSIC STORES

In 1999, Northeastern University student Shawn Fanning dropped out of school to complete work on a software project that would simplify finding and downloading MP3 files on the Internet (Doyle, 2000). The result was a free downloadable

Napster program that transformed PCs into servers for exchanging music files over the Internet. The program also sported a chat-room feature that served a community of music fans eager to discuss their favorite bands. Originally an experiment between Fanning and his friends, the program's popularity spread through word of mouth. By the end of the first week, 15,000 people had downloaded the program (Riedel, 2006).

Although music fans were thrilled by their newfound ability to download free songs (albeit illegally), the record industry was not happy. In December 1999, all four major record labels, together with the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), launched a series of lawsuits against Fanning and his site for copyright infringement. Citing the nonpayment of royalties and the loss of revenue through lost CD sales, the RIAA also claimed that artists would be unwilling to create new songs now that they could be obtained for free. In response, Napster argued that it merely provided the software for people to share music files and no copyrighted material appeared on the site itself. In addition, Fanning claimed that the site encouraged people to go out and buy CDs based on the exposure artists received from Napster (Riedel, 2006).

As the number of the Napster program users grew, the lawsuit began to garner publicity. Some Napster supporters, many of them college students, viewed the legal battle as a David versus Goliath situation and rooted for Fanning to beat the corporate music giants. Most recording artists sided with

the record labels, with heavy metal rock group Metallica and rap artist Dr. Dre launching their own separate lawsuits against Napster in April 2000. However, some bands discovered a way to use the site to their advantage. Alternative rock group Radiohead promoted its album *Kid A* by secretly releasing the record to Napster 3 weeks before its street release date, creating a wave of publicity that launched the album to the No. 1 spot on the *Billboard 200* chart in October 2000 (Menta, 2000). Reggae-rock band Dispatch poured free recordings onto the site, increasing its fan base to such an extent that it sold out multiple nights at Madison Square Garden in early 2007 (Knopper, 2009). Dispatch bassist Pete Heimbold said, "What we found was it really didn't deter kids from coming to shows and buying CDs. In fact, I think it had the opposite effect—people heard songs off Napster and had a lot of merchandise and CDs (Knopper, 2009)."

Despite the Napster program's many advantages, including a built-in user base of 26.4 million people, the major record labels were unable to reach a deal with the site to create any form of fee-based service. In 2007, former EMI Executive Ted Cohen said, "The record labels had an opportunity to create a digital ecosystem and infrastructure to sell music online, but they kept looking at the small picture instead of the big one. They wouldn't let go of CDs (Mnookin, 2007)." A court injunction in 2000 ordered Napster to remove all copyrighted material from its servers, and within two days the website was effectively shut down. Following a bankruptcy liquidation, the

Napster program was reinvented as a paid subscription service in 2003. Under its new terms, users pay a fee to access music.

THE POST-NAPSTER UNIVERSE: GNUTELLA AND KAZAA

Napster's initial success resulted in a wave of similar sites emerging throughout 2000. The creators of these new services recognized that Napster's legal problems were the result of maintaining a central file server. By keeping a list of all the users on the network, Napster was able to control its users' activities by blocking illegal downloads. When the court ordered the service to halt illegal downloading, the absence of a central database destroyed the entire Napster network.

To avoid a similar fate, new peer-to-peer (P2P) systems adopted two different approaches. The Gnutella network, which serves clients such as LimeWire, BearShare, and WinMX, avoided maintaining a central database. Instead, it dispersed information about file locations across computer "nodes" around the world. Users were able to find each other,

but the service could disclaim the ability to prevent copyright infringements. The lack of a centralized server and multiple client base meant that, unlike Napster, it would be impossible to shut down the entire Gnutella network through a simple court order. Courts would need to block all Gnutella network traffic at the Internet service provider (ISP) level of the Internet, a far trickier prospect than simply shutting down a central database.

In addition to a lack of a central database, some P2P providers set up in offshore locations to take advantage of less-restrictive copyright laws and weaker enforcement. Kazaa was initially based in the Pacific island nation of Vanuata and operated out of Australia. However, the company's offshore location did not protect it from copyright infringement laws. After a series of legal wrangles, Kazaa was ordered to modify its software in Australia in 2005 and agreed to pay $100 million in damages to the record industry. In 2006, the site became a legal music download service (BBC News, 2006).

Not content with pursuing providers of illegal music downloads, the RIAA also took legal action against the users of sites such as LimeWire and Kazaa. In 2003, the recording industry sued 261 American music fans for illegally sharing songs on P2P networks (Kravets, 2008). Although fines under U.S. copyright law can rise to up to $150,000 per illegally downloaded track, most of the cases were settled for much less. As of 2008, the RIAA had sued or threatened to sue more than 30,000 individuals for copyright infringement (Kravets, 2008).

BUSTED! WOMAN FINED $1.92 MILLION

In an ongoing legal battle with the RIAA, Minnesota woman Jammie Thomas was found guilty of copyright infringement for a second time in 2009 and fined $1.92 million for illegally downloading 24 songs on file-sharing Kazaa website. First fined $222,000 for using the Kazaa service, the 30-year-old single mother of four refused to settle with the recording industry out of court. Thomas claimed her innocence, maintaining that she was not the Kazaa service user whose files had been detected by RIAA investigators (Kravets, 2008).

The case became the first of its kind to go before a jury in 2007, and Thomas faced fines ranging from $18,000 to $3.6 million under the Copyright Act of 1976. After deliberating for 5 hours, a jury found her guilty of copyright infringement and awarded the RIAA $222,000 in damages. The verdict was thrown out a year later when a

federal judge declared a mistrial. However, jurors in Thomas's second trial found her guilty again, upping the fine to $1.92 million. A federal judge later reduced the damages to $50,000. In January 2010, the RIAA offered to close the case for $25,000, but Thomas continued to refuse to pay (Kravets, 2010).

Thomas's case has provoked strong reactions on both sides of the debate. RIAA spokeswoman Cara Duckwork said, "It is a shame that Ms. Thomas-Rasset continues to deny any responsibility for her actions rather than accept a reasonable settlement offer and put this case behind her (Kravets, 2010)." Joe Sibley, one of Thomas's lawyers, argued, "They want to use this case as a bogeyman to scare people into doing what they want, to pay exorbitant damages (Kravets, 2010)." The RIAA is currently winding down its 6-year campaign against illegal downloaders, approximately 30,000 lawsuits in all. Instead the RIAA is focusing on creating a program with Internet providers to discontinue service to users who continue to break online copyright laws (Kravets, 2010).

THE ADVENT OF DIGITAL MUSIC STORES

With the closure of the Napster program and the crackdown on illegal downloading, a void in the music distribution market opened and was almost immediately filled by fee-based online music providers. This void helped to resurrect one company many feared was declining. Apple launched iTunes—a free application for the Mac computer that converted audio CDs into digital music files, organized digital music collections, and played Internet radio—and the iPod—a portable media player compatible with the iTunes software—in 2001, and both products have dominated the market ever since. In 2003, the company signed deals with all of the major record labels and launched the iTunes Store, a virtual store that enabled people to buy and download digital music on demand. Initially featuring 200,000 songs at a cost of $0.99 each to download, the store quickly revolutionized the digital music industry. Within a week, iTunes Store customers purchased 1 million songs (Apple). Six months later, Apple convinced the record labels to expand the service to Microsoft Windows operating system users, and by the following year, the iTunes Store had gone international. Within 5 years of its launch, the iTunes Store was the top music seller in the United States, and in February 2010, Apple celebrated its 10 billionth download (Williams, 2010).

Several companies have attempted to cash in on the success of iTunes, with varying results. In 2007, Internet giant Amazon.com launched the Amazon MP3 digital music download store that initially offered more than 2 million songs priced between $0.89 and $0.99 (Richardson, 2007). Amazon's major selling point was its lack of digital rights management (DRM) software, which enabled music downloads to be played on any hardware device. In contrast, songs downloaded through the iTunes appliance program could only be played on Apple products. Apple removed these restrictions in 2009 after negotiating an agreement with the major record labels. Despite its efforts to topple Apple from the top spot in the digital music arena, the Amazon MP3 service only commanded 8 percent of the digital music market in 2009, compared with Apple's 69 percent of the market (NPD Group, 2009). Napster has also stayed in the game by releasing a new design plan in 2009 after being purchased by Best Buy. The plan requires users to pay a fee to access all the music in its catalog. This plan has kept Napster in business; however, the company only had 1 percent to 2 percent of the market share at the beginning of 2010 (Weintraub, 2010). Other online music stores are operated by Wal-Mart, Rhapsody, and Yahoo! Music.

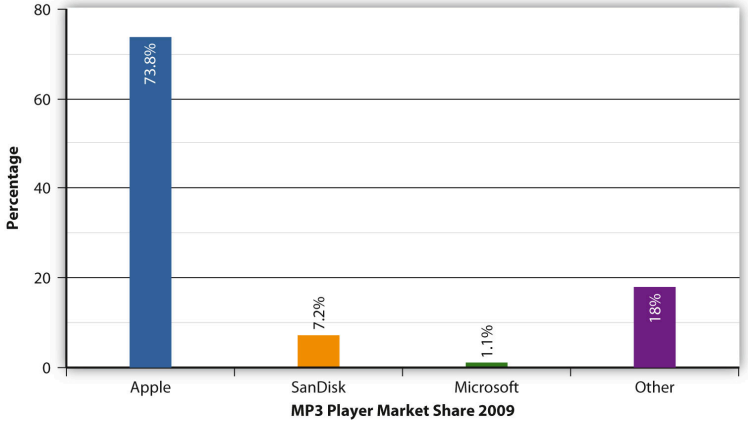
THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL MUSIC TECHNOLOGY

Once digital music technology was introduced to the world, its domination of the music industry was almost instantaneous. MP3 players have several key advantages over CD players. They are smaller and more portable, eliminating the necessity of lugging around bulky CD carrying cases. Whereas CDs can only hold a relatively small amount of data, MP3 players are able to compress thousands of songs onto a single device (this lack of packaging and manufacturing has caused disputes between artists and labels over royalties, which will be discussed later on). The lack of moving parts means MP3 players can be taken jogging or cycling without the risk of a song skipping every time the user hits a bumpy patch of road. Users are also no longer obligated to buy entire albums; instead, they can pick and choose their favorite songs from a catalog of online music.

Of the many brands of MP3 player currently available on the market, Apple's iPod has been the dominant force in the digital music industry since its launch in 2001 (see Figure 6.15). Apple CEO Steve Jobs attributes the success of his product to its simple design. In a 2005 interview he said, "One of the biggest insights we have was that we decided not to try to manage your music library on the iPod, but to manage it in iTunes. Other companies tried to do everything on the device

itself and made it so complicated that it was useless (levy, 2006)." The iPod has also reaped the benefits of a successful marketing campaign and constant reinvention of its original format. Customers now have the choice of several different iPod models according to their need for storage space and desire for additional services such as Internet access and video-playing capability.

FIGURE 6.20



Since its launch in 2001, Apple's iPod has remained the biggest-selling brand of MP3 player (Nusca, 2009).

PROFIT DIVISION

One effect that Apple iTunes and other online retailers have had on the music industry is to shake up the way that profits are divided among artists and record labels. Because of the unanticipated boom in digital record sales, recording artists and their publishers were unprepared for the possibility that they might need to renegotiate their contracts to include digital downloads. Many artists discovered to their cost that their contracts predated the digital download era, leaving them open to exploitative royalty rates for digital downloads of songs and ringtones.

The very definition of digital royalties is still under negotiation—should a download be classified as licensed use of an artist's music (which nets the artist approximately 50 percent of the download fee in royalties), or should it be classified as a retail sale (which nets the artist approximately 12 percent of the download fee in royalties) (Michaels, 2009)? The answer depends on the contractual agreement between artists and record labels. In 2009, rapper Eminem's publishing company FBT Productions sued Universal Music Group for $1.6 million of unpaid royalties, arguing that the downloads should fall under the "licensing" agreements that cover physical releases such as CDs, rather than the "distribution" agreements put forth by Universal Music Group (Michaels, 2009). A jury agreed that a song sold online is no different

from a song bought in a store and ruled in favor of the record label.

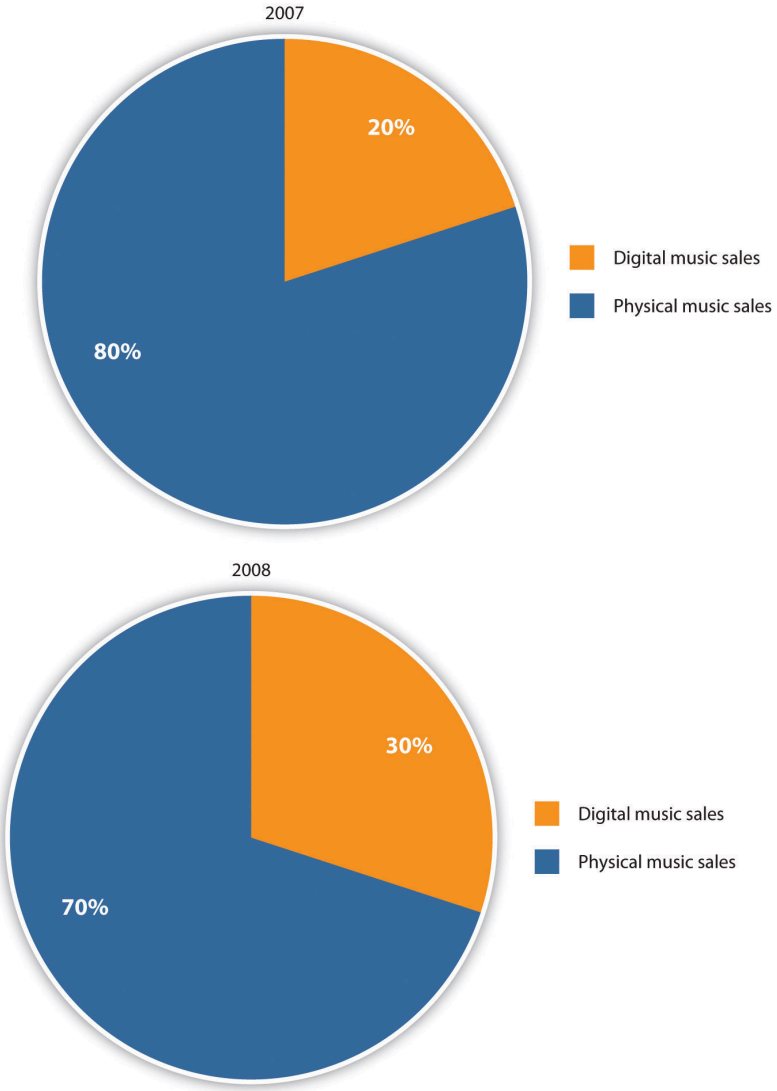
Because online retailers such as Apple are responsible for the marketing, management, and delivery of downloaded music, record labels' overheads are much lower. This new industry trend has prompted many artists and publishers to demand a bigger share of labels' profits. As of 2010, a $0.99 download from the iTunes appliance program generates $0.30 for Apple and $0.70 for the record label, of which $0.09 goes to the songwriter and publisher as a standard mechanical royalty (Albanesius, 2008).

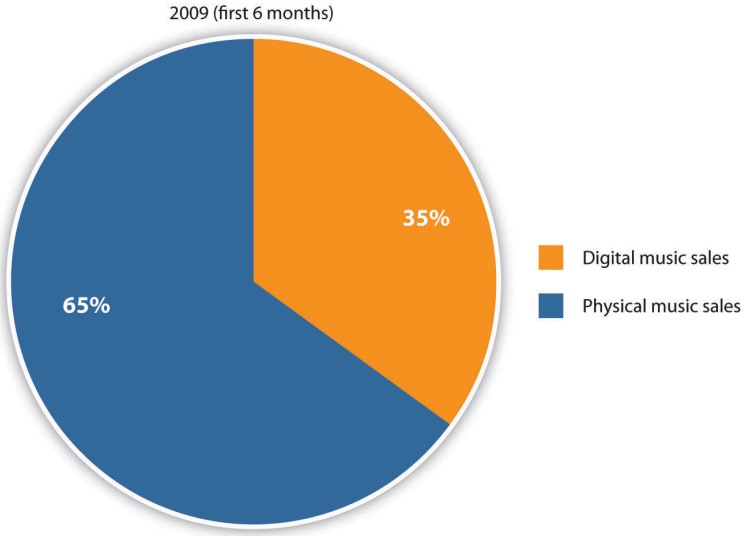
CD SALES

The burgeoning popularity of digital music has drastically reduced revenue brought in from CD sales since 2001. Although many people have switched from illegally downloading to purchasing music on digital stores, paid digital downloads have not yet begun to make up for the loss of revenue from CD sales, and illegal downloads remain a problem for the recording industry. According to online download tracker BigChampagne Media Measurement,

unauthorized downloads still represent about 90 percent of the market (Goldman). With album sales declining at a rate of 8 percent a year, music executives are trying to figure out how to stem the flow of money flooding out of the CD sales market. Former head of Yahoo! Music David Goldberg said, "The digital music business is a war of attrition that nobody seems to be winning. The CD is still disappearing, and nothing is replacing it in entirety as a revenue generator (Goldman)." In 2009, digital revenue sales rose and were well on the way to equaling CD sales, which were on the decline (see Figure 6.21).

FIGURE 6.21


2007
20%
80%
Digital music sales
Physical music sales
2008
30%
70%
Digital music sales
Physical music sales

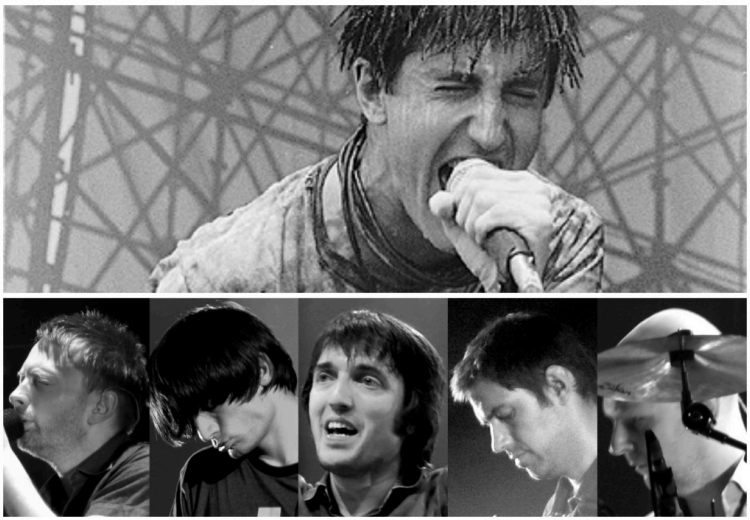


Digital Music Sales versus Physical Music Sales (Graham, 2009).

To partially make up for lost sales, the music industry has been generating revenue through licensing fees, including fees for ringtones, music played on Internet radio stations such as MySpace Music and Pandora, and music videos on the YouTube video-sharing website that is owned by Google. In 2009, digital licensing revenue reached $84 million and continues to grow (Goldman). Meanwhile, recording artists are focusing their attention on live performances and merchandise, which have become their main source of revenue. Demand for concert tickets rose at least 7 percent

in 2008 to $4.2 billion, according to touring industry trade magazine *Pollstar* (Sisario, 2008).

UTILIZING THE INTERNET: A NEW LEVEL OF INDIE



Artists such as Nine Inch Nails and Radiohead are abandoning the traditional music industry model in favor of marketing their songs directly to fans.

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Over the past few years, the Internet has begun to level the proverbial playing field between major and independent record labels. Exemplifying how smaller indie labels are able to latch on to trends more quickly than the Big Four, indies have embraced new technology, including blogging, online video sites, and online social networking sites, as a means of promoting their music, while the major labels have fallen behind the curve. With social networking sites enabling artists to communicate directly with their fans, the need for extensive financial backing or an industry middleman is all but eliminated. Now, artists can upload their music onto a social networking site for free and generate record sales purely through word of mouth.

Although a few indie artists have become household names entirely through the buzz generated on social networking sites, many others find that they need some guidance. The direct-to-fan business model has created opportunities for web-based companies such as Nimbit and ReverbNation, which provide software that enables independent artists and record labels to market their music online, keep track of sales,

create demand for their music, and communicate with fans. The companies offer social networking applications that enable fans to purchase music directly from the artists rather than being redirected to a third-party website. Other advantages for bands include automatic updates to fans across a variety of networking sites, digital distribution through the iTunes appliance program and other stores, and real-time sales updates.

Many established artists have also embraced the direct-to-fan business model. In 2007, Nine Inch Nails frontman Trent Reznor announced that the band was splitting from its contractual obligations to Universal Music Group to distribute its next albums independently. Well known for his vocal distaste of major record labels and their profiteering, Reznor encouraged fans in Australia to steal his album *Year Zero* because he believed it was priced too highly there (SPIN, 2007). Commenting on the state of the music industry in a 2007 interview he said, "I've got a battle where I'm trying to put out quality material that matters and I've got fans that feel it's their right to steal it and I've got a company that's so bureaucratic and clumsy and ignorant and behind the times they don't know what to do, so they rip the people off (Johnson, 2007)." Following the band's split with Universal, they released studio album *The Slip* as a free digital download in 2008. Reznor stated, "This one's on me," on his website, thanking fans for their loyalty. The album was downloaded 1.4 million times within the first 6 weeks of its release (Kent,

2011). A similar technique used by tech-savvy alternative band Radiohead reaped even higher rewards in 2007, when its retail release of *In Rainbows* entered the album chart at No. 1 even though the digital version had been offered online at a price of the customer's choosing several months earlier (see Chapter 11 "The Internet and Social Media" for more information about Radiohead's *In Rainbows* release) (Brandle, 2008). The web-based direct release model allows bands such as Radiohead and Nine Inch Nails to obtain vital information about their fan bases—including e-mail addresses—that they can use for future promotions. Whether or not the practice proves to be a passing fad, the traditional music industry model is shifting as new technology makes it easier for artists to communicate directly with their fans.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The introduction of digital music technology and peer-to-peer file sharing in 1999 changed the nature of the music industry. Websites, such as the Napster service, which enabled users to share free music, negatively impacted CD sales. Although the RIAA successfully shut down Napster, other sites emerged throughout the early 2000s, such as the Gnutella network and the Kazaa service. Rather than figuring

out a way to make money from digital music, the recording industry focused its efforts on bringing lawsuits against illegal downloaders. By the time iTunes and other fee-based music sites became available, irreversible damage had been done to the industry's sales figures.

- Apple's iTunes Store is the dominant digital music retailer in the United States, commanding almost 70 percent of the digital music market. The boom in digital music sales has affected the music industry in several ways: It has changed the way that profits are distributed among recording artists and labels, it has caused a massive decline in CD sales, and it has prompted industry executives to seek profits elsewhere (for example, through licensing fees).
- The Internet has proved advantageous for smaller indie labels that take advantage of blogging, social networking sites, and video websites as a means to promote their music. Companies such as Nimbit and ReverbNation are replacing some of the functions performed by major record labels, enabling artists to promote and distribute their own music directly to fans. Established bands such as Radiohead and Nine Inch Nails have separated from major labels and used the Internet to successfully distribute their music at little or no cost to fans. The ready availability and low cost of this new technology is changing the music

industry, and the Big Four companies may need to adapt traditional business models to return to profit.

EXERCISE

Visit the Apple website (http://www.apple.com/) and compare its digital music services and products with those of its nearest competitors. For music, look at Amazon (http://www.amazon.com/), Yahoo! Music (http://new.music.yahoo.com/), and Napster (http://www.napster.com). How do the prices and experiences differ? For MP3 players, look at Sony (http://www.sony.com), Philips (http://www.usa.philips.com/), and RCA (http://www.rca.com).

- How do the various MP3 players differ?
- After comparing Apple to its competitors, why do you think Apple commands a larger share of the digital music market?
- Conduct a survey among your peers to research consumer opinions. How have these sites been influenced by digital music sales?

END-OF-CHAPTER ASSESSMENT

Review Questions

1. Section 1
    1. How did Tin Pan Alley influence the development of popular music, and how did the music that came out of Tin Pan Alley differ from classical music?
    2. What are some of the technological developments that influenced the growth of popular music, and how did they assist its progress?
    3. What genres of music developed throughout the 20th century? What musical elements characterize each genre?
2. Section 2
    1. What cultural factors influenced the popular music industry in the 20th century?
    2. How did music influence culture in the 20th century? How are music and culture interrelated?
3. Section 3
    1. What are the Big Four record labels? In what ways

do they influence the music industry?
2. What are the main differences between major labels and indie labels? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?
3. What three steps are involved in the music production process? What factors are currently affecting the ways in which music is produced and distributed?

4. Section 4

    1. How did peer-to-peer sharing networks affect the music business when they were first introduced? How did digital music progress from users downloading music illegally to purchasing from online music stores?
    2. What are some of the impacts that digital music has had on the industry? How are industry executives responding to these impacts?
    3. What is the direct-to-fan business model, and how has new technology enabled its progression?

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. Does music primarily reflect or influence cultural and social change?
2. How did the major record labels' reaction to peer-to-peer file sharing place them at a strategic disadvantage in the music industry?
3. What are the potential implications of the direct-to-fan business model for the future of the music industry?
4. Music critics frequently proclaim the "death of rock and roll." How might the corporate influence of the Big Four over the modern music industry be related to these claims?
5. How have social and political factors influenced musical tastes throughout the past century?

CAREER CONNECTION

Although many traditional music industry careers are in decline as a result of poor CD sales and the impact of new technology, changes within the industry have created new opportunities. As artists turn away from recorded music

and focus on live performances, demand for concert tickets continues to rise. One possible career path in the music industry is that of a concert promoter. Read about the demands and expectations of a concert promoter at http://entertainment.howstuffworks.com/concert-tour2.htm . Once you have familiarized yourself with the material, read about the personal experiences of concert promoter David Werlin at http://www.bankrate.com/brm/news/advice/19990701a.asp and answer the following questions:

1. What advantages and disadvantages does Werlin give for working for a big promotion company versus working for a small organization?
2. How do both the HowStuffWorks website and Werlin's experiences emphasize the need for flexibility when working as a concert promoter?
3. As with many careers, working as a concert promoter usually involves starting at the bottom and working your way to the top. Think about how you might promote an event on your college campus or in your neighborhood. Use the tips from both websites to make a list of things you would need to consider to prepare for the event.

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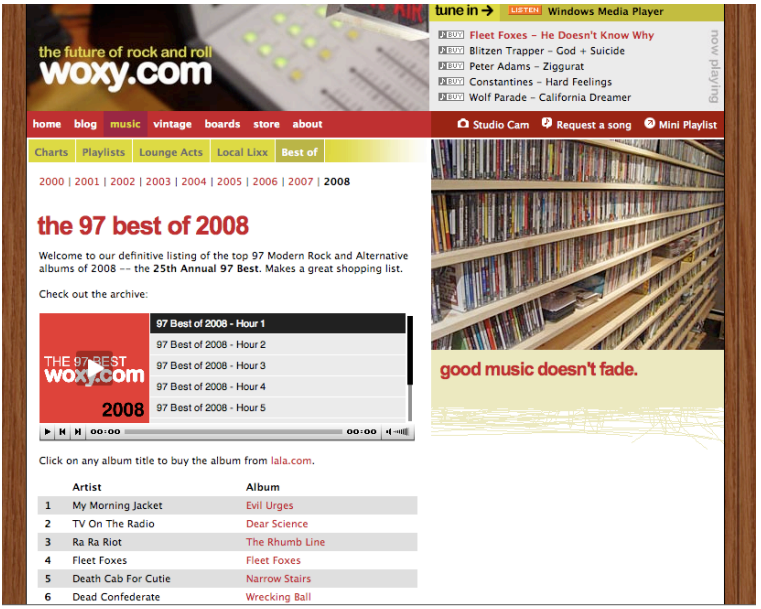
SOURCE EDITION - CHAPTERS 7-9

Chapter 7: Radio

7.1 Radio
7.2 Evolution of Radio Broadcasting
7.3 Radio Station Formats
7.4 Radio's Impact on Culture
7.5 Radio's New Future

7.1 Radio

FIGURE 7.1



In 1983, radio station WOXY's new owners bought the station and changed its format from Top 40 to the up-and-coming alternative rock format, kicking off with U2's "Sunday Bloody Sunday (WOXY, 2009)." Then located in the basement of a fast-food restaurant in Ohio, the station was a risk for its purchasers, a husband and wife team who took a chance by changing the format to a relatively new one. Their investment paid off with the success of their station. By 1990, WOXY had grown in prestige to become one of *Rolling Stone* magazine's top 15 radio stations in the country, and had even been made famous by a reference in the 1988 film *Rain Man* (Bishop, 2004). In 1998, the station launched a web cast

and developed a national following, ranking 12th among Internet broadcasters for listenership in 2004 (Bishop, 2004).

When the station's owners decided to retire and sell the frequency allocation in 2004, they hoped to find investors to continue the online streaming version of the station. After several months of unsuccessful searching, however, the station went off the air entirely—only to find a last-minute investor willing to fund an Internet version of the station (WOXY).

The online version of the station struggled to make ends meet until it was purchased by the online music firm Lala (Cheng, 2010). The now-defunct Lala sold WOXY to music company Future Sounds Inc., which moved the station and staff from Ohio to Austin, Texas. In March 2010, citing "current economic realities and the lack of ongoing funding," WOXY.com went off the air with only a day's notice (Cheng, 2010).

Taken in the context of the modern Internet revolution and the subsequent faltering of institutions such as newspapers and book publishers, the rise and fall of WOXY may seem to bode ill for the general fate of radio. However, taken in the larger context of radio's history, this story of the Internet's effect on radio could prove to be merely another leap in a long line of radio revolutions. From the shutting down of all broadcasts during World War I to the eclipse of radio by television during the 1950s, many arbiters of culture and business have prophesized the demise of radio for decades. Yet this chapter will show how the inherent flexibility and

intimacy of the medium has allowed it to adapt to new market trends and to continue to have relevance as a form of mass communication.

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7.2 Evolution of Radio Broadcasting

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify the major technological changes in radio as a medium since its inception.
2. Explain the defining characteristics of radio's Golden Age.
3. Describe the effects of networks and conglomerates on radio programming and culture.

At its most basic level, radio is communication through the use of radio waves. This includes radio used for person-to-person communication as well as radio used for mass communication. Both of these functions are still practiced today. Although most people associate the term *radio* with radio stations that broadcast to the general public, radio wave technology is used in everything from television to cell phones, making it a primary conduit for person-to-person communication.

THE INVENTION OF RADIO

Guglielmo Marconi is often credited as the inventor of radio. As a young man living in Italy, Marconi read a biography of Hienrich Hertz, who had written and experimented with early forms of wireless transmission. Marconi then duplicated Hertz's experiments in his own home, successfully sending transmissions from one side of his attic to the other (PBS). He saw the potential for the technology and approached the Italian government for support. When the government showed no interest in his ideas, Marconi moved to England and took out a patent on his device. Rather than inventing radio from scratch, however, Marconi essentially combined the ideas and experiments of other people to make them into a useful communications tool (Coe, 1996).

FIGURE 7.2



Guglielmo Marconi developed an early version of the wireless radio.

Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

In fact, long-distance electronic communication has existed since the middle of the 19th century. The telegraph communicated messages through a series of long and short clicks. Cables across the Atlantic Ocean connected even the far-distant United States and England using this technology. By the 1870s, telegraph technology had been used to develop the telephone, which could transmit an individual's voice over the same cables used by its predecessor.

When Marconi popularized wireless technology, contemporaries initially viewed it as a way to allow the telegraph to function in places that could not be connected by cables. Early radios acted as devices for naval ships to communicate with other ships and with land stations; the focus was on person-to-person communication. However, the potential for broadcasting—sending messages to a large group of potential listeners—wasn't realized until later in the development of the medium.

BROADCASTING ARRIVES

The technology needed to build a radio transmitter and

receiver was relatively simple, and the knowledge to build such devices soon reached the public. Amateur radio operators quickly crowded the airwaves, broadcasting messages to anyone within range and, by 1912, incurred government regulatory measures that required licenses and limited broadcast ranges for radio operation (White). This regulation also gave the president the power to shut down all stations, a power notably exercised in 1917 upon the United States' entry into World War I to keep amateur radio operators from interfering with military use of radio waves for the duration of the war (White).

Wireless technology made radio as it is known today possible, but its modern, practical function as a mass communication medium had been the domain of other technologies for some time. As early as the 1880s, people relied on telephones to transmit news, music, church sermons, and weather reports. In Budapest, Hungary, for example, a subscription service allowed individuals to listen to news reports and fictional stories on their telephones (White). Around this time, telephones also transmitted opera performances from Paris to London. In 1909, this innovation emerged in the United States as a pay-per-play phonograph service in Wilmington, Delaware (White). This service allowed subscribers to listen to specific music recordings on their telephones (White).

In 1906, Massachusetts resident Reginald Fessenden initiated the first radio transmission of the human voice, but

his efforts did not develop into a useful application (Grant, 1907). Ten years later, Lee de Forest used radio in a more modern sense when he set up an experimental radio station, 2XG, in New York City. De Forest gave nightly broadcasts of music and news until World War I halted all transmissions for private citizens (White).

RADIO'S COMMERCIAL POTENTIAL

After the World War I radio ban lifted with the close of the conflict in 1919, a number of small stations began operating using technologies that had developed during the war. Many of these stations developed regular programming that included religious sermons, sports, and news (White). As early as 1922, Schenectady, New York's WGY broadcast over 40 original dramas, showing radio's potential as a medium for drama. The WGY players created their own scripts and performed them

live on air. This same groundbreaking group also made the first known attempt at television drama in 1928 (McLeod, 1998).

Businesses such as department stores, which often had their own stations, first put radio's commercial applications to use. However, these stations did not advertise in a way that the modern radio listener would recognize. Early radio advertisements consisted only of a "genteel sales message broadcast during 'business' (daytime) hours, with no hard sell or mention of price (Sterling & Kittross, 2002)." In fact, radio advertising was originally considered an unprecedented invasion of privacy, because—unlike newspapers, which were bought at a newsstand—radios were present in the home and spoke with a voice in the presence of the whole family (Sterling & Kittross, 2002). However, the social impact of radio was such that within a few years advertising was readily accepted on radio programs. Advertising agencies even began producing their own radio programs named after their products. At first, ads ran only during the day, but as economic pressure mounted during the Great Depression in the 1930s, local stations began looking for new sources of revenue, and advertising became a normal part of the radio soundscape (Sterling & Kittross, 2002).

THE RISE OF RADIO NETWORKS

Not long after radio's broadcast debut, large businesses saw its potential profitability and formed networks. In 1926, RCA started the National Broadcasting Network (NBC). Groups of stations that carried syndicated network programs along with a variety of local shows soon formed its Red and Blue networks. Two years after the creation of NBC, the United Independent Broadcasters became the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) and began competing with the existing Red and Blue networks (Sterling & Kittross, 2002).

Although early network programming focused mainly on music, it soon developed to include other programs. Among these early innovations was the variety show. This format generally featured several different performers introduced by a host who segued between acts. Variety shows included styles as diverse as jazz and early country music. At night, dramas and comedies such as *Amos 'n' Andy*, *The Lone Ranger*, and *Fibber McGee and Molly* filled the airwaves. News, educational programs, and other types of talk programs also rose to prominence during the 1930s (Sterling & Kittross, 2002).

THE RADIO ACT OF 1927

In the mid-1920s, profit-seeking companies such as department stores and newspapers owned a majority of the nation's broadcast radio stations, which promoted their owners' businesses (ThinkQuest). Nonprofit groups such as churches and schools operated another third of the stations. As the number of radio stations outgrew the available frequencies, interference became problematic, and the government stepped into the fray.

The Radio Act of 1927 established the Federal Radio Commission (FRC) to oversee regulation of the airwaves. A year after its creation, the FRC reallocated station bandwidths to correct interference problems. The organization reserved 40 high-powered channels, setting aside 37 of these for network affiliates. The remaining 600 lower-powered bandwidths went to stations that had to share the frequencies; this meant that as one station went off the air at a designated time, another one began broadcasting in its place. The Radio Act of 1927 allowed major networks such as CBS and NBC to gain a 70 percent share of U.S. broadcasting by the early 1930s, earning them $72 million in profits by 1934 (McChesney, 1992). At the same time, nonprofit broadcasting fell to only 2 percent of the market (McChesney, 1992).

In protest of the favor that the 1927 Radio Act showed toward commercial broadcasting, struggling nonprofit radio

broadcasters created the National Committee on Education by Radio to lobby for more outlets. Basing their argument on the notion that the airwaves—unlike newspapers—were a public resource, they asserted that groups working for the public good should take precedence over commercial interests. Nevertheless, the Communications Act of 1934 passed without addressing these issues, and radio continued as a mainly commercial enterprise (McChesney, 1992).

THE GOLDEN AGE OF RADIO

The so-called Golden Age of Radio occurred between 1930 and the mid-1950s. Because many associate the 1930s with the struggles of the Great Depression, it may seem contradictory that such a fruitful cultural occurrence arose during this decade. However, radio lent itself to the era. After the initial purchase of a receiver, radio was free and so provided an

inexpensive source of entertainment that replaced other, more costly pastimes, such as going to the movies.

Radio also presented an easily accessible form of media that existed on its own schedule. Unlike reading newspapers or books, tuning in to a favorite program at a certain time became a part of listeners' daily routine because it effectively forced them to plan their lives around the dial.

DAYTIME RADIO FINDS ITS MARKET

During the Great Depression, radio became so successful that another network, the Mutual Broadcasting Network, began in 1934 to compete with NBC's Red and Blue networks and the CBS network, creating a total of four national networks (Cashman, 1989). As the networks became more adept at generating profits, their broadcast selections began to take on a format that later evolved into modern television programming. Serial dramas and programs that focused on domestic work aired during the day when many women were at home. Advertisers targeted this demographic with commercials for domestic needs such as soap (Museum).

Because they were often sponsored by soap companies, daytime serial dramas soon became known as *soap operas*. Some modern televised soap operas, such as *Guiding Light*, which ended in 2009, actually began in the 1930s as radio serials (Hilmes, 1999).

THE ORIGINS OF PRIME TIME

During the evening, many families listened to the radio together, much as modern families may gather for television's prime time. Popular evening comedy variety shows such as George Burns and Gracie Allen's *Burns and Allen*, the *Jack Benny Show*, and the *Bob Hope Show* all began during the 1930s. These shows featured a central host—for whom the show was often named—and a series of sketch comedies, interviews, and musical performances, not unlike contemporary programs such as *Saturday Night Live*. Performed live before a studio audience, the programs thrived on a certain flair and spontaneity. Later in the evening, so-called prestige dramas such as *Lux Radio Theater* and *Mercury*

Theatre on the Air aired. These shows featured major Hollywood actors recreating movies or acting out adaptations of literature (Hilmes).

FIGURE 7.3



Many prime-time radio broadcasts featured film stars recreating famous films over the air.

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INSTANT NEWS

By the late 1930s, the popularity of radio news broadcasts had surpassed that of newspapers. Radio's ability to emotionally draw its audiences in close to events made for news that evoked stronger responses and, thus, greater interest than print news could. For example, the infant son of famed aviator Charles Lindbergh was kidnapped and murdered in 1932. Radio networks set up mobile stations that covered events as they unfolded, broadcasting nonstop for several days and keeping listeners updated on every detail while tying them emotionally to the outcome (Brown, 1998).

As recording technology advanced, reporters gained the ability to record events in the field and bring them back to the studio to broadcast over the airwaves. One early example of this was Herb Morrison's recording of the *Hindenburg* disaster. In 1937, the *Hindenburg* blimp exploded into flames while attempting to land, killing 37 of its passengers. Morrison was already on the scene to record the descent, capturing the fateful crash. The entire event was later broadcast, including the sound of the exploding blimp,

providing listeners with an unprecedented emotional connection to a national disaster. Morrison's exclamation "Oh, the humanity!" became a common phrase of despair after the event (Brown, 1998).

Radio news became even more important during World War II, when programs such as Norman Corwin's *This Is War!* sought to bring more sober news stories to a radio dial dominated by entertainment. The program dealt with the realities of war in a somber manner; at the beginning of the program, the host declared, "No one is invited to sit down and take it easy. Later, later, there's a war on (Horten, 2002)." In 1940, Edward R. Murrow, a journalist working in England at the time, broadcast firsthand accounts of the German bombing of London, giving Americans a sense of the trauma and terror that the English were experiencing at the outset of the war (Horten, 2002). Radio news outlets were the first to broadcast the attack on Pearl Harbor that propelled the United States into World War II in 1941. By 1945, radio news had become so efficient and pervasive that when Roosevelt died, only his wife, his children, and Vice President Harry S. Truman were aware of it before the news was broadcast over the public airwaves (Brown).

THE BIRTH OF THE FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

The Communications Act of 1934 created the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and ushered in a new era of government regulation. The organization quickly began enacting influential radio decisions. Among these was the 1938 decision to limit stations to 50,000 watts of broadcasting power, a ceiling that remains in effect today (Cashman). As a result of FCC antimonopoly rulings, RCA was forced to sell its NBC Blue network; this spun-off division became the American Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) in 1943 (Brinson, 2004).

Another significant regulation with long-lasting influence was the Fairness Doctrine. In 1949, the FCC established the Fairness Doctrine as a rule stating that if broadcasters editorialized in favor of a position on a particular issue, they had to give equal time to all other reasonable positions on that issue (Browne & Browne, 1986). This tenet came from the long-held notion that the airwaves were a public resource, and that they should thus serve the public in some way. Although the regulation remained in effect until 1987, the impact of its

core concepts are still debated. This chapter will explore the Fairness Doctrine and its impact in greater detail in a later section.

RADIO ON THE MARGINS

Despite the networks' hold on programming, educational stations persisted at universities and in some municipalities. They broadcast programs such as *School of the Air* and *College of the Air* as well as roundtable and town hall forums. In 1940, the FCC reserved a set of frequencies in the lower range of the FM radio spectrum for public education purposes as part of its regulation of the new spectrum. The reservation of FM frequencies gave educational stations a boost, but FM proved initially unpopular due to a setback in 1945, when the FCC moved the FM bandwidth to a higher set of frequencies, ostensibly to avoid problems with interference (Longley, 1968). This change required the purchase of new equipment by both consumers and radio stations, thus greatly slowing the widespread adoption of FM radio.

One enduring anomaly in the field of educational stations has been the Pacifica Radio network. Begun in 1949 to counteract the effects of commercial radio by bringing educational programs and dialogue to the airwaves, Pacifica has grown from a single station—Berkeley, California's KPFA—to a network of five stations and more than 100 affiliates (Pacifica Network). From the outset, Pacifica aired newer classical, jazz, and folk music along with lectures, discussions, and interviews with public artists and intellectuals. Among Pacifica's major innovations was its refusal to take money from commercial advertisers, relying instead on donations from listeners and grants from institutions such as the Ford Foundation and calling itself listener-supported (Mitchell, 2005).

Another important innovation on the fringes of the radio dial during this time was the growth of border stations. Located just across the Mexican border, these stations did not have to follow FCC or U.S. regulatory laws. Because the stations broadcast at 250,000 watts and higher, their listening range covered much of North America. Their content also diverged—at the time markedly—from that of U.S. stations. For example, Dr. John Brinkley started station XERF in Del Rio, Mexico, after being forced to shut down his station in Nebraska, and he used the border station in part to promote a dubious goat gland operation that supposedly cured sexual impotence (Dash, 2008). Besides the goat gland promotion, the station and others like it often carried music, like country

and western, that could not be heard on regular network radio. Later border station disc jockeys, such as Wolfman Jack, were instrumental in bringing rock and roll music to a wider audience (Rudel, 2008).

TELEVISION STEALS THE SHOW

A great deal of radio's success as a medium during the 1920s and 1930s was due to the fact that no other medium could replicate it. This changed in the late 1940s and early 1950s as television became popular. A 1949 poll of people who had seen television found that almost half of them believed that radio was doomed (Gallup, 1949). Television sets had come on the market by the late 1940s, and by 1951, more Americans were watching television during prime time than ever (Bradley). Famous radio programs such as *The Bob Hope Show* were made into television shows, further diminishing radio's unique offerings (Cox, 1949).

Surprisingly, some of radio's most critically lauded dramas launched during this period. *Gunsmoke*, an adult-oriented Western show (that later become television's longest-running show) began in 1952; crime drama *Dragnet*, later made famous in both television and film, broadcast between 1949 and 1957; and *Yours Truly, Johnny Dollar* aired from 1949 to 1962, when CBS canceled its remaining radio dramas. However, these respected radio dramas were the last of their kind (Cox, 2002). Although radio was far from doomed by television, its Golden Age was.

TRANSITION TO TOP 40

As radio networks abandoned the dramas and variety shows that had previously sustained their formats, the soundscape was left to what radio could still do better than any other mass medium: play music. With advertising dollars down and the emergence of better recording formats, it made good business sense for radio to focus on shows that played prerecorded music. As strictly music stations began to rise, new innovations to increase their profitability appeared. One of the most notable and far-reaching of these innovations was the

Top 40 station, a concept that supposedly came from watching jukebox patrons continually play the same songs (Brewster & Broughton, 2000). Robert Storz and Gordon McLendon began adapting existing radio stations to fit this new format with great success. In 1956, the creation of limited playlists further refined the format by providing about 50 songs that disc jockeys played repeatedly every day. By the early 1960s, many stations had developed limited playlists of only 30 songs (Walker, 2001).

Another musically fruitful innovation came with the increase of Black disc jockeys and programs created for Black audiences. Because its advertisers had nowhere to go in a media market dominated by White performers, Black radio became more common on the AM dial. As traditional programming left radio, disc jockeys began to develop as the medium's new personalities, talking more in between songs and developing followings. Early Black disc jockeys even began improvising rhymes over the music, pioneering techniques that later became rap and hip-hop. This new personality-driven style helped bring early rock and roll to new audiences (Walker, 2001).

FM: THE HIGH-FIDELITY COUNTERCULTURE

As music came to rule the airwaves, FM radio drew in new listeners because of its high-fidelity sound capabilities. When radio had primarily featured dramas and other talk-oriented formats, sound quality had simply not mattered to many people, and the purchase of an FM receiver did not compete with the purchase of a new television in terms of entertainment value. As FM receivers decreased in price and stereo recording technology became more popular, however, the high-fidelity trend created a market for FM stations. Mostly affluent consumers began purchasing component stereos with the goal of getting the highest sound quality possible out of their recordings (Douglas, 2004). Although this audience often preferred classical and jazz stations to Top 40 radio, they were tolerant of new music and ideas (Douglas, 2004).

Both the high-fidelity market and the growing youth counterculture of the 1960s had similar goals for the FM spectrum. Both groups eschewed AM radio because of the predictable programming, poor sound quality, and over-commercialization. Both groups wanted to treat music as an important experience rather than as just a trendy pastime or a means to make money. Many adherents to the youth counterculture of the 1960s came from affluent, middle-class

families, and their tastes came to define a new era of consumer culture. The goals and market potential of both the high-fidelity lovers and the youth counterculture created an atmosphere on the FM dial that had never before occurred (Douglas, 2004).

Between the years 1960 and 1966, the number of households capable of receiving FM transmissions grew from about 6.5 million to some 40 million. The FCC also aided FM by issuing its nonduplication ruling in 1964. Before this regulation, many AM stations had other stations on the FM spectrum that simply duplicated the AM programming. The nonduplication rule forced FM stations to create their own fresh programming, opening up the spectrum for established networks to develop new stations (Douglas, 2004).

The late 1960s saw new disc jockeys taking greater liberties with established practices; these liberties included playing several songs in a row before going to a commercial break or airing album tracks that exceeded 10 minutes in length. University stations and other nonprofit ventures to which the FCC had given frequencies during the late 1940s popularized this format, and, in time, commercial stations tried to duplicate their success by playing fewer commercials and by allowing their disc jockeys to have a say in their playlists. Although this made for popular listening formats, FM stations struggled to make the kinds of profits that the AM spectrum drew (Douglas, 2004).

In 1974, FM radio accounted for one-third of all radio

listening but only 14 percent of radio profits (Douglas, 2004). Large network stations and advertisers began to market heavily to the FM audience in an attempt to correct this imbalance. Stations began tightening their playlists and narrowing their formats to please advertisers and to generate greater revenues. By the end of the 1970s, radio stations were beginning to play specific formats, and the progressive radio of the previous decade had become difficult to find (Douglas, 2004).

THE RISE OF PUBLIC RADIO

After the Golden Age of Radio came to an end, most listeners tuned in to radio stations to hear music. The variety shows and talk-based programs that had sustained radio in early years could no longer draw enough listeners to make them a successful business proposition. One divergent path from this general trend, however, was the growth of public radio.

Groups such as the Ford Foundation had funded public media sources during the early 1960s. When the foundation decided to withdraw its funding in the middle of the decade,

the federal government stepped in with the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967. This act created the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) and charged it with generating funding for public television and radio outlets. The CPB in turn created National Public Radio (NPR) in 1970 to provide programming for already-operating stations. Until 1982, in fact, the CPB entirely and exclusively funded NPR. Public radio's first program was *All Things Considered*, an evening news program that focused on analysis and interpretive reporting rather than cutting-edge coverage. In the mid-1970s, NPR attracted Washington-based journalists such as Cokie Roberts and Linda Wertheimer to its ranks, giving the coverage a more professional, hard-reporting edge (Schardt, 1996).

However, in 1983, public radio was pushed to the brink of financial collapse. NPR survived in part by relying more on its member stations to hold fundraising drives, now a vital component of public radio's business model. In 2003, Joan Kroc, the widow of McDonald's CEO and philanthropist Ray Kroc, bequeathed a grant of over $200 million to NPR that may keep it afloat for many years to come.

FIGURE 7.4



A Prairie Home Companion, hosted by Garrison Keillor (pictured here), is a long-standing public radio tradition that hearkens back to the early days of radio variety shows.

Having weathered the financial storm intact, NPR continued its progression as a respected news provider. During the first Gulf War, NPR sent out correspondents for the first time to provide in-depth coverage of unfolding events. Public radio's extensive coverage of the 2001 terrorist bombings gained its member stations many new listeners, and it has since expanded (Clift, 2011). Although some have accused NPR of presenting the news with a liberal bias, its listenership in 2005 was 28 percent conservative, 32 percent liberal, and 29 percent moderate. Newt Gingrich, a conservative Republican and

former speaker of the house, has stated that the network is "a lot less on the left" than some may believe (Sherman, 2005). With more than 26 million weekly listeners and 860 member stations in 2009, NPR has become a leading radio news source (Kamenetz, 2009).

Public radio distributors such as Public Radio International (PRI) and local public radio stations such as WBEZ in Chicago have also created a number of cultural and entertainment programs, including quiz shows, cooking shows, and a host of local public forum programs. Storytelling programs such as *This American Life* have created a new kind of free-form radio documentary genre, while shows such as PRI's variety show *A Prairie Home Companion* have revived older radio genres. This variety of popular public radio programming has shifted radio from a music-dominated medium to one that is again exploring its vast potential.

CONGLOMERATES

During the early 1990s, many radio stations suffered the effects of an economic recession. Some stations initiated local marketing agreements (LMAs) to share facilities and resources amid this economic decline. LMAs led to

consolidation in the industry as radio stations bought other stations to create new hubs for the same programming. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 further increased consolidation by eliminating a duopoly rule prohibiting dual station ownership in the same market and by lifting the numerical limits on station ownership by a single entity.

As large corporations such as Clear Channel Communications bought up stations around the country, they reformatted stations that had once competed against one another so that each focused on a different format. This practice led to mainstream radio's present state, in which narrow formats target highly specific demographic audiences.

Ultimately, although the industry consolidation of the 1990s made radio profitable, it reduced local coverage and diversity of programming. Because stations around the country served as outlets for a single network, the radio landscape became more uniform and predictable (Keith, 2010). Much as with chain restaurants and stores, some people enjoy this type of predictability, while others prefer a more localized, unique experience (Keith, 2010).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The Golden Age of Radio covered the period between

1930 and 1950. It was characterized by radio's overwhelming popularity and a wide range of programming, including variety, music, drama, and theater programs.

- Top 40 radio arose after most nonmusic programming moved to television. This format used short playlists of popular hits and gained a great deal of commercial success during the 1950s and 1960s.
- FM became popular during the late 1960s and 1970s as commercial stations adopted the practices of free-form stations to appeal to new audiences who desired higher fidelity and a less restrictive format.
- Empowered by the Telecommunications Act of 1996, media conglomerates have subsumed unprecedented numbers of radio stations by single companies. Radio station consolidation brings predictability and profits at the expense of unique programming.

EXERCISES

Please respond to the following short-answer writing prompts. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. Explain the advantages that radio had over traditional print media during the 1930s and 1940s.
2. Do you think that radio could experience another golden age? Explain your answer.
3. How has the consolidation of radio stations affected radio programming?
4. Characterize the overall effects of one significant technological or social shift described in this section on radio as a medium.

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7.3 Radio Station Formats

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe the use of radio station formats in the development of modern stations.
2. Analyze the effects of formats on radio programming.

Early radio network programming laid the groundwork for television's format, with many different programs that appealed to a variety of people broadcast at different times of the day. As television's popularity grew, however, radio could not compete and so it turned to fresh programming techniques. A new type of format-driven station became the norm. Propelled by the development of new types of music such as psychedelic rock and smooth jazz, the evolution of radio station formats took place. Since the beginning of this shift, different stations have tended to focus on the music that certain demographics preferred. For example, many people

raised on Top 40 radio of the 1950s and 1960s did not necessarily want to hear modern pop hits, so stations playing older popular songs emerged to meet their needs.

Modern formats take into account aging generations, with certain stations specifically playing the pop hits of the 1950s and early 1960s, and others focusing on the pop hits of the late 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. These formats have developed to target narrow, defined audiences with predictable tastes and habits. Ratings services such as Arbitron can identify the 10-year age demographic, the education level, and even the political leanings of listeners who prefer a particular format. Because advertisers want their commercials to reach an audience likely to buy their products, this kind of audience targeting is crucial for advertising revenue.

TOP RADIO FORMATS

The following top radio formats and their respective statistics were determined by an Arbitron survey that was released in 2010 (Arbitron Inc., 2010). The most popular formats and subformats cover a wide range of demographics, revealing radio's wide appeal.

COUNTRY

Country music as a format includes stations devoted both to older and newer country music. In 2010, the country music format stood as the most popular radio format, beating out even such prominent nonmusic formats as news and talk. The format commanded the greatest listener share and the second largest number of stations dedicated to the style. Favored in rural regions of the country, the country music format—featuring artists like Keith Urban, the Dixie Chicks, and Tim McGraw—appeals to both male and female listeners from a variety of income levels (Arbitron Inc., 2010).

NEWS/TALK/ INFORMATION

The news/talk/information format includes AM talk radio, public radio stations with talk programming, network news radio, sports radio, and personality talk radio. This format reached nearly 59 million listeners in 2010, appealing

particularly to those aged 65 and older; over 70 percent of its listeners had attended college. These listeners also ranked the highest among formats in levels of home ownership (Arbitron Inc., 2010).

ADULT CONTEMPORARY

Generally targeted toward individuals over 30, the adult contemporary (AC) format favors pop music from the last 15 to 20 years as opposed to current hits. Different subformats, such as hot AC and modern AC, target younger audiences by playing songs that are more current. In 2010, the majority of AC audience were affluent, married individuals divided roughly along the national average politically. Adult contemporary listeners ranked highest by format in at-work listening. Hot AC, a subformat of AC that plays more current hits, ranked seventh in the nation. Urban AC, a version of AC that focuses on older R&B hits, ranked eighth in the nation in 2010 (Arbitron Inc., 2010).

POP CONTEMPORARY HIT RADIO

Pop contemporary hit radio, or pop CHR, is a subformat of contemporary hit radio (CHR). Other subformats of CHR include dance CHR and rhythmic CHR. Branded in the 1980s, this format encompasses stations that have a Top 40 orientation but draw on a wide number of formats, such as country, rock, and urban (Ford, 2008). In 2010, pop CHR ranked first among teenaged listeners, with 65 percent of its overall listeners aged under 35. This music, ranging from popular artists like Taylor Swift and Kanye West to Shakira, was played in the car more than at home or work, and saw its largest listening times in the evenings. Rhythmic CHR, a subformat focusing on a mix of rhythmic pop, R&B, dance, and hip-hop hits, also ranked high in 2010 (Arbitron).

CLASSIC ROCK

Classic rock stations generally play rock singles from the 1970s

and 1980s, like "Stairway to Heaven," by Led Zeppelin, and "You Shook Me All Night Long," by AC/DC. Another distinct but similar format is album-oriented rock (AOR). This format focuses on songs that were not necessarily released as singles, also known as album cuts (Radio Station World). In 2010, classic rock stations ranked fifth in listener figures. These individuals were overwhelmingly men (70 percent) between the ages of 35 and 54 (54 percent). Classic rock was most often listened to in the car and at work, with only 26 percent of its listeners tuning in at home (Arbitron).

URBAN CONTEMPORARY

The urban contemporary format plays modern hits from mainly Black artists—such as Lil Wayne, John Legend, and Ludacris—featuring a mix of soul, hip-hop, and R&B. In 2010, the format ranked eleventh in the nation. Urban contemporary focuses on listeners in the 18–34 age range (Arbitron).

MEXICAN REGIONAL

The Mexican regional format is devoted to Spanish-language music, particularly Mexican and South American genres. In 2010, it ranked thirteenth in the nation and held the top spot in Los Angeles, a reflection of the rise in immigration from Mexico, Central America, and South America. Mexican regional's listener base was over 96 percent Hispanic, and the format was most popular in the Western and Southwestern regions of the country. However, it was less popular in the Eastern regions of the country; in New England, for example, the format held a zero percent share of listening. The rise of the Mexican regional format illustrates the ways in which radio can change rapidly to meet new demographic trends (Arbitron).

An increasingly Spanish language–speaking population in the United States has also resulted in a number of distinct Spanish-language radio formats. These include Spanish oldies, Spanish adult hits, Spanish religious, Spanish tropical, and Spanish talk among others. Tejano, a type of music developed in Hispanic Texan communities, has also gained enough of an audience to become a dedicated format (Arbitron).

OTHER POPULAR FORMATS

Radio formats have become so specialized that ratings group Arbitron includes more than 50 designations. What was once simply called rock music has been divided into such subformats as alternative and modern rock. Alternative rock began as a format played on college stations during the 1980s but developed as a mainstream format during the following decade, thanks in part to the popular grunge music of that era. As this music aged, stations began using the term modern rock to describe a format dedicated to new rock music. This format has also spawned the active rock format, which plays modern rock hits with older rock hits thrown in (Radio Station World).

Nostalgia formats have split into a number of different formats as well. Oldies stations now generally focus on hits from the 1950s and 1960s, while the classic hits format chooses from hits of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Urban oldies, which focuses on R&B, soul, and other urban music hits from the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, has also become a popular radio format. Formats such as adult hits mix older songs from the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s with a small selection of popular music, while formats such as '80s hits picks mainly from the 1980s (Radio Station World).

Radio station formats are an interesting way to look at

popular culture in the United States. The evolution of nostalgia formats to include new decades nods to the size and tastes of the nation's aging listeners. Hits of the 1980s are popular enough with their demographic to have entire stations dedicated to them, while other generations prefer stations with a mix of decades. The rise of the country format and the continued popularity of the classic rock format are potential indicators of cultural trends.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Radio station formats target demographics that can generate advertising revenue.
- Contemporary hit radio was developed as a Top 40 format that expanded beyond strictly pop music to include country, rock, and urban formats.
- Spanish-language formats have grown in recent years, with Mexican regional moving into the top 10 formats in 2008.
- Nostalgia genres have developed to reflect the tastes of aging listeners, ranging from mixes of music from the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s with current hits to formats that pick strictly from the 1980s.

EXERCISES

Please respond to the following writing prompts. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. What is the purpose of radio station formats?
2. How have radio station formats affected the way that modern stations play music?
3. Pick a format, such as country or classic rock, and speculate on the reasons for its popularity.

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7.4 Radio's Impact on Culture

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Analyze radio as a form of mass media.
2. Describe the effects of radio on the spread of different types of music.
3. Analyze the effects of the Fairness Doctrine on political radio.

4. Formulate opinions on controversial issues in radio.

Since its inception, radio's impact on American culture has been immense. Modern popular culture is unthinkable without the early influence of radio. Entire genres of music that are now taken for granted, such as country and rock, owe their popularity and even existence to early radio programs that publicized new forms.

A NEW KIND OF MASS MEDIA

Mass media such as newspapers had been around for years before the existence of radio. In fact, radio was initially considered a kind of disembodied newspaper. Although this idea gave early proponents a useful, familiar way to think about radio, it underestimated radio's power as a medium. Newspapers had the potential to reach a wide audience, but radio had the potential to reach almost everyone. Neither illiteracy nor even a busy schedule impeded radio's success—one could now perform an activity and listen to the

radio at the same time. This unprecedented reach made radio an instrument of social cohesion as it brought together members of different classes and backgrounds to experience the world as a nation.

Radio programs reflected this nationwide cultural aspect of radio. *Vox Pop*, a show originally based on person-in-the-street interviews, was an early attempt to quantify the United States' growing mass culture. Beginning in 1935, the program billed itself as an unrehearsed "cross-section of what the average person really knows" by asking random people an assortment of questions. Many modern television shows still employ this format not only for viewers' amusement and information but also as an attempt to sum up national culture (Loviglio, 2002). *Vox Pop* functioned on a cultural level as an acknowledgement of radio's entrance into people's private lives to make them public (Loviglio, 2002).

Radio news was more than just a quick way to find out about events; it was a way for U.S. citizens to experience events with the same emotions. During the Ohio and Mississippi river floods of 1937, radio brought the voices of those who suffered as well as the voices of those who fought the rising tides. A West Virginia newspaper explained the strengths of radio in providing emotional voices during such crises: "Thanks to radio...the nation as a whole has had its nerves, its heart, its soul exposed to the needs of its unfortunates...We are a nation integrated and interdependent. We are 'our brother's keeper (Brown).'"

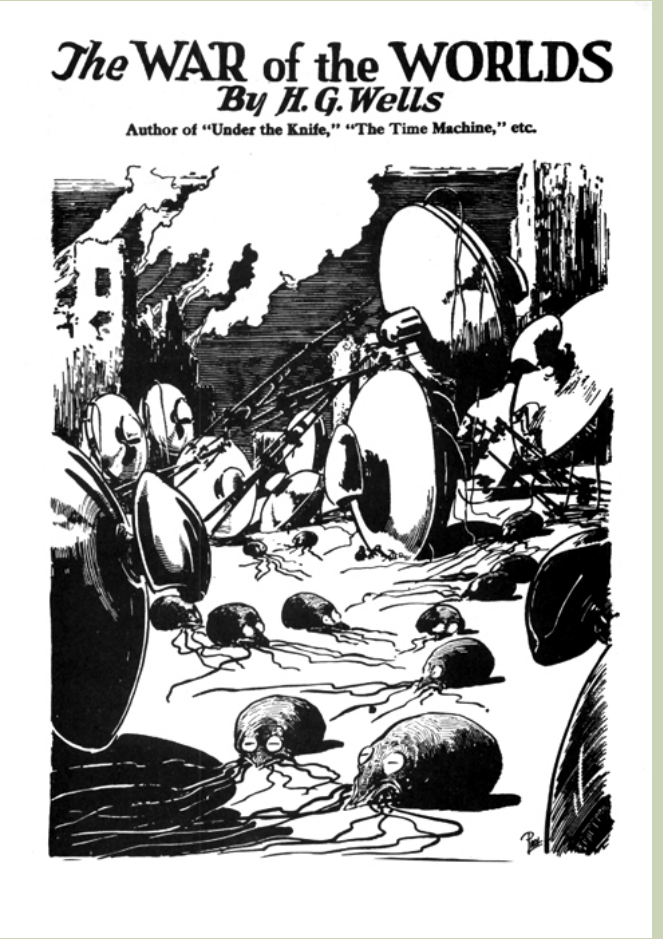
Radio's presence in the home also heralded the evolution of consumer culture in the United States. In 1941, two-thirds of radio programs carried advertising. Radio allowed advertisers to sell products to a captive audience. This kind of mass marketing ushered in a new age of consumer culture (Cashman).

WAR OF THE WORLDS AND THE POWER OF RADIO

During the 1930s, radio's impact and powerful social influence was perhaps most obvious in the aftermath of the Orson Welles's notorious *War of the Worlds* broadcast. On Halloween night in 1938, radio producer Orson Welles told listeners of the *Mercury Theatre on the Air* that they would be treated to an original adaptation of H. G. Wells's classic science fiction novel of alien invasion *War of the Worlds*. The adaptation started as if it were a normal music show

that was interrupted by news reports of an alien invasion. Many listeners had tuned in late and did not hear the disclaimer, and so were caught up by the realism of the adaptation, believing it to be an actual news story.

FIGURE 7.5



Orson Welles's *War of the Worlds* broadcast terrified listeners, many of whom actually believed a Martian invasion was actually occurring.

Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

According to some, an estimated 6 million people listened to the show, with an incredible 1.7 million believing it to be true (Lubertozzi & Holmsten, 2005). Some listeners called loved ones to say goodbye or ran into the street armed with weapons to fight off the invading Martians of the radio play (Lubertozzi & Holmsten, 2005). In Grovers Mill, New Jersey—where the supposed invasion began—some listeners reported nonexistent fires and fired gunshots at a water tower thought to be a Martian landing craft. One listener drove through his own garage door in a rush to escape the area. Two Princeton University professors spent the night searching for the meteorite that had supposedly preceded the invasion (Lubertozzi & Holmsten, 2005). As calls came in to local police stations, officers explained that they were equally concerned about the problem (Lubertozzi & Holmsten, 2005).

Although the story of the *War of the Worlds* broadcast may be funny in retrospect, the event traumatized those who believed the story. Individuals from every education level and walk of life had been taken in by the program, despite the producers' warnings before, during the intermission, and after the program (Lubertozzi & Holmsten, 2005). This event revealed the unquestioning faith that many Americans had in radio. Radio's intimate communication style was a powerful force during the 1930s and 1940s.

RADIO AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF POPULAR MUSIC

One of radio's most enduring legacies is its impact on music. Before radio, most popular songs were distributed through piano sheet music and word of mouth. This necessarily limited the types of music that could gain national prominence. Although recording technology had also emerged several decades before radio, music played live over the radio sounded better than it did on a record played in the home. Live music performances thus became a staple of early radio. Many performance venues had their own radio transmitters to broadcast live shows—for example, Harlem's Cotton Club broadcast performances that CBS picked up and broadcast nationwide.

Radio networks mainly played swing jazz, giving the bands and their leaders a widespread audience. Popular bandleaders including Duke Ellington, Benny Goodman, and Tommy Dorsey and their jazz bands became nationally famous through their radio performances, and a host of other jazz musicians flourished as radio made the genre nationally popular (Wald, 2009). National networks also played classical music. Often presented in an educational context, this programming had a different tenor than did dance-band programming. NBC promoted the genre through shows such as the *Music Appreciation Hour*, which sought to educate both young people and the general public on the nuances of classical music (Howe, 2003). It created the NBC Symphony Orchestra, a 92-piece band under the direction of famed conductor Arturo Toscanini. The orchestra made its first performance in 1937 and was so popular that Toscanini stayed on as conductor for 17 years (Horowitz, 2005). The Metropolitan Opera was also popular; its broadcasts in the early 1930s had an audience of 9 million listeners (Horowitz, 2005).

REGIONAL SOUNDS TAKE HOLD

The promotional power of radio also gave regional music an immense boost. Local stations often carried their own programs featuring the popular music of the area. Stations such as Nashville, Tennessee's WSM played early country, blues, and folk artists. The history of this station illustrates the ways in which radio—and its wide range of broadcasting—created new perspectives on American culture. In 1927, WSM's program *Barn Dance*, which featured early country music and blues, followed an hour-long program of classical music. George Hay, the host of *Barn Dance*, used the juxtaposition of classical and country genres to spontaneously rename the show: "For the past hour we have been listening to music taken largely from Grand Opera, but from now on we will present 'The Grand Ole Opry (Kyriakoudes).'" NBC picked up the program for national syndication in 1939, and it is currently one of the longest-running radio programs of all time.

FIGURE 7.6



Country musician Dolly Parton sings a song on stage during a Grand Ole Opry live broadcast in Nashville, Tenn. as U.S. soldiers watch the show simultaneously in Iraq on April 23, 2005. Secretary of Defense Donald. H. Rumsfeld also visited Nashville to thank Dolly Parton, the Grand Ole Opry and the American people for their support of our troops. DoD photo by Tech. Sgt. Cherie A. Thurlby, U.S. Air Force.

The *Grand Ole Opry* gave a national stage to country and early rock musicians.

Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

Shreveport, Louisiana's KWKH aired an *Opry*-type show called *Louisiana Hayride*. This program propelled stars such as Hank Williams into the national spotlight. Country music, formerly a mix of folk, blues, and mountain music, was made

into a genre that was accessible by the nation through this show. Without programs that featured these country and blues artists, Elvis Presley and Johnny Cash would not have become national stars, and country music may not have risen to become a popular genre (DiMeo, 2010).

In the 1940s, other Southern stations also began playing rhythm and blues records recorded by Black artists. Artists such as Wynonie Harris, famous for his rendition of Roy Brown's "Good Rockin' Tonight," were often played by White disc jockeys who tried to imitate Black Southerners (Laird, 2005). During the late 1940s, both Memphis, Tennessee's WDIA and Atlanta, Georgia's WERD were owned and operated by Black individuals. These disc jockeys often provided a measure of community leadership at a time when few Black individuals were in powerful positions (Walker).

RADIO'S LASTING INFLUENCES

Radio technology changed the way that dance and popular

music were performed. Because of the use of microphones, vocalists could be heard better over the band, allowing singers to use a greater vocal range and create more expressive styles, an innovation that led singers to become an important part of popular music's image. The use of microphones similarly allowed individual performers to be featured playing solos and lead parts, features that were less encouraged before radio. The exposure of radio also led to more rapid turnover in popular music. Before radio, jazz bands played the same arrangement for several years without it getting old, but as radio broadcasts reached wide audiences, new arrangements and songs had to be produced at a more rapid pace to keep up with changing tastes (Wald).

The spotlight of radio allowed the personalities of artists to come to the forefront of popular music, giving them newfound notoriety. Phil Harris, the bandleader from the *Jack Benny Show*, became the star of his own program. Other famous musicians used radio talent shows to gain fame. Popular programs such as *Major Bowes and His Original Amateur Hour* featured unknown entertainers trying to gain fame through exposure to the show's large audience. Major Bowes used a gong to usher bad performers offstage, often contemptuously dismissing them, but not all the performers struck out; such successful singers as Frank Sinatra debuted on the program (Sterling & Kitross).

Television, much like modern popular music, owes a significant debt to the Golden Age of Radio. Major radio

networks such as NBC, ABC, and CBS became—and remain—major forces in television, and their programming decisions for radio formed the basis for television. Actors, writers, and directors who worked in radio simply transferred their talents into the world of early television, using the successes of radio as their models.

RADIO AND POLITICS

Over the years, radio has had a considerable influence on the political landscape of the United States. In the past, government leaders relied on radio to convey messages to the public, such as President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "fireside chats." Radio was also used as a way to generate propaganda for World War II. The War Department established a Radio Division in its Bureau of Public Relations as early as 1941. Programs such as the *Treasury Hour* used radio drama to raise revenue through the sale of war bonds, but other government efforts took a decidedly political turn. Norman Corwin's *This Is War!* was funded by the federal Office of Facts and Figures

(OFF) to directly garner support for the war effort. It featured programs that prepared listeners to make personal sacrifices—including death—to win the war. The program was also directly political, popularizing the idea that the New Deal was a success and bolstering Roosevelt's image through comparisons with Lincoln (Horten).

FDR'S FIRESIDE CHATS

FIGURE 7.7



During his presidency, Franklin D. Roosevelt delivered fireside chats, a series of radio broadcasts in which he spoke directly to the American people.

UNC Greensboro Special Collections and University Archives – Franklin Roosevelt photograph, 1940s – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Depression-era radio talks, or "fireside chats," remain one of the most famous uses of radio in politics. While governor of New York, Roosevelt had used radio as a political tool, so he quickly adopted it to explain the unprecedented actions that his administration was taking to deal with the economic fallout of the Great Depression. His first speech took place only 1 week after being inaugurated. Roosevelt had closed all of the banks in the country for 4 days while the government dealt with a national banking crisis, and he used the radio to explain his actions directly to the American people (Grafton, 1999).

Roosevelt's first radio address set a distinct tone as he employed informal speech in the hopes of inspiring confidence in the American people and of helping them stave off the kind of panic that could have destroyed the entire banking system. Roosevelt understood both the intimacy of radio and its powerful outreach (Grafton, 1999). He was thus able to balance a personal tone with a message that was meant for millions of people. This relaxed approach inspired a CBS executive to name the series the "fireside chats (Grafton, 1999)."

Roosevelt delivered a total of 27 of these 15- to 30-minute-long addresses to estimated audiences of 30 million to 40 million people, then a quarter of the U.S. population

(Grafton, 1999). Roosevelt's use of radio was both a testament to his own skills and savvy as a politician and to the power and ubiquity of radio during this period. At the time, there was no other form of mass media that could have had the same effect.

Certainly, radio has been used by the government for its own purposes, but it has had an even greater impact on politics by serving as what has been called "the ultimate arena for free speech (Davis & Owen, 1998)." Such infamous radio firebrands as Father Charles Coughlin, a Roman Catholic priest whose radio program opposed the New Deal, criticized Jews, and supported Nazi policies, aptly demonstrated this capability early in radio's history (Sterling & Kitross). In recent decades, radio has supported political careers, including those of U.S. Senator Al Franken of Minnesota, former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani, and presidential aspirant Fred Thompson. Talk show hosts such as Rush Limbaugh have gained great political influence, with some even viewing Limbaugh as the *de facto* leader of the Republican Party (Halloran, 2009).

THE IMPORTANCE OF TALK RADIO

An important contemporary convergence of radio and politics can be readily heard on modern talk radio programs. Far from being simply chat shows, the talk radio that became popular in the 1980s features a host who takes callers and discusses a wide assortment of topics. Talk radio hosts gain and keep their listeners by sheer force of personality, and some say shocking or insulting things to get their message across. These hosts range from conservative radio hosts such as Rush Limbaugh to so-called shock jocks such as Howard Stern.

REPEAL OF THE FAIRNESS DOCTRINE

While talk radio first began during the 1920s, the emergence of the format as a contemporary cultural and political force took place during the mid- to late-1980s following the repeal of the Fairness Doctrine (Cruz, 2007). As you read earlier in this

chapter, this doctrine, established in 1949, required any station broadcasting a political point of view over the air to allow equal time to all reasonable dissenting views. Despite its noble intentions of safeguarding public airwaves for diverse views, the doctrine had long attracted a level of dissent. Opponents of the Fairness Doctrine claimed that it had a chilling effect on political discourse as stations, rather than risk government intervention, avoided programs that were divisive or controversial (Cruz, 2007). In 1987, the FCC under the Reagan administration repealed the regulation, setting the stage for an AM talk radio boom; by 2004, the number of talk radio stations had increased by 17-fold (Anderson, 2005).

The end of the Fairness Doctrine allowed stations to broadcast programs without worrying about finding an opposing point of view to balance the stated opinions of its host. Radio hosts representing all points of the political spectrum could say anything that they wanted to—within FCC limits—without fear of rebuttal. Media bias and its ramifications will be explored at greater length in Chapter 14 "Ethics of Mass Media".

THE REVITALIZATION OF AM

The migration of music stations to the FM spectrum during the 1960s and 1970s provided a great deal of space on the AM band for talk shows. With the Fairness Doctrine no longer a hindrance, these programs slowly gained notoriety during the late 1980s and early 1990s. In 1998, talk radio hosts railed against a proposed congressional pay increase, and their listeners became incensed; House Speaker Jim Wright received a deluge of faxes protesting it from irate talk radio listeners from stations all over the country (Douglas). Ultimately, Congress canceled the pay increase, and various print outlets acknowledged the influence of talk radio on the decision. Propelled by events such as these, talk radio stations rose from only 200 in the early 1980s to more than 850 in 1994 (Douglas).

COAST TO COAST AM

Although political programs unquestionably rule AM talk radio, that dial is also home to a kind of show that some radio listeners may have never experienced. Late at night on AM radio, a program airs during which listeners hear stories about ghosts, alien abductions, and fantastic creatures. It's not a fictional drama program, however, but instead a call-in talk show called *Coast to Coast AM*. In 2006, this unlikely success ranked among the top 10 AM talk radio programs in the nation—a stunning feat considering its 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. time slot and bizarre format (Vigil, 2006).

Originally started by host Art Bell in the 1980s, *Coast to Coast* focuses on topics that mainstream media outlets rarely treat seriously. Regular guests include ghost investigators, psychics, Bigfoot biographers, alien abductees, and deniers of the moon landing. The guests take calls from listeners who are allowed to ask questions or talk about their own paranormal experiences or theories.

Coast to Coast's current host, George Noory, has continued the show's format. In some areas, its ratings have even exceeded those of Rush Limbaugh's (Vigil, 2006). For a late-night show, these kinds of high ratings are rare. The success of *Coast to Coast* is thus a continuing testament to the diversity and unexpected potential of radio (Vigil, 2006).

ON-AIR POLITICAL INFLUENCE

As talk radio's popularity grew during the early 1990s, it quickly became an outlet for political ambitions. In 1992, nine talk show hosts ran for U.S. Congress. By the middle of the decade, it had become common for many former—or failed—politicians to attempt to use the format. Former California governor Jerry Brown and former New York mayor Ed Koch were among the mid-1990s politicians that had AM

talk shows (Annenberg Public Policy Center, 1996). Both conservatives and liberals widely agree that conservative hosts dominate AM talk radio. Many talk show hosts, such as Limbaugh, who began his popular program 1 year after the repeal of the Fairness Doctrine, have made a profitable business out of their programs.

FIGURE 7.8



Talk radio shows increased dramatically in number and popularity in the wake of the 1987 repeal of the Fairness Doctrine.

JD Lasica – Blogworld Talk Radio – CC BY-NC 2.0.

During the 2000s, AM talk radio continued to build. Hosts such as Michael Savage, Sean Hannity, and Bill O'Reilly furthered the trend of popular conservative talk shows, but liberal hosts also became popular through the short-lived Air America network. The network closed abruptly in 2010 amid financial concerns (Stelter, 2010). Although the network was unsuccessful, it provided a platform for such hosts as MSNBC TV news host Rachel Maddow and Minnesota Senator Al Franken. Other liberal hosts such as Bill Press and Ron Reagan, son of President Ronald Reagan, have also found success in the AM political talk radio field (Stelter, 2010). Despite these successes, liberal talk radio is often viewed as unsustainable (Hallowell, 2010). To some, the failure of Air America confirms conservatives' domination of AM radio. In response to the conservative dominance of talk radio, many prominent liberals, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, have advocated reinstating the Fairness Doctrine and forcing stations to offer equal time to contrasting opinions (Stotts, 2008).

FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND RADIO CONTROVERSIES

While the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution gives radio personalities the freedom to say nearly anything they want on the air without fear of prosecution (except in cases of obscenity, slander, or incitement of violence, which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 15 "Media and Government"), it does not protect them from being fired from their jobs when their controversial comments create a public outrage. Many talk radio hosts, such as Howard Stern, push the boundaries of acceptable speech to engage listeners and boost ratings, but sometimes radio hosts push too far, unleashing a storm of controversy.

MAKING (AND UNMAKING) A CAREER OUT OF CONTROVERSY

Talk radio host Howard Stern has managed to build his career on creating controversy—despite being fined multiple times for indecency by the FCC, Stern remains one of highest-paid and most popular talk radio hosts in the United States. Stern's radio broadcasts often feature scatological or sexual humor, creating an "anything goes" atmosphere. Because his on-air antics frequently generate controversy that can jeopardize advertising sponsorships and drive away offended listeners—in addition to risking fines from the FCC—Stern has a history of uneasy relationships with the radio stations that employ him. In an effort to free himself of conflicts with station owners and sponsors, in 2005 Stern signed a contract with Sirius Satellite Radio, which is exempt from FCC regulation, so that he can continue to broadcast his show without fear of censorship.

Stern's massive popularity gives him a lot of clout, which has allowed him to weather controversy and continue to have a successful career. Other radio hosts who have gotten themselves in trouble with poorly considered on-air comments have not been so lucky. In April 2007, Don Imus, host of the long-running *Imus in the Morning*, was suspended for racist and sexist comments made about the Rutgers University

women's basketball team (MSNBC, 2007). Though he publically apologized, the scandal continued to draw negative attention in the media, and CBS canceled his show to avoid further unfavorable publicity and the withdrawal of advertisers. Though he returned to the airwaves in December of that year with a different station, the episode was a major setback for Imus's career and his public image. Similarly, syndicated conservative talk show host Dr. Laura Schelssinger ended her radio show in 2010 due to pressure from radio stations and sponsors after her repeated use of a racial epithet on a broadcast incited a public backlash (MSNBC, 2007).

As the examples of these talk radio hosts show, the issue of freedom of speech on the airwaves is often complicated by the need for radio stations to be profitable. Outspoken or shocking radio hosts can draw in many listeners, attracting advertisers to sponsor their shows and bringing in money for their radio stations. Although some listeners may be offended by these hosts and may stop tuning in, as long as the hosts continue to attract advertising dollars, their employers are usually content to allow the hosts to speak freely on the air. However, if a host's behavior ends up sparking a major controversy, causing advertisers to withdraw their sponsorship to avoid tarnishing their brands, the radio station will often fire the host and look to someone who can better sustain advertising partnerships. Radio hosts' right to free speech does not compel their employer to give them the forum to exercise it. Popular hosts like Don Imus may find a home on the air again once the

furor has died down, but for radio hosts concerned about the stability of their careers, the lesson is clear: there are practical limits on their freedom of speech.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Radio was unique as a form of mass media because it had the potential to reach anyone, even the illiterate. Radio news in the 1930s and 1940s brought the emotional impact of traumatic events home to the listening public in a way that gave the nation a sense of unity.
- Radio encouraged the growth of national popular music stars and brought regional sounds to wider audiences. The effects of early radio programs can be felt both in modern popular music and in television programming.
- The Fairness Doctrine was created to ensure fair coverage of issues over the airwaves. It stated that radio stations must give equal time to contrasting points of view on an issue. An enormous rise in the popularity of AM talk radio occurred after the repeal of the Fairness Doctrine in 1987.
- The need for radio stations to generate revenue places practical limits on what radio personalities can say on

the air. Shock jocks like Howard Stern and Don Imus test, and sometimes exceed, these limits and become controversial figures, highlighting the tension between freedom of speech and the need for businesses to be profitable.

EXERCISES

Please respond to the following writing prompts. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. Describe the unique qualities that set radio apart from other forms of mass media, such as newspapers.
2. How did radio bring new music to places that had never heard it before?
3. Describe political talk radio before and after the Fairness Doctrine. What kind of effect did the Fairness Doctrine have?
4. Do you think that the Fairness Doctrine should be reinstated? Explain your answer.
5. Investigate the controversy surrounding Don Imus and the comments that led to his show's cancellation. What is your opinion of his comments and CBS's reaction to them?

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7.5 Radio's New Future

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Distinguish the differences between satellite radio, HD radio, Internet radio, and podcasting.
2. Identify the development of new radio technologies.

Although the future of radio has been doubted many times throughout its history, it is still in existence. The inherent portability of the medium gives it an advantage over other types of media that require an individual's full attention, such

as television or print. The simplicity of radio has leant itself to a variety of uses.

In recent years, new technologies have promised to expand the reach of radio and to expand the kinds of programming it offers. Satellite and HD radio have increased the amount and diversity of available programming by making more stations available. Internet radio has increased the accessibility of radio communication, and practically anyone who has access to a computer can create subscription podcasts to distribute around the world. These new technologies promise to make radio an enduring, innovative form of media.

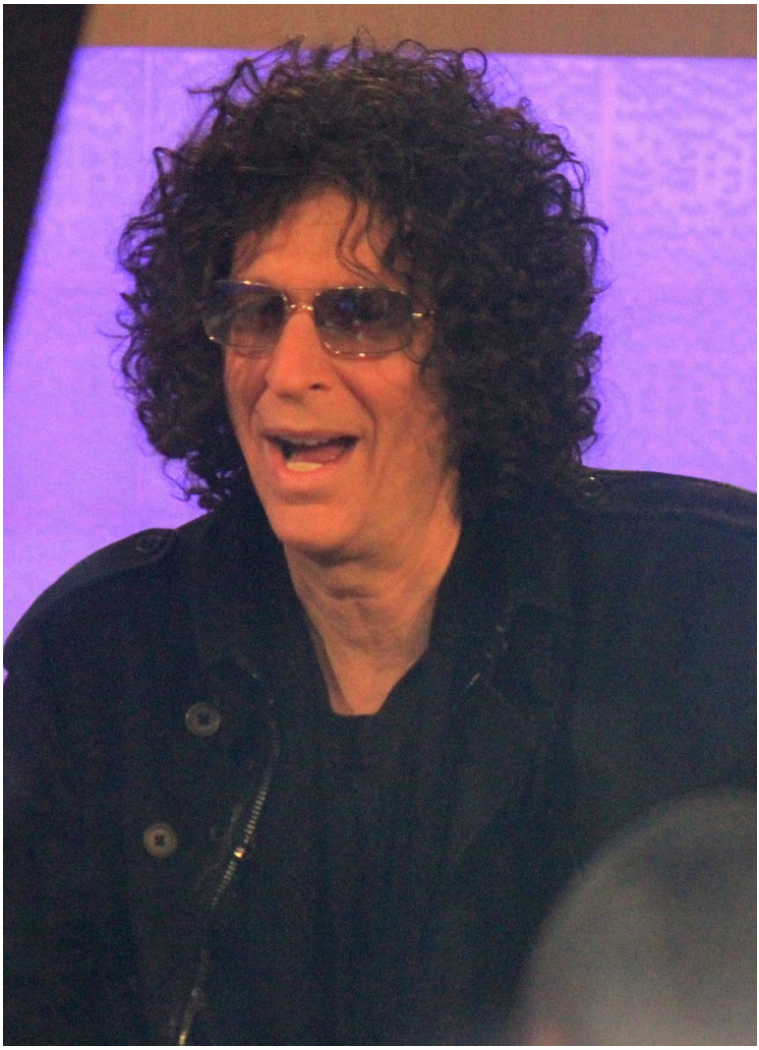
SATELLITE RADIO

In 1998, the FCC awarded licenses to two businesses interested in creating a radio version of cable television—without the cables. This act was the beginning of satellite radio, and the companies soon became XM and Sirius. These two networks sold special receivers that could pick up satellite transmissions broadcasting a wide range of formats on different channels to listeners who paid a monthly fee for the commercial-free programming.

Like cable television, satellite radio was not required to

censor its disc jockeys or guests for profanity. This attracted somewhat controversial radio personalities known for their conflicts with the FCC, such as Howard Stern and Opie and Anthony. The networks also drew hosts such as NPR's Bob Edwards and Bruce Springsteen's guitarist "Little" Steven Van Zandt to create their own shows. Because listeners paid one price for access to all of the channels, disc jockeys experienced less pressure to adhere to the limited playlist style of programming that was the norm for terrestrial radio stations (Breen, 2005). In 2008, Sirius and XM merged to form Sirius XM. In 2010, the company recorded its first profits (Reuters, 2010).

FIGURE 7.9



Talk show host Howard Stern moved his controversial program to satellite radio in 2006, removing himself from FCC censorship rules and helping to popularize the medium.

Wikimedia Commons – CC BY 2.0.

HD RADIO

Developed around 2001 to help terrestrial radio stations compete with emerging satellite radio technology, HD radio is essentially a digital transmission of radio signals resulting in less static and better sound quality, even for AM stations. Upgraded quality is not the major benefit of HD radio, however; the technology allows signals to be compressed so that one station can air so-called shadow stations on the same frequency as its regular broadcast. Although listeners need an HD radio to receive these channels, they pay no subscription fee, as independent stations provide their own programming as they deem necessary (Pogue, 2009).

Stations such as NPR's WAMU in Washington, DC, broadcast different types of programming on their shadow channels. For example, the station's 88.5-1 broadcasts the regular analog schedule of WAMU, while 88.5-2 broadcasts bluegrass and country music programming, and 88.5-3

broadcasts public radio programs not available on the analog version of 88.5 (American Universe Radio).

HD radio allows current broadcasters to provide content that they would normally put aside in favor of more commercial programs. WAMU's bluegrass and country shadow station plays content originally played over the airwaves but relegated to the Internet in favor of more marketable programs. The innovation of HD radio allowed the station to reintroduce the programs without risking its financial stability. With this financial freedom, HD radio offers a host of programming possibilities for traditional radio.

INTERNET RADIO AND PODCASTING

Broadcasting is both a strength and limitation of broadcasting. Although technological advances of the past 50 years, such as audio recorders and microphones, have made creating a radio program simple, finding a way to broadcast that program presents difficulties for the average person. The expansion of

the Internet, however, has changed this limitation into a manageable hurdle for both businesses and individuals alike.

INTERNET RADIO

At its core, Internet radio is simply the streaming of audio programs through the medium of the Internet. As early as 1994, radio stations such as Chapel Hill, North Carolina's WXYC were broadcasting their signal over the Internet, and so potentially gaining a worldwide audience (WXYC). Soon, online-only radio stations were created to broadcast programs. Services such as Live 365, founded in 1999, have acted as distributors for Internet radio programs, charging broadcasters fees to stream their programs to a large listening audience.

Another type of Internet radio service is Pandora radio. This radio website does not distribute existing programs but rather allows users to create their own custom music radio stations. A listener creates a Pandora account and types in a song, composer, or artist, and the service creates a station that plays songs that are similar to the user's selection. This analysis of music attempts to collect as many details about a song as possible, from lyrics to instrumentation to harmony, and then

categorizes songs according to these attributes, making it possible for listeners to customize their own stations based on one or more of the cataloged attributes. The listener can delete unwanted songs from the playlist and create new stations as well. Pandora currently relies on on-screen advertising and has implemented audio advertisements as well (Beltrone, 2009). Other music services such as Yahoo! Music, AOL Radio, and Jango offer radio stations with multiple programmed genres.

PROBLEMS OF INTERNET BROADCASTING

Despite the rise of Internet radio over the past several years, its success has never been a sure thing. As the trend gained momentum, many inexperienced broadcasters confronted the issue of royalties, and many experienced broadcasters encountered new legal issues related to streaming. Stations that broadcast over the airwaves must pay publishing royalties to the musicians and songwriters behind the recordings. Rather than pay an individual musician or songwriter each time a

recording is played, however, broadcasters—including radio station, coffee shops, and restaurants—pay for a blanket license that allows them to play any song. As Internet broadcasting grew, musicians and record labels began demanding royalties from Internet stations and specifying new licensing restrictions. For instance, Pandora radio's license specifies that users can buy a song, but they can't replay a song without purchasing it, nor can they skip more than six songs per hour.

Other issues arose as terrestrial stations began streaming on the Internet. Since its inception, the medium has struggled with such concerns as whether advertisers should pay for commercials played over the Internet as well as over the air and what types of licenses should be used for Internet radio stations. In time, the federal government mediated an agreement between broadcasters and record companies with the Webcasters Settlement Act of 2009. This legislation designated Internet-only stations as pure-play stations, dividing them according to the types of coverage they offer. Each category pays royalties in different ways, ensuring both fair compensation for artists and the future viability of Internet radio (Albenesius, 2009).

PODCASTING

Unlike Internet radio, podcasting employs downloadable rather than streamed programs. The term *podcasting* itself stems from the use of MP3 players such as Apple's iPod to use programs on demand. Many terrestrial stations have employed podcasting to supplement their traditional over-the-air broadcasting. Because these are single programs rather than continuous stations, podcasts are an easier medium to produce than is Internet radio.

Some podcast producers, such as Mignon Fogarty, have created programs that led to book deals and a steady income. Fogarty's weekly *Grammar Girl: Quick and Dirty Tricks* podcast focuses on simple grammar rules. Within a year of its inception, this podcast racked up 1 million downloads and received national acclaim (Faherty, 2007). Nevertheless, podcasting does not fit neatly into the traditional concept of radio. Yet, there is no question that it is following in the footsteps of past radio programs, and that it provides a potential vision of the medium's place in the years to come. Just as radio evolved from a medium for soap operas and live music to talk shows and recorded music, podcasts are a window into what radio may evolve into in the future.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Radio's flexibility as a medium has allowed it to adjust to the fluctuations of audience tastes and markets.
- Satellite radio is a subscription-based service, while HD radio is provided at no cost by current radio providers.
- Internet radio and podcasting have allowed many new programs and stations to be broadcast at low cost.

EXERCISES

Please respond to the following writing prompts. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. Define satellite radio, HD radio, Internet radio, and podcasting.
2. How have each of these mediums fared in terms of popularity?
3. Pick one of these mediums and predict its future success given its current popularity.

END-OF-CHAPTER ASSESSMENT

Review Questions

1. Section 1

    1. Name three major changes that have affected the development of radio.
    2. What made the period from the 1930s to the 1950s radio's golden age?
    3. How have large networks affected the development of radio?
    4. Has the corporate consolidation of radio over the past decades made radio better or worse in your opinion? Explain your answer.

2. Section 2

    1. How and why do modern radio stations employ radio formats?
    2. What is your opinion about the effects of formats on the current state of radio?
    3. Describe your favorite radio format and explain how the advertising is marketed to you.

3. Section 3

1. What makes radio unique among forms of mass media?
2. Explain the ways radio affected the development of your favorite genre of music.
3. How do you think popular music would be heard and spread if there was no radio?
4. What do you think political talk radio would presently be like if the Fairness Doctrine had not been repealed?

4. Section 4

1. How do you think new radio technologies will affect traditional radio broadcasting over the next 10 years?
2. Of the four new radio technologies listed in Section 7.4 "Radio's New Future", which do you think has the most potential to succeed? Explain your answer.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. Taken as a whole, has government regulation been good or bad for radio? Explain your answer using

specific examples.

2. Given the rise of tightly formatted radio stations, do you think it is still possible to have a truly popular music? Why or why not?
3. Do you think radio should be treated as a public resource or a private commodity? If your view was made law, how would it affect radio programming?
4. If radio is a public resource, how should issues of freedom of speech and censorship be handled?
5. Given the history of radio, do you think that new innovations in radio will make radio more democratic and accessible, or will regulatory and market forces control access?

CAREER CONNECTION

New technologies in radio have created new radio career possibilities. As podcasting, Internet radio, satellite radio, and HD radio have fueled demand for new content, opportunities have emerged for self-starters to create and host their own radio programs or become freelance radio journalists.

Consider some of the uses for podcasting and radio

journalism. Some useful links for researching careers in these areas, among others you may find through your own research, are (http://transom.org/) and (http://www.airmedia.org/). Based on your research and ideas, identify a career field in online radio that you may wish to pursue. Think about ways that people in this career field have employed radio. Now answer the following questions:

1. How have people used radio in your chosen career?
2. How have new technologies, such as podcasting and Internet radio, allowed for new uses of radio in this career?
3. How could you use radio in your career even if you weren't necessarily a radio producer or journalist?
4. What kinds of projects or initiatives could you undertake that would involve radio?

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Chapter 8: Movies

8.1 Movies
8.2 The History of Movies
8.3 Movies and Culture
8.4 Issues and Trends in Film
8.5 The Influence of New Technology

8.1 Movies

FIGURE 8.1



NASA Goddard Space Flight Center – Viewing 3D IMAX clips – CC BY 2.0.

In 2009, many moviegoers were amazed by the three-dimensional (3-D) film *Avatar*. *Avatar* grossed over $1.8 billion in theaters worldwide, $1.35 billion from 3-D sales alone (Gray, 2010). Following in that vein, dozens of other movie studios released 3-D films, resulting in lesser box office successes such as *Alice in Wonderland*, *Clash of the Titans*, and *Shrek Forever After*. Many film reviewers and audiences seemed adamant—3-D movies were the wave of the future.

However, could this eye-popping technology actually ruin our moviegoing experience? Brian Moylan, a critic for Gawker.com, argues that it already has. The problem with 3-D, he says, is that "It is so mind-numbingly amazing that

narrative storytelling hasn't caught up with the technology. The corporate screenwriting borgs are so busy trying to come up with plot devices to highlight all the newfangled whoosiwhatsits—objects being hurled at the audience, flying sequences, falling leaves, glowing Venus Flytraps—that no one is really bothering to tell a tale (Moylan)."

James Cameron, director of *Avatar*, agrees. "[Studios] think, 'what was the takeaway lessons from *Avatar*? Oh you should make more money with 3-D.' They ignore the fact that we natively authored the film in 3-D, and [they] decide that what we accomplished in several years of production could be done in an eight week (post-production 3-D) conversion [such as] with *Clash of the Titans* (Baig, 2010)." Cameron makes the following point: While recent films such as *Avatar* (2009) and *Beowulf* (2007) were created exclusively for 3-D, many other filmmakers have converted their movies to 3-D after filming was already complete. *Clash of the Titans* is widely criticized because its 3-D effects were quickly added in postproduction (Baig, 2010).

What effect does this have on audiences? Aside from the complaints of headaches and nausea (and the fact that some who wear glasses regularly can find it uncomfortable or even impossible to wear 3-D glasses on top of their own), many say that the new technology simply makes movies look worse. The film critic Roger Ebert has continuously denounced the technology, noting that movies such as *The Last Airbender* look like they're "filmed with a dirty sheet over the

lens (Ebert, 2010)." 3-D technology can cause a movie to look fuzzier, darker, and generally less cinematically attractive. However, movie studios are finding 3-D films attractive for another reason.

Because seeing a movie in 3-D is considered a "premium" experience, consumers are expected to pay higher prices. And with the increasing popularity of IMAX 3D films, tickets may surpass $20 per person (Stewart & McClintock, 2010). This gives 3-D films an advantage over 2-D ones as audiences are willing to pay more.

The recent 3-D boom has often been compared to the rise of color film in the early 1950s. However, some maintain that it's just a fad. Will 3-D technology affect the future of filmmaking? With a host of new 3-D technologies for the home theater being released in 2010, many are banking on the fact that it will. Director James Cameron, however, is unsure of the technology's continuing popularity, arguing that "If people put bad 3-D in the marketplace they're going to hold back or even threaten the emerging of 3-D (Baig)." What is important, he maintains, is the creative aspect of moviemaking—no technology can replace good filmmaking. In the end, audiences will determine the medium's popularity. Throughout the history of film, Technicolor dyes, enhanced sound systems, and computer-generated graphics have boasted huge box-office revenues; however, it's ultimately the viewers who determine what a good movie is and who set the standard for future films.

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8.2 The History of Movies

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify key points in the development of the motion picture industry.
2. Identify key developments of the motion picture industry and technology.
3. Identify influential films in movie history.

The movie industry as we know it today originated in the early 19th century through a series of technological developments: the creation of photography, the discovery of the illusion of motion by combining individual still images, and the study of human and animal locomotion. The history presented here begins at the culmination of these technological developments, where the idea of the motion picture as an entertainment industry first emerged. Since then, the industry has seen extraordinary transformations, some driven by the artistic visions of individual participants, some by commercial necessity, and still others by accident. The history of the

cinema is complex, and for every important innovator and movement listed here, others have been left out. Nonetheless, after reading this section you will understand the broad arc of the development of a medium that has captured the imaginations of audiences worldwide for over a century.

THE BEGINNINGS: MOTION PICTURE TECHNOLOGY OF THE LATE 19TH CENTURY

While the experience of watching movies on smartphones may seem like a drastic departure from the communal nature of film viewing as we think of it today, in some ways the small-format, single-viewer display is a return to film's early roots. In 1891, the inventor Thomas Edison, together with William Dickson, a young laboratory assistant, came out with what they called the kinetoscope, a device that would become the predecessor to the motion picture projector. The kinetoscope was a cabinet with a window through which individual viewers could experience the illusion of a moving image (Gale Virtual

Reference Library) (British Movie Classics). A perforated celluloid film strip with a sequence of images on it was rapidly spooled between a light bulb and a lens, creating the illusion of motion (Britannica). The images viewers could see in the kinetoscope captured events and performances that had been staged at Edison's film studio in East Orange, New Jersey, especially for the Edison kinetograph (the camera that produced kinetoscope film sequences): circus performances, dancing women, cockfights, boxing matches, and even a tooth extraction by a dentist (Robinson, 1994).

FIGURE 8.2



The Edison kinetoscope.
todd.vision – Kinetoscope – CC BY 2.0.

As the kinetoscope gained popularity, the Edison Company

began installing machines in hotel lobbies, amusement parks, and penny arcades, and soon kinetoscope parlors—where customers could pay around 25 cents for admission to a bank of machines—had opened around the country. However, when friends and collaborators suggested that Edison find a way to project his kinetoscope images for audience viewing, he apparently refused, claiming that such an invention would be a less profitable venture (Britannica).

Because Edison hadn't secured an international patent for his invention, variations of the kinetoscope were soon being copied and distributed throughout Europe. This new form of entertainment was an instant success, and a number of mechanics and inventors, seeing an opportunity, began toying with methods of projecting the moving images onto a larger screen. However, it was the invention of two brothers, Auguste and Louis Lumière—photographic goods manufacturers in Lyon, France—that saw the most commercial success. In 1895, the brothers patented the cinématographe (from which we get the term *cinema*), a lightweight film projector that also functioned as a camera and printer. Unlike the Edison kinetograph, the cinématographe was lightweight enough for easy outdoor filming, and over the years the brothers used the camera to take well over 1,000 short films, most of which depicted scenes from everyday life. In December 1895, in the basement lounge of the Grand Café, Rue des Capucines in Paris, the Lumières held the world's first ever commercial film screening, a sequence of about 10 short

scenes, including the brother's first film, *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory*, a segment lasting less than a minute and depicting workers leaving the family's photographic instrument factory at the end of the day, as shown in the still frame here in Figure 8.3 (Encyclopedia of the Age of Industry and Empire).

Believing that audiences would get bored watching scenes that they could just as easily observe on a casual walk around the city, Louis Lumière claimed that the cinema was "an invention without a future (Menand, 2005)," but a demand for motion pictures grew at such a rapid rate that soon representatives of the Lumière company were traveling throughout Europe and the world, showing half-hour screenings of the company's films. While cinema initially competed with other popular forms of entertainment—circuses, vaudeville acts, theater troupes, magic shows, and many others—eventually it would supplant these various entertainments as the main commercial attraction (Menand, 2005). Within a year of the Lumières' first commercial screening, competing film companies were offering moving-picture acts in music halls and vaudeville theaters across Great Britain. In the United States, the Edison Company, having purchased the rights to an improved projector that they called the Vitascope, held their first film screening in April 1896 at Koster and Bial's Music Hall in Herald Square, New York City.

Film's profound impact on its earliest viewers is difficult

to imagine today, inundated as many are by video images. However, the sheer volume of reports about the early audience's disbelief, delight, and even fear at what they were seeing suggests that viewing a film was an overwhelming experience for many. Spectators gasped at the realistic details in films such as Robert Paul's *Rough Sea at Dover*, and at times people panicked and tried to flee the theater during films in which trains or moving carriages sped toward the audience (Robinson). Even the public's perception of film as a medium was considerably different from the contemporary understanding; the moving image was an improvement upon the photograph—a medium with which viewers were already familiar—and this is perhaps why the earliest films documented events in brief segments but didn't tell stories. During this "novelty period" of cinema, audiences were more interested by the phenomenon of the film projector itself, so vaudeville halls advertised the kind of projector they were using (for example "The Vitascope—Edison's Latest Marvel") (Balcanasu, et. al.), rather than the names of the films (Britannica Online).

FIGURE 8.3



Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory: One of the first films viewed by an audience.

Craig Duffy – Workers Leaving The Lumiere Factory – CC BY-NC 2.0.

By the close of the 19th century, as public excitement over the moving picture's novelty gradually wore off, filmmakers were also beginning to experiment with film's possibilities as a medium in itself (not simply, as it had been regarded up until then, as a tool for documentation, analogous to the camera or the phonograph). Technical innovations allowed filmmakers like Parisian cinema owner Georges Méliès to experiment with special effects that produced seemingly magical

transformations on screen: flowers turned into women, people disappeared with puffs of smoke, a man appeared where a woman had just been standing, and other similar tricks (Robinson).

Not only did Méliès, a former magician, invent the "trick film," which producers in England and the United States began to imitate, but he was also the one to transform cinema into the narrative medium it is today. Whereas before, filmmakers had only ever created single-shot films that lasted a minute or less, Méliès began joining these short films together to create stories. His 30-scene *Trip to the Moon* (1902), a film based on a Jules Verne novel, may have been the most widely seen production in cinema's first decade (Robinson). However, Méliès never developed his technique beyond treating the narrative film as a staged theatrical performance; his camera, representing the vantage point of an audience facing a stage, never moved during the filming of a scene. In 1912, Méliès released his last commercially successful production, *The Conquest of the Pole*, and from then on, he lost audiences to filmmakers who were experimenting with more sophisticated techniques (Encyclopedia of Communication and Information).

FIGURE 8.4



Georges Méliès's *Trip to the Moon* was one of the first films to incorporate fantasy elements and to use "trick" filming techniques, both of which heavily influenced future filmmakers.

Craig Duffy – Workers Leaving The Lumiere Factory – CC BY-NC 2.0.

THE NICKELODEON CRAZE (1904–1908)

One of these innovative filmmakers was Edwin S. Porter, a projectionist and engineer for the Edison Company. Porter's 12-minute film, *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), broke with the stagelike compositions of Méliès-style films through its use of editing, camera pans, rear projections, and diagonally composed shots that produced a continuity of action. Not only did *The Great Train Robbery* establish the realistic narrative as a standard in cinema, it was also the first major box-office hit. Its success paved the way for the growth of the film industry, as investors, recognizing the motion picture's great moneymaking potential, began opening the first permanent film theaters around the country.

Known as nickelodeons because of their 5 cent admission charge, these early motion picture theaters, often housed in converted storefronts, were especially popular among the working class of the time, who couldn't afford live theater. Between 1904 and 1908, around 9,000 nickelodeons appeared in the United States. It was the nickelodeon's popularity that established film as a mass entertainment medium (Dictionary of American History).

THE "BIZ": THE MOTION PICTURE INDUSTRY EMERGES

As the demand for motion pictures grew, production companies were created to meet it. At the peak of nickelodeon popularity in 1910 (Britannica Online), there were 20 or so major motion picture companies in the United States. However, heated disputes often broke out among these companies over patent rights and industry control, leading even the most powerful among them to fear fragmentation that would loosen their hold on the market (Fielding, 1967). Because of these concerns, the 10 leading companies—including Edison, Biograph, Vitagraph, and others—formed the Motion Picture Patents Company (MPPC) in 1908. The MPPC was a trade group that pooled the most significant motion picture patents and established an exclusive contract between these companies and the Eastman Kodak Company as a supplier of film stock. Also known as *the Trust*, the MPPC's goal was to standardize the industry and shut out competition through monopolistic control. Under the Trust's licensing system, only certain licensed companies could participate in the exchange, distribution, and production of film at different levels of the industry—a shut-out tactic that eventually

backfired, leading the excluded, independent distributors to organize in opposition to the Trust (Britannica Online).

THE RISE OF THE FEATURE

In these early years, theaters were still running single-reel films, which came at a standard length of 1,000 feet, allowing for about 16 minutes of playing time. However, companies began to import multiple-reel films from European producers around 1907, and the format gained popular acceptance in the United States in 1912 with Louis Mercanton's highly successful *Queen Elizabeth*, a three-and-a-half reel "feature," starring the French actress Sarah Bernhardt. As exhibitors began to show more features—as the multiple-reel film came to be called—they discovered a number of advantages over the single-reel short. For one thing, audiences saw these longer films as special events and were willing to pay more for admission, and because of the popularity of the feature narratives, features generally experienced longer runs in theaters than their single-reel predecessors (Motion Pictures). Additionally, the feature film gained popularity among the

middle classes, who saw its length as analogous to the more "respectable" entertainment of live theater (Motion Pictures). Following the example of the French *film d'art*, U.S. feature producers often took their material from sources that would appeal to a wealthier and better educated audience, such as histories, literature, and stage productions (Robinson).

As it turns out, the feature film was one factor that brought about the eventual downfall of the MPPC. The inflexible structuring of the Trust's exhibition and distribution system made the organization resistant to change. When movie studio, and Trust member, Vitagraph began to release features like *A Tale of Two Cities* (1911) and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1910), the Trust forced it to exhibit the films serially in single-reel showings to keep with industry standards. The MPPC also underestimated the appeal of the star system, a trend that began when producers chose famous stage actors like Mary Pickford and James O'Neill to play the leading roles in their productions and to grace their advertising posters (Robinson). Because of the MPPC's inflexibility, independent companies were the only ones able to capitalize on two important trends that were to become film's future: single-reel features and star power. Today, few people would recognize names like Vitagraph or Biograph, but the independents that outlasted them—Universal, Goldwyn (which would later merge with Metro and Mayer), Fox (later 20th Century Fox), and Paramount (the later version of the Lasky Corporation)—have become household names.

HOLLYWOOD

As moviegoing increased in popularity among the middle class, and as the feature films began keeping audiences in their seats for longer periods of time, exhibitors found a need to create more comfortable and richly decorated theater spaces to attract their audiences. These "dream palaces," so called because of their often lavish embellishments of marble, brass, guilding, and cut glass, not only came to replace the nickelodeon theater, but also created the demand that would lead to the Hollywood studio system. Some producers realized that the growing demand for new work could only be met if the films were produced on a regular, year-round system. However, this was impractical with the current system that often relied on outdoor filming and was predominately based in Chicago and New York—two cities whose weather conditions prevented outdoor filming for a significant portion of the year. Different companies attempted filming in warmer locations such as Florida, Texas, and Cuba, but the place where producers eventually found the most success was a small, industrial suburb of Los Angeles called Hollywood.

Hollywood proved to be an ideal location for a number of reasons. Not only was the climate temperate and sunny year-round, but land was plentiful and cheap, and the location allowed close access to a number of diverse topographies: mountains, lakes, desert, coasts, and forests. By 1915, more than 60 percent of U.S. film production was centered in Hollywood (Britannica Online).

THE ART OF SILENT FILM

While the development of narrative film was largely driven by commercial factors, it is also important to acknowledge the role of individual artists who turned it into a medium of personal expression. The motion picture of the silent era was generally simplistic in nature; acted in overly animated movements to engage the eye; and accompanied by live music, played by musicians in the theater, and written titles to create a mood and to narrate a story. Within the confines of this medium, one filmmaker in particular emerged to transform the silent film into an art and to unlock its potential as a

medium of serious expression and persuasion. D. W. Griffith, who entered the film industry as an actor in 1907, quickly moved to a directing role in which he worked closely with his camera crew to experiment with shots, angles, and editing techniques that could heighten the emotional intensity of his scenes. He found that by practicing parallel editing, in which a film alternates between two or more scenes of action, he could create an illusion of simultaneity. He could then heighten the tension of the film's drama by alternating between cuts more and more rapidly until the scenes of action converged. Griffith used this technique to great effect in his controversial film *The Birth of a Nation*, which will be discussed in greater detail later on in this chapter. Other techniques that Griffith employed to new effect included panning shots, through which he was able to establish a sense of scene and to engage his audience more fully in the experience of the film, and tracking shots, or shots that traveled with the movement of a scene (Motion Pictures), which allowed the audience—through the eye of the camera—to participate in the film's action.

MPAA: COMBATING CENSORSHIP

As film became an increasingly lucrative U.S. industry, prominent industry figures like D. W. Griffith, slapstick comedian/director Charlie Chaplin, and actors Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks grew extremely wealthy and influential. Public attitudes toward stars and toward some stars' extravagant lifestyles were divided, much as they are today: On the one hand, these celebrities were idolized and imitated in popular culture, yet at the same time, they were criticized for representing a threat, on and off screen, to traditional morals and social order. And much as it does today, the news media liked to sensationalize the lives of celebrities to sell stories. Comedian Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle, who worked alongside future icons Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton, was at the center of one of the biggest scandals of the silent era. When Arbuckle hosted a marathon party over Labor Day weekend in 1921, one of his guests, model Virginia Rapp, was rushed to the hospital, where she later died. Reports of a drunken orgy, rape, and murder surfaced. Following World War I, the United States was in the middle of significant social reforms, such as Prohibition. Many feared that movies and their stars could threaten the moral order of the country. Because of the nature of the crime and the celebrity involved, these fears became inexplicably tied to the Artbuckle case (Motion Pictures). Even

though autopsy reports ruled that Rapp had died from causes for which Arbuckle could not be blamed, the comedian was tried (and acquitted) for manslaughter, and his career was ruined.

The Arbuckle affair and a series of other scandals only increased public fears about Hollywood's impact. In response to this perceived threat, state and local governments increasingly tried to censor the content of films that depicted crime, violence, and sexually explicit material. Deciding that they needed to protect themselves from government censorship and to foster a more favorable public image, the major Hollywood studios organized in 1922 to form an association they called the Motion Picture Producers and Distributers of America (later renamed the Motion Picture Association of America, or **MPAA**). Among other things, the MPAA instituted a code of self-censorship for the motion picture industry. Today, the MPAA operates by a voluntary rating system, which means producers can voluntarily submit a film for review, which is designed to alert viewers to the age-appropriateness of a film, while still protecting the filmmakers' artistic freedom (Motion Picture Association of America).

SILENT FILM'S DEMISE

In 1925, Warner Bros. was just a small Hollywood studio looking for opportunities to expand. When representatives from Western Electric offered to sell the studio the rights to a new technology they called Vitaphone, a sound-on-disc system that had failed to capture the interest of any of the industry giants, Warner Bros. executives took a chance, predicting that the novelty of talking films might be a way to make a quick, short-term profit. Little did they anticipate that their gamble would not only establish them as a major Hollywood presence but also change the industry forever.

The pairing of sound with motion pictures was nothing new in itself. Edison, after all, had commissioned the kinetoscope to create a visual accompaniment to the phonograph, and many early theaters had orchestra pits to provide musical accompaniment to their films. Even the smaller picture houses with lower budgets almost always had an organ or piano. When Warner Bros. purchased Vitaphone technology, it planned to use it to provide prerecorded orchestral accompaniment for its films, thereby increasing their marketability to the smaller theaters that didn't have their own orchestra pits (Gochenour, 2000). In 1926, Warner debuted the system with the release of *Don Juan*, a costume drama accompanied by a recording of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra; the public responded

enthusiastically (Motion Pictures). By 1927, after a $3 million campaign, Warner Bros. had wired more than 150 theaters in the United States, and it released its second sound film, *The Jazz Singer*, in which the actor Al Jolson improvised a few lines of synchronized dialogue and sang six songs. The film was a major breakthrough. Audiences, hearing an actor speak on screen for the first time, were enchanted (Gochenour). While radio, a new and popular entertainment, had been drawing audiences away from the picture houses for some time, with the birth of the "talkie," or talking film, audiences once again returned to the cinema in large numbers, lured by the promise of seeing and hearing their idols perform (Higham, 1973). By 1929, three-fourths of Hollywood films had some form of sound accompaniment, and by 1930, the silent film was a thing of the past (Gochenour).

"I DON'T THINK WE'RE IN KANSAS ANYMORE": FILM GOES TECHNICOLOR

Although the techniques of tinting and hand painting had been available methods for adding color to films for some time (Georges Méliès, for instance, employed a crew to hand-paint many of his films), neither method ever caught on. The hand-painting technique became impractical with the advent of mass-produced film, and the tinting process, which filmmakers discovered would create an interference with the transmission of sound in films, was abandoned with the rise of the talkie. However, in 1922, Herbert Kalmus's Technicolor company introduced a dye-transfer technique that allowed it to produce a full-length film, *The Toll of the Sea*, in two primary colors (Gale Virtual Reference Library). However, because only two colors were used, the appearance of *The Toll of the Sea* (1922), *The Ten Commandments* (1923), and other early Technicolor films was not very lifelike. By 1932, Technicolor had designed a three-color system with more realistic results, and for the next 25 years, all color films were produced with this improved system. Disney's *Three Little Pigs* (1933) and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (1936) and films with

live actors, like MGM's *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) and *Gone With the Wind* (1939), experienced early success using Technicolor's three-color method.

Despite the success of certain color films in the 1930s, Hollywood, like the rest of the United States, was feeling the impact of the Great Depression, and the expenses of special cameras, crews, and Technicolor lab processing made color films impractical for studios trying to cut costs. Therefore, it wasn't until the end of the 1940s that Technicolor would largely displace the black-and-white film (Motion Pictures in Color).

RISE AND FALL OF THE HOLLYWOOD STUDIO

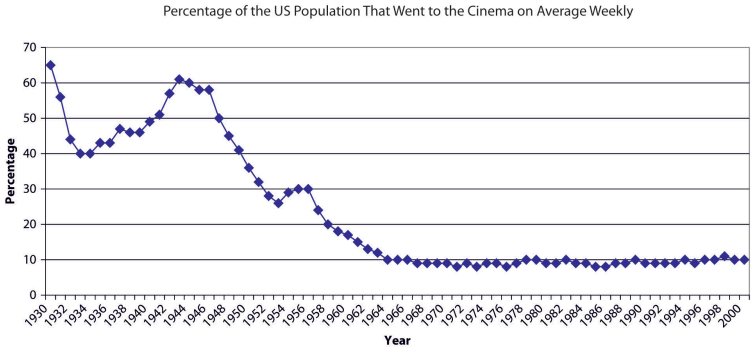
The spike in theater attendance that followed the introduction of talking films changed the economic structure of the motion picture industry, bringing about some of the largest mergers in industry history. By 1930, eight studios produced 95 percent of all American films, and they continued to experience growth even during the Depression. The five most influential

of these studios—Warner Bros., Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, RKO, 20th Century Fox, and Paramount—were vertically integrated; that is, they controlled every part of the system as it related to their films, from the production to release, distribution, and even viewing. Because they owned theater chains worldwide, these studios controlled which movies exhibitors ran, and because they "owned" a stock of directors, actors, writers, and technical assistants by contract, each studio produced films of a particular character.

The late 1930s and early 1940s are sometimes known as the "Golden Age" of cinema, a time of unparalleled success for the movie industry; by 1939, film was the 11th-largest industry in the United States, and during World War II, when the U.S. economy was once again flourishing, two-thirds of Americans were attending the theater at least once a week (Britannica Online). Some of the most acclaimed movies in history were released during this period, including *Citizen Kane* and *The Grapes of Wrath*. However, postwar inflation, a temporary loss of key foreign markets, the advent of the television, and other factors combined to bring that rapid growth to an end. In 1948, the case of the *United States v. Paramount Pictures*—mandating competition and forcing the studios to relinquish control over theater chains—dealt the final devastating blow from which the studio system would never recover. Control of the major studios reverted to Wall Street, where the studios were eventually absorbed by multinational

corporations, and the powerful studio heads lost the influence they had held for nearly 30 years (Baers, 2000).

FIGURE 8.5



Rise and Decline of Movie Viewing During Hollywood's "Golden Age"

Graph from Pautz, Michelle C. 2002. The Decline in Average Weekly Cinema Attendance: 1930–2000. Issues in Political Economy, 11 (Summer): 54–65.

POST–WORLD WAR II: TELEVISION PRESENTS A THREAT

While economic factors and antitrust legislation played key roles in the decline of the studio system, perhaps the most important factor in that decline was the advent of the television. Given the opportunity to watch "movies" from the comfort of their own homes, the millions of Americans who owned a television by the early 1950s were attending the cinema far less regularly than they had only several years earlier (Motion Pictures). In an attempt to win back diminishing audiences, studios did their best to exploit the greatest advantages film held over television. For one thing, television broadcasting in the 1950s was all in black and white, whereas the film industry had the advantage of color. While producing a color film was still an expensive undertaking in the late 1940s, a couple of changes occurred in the industry in the early 1950s to make color not only more affordable, but more realistic in its appearance. In 1950, as the result of antitrust legislation, Technicolor lost its monopoly on the color film industry, allowing other providers to offer more competitive pricing on filming and processing services. At the same time, Kodak came out with a multilayer film stock that made it possible to use more affordable cameras and to produce a higher quality

image. Kodak's Eastmancolor option was an integral component in converting the industry to color. In the late 1940s, only 12 percent of features were in color; however, by 1954 (after the release of Kodak Eastmancolor) more than 50 percent of movies were in color (Britannica Online).

Another clear advantage on which filmmakers tried to capitalize was the sheer size of the cinema experience. With the release of the epic biblical film *The Robe* in 1953, 20th Century Fox introduced the method that would soon be adopted by nearly every studio in Hollywood: a technology that allowed filmmakers to squeeze a wide-angle image onto conventional 35-mm film stock, thereby increasing the aspect ratio (the ratio of a screen's width to its height) of their images. This wide-screen format increased the immersive quality of the theater experience. Nonetheless, even with these advancements, movie attendance never again reached the record numbers it experienced in 1946, at the peak of the Golden Age of Hollywood (Britannica Online).

MASS ENTERTAINMENT, MASS PARANOIA: HUAC AND THE HOLLYWOOD BLACKLIST

The Cold War with the Soviet Union began in 1947, and with it came the widespread fear of communism, not only from the outside, but equally from within. To undermine this perceived threat, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) commenced investigations to locate communist sympathizers in America who were suspected of conducting espionage for the Soviet Union. In the highly conservative and paranoid atmosphere of the time, Hollywood, the source of a mass-cultural medium, came under fire in response to fears that subversive, communist messages were being embedded in films. In November

1947, more than 100 people in the movie business were called to testify before the HUAC about their and their colleagues' involvement with communist affairs. Of those investigated, 10 in particular refused to cooperate with the committee's questions. These 10, later known as the Hollywood Ten, were fired from their jobs and sentenced to serve up to a year in prison. The studios, already slipping in influence and profit, were eager to cooperate in order to save themselves, and a number of producers signed an agreement stating that no communists would work in Hollywood.

The hearings, which recommenced in 1951 with the rise of Senator Joseph McCarthy's influence, turned into a kind of witch hunt as witnesses were asked to testify against their associates, and a blacklist of suspected communists evolved. Over 324 individuals lost their jobs in the film industry as a result of blacklisting (the denial of work in a certain field or industry) and HUAC investigations (Georgakas, 2004; Mills, 2007; Dressler, et. al., 2005).

DOWN WITH THE ESTABLISHMENT: YOUTH CULTURE OF THE 1960S AND 1970S

Movies of the late 1960s began attracting a younger demographic, as a growing number of young people were drawn in by films like Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* (1969), Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), and Dennis Hopper's *Easy Rider* (1969)—all revolutionary in their genres—that displayed a sentiment of unrest toward conventional social orders and included some of the earliest instances of realistic and brutal violence in film. These four films in particular grossed so much money at the box offices that producers began churning out low-budget copycats to draw in a new, profitable market (Motion Pictures). While this led to a rise in youth-culture films, few of them saw great success. However, the new liberal attitudes toward depictions of sex and violence in these films represented a sea of change in the movie industry that manifested in many movies of the 1970s, including Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* (1972), William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* (1973), and

Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975), all three of which saw great financial success (Britannica Online; Belton, 1994).

BLOCKBUSTERS, KNOCKOFFS, AND SEQUELS

In the 1970s, with the rise of work by Coppola, Spielberg, George Lucas, Martin Scorsese, and others, a new breed of director emerged. These directors were young and film-school educated, and they contributed a sense of professionalism, sophistication, and technical mastery to their work, leading to a wave of blockbuster productions, including *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), *Star Wars* (1977), *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), and *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982). The computer-generated special effects that were available at this time also contributed to the success of a number of large-budget productions. In response to these and several earlier blockbusters, movie production and marketing techniques also began to shift, with studios investing more money in fewer

films in the hopes of producing more big successes. For the first time, the hefty sums producers and distributers invested didn't go to production costs alone; distributers were discovering the benefits of TV and radio advertising and finding that doubling their advertising costs could increase profits as much as three or four times over. With the opening of *Jaws*, one of the five top-grossing films of the decade (and the highest grossing film of all time until the release of *Star Wars* in 1977), Hollywood embraced the wide-release method of movie distribution, abandoning the release methods of earlier decades, in which a film would debut in only a handful of select theaters in major cities before it became gradually available to mass audiences. *Jaws* was released in 600 theaters simultaneously, and the big-budget films that followed came out in anywhere from 800 to 2,000 theaters nationwide on their opening weekends (Belton; Hanson & Garcia-Myers, 2000).

The major Hollywood studios of the late 1970s and early 1980s, now run by international corporations, tended to favor the conservative gamble of the tried and true, and as a result, the period saw an unprecedented number of high-budget sequels—as in the *Star Wars*, *Indiana Jones*, and *Godfather* films—as well as imitations and adaptations of earlier successful material, such as the plethora of "slasher" films that followed the success of the 1979 thriller *Halloween*. Additionally, corporations sought revenue sources beyond the movie theater, looking to the video and cable releases of their films. Introduced in 1975, the VCR became nearly ubiquitous

in American homes by 1998 with 88.9 million households owning the appliance (Rosen & Meier, 2000). Cable television's growth was slower, but ownership of VCRs gave people a new reason to subscribe, and cable subsequently expanded as well (Rogers). And the newly introduced concept of film-based merchandise (toys, games, books, etc.) allowed companies to increase profits even more.

THE 1990S AND BEYOND

The 1990s saw the rise of two divergent strands of cinema: the technically spectacular blockbuster with special, computer-generated effects and the independent, low-budget film. The capabilities of special effects were enhanced when studios began manipulating film digitally. Early examples of this technology can be seen in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991) and *Jurassic Park* (1993). Films with an epic scope—*Independence Day* (1996), *Titanic* (1997), and *The Matrix* (1999)—also employed a range of computer-animation techniques and special effects to wow audiences and

to draw more viewers to the big screen. *Toy Story* (1995), the first fully computer-animated film, and those that came after it, such as *Antz* (1998), *A Bug's Life* (1998), and *Toy Story 2* (1999), displayed the improved capabilities of computer-generated animation (Sedman, 2000). At the same time, independent directors and producers, such as the Coen brothers and Spike Jonze, experienced an increased popularity, often for lower-budget films that audiences were more likely to watch on video at home (Britannica Online). A prime example of this is the 1996 Academy Awards program, when independent films dominated the Best Picture category. Only one movie from a big film studio was nominated—*Jerry Maguire*—while the rest were independent films. The growth of both independent movies and special-effects-laden blockbusters continues to the present day. You will read more about current issues and trends and the future of the movie industry later on in this chapter.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The concept of the motion picture was first introduced to a mass audience through Thomas Edison's kinetoscope in 1891. However, it wasn't until the Lumière brothers released the cinématographe in 1895 that motion pictures were projected for audience

viewing. In the United States, film established itself as a popular form of entertainment with the nickelodeon theater in the 1910s.

- The release of *The Jazz Singer* in 1927 marked the birth of the talking film, and by 1930 silent film was a thing of the past. Technicolor emerged for film around the same time and found early success with movies like *The Wizard of Oz* and *Gone With the Wind*. However, people would continue to make films in black and white until the late 1950s.
- By 1915 most of the major film studios had moved to Hollywood. During the Golden Age of Hollywood, these major studios controlled every aspect of the movie industry, and the films they produced drew crowds to theaters in numbers that have still not been surpassed. After World War II, the studio system declined as a result of antitrust legislation that took power away from studios and of the invention of the television.
- During the 1960s and 1970s, there was a rise in films—including *Bonnie and Clyde*, *The Wild Bunch*, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and *Easy Rider*—that celebrated the emerging youth culture and a rejection of the conservatism of the previous decades. This also led to looser attitudes toward depictions of sexuality and violence in film. The 1970s and 1980s saw the rise of the blockbuster, with films like *Jaws*, *Star*

Wars, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and *The Godfather*.

- The adoption of the VCR by most households in the 1980s reduced audiences at movie theaters but opened a new mass market of home movie viewers. Improvements in computer animation led to more special effects in film during the 1990s with movies like *The Matrix*, *Jurassic Park*, and the first fully computer-animated film, *Toy Story*.

EXERCISES

Identify four films that you would consider to be representative of major developments in the industry and in film as a medium that were outlined in this section. Imagine you are using these films to explain movie history to a friend. Provide a detailed explanation of why each of these films represents significant changes in attitudes, technology, or trends and situate each in the overall context of film's development. Consider the following questions:

1. How did this movie influence the film industry?
2. What has been the lasting impact of this movie on the film industry?
3. How was the film industry and technology different

before this film?

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8.3 Movies and Culture

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize how movies reflect cultural attitudes, trends, and events.
2. Indicate how movies influence culture.

MOVIES MIRROR CULTURE

The relationship between movies and culture involves a complicated dynamic; while American movies certainly influence the mass culture that consumes them, they are also an integral part of that culture, a product of it, and therefore a reflection of prevailing concerns, attitudes, and beliefs. In considering the relationship between film and culture, it is important to keep in mind that, while certain ideologies may

be prevalent in a given era, not only is American culture as diverse as the populations that form it, but it is also constantly changing from one period to the next. Mainstream films produced in the late 1940s and into the 1950s, for example, reflected the conservatism that dominated the sociopolitical arenas of the time. However, by the 1960s, a reactionary youth culture began to emerge in opposition to the dominant institutions, and these antiestablishment views soon found their way onto the screen—a far cry from the attitudes most commonly represented only a few years earlier.

In one sense, movies could be characterized as America's storytellers. Not only do Hollywood films reflect certain commonly held attitudes and beliefs about what it means to be American, but they also portray contemporary trends, issues, and events, serving as records of the eras in which they were produced. Consider, for example, films about the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks: *Fahrenheit 9/11*, *World Trade Center*, *United 93*, and others. These films grew out of a seminal event of the time, one that preoccupied the consciousness of Americans for years after it occurred.

BIRTH OF A NATION

In 1915, director D. W. Griffith established his reputation with the highly successful film *The Birth of a Nation*, based on Thomas Dixon's novel *The Clansman*, a prosegregation narrative about the American South during and after the Civil War. At the time, *The Birth of a Nation* was the longest feature film ever made, at almost 3 hours, and contained huge battle scenes that amazed and delighted audiences. Griffith's storytelling ability helped solidify the narrative style that would go on to dominate feature films. He also experimented with editing techniques such as close-ups, jump cuts, and parallel editing that helped make the film an artistic achievement.

Griffith's film found success largely because it captured the social and cultural tensions of the era. As American studies specialist Lary May has argued, "[Griffith's] films dramatized every major concern of the day (May, 1997)." In the early 20th century, fears about recent waves of immigrants had led to certain racist attitudes in mass culture, with "scientific" theories of the time purporting to link race with inborn traits like intelligence and other capabilities. Additionally, the dominant political climate, largely a reaction against populist labor movements, was one of conservative elitism, eager to attribute social inequalities to natural human differences (Darity). According to a report by the New York *Evening*

Post after the film's release, even some Northern audiences "clapped when the masked riders took vengeance on Negroes (Higham)." However, the outrage many groups expressed about the film is a good reminder that American culture is not monolithic, that there are always strong contingents in opposition to dominant ideologies.

While critics praised the film for its narrative complexity and epic scope, many others were outraged and even started riots at several screenings because of its highly controversial, openly racist attitudes, which glorified the Ku Klux Klan and blamed Southern Blacks for the destruction of the war (Higham). Many Americans joined the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in denouncing the film, and the National Board of Review eventually cut a number of the film's racist sections (May). However, it's important to keep in mind the attitudes of the early 1900s. At the time the nation was divided, and Jim Crow laws and segregation were enforced. Nonetheless, *The Birth of a Nation* was the highest grossing movie of its era. In 1992, the film was classified by the Library of Congress among the "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant films" in U.S. history.

FIGURE 8.6



The Birth of a Nation expressed racial tensions of the early 20th century.

Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

"THE AMERICAN WAY"

Until the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, American films after World War I generally reflected the neutral, isolationist stance that prevailed in politics and culture. However, after the United States was drawn into the war in Europe, the government enlisted Hollywood to help with the war effort, opening the federal Bureau of Motion Picture Affairs in Los Angeles. Bureau officials served in an advisory capacity on the production of war-related films, an effort with which the studios cooperated. As a result, films tended toward the patriotic and were produced to inspire feelings of pride and confidence in being American and to clearly establish that America and its allies were forces of good. For instance, critically acclaimed *Casablanca* paints a picture of the ill effects of fascism, illustrates the values that heroes like Victor Laszlo

hold, and depicts America as a place for refugees to find democracy and freedom (Digital History).

These early World War II films were sometimes overtly propagandist, intended to influence American attitudes rather than present a genuine reflection of American sentiments toward the war. Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* films, for example, the first of which was produced in 1942, were developed for the U.S. Army and were later shown to general audiences; they delivered a war message through narrative (Koppes & Black, 1987). As the war continued, however, filmmakers opted to forego patriotic themes for a more serious reflection of American sentiments, as exemplified by films like Alfred Hitchcock's *Lifeboat*.

YOUTH VERSUS AGE: FROM COUNTERCULTURE TO MASS CULTURE

In Mike Nichols's 1967 film *The Graduate*, Dustin Hoffman,

as the film's protagonist, enters into a romantic affair with the wife of his father's business partner. However, Mrs. Robinson and the other adults in the film fail to understand the young, alienated hero, who eventually rebels against them. *The Graduate*, which brought in more than $44 million at the box office, reflected the attitudes of many members of a young generation growing increasingly dissatisfied with what they perceived to be the repressive social codes established by their more conservative elders (Dirks).

This baby boomer generation came of age during the Korean and Vietnam wars. Not only did the youth culture express a cynicism toward the patriotic, prowar stance of their World War II–era elders, but they displayed a fierce resistance toward institutional authority in general, an antiestablishmentism epitomized in the 1967 hit film *Bonnie and Clyde*. In the film, a young, outlaw couple sets out on a cross-country bank-robbing spree until they're killed in a violent police ambush at the film's close (Belton).

FIGURE 8.7



Bonnie and Clyde reflected the attitudes of a rising youth culture.

Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

Bonnie and Clyde's violence provides one example of the ways

films at the time were testing the limits of permissible on-screen material. The youth culture's liberal attitudes toward formally taboo subjects like sexuality and drugs began to emerge in film during the late 1960s. Like *Bonnie and Clyde*, Sam Peckinpah's 1969 Western *The Wild Bunch*, displays an early example of aestheticized violence in film. The wildly popular *Easy Rider* (1969)—containing drugs, sex, and violence—may owe a good deal of its initial success to liberalized audiences. And in the same year, *Midnight Cowboy*, one of the first Hollywood films to receive an X rating (in this case for its sexual content), won three Academy Awards, including Best Picture (Belton). As the release and subsequently successful reception of these films attest, what at the decade's outset had been countercultural had, by the decade's close, become mainstream.

THE HOLLYWOOD PRODUCTION CODE

When the MPAA (originally MPPDA) first banded together in 1922 to combat government censorship and to promote

artistic freedom, the association attempted a system of self-regulation. However, by 1930—in part because of the transition to talking pictures—renewed criticism and calls for censorship from conservative groups made it clear to the MPPDA that the loose system of self-regulation was not enough protection. As a result, the MPPDA instituted the Production Code, or Hays Code (after MPPDA director William H. Hays), which remained in place until 1967. The code, which according to motion picture producers concerned itself with ensuring that movies were "directly responsible for spiritual or moral progress, for higher types of social life, and for much correct thinking (History Matters)," was strictly enforced starting in 1934, putting an end to most public complaints. However, many people in Hollywood resented its restrictiveness. After a series of Supreme Court cases in the 1950s regarding the code's restrictions to freedom of speech, the Production Code grew weaker until it was finally replaced in 1967 with the MPAA rating system (American Decades Primary Sources, 2004).

MPAA RATINGS

As films like *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966) tested the limits on violence and language, it became clear that the Production Code was in need of replacement. In 1968, the MPAA adopted a ratings system to identify films in terms of potentially objectionable content. By providing officially designated categories for films that would not have passed Production Code standards of the past, the MPAA opened a way for films to deal openly with mature content. The ratings system originally included four categories: G (suitable for general audiences), M (equivalent to the PG rating of today), R (restricted to adults over age 16), and X (equivalent to today's NC-17).

The MPAA rating systems, with some modifications, is still in place today. Before release in theaters, films are submitted to the MPAA board for a screening, during which advisers decide on the most appropriate rating based on the film's content. However, studios are not required to have the MPAA screen releases ahead of time—some studios release films without the MPAA rating at all. Commercially, less restrictive ratings are generally more beneficial, particularly in the case of adult-themed films that have the potential to earn the most restrictive rating, the NC-17. Some movie theaters will not screen a movie that is rated NC-17. When filmmakers get a more restrictive rating than they were hoping for, they may

resubmit the film for review after editing out objectionable scenes (Dick, 2006).

THE NEW WAR FILM: CYNICISM AND ANXIETY

Unlike the patriotic war films of the World War II era, many of the films about U.S. involvement in Vietnam reflected strong antiwar sentiment, criticizing American political policy and portraying war's damaging effects on those who survived it. Films like *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), *M*A*S*H* (1970), *The Deer Hunter* (1978), and *Apocalypse Now* (1979) portray the military establishment in a negative light and dissolve clear-cut distinctions, such as the "us versus them" mentality, of earlier war films. These, and the dozens of Vietnam War films that were produced in the 1970s and 1980s—Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (1986) and *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989) and Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), for example—reflect the sense of defeat and lack of closure Americans felt after the Vietnam War and the emotional and psychological scars it left on the nation's psyche (Dirks, 2010;

Anderegg, 1991). A spate of military and politically themed films emerged during the 1980s as America recovered from defeat in Vietnam, while at the same time facing anxieties about the ongoing Cold War with the Soviet Union.

Fears about the possibility of nuclear war were very real during the 1980s, and some film critics argue that these anxieties were reflected not only in overtly political films of the time but also in the popularity of horror films, like *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th*, which feature a mysterious and unkillable monster, and in the popularity of the fantastic in films like *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and *Star Wars*, which offer imaginative escapes (Wood, 1986).

MOVIES SHAPE CULTURE

Just as movies reflect the anxieties, beliefs, and values of the cultures that produce them, they also help to shape and solidify a culture's beliefs. Sometimes the influence is trivial,

as in the case of fashion trends or figures of speech. After the release of *Flashdance* in 1983, for instance, torn T-shirts and leg warmers became hallmarks of the fashion of the 1980s (Pemberton-Sikes, 2006). However, sometimes the impact can be profound, leading to social or political reform, or the shaping of ideologies.

FILM AND THE RISE OF MASS CULTURE

During the 1890s and up until about 1920, American culture experienced a period of rapid industrialization. As people moved from farms to centers of industrial production, urban areas began to hold larger and larger concentrations of the population. At the same time, film and other methods of mass communication (advertising and radio) developed, whose messages concerning tastes, desires, customs, speech, and behavior spread from these population centers to outlying areas across the country. The effect of early mass-communication media was to wear away regional differences and create a more homogenized, standardized culture.

Film played a key role in this development, as viewers began

to imitate the speech, dress, and behavior of their common heroes on the silver screen (Mintz, 2007). In 1911, the Vitagraph company began publishing *The Motion Picture Magazine*, America's first fan magazine. Originally conceived as a marketing tool to keep audiences interested in Vitagraph's pictures and major actors, *The Motion Picture Magazine* helped create the concept of the film star in the American imagination. Fans became obsessed with the off-screen lives of their favorite celebrities, like Pearl White, Florence Lawrence, and Mary Pickford (Doyle, 2008).

AMERICAN MYTHS AND TRADITIONS

American identity in mass society is built around certain commonly held beliefs, or myths about shared experiences, and these American myths are often disseminated through or reinforced by film. One example of a popular American myth, one that dates back to the writings of Thomas Jefferson and other founders, is an emphasis on individualism—a celebration of the common man or woman as a hero or

reformer. With the rise of mass culture, the myth of the individual became increasingly appealing because it provided people with a sense of autonomy and individuality in the face of an increasingly homogenized culture. The hero myth finds embodiment in the Western, a film genre that was popular from the silent era through the 1960s, in which the lone cowboy, a seminomadic wanderer, makes his way in a lawless, and often dangerous, frontier. An example is 1952's *High Noon*. From 1926 until 1967, Westerns accounted for nearly a quarter of all films produced. In other films, like Frank Capra's 1946 movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, the individual triumphs by standing up to injustice, reinforcing the belief that one person can make a difference in the world (Belton). And in more recent films, hero figures such as Indiana Jones, Luke Skywalker (*Star Wars*), and Neo (*The Matrix*) have continued to emphasize individualism.

SOCIAL ISSUES IN FILM

As D. W. Griffith recognized nearly a century ago, film has enormous power as a medium to influence public opinion. Ever since Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* sparked strong

public reactions in 1915, filmmakers have been producing movies that address social issues, sometimes subtly, and sometimes very directly. More recently, films like *Hotel Rwanda* (2004), about the 1994 Rwandan genocide, or *The Kite Runner* (2007), a story that takes place in the midst of a war-torn Afghanistan, have captured audience imaginations by telling stories that raise social awareness about world events. And a number of documentary films directed at social issues have had a strong influence on cultural attitudes and have brought about significant change.

In the 2000s, documentaries, particularly those of an activist nature, were met with greater interest than ever before. Films like *Super Size Me* (2004), which documents the effects of excessive fast-food consumption and criticizes the fast-food industry for promoting unhealthy eating habits for profit, and *Food, Inc.* (2009), which examines corporate farming practices and points to the negative impact these practices can have on human health and the environment, have brought about important changes in American food culture (Severson, 2009). Just 6 weeks after the release of *Super Size Me*, McDonald's took the supersize option off its menu and since 2004 has introduced a number of healthy food options in its restaurants (Sood, 2004). Other fast-food chains have made similar changes (Sood, 2004).

Other documentaries intended to influence cultural attitudes and inspire change include those made by director Michael Moore. Moore's films present a liberal stance on social

and political issues such as health care, globalization, and gun control. His 2002 film *Bowling for Columbine*, for example, addressed the Columbine High School shootings of 1999, presenting a critical examination of American gun culture. While some critics have accused Moore of producing propagandistic material under the label of documentary because of his films' strong biases, his films have been popular with audiences, with four of his documentaries ranking among the highest grossing documentaries of all time. *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004), which criticized the second Bush administration and its involvement in the Iraq War, earned $119 million at the box office, making it the most successful documentary of all time (Dirks, 2006).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- As products of mass culture, movies reflect cultural attitudes, trends, and concerns:
    1. D. W. Griffith's film *The Birth of a Nation*, presenting a racist perspective on the U.S. Civil War and its aftermath, reflected racist concerns of the era in which it was produced.
    2. During World War II, films reflected the patriotic, prowar sentiments of the time.

3. In the 1960s and 1970s with the rise of an antiestablishment youth culture, movies adopted more liberal stances toward sexuality and violence and displayed a cynicism toward established social structures.

- After the failure of the Vietnam War, films reflected a more ambivalent attitude toward war.
- The MPAA rating system, established in 1968, gave filmmakers greater freedom in the content they were able to portray on screen.
- Movies shape cultural attitudes and customs, as audiences adopt the attitudes and styles of the characters they watch on screen. Filmmakers may use their movies to influence cultural attitudes toward certain social issues, as in *Fahrenheit 9/11* and *Super Size Me*.

EXERCISES

1. Consider three films you have watched in the last year. In what ways have these films reflected current concerns, trends, or attitudes? Of these movies, which do you think have the most potential to shape cultural

attitudes or bring about social change? How do you think these movies might bring about this change?

2. Locate a film that has been remade and watch the original and remade versions. Besides the obvious changes in fashion and technology, what other differences do you notice that reflect the cultural attitudes, trends, and events in which each film was produced?

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8.4 Issues and Trends in Film

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize the role the major Hollywood studios have in shaping the movie industry today.
2. Identify the major economic concerns involved in the production and distribution of films.
3. Describe the effects of piracy on the movie industry.

Filmmaking is both a commercial and artistic venture. The current economic situation in the film industry, with increased production and marketing costs and lower audience turnouts in theaters, often sets the standard for the films big studios are willing to invest in. If you wonder why theaters have released so many remakes and sequels in recent years, this section may help you to understand the motivating factors behind those decisions.

THE INFLUENCE OF HOLLYWOOD

In the movie industry today, publicity and product are two sides of the same coin. Even films that get a lousy critical reception can do extremely well in ticket sales if their marketing campaigns manage to create enough hype. Similarly, two comparable films can produce very different results at the box office if they have been given different levels of publicity. This explains why the film *What Women Want*, starring Mel Gibson, brought in $33.6 million in its opening weekend in 2000, while a few months later, *The Million Dollar Hotel*, also starring Gibson, only brought in $29,483 during its opening weekend (Nash Information Services, 2000; Nash Information Services, 2001). Unlike in the days of the Hollywood studio system, no longer do the actors alone draw audiences to a movie. The owners of the nation's major movie theater chains are keenly aware that a film's success at the box office has everything to do with studio-generated marketing and publicity. *What Women Want* was produced by Paramount, one of the film industry's six leading studios, and widely released (on 3,000 screens) after an extensive marketing effort, while *The Million Dollar Hotel* was produced by Lionsgate, an independent studio without the necessary marketing budget to fill enough seats for a wide release on opening weekend (Epstein, 2005).

The Hollywood "dream factory," as Hortense Powdermaker labeled it in her 1950 book on the movie industry (Powdermaker), manufactures an experience that is part art and part commercial product (James, 1989). While the studios of today are less factory-like than they were in the vertically integrated studio system era, the coordinated efforts of a film's production team can still be likened to a machine calibrated for mass production. The films the studios churn out are the result of a capitalist enterprise that ultimately looks to the "bottom line" to guide most major decisions. Hollywood is an industry, and as in any other industry in a mass market, its success relies on control of production resources and "raw materials" and on its access to mass distribution and marketing strategies to maximize the product's reach and minimize competition (Belton). In this way, Hollywood has an enormous influence on the films to which the public has access.

Ever since the rise of the studio system in the 1930s, the majority of films have originated with the leading Hollywood studios. Today, the six big studios control 95 percent of the film business (Dick). In the early years, audiences were familiar with the major studios, their collections of actors and directors, and the types of films that each studio was likely to release. All of that changed with the decline of the studio system; screenwriters, directors, scripts, and cinematographers no longer worked exclusively with one studio, so these days, while moviegoers are likely to know the name of a film's

director and major actors, it's unusual for them to identify a film with the studio that distributes it. However, studios are no less influential. The previews of coming attractions that play before a movie begins are controlled by the studios (Busis, 2010). Online marketing, TV commercials, and advertising partnerships with other industries—the name of an upcoming film, for instance, appearing on some Coke cans—are available tools for the big-budget studios that have the resources to commit millions to prerelease advertising. Even though studios no longer own the country's movie theater chains, the films produced by the big six studios are the ones the multiplexes invariably show. Unlike films by independents, it's a safe bet that big studio movies are the ones that will sell tickets.

THE BLOCKBUSTER STANDARD

While it may seem like the major studios are making heavy profits, moviemaking today is a much riskier, less profitable enterprise than it was in the studio system era. The massive budgets required for the global marketing of a film are huge financial gambles. In fact, most movies cost the studios much

more to market and produce—upward of $100 million—than their box-office returns ever generate. With such high stakes, studios have come to rely on the handful of blockbuster films that keep them afloat (New World Encyclopedia), movies like *Titanic*, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, and *Avatar* (New World Encyclopedia). The blockbuster film becomes a touchstone, not only for production values and story lines, but also for moviegoers' expectations. Because studios know they can rely on certain predictable elements to draw audiences, they tend to invest the majority of their budgets on movies that fit the blockbuster mold. Remakes, movies with sequel setups, or films based on best-selling novels or comic books are safer bets than original screenplays or movies with experimental or edgy themes.

James Cameron's *Titanic* (1997), the second highest grossing movie of all time, saw such success largely because it was based on a well-known story, contained predictable plot elements, and was designed to appeal to the widest possible range of audience demographics with romance, action, expensive special effects, and an epic scope—meeting the blockbuster standard on several levels. The film's astronomical $200 million production cost was a gamble indeed, requiring the backing of two studios, Paramount and 20th Century Fox (Hansen & Garcia-Meyers). However, the rash of high-budget, and high-grossing, films that have appeared since—*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* and its sequels (2002–2011), *Avatar* (2009), *Alice in*

Wonderland (2010), *The Lord of the Rings* films (2001–2003), *The Dark Knight* (2008), and others—are an indication that, for the time being, the blockbuster standard will drive Hollywood production.

THE ROLE OF INDEPENDENT FILMS

While the blockbuster still drives the industry, the formulaic nature of most Hollywood films of the 1980s, 1990s, and into the 2000s has opened a door for independent films to make their mark on the industry. Audiences have welcomed movies like *Fight Club* (1999), *Lost in Translation* (2003), and *Juno* (2007) as a change from standard Hollywood blockbusters. Few independent films reached the mainstream audience during the 1980s, but a number of developments in that decade paved the way for their increased popularity in the coming years. The Sundance Film Festival (originally the U.S. Film Festival) began in Park City, Utah, in 1980 as a way for independent filmmakers to showcase their work. Since then, the festival has grown to garner more public attention,

and now often represents an opportunity for independents to find market backing by larger studios. In 1989, Steven Soderbergh's *sex, lies, and videotape*, released by Miramax, was the first independent to break out of the art-house circuit and find its way into the multiplexes.

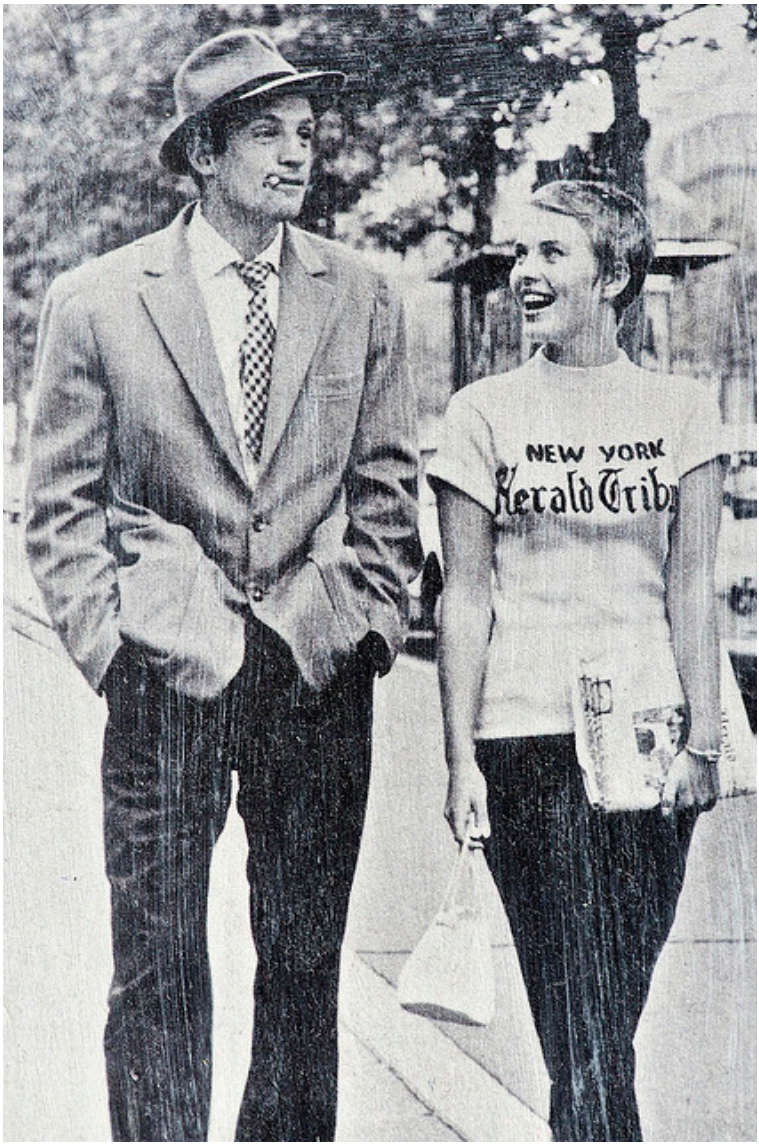
In the 1990s and 2000s, independent directors like the Coen brothers, Wes Anderson, Sofia Coppola, and Quentin Tarantino made significant contributions to contemporary cinema. Tarantino's 1994 film, *Pulp Fiction*, garnered attention for its experimental narrative structure, witty dialogue, and nonchalant approach to violence. It was the first independent film to break $100 million at the box office, proving that there is still room in the market for movies produced outside of the big six studios (Bergan, 2006).

THE ROLE OF FOREIGN FILMS

English-born Michael Apted, former president of the Director's Guild of America, once said, "Europeans gave me the inspiration to make movies...but it was the Americans who

showed me how to do it (Apted, 2007)." Major Hollywood studio films have dominated the movie industry worldwide since Hollywood's golden age, yet American films have always been in a relationship of mutual influence with films from foreign markets. From the 1940s through the 1960s, for example, American filmmakers admired and were influenced by the work of overseas auteurs—directors like Ingmar Bergman (Sweden), Federico Fellini (Italy), François Truffaut (France), and Akira Kurosawa (Japan), whose personal, creative visions were reflected in their work (Pells, 2006). The concept of the auteur was particularly important in France in the late 1950s and early 1960s when French filmmaking underwent a rebirth in the form of the New Wave movement . The French New Wave was characterized by an independent production style that showcased the personal authorship of its young directors (Bergan). The influence of the New Wave was, and continues to be, felt in the United States. The generation of young, film school-educated directors that became prominent in American cinema in the late 1960s and early 1970s owe a good deal of their stylistic techniques to the work of French New Wave directors.

FIGURE 8.8



The French New Wave movement of the 1950s and 1960s showed that films could be both artistically and commercially

successful. Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* is well known for its improvisatory techniques and use of jump cuts.

Vintage Breathless Movie Poster Detail – CC BY 2.0.

In the current era of globalization, the influence of foreign films remains strong. The rapid growth of the entertainment industry in Asia, for instance, has led to an exchange of style and influence with U.S. cinema. Remakes of a number of popular Japanese horror films, including *The Ring* (2005), *Dark Water* (2005), and *The Grudge* (2004), have fared well in the United States, as have Chinese martial arts films like *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), *Hero* (2002), and *House of Flying Daggers* (2004). At the same time, U.S. studios have recently tried to expand into the growing Asian market by purchasing the rights to films from South Korea, Japan, and Hong Kong for remakes with Hollywood actors (Lee, 2005).

CULTURAL IMPERIALISM OR GLOBALIZATION?

With the growth of Internet technology worldwide and the expansion of markets in rapidly developing countries, American films are increasingly finding their way into movie theaters and home DVD players around the world. In the eyes of many people, the problem is not the export of a U.S. product to outside markets, but the export of American culture that comes with that product. Just as films of the 1920s helped to shape a standardized, mass culture as moviegoers learned to imitate the dress and behavior of their favorite celebrities, contemporary film is now helping to form a mass culture on the global scale, as the youth of foreign nations acquire the American speech, tastes, and attitudes reflected in film (Gienow-Hecht, 2006).

Staunch critics, feeling helpless to stop the erosion of their national cultures, accuse the United States of cultural imperialism through flashy Hollywood movies and commercialism—that is, deliberate conquest of one culture by another to spread capitalism. At the same time, others argue that the worldwide impact of Hollywood films is an inevitable part of globalization, a process that erodes national borders, opening the way for a free flow of ideas between cultures (Gienow-Hecht, 2006).

THE ECONOMICS OF MOVIES

With control of over 95 percent of U.S. film production, the big six Hollywood studios—Warner Bros., Paramount, 20th Century Fox, Universal, Columbia, and Disney—are at the forefront of the American film industry, setting the standards for distribution, release, marketing, and production values. However, the high costs of moviemaking today are such that even successful studios must find moneymaking potential in crossover media—computer games, network TV rights, spin-off TV series, DVD and releases on Blu-ray Disc format, toys and other merchandise, books, and other after-market products—to help recoup their losses. The drive for aftermarket marketability in turn dictates the kinds of films studios are willing to invest in (Hansen & Garcia-Meyers).

RISING COSTS AND BIG BUDGET MOVIES

In the days of the vertically integrated studio system, filmmaking was a streamlined process, neither as risky nor as expensive as it is today. When producers, directors, screenwriters, art directors, actors, cinematographers, and other technical staff were all under contract with one studio, turnaround time for the casting and production of a film was often as little as 3 to 4 months. Beginning in the 1970s, after the decline of the studio system, the production costs for films increased dramatically, forcing the studios to invest more of their budgets in marketing efforts that could generate presales —that is, sales of distribution rights for a film in different sectors before the movie's release (Hansen & Garcia-Meyers). This is still true of filmmaking today. With contracts that must be negotiated with actors, directors, and screenwriters, and with extended production times, costs are exponentially higher than they were in the 1930s—when a film could be made for around $300,000 (Schaefer, 1999). By contrast, today's average production budget, not including marketing expenses, is close to $65 million today (Nash Information Services).

Consider James Cameron's *Avatar*, released in 2009, which cost close to $340 million, making it one of the most expensive films of all time. Where does such an astronomical budget go? When weighing the total costs of producing and releasing a

film, about half of the money goes to advertising. In the case of *Avatar*, the film cost $190 million to make and around $150 million to market (Sherkat-Massoom, 2010; Keegan, 2009). Of that $190 million production budget, part goes toward above-the-line costs, those that are negotiated before filming begins, and part to below-the-line costs, those that are generally fixed. Above-the-line costs include screenplay rights; salaries for the writer, producer, director, and leading actors; and salaries for directors', actors', and producers' assistants. Below-the-line costs include the salaries for nonstarring cast members and technical crew, use of technical equipment, travel, locations, studio rental, and catering (Tirelli). For *Avatar*, the reported $190 million doesn't include money for research and development of 3-D filming and computer-modeling technologies required to put the film together. If these costs are factored in, the total movie budget may be closer to $500 million (Keegan). Fortunately for 20th Century Fox, *Avatar* made a profit over these expenses in box-office sales alone, raking in $750 million domestically (to make it the highest-grossing movie of all time) in the first 6 months after its release (Box Office Mojo, 2010). However, one thing you should keep in mind is that *Avatar* was released in both 2-D and 3-D. Because 3-D ticket prices are more expensive than traditional 2-D theaters, the box-office returns are inflated.

THE BIG BUDGET FLOP

However, for every expensive film that has made out well at the box office, there are a handful of others that have tanked. Back in 1980, when United Artists (UA) was a major Hollywood studio, its epic western *Heaven's Gate* cost nearly six times its original budget: $44 million instead of the proposed $7.6 million. The movie, which bombed at the box office, was the largest failure in film history at the time, losing at least $40 million, and forcing the studio to be bought out by MGM (Hall & Neale, 2010). Since then, *Heaven's Gate* has become synonymous with commercial failure in the film industry (Dirks).

More recently, the 2005 movie *Sahara* lost $78 million, making it one of the biggest financial flops in film history. The film's initial production budget of $80 million eventually doubled to $160 million, due to complications with filming in Morocco and to numerous problems with the script (Bunting, 2007).

PIRACY

Movie piracy used to be perpetrated in two ways: Either someone snuck into a theater with a video camera, turning out blurred, wobbly, off-colored copies of the original film, or somebody close to the film leaked a private copy intended for reviewers. In the digital age, however, crystal-clear bootlegs of movies on DVD and the Internet are increasingly likely to appear illegally, posing a much greater threat to a film's profitability. Even safeguard techniques like digital watermarks are frequently sidestepped by tech-savvy pirates (France, 2009).

In 2009, an unfinished copy of 20th Century Fox's *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* appeared online 1 month before the movie's release date in theaters. Within a week, more than 1 million people had downloaded the pirated film. Similar situations have occurred in recent years with other major movies, including *The Hulk* (2003) and *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith* (2005) (France, 2009). According to a 2006 study sponsored by the MPAA, Internet piracy and other methods of illegal copying cost major Hollywood studios $6.1 billion in the previous year (Hiestand, 2006). The findings of this report have since been called into question, with investigators claiming that there was no clear methodology for how researchers estimated those figures (Sandoval, 2010). Nonetheless, the ease of theft made possible by the digitization

of film and improved file-sharing technologies like BitTorrent software, a peer-to-peer protocol for transferring large quantities of information between users, have put increased financial strain on the movie industry.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A film's performance at the box office is often directly related to the studio marketing budget that backs it.
- Because of high marketing and production costs, the major studios have increasingly come to rely on blockbuster films to keep themselves profitable.
- Independent films found increased popularity in the 1990s and 2000s, in part because they represented a break from the predictable material often released by studios.
- With the rise of digital filming technology and online movies, movie piracy has become an increasing concern for Hollywood.

EXERCISES

In Section 8.3 "Issues and Trends in Film", you learned that blockbuster films rely on certain predictable elements to attract audiences. Think about recent blockbusters like *Alice in Wonderland*, *Avatar*, and *Pirates of the Caribbean* and consider the following:

1. What elements do these films have in common? Why do you think these elements help to sell movies?
2. How have the big Hollywood studios shaped these elements?
3. How do economic concerns, like box-office totals, promote predictable elements?
4. Have these movies been affected by piracy? If so, how? If not, why?

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8.5 The Influence of New Technology

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify the impact of home-entertainment technology on the motion picture industry.

2. Recognize the role the DVD market plays in the economics of moviemaking.
3. Describe the impact of digital cinematography on the film industry.

New technologies have a profound impact, not only on the way films are made, but also on the economic structure of the film industry. When VCR technology made on-demand home movie viewing possible for the first time, filmmakers had to adapt to a changing market. The recent switch to digital technology also represents a turning point for film. In this section, you will learn how these and other technologies have changed the face of cinema.

EFFECTS OF HOME ENTERTAINMENT TECHNOLOGY

The first technology for home video recording, Sony's Betamax cassettes, hit the market in 1975. The device, a

combined television set and videocassette recorder (VCR), came with the high price tag of $2,495, making it a luxury still too expensive for the average American home. Two years later, RCA released the vertical helical scan (VHS) system of recording, which would eventually outsell Betamax, though neither device was yet a popular consumer product. Within several years however, the concept of home movie recording and viewing was beginning to catch on. In 1979, Columbia Pictures released 20 films for home viewing, and a year later Disney entered the market with the first authorized video rental plan for retail stores. By 1983, VCRs were still relatively uncommon, found in just 10 percent of American homes, but within 2 years the device had found a place in nearly one-third of U.S. households (Entertainment Merchant Association).

At the same time, video rental stores began to spring up across the country. In 1985, three major video rental chains—Blockbuster, Hastings, and Movie Gallery—opened their doors. The video rental market took off between 1983 and 1986, reaching $3.37 billion in 1986. Video sales that year came to $1 billion, for total revenue of more than $4 billion, marking the first time in history that video would eclipse box-office revenues ($3.78 billion that year) (Entertainment Merchant Association).

Video sales and rentals opened a new mass market in the entertainment industry—the home movie viewer—and offered Hollywood an extended source of income from its

films. On the other hand, the VCR also introduced the problem of piracy.

VCRS LEGAL, JUST BARELY

In an age when Hollywood was already struggling financially because of increased production costs, Sony's release of home video recording technology became a major source of anxiety for Hollywood studios. If people could watch movies in their own homes, would they stop going to the movies altogether? In the 1976 case *Sony Corp. of America v. Universal City Studios*, Universal Studios, and the Walt Disney Company sued Sony in the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California. The suit argued that because Sony was manufacturing a technology that could potentially be used to break copyright law, the company was therefore liable for any copyright infringement committed by VCR purchasers. The District Court struggled with the case, eventually ruling against

Sony. However, Sony appealed to the Supreme Court, where the case was again highly debated. Part of the struggle was the recognition that the case had wider implications: Does a device with recording capabilities conflict with copyright law? Is an individual guilty of copyright infringement if she records a single movie in her own home for her own private use?

Eventually the Supreme Court ruled that Sony and other VCR manufacturers could not be held liable for copyright infringement. This case represented an important milestone for two reasons. It opened up a new market in the entertainment sector, enabling video rental and home movie sales. Additionally, the case set a standard for determining whether a device with copying or recording capability violated copyright law. The court ruled that because nonprofit, noncommercial home recording did not constitute copyright violation, VCR technology did have legitimate legal uses, and Sony and other companies could not be held liable for any misuse of their devices. Recently, this case has posed interpretive challenges in legal battles and in debates over file sharing through the Internet (Spruill & Adler, 2009).

THE OPTICAL DISC SYSTEM

In 1980, around the time when consumers were just beginning to purchase VCRs for home use, Pioneer Electronics introduced another technology, the LaserDisc, an optical storage disc that produced higher quality images than did VHS tapes. Nonetheless, because of its large size (12 inches in diameter) and lack of recording capabilities, this early disc system never became popular in the U.S. market. However, the LaserDisc's successor, the digital versatile disc (DVD) was a different story. Like LaserDisc, the DVD is an optical storage disc—that is, a device whose encoded information follows a spiral pattern on the disc's surface and can be read when illuminated by a laser diode. However, unlike the analog-formatted LaserDisc, the DVD's information storage is entirely digital, allowing for a smaller, lighter, more compressed medium.

The first DVDs were released in stores in 1997, impressing consumers and distributers with their numerous advantages over the VHS tape: sharper-resolution images, compactness, higher durability, interactive special features, and better copy protection. In only a few years, sales of DVD players and discs surpassed those of VCRs and videos, making the DVD the most rapidly adopted consumer electronics product of all time (Entertainment Merchant Association).

In 1999, the movie rental market was revolutionized by Netflix. Netflix began in 1997 as a video rental store in California. In 1999, the company began offering a subscription service online. Subscribers would select movies that they wanted to see on Netflix's website, and the movies would arrive in their mailbox a few days later, along with a prepaid return envelope. This allowed users to select from thousands of movies and television shows in the privacy of their own home.

More recently, DVD technology has been surpassed by the Blu-ray Disc format, intended for storing and producing high-definition video. Released in 2006, the Blu-ray Disc technology has the same physical dimensions as DVDs, but because they are encoded to be read by lasers with a shorter wavelength, the discs have more than five times the storage capacity of the DVD (Blu Ray). By 2009 there were 10.9 million Blu-ray Disc players in U.S. homes (Molbaek, 2009). However, the technology has yet to replace the DVD in rental stores and among the majority of U.S. consumers.

DVD REVENUES AND DECLINE

DVD rentals and sales make up a major source of revenue for the movie industry, accounting for nearly half of the returns on feature films. In fact, for some time the industry has been exploiting the profitability of releasing some films directly to DVD without ever premiering them in theaters or of releasing films on DVD simultaneously with their theater releases. According to one estimate, for every movie that appears in theaters, there are three that go straight to DVD (Court, 2006). While *direct-to-DVD* has become synonymous with poor production values and ill-conceived sequels, there are a number of reasons why a studio might bypass the multiplexes. Prequels and sequels of box-office hits, shot on a lower production budget, are often released this way and can generate considerable income from the niche market of hard-core fans. The fourth *American Pie* film, *Bring It On: In It to Win It*, and *Ace Ventura Pet Detective, Jr.* are all examples of successful direct-to-DVD films. However, in other cases, the costs of theatrical promotion and release may simply be too high for a studio to back. This is especially true among independently produced films that lack the big-studio marketing budgets. *Slumdog Millionaire* (2009) was almost one of these cases. However, the film did make it to theaters, going on to win eight Academy Awards in 2009, including

Best Picture (Charity, 2009). Finally, a film may go straight to DVD when its content is too controversial to be released in theaters. For example, almost all porn films are direct-to-DVD releases.

Between 2005 and 2008, the number of direct-to-DVD releases grew 36 percent as studios began to see the profitability of the strategy (Barnes, 2008). After a movie's success at the box office, a prequel, sequel, or related movie might earn the same profit pound-for-pound at the rental store if filmmakers slash the production budget, often replacing the original celebrity actors with less expensive talent. In 2008, direct-to-DVD brought in around $1 billion in sales (Barnes, 2008).

Despite the profitability of the DVD market, the economic downturn that began in 2007, along with the concurrent release of Blu-ray Disc technology and online digital downloads, have brought about a decline in DVD sales among U.S. consumers (Garrett, 2008). With the rise in digital downloads, Netflix broadened its appeal in 2007 by offering subscribers live-streaming movies and TV shows. This allowed viewers to watch programs on their computers, handheld devices, the Nintendo Wii game system, the Sony PlayStation 3 game system, and the Microsoft Xbox 360 game system without ever having the disc itself.

Additionally, by late 2007 film studios also became anxious over another trend: the Redbox rental system. Redbox, an American company that places DVD rental vending machines in pharmacies, grocery stores, and fast-food chains around the

country, had placed a kiosk in approximately 22,000 locations by 2009 (Barnes, 2009). For the movie industry, the trouble isn't the widespread availability of Redbox rentals, it's the price. As of March 2001, customers can rent DVDs from a Redbox kiosk for only $1 per day, which has already led to a severe decline in rental revenue for the film industry (Diorio, 2009). According to the traditional pricing model, prices for rentals are based on a release window; newly released films cost more to rent for a specified period of time after their release. When customers can rent both older and newly released movies at the same low price, rentals don't produce the same returns (Hiestand, 2006).

Hollywood has also suffered major losses from online piracy. Since 2007, studios have been teaming up to turn this potential threat into a source of income. Now, instead of illegally downloading their favorite movies from file-sharing sites, fans can go to legal, commercial-supported sites like Hulu.com, where they can access a selected variety of popular movies and TV shows for the same price as accessing NBC, ABC, and CBS—free. In April 2010, Hulu announced it had already launched a fee-based service, Hulu Plus, in addition to its free service, for users who want access to even more programs, such as *Glee* (Reuters, 2010). Hulu doesn't allow viewers to download the films to their home computers, but it does provide a home-viewing experience through online streaming of content (Hulu, 2010).

THE INDUSTRY GOES DIGITAL

In an industry where technological innovations can transform production or distribution methods over the course of a few years, it's incredible to think that most movies are still captured on celluloid film, the same material that Thomas Edison used to capture his kinetoscope images well over a century ago. In 2002, George Lucas's *Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones* became the first major Hollywood movie filmed on high-definition digital video. However, the move to digitally filmed movies has been gradual; much of the movie industry—including directors, producers, studios, and major movie theater chains—has been slow to embrace this major change in filming technology. At the time that Lucas filmed *Attack of the Clones*, only 18 theaters in the country were equipped with digital projectors (Kirsner, 2006).

However, digital cinematography has become an increasingly attractive, and increasingly popular, option for a number of reasons. For one thing, during production, it

eliminates the need to reload film. A scene filmed in the traditional method, requiring multiple takes, can now be filmed in one continuous take because no raw material is being used in the process (Kirsner, 2006). The digital format streamlines the editing process as well. Rather than scanning the images into a computer before adding digital special effects and color adjustments, companies with digitally filmed material can send it electronically to the editing suite. Additionally, digital film files aren't susceptible to scratching or wear over time, and they are capable of producing crystal-clear, high-resolution images (Taub, 2009).

FIGURE 8.9



Attack of the Clones was the first film to be made with digital cinematography.

Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

For distributers and production companies, digitally recorded images eliminate the costs of purchasing, developing, and printing film. Studios spend around $800 million each year making prints of the films they distribute to theaters and additional money on top of that to ship the heavy reels (Burr, 2002). For a film like *Attack of the Clones*, widely released in 3,000 theaters, printing and shipping costs for 35-mm film would be around $20 million (Burr, 2002). On the other hand, with digital format, which requires no printing and can be sent to theaters on a single hard drive, or, as the system develops, over cable or satellite, these costs are virtually eliminated (Carvajal, 2005; Burr).

In part, the change has been gradual because, for theaters, the costs of making the digital switch (at around $125,000 for a high-quality digital projector) (Reuters, 2003) is high, and the transformation offers them fewer short-term incentives than it does for distributors, who could save a significant amount of money with digital technology. Furthermore, theaters have already heavily invested in their current projection equipment for 35-mm film (Carvajal). In the long run, the high-definition picture capabilities of digital movies might boost profits as more moviegoers turn out at the theaters, but there are no guarantees. In the meantime, the major studios are negotiating with leading theater chains to underwrite some of the conversion expenses (McCarthy, 2009).

Another financial pitfall of digital film is, surprisingly, the cost of storage once the film is out of major circulation. For major studios, a significant portion of revenues—around one-third—comes from the rerelease of old films. Studios invest an annual budget of just over $1,000 per film to keep their 35-millimeter masters in archival storage (Cieply, 2007). Keeping the film stock at controlled temperature and moisture levels prevents degradation, so masters are often stored in mines, where these conditions can be met most optimally (Cieply, 2007).

Digital data however, for all of its sophistication, is actually less likely to last than traditional film is; DVDs can degrade rapidly, with only a 50 percent chance of lasting up to 15 years (Cieply, 2007), while hard drives must be operated

occasionally to prevent them from locking up. As a result, the storage cost for digital originals comes closer to $12,500 per film per year (Cieply, 2007). Moreover, as one generation of digital technology gives way to another, files have to be migrated to newer formats to prevent originals from becoming unreadable.

THE RESURGENCE OF 3-D

After World War II, as movie attendance began to decline, the motion picture industry experimented with new technologies to entice audiences back into increasingly empty theaters. One such gimmick, the 3-D picture, offered the novel experience of increased audience "participation" as monsters, flying objects, and obstacles appeared to invade the theater space, threatening to collide with spectators. The effect was achieved by manipulating filming equipment to work like a pair of human eyes, mimicking the depth of field produced through binocular vision. By joining two cameras together and spacing them slightly apart with their lenses angled fractionally toward one another, filmmakers could achieve an effect similar to that

created by the overlapping fields of vision of the right and left eye. In theaters, the resulting images were played simultaneously on two separate projectors. The 3-D glasses spectators wore were polarized to filter the images so that the left eye received only "left eye" projections and the right eye received only "right eye" projections (Buchanan, 2008).

3-D was an instant sensation. *House of Wax*, the first big-budget 3-D movie, released in 1953, brought in over $1 million during its first 3 weeks in theaters, making it one of the most successful films of the year. Best of all for investors, 3-D could be created with fairly inexpensive equipment. For this reason, a boom of 3-D development soon occurred nationwide. Forty-six 3-D movies were filmed in a span of 2 years. However, 3-D proved to be a brief success, with its popularity already beginning to wane by the end of 1953 (Hayes, 2009).

FIGURE 8.10



Resurgence of 3-D.
J Mark Dodds – PopCorn Culture – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

3-D soon migrated from the realm of common popular entertainment to novelty attraction, appearing in IMAX cinemas, as an occasional marketing draw for kids' movies, and in theme-park classics like *Captain Eo* and *Honey, I Shrunk the Audience*. *Captain Eo*, a Disneyland attraction from 1986 to 1993, featured pop sensation Michael Jackson in his heyday. Following Jackson's death, the film was rereleased for a limited time in 2010 (Rivera, 2009).

Despite the marginal role 3-D has played since the midcentury fad died out, new technologies have brought

about a resurgence in the trend, and the contemporary 3-D experience seems less like a gimmick and more like a serious development in the industry. DreamWorks animation CEO Jeffrey Katzenberg, for one, likened the new 3-D to the introduction of color (McCarthy). One of the downfalls that led to the decline of 3-D in the 1950s was the "3-D headache" phenomenon audiences began to experience as a result of technical problems with filming (Hayes). To create the 3-D effect, filmmakers need to calculate the point where the overlapping images converge, an alignment that had to be performed by hand in those early years. And for the resulting image to come through clearly, the parallel cameras must run in perfect sync with one another—another impossibility with 35-millimeter film, which causes some distortion by the very fact of its motion through the filming camera.

Today the 3-D headache is a thing of the past, as computerized calibration makes perfect camera alignment a reality and as the digital recording format eliminates the celluloid-produced distortion. Finally, a single digital projector equipped with a photo-optical device can now perform the work of the two synchronized projectors of the past. For the theater chains, 3-D provides the first real incentive to make the conversion to digital. Not only do audiences turn out in greater numbers for an experience they can't reproduce at home, even on their HD television sets, but theaters are also able to charge more for tickets to see 3-D films. In 2008, for example, *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, which grossed $102

million, earned 60 percent of that money through 3-D ticket sales, even though it played in 3-D on only 30 percent of its screens (McCarthy). Two of the top-grossing movies of all time, *Avatar* (2009) and *Alice in Wonderland* (2010), were both released in 3-D.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The introduction of the VCR in the late 1970s made home movie viewing easy. The VCR was replaced by DVD technology in the late 1990s, which is currently being replaced by Blu-ray Disc technology.
- DVD sales and rentals account for about a third of film revenues. Some films are released straight to DVD without ever appearing in theaters.
- *Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones* (2002) was the first big-budget film to be recorded digitally. Since then, many more films have been made with digital cinematography. However a full-scale industry change has been gradual, mainly because of the costs of conversion.
- Three-dimensional movies were a fad in the 1950s. In recent years, because of improved technologies, 3-D movies have seen a resurgence.

EXERCISES

Imagine you work for a major Hollywood studio and you are negotiating a contract with a large theater chain to switch to a digital projection system. Consider the following:

1. What are the pros and cons of this switch?
2. How have digital projection systems affected the motion picture industry?
3. How has digital film affected the DVD market?

END-OF-CHAPTER ASSESSMENT

Review Questions

1. Section 1

    1. Explain the importance of Georges Méliès's work in the development of cinematography?
    2. Why was the MPPC formed?
    3. What caused the movie industry to move to Hollywood?

4. Describe the factors that led to the rise and fall of the Hollywood studio system.
5. What impact did the HUAC investigations have on Hollywood?

2. Section 2

1. Explain audience reactions to *The Birth of a Nation*. How did this film reflect the culture of its time?
2. Explain the role Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* films played in World War II cinema.
3. What does *The Graduate* reflect about the culture of the late 1960s?
4. Explain how American individualism is reinforced in popular films.
5. Name some films that have had an impact on social issues.

3. Section 3

1. Why might studios invest nearly half of their budgets in marketing efforts?
2. List the six major Hollywood studios today and explain their influence on the film industry.
3. What economic factors have led to the blockbuster standard?
4. Explain the influence of foreign films on

American cinema.

5. What factors have led to the increase of film piracy?

4. Section 4

    1. Explain the significance of the *Sony Corp. of America v. Universal City Studios* case.
    2. Why are some movies released direct-to-DVD?
    3. Explain the reluctance of major theater chains to switch to the digital system.
    4. What are some advantages of digital cinematography?
    5. Why did the 3-D movie trend fizzle out in the 1950s?

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. Imagine you are a film studies teacher and you choose to show excerpts from *The Birth of a Nation* in your class to illustrate its significance in film history. One student is highly offended by the film and stops to voice her concerns to you after class. Taking into consideration the things you have learned about the

history of cinema and the relationship between film and culture, how would you explain your choice to this student?

2. Assume you want to create a documentary to raise awareness about a social issue that concerns you. What issue would you address and what would you choose to document? Whom would you interview, where would you go, and so on?
3. How would you respond to a visitor from another country who accuses the United States of cultural imperialism through the export of American movies?
4. Imagine you want to produce a remake of a movie from the 1980s. Choose a movie that you think would be a blockbuster. Create a marketing plan that includes merchandise tie-ins and sources of revenue beyond the box office.
5. After its decline in the 1950s, 3-D experienced a brief comeback in the 1980s. Based on what you know about the movie industry of the time and the culture of the 1980s, why might this have occurred?

CAREER CONNECTION

Research the career of a Hollywood producer. In this

career, identify the different types of producers involved in a production. What tasks are these producers expected to perform? Do people in this career specialize in a certain genre of film? If so, which genre would you specialize in and why?

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Chapter 9: Television

9.1 The Evolution of Television
9.2 The Relationship Between Television and Culture
9.3 Issues and Trends in the Television Industry
9.4 Influence of New Technologies

9.1 The Evolution of Television

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify two technological developments that paved the way for the evolution of television.
2. Explain why electronic television prevailed over mechanical television.
3. Identify three important developments in the history of television since 1960.

Since replacing radio as the most popular mass medium in the 1950s, television has played such an integral role in modern life that, for some, it is difficult to imagine being without it. Both reflecting and shaping cultural values, television has at times been criticized for its alleged negative influences on children and young people and at other times lauded for its ability to create a common experience for all its viewers. Major world events such as the John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King assassinations and the Vietnam War in the 1960s, the *Challenger* shuttle explosion in 1986, the 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, and the impact and aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 have all played out

on television, uniting millions of people in shared tragedy and hope. Today, as Internet technology and satellite broadcasting change the way people watch television, the medium continues to evolve, solidifying its position as one of the most important inventions of the 20th century.

THE ORIGINS OF TELEVISION

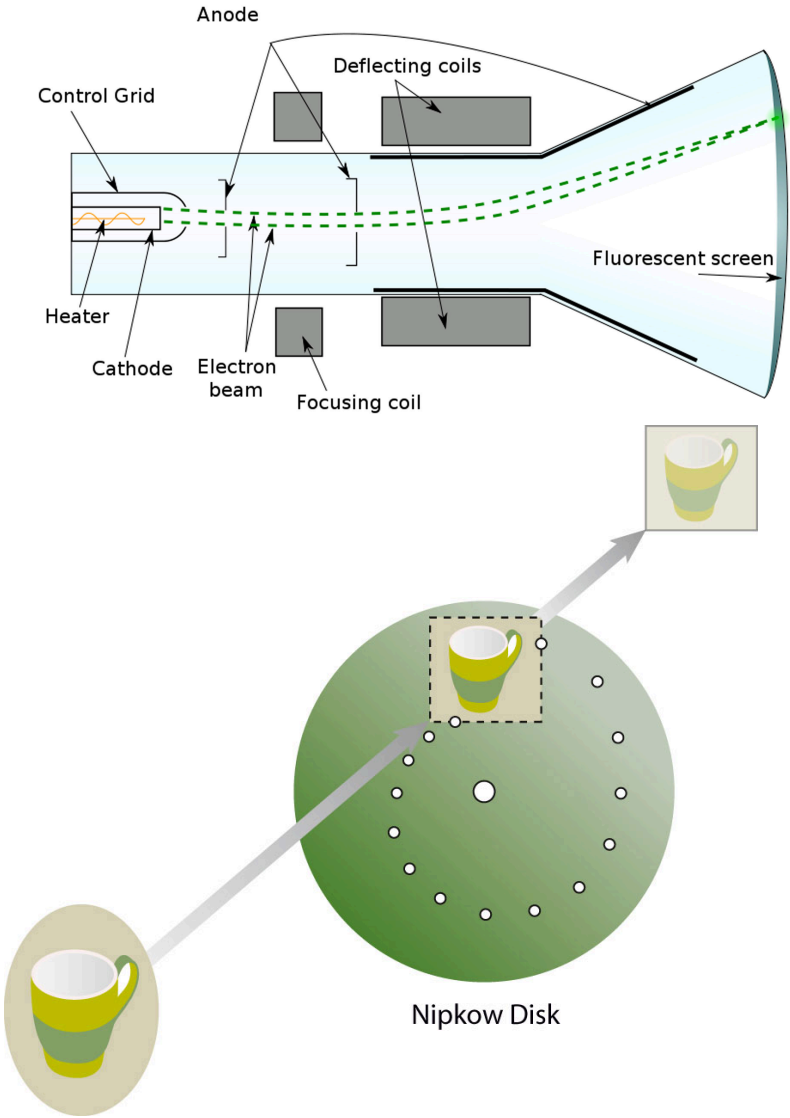
Inventors conceived the idea of television long before the technology to create it appeared. Early pioneers speculated that if audio waves could be separated from the electromagnetic spectrum to create radio, so too could TV waves be separated to transmit visual images. As early as 1876, Boston civil servant George Carey envisioned complete television systems, putting forward drawings for a "selenium camera" that would enable people to "see by electricity" a year later (Federal Communications Commission, 2005).

During the late 1800s, several technological developments set the stage for television. The invention of the cathode ray tube (CRT) by German physicist Karl Ferdinand Braun in 1897 played a vital role as the forerunner of the TV

picture tube. Initially created as a scanning device known as the cathode ray oscilloscope, the CRT effectively combined the principles of the camera and electricity. It had a fluorescent screen that emitted a visible light (in the form of images) when struck by a beam of electrons. The other key invention during the 1880s was the mechanical scanner system. Created by German inventor Paul Nipkow, the scanning disk was a large, flat metal disk with a series of small perforations arranged in a spiral pattern. As the disk rotated, light passed through the holes, separating pictures into pinpoints of light that could be transmitted as a series of electronic lines. The number of scanned lines equaled the number of perforations, and each rotation of the disk produced a television frame. Nipkow's mechanical disk served as the foundation for experiments on the transmission of visual images for several decades.

In 1907, Russian scientist Boris Rosing used both the CRT and the mechanical scanner system in an experimental television system. With the CRT in the receiver, he used focused electron beams to display images, transmitting crude geometrical patterns onto the television screen. The mechanical disk system was used as a camera, creating a primitive television system.

FIGURE 9.1


Anode
Deflecting coils
Control Grid
Fluorescent screen
Heater
Cathode
Electron beam
Focusing coil
Nipkow Disk

Two key inventions in the 1880s paved the way for television to emerge: the cathode ray tube and the mechanical disk system.

MECHANICAL TELEVISION VERSUS ELECTRONIC TELEVISION

From the early experiments with visual transmissions, two types of television systems came into existence: mechanical television and electronic television. Mechanical television developed out of Nipkow's disk system and was pioneered by British inventor John Logie Baird. In 1926, Baird gave the world's first public demonstration of a television system at Selfridge's department store in London. He used mechanical rotating disks to scan moving images into electrical impulses, which were transmitted by cable to a screen. Here they showed up as a low-resolution pattern of light and dark. Baird's first television program showed the heads of two ventriloquist dummies, which he operated in front of the camera apparatus

out of the audience's sight. In 1928, Baird extended his system by transmitting a signal between London and New York. The following year, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) adopted his mechanical system, and by 1932, Baird had developed the first commercially viable television system and sold 10,000 sets. Despite its initial success, mechanical television had several technical limitations. Engineers could get no more than about 240 lines of resolution, meaning images would always be slightly fuzzy (most modern televisions produce images of more than 600 lines of resolution). The use of a spinning disk also limited the number of new pictures that could be seen per second, resulting in excessive flickering. The mechanical aspect of television proved to be a disadvantage that required fixing in order for the technology to move forward.

At the same time Baird (and, separately, American inventor Charles Jenkins) was developing the mechanical model, other inventors were working on an electronic television system based on the CRT. While working on his father's farm, Idaho teenager Philo Farnsworth realized that an electronic beam could scan a picture in horizontal lines, reproducing the image almost instantaneously. In 1927, Farnsworth transmitted the first all-electronic TV picture by rotating a single straight line scratched onto a square piece of painted glass by 90 degrees.

Farnsworth barely profited from his invention; during World War II, the government suspended sales of TV sets, and by the time the war ended, Farnsworth's original patents were

close to expiring. However, following the war, many of his key patents were modified by RCA and were widely applied in broadcasting to improve television picture quality.

Having coexisted for several years, electronic television sets eventually began to replace mechanical systems. With better picture quality, no noise, a more compact size, and fewer visual limitations, the electronic system was far superior to its predecessor and rapidly improving. By 1939, the last mechanical television broadcasts in the United States had been replaced with electronic broadcasts.

EARLY BROADCASTING

Television broadcasting began as early as 1928, when the Federal Radio Commission authorized inventor Charles Jenkins to broadcast from W3XK, an experimental station in the Maryland suburbs of Washington, DC. Silhouette images from motion picture films were broadcast to the general public on a regular basis, at a resolution of just 48 lines. Similar experimental stations ran broadcasts throughout the early 1930s. In 1939, RCA subsidiary NBC (National Broadcasting Company) became the first network to introduce regular

television broadcasts, transmitting its inaugural telecast of the opening ceremonies at the New York World's Fair. The station's initial broadcasts transmitted to just 400 television sets in the New York area, with an audience of 5,000 to 8,000 people (Lohr, 1940).

Television was initially available only to the privileged few, with sets ranging from $200 to $600—a hefty sum in the 1930s, when the average annual salary was $1,368 (KC Library). RCA offered four types of television receivers, which were sold in high-end department stores such as Macy's and Bloomingdale's, and received channels 1 through 5. Early receivers were a fraction of the size of modern TV sets, featuring 5-, 9-, or 12-inch screens. Television sales prior to World War II were disappointing—an uncertain economic climate, the threat of war, the high cost of a television receiver, and the limited number of programs on offer deterred numerous prospective buyers. Many unsold television sets were put into storage and sold after the war.

NBC was not the only commercial network to emerge in the 1930s. RCA radio rival CBS (Columbia Broadcasting System) also began broadcasting regular programs. So that viewers would not need a separate television set for each individual network, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) outlined a single technical standard. In 1941, the panel recommended a 525-line system and an image rate of 30 frames per second. It also recommended that all U.S. television sets operate using analog signals (broadcast signals

made of varying radio waves). Analog signals were replaced by digital signals (signals transmitted as binary code) in 2009.

With the outbreak of World War II, many companies, including RCA and General Electric, turned their attention to military production. Instead of commercial television sets, they began to churn out military electronic equipment. In addition, the war halted nearly all television broadcasting; many TV stations reduced their schedules to around 4 hours per week or went off the air altogether.

COLOR TECHNOLOGY

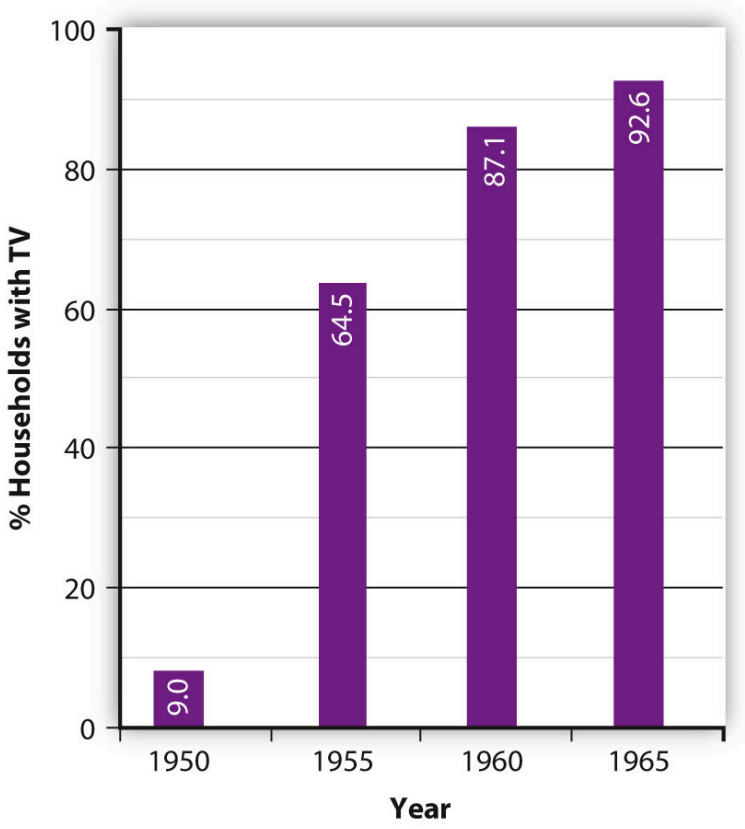
Although it did not become available until the 1950s or popular until the 1960s, the technology for producing color television was proposed as early as 1904, and was demonstrated by John Logie Baird in 1928. As with his black-and-white television system, Baird adopted the mechanical method, using a Nipkow scanning disk with three spirals, one for each primary color (red, green, and blue). In 1940, CBS researchers, led by Hungarian television engineer Peter Goldmark, used Baird's 1928 designs to develop a concept of

mechanical color television that could reproduce the color seen by a camera lens.

Following World War II, the National Television System Committee (NTSC) worked to develop an all-electronic color system that was compatible with black-and-white TV sets, gaining FCC approval in 1953. A year later, NBC made the first national color broadcast when it telecast the Tournament of Roses Parade. Despite the television industry's support for the new technology, it would be another 10 years before color television gained widespread popularity in the United States, and black-and-white TV sets outnumbered color TV sets until 1972 (Klooster, 2009).

THE GOLDEN AGE OF TELEVISION

FIGURE 9.3



During the so-called "golden age" of television, the percentage of U.S. households that owned a television set rose from 9 percent in 1950 to 95.3 percent in 1970.

The 1950s proved to be the golden age of television, during which the medium experienced massive growth in popularity. Mass-production advances made during World War II substantially lowered the cost of purchasing a set, making television accessible to the masses. In 1945, there were fewer

than 10,000 TV sets in the United States. By 1950, this figure had soared to around 6 million, and by 1960 more than 60 million television sets had been sold (World Book Encyclopedia, 2003). Many of the early television program formats were based on network radio shows and did not take advantage of the potential offered by the new medium. For example, newscasters simply read the news as they would have during a radio broadcast, and the network relied on newsreel companies to provide footage of news events. However, during the early 1950s, television programming began to branch out from radio broadcasting, borrowing from theater to create acclaimed dramatic anthologies such as *Playhouse 90* (1956) and *The U.S. Steel Hour* (1953) and producing quality news film to accompany coverage of daily events.

Two new types of programs—the magazine format and the TV spectacular—played an important role in helping the networks gain control over the content of their broadcasts. Early television programs were developed and produced by a single sponsor, which gave the sponsor a large amount of control over the content of the show. By increasing program length from the standard 15-minute radio show to 30 minutes or longer, the networks substantially increased advertising costs for program sponsors, making it prohibitive for a single sponsor. Magazine programs such as the *Today* show and *The Tonight Show*, which premiered in the early 1950s, featured multiple segments and ran for several hours. They were also screened on a daily, rather than weekly, basis, drastically

increasing advertising costs. As a result, the networks began to sell spot advertisements that ran for 30 or 60 seconds. Similarly, the television spectacular (now known as the television special) featured lengthy music-variety shows that were sponsored by multiple advertisers.

FIGURE 9.4



ABC's *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* brought the quiz show back to prime-time television after a 40-year absence.

sonicwwtbamfangamer2 – millionaire – CC BY-SA 2.0.

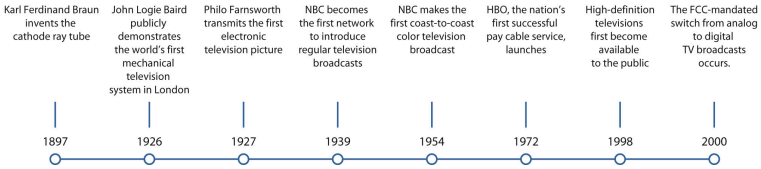
In the mid-1950s, the networks brought back the radio quiz-show genre. Inexpensive and easy to produce, the trend caught on, and by the end of the 1957–1958 season, 22 quiz shows were being aired on network television, including CBS's *$64,000 Question*. Shorter than some of the new types of programs, quiz shows enabled single corporate sponsors to have their names displayed on the set throughout the show. The popularity of the quiz-show genre plunged at the end of the decade, however, when it was discovered that most of the shows were rigged. Producers provided some contestants with the answers to the questions in order to pick and choose the most likable or controversial candidates. When a slew of contestants accused the show *Dotto* of being fixed in 1958, the networks rapidly dropped 20 quiz shows. A New York grand jury probe and a 1959 congressional investigation effectively ended prime-time quiz shows for 40 years, until ABC revived the genre with its launch of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* in 1999 (Boddy, 1990).

THE RISE OF CABLE TELEVISION

Formerly known as Community Antenna Television, or CATV, cable television was originally developed in the 1940s in remote or mountainous areas, including in Arkansas, Oregon, and Pennsylvania, to enhance poor reception of regular television signals. Cable antennas were erected on mountains or other high points, and homes connected to the towers would receive broadcast signals.

In the late 1950s, cable operators began to experiment with microwave to bring signals from distant cities. Taking advantage of their ability to receive long-distance broadcast signals, operators branched out from providing a local community service and began focusing on offering consumers more extensive programming choices. Rural parts of Pennsylvania, which had only three channels (one for each network), soon had more than double the original number of channels as operators began to import programs from independent stations in New York and Philadelphia. The wider variety of channels and clearer reception the service offered soon attracted viewers from urban areas. By 1962, nearly 800 cable systems were operational, serving 850,000 subscribers.

FIGURE 9.5



The Evolution of Television

Cable's exponential growth was viewed as competition by local TV stations, and broadcasters campaigned for the FCC to step in. The FCC responded by placing restrictions on the ability of cable systems to import signals from distant stations, which froze the development of cable television in major markets until the early 1970s. When gradual deregulation began to loosen the restrictions, cable operator Service Electric launched the service that would change the face of the cable television industry—pay TV. The 1972 Home Box Office (HBO) venture, in which customers paid a subscription fee to access premium cable television shows and video-on-demand products, was the nation's first successful pay cable service. HBO's use of a satellite to distribute its programming made the network available throughout the United States. This gave it an advantage over the microwave-distributed services, and other cable providers quickly followed suit. Further deregulation provided by the 1984 Cable Act enabled the industry to expand even further, and by the end of the 1980s, nearly 53 million households subscribed to cable television

(see
Section 6.3 "Current Popular Trends in the Music Industry").
In the 1990s, cable operators upgraded their systems by building higher-capacity hybrid networks of fiber-optic and coaxial cable. These broadband networks provide a multichannel television service, along with telephone, high-speed Internet, and advanced digital video services, using a single wire.

THE EMERGENCE OF DIGITAL TELEVISION

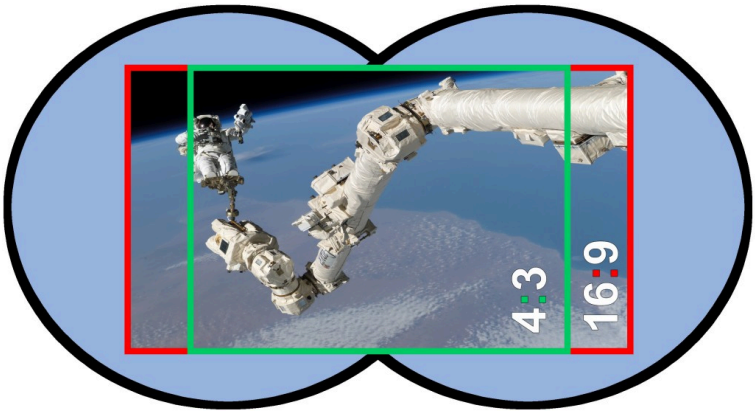
Following the FCC standards set out during the early 1940s, television sets received programs via analog signals made of radio waves. The analog signal reached TV sets through three different methods: over the airwaves, through a cable wire, or by satellite transmission. Although the system remained in place for more than 60 years, it had several disadvantages. Analog systems were prone to static and distortion, resulting in a far poorer picture quality than films shown in movie theaters. As television sets grew increasingly larger, the limited

resolution made scan lines painfully obvious, reducing the clarity of the image. Companies around the world, most notably in Japan, began to develop technology that provided newer, better-quality television formats, and the broadcasting industry began to lobby the FCC to create a committee to study the desirability and impact of switching to digital television. A more efficient and flexible form of broadcast technology, digital television uses signals that translate TV images and sounds into binary code, working in much the same way as a computer. This means they require much less frequency space and also provide a far higher quality picture. In 1987, the Advisory Committee on Advanced Television Services began meeting to test various TV systems, both analog and digital. The committee ultimately agreed to switch from analog to digital format in 2009, allowing a transition period in which broadcasters could send their signal on both an analog and a digital channel. Once the switch took place, many older analog TV sets were unusable without a cable or satellite service or a digital converter. To retain consumers' access to free over-the-air television, the federal government offered $40 gift cards to people who needed to buy a digital converter, expecting to recoup its costs by auctioning off the old analog broadcast spectrum to wireless companies (Steinberg, 2007). These companies were eager to gain access to the analog spectrum for mobile broadband projects because this frequency band allows signals to travel greater distances and penetrate buildings more easily.

THE ERA OF HIGH-DEFINITION TELEVISION

Around the same time the U.S. government was reviewing the options for analog and digital television systems, companies in Japan were developing technology that worked in conjunction with digital signals to create crystal-clear pictures in a wide-screen format. High-definition television, or HDTV, attempts to create a heightened sense of realism by providing the viewer with an almost three-dimensional experience. It has a much higher resolution than standard television systems, using around five times as many pixels per frame. First available in 1998, HDTV products were initially extremely expensive, priced between $5,000 and $10,000 per set. However, as with most new technology, prices dropped considerably over the next few years, making HDTV affordable for mainstream shoppers.

FIGURE 9.6



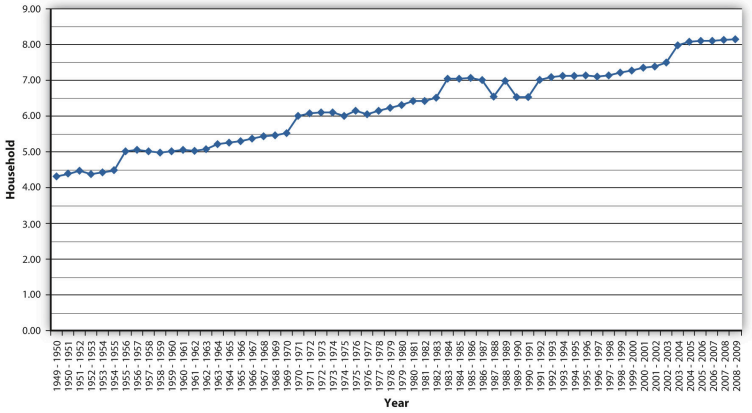
HDTV uses a wide-screen format with a different aspect ratio (the ratio of the width of the image to its height) than standard-definition TV. The wide-screen format of HDTV is similar to that of movies, allowing for a more authentic film-viewing experience at home.

Wikimedia Commons – CC BY-SA 3.0.

As of 2010, nearly half of American viewers are watching television in high definition, the fastest adoption of TV technology since the introduction of the VCR in the 1980s (Stelter, 2010). The new technology is attracting viewers to watch television for longer periods of time. According to the

Nielsen Company, a company that measures TV viewership, households with HDTV watch 3 percent more prime-time television—programming screened between 7 and 11 p.m., when the largest audience is available—than their standard-definition counterparts (Stelter, 2010). The same report claims that the cinematic experience of HDTV is bringing families back together in the living room in front of the large wide-screen TV and out of the kitchen and bedroom, where individuals tend to watch television alone on smaller screens. However, these viewing patterns may change again soon as the Internet plays an increasingly larger role in how people view TV programs. The impact of new technologies on television is discussed in much greater detail in Section 9.4 "Influence of New Technologies" of this chapter.

FIGURE 9.7



Since 1950, the amount of time the average household spends watching television has almost doubled.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Two key technological developments in the late 1800s played a vital role in the evolution of television: the cathode ray tube and the scanning disk. The cathode ray tube, invented by German physicist Karl Ferdinand Braun in 1897, was the forerunner of the TV picture tube. It had a fluorescent screen that emitted a visible light (in the form of images) when struck by a beam of electrons. The scanning disk, invented by German inventor Paul Nipkow, was a large, flat metal disk that could be used as a rotating camera. It served as the

foundation for experiments on the transmission of visual images for several decades.

- Out of the cathode ray tube and the scanning disk, two types of primitive television systems evolved: mechanical systems and electronic systems. Mechanical television systems had several technical disadvantages: Low resolution caused fuzzy images, and the use of a spinning disk limited the number of new pictures that could be seen per second, resulting in excessive flickering. By 1939, all mechanical television broadcasts in the United States had been replaced by electronic broadcasts.
- Early televisions were expensive, and the technology was slow to catch on because development was delayed during World War II. Color technology was delayed even further because early color systems were incompatible with black-and-white television sets. Following the war, television rapidly replaced radio as the new mass medium. During the "golden age" of television in the 1950s, television moved away from radio formats and developed new types of shows, including the magazine-style variety show and the television spectacular.
- Since 1960, several key technological developments have taken place in the television industry. Color television gained popularity in the late 1960s and began to replace black-and-white television in the

1970s. Cable television, initially developed in the 1940s to cater to viewers in rural areas, switched its focus from local to national television, offering an extensive number of channels. In 2009, the traditional analog system, which had been in place for 60 years, was replaced with digital television, giving viewers a higher-quality picture and freeing up frequency space. As of 2010, nearly half of American viewers have high-definition television, which offers a crystal-clear picture in wide-screen to provide a cinematic experience at home.

EXERCISES

Please respond to the following writing prompts. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. Prior to World War II, television was in the early stages of development. In the years following the war, the technical development and growth in popularity of the medium were exponential. Identify two ways television evolved after World War II. How did these changes make postwar television superior to its predecessor?
2. Compare the television you use now with the

television from your childhood. How have TV sets changed in your lifetime?

3. What do you consider the most important technological development in television since the 1960s? Why?

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9.3 Issues and Trends in the Television Industry

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Explain the influence of sponsors on program content.
2. Describe the major trends among the broadcasting and cable networks.

When television was in its infancy, producers modeled the new

medium on radio. Popular radio shows such as police drama *Dragnet* and western cowboy series *Gunsmoke* were adapted for television, and new TV shows were sponsored by single advertisers, just as radio shows had been. Television was dominated by three major networks—NBC, ABC, and CBS—and these networks accounted for more than 95 percent of all prime-time viewing until the late 1970s. Today, the television industry is far more complex. Programs are sponsored by multiple advertisers; programming is controlled by major media conglomerates; and the three major networks no longer dominate the airwaves but instead share their viewers with numerous cable channels. Several factors account for these trends within the industry, including technological developments, government regulations, and the creation of new networks.

THE INFLUENCE OF CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP

Early television programs were often developed, produced, and

supported by a single sponsor, which sometimes reaped the benefits of having its name inserted into the program's title—*Colgate Comedy Hour*, *Camel Newsreel*, *Goodyear TV Playhouse*. However, as production costs soared during the 1950s (a single one-hour TV show cost a sponsor about $35,000 in 1952 compared with $90,000 at the end of the decade), sponsors became increasingly unable to bear the financial burden of promoting a show single-handedly. This suited the broadcast networks, which disliked the influence sponsors exerted over program content. Television executives, in particular NBC's Sylvester L. "Pat" Weaver, advocated the magazine concept, in which advertisers purchased one- or two-minute blocks rather than the entire program, just as magazines contained multiple advertisements from different sponsors. The presence of multiple sponsors meant that no one advertiser controlled the entire program.

FIGURE 9.13



Many sponsors believed that if viewers identified their favorite shows, such as the *Colgate Comedy Hour*, with a sponsor, they would be more likely to purchase the product being advertised.

Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

Although advertising agencies relinquished control of production to the networks, they retained some influence over the content of the programs they sponsored. As one executive commented, "If my client sells peanut butter and the script calls for a guy to be poisoned eating a peanut butter sandwich, you can bet we're going to switch that poison to a martini (Newcomb)." Sponsors continue to influence program

content indirectly by financially supporting shows they support and pulling funding from those they do not. For example, in 1995, pharmaceutical giant Procter & Gamble, the largest television advertiser, announced it would no longer sponsor salacious daytime talk shows. The company provided producers with details about its guidelines, pulling out of shows it deemed offensive and supporting shows that dealt with controversial subject matter responsibly. Communications heavyweight AT&T took a similar path, reviewing shows after they were taped but before they aired in order to make decisions about corporate sponsorship on an individual basis (Advertising Age, 1995). In 2009, advertisers used their financial might to take a stand against Fox News host Glenn Beck, who offended viewers and sponsors alike with his incendiary comments that President Obama was a "racist" and had a "deep-seated hatred for white people." Sponsors of the *Glenn Beck* TV talk show began to remove advertising spots from the program in protest of Beck's comments. A spokeswoman for Progressive car insurance said, "We place advertising on a variety of programming with the goal of reaching a broad range of insurance consumers who might be interested in our products. We also seek to avoid advertising on programming that our customers or potential customers may find extremely offensive (Spain, 2009)." Other shows whose advertisers have pulled ads include NBC's long-running sketch comedy show *Saturday Night Live*, BET's *Hot Ghetto Mess*, and ABC's *Ellen* sitcom.

PUBLIC TELEVISION AND CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP

Corporate sponsorship does not just affect network television. Even public television has become subject to the influence of advertising. Established in 1969, Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) developed out of a report by the Carnegie Commission on Educational Television, which examined the role of educational, noncommercial television on society. The report recommended that the government finance public television in order to provide diversity of programming during the network era—a service created "not to sell products" but to "enhance citizenship and public service (McCauley, 2003)." Public television was also intended to provide universal access to television for viewers in rural areas or viewers who could not afford to pay for private television services. PBS focused on educational program content, targeting viewers who were less appealing to the commercial networks and advertisers, such as the over-50 age demographic and children under 12.

The original Carnegie Commission report recommended that Congress create a federal trust fund based on a manufacturer's excise tax on the sale of TV sets to finance public television. Following intense lobbying by the National Association of Broadcasters, the proposal was removed from

the legislation that established the service. As a result, public television subsists on viewer contributions and federal funding and the latter has been drastically reduced in recent years. Although a 2007 proposal by President George W. Bush to eliminate more than half of the federal allocation to public broadcasting ($420 million out of $820 million) was overturned, PBS has become increasingly dependent on corporate sponsorship to stay afloat. By 2006, corporate sponsors funded more than 25 percent of all public television. Sponsorship has saved many programs that would otherwise have been lost, but critics have bemoaned the creeping commercialism of public television. When PBS began selling banner advertisements on its website in 2006, Gary Ruskin, executive director of consumer group Commercial Alert, commented, "It's just one more intrusion of the commercial ethos into an organization that was supposed to be firmly noncommercial. The line between them and the commercial networks is getting fuzzier and fuzzier (Gold, 2006)." Despite such criticisms, the drop in federal funding has forced public television executives to seek more creative ways of obtaining financial backing—for example, through online banner ads. In 2009, PBS shortened the length of time companies were required to sponsor some programs in an effort to encourage advertisers (Stelter, 2009). As of 2010, the future of PBS remained uncertain. With better-funded cable channels offering niche-interest shows that were traditionally public television's domain (BBC nature series *Planet Earth* was

shown on the Discovery Channel, while historical dramas *John Adams* and *The Tudors* are shown on premium cable channels HBO and Showtime), PBS is left to rely on shows that have been around for decades, such as *Nova* and *Nature*, to attract audiences (McGrath, 2008). Only time will tell how PBS fares in the face of competition.

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE NETWORK

The period between 1950 and 1970 is historically recognized as the network era. Aside from a small portion of airtime controlled by public television, the three major networks (known as the Big Three) dominated the television industry, collectively accounting for more than 95 percent of prime-time viewing. In 1986, Rupert Murdoch, the head of multinational company News Corp, launched the Fox network, challenging the dominance of the Big Three. In its infancy, Fox was at best a minor irritation to the other networks. With fewer than

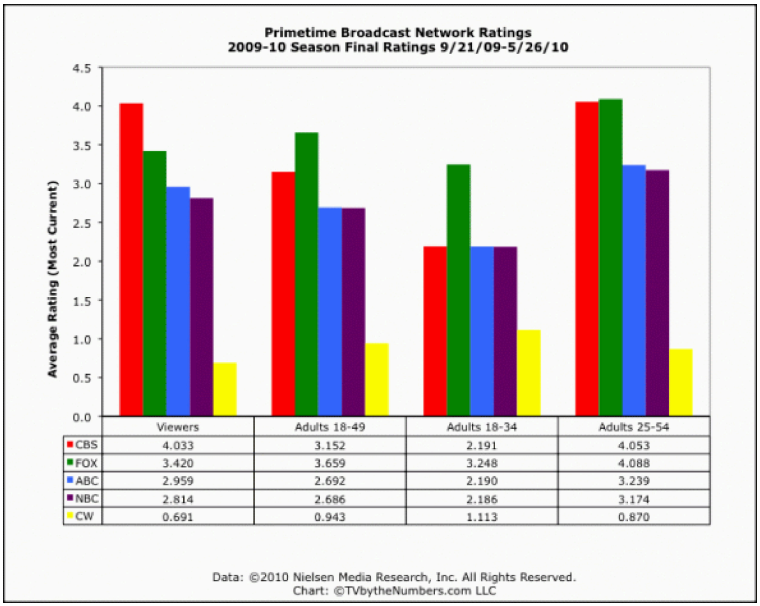
100 affiliated stations (the other networks all had more than 200 affiliates each), reaching just 80 percent of the nation's households (compared with the Big Three's 97 percent coverage rate), and broadcasting just one show (*The Late Show Starring Joan Rivers*), Fox was barely a consideration in the ratings war. During the early 1990s, these dynamics began to change. Targeting young viewers and Black audiences with shows such as *Beverly Hills 90210*, *Melrose Place*, *In Living Color*, and *The Simpsons*, Fox began to establish itself as an edgy, youth-oriented network. Luring affiliates away from other networks to increase its viewership, Fox also extended its programming schedule beyond the initial 2-night-a-week broadcasts. By the time the fledgling network acquired the rights to National Football League (NFL) games with its $1.58 billion NFL deal in 1994, entitling it to 4 years of NFL games, Fox was a worthy rival to the other three broadcast networks. Its success turned the Big Three into the Big Four. In the 1994–1995 television season, 43 percent of U.S. households were watching the Big Four at any given moment during prime time (Poniewozik, 2009).

Fox's success prompted the launch of several smaller networks in the mid-1990s. UPN (owned by Paramount, recently acquired by Viacom) and WB (owned by media giant Time Warner) both debuted in January 1995. Using strategies similar to Fox, the networks initially began broadcasting programs 2 nights a week, expanding to a 6-day schedule by 2000. Targeting young and minority audiences with shows

such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Moesha*, *Dawson's Creek*, and *The Wayans Bros.*, the new networks hoped to draw stations away from their old network affiliations. However, rather than repeating the success of Fox, UPN and WB struggled to make an impact. Unable to attract many affiliate stations, the two fledgling networks reached fewer households than their larger rivals because they were unobtainable in some smaller cities. High start-up costs, relatively low audience ratings, and increasing production expenses spelled the end of the "netlets," a term coined by *Variety* magazine for minor-league networks that lacked a full week's worth of programming. After losing $1 billion each, parent companies CBS (having split from Viacom) and Time Warner agreed to merge UPN and WB, resulting in the creation of the CW network in 2006. Targeting the desirable 18–34 age group, the network retained the most popular shows from before the merger—*America's Next Top Model* and *Veronica Mars* from UPN and *Beauty and the Geek* and *Smallville* from WB—as well as launching new shows such as *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries*. Despite its cofounders' claims that the CW would be the "fifth great broadcast network," the collaboration got off to a shaky start. Frequently outperformed by Spanish-language television network Univision in 2008 and with declining ratings among its target audience, critics began to question the future of the CW network (Grego, 2010). However, the relative success of shows such as *Gossip Girl* and *90210* in 2009 gave the network a foothold on its

intended demographic, quashing rumors that co-owners CBS Corporation and Warner Bros. might disband the network. Warner Bros. Television Group President Bruce Rosenblum said, "I think the built-in assumption and the expectation is that the CW is here to stay (Collins, 2009)."

FIGURE 9.14



	Viewers	Adults 18-49	Adults 18-34	Adults 25-54
CBS	4.033	3.152	2.191	4.053
FOX	3.420	3.659	3.248	4.088
ABC	2.959	2.692	2.190	3.239
NBC	2.814	2.686	2.186	3.174
CW	0.691	0.943	1.113	0.870

Despite launching several new shows geared toward its target demographic, the CW remains fifth in the network rankings.

CABLE CHALLENGES THE NETWORKS

A far greater challenge to network television than the emergence of smaller competitors was the increasing dominance of cable television. Between 1994 and 2009, the percentage of U.S. households watching the Big Four networks during prime time plummeted from 43 percent to 27 percent (Poniewozik, 2009). Two key factors influenced the rapid growth of cable television networks: industry deregulation and the use of satellites to distribute local TV stations around the country.

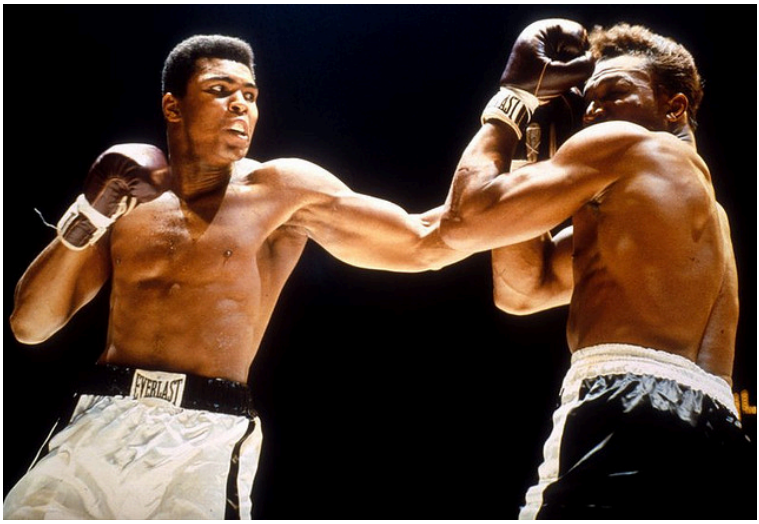
During the 1970s, the growth of cable television was restricted by FCC regulations, which protected broadcasters by establishing franchising standards and enforcing anti-siphoning rules that prevented cable from taking sports and movie programming away from the networks. However, during the late 1970s, a court ruled that the FCC had exceeded its authority, and the anti-siphoning rules were repealed. This decision paved the way for the development of cable movie

channels, contributing to the exponential growth of cable in the 1980s and 1990s. Further deregulation of cable in the 1984 Cable Communications Policy Act removed restrictions on cable rates, enabling operators to charge what they wanted for cable services as long as there was effective competition to the service (a standard that over 90 percent of all cable markets could meet). Other deregulatory policies during the 1980s included the eradication of public-service requirements and the elimination of regulated amounts of advertising in children's programming, expanding the scope of cable channel stations. Deregulation was intended to encourage competition within the industry but instead enabled local cable companies to establish monopolies all over the country. In 1989, U.S. Senator Al Gore of Tennessee commented, "Precipitous rate hikes of 100 percent or more in one year have not been unusual since cable was given total freedom to charge whatever the market will bear.... Since cable was deregulated, we have also witnessed an extraordinary concentration of control and integration by cable operators and program services, manifesting itself in blatantly anticompetitive behavior toward those who would compete with existing cable operators for the right to distribute services (Zaretsky, 1995)." The FCC reintroduced regulations for basic cable rates in 1992, by which time more than 56 million households (over 60 percent of the households with televisions) subscribed to a cable service.

The growth of cable TV was also assisted by a national

satellite distribution system. Pioneered by Time Inc., which founded cable network company HBO, the corporation used satellite transmission in 1975 to beam the "Thrilla from Manila"—the historic heavyweight boxing match between Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier—into people's homes. Shortly afterward, entrepreneur Ted Turner, owner of independent Atlanta-based station WTBS, uplinked his station's signal onto the same satellite as HBO, enabling cable operators to downlink the station on one of their channels. Initially provided free to subscribers to encourage interest, the station offered TV reruns, wrestling, and live sports from Atlanta. Having created the first "superstation," Turner expanded his realm by founding 24-hour news network CNN in 1980. At the end of the year, 28 national programming services were available, and the cable revolution had begun. Over the next decade, the industry underwent a period of rapid growth and popularity, and by 1994 viewers could choose from 94 basic and 20 premium cable services.

FIGURE 9.15



The 1975 "Thrilla from Manila" was one of the first offerings by HBO.

benyupp – muhammad ali – CC BY 2.0.

NARROWCASTING

Because the proliferation of cable channels provided viewers with so many choices, broadcasters began to move away from mass-oriented programming in favor of more targeted shows.

Whereas the broadcast networks sought to obtain the widest audience possible by avoiding programs that might only appeal to a small minority of viewers, cable channels sought out niche audiences within specific demographic groups—a process known as narrowcasting. In much the same way that specialist magazines target readers interested in a particular sport or hobby, cable channels emphasize one topic, or group of related topics, that appeal to specific viewers (often those who have been neglected by broadcast television). People interested in current affairs can tune into CNN, MSNBC, Fox News, or any number of other news channels, while those interested in sports can switch on ESPN or TSN (The Sports Network). Other channels focus on music, shopping, comedy, science fiction, or programs aimed at specific cultural or gender groups. Narrowcasting has proved beneficial for advertisers and marketers, who no longer need to time their communications based on the groups of people who are most likely to watch television at certain times of the day. Instead, they concentrate their approach on subscription channels that appeal directly to their target consumers.

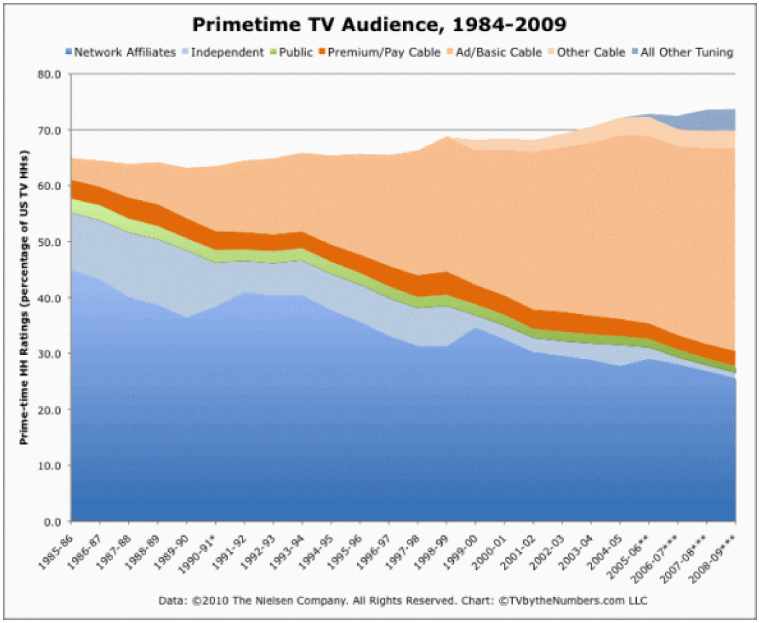
IMPACT ON NETWORKS

The popularity of cable television has forced the Big Four networks to rethink their approach to programming over the past three decades. Because of the narrowcasting mode of distribution and exhibition, cable TV has offered more explicit sexual and violent content than broadcast television does. To compete for cable channels' viewing audience, broadcast networks have loosened restrictions on graphic material and now frequently feature partial nudity, violence, and coarse language. This has increased viewership of mildly controversial shows such as *CSI*, *NCIS*, *Grey's Anatomy*, and *Private Practice*, while opening the networks to attacks from conservative advocacy groups that object to extreme content.

The broadcast networks are increasingly adapting narrowcasting as a programming strategy. Newer networks, such as the CW, deliberately target the 18–34 age group (women in particular). Since its inception, the CW has replaced urban comedies such as *Everybody Hates Chris* with female-oriented series such as *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries*. Older networks group similar programs that appeal to specific groups in adjacent time slots to retain viewers for as long as possible. For example, ABC sitcoms *Modern Family* and *Cougar Town* run back to back, while Fox follows reality police series *Cops* with crime-fighting show *America's Most Wanted*.

Despite responding to challenges from cable, the broadcast networks' share of the total audience has declined each year. Between 2000 and 2009, the networks saw their numbers drop by around 8 million viewers (Bianco, 2009).

FIGURE 9.16



Increased competition from cable channels has caused a steady decline in the networks' audience ratings.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- During the 1950s, the cost of producing a single television show increased as shows became longer and production costs soared. Sponsorship on network television shifted from single sponsorship, in which a program was entirely supported and produced by one advertiser, to multiple sponsorship, in which advertisers bought 1- or 2-minute spots on the show. Although no one advertiser controlled the content of the show, sponsors had some say in the program's subject matter. Sponsors have retained some control over program content by withdrawing funding from shows that are deemed to have offensive or inappropriate content.
- Public television was created to enhance citizenship and also to provide a television service for people in rural areas or those who could not afford to pay for a private television service. Despite its origins as a noncommercial entity, public television has increasingly had to turn to commercial sponsorship to stay afloat. Government funding for public television has declined over the years, and competition from niche cable channels has rendered its future uncertain.
- Between 1950 and 1970, the Big Three networks

(ABC, CBS, and NBC) accounted for around 95 percent of prime-time viewing. The addition of Fox in 1986 created the Big Four; however, attempts to create an additional major network have been unsuccessful. CBS-owned UPN and Time Warner-owned WB merged in 2006 to create the CW. Targeted at women aged 18–34, the CW consistently ranks a low fifth in the ratings.

- The primary challenge to network television has been the rapid growth of cable, which grew exponentially in the 1980s and 1990s as a result of industry deregulation and the use of satellites to distribute local channels to a national audience (pioneered by HBO in the 1970s). Cable broadcasters use a process known as narrowcasting to target niche audiences for their shows. Channels usually focus on a single topic, such as news, weather, shopping, or comedy. Competition from cable has forced network television to loosen its restrictions regarding sex and violence on shows, and the networks have turned increasingly to narrowcasting in an effort to retain audiences. Despite its efforts, competition from cable and other sources has caused prime-time viewing audiences of the Big Four networks to drop from 43 percent in 1994 to 27 percent in 2009.

EXERCISES

Please respond to the following short-answer writing prompts. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. Choose one of the Big Four networks and print out its weekly programming schedule. Watch the network's prime-time programs over the course of a week, noting the target demographic for each show. Observe the advertising sponsors that support each show and compare how the products and services fit with the intended audience.

    - Does the network make use of narrowcasting to air shows with the same demographic in adjacent time slots?
    - How do the types of products and services advertised during each show change depending on the content and target audience?
    - Does the network cater to one target audience in particular?

2. How has the rise of cable television affected the Big Four networks? What trends have emerged out of this competition?

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9.4 Influence of New Technologies

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe the difference between satellite television and cable television.
2. Identify two of the major satellite companies in today's market.
3. Identify ways in which the Internet has affected content delivery and viewing patterns.

The experience of watching television is rapidly changing with the progression of technology. No longer restricted to a limited number of channels on network television, or even to a TV schedule, viewers are now able to watch exactly what they want to watch, when they want to watch it. Nontelevision delivery

systems such as the Internet, which enables viewers to download traditional TV shows onto a computer, laptop, iPod, or smartphone, are changing the way people watch television. Meanwhile, cable and satellite providers are enabling viewers to purchase TV shows to watch at their convenience through the use of video-on-demand services, changing the concept of prime-time viewing. Digital video recording (DVR) systems such as TiVo, which enable users to record particular shows onto the system's computer memory, are having a similar effect.

Although TV audiences are becoming increasingly fragmented, they are also growing because of the convenience and availability of new technology. In 2009, Nielsen's Three Screen Report, which encompassed television, cell phone, and computer usage, reported that the average viewer watched more than 151 hours of television per month, up 3.6 percent from the previous year (Semuels, 2009). Viewers might not all be sitting together in the family room watching prime-time shows on network TV between 7 and 11 p.m., but they are watching.

THE WAR BETWEEN SATELLITE AND CABLE TELEVISION

The origins of satellite television can be traced to the space race of the 1950s, when the United States and the Soviet Union were competing to put the first satellite into space. Soviet scientists accomplished the goal first with the launch of *Sputnik* in 1957, galvanizing Americans (who were fearful of falling behind in space technology during the Cold War era) into intensifying their efforts and resulting in the creation of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in 1958. AT&T launched *Telstar*, the first active communications satellite, on July 10, 1962, and the first transatlantic television signal—a black-and-white image of a U.S. flag waving in front of the Andover Earth Station in western Maine—transmitted that same day. However, the television industry did not utilize satellites for broadcasting purposes until the late 1970s when PBS introduced Public Television Satellite Service. Satellite communication technology caught on and was used by broadcasters as a distribution method between 1978 and 1984 by pioneering cable channels such as HBO, TBS (Turner Broadcasting System), and CBN (Christian Broadcasting Network, later the Family Channel).

The trouble with early satellite television systems was that once people purchased a satellite system, they had free access to every basic and premium cable service that was broadcasting via satellite signals. The FCC had an "open skies" policy, under which users had as much right to receive signals as broadcasters had the right to transmit them. Initially, the satellite receiver systems were prohibitively expensive for most families, costing more than $10,000. However, as the price of a satellite dish dropped toward the $3,000 mark in the mid-1980s, consumers began to view satellite TV as a cheaper, higher-quality alternative to cable. Following the initial purchase of a dish system, the actual programming—consisting of more than 100 cable channels—was free. Cable broadcasters lobbied the government for legal assistance and, under the 1984 Cable Act, were allowed to encrypt their satellite feeds so that only people who purchased a decoder from a satellite provider could receive the channel.

Following the passing of the Cable Act, the satellite industry took a dramatic hit. Sales of the popular direct-to-home (DTH) systems (precursors to the smaller, more powerful direct broadcast satellite systems introduced in the 1990s) that had offered free cable programming slumped from 735,000 units in 1985 to 225,000 units a year later, and around 60 percent of satellite retailers went out of business. The satellite industry's sudden drop in popularity was exacerbated by large-scale antidish advertising campaigns by cable operators, depicting satellite dishes as unsightly.

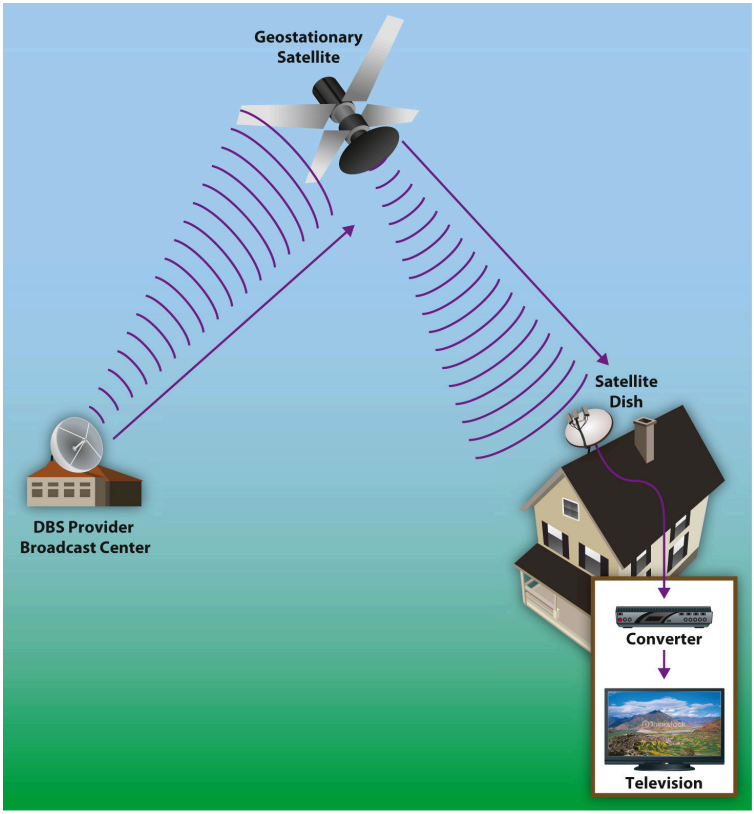
Although sales picked up in the late 1980s with the introduction of integrated receiving and decoding units and the arrival of program packages, which saved consumers the time and effort of signing up for individual programming services, the growth of the satellite industry was stunted by piracy—the theft of satellite signals. Of the 1.9 million units manufactured between 1986 and 1990, fewer than 500,000 were receiving signals legally (Thibedeau, 2000). The problem was ultimately solved by the actions of the Satellite Broadcasting and Communications Association (SBCA)

, an association created in 1986 by the merger of two trade organizations—the Society of Private and Commercial Earth Stations (SPACE) and the Direct Broadcast Satellite Association (DBSA). SPACE was composed of manufacturers, distributors, and retailers of direct-to-home systems, and DBSA represented companies interested in direct broadcast satellite systems. The SBCA set up an antipiracy task force, aggressively pursuing illegal hackers with the FBI's help.

Once the piracy problem was under control, the satellite industry could move forward. In 1994, four major cable companies launched a first-generation direct broadcast satellite (DBS) system called PrimeStar. The system, a small-dish satellite-delivered program service specifically intended for home reception, was the first successful attempt to enter the market in the United States. Within a year, PrimeStar was beaming 67 channels into 70,000

homes for a monthly fee of $25 to $35 (in addition to a hardware installation fee of $100 to $200). By 1996, competing companies DirecTV and the EchoStar Dish Network had entered the industry, and Dish Network's cheaper prices were forcing its competitors to drop their fees. DirecTV acquired PrimeStar's assets in 1999 for around $1.82 billion, absorbing its rival's 2.3 million subscribers (Junnarker, 1999).

FIGURE 9.17



Subscribers of DBS receive signals from geostationary satellites that are broadcast in digital format at microwave frequency and intercepted by a satellite dish. A converter next to the television produces output that can be viewed on the television receiver.

THE CURRENT SATELLITE MARKET: DIRECTV VERSUS DISH NETWORK

As of 2010, the two biggest players in the satellite TV industry are DirecTV and Dish Network. Assisted by the passing of the Satellite Television Home Viewers Act in 1999, which enabled satellite providers to carry local TV stations (putting them on equal footing with cable television), both companies have grown rapidly over the past decade. In the first quarter of 2010, DirecTV boasted 18.6 million subscribers, placing it ahead of its rival, Dish Network, which reported a total of 14.3 million subscribers (Paul, 2010). Dish courts customers who have been hit by the economic downturn, aggressively cutting its prices and emphasizing its low rates. Conversely, DirecTV targets affluent consumers, emphasizing quality and choice in its advertising campaigns and investing in advanced services and products such as multiroom viewing (enabling a subscriber to watch a show in one room, pause it, and continue watching the same show in another room) to differentiate itself from rival satellite and cable companies.

Since the 1999 legislation put satellite television in direct competition with cable, the major satellite companies have

increasingly pitted themselves against cable broadcasters, offering consumers numerous incentives to switch providers. One of these incentives is the addition of premium networks for satellite subscribers in the same vein as premium cable channel HBO. In 2005, DirecTV expanded its 101 Network channel to include original shows, becoming the first satellite station to air first episodes of a broadcast television series with NBC daytime soap opera *Passions* in 2007. The station aired first-run episodes of football drama series *Friday Night Lights* in 2008 and set its sights on the male over-35 demographic by obtaining syndication rights to popular HBO series *Oz* and *Deadwood* a year later. Commenting on the satellite company's programming plans, executive vice president for entertainment for DirecTV Eric Shanks said, "We'd like to become a pre-cable window for these premium channels (Carter, 2009)." In other words, the company hopes to purchase HBO shows such as *Sex and the City* before HBO sells the series to basic-cable channels like TBS.

In another overt bid to lure cable customers over to satellite television, both DirecTV and Dish Network offer a number of comprehensive movies and sports packages, benefiting from their additional channel capacity (satellite TV providers typically offer around 350 channels, compared with 180 channels on cable) and their ability to receive international channels often unavailable on cable. In the mid-2000s, the satellite companies also began encroaching on cable TV's domination of bundled packages, by offering all-in-one phone,

Internet, and television services. Despite being ideally suited to offering such packages with their single telecommunications pipe into the house, cable companies such as Comcast, Cox, and Time Warner had developed a reputation for offering poor service at extortionate prices. In the first three quarters of 2004, the eight largest cable providers (with the exception of bankrupt Adelphia) lost 552,000 basic-cable subscribers. Between 2000 and 2004, cable's share of the TV market fell from 66 percent to 62 percent, while the number of U.S. households with satellite TV increased from 12 percent to 19 percent (Belson, 2004). Despite reports that cash-strapped consumers are switching off pay-TV services to save money during strained economic times, satellite industry revenues have risen steadily over the past decade.

THE IMPACT OF DVRS AND THE INTERNET: CHANGING CONTENT DELIVERY

Over the past two decades, the viewing public has become increasingly fragmented as a result of growing competition between cable and satellite channels and traditional network television stations. Now, TV audiences are being presented with even more options. Digital video recorders (DVRs) like TiVo allow viewers to select and record shows they can watch at a later time. For example, viewers can set their DVRs to record all new (or old) episodes of the show *Deadliest Catch* and then watch the recorded episodes whenever they have free time.

DVRs can be used by advertisers to track which shows are being viewed. DVRs are even capable of targeting viewers with specific ads when they decide to watch their recorded program. In 2008, consumer groups battled with cable companies and lawmakers to protect the privacy of viewers who did not wish to be tracked this way, causing Nielsen to make tracking optional.

Nontelevision delivery systems such as the Internet allow viewers to download their favorite shows at any time, on

several different media. The Internet has typically been bad news for traditional forms of media; newspapers, magazines, the music industry, video rental companies, and bookstores have all suffered from the introduction of the Internet. However, unlike other media, television has so far survived the Internet's effects. Television remains the dominant source of entertainment for most Americans, who are using new media in conjunction with traditional TV viewing, watching vast quantities of television in addition to streaming numerous YouTube videos and catching up on missed episodes via the networks' web pages. In the third quarter of 2008, the average American watched 142 hours of television per month, an increase of 5 hours per month from the same quarter the previous year. Internet use averaged 27 hours per month, an increase of an hour and a half between 2007 and 2008 (Stross, 2009).

NEW VIEWING OUTLETS: YOUTUBE AND HULU

Of the many recent Internet phenomena, few have made as big an impact as video-sharing website YouTube. Created by three PayPal engineers in 2005, the site enables users to upload personal videos, television clips, music videos, and snippets of movies that can be watched by other users worldwide. Although it initially drew unfavorable comparisons with the original music-sharing site Napster (see Chapter 6 "Music"), which was buried under an avalanche of copyright infringement lawsuits, YouTube managed to survive the controversy by forming agreements with media corporations, such as NBC Universal Television, to legally broadcast video clips from shows such as *The Office*. In 2006, the company, which showed more than 100 million video clips per day, was purchased by Google for $1.65 billion (MSNBC, 2006). Correctly predicting that the site was the "next step in the evolution of the Internet," Google CEO Eric Schmidt has watched YouTube's popularity explode since the takeover. As of 2010, YouTube shows more than 2 billion clips per day and allows people to upload 24 hours of video every single minute (Youtube). To secure its place as the go-to entertainment website, YouTube is expanding its boundaries by developing

a movie rental service and showing live music concerts and sporting events in real time. In January 2010, Google signed a deal with the Indian Premier League, making 60 league cricket matches available on YouTube's IPL channel and attracting 50 million viewers worldwide (Timmons, 2010).

FIGURE 9.18



Agreements between YouTube and media corporations

allow viewers to watch clips of their favorite shows on YouTube for free.

andresmh – Homeless on YouTube – CC BY-SA 2.0.

While YouTube remains focused on user-generated material, viewers looking for commercial videos of movies and TV shows are increasingly turning to Hulu. Established in 2007 following a deal between NBC Universal, News Corporation, and a number of leading Internet companies (including Yahoo!, AOL, MSN, and MySpace), the site gives users access to an entire library of video clips without charge and syndicates its material to partner distribution sites. The videos include full episodes of current hit shows such as *House*, *Saturday Night Live*, and *The Simpsons*, as well as older hits from the studios' television libraries. Supported through advertising, the venture, which is only available to viewers in the United States, became the premier video broadcast site on the web within 2 years. In July 2009, the site received more than 38 million viewers and delivered more videos than any site except YouTube (Salter, 2009). Throughout the entire year, Hulu generated an estimated $120 million in revenue and increased its advertiser base to 250 sponsors (Salter, 2009). Its advertising model appeals to viewers, who need only watch two minutes of promotion in 22 minutes of programming, compared with 8 minutes on television. Limiting sponsorship to one advertiser per show has

helped make recall rates twice as high as those for the same advertisements on television, benefiting the sponsors as well as the viewers.

Some critics and television executives claim that the Hulu model has been too successful for its own good, threatening the financial underpinnings of cable TV by reducing DVD sales and avoiding carriage fees—in 2009, Fox pulled most of the episodes of *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* from Hulu's site. Per the networks' request, Hulu also shut off access to its programming from Boxee, a fledgling service that enabled viewers to stream online video to their TV sets. "We have to find ways to advance the business rather than cannibalize it," stated the distribution chief at TNT, a network that refused to stream episodes of shows such as *The Closer* on Hulu's site (Rose, 2009). However, many television executives realize that if they do not cannibalize their own material, others will. When a viral video of *Saturday Night Live* short "Lazy Sunday" hit the web in 2005, generating millions of hits on YouTube, NBC did not earn a dime. Broadcast networks—the Big Four and the CW—have also begun streaming shows for free in an effort to stop viewers from watching episodes on other websites.

VIDEO-ON-DEMAND

Originally introduced in the early 1990s, the concept of video on demand (VOD)—a pay-per-view system that allows viewers to order or download a film via television or the Internet and watch it at their convenience—was not immediately successful because of the prohibitive cost of ordering a movie compared to buying or renting it from a store. Another early complaint about the service was that studios withheld movies until long after they were available on DVD, by which time most people who wanted to view the film had already seen it. Both of these disadvantages have since been remedied, with movies now released at the same time on VOD as they are on DVD at competitive rental prices. Currently, most cable and satellite TV providers offer some form of on-demand service, either VOD, which provides movies 24 hours a day and enables viewers all the functionality of a DVD player (such as the ability to pause, rewind, or fast forward films), or near video on demand (NVOD), which broadcasts multiple copies of a film or program over short time intervals but does not allow viewers to control the video.

As an alternative to cable or satellite VOD, viewers can also readily obtain movies and television shows over the Internet, via free services such as YouTube and Hulu or through paid subscriptions to sites that stream movies to a computer. Online DVD rental service Netflix started giving subscribers

instant access to its catalog of older TV programs and films in 2007, while Internet giant Amazon.com set up a rival service resembling the pay-per-view model in 2008. Viewers can also stream free episodes of their favorite shows via cable and broadcast networks' websites. With the increasing popularity of smartphones—cell phones that contain built-in applications and Internet access—viewers are using VOD as a way of watching television while they are out of the house. Having discovered that consumers are willing to watch entire TV episodes or even films on their smartphones, industry executives are looking for ways to capitalize on smartphone technology. In 2010, News Corporation's Fox Mobile Group was planning to launch Bitbop, a service that will stream TV episodes to smartphones for $9.99 a month. Discussing the project, Bitbop architect Joe Bilman said that "the marriage of on-demand content and mobility has the power to light a fire in the smartphone space (Stelter, 2010)." The shift from traditional television viewing to online viewing is making a small but noticeable dent in the $84 billion cable and satellite industry. Between the beginning of 2008 and the end of 2009, an estimated 800,000 U.S. households cut the cable cord in favor of web viewing (Schonfeld, 2010).

INTERACTIVE TELEVISION

Moving a step beyond VOD, cable and satellite TV providers are combining aspects of traditional television viewing with online content to create an entirely new way of watching shows—interactive television (iTV). Using an additional set-top box and their remote control, viewers can utilize several different features that go beyond simply watching a television show. For example, interactive television enables users to take part in quiz shows, vote for a favorite contestant on a game show, view highlights or look up statistics during sports matches, create a music playlist or photo slideshow, and view local information such as weather and traffic through a ticker under a current TV program. Software such as Microsoft's UltimateTV, released in 2001, even brought interactivity to individual television shows. For example, a viewer watching CBS crime series *CSI* can click on the interactive icon in the corner of the screen and obtain instant information about forensic analysis techniques, along with an episode guide, character biographies, and a map of the show's Las Vegas setting.

Interactive television is beginning to take on the social format of the web, linking viewers with online communities who use communication tools such as Twitter and Skype IM to discuss what they just saw on television in real time. When

popular musical comedy show *Glee* hit the screens in 2009, marketing experts at Fox pushed for a strong online presence, airing the pilot episode well in advance of the actual season debut and generating buzz on social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook. Once the show gained widespread popularity, Fox launched an interactive hypertrailer on its website, allowing viewers to click on and "like" the show's cast members on Facebook. The *Glee* cast also participates in weekly "tweet-peats," which feature live Twitter feeds that scroll across the bottom of the screen during reruns of the show, providing behind-the-scenes details and answering fan questions. The CW network uses a similar technique with its "TV to Talk About" campaign, a tagline that changes from ad to ad to include iterations such as "TV to text about," "blog about," or "tweet about." Its website offers forums where viewers can discuss episodes and interact with video extras, photos, and background clips about various shows. Online television forum Television Without Pity provides viewers with an alternative place for discussion that is not affiliated with any one network.

FIGURE 9.19



A Nielsen report found that during the fourth quarter of 2009, 60 percent of Americans spent up to 3.5 hours every month going online and watching TV simultaneously.

Christopher Bowns – My desk – CC BY-SA 2.0.

Despite the shift toward interactive television, one barrier that manufacturers seem to be unwilling to cross is the addition of Internet to people's TV sets. Although Internet-enabled televisions began trickling into the market in 2008 and 2009, many industry executives remained skeptical of their potential. In February 2009, Sony spokesman Greg Belloni said, "Sony's stance is that consumers don't want an Internet-like experience with their TVs, and we're really not focused on bringing

anything other than Internet video or widgets to our sets right now (Richtel, 2009)." Although some analysts predict that up to 20 percent of televisions will be Internet-enabled by 2012, consulting firm Deloitte anticipates the continued concurrent use of TV sets with laptops, MP3 players, and other browser-enabled devices (Deloitte, 2010).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The first satellite television signal was broadcast in 1962; however, the television industry did not begin utilizing satellites for broadcasting purposes until the late 1970s. Early problems with satellite TV included the high cost of a satellite dish and the theft of satellite signals following the passing of the Cable Act in 1984. Once piracy was under control, satellite television companies began to emerge and become profitable. The two biggest current satellite television providers are DirecTV, which targets its services toward affluent consumers, and Dish Network, which targets lower-earning consumers. Since the 1999 legislation enabled satellite companies to broadcast local channels, satellite TV has become a viable threat to cable. Satellite companies attempt to lure cable customers by offering premium channels, sports and movie packages, and

competitive prices.

- Unlike some other forms of media, television is so far surviving the impact of the Internet. However, the World Wide Web is changing content delivery methods and the way people conceive television and program scheduling. New viewing outlets such as YouTube and Hulu enable viewers to watch online video clips, entire episodes of TV shows, and movies free of charge (although Hulu also offers paid content with a wider selection of programs to offset the losses in network advertising revenue). Video-on-demand services, now available through most cable and satellite providers, allow viewers to order movies or TV programs at their convenience, rather than having to adhere to a fixed programming schedule. VOD is also available through Internet sites such as Amazon.com and Netflix, allowing people to stream shows and video clips to their smartphones and watch television while on the go. Thanks to the influence of the Internet, television is becoming more interactive, with providers combining aspects of traditional viewing and online content. This is manifested in two ways: new features that provide viewers with hundreds of additional options while they watch their favorite shows (for example, the ability to look up a news story or get a weather update), and social television, which encourages viewers to combine TV viewing with social

networking (for example, by blogging or joining an online chat forum about the show).

EXERCISES

Please respond to the following short-answer writing prompts. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. What is the difference between satellite and cable television? In today's market, who is winning the battle for consumers?
2. Aside from DirecTV and Dish Network, what other satellite options do consumers have? How do these options differ from DirecTV and Dish Network?
3. How have the Internet and DVRs affected your television-viewing habits?

END-OF-CHAPTER ASSESSMENT

Review Questions

1. Section 1

    1. What were some of the technological developments that paved the way for the evolution of television, and what role did they play?
    2. What factors contributed to the dominance of electronic television over mechanical television?
    3. Why was color technology slow to gain popularity following its development?
    4. What were some of the important landmarks in the history of television after 1960?

2. Section 2

    1. What cultural factors influenced television programming between 1950 and 2010?
    2. How did television influence culture between 1950 and 2010? How are television and culture interrelated?

3. Section 3

    1. How can corporate sponsors influence television programming?
    2. What factors have influenced the decline of the major networks since 1970? How have the networks adapted to changes in the industry?
    3. How does cable television differ from network television? How has the growth of cable been

influenced by industry legislation?

4. Section 4

    1. What are the main differences between satellite television and cable television? What factors influenced the growing popularity of satellite television in the 1980s and 1990s?
    2. Who are the two main competitors in the satellite television industry? How do they differ?
    3. How is the Internet changing content delivery methods and viewing patterns?

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. Do television programs just reflect cultural and social change, or do they influence it?
2. Television audiences are becoming increasingly fragmented as a result of competition from cable and satellite companies and nontelevision delivery systems such as the Internet. What are the potential social implications of this trend?
3. How can broadcast networks compete against satellite and cable operators?

4. Critics frequently blame television for increasing levels of violence and aggression in children. Do broadcasters have a social responsibility to their viewers, and if so, how can they fulfill it?
5. Supporters of public television argue that it serves a valuable role in the community, whereas opponents believe it is outdated. Is public television still relevant in today's society, or should funding be cut completely?

CAREER CONNECTION

Whether online viewing outlets continue to grow in popularity or viewers return to more traditional methods of watching television, broadcasters are likely to remain dependent on advertising sponsors to fund their programming. Advertising sales executives work for a specific network and sell TV time to agencies and companies, working within budgets to ensure that clients make effective use of their advertising time.

Read through the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics overview of a career in advertising sales. You can find it at: http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos297.htm.

Then, read BNET's analysis of the television advertising industry at http://industry.bnet.com/media/10008136/truth-in-network-tv-advertising-and-what-to-do-about-it/. Once you have looked at both sites, use the information to answer these questions:

1. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics website, the employment rate for advertising sales agents is expected to increase by 7 percent between 2010 and 2018, about average for all professions. What reasons does the site give for this increase? How will the growth be offset?
2. What predictions does the BNET article make about future trends in the Big Four networks' advertising sales? How might this affect career prospects?
3. Based on the analysis in the BNET article and the information on the Bureau of Labor Statistics website, how is the advertising sales industry likely to change and develop?
4. As the Bureau of Labor Statistics website points out, creativity is an invaluable trait for advertising sales executives. Using the information on both sites, think of a list of creative ways to attract new clients to the ailing broadcast networks.

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9.2 The Relationship Between Television and Culture

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify ways in which American culture is reflected on television.
2. Identify ways in which television affects the development of American culture.

Since its inception as an integral part of American life in the 1950s, television has both reflected and nurtured cultural mores and values. From the escapist dramas of the 1960s, which consciously avoided controversial issues and glossed over life's harsher realities in favor of an idealized portrayal, to the copious reality TV shows in recent years, on which

participants discuss even the most personal and taboo issues, television has held up a mirror to society. But the relationship between social attitudes and television is reciprocal; broadcasters have often demonstrated their power to influence viewers, either consciously through slanted political commentary, or subtly, by portraying controversial relationships (such as single parenthood, same-sex marriages, or interracial couplings) as socially acceptable. The symbiotic nature of television and culture is exemplified in every broadcast, from family sitcoms to serious news reports.

CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON TELEVISION

In the 1950s, most television entertainment programs ignored current events and political issues. Instead, the three major networks (ABC, NBC, and CBS) developed prime-time shows that would appeal to a general family audience. Chief among these types of shows was the domestic comedy—a generic family comedy that was identified by its character-based humor and usually set within the home. Seminal examples included popular 1950s shows such as *Leave It to Beaver, The*

Donna Reed Show, and *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*. Presenting a standardized version of the White middle-class suburban family, domestic comedies portrayed the conservative values of an idealized American life. Studiously avoiding prevalent social issues such as racial discrimination and civil rights, the shows focused on mostly White middle-class families with traditional nuclear roles (mother in the home, father in the office) and implied that most domestic problems could be solved within a 30-minute time slot, always ending with a strong moral lesson.

Although these shows depicted an idealized version of American family life, many families in the 1950s were traditional nuclear families. Following the widespread poverty, political uncertainty, and physical separation of the war years, many Americans wanted to settle down, have children, and enjoy the peace and security that family life appeared to offer. During the booming postwar era, a period of optimism and prosperity, the traditional nuclear family flourished. However, the families and lifestyles presented in domestic comedies did not encompass the overall American experience by any stretch of the imagination. As historian Stephanie Coontz points out, "the June Cleaver or Donna Stone homemaker role was not available to the more than 40 percent of black women with small children who worked outside the home (Coontz, 1992)." Although nearly 60 percent of the U.S. population was labeled middle class by the mid-1950s, 25 percent of all families and more than 50 percent of two-parent Black families

were poor. Migrant workers suffered horrific deprivations, and racial tensions were rife. None of this was reflected in the world of domestic comedies, where even the Hispanic gardener in *Father Knows Best* was named Frank Smith (Coontz, 1992).

FIGURE 9.8



Most domestic comedies in the 1950s portrayed an idealized version of family life and ignored social and political events.

Dennis S. Hurd – The Cleavers – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Not all programs in the 1950s were afraid to tackle

controversial social or political issues. In March 1954, journalist Edward R. Murrow broadcast an unflattering portrait of U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy on his show *See It Now*. McCarthy, a member of the Senate Investigation Committee, had launched inquiries regarding potential Communist infiltration in U.S. institutions. Murrow thought that McCarthy's aggressive tactics were a potential threat to civil liberties. His portrait cast the senator from Wisconsin in an unflattering light by pointing out contradictions in his speeches. This led to such an uproar that McCarthy was formally reprimanded by the U.S. Senate (Friedman, 2008).

Entertainment programs also tackled controversial issues. The long-running television western *Gunsmoke*, which aired on CBS from 1955 to 1975, flourished in a Cold War society, where U.S. Marshal Matt Dillon (James Arness) stood up to lawlessness in defense of civilization. The characters and community in *Gunsmoke* faced relevant social issues, including the treatment of minority groups, the meaning of family, the legitimacy of violence, and the strength of religious belief. During the 1960s, the show adapted to the desires of its viewing audience, becoming increasingly aware of and sympathetic to ethnic minorities, in tune with the national mood during the civil rights era. This adaptability helped the show to become the longest-running western in TV history.

VIOLENCE AND ESCAPISM IN THE 1960S

During the 1960s, television news broadcasts brought the realities of real-world events into people's living rooms in vivid detail. *The CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite*, which debuted in 1962, quickly became the country's most popular newscast, and by the end of the decade, journalist Walter Cronkite was known as the most trusted man in America. Following John F. Kennedy's election to the presidency at the beginning of the decade, the 1960s took an ominous turn. Shocked viewers tuned into Cronkite's broadcast on November 22, 1963, to learn about the assassination of their president. During the next few days, viewers followed every aspect of the tragedy on television, from the tremor in Cronkite's voice as he removed his glasses and announced the news of Kennedy's death, to the frantic scenes from Dallas police headquarters where the assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald, was gunned down by nightclub owner Jack Ruby, to the thousands of mourners lining up next to the president's flag-draped coffin.

FIGURE 9.9



Television began to play a major role in U.S. politics during the presidency of John. F. Kennedy.

Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

Around the same time as Kennedy's assassination, horrific images from Vietnam were streaming into people's living rooms during the nation's first televised war. With five camera crews on duty in the Saigon bureau, news crews captured vivid details of the war in progress. Although graphic images were rarely shown on network TV, several instances of violence reached the screen, including a CBS report in 1965 that showed Marines lighting the thatched roofs of the village of Cam Ne with Zippo lighters and an NBC news report in 1968

that aired a shot of South Vietnamese General Nguyen Ngoc Loan executing a captive on a Saigon street. Further images, of children being burned and scarred by napalm and prisoners being tortured, fueled the antiwar sentiments of many Americans. In addition to the devastation caused by the president's death and the Vietnam War, Americans were also feeling the pressure of the Cold War—the clash between the United States and the Soviet Union in the years following World War II. This pressure was especially great during periods of tension throughout the 1950s and 1960s, such as the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, a confrontation that caused many people to fear nuclear war.

As a result of the intense stress faced by many Americans during the 1960s, broadcasters and viewers turned to escapist programs such as *I Dream of Jeannie*, a fantasy show about a 2,000-year-old genie who marries an astronaut, and *Bewitched*, a supernatural-themed show about a witch who tries to live as a suburban housewife. Both shows typified the situation comedy, or sitcom, a comedy genre featuring a recurring cast of characters who resolve zany situations based on their everyday lives. Other popular sitcoms in the 1960s included *The Beverly Hillbillies*, a show about a poor backwoods family who move to Beverly Hills, California, after finding oil on their land, and *Gilligan's Island*, the ultimate escapist comedy about seven characters shipwrecked on an uncharted island. None of the 1960s sitcoms mentioned any of the political unease that was taking place in the outside world,

providing audiences with a welcome diversion from real life. Other than an occasional documentary, TV programming in the 1960s consisted of a sharp dichotomy between prime-time escapist comedy and hard news.

FIGURE 9.10



Escapist sitcoms like *I Dream of Jeannie* provided

Americans with a much-needed diversion from the stressful events of the 1960s.

Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

DIVERSITY AND POLITICS IN THE 1970S

During the 1970s, broadcasters began to diversify families on their shows to reflect changing social attitudes toward formerly controversial issues such as single parenthood and divorce. Feminist groups including the National Organization for Women (NOW), the National Women's Political Caucus, and the Coalition of Labor Union Women pushed for equality on issues such as pay and encouraged women to enter the workforce. In 1972, the U.S. Supreme Court sanctioned women's right to abortion, giving them control over their reproductive rights. Divorce rates skyrocketed during the 1970s, as states adopted no-fault divorce laws, and the change in family dynamics was reflected on television. Between 1972

and 1978, CBS aired the socially controversial sitcom *Maude*. Featuring a middle-aged feminist living with her fourth husband and divorced daughter, the show exploded the dominant values of the White middle-class domestic sitcom and its traditional gender roles. Throughout its 7-year run, *Maude* tackled social and political issues such as abortion, menopause, birth control, alcoholism, and depression. During its first four seasons, the show was in the top 10 in Nielsen ratings, illustrating the changing tastes of the viewing audience, who had come of age during the era of civil rights and Vietnam protests and developed a taste for socially conscious television. Other 1970s sitcoms took the same approach, including *Maude*'s CBS predecessor, *All in the Family*, which covered issues ranging from racism and homophobia to rape and miscarriage, and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, which reflected changing attitudes toward women's rights by featuring television's first never-married independent career woman as the central character. Even wholesome family favorite *The Brady Bunch*, which ran from 1969 to 1974, featured a non-nuclear family, reflecting the rising rates of blended families in American society.

FIGURE 9.11



The popularity of controversial shows like *Maude* reflected the changing cultural and social values of the 1970s.

Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

In addition to changing family dynamics on sitcoms and other prime-time shows, variety and comedy sketch shows developed

a political awareness in the 1970s that reflected audiences' growing appetite for social and political commentary. Sketch comedy show *Saturday Night Live* (*SNL*) premiered on NBC in 1975 and has remained on air ever since. Featuring a different celebrity guest host every week and relatively unknown comedy regulars, the show parodies contemporary popular culture and politics, lambasting presidential candidates and pop stars alike. Earlier NBC sketch comedy show *Laugh-In*, which ran from 1968 to 1973, also featured politically charged material, though it lacked the satirical bite of later series such as *SNL*. By the end of the decade, television broadcasting reflected a far more politically conscious and socially aware viewing audience.

THE INFLUENCE OF CABLE TELEVISION IN THE 1980S

Until the mid-1980s, the top three networks (ABC, NBC, and CBS) dominated television broadcasting in the United

States. However, as cable services gained popularity following the deregulation of the industry in 1984, viewers found themselves with a multitude of options. Services such as Cable News Network (CNN), Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (ESPN), and Music Television (MTV) profoundly altered the television landscape in the world of news, sports, and music. New markets opened up for these innovative program types, as well as for older genres such as the sitcom. During the 1980s, a revival of family sitcoms took place with two enormous hits: *The Cosby Show* and *Family Ties*. Both featured a new take on modern family life, with the mothers working outside of the home and the fathers pitching in with housework and parental duties. Despite their success on network television, sitcoms faced stiff competition from cable's variety of choices. Between 1983 and 1994, weekly broadcast audience shares (a measure of the number of televisions in use that are tuned to a particular show) for network television dropped from 69 to 52, while cable networks' shares rose from 9 to 26 (Newcomb, 2004).

With a growing number of households subscribing to cable TV, concern began to grow about the levels of violence to which children were becoming exposed. In addition to regularly broadcast network programs, cable offered viewers the chance to watch films and adult-themed shows during all hours, many of which had far more violent content than normal network programming. One study found that by the time an average child leaves elementary school, he or she has

witnessed 8,000 murders and more than 100,000 other acts of violence on television (Blakey, 2002). Although no conclusive links have been drawn between witnessing violence on television and carrying out violence in real life, the loosening boundaries regarding sexual and violent content on television is a persistent cause for concern for many parents. For more information on the social effects of violence in the media, please refer to Chapter 2 "Media Effects".

SPECIALIZATION IN THE 1990S AND 2000S

Although TV viewership is growing, the vast number of cable channels and other, newer content delivery platforms means that audiences are thinly stretched. In recent years, broadcasters have been narrowing the focus of their programming to meet the needs and interests of an increasingly fragmented audience. Entire cable channels devoted to cooking, music, news, African American interests (see sidebar below), weather, and courtroom drama enable viewers to choose exactly what type of show they want to

watch, and many news channels are further specialized according to viewers' political opinions. This trend toward specialization reflects a more general shift within society, as companies cater increasingly to smaller, more targeted consumer bases. Business magazine editor Chris Anderson explains, "We're leaving the watercooler era, when most of us listened, watched and read from the same relatively small pool of mostly hit content. And we're entering the microculture era, when we are all into different things (Gunther, 2006)." Just as cable broadcasters are catering to niche markets, Internet-based companies such as Amazon.com and Netflix are taking advantage of this concept by selling large numbers of books, DVDs, and music albums with narrow appeal. Section 9.3 "Issues and Trends in the Television Industry" and Section 9.4 "Influence of New Technologies" of this chapter will cover the recent trends and issues of this era in television.

BLACK ENTERTAINMENT TELEVISION (BET)

Launched in 1980, Black Entertainment Television (BET) was the first television network in the United States dedicated to the interests of African American viewers. The basic-cable franchise was created in Washington, DC, by media entrepreneur Robert Johnson, who initially invested $15,000 in the venture. Within a decade, he had turned the company into a multimillion-dollar enterprise, and in 1991 it became the first Black-controlled company on the New York Stock Exchange. The company was sold to Viacom in 2003 for $3 billion.

Pre-dating MTV by a year, BET initially focused on Black-oriented music videos but soon diversified into original urban-oriented programs and public affairs shows. Although BET compensated somewhat for the underrepresentation of Blacks on television (African

Americans made up 8 percent of the prime-time characters on television in 1980 but made up 12 percent of the population), viewers complained about the portrayal of stereotypical images and inappropriate violent or sexual behavior in many of the rap videos shown by the network. In a 2004 interview with BET vice president of communications Michael Lewellen, former BET talk show host Bev Smith said, "We had videos on BET in those days that were graphic but didn't proliferate as they seem to be doing now. That's all you do seem to see are scantily dressed women who a lot of African American women are upset about in those videos (Fox News, 2004)." Despite the criticisms, BET remained the No. 1 cable network among Blacks 18 to 34 in 2010 and retained an average audience of 524,000 total viewers during the first quarter of the year (Forbes, 2010).

TELEVISION'S INFLUENCE ON CULTURE

Despite entering a microculture era with a variety of niche markets, television remains the most important unifying cultural presence in the United States. During times of national crises, television news broadcasts have galvanized the country by providing real-time coverage of major events. When terrorists crashed planes into the World Trade Center towers in 2001, 24-hour TV news crews provided stunned viewers around the world with continuous updates about the attack and its aftermath. Meanwhile, network blockbusters such as *Lost* and *24* have united viewers in shared anticipation, launching numerous blogs, fan sites, and speculative workplace discussions about characters' fates.

Televised coverage of the news has had several cultural effects since the 1950s. Providing viewers with footage of the most intense human experiences, televised news has been able to reach people in a way that radio and newspapers cannot. The images themselves have played an important role in influencing viewer opinion. During the coverage of the civil rights movement, for example, footage of a 1963 attack on civil rights protesters in Birmingham, Alabama, showed police blasting African American demonstrators—many of them

children—with fire hoses. Coupled with images of angry White segregationist mobs squaring off against Black students, the news footage did much to sway public opinion in favor of liberal legislation such as the 1964 Voting Rights Act. Conversely, when volatile pictures of the race riots in Detroit and other cities in the late 1960s hit the airwaves, horrified viewers saw the need for a return to law and order. The footage helped create an anti-civil-rights backlash that encouraged many viewers to vote for conservative Republican Richard Nixon during the 1968 presidential election.

During the past few decades, mass-media news coverage has gone beyond swaying public opinion through mere imagery. Trusted centrist voices such as that of Walter Cronkite, who was known for his impartial reporting of some of the biggest news stories in the 1960s, have been replaced by highly politicized news coverage on cable channels such as conservative Fox News and liberal MSNBC. As broadcasters narrow their focus to cater to more specialized audiences, viewers choose to watch the networks that suit their political bias. Middle-of-the-road network CNN, which aims for nonpartisanship, frequently loses out in the ratings wars against Fox and MSNBC, both of which have fierce groups of supporters. As one reporter put it, "A small partisan base is enough for big ratings; the mildly interested middle might rather watch *Grey's Anatomy* (Poniewozik, 2010)." Critics argue that partisan news networks cause viewers to have less

understanding of opposing political opinions, making them more polarized.

TABLE 9.1 PARTISAN PROFILE OF TV NEWS AUDIENCES IN 2008

News Channel	Republican (%)	Democratic (%)	Independent (%)
Fox News	39	33	22
Nightly Network	22	45	26
MSNBC	18	45	27
CNN	18	51	23
NewsHour	21	46	23

Source: "Partisanship and Cable News Audiences," Oct. 30, 2009, Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, a project of the Pew Research Center

SOCIAL CONTROVERSY

The issue of whether television producers have a responsibility

to promote particular social values continues to generate heated discussion. When the unmarried title character in the CBS series *Murphy Brown*—a comedy show about a divorced anchorwoman—got pregnant and chose to have the baby without any involvement from the father, then–Vice President Dan Quayle referenced the show as an example of degenerating family values. Linking the 1992 Los Angeles riots to a breakdown of family structure and social order, Quayle lambasted producers' poor judgment, saying, "It doesn't help matters when prime-time TV has Murphy Brown, a character who supposedly epitomizes today's intelligent, highly paid professional woman, mocking the importance of fathers by bearing a child alone, and calling it just another 'lifestyle choice (Time, 1992).'" Quayle's outburst sparked lively debate between supporters and opponents of his viewpoint, with some praising his outspoken social commentary and others dismissing him as out of touch with America and its growing number of single mothers.

Similar controversy arose with the portrayal of openly gay characters on prime-time television shows. When the lead character on the ABC sitcom *Ellen* came out in 1997 (2 weeks after Ellen DeGeneres, the actress who played the role, announced that she was gay), she became the first leading gay character on both broadcast and cable networks. The show proved to be a test case for the nation's tolerance of openly gay characters on prime-time TV and became the subject of much debate. Embraced by liberal supporters and lambasted

by conservative objectors (evangelical Baptist minister Jerry Falwell infamously dubbed her "Ellen DeGenerate"), both the actress and the show furthered the quest to make homosexuality acceptable to mainstream audiences. Although *Ellen* was canceled the following year (amid disagreements with producers about whether it should contain a parental advisory warning), DeGeneres successfully returned to television in 2003 with her own talk show. Subsequent shows with prominent gay characters were quick to follow in *Ellen*'s footsteps. According to the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), 18 lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender characters accounted for 3 percent of scripted series regulars in the 2009–2010 broadcast television schedule, up from 1.3 percent in 2006 (Mitchell, 2009).

CREATING STARS VIA REALITY TELEVISION

Emerging out of the 1948 TV series *Candid Camera*, in which people were secretly filmed responding to elaborate practical jokes, reality television aimed to capture real, unscripted life on

camera. The genre developed in several different directions, from home-video clip shows (*America's Funniest Home Videos*, *America's Funniest People*) to true-crime reenactment shows (*America's Most Wanted*, *Unsolved Mysteries*) to thematic shows based on professions of interest (*Project Runway*, *Police Women of Broward County*, *Top Chef*). Near the turn of the millennium, the genre began to lean toward more voyeuristic shows, such as MTV's *The Real World*, an unscripted "documentary" that followed the lives of seven strangers selected to live together in a large house or apartment in a major city. The show drew criticisms for glamorizing bad behavior and encouraging excessive drinking and casual sex, although its ratings soared with each successive controversy (a trend that critics claim encouraged producers to actively stage rating-grabbing scenarios). During the late 1990s and 2000s, a wave of copycat reality TV shows emerged, including the voyeuristic series *Big Brother*, which filmed a group of strangers living together in an isolated house full of cameras in an attempt to win large amounts of cash, and *Survivor*, a game show in which participants competed against each other by performing endurance challenges on an uninhabited island. *Survivor*'s success as the most popular show on television in the summer of 2000 ensured the continued growth of the reality television genre, and producers turned their attention to reality dating shows such as *The Bachelor*, *Temptation Island*, and *Dating in the Dark*. Cheap to produce, with a seemingly never-ending supply of willing

contestants and eager advertising sponsors, reality TV shows continue to bring in big ratings. As of 2010, singing talent competition *American Idol* is television's biggest revenue generator, pulling in $8.1 million in advertising sales every 30 minutes it is on the air (Bond, 2010).

FIGURE 9.12



The stress of appearing on reality television shows has

proved detrimental to some contestants' health. *Britain's Got Talent* star Susan Boyle suffered a nervous breakdown in 2009.

Banalities – SuBo Dreamed a Dream – CC BY 2.0.

Reality TV has created the cultural phenomenon of the instant celebrity. Famous for simply being on the air, reality show contestants are extending their 15 minutes in the spotlight. Kate Gosselin, star of *Jon & Kate Plus 8*, a cable TV show about a couple who have eight children, has since appeared in numerous magazine articles, and in 2010 she starred on celebrity reality dance show *Dancing with the Stars*. *Survivor* contestant Elisabeth Hasselbeck became a co-host on TV talk show *The View*, and several *American Idol* contestants (including Kelly Clarkson and Carrie Underwood) have become household names. The genre has drawn criticism for creating a generation that expects to achieve instant wealth without having to try very hard and also for preying on vulnerable people whom critics call "disposable." When *Britain's Got Talent* star Susan Boyle suffered a public meltdown in 2009 after the stress of transitioning from obscurity to stardom in an extremely short time period, the media began to point out the dangers of reality television. In 2009, TheWrap.com investigated the current lives of former stars of reality shows such as *The Contender*, *Paradise Hotel*, *Wife Swap*, and *Extreme Makeover*, and found that at least 11 participants had

committed suicide as an apparent result of their appearances on screen (Adams, 2009; Feldlinger).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Television has been reflecting changing cultural values since it first gained popularity after World War II. During the 1950s, most programs ignored current events and political issues in favor of family-friendly domestic comedies, which featured White suburban middle-class families. Extreme stress during the 1960s, caused by political events such as the Vietnam War and the Cuban Missile Crisis, led people to turn to escapist television offered by fantasy sitcoms. These provided a sharp dichotomy with the hard-news shows of the era. Social consciousness during the 1970s prompted television producers to reflect changing social attitudes regarding single parenthood, women's roles, and divorce, and sitcom families began to reflect the increasing number of non-nuclear families in society. The increasing popularity of cable TV in the 1980s led to an explosion of news and entertainment channels, some of which raised concerns about the levels of violence on television. During the 1990s and 2000s, TV networks became more specialized, catering to

niche markets in order to meet the needs of an increasingly fragmented audience.

- Television reflects cultural values, and it also influences culture. One example of this is the polarization of cable TV news, which is no longer centrist but caters to individual political tastes. Critics argue that this influences cable news viewers' opinions and makes them less open to opposing political viewpoints. Entertainment programs also play an influential role within society. By portraying controversial relationships such as single parents or gay couples as acceptable, TV shows have the power to shape viewers' attitudes. In recent years, broadcasters have created the concept of the instant celebrity through the genre of reality television. Contestants on reality TV shows now permeate every aspect of culture and the media, from the music charts to popular magazines and newspapers.

EXERCISES

Please respond to the following short-answer writing prompts. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. Choose a popular sitcom from the past 50 years you are familiar with (you can view episodes on Hulu.com to refamiliarize yourself if necessary). Using the ideas in this section as a starting point, identify three ways in which your chosen sitcom reflects or reflected American culture.
2. Spend a few days reviewing news coverage on Fox News and MSNBC. How is coverage of similar news stories different? Do you think partisan news networks can affect public opinion? Why or why not?

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SOURCE EDITION - CHAPTERS 10-12

Chapter 10: Electronic Games and Entertainment

10.1 Electronic Games and Entertainment
10.2 The Evolution of Electronic Games
10.3 Influential Contemporary Games
10.4 The Impact of Video Games on Culture
10.5 Controversial Issues
10.6 Blurring the Boundaries Between Video Games, Information, Entertainment, and Communication

10.1 Electronic Games and Entertainment

WANT TO GET AWAY?

FIGURE 10.1



Anders Adermark – Playing – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Video games have come a long way from using a simple joystick to guide Pac-Man on his mission to find food and avoid ghosts. This is illustrated by a 2007 Southwest Airlines commercial in which two friends are playing a baseball video game on a Nintendo Wii–like console. The batting friend tells the other to throw his pitch—and he does, excitedly firing his controller into the middle of the plasma TV, which then falls off the wall. Both friends stare in shock at the shattered flat screen as the narrator asks, "Want to get away?"

Such a scene is unlikely to have taken place in the early days of video games when Atari reigned supreme and the action of playing solely centered on hand–eye coordination. The

learning curve was relatively nonexistent; players maneuvered a joystick to shoot lines of aliens in the sky, or they turned the wheel on a paddle to play a virtual game of table tennis.

But as video games became increasingly popular, they also became increasingly complex. Consoles upgraded and evolved on a regular basis, and the games kept up. Players called each other with loopholes and tips on how to get Mario and Luigi onto the next level, and now they exchange their tricks on gaming blogs. Games like *The Legend of Zelda* and *Final Fantasy* created alternate worlds and intricate story lines, providing multiple-hour epic adventures.

Long criticized for taking kids out of the backyard and into a sedentary spot in front of the TV, many video games have circled back to their simpler origins and, in doing so, have made players more active. Casual gamers who could quickly figure out how to put together puzzle pieces in *Tetris* can now just as easily figure out how to "swing" a tennis racket with a Wiimote. Video games are no longer a convenient scapegoat for America's obesity problems; *Wii Fit* offers everything from yoga to boxing, and *Dance Dance Revolution* estimates calories burned while players dance.

The logistics of video games continue to change, and as they do, gaming has begun to intersect with every other part of culture. Players can learn how to "perform" their favorite songs with *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band*. Product placement akin to what is seen in movies and on TV is equally prevalent in video games such as the popular *Forza*

Motorsport or *FIFA* series. As the Internet allows for players across the world to participate simultaneously, video games have the potential to one day look like competitive reality shows (Dolan). Arguably, video games even hold a place in the art world, with the increasing complexity of animation and story lines (Tres Kap).

And now, with endless possibilities for the future, video games are attracting new and different demographics. Avid players who grew up with video games may be the first ones to purchase 3-D televisions for the 3-D games of the future (Williams, 2010). But casual players, perhaps of an older demographic, will be drawn to the simplicity of a game like *Wii Bowling*. Video games have become more accessible than ever. Social media websites like Facebook offer free video game applications, and smartphone users can download apps for as little as a dollar, literally putting video games in one's back pocket. Who needs a cumbersome Scrabble board when it's available on a touch screen anytime, anywhere?

Video games have become ubiquitous in modern culture. Understanding them as a medium allows a fuller understanding of their implications in the realms of entertainment, information, and communication. Studying their history reveals new perspectives on the ways video games have affected mainstream culture.

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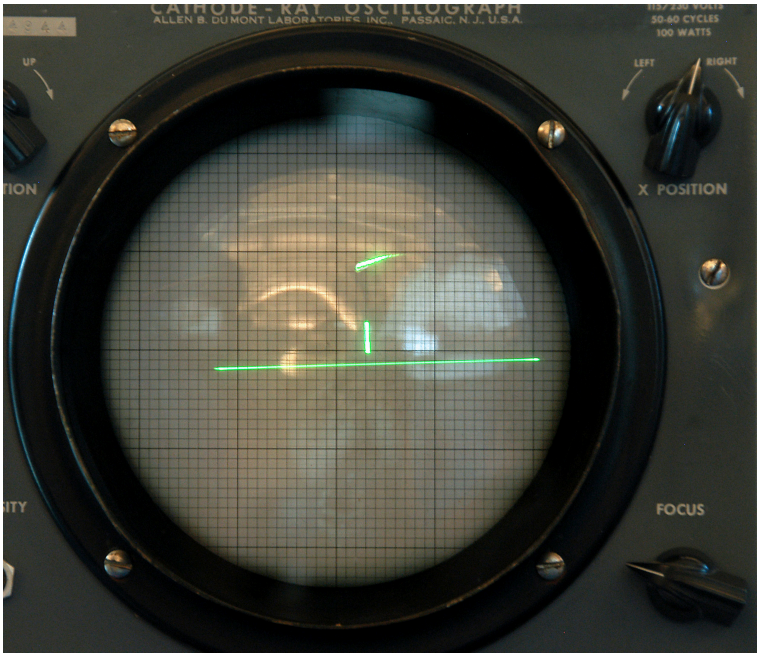
10.2 The Evolution of Electronic Games

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify the major companies involved in video game production.
2. Explain the important innovations that drove the acceptance of video games by mainstream culture.
3. Determine major technological developments that influenced the evolution of video games.

Pong, the electronic table-tennis simulation game, was the first video game for many people who grew up in the 1970s and is now a famous symbol of early video games. However, the precursors to modern video games were created as early as the 1950s. In 1952 a computer simulation of tic-tac-toe was developed for the Electronic Delay Storage Automatic Calculator (EDSAC), one of the first stored-information computers, and in 1958 a game called *Tennis for Two* was developed at Brookhaven National Laboratory as a way to entertain people coming through the laboratory on tours (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, 2008).

FIGURE 10.2



Tennis for Two was a rudimentary game designed to entertain visitors to the Brookhaven National Laboratory.

Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

These games would generate little interest among the modern game-playing public, but at the time they enthralled their users and introduced the basic elements of the cultural video game experience. In a time before personal computers, these games allowed the general public to access technology that had been restricted to the realm of abstract science. *Tennis for Two* created an interface where anyone with basic motor skills

could use a complex machine. The first video games functioned early on as a form of media by essentially disseminating the experience of computer technology to those who did not have access to it.

As video games evolved, their role as a form of media grew as well. Video games have grown from simple tools that made computing technology understandable to forms of media that can communicate cultural values and human relationships.

THE 1970S: THE RISE OF THE VIDEO GAME

The 1970s saw the rise of video games as a cultural phenomenon. A 1972 article in *Rolling Stone* describes the early days of computer gaming:

Reliably, at any nighttime moment (i.e. non-business hours) in North America hundreds of computer technicians are effectively out of their bodies, locked in life-or-death space combat computer-projected onto cathode ray tube display screens, for hours at a time, ruining their eyes, numbing their fingers in frenzied mashing of control buttons,

joyously slaying their friend and wasting their employers' valuable computer time. Something basic is going on (Brand, 1972).

This scene was describing *Spacewar!*, a game developed in the 1960s at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) that spread to other college campuses and computing centers. In the early '70s, very few people owned computers. Most computer users worked or studied at university, business, or government facilities. Those with access to computers were quick to utilize them for gaming purposes.

ARCADE GAMES

The first coin-operated arcade game was modeled on *Spacewar!* It was called *Computer Space*, and it fared poorly among the general public because of its difficult controls. In 1972, *Pong*, the table-tennis simulator that has come to symbolize early computer games, was created by the fledgling company Atari, and it was immediately successful. *Pong* was initially placed in bars with pinball machines and other games of chance, but as video games grew in popularity, they were placed in any establishment that would take them. By the end of the 1970s, so many video arcades were being built that some towns passed zoning laws limiting them (Kent, 1997).

The end of the 1970s ushered in a new era—what some call the golden age of video games—with the game *Space Invaders*, an international phenomenon that exceeded all expectations. In Japan, the game was so popular that it caused a national coin shortage. Games like *Space Invaders* illustrate both the effect of arcade games and their influence on international culture. In two different countries on opposite sides of the globe, Japanese and American teenagers, although they could not speak to one another, were having the same experiences thanks to a video game.

VIDEO GAME CONSOLES

The first video game console for the home began selling in 1972. It was the Magnavox Odyssey, and it was based on prototypes built by Ralph Behr in the late 1960s. This system included a *Pong*-type game, and when the arcade version of *Pong* became popular, the Odyssey began to sell well. Atari, which was making arcade games at the time, decided to produce a home version of *Pong* and released it in 1974. Although this system could only play one game, its graphics and controls were superior to the Odyssey, and it was sold

through a major department store, Sears. Because of these advantages, the Atari home version of *Pong* sold well, and a host of other companies began producing and selling their own versions of *Pong* (Herman, 2008).

A major step forward in the evolution of video games was the development of game cartridges that stored the games and could be interchanged in the console. With this technology, users were no longer limited to a set number of games, leading many video game console makers to switch their emphasis to producing games. Several groups, such as Magnavox, Coleco, and Fairchild, released versions of cartridge-type consoles, but Atari's 2600 console had the upper hand because of the company's work on arcade games. Atari capitalized off of its arcade successes by releasing games that were well known to a public that was frequenting arcades. The popularity of games such as *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man* made the Atari 2600 a successful system. The late 1970s also saw the birth of companies such as Activision, which developed third-party games for the Atari 2600 (Wolf).

HOME COMPUTERS

The birth of the home computer market in the 1970s paralleled the emergence of video game consoles. The first computer designed and sold for the home consumer was the Altair. It was first sold in 1975, several years after video game consoles had been selling, and it sold mainly to a hobbyist market. During this period, people such as Steve Jobs, the founder of Apple, were building computers by hand and selling them to get their start-up businesses going. In 1977, three important computers—Radio Shack's TRS-80, the Commodore PET, and the Apple II—were produced and began selling to the home market (Reimer, 2005).

The rise of personal computers allowed for the development of more complex games. Designers of games such as *Mystery House*, developed in 1979 for the Apple II, and *Rogue*, developed in 1980 and played on IBM PCs, used the processing power of early home computers to develop video games that had extended plots and story lines. In these games, players moved through landscapes composed of basic graphics, solving problems and working through an involved narrative. The development of video games for the personal computer platform expanded the ability of video games to act as media by allowing complex stories to be told and new forms of interaction to take place between players.

THE 1980S: THE CRASH

Atari's success in the home console market was due in large part to its ownership of already-popular arcade games and the large number of game cartridges available for the system. These strengths, however, eventually proved detrimental to the company and led to what is now known as the video game crash of 1983. Atari bet heavily on its past successes with popular arcade games by releasing *Pac-Man* for the Atari 2600. *Pac-Man* was a successful arcade game that did not translate well to the home console, leading to disappointed consumers and lower-than-expected sales. Additionally, Atari produced 10 million of the lackluster *Pac-Man* games on its first run, despite the fact that active consoles were only estimated at 10 million. Similar mistakes were made with a game based on the movie *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*, which has gained notoriety as one of the worst games in Atari's history. It was not received well by consumers despite the success of the movie, and Atari had again bet heavily on its success. Piles of unsold *E.T.* game cartridges were reportedly

buried in the New Mexico desert under a veil of secrecy (Monfort & Bogost, 2009).

As retail outlets became increasingly wary of home console failures, they began stocking fewer games on shelves. This action, combined with an increasing number of companies producing games, led to overproduction and a resulting fallout in the video game market in 1983. Many smaller game developers did not have the capacity to withstand this downturn and went out of business. Although Coleco and Atari were able to make it through the crash, neither company regained its former share of the video game market. It was 1985 when the video game market picked up again.

THE RISE OF NINTENDO

Nintendo, a Japanese card and novelty producer that had begun to produce electronic games in the 1970s, was responsible for arcade games such as *Donkey Kong* in the early 1980s. Its first home console, developed in 1984 for sale in Japan, tried to succeed where Atari had failed. The Nintendo system used newer, better microchips, bought in large quantities, to ensure high-quality graphics at a price consumers could afford. Keeping console prices low meant

Nintendo had to rely on games for most of its profits and maintain control of game production. This was something Atari had failed to do, and it led to a glut of low-priced games that caused the crash of 1983. Nintendo got around this problem with proprietary circuits that would not allow unlicensed games to be played on the console. This allowed Nintendo to dominate the home video game market through the end of the decade, when one-third of homes in the United States had a Nintendo system (Cross & Smits, 2005).

Nintendo introduced its Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) in the United States in 1985. The game *Super Mario Brothers*, released with the system, was also a landmark in video game development. The game employed a narrative in the same manner as more complicated computer games, but its controls were accessible and its objectives simple. The game appealed to a younger demographic, generally boys in the 8–14 range, than the one targeted by Atari (Kline, et. al., 2003). Its designer, Shigeru Miyamoto, tried to mimic the experiences of childhood adventures, creating a fantasy world not based on previous models of science fiction or other literary genres (McLaughlin, 2007). *Super Mario Brothers* also gave Nintendo an iconic character who has been used in numerous other games, television shows, and even a movie. The development of this type of character and fantasy world became the norm for video game makers. Games such as *The Legend of Zelda* became franchises with film and television possibilities rather than simply one-off games.

As video games developed as a form of media, the public struggled to come to grips with the kind of messages this medium was passing on to children. These were no longer simple games of reflex that could be compared to similar nonvideo games or sports; these were forms of media that included stories and messages that concerned parents and children's advocates. Arguments about the larger meaning of the games became common, with some seeing the games as driven by ideas of conquest and gender stereotypes, whereas others saw basic stories about traveling and exploration (Fuller & Jenkins, 1995).

OTHER HOME CONSOLE SYSTEMS

Other software companies were still interested in the home console market in the mid-1980s. Atari released the 2600jr and the 7800 in 1986 after Nintendo's success, but the consoles could not compete with Nintendo. The Sega Corporation, which had been involved with arcade video game production, released its Sega Master System in 1986. Although the system had more graphics possibilities than the NES, Sega failed to

make a dent in Nintendo's market share until the early 1990s, with the release of Sega Genesis (Kerr, 2005).

COMPUTER GAMES FLOURISH AND INNOVATE

The enormous number of games available for Atari consoles in the early 1980s took its toll on video arcades. In 1983, arcade revenues had fallen to a 3-year low, leading game makers to turn to newer technologies that could not be replicated by home consoles. This included arcade games powered by laser discs, such as *Dragon's Lair* and *Space Ace*, but their novelty soon wore off, and laser-disc games became museum pieces (Harmetz, 1984). In 1989, museums were already putting on exhibitions of early arcade games that included ones from the early 1980s. Although newer games continued to come out on arcade platforms, they could not compete with the home console market and never achieved their previous successes

from the early 1980s. Increasingly, arcade gamers chose to stay at home to play games on computers and consoles. Today, dedicated arcades are a dying breed. Most that remain, like the Dave & Buster's and Chuck E. Cheese's chains, offer full-service restaurants and other entertainment attractions to draw in business.

Home games fared better than arcades because they could ride the wave of personal computer purchases that occurred in the 1980s. Some important developments in video games occurred in the mid-1980s with the development of online games. Multiuser dungeons, or MUDs, were role-playing games played online by multiple users at once. The games were generally text-based, describing the world of the MUD through text rather than illustrating it through graphics. The games allowed users to create a character and move through different worlds, accomplishing goals that awarded them with new skills. If characters attained a certain level of proficiency, they could then design their own area of the world. *Habitat*, a game developed in 1986 for the Commodore 64, was a graphic version of this type of game. Users dialed up on modems to a central host server and then controlled characters on screen, interacting with other users (Reimer, 2005).

During the mid-1980s, a demographic shift occurred. Between 1985 and 1987, games designed to run on business computers rose from 15 percent to 40 percent of games sold (Elmer-Dewitt, et. al., 1987). This trend meant that game makers could use the increased processing power of business

computers to create more complex games. It also meant adults were interested in computer games and could become a profitable market.

THE 1990S: THE RAPID EVOLUTION OF VIDEO GAMES

Video games evolved at a rapid rate throughout the 1990s, moving from the first 16-bit systems (named for the amount of data they could process and store) in the early 1990s to the first Internet-enabled home console in 1999. As companies focused on new marketing strategies, wider audiences were targeted, and video games' influence on culture began to be felt.

CONSOLE WARS

Nintendo's dominance of the home console market throughout the late 1980s allowed it to build a large library of games for use on the NES. This also proved to be a weakness, however, because Nintendo was reluctant to improve or change its system for fear of making its game library obsolete. Technology had changed in the years since the introduction of the NES, and companies such as NEC and Sega were ready to challenge Nintendo with 16-bit systems (Slaven).

FIGURE 10.3



Sega's commercials suggested that it was a more violent version of Nintendo.

jeriaska – Splatterhouse – CC BY-NC 2.0.

The Sega Master System had failed to challenge the NES, but with the release of its 16-bit system, Sega Genesis, the company pursued a new marketing strategy. Whereas Nintendo targeted 8- to 14-year-olds, Sega's marketing plan targeted 15- to 17-year olds, making games that were more mature and advertising during programs such as the MTV Video Music Awards. The campaign successfully branded Sega as a cooler version of Nintendo and moved mainstream video games into a more mature arena. Nintendo responded to the Sega Genesis with its own 16-bit system, the Super NES, and began creating

more mature games as well. Games such as Sega's *Mortal Kombat* and Nintendo's *Street Fighter* competed to raise the level of violence possible in a video game. Sega's advertisements even suggested that its game was better because of its more violent possibilities (Gamespot).

By 1994, companies such as 3DO, with its 32-bit system, and Atari, with its allegedly 64-bit Jaguar, attempted to get in on the home console market but failed to use effective marketing strategies to back up their products. Both systems fell out of production before the end of the decade. Sega, fearing that its system would become obsolete, released the 32-bit Saturn system in 1995. The system was rushed into production and did not have enough games available to ensure its success (Cyberia PC). Sony stepped in with its PlayStation console at a time when Sega's Saturn was floundering and before Nintendo's 64-bit system had been released. This system targeted an even older demographic of 14- to 24-year-olds and made a large effect on the market; by March of 2007, Sony had sold 102 million PlayStations (Edge Staff, 2009).

COMPUTER GAMES GAIN MAINSTREAM ACCEPTANCE

Computer games had avid players, but they were still a niche market in the early 1990s. An important step in the mainstream acceptance of personal computer games was the development of the first-person shooter genre. First popularized by the 1992 game *Wolfenstein 3D*, these games put the player in the character's perspective, making it seem as if the player were firing weapons and being attacked. *Doom*, released in 1993, and *Quake*, released in 1996, used the increased processing power of personal computers to create vivid three-dimensional worlds that were impossible to fully replicate on video game consoles of the era. These games pushed realism to new heights and began attracting public attention for their graphic violence.

FIGURE 10.4



Myst challenged the notion that only violent games could be successful.

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Another trend was reaching out to audiences outside of the video-game-playing community. *Myst*, an adventure game where the player walked around an island solving a mystery, drove sales of CD-ROM drives for computers. *Myst*, its sequel *Riven*, and other nonviolent games such as *SimCity* actually outsold *Doom* and *Quake* in the 1990s (Miller, 1999). These nonviolent games appealed to people who did not generally play video games, increasing the form's audience and expanding the types of information that video games put across.

ONLINE GAMING GAINS POPULARITY

A major advance in game technology came with the increase in Internet use by the general public in the 1990s. A major feature of *Doom* was the ability to use multiplayer gaming through the Internet. Strategy games such as *Command and Conquer* and *Total Annihilation* also included options where players could play each other over the Internet. Other fantasy-inspired role-playing games, such as *Ultima Online*, used the Internet to initiate the massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) genre (Reimer). These games used the Internet as their platform, much like the text-based MUDs, creating a space where individuals could play the game while socially interacting with one another.

PORTABLE GAME SYSTEMS

The development of portable game systems was another important aspect of video games during the 1990s. Handheld games had been in use since the 1970s, and a system with interchangeable cartridges had even been sold in the early 1980s. Nintendo released the Game Boy in 1989, using the same principles that made the NES dominate the handheld market throughout the 1990s. The Game Boy was released with the game *Tetris*, using the game's popularity to drive purchases of the unit. The unit's simple design meant users could get 20 hours of playing time on a set of batteries, and this basic design was left essentially unaltered for most of the decade. More advanced handheld systems, such as the Atari Lynx and Sega Game Gear, could not compete with the Game Boy despite their superior graphics and color displays (Hutsko, 2000).

The decade-long success of the Game Boy belies the conventional wisdom of the console wars that more advanced technology makes for a more popular system. The Game Boy's static, simple design was readily accessible, and its stability allowed for a large library of games to be developed for it. Despite using technology almost a decade old, the Game Boy accounted for 30 percent of Nintendo of America's overall revenues at the end of the 1990s (Hutsko, 2000).

THE EARLY 2000S: 21ST-CENTURY GAMES

THE CONSOLE WARS CONTINUE

Sega gave its final effort in the console wars with the Sega Dreamcast in 1999. This console could connect to the Internet, emulating the sophisticated computer games of the 1990s. The new features of the Sega Dreamcast were not enough to save the brand, however, and Sega discontinued production in 2001, leaving the console market entirely (Business Week).

A major problem for Sega's Dreamcast was Sony's release of the PlayStation 2 (PS2) in 2000. The PS2 could function as a DVD player, expanding the role of the console into an entertainment device that did more than play video games. This console was incredibly successful, enjoying a long production run, with more than 106 million units sold worldwide by the end of the decade (A Brief History of Game Console Warfare).

In 2001, two major consoles were released to compete with the PS2: the Xbox and the Nintendo GameCube. The Xbox was an attempt by Microsoft to enter the market with a console that expanded on the functions of other game consoles. The unit had features similar to a PC, including a hard drive and an Ethernet port for online play through its service, Xbox Live. The popularity of the first-person shooter game *Halo*, an Xbox exclusive release, boosted sales as well. Nintendo's GameCube did not offer DVD playback capabilities, choosing instead to focus on gaming functions. Both of these consoles sold millions of units but did not come close to the sales of the PS2.

COMPUTER GAMING BECOMES A NICHE MARKET

As consoles developed to rival the capabilities of personal computers, game developers began to focus more on games for consoles. From 2000 to the end of the decade, the popularity of personal computer games has gradually declined. The computer gaming community, while still significant, is focused on game players who are willing to pay a lot of money on personal computers that are designed specifically for gaming, often including multiple monitors and user modifications that allow personal computers to play newer games. This type of market, though profitable, is not large enough to compete with the audience for the much cheaper game consoles (Kalning, 2008).

THE EVOLUTION OF PORTABLE GAMING

Nintendo continued its control of the handheld game market into the 2000s with the 2001 release of the Game Boy Advance, a redesigned Game Boy that offered 32-bit processing and compatibility with older Game Boy games. In 2004, anticipating Sony's upcoming handheld console, Nintendo released the Nintendo DS, a handheld console that featured two screens and Wi-Fi capabilities for online gaming. Sony's PlayStation Portable (PSP) was released the following year and featured Wi-Fi capabilities as well as a flexible platform that could be used to play other media such as MP3s (Patsuris, 2004). These two consoles, along with their newer versions, continue to dominate the handheld market

One interesting innovation in mobile gaming occurred in 2003 with the release of the Nokia N-Gage. The N-Gage was a combination of a game console and mobile phone that, according to consumers, did not fill either role very well. The product line was discontinued in 2005, but the idea of playing games on phones persisted and has been developed on other platforms (Stone, 2007). Apple currently dominates the industry of mobile phone games; in 2008 and 2009 alone, iPhone games generated $615 million in revenue (Farago, 2010). As mobile phone gaming grows in popularity and as the supporting technology becomes increasingly more advanced,

traditional portable gaming platforms like the DS and the PSP will need to evolve to compete. Nintendo is already planning a successor to the DS that features 3-D graphics without the use of 3-D glasses that it hopes will help the company retain and grow its share of the portable gaming market.

VIDEO GAMES TODAY

The trends of the late 2000s have shown a steadily increasing market for video games. Newer control systems and family-oriented games have made it common for many families to engage in video game play as a group. Online games have continued to develop, gaining unprecedented numbers of players. The overall effect of these innovations has been the increasing acceptance of video game culture by the mainstream.

HOME CONSOLES

The current state of the home console market still involves the three major companies of the past 10 years: Nintendo, Sony, and Microsoft. The release of Microsoft's Xbox 360 led this generation of consoles in 2005. The Xbox 360 featured expanded media capabilities and integrated access to Xbox Live, an online gaming service. Sony's PlayStation 3 (PS3) was released in 2006. It also featured enhanced online access as well as expanded multimedia functions, with the additional capacity to play Blu-ray discs. Nintendo released the Wii at the same time. This console featured a motion-sensitive controller that departed from previous controllers and focused on accessible, often family-oriented games. This combination successfully brought in large numbers of new game players, including many older adults. By June 2010, in the United States, the Wii had sold 71.9 million units, the Xbox 360 had sold 40.3 million, and the PS3 trailed at 35.4 million (VGChartz, 2010). In the wake of the Wii's success, Microsoft and Sony have introduced their own motion-sensitive systems (Mangalindan, 2010).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- In a time before personal computers, early video games allowed the general public to access technology that had been restricted to the realm of abstract science. *Tennis for Two* created an interface where anyone with basic motor skills could use a complex machine. The first video games functioned early on as a form of media by essentially disseminating the experience of computer technology to those without access to it.
- Video games reached wider audiences in the 1990s with the advent of the first-person shooter genre and popular nonaction games such as *Myst*. The games were marketed to older audiences, and their success increased demand for similar games.
- Online capabilities that developed in the 1990s and expanded in the 2000s allowed players to compete in teams. This innovation attracted larger audiences to gaming and led to new means of social communication.
- A new generation of accessible, family-oriented games in the late 2000s encouraged families to interact through video games. These games also brought in older demographics that had never used video games

before.

EXERCISES

Video game marketing has changed to bring in more and more people to the video game audience. Think about the influence video games have had on you or people you know. If you have never played video games, then think about the ways your conceptions of video games have changed. Sketch out a timeline indicating the different occurrences that marked your experiences related to video games. Now compare this timeline to the history of video games from this section. Consider the following questions:

1. How did your own experiences line up with the history of video games?
2. Did you feel the effects of marketing campaigns directed at you or those around you?
3. Were you introduced to video games during a surge in popularity? What games appealed to you?

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10.3 Influential Contemporary Games

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify the effect electronic games have on culture.
2. Select the most influential and important games released to the general public within the last few years.
3. Describe ways new games have changed the video game as a form of media.

With such a short history, the place of video games in culture

is constantly changing and being redefined. Are video games entertainment or art? Should they focus on fostering real-life skills or developing virtual realities? Certain games have come to prominence in recent years for their innovations and genre-expanding attributes. These games are notable for not only great economic success and popularity but also for having a visible influence on culture.

GUITAR HERO AND *ROCK BAND*

The musical series *Guitar Hero*, based on a Japanese arcade game of the late '90s, was first launched in North America in 2005. In the game, the player uses a guitar-shaped controller to match the rhythms and notes of famous rock songs. The closer the player approximates the song, the better the score. This game introduced a new genre of games in which players simulate playing musical instruments. *Rock Band*, released in 2007, uses a similar format, including a microphone for singing, a drum set, and rhythm and bass guitars. These games are based on a similar premise as earlier rhythm-based games such as *Dance Dance Revolution*, in which players keep the

rhythm on a dance pad. *Dance Dance Revolution*, which was introduced to North American audiences in 1999, was successful but not to the extent that the later band-oriented games were. In 2008, music-based games brought in an estimated $1.9 billion.

FIGURE 10.5



Rock Band includes a microphone and a drum set along with a guitar.

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GAME Online – World of Warcraft: Cataclysm for PC – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Guitar Hero and *Rock Band* brought new means of marketing and a kind of cross-media stimulus with them. The songs featured in the games experienced increased downloads and sales—as much as an 840 percent increase in some cases (Peckham, 2008). The potential of this type of game did not escape its developers or the music industry. Games dedicated solely to one band were developed, such as *Guitar Hero: Aerosmith* and *The Beatles: Rock Band*. These games were a mix of music documentary, greatest hits album, and game. They included footage from early concerts, interviews with band members, and, of course, songs that allowed users to play along. When *Guitar Hero: Aerosmith* was released, the band's catalog experienced a 40 percent increase in sales (Quan, 2008).

The rock band Metallica made its album *Death Magnetic* available for *Guitar Hero III* on the same day it was released as an album (Quan, 2008). Other innovations include Rock Band Network, a means for bands and individuals to create versions of their own songs for *Rock Band* that can be downloaded for a fee. The sporadic history of the video game industry makes it unclear if this type of game will maintain

market share or even maintain its popularity, but it has clearly opened new avenues of expression as a form of media.

THE *GRAND THEFT AUTO* SERIES

The first game in the *Grand Theft Auto (GTA)* series was released in 1997 for the PC and Sony PlayStation. The game had players stealing cars—not surprising given its title—and committing a variety of crimes to achieve specific goals. The game's extreme violence made it popular with players of the late 1990s, but its true draw was the variety of options that players could employ in the game. Specific narratives and goals could be pursued, but if players wanted to drive around and explore the city, they could do that as well. A large variety of cars, from sports cars to tractor trailers, were available depending on the player's goals. The violence could likewise be taken to any extreme the player wished, including stealing cars, killing pedestrians, and engaging the police in a shoot-out. This type of game is known as a sandbox game, or open world,

and it is defined by the ability of users to freely pursue their own objectives (Donald, 2000).

The *GTA* series has evolved over the past decade by increasing the realism, options, and explicit content of the first game. *GTA III* and *GTA IV*, as well as a number of spin-off games, such as the recent addition *The Ballad of Gay Tony*, have made the franchise more profitable and more controversial. These newer games have expanded on the idea of an open video game world, allowing players to have their characters buy and manage businesses, play unrelated mini-games (such as bowling and darts), and listen to a wide variety of in-game music, talk shows, and even television programs. However, increasing freedom also results in increasing controversy, as players can choose to solicit prostitutes, visit strip clubs, perform murder sprees, and assault law enforcement agents. Lawsuits have attempted to tie the games to real-life instances of violence, and *GTA* games are routinely the target of political investigations into video game violence (Morales, 2005).

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

World of Warcraft (WoW), released in 2004, is a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) loosely based on the *Warcraft* strategy franchise of the 1990s. The game is conducted entirely online, though it is accessed through purchased software, and players purchase playing time. Each player chooses an avatar, or character, that belongs to one of several races, such as orcs, elves, and humans. These characters can spend their time on the game by completing quests, learning trades, or simply interacting with other characters. As characters gain experience, they obtain skills and earn virtual money. Players also choose whether they can attack other players without prior agreement by choosing a PvP (player versus player) server. The normal server allows players to fight each other, but it can only be done if both players consent. A third server is reserved for those players who want to role-play, or act in character.

FIGURE 10.6



World of Warcraft allows players to team up with other avatars to go on quests or just socialize.

GAME Online – World of Warcraft: Cataclysm for PC – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Various organizations have sprung up within the *WoW* universe. Guilds are groups that ascribe to specific codes of conduct and work together to complete tasks that cannot be accomplished by a lone individual. The guilds are organized by the players; they are not maintained by *WoW* developers. Each has its own unique identity and social rules, much like a college fraternity or social club. Voice communication technology allows players to speak to each other as they complete missions and increases the social bonding that holds such organizations together (Barker, 2006).

WoW has taken the medium of video games to unprecedented levels. Although series such as *Grand Theft Auto* allow players a great deal of freedom, everything done in the games was accounted for at some point. *WoW*, which depends on the actions of millions of players to drive the game, allows people to literally live their lives through a game. In the game, players can earn virtual gold by mining it, killing enemies, and killing other players. It takes a great deal of time to accumulate gold in this manner, so many wealthy players choose to buy this gold with actual dollars. This is technically against the rules of the game, but these rules are unenforceable. Entire real-world industries have developed from this trade in gold. Chinese companies employ workers, or "gold farmers

," who work 10-hour shifts finding gold in *WoW* so that the company can sell it to clients. Other players make money by finding deals on virtual goods and then selling them for a profit. One *WoW* player even "traveled" to Asian servers to take advantage of cheap prices, conducting a virtual import–export business (Davis, 2009).

The unlimited possibilities in such a game expand the idea of what a game is. It is obvious that an individual who buys a video game, takes it home, and plays it during his or her leisure is, in fact, playing a game. But if that person is a "gold farmer" doing repetitious tasks in a virtual world to make a real-world living, the situation is not as clear. *WoW* challenges conventional notions of what a game is by allowing the players to create their own goals. To some players, the goal may be to gain a high level for their character; others may be interested in role-playing, whereas others are focused on making a profit. This kind of flexibility leads to the development of scenarios never before encountered in game-play, such as the development of economic classes.

CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE

The *Call of Duty* series of first-person shooter games is notable for its record-breaking success in the video game market, generating more than $3 billion in retail sales through late 2009 (Ivan, 2009). *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* was released in 2009 to critical acclaim and a great deal of controversy. The game included a 5-minute sequence in which the player, as a CIA agent infiltrating a terrorist cell, takes part in a massacre of innocent civilians. The player was not required to shoot civilians and could skip the sequence if desired, but these options did not stop international attention and calls to ban the game (Games Radar, 2009). Proponents of the series argue that *Call of Duty* has a Mature rating and is not meant to be played by minors. They also point out that the games are less violent than many modern movies. However, the debate has continued, escalating as far as the United Kingdom's House of Commons (Games Radar, 2009).

WII SPORTS AND *WII FIT*

The Nintendo Wii, with its dedicated motion-sensitive controller, was sold starting in 2006. The company had attempted to implement similar controllers in the past, including the Power Glove in 1989, but it had never based an entire console around such a device. The Wii's simple design was combined with basic games such as *Wii Sports* to appeal to previously untapped audiences. *Wii Sports* was included with purchase of the Wii console and served as a means to demonstrate the new technology. It included five games: baseball, bowling, boxing, tennis, and golf. *Wii Sports* created a way for group play without the need for familiarity with video games. It was closer to outdoor social games such as horseshoes or croquet than it was to *Doom*. There was also nothing objectionable about it: no violence, no in-your-face intensity—just a game that even older people could access and enjoy. *Wii Bowling* tournaments were sometimes organized by retirement communities, and many people found the game to be a new way to socialize with their friends and families (Wischnowsky, 2007).

Wii Fit combined the previously incompatible terms "fitness" and "video games." Using a touch-sensitive platform, players could do aerobics, strength training, and yoga. The game kept track of players' weights, acting as a kind of virtual trainer (Vella, 2008). *Wii Fit* used the potential of video games

to create an interactive version of an exercise machine, replacing workout videos and other forms of fitness that had never before considered Nintendo a competitor. This kind of design used the inherent strengths of video games to create a new kind of experience.

Nintendo found most of its past success marketing to younger demographics with games that were less controversial than the 1990s first-person shooters. *Wii Sports* and *Wii Fit* saw Nintendo playing to its strengths and expanding on them with family-friendly games that encouraged multiple generations to use video games as a social platform. This campaign was so successful that it is being imitated by rival companies Sony and Microsoft, which have released the Sony PlayStation Move and the Microsoft Kinect.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band* created a new means of marketing for the music industry. Music featured on the games experienced increased downloads and sales.
- The *Grand Theft Auto* series was revolutionary and controversial for its open-ended field. Players could choose from a number of different options, allowing them to set their own goals and create their own version of the game.

- *World of Warcraft* has brought the MMORPG genre to new heights of popularity. The large number of users has made the game evolve to a level of complexity unheard of in video games.
- *Wii Sports* and *Wii Fit* brought video games to audiences that had never been tapped by game makers. Older adults and families used *Wii Sports* as a means of family bonding, and *Wii Fit* took advantage of motion-controlled game playing to enter the fitness market.

EXERCISES

Think about the ways in which the games from this section were innovative and groundbreaking. Consider the following questions:

1. What new social, technological, or cultural areas did they explore?
2. Pick one of these areas—social, technological, or cultural—and write down ways in which video games could have a future influence in this area.

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10.4 The Impact of Video Games on Culture

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe gaming culture and how it has influenced mainstream culture.
2. Analyze the ways video games have affected other forms of media.
3. Describe how video games can be used for educational purposes.
4. Identify the arguments for and against the depiction of video games as an art.

An NPD poll conducted in 2007 found that 72 percent of the U.S. population had played a video game that year (Faylor, 2008). The increasing number of people playing video games means that video games are having an undeniable effect on

culture. This effect is clearly visible in the increasing mainstream acceptance of aspects of gaming culture. Video games have also changed the way that many other forms of media, from music to film, are produced and consumed. Education has also been changed by video games through the use of new technologies that help teachers and students communicate in new ways through educational games such as *Brain Age*. As video games have an increasing influence on our culture, many have voiced their opinions on whether this form of media should be considered an art.

GAME CULTURE

To fully understand the effects of video games on mainstream culture, it is important to understand the development of gaming culture, or the culture surrounding video games. Video games, like books or movies, have avid users who have made this form of media central to their lives. In the early 1970s, programmers got together in groups to play *Spacewar!*, spending a great deal of time competing in a game that was rudimentary compared to modern games (Brand). As video arcades and home video game consoles gained in popularity, youth culture quickly adapted to this type of media, engaging

in competitions to gain high scores and spending hours at the arcade or with the home console.

In the 1980s, an increasing number of kids were spending time on consoles playing games and, more importantly, increasingly identifying with the characters and products associated with the games. Saturday morning cartoons were made out of the *Pac-Man* and *Super Mario Bros.* games, and an array of nongame merchandise was sold with video game logos and characters. The public recognition of some of these characters has made them into cultural icons. A poll taken in 2007 found that more Canadians surveyed could identify a photo of Mario, from *Super Mario Bros.*, than a photo of the current Canadian prime minister (Cohn & Toronto, 2007).

As the kids who first played *Super Mario Bros.* began to outgrow video games, companies such as Sega, and later Sony and Microsoft, began making games to appeal to older demographics. This has increased the average age of video game players, which was 35 in 2009 (Entertainment Software Association, 2009). The Nintendo Wii has even found a new demographic in retirement communities, where *Wii Bowling* has become a popular form of entertainment for the residents (Wischnowsky). The gradual increase in gaming age has led to an acceptance of video games as an acceptable form of mainstream entertainment.

THE SUBCULTURE OF GEEKS

The acceptance of video games in mainstream culture has consequently changed the way that the culture views certain people. "Geek" was the name given to people who were adept at technology but lacking in the skills that tended to make one popular, like fashion sense or athletic ability. Many of these people, because they often did not fare well in society, favored imaginary worlds such as those found in the fantasy and science fiction genres. Video games were appealing because they were both a fantasy world and a means to excel at something. Jim Rossignol, in his 2008 book *This Gaming Life: Travels in Three Cities*, explained part of the lure of playing *Quake III* online:

Cold mornings, adolescent disinterest, and a nagging hip injury had meant that I was banished from the sports field for many years. I wasn't going to be able to indulge in the camaraderie that sports teams felt or in the extended buzz

of victory through dedication and cooperation. That entire swathe of experience had been cut off from me by cruel circumstance and a good dose of self-defeating apathy. Now, however, there was a possibility for some kind of redemption: a sport for the quick-fingered and the computer-bound; a space of possibility in which I could mold friends and strangers into a proficient gaming team (Rossignol, 2008).

Video games gave a group of excluded people a way to gain proficiency in the social realm. As video games became more of a mainstream phenomenon and video game skills began to be desired by a large number of people, the popular idea of geeks changed. It is now common to see the term "geek" used to mean a person who understands computers and technology. This former slur is also prominent in the media, with headlines in 2010 such as "Geeks in Vogue: Top Ten Cinematic Nerds (Sharp, 2010)."

Many media stories focusing on geeks examine the ways in which this subculture has been accepted by the mainstream. Geeks may have become "cooler," but mainstream culture has also become "geekier." The acceptance of geek culture has led to acceptance of geek aesthetics. The mainstreaming of video games has led to acceptance of fantasy or virtual worlds. This is evident in the popularity of film/book series such as *The Lord of the*

Rings and *Harry Potter*. Comic book characters, emblems of geek culture, have become the vehicles for blockbuster movies such as *Spider-Man* and *The Dark Knight*. The idea of a fantasy or virtual world has come to appeal to greater numbers of people. Virtual worlds such as those represented in the *Grand Theft Auto* and *Halo* series and online games such as *World of Warcraft* have expanded the idea of virtual worlds so that they are not mere means of escape but new ways to interact (Konzack, 2006).

THE EFFECTS OF VIDEO GAMES ON OTHER TYPES OF MEDIA

Video games during the 1970s and '80s were often derivatives of other forms of media. *E.T.*, *Star Wars*, and a number of other games took their cues from movies, television shows, and books. This began to change in the 1980s with the

development of cartoons based on video games, and in the 1990s and 2000s with live-action feature films based on video games.

TELEVISION

Television programs based on video games were an early phenomenon. *Pac-Man*, *Pole Position*, and *Q*bert* were among the animated programs that aired in the early 1980s. In the later 1980s, shows such as *The Super Mario Bros. Super Show!* and *The Legend of Zelda* promoted Nintendo games. In the 1990s, *Pokémon*, originally a game developed for the Nintendo Game Boy, was turned into a television series, a card game, several movies, and even a musical (Internet Movie Database). Recently, several programs have been developed that revolve entirely around video games—the web series *The Guild*, for instance, tells the story of a group of friends who interact through an unspecified MMORPG.

Nielsen, the company that tabulates television ratings, has begun rating video games in a similar fashion. In 2010, this information showed that video games, as a whole, could be considered a kind of fifth network, along with the television networks NBC, ABC, CBS, and Fox (Shields, 2009).

Advertisers use Nielsen ratings to decide which programs to support. The use of this system is changing public perceptions to include video game playing as a habit similar to television watching.

Video games have also influenced the way that television is produced. The Rocket Racing League, scheduled to be launched in 2011, will feature a "virtual racetrack." Racing jets will travel along a virtual track that can only be seen by pilots and spectators with enabled equipment. Applications for mobile devices are being developed that will allow spectators to race virtual jets alongside the ones flying in real time (Hadhazy, 2010). This type of innovation is only possible with a public that has come to demand and rely on the kind of interactivity that video games provide.

FILM

The rise in film adaptations of video games accompanies the increased age of video game users. In 1995, *Mortal Kombat*, a live-action movie based on the video game, grossed over $70 million at the box office, placing it 22nd in the rankings for that year (Box Office Mojo). *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*, released

in 2001, starred well-known actress Angelina Jolie and ranked No. 1 at the box office when it was released, and 15th overall for the year (Box Office Mojo). Films based on video games are an increasingly common sight at the box office, such as producer Jerry Bruckheimer's *Prince of Persia*, or the recent sequel to *Tron*, based on the idea of a virtual gaming arena.

Another aspect of video games' influence on films is how video game releases are marketed and perceived. The release date for anticipated game *Grand Theft Auto IV* was announced and marketed to compete with the release of the film *Iron Man*. *Grand Theft Auto IV* supposedly beat *Iron Man* by $300 million in sales. This kind of comparison is, in some ways, misleading. Video games cost much more than a ticket to a movie, so higher sales does not mean that more people bought the game than the movie. Also, the distribution apparatus for the two media is totally different. Movies can only be released in theaters, whereas video games can be sold at any retail outlet (Associated Press, 2008). What this kind of news story proves, however, is that the general public considers video games as something akin to a film. It is also important to realize that the scale of production and profit for video games is similar to that of films. Video games include music scores, actors, and directors in addition to the game designers, and the budgets for major games reflect this. *Grand Theft Auto IV* cost an estimated $100 million to produce (Bowditch, 2008).

MUSIC

Video games have been accompanied by music ever since the days of the arcade. Video game music was originally limited to computer beeps turned into theme songs. The design of the Nintendo 64, Sega Saturn, and Sony PlayStation made it possible to use sampled audio on new games, meaning songs played on physical instruments could be recorded and used on video games. Beginning with the music of the *Final Fantasy* series, scored by famed composer Nobuo Uematsu, video game music took on film score quality, complete with full orchestral and vocal tracks. This innovation proved beneficial to the music industry. Well-known musicians such as Trent Reznor, Thomas Dolby, Steve Vai, and Joe Satriani were able to create the soundtracks for popular games, giving these artists exposure to new generations of potential fans (Video Games Music Big Hit, 1997). Composing music for video games has turned into a profitable means of employment for many musicians. Schools such as Berklee College of Music, Yale, and New York University have programs that focus on composing music for video games. The students are taught many of the same principles that are involved in film scoring (Khan, 2010).

Many rock bands have allowed their previously recorded songs to be used in video games, similar to a hit song being used on a movie soundtrack. The bands are paid for the rights

to use the song, and their music is exposed to an audience that otherwise might not hear it. As mentioned earlier, games like *Rock Band* and *Guitar Hero* have been used to promote bands. The release of *The Beatles: Rock Band* was timed to coincide with the release of digitally remastered reissues of the Beatles' albums.

Another phenomenon relating to music and video games involves musicians covering video game music. A number of bands perform only video game covers in a variety of styles, such as the popular Japanese group the Black Mages, which performs rock versions of *Final Fantasy* music. Playing video game themes is not limited to rock bands, however. An orchestra and chorus called Video Games Live started a tour in 2005 dedicated to playing well-known video game music. Their performances are often accompanied by graphics projected onto a screen showing relevant sequences from the video games (Play Symphony).

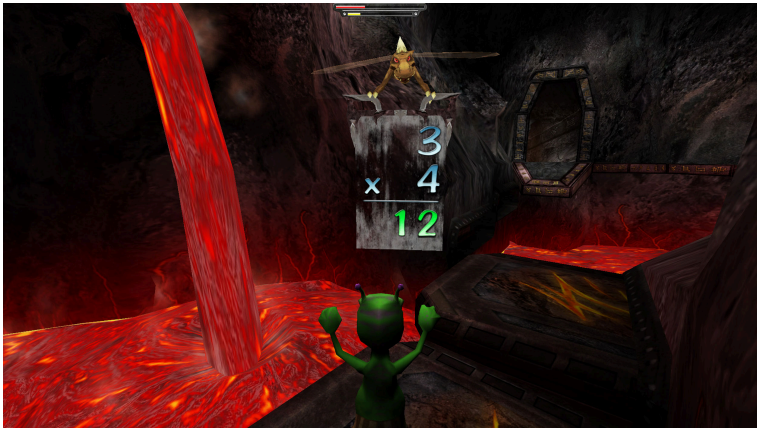
MACHINIMA

Recently, the connection between video games and other media has increased with the popularity of machinima, animated films and series created by recording character

actions inside video games. Beginning with the short film "Diary of a Camper," filmed inside the game *Quake* in 1996, fans of video games have adopted the technique of machinima to tell their own stories. Although these early movies were released only online and targeted a select niche of gamers, professional filmmakers have since adopted the process, using machinima to storyboard scenes and to add a sense of individuality to computer-generated shots. This new form of media is increasingly becoming mainstream, as TV shows such as *South Park* and channels such as MTV2 have introduced machinima to a larger audience (Strickland).

VIDEO GAMES AND EDUCATION

FIGURE 10.7



Educational video games have proven to be useful tools for educators.

One sign of the mainstreaming of video games is the increase of educational institutions that embrace them. As early as the 1980s, games such as *Number Munchers* and *Word Munchers* were designed to help children develop basic math and grammar skills. In 2006, the Federation of American

Scientists completed a study that approved of video game use in education. The study cited the fact that video game systems were present in most households, kids favored learning through video games, and games could be used to facilitate analytical skills (Feller, 2006). Another study, published in the science journal *Nature* in 2002, found that regular video game players had better developed visual-processing skills than people who did not play video games. Participants in the test were asked to play a first-person shooter game for 1 hour a day for 10 days, and were then tested for specific visual attention skills. The playing improved these skills in all participants, but the regular video game players had a greater skill level than the non–game players. According to the study, "Although video-game playing may seem to be rather mindless, it is capable of radically altering visual attention processing (Green & Bavelier, 2003)."

Other educational institutions have begun to embrace video games as well. The Boy Scouts of America have created a "belt loop," something akin to a merit badge, for tasks including learning to play a parent-approved game and developing a schedule to balance video game time with homework (Murphy, 2010). The federal government has also seen the educational potential of video games. A commission on balancing the federal budget suggested a video game that would educate Americans about the necessary costs of balancing the federal budget (Wolf, 2010). The military has similarly embraced video games as training simulators for new

soldiers. These simulators, working off of newer game technologies, present several different realistic options that soldiers could face on the field. The games have also been used as recruiting tools by the U.S. Army and the Army National Guard (Associated Press, 2003).

The ultimate effect of video game use for education, whether in schools or in the public arena, means that video games have been validated by established cultural authorities. Many individuals still resist the idea that video games can be beneficial or have a positive cultural influence, but their embrace by educational institutions has given video games validation.

VIDEO GAMES AS ART

While universally accepted as a form of media, a debate has recently arisen over whether video games can be considered a form of art. Roger Ebert, the well-known film critic, has historically argued that "video games can never be art," citing the fact that video games are meant to be won, whereas art is meant to be experienced (Ebert, 2010).

His remarks have generated an outcry from both video

gamers and developers. Many point to games such as 2009's *Flower*, in which players control the flow of flower petals in the wind, as examples of video games developing into art. *Flower* avoids specific plot and characters to allow the player to focus on interaction with the landscape and the emotion of the game-play (That Game Company). Likewise, more mainstream games such as the popular *Katamari* series, released in 2004, are built around the idea of creation, requiring players to pull together a massive clump of objects in order to create a star.

Video games, once viewed as a mindless source of entertainment, are now being featured in publications such as *The New Yorker* magazine and *The New York Times* (Fisher, 2010). With the development of increasingly complex musical scores and the advent of machinima, the boundaries between video games and other forms of media are slowly blurring. While they may not be considered art by everyone, video games have contributed significantly to modern artistic culture.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The aesthetics and principles of gaming culture have had an increasing effect on mainstream culture. This has led to the gradual acceptance of marginalized social groups and increased comfort with virtual worlds and

the pursuit of new means of interaction.

- Video games have gone from being a derivative medium that took its cues from other media, such as books, films, and music, to being a form of media that other types derive new ideas from. Video games have also interacted with older forms of media to change them and create new means of entertainment and interaction.
- Educational institutions have embraced the use of video games as valuable tools for teaching. These tools include simulated worlds in which important life skills can be learned and improved.
- While video games may not be accepted by everyone as a form of art, there is no doubt that they contribute greatly to artistic media such as music and film.

EXERCISES

Think about the ways in which video games have influenced and affected other forms of media. Then consider the following questions:

1. Are there things video games will never be able to offer?

2. Write down several examples of ways in which other forms of media are not replicated by video games. Then speculate on ways video games could eventually emulate these forms.

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10.5 Controversial Issues

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe controversial issues related to modern video games.
2. Analyze the issues and problems with rating electronic entertainment.
3. Discuss the effects of video game addiction.
4. Examine the gender issues surrounding video games.

The increasing realism and expanded possibilities of video games has inspired a great deal of controversy. However, even early games, though rudimentary and seemingly laughable nowadays, raised controversy over their depiction of adult themes. Although increased realism and graphics capabilities of contemporary video games have increased the shock value of in-game violence, international culture has been struggling

to come to terms with video game violence since the dawn of video games.

VIOLENCE

Violence in video games has been controversial from their earliest days. *Death Race*, an arcade game released in 1976, encouraged drivers to run over stick figures, which then turned into *X*s. Although the programmers claimed that the stick figures were not human, the game was controversial, making national news on the TV talk show *Donahue* and the TV news magazine *60 Minutes*. Video games, regardless of their realism or lack thereof, had added a new potential to the world of games and entertainment: the ability to simulate murder.

The enhanced realism of video games in the 1990s accompanied a rise in violent games as companies expanded the market to target older demographics. A great deal of controversy exists over the influence of this kind of violence on children, and also over the rating system that is applied to video games. There are many stories of real-life violent acts involving video games. The 1999 Columbine High School massacre was quickly linked to the teenage perpetrators' enthusiasm for video games. The families of Columbine victims brought a

lawsuit against 25 video game companies, claiming that if the games had not existed, the massacre would not have happened (Ward, 2001). In 2008, a 17-year-old boy shot his parents after they took away his video game system, killing his mother (Harvey, 2009). Also in 2008, when six teens were arrested for attempted carjacking and robbery, they stated that they were reenacting scenes from *Grand Theft Auto* (Cochran, 2008).

There is no shortage of news stories that involve young men committing crimes relating to an obsession with video games. The controversy has not been resolved regarding the influences behind these crimes. Many studies have linked aggression to video games; however, critics take issue with using the results of these studies to claim that the video games caused the aggression. They point out that people who enact video-game–related crimes already have psychopathic tendencies, and that the results of such research studies are correlational rather than causational—a naturally violent person is drawn to play violent video games (Adams, 2010). Other critics point out that violent games are designed for adults, just as violent movies are, and that parents should enforce stricter standards for their children.

The problem of children's access to violent games is a large and complex one. Video games present difficult issues for those who create the ratings. One problem is the inconsistency that seems to exist in rating video games and movies. Movies with violence or sexual themes are rated either R or NC-17. Filmmakers prefer the R rating over the NC-17 rating because

NC-17 ratings hurt box office sales, and they will often heavily edit films to remove overly graphic content. The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB), rates video games. The two most restrictive ratings the ESRB has put forth are "M" (for Mature; 17 and older; "may contain mature sexual themes, more intense violence, and/or strong language") and "AO" (for Adults Only; 18 and up; "may include graphic depictions of sex and/or violence"). If this rating system were applied to movies, a great deal of movies now rated R would be labeled AO. An AO label can have a devastating effect on game sales; in fact, many retail outlets will not sell games with an AO rating (Hyman, 2005). This creates a situation where a video game with a sexual or violent scene as graphic as the ones seen in R-rated movies is difficult to purchase, whereas a pornographic magazine can be bought at many convenience stores. This issue reveals a unique aspect of video games. Although many of them are designed for adults, the distribution system and culture surrounding video games is still largely youth-oriented.

VIDEO GAME ADDICTION

Another controversial issue is the problem of video game addiction. As of the print date, the American Medical Association (AMA) has not created an official diagnosis of video game addiction, citing the lack of long-term research. However, the AMA uses the term "video game overuse" to describe video game use that begins to affect other aspects of an individual's life, such as relationships and health. Studies have found that socially marginalized people have more of a tendency to overuse games, especially online role-playing games like *World of Warcraft*. Other studies have found that patterns of time usage and social dysfunction in players who overuse games are similar to those of other addictive disorders (Khan, 2007).

FIGURE 10.8



Video game use can become an obsession with some people. Steven Andrew – Video Games – CC BY-NC 2.0.

Groups such as Online Gamers Anonymous have developed a 12-step program similar to that of Alcoholics Anonymous to help gamers deal with problems relating to game overuse. This group is run by former online gamers and family members of those affected by heavy game use (On-line Gamers Anonymous). This problem is not new, but it has become more prevalent. In the early 1990s, many stories surfaced of individuals dropping out of college or getting divorced because of addiction to MUDs (Greene, 1998). In addition, heavy video gaming, much like heavy computer use in an office setting, can result in painful repetitive stress injuries. Even worse are the rare, but serious, cases of death resulting from

video game overuse. In the early '80s, two deaths were linked to the video game *Berzerk*. The players, both in their late teens, suffered fatal heart attacks while struggling to achieve top scores (Arcade History). The issue of video game addiction has become a larger one because of the ubiquity of video games and Internet technology. In countries that have a heavily wired infrastructure, such as South Korea, the problem is even bigger. In 2010, excessive game use was problematic enough that the South Korean government imposed an online gaming curfew for people under the age of 18 that would block certain sites after midnight. This decision followed the death of a 3-month-old baby from starvation while her parents played an online game at an Internet café (Cain, 2010).

Another side of video game addiction is told well by Jim Rossignol in his book *This Gaming Life: Travels in Three Cities*. The book describes Rossignol's job as a journalist for a financial company and his increasing involvement with *Quake III*. Rossignol trained a team of players to compete in virtual online tournaments, scheduling practices and spending the hours afterward analyzing strategies with his teammates. His intense involvement in the game led to poor performance at his job, and he was eventually fired. After being fired, he spent even more time on the game, not caring about his lack of a job or shrinking savings. The story up to this point sounds like a testimonial about the dangers of game addiction. However, because of his expertise in the game, he was hired by a games magazine and enjoyed full-time employment writing about

what he loved doing. Rossignol does not gloss over the fact that games can have a negative influence, but his book speaks to the ways in which gaming—often what would be described as obsessive gaming—can cause positive change in people's lives (Rossignol).

SEXISM

FIGURE 10.9



Games such as *Tomb Raider* and *Dead or Alive Xtreme* have been criticized for their demeaning depiction of women.

Joshua | Ezzell – TOMB RAIDER 2013 | Simplified – CC BY 2.0.

It is no secret that young adult men make up the majority of video gamers. A study in 2009 found that 60 percent of gamers were male, and the average age of players was 35 (Entertainment Software Association, 2009). While the gender gap has certainly narrowed in the past 30 years, video gaming is still in many ways a male-dominated medium.

Male influence can be seen throughout the industry. Women make up less than 12 percent of game designers and programmers, and those who do enter the field often find themselves facing subtle—and not so subtle—sexism (Media Awareness Network). When *Game Developer* magazine

released its list of top 50 people in the video game industry for 2010, bloggers were quick to note that no female developers appeared in the list (Doctorow, 2010). In 2007, scandal erupted over a pornographic comic featuring Jade Raymond, current managing director of the French video game publisher Ubisoft, that surfaced on an online forum. The motivation behind the comic was to allege that Raymond did not deserve her position at Ubisoft because she earned it based on her looks, rather than on her abilities and experience.

Sexism in video games has existed since the early days of the medium. The plot of the infamous *Custer's Revenge*, released for the Atari 2600 in 1982, centered on the rape of a Native American woman. Popular NES games such as *Super Mario Bros.* and *The Legend of Zelda* featured a male figure rescuing a damsel in distress. Both the protagonist and antagonist in the original *Tomb Raider* game had hourglass figures with prominent busts and nonexistent waists, a trend that continues in the franchise today. In 2003, the fighting series *Dead or Alive* released a spin-off game titled *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball* that existed to showcase the well-endowed female characters in swim attire (Strauss, 2010). The spin-off was so popular that two more similar games were released.

Some note that video games are not unique in their demeaning portrayal of women. Like movies, television, and other media forms, video games often fall back on gender stereotyping in order to engage consumers. Defenders point

out that many male video game characters are also depicted lewdly. Games such as *God of War* and *Mortal Kombat* feature hypersexualized men with bulging muscles and aggressive personalities who rely on their brawn rather than their brains. How are men affected by these stereotypes? Laboratory studies have shown that violence and aggression in video games affect men more than women, leading to higher levels of male aggression (Bartholow & Anderson, 2002). While sexism is certainly present in video games, it seems sexual stereotyping affects both genders negatively.

In recent years, game designers have sought to move away from these clichéd representations of gender. The popular game *Portal*, released in 2007, features a female protagonist clad in a simple orange jumpsuit who relies on her wits to solve logic puzzles. Series such as *Half-Life* and *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney* star male heroes who are intellectuals instead of warriors. Other games, like the *Mass Effect* series and *Halo: Reach*, allow gamers to choose the gender of the main character without altering elements of the plot or game-play. However, despite recent strides forward, there is no doubt that as the video game industry continues to evolve, so too will the issue of gender.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Video game violence has been an issue since the 1976 game *Death Race*. The potential of video games to simulate murder created a new issue in entertainment media.
- A great number of news stories link video games with violent crimes. Studies have found a correlation between aggressive behavior and video games, but critics claim that these studies do not prove that video games cause violent acts.
- The video game rating system informs purchasers about the content of a game. The highest rating, Adults Only, hurts video game sales, so companies try to make games that are rated Mature. Critics charge that video game ratings are inconsistent with other schemes, such as the movie rating system.
- Video game addiction is associated more with online games, although many instances of single-player obsessions exist as well. It has become a high-profile issue with the rise in popularity of online gaming.
- The American Medical Association has not developed a diagnosis for video game addiction. Instead, it uses the term "video game overuse" to describe a state where an individual's gaming habits have a detrimental

effect on his or her personal life.

- Sexism and gender issues are hot topics in the video game industry, as female gamers and developers often struggle for equal footing. Controversy has arisen over character stereotypes; however, modern games are beginning to break through conventional barriers of gender.

EXERCISES

Choose video game violence or video game addiction and search for it on the Internet. Examine the research that is associated with the issue you chose. Then consider the following questions:

1. What is your opinion of the issue in light of the research?
2. Has your issue been researched thoroughly?
3. Visit message boards and forums and search for journal articles related to video game addiction or violence. What actions would you suggest to research these issues more fully?

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10.6 Blurring the Boundaries Between Video Games, Information, Entertainment, and Communication

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify how video games allow previously marginalized groups to enjoy new social experiences.
2. Explain how virtual worlds can be used to facilitate learning.
3. Describe the different ways video games have been used to communicate messages.

Early video games were easily identifiable as games. They had basic goals and set rules of play. As games have developed in complexity, they have allowed for newer options and an expanded idea of what constitutes a game. At the same time, the aesthetics and design of game culture have been applied to tools and entertainment phenomena that are not technically games. The result is a blurring of the lines between games and other forms of communication, and the creation of new means of mixing information, entertainment, and communication.

VIDEO GAMES AND THE SOCIAL WORLD OF SPORTS

FIGURE 10.10



Team video games can provide many of the benefits of physical sports.

Fabio Hofnik – New Super Mario Bros. – CC BY-NC 2.0.

Video games have developed in complexity and flexibility to the point that they are providing new kinds of social interactions. This is perhaps clearest when games are compared to physical sports. Most of the abstract reasons for involvement in sports—things like teamwork, problem solving, and leadership—are also reasons to play video games that allow online team interaction. Sports are often portrayed as a social platform where people can learn new skills. Amateur sports teams provide an important means of socialization and communication for many people, allowing individuals from different gender, ethnic, and class backgrounds to find a common forum for communication. Video games have similar capacities; players who engage in online team battles must communicate with one another effectively and learn to collectively solve problems. In fact, video games could arguably provide a more inclusive platform for socializing because they do not exclude most socially or physically challenged individuals. The social platform of online games is certainly no utopia, as competitive endeavors of any sort inevitably create opportunities for negative communication, but it allows people of different genders, races, and nationalities to play on equal footing, a feat that is difficult, if not impossible, in the physical realm.

VIRTUAL WORLDS AND SOCIETAL INTERACTION

Massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) such as *World of Warcraft*, *EverQuest*, and *EVE Online* allow for an unprecedented variety of goals to be pursued. According to one study on online communities,

> that means games are no longer meant to be a solitary activity played by a single individual. Instead, the player is expected to join a virtual community that is parallel with the physical world, in which societal, cultural, and economical systems arise (Zaphiris, et. al., 2008).

MMORPGs can function as a kind of hybrid of social media and video games in this respect. In some instances, these games could function entirely as social media, and not as games. Consider a player who has no desire to achieve any of the prescribed goals of a game, such as going on quests or accomplishing tasks. This individual could simply walk around in social areas and talk to new people. Is the player still

playing a game at this point, or has the game turned into a type of social media?

Virtual worlds such as *Second Life* are good examples of the thin line between games and social media. In this virtual world, users create avatars to represent themselves. They can then explore the world and take part in the culture that characterizes it. The *Second Life* website FAQ (frequently asked questions) tries to illustrate the differences between a virtual world and a video game:

While the Second Life interface and display are similar to most popular massively multiplayer online role playing games (or MMORPGs), there are two key, unique differences:

Creativity: The Second Life virtual world provides almost unlimited freedom to its Residents. This world really is whatever you make it. If you want to hang out with your friends in a garden or nightclub, you can. If you want to go shopping or fight dragons, you can. If you want to start a business, create a game or build a skyscraper you can. It's up to you.

Ownership: Instead of paying a monthly subscription fee, Residents can start a Basic account for FREE. Additional Basic accounts cost a one-time flat fee of just $9.95. If you choose to get land to live, work and build on, you pay a monthly lease fee based on the amount of land you have. You also own anything you create—Residents retain intellectual property rights over their in-world creations (Second Life).

Virtual worlds may differ from traditional video games in

key ways, but these differences will likely be further blurred as games develop. Regardless of the way these worlds are classified, they are based heavily on the aesthetics and design of video games.

Virtual worlds are societies in which communication can be expanded to relay information in ways that cannot be done with other forms of media. Universities have set up virtual classrooms in *Second Life* that employ techniques for teaching that are otherwise impossible. Curriculum can be set up to take advantage of the virtual world's creative capacity (Kluge & Riley, 2008). For example, a class on architecture could lead students through a three-dimensional recreation of a Gothic cathedral, a history class could rely on an interactive battlefield simulation to explain the mechanics of a famous battle, or a physics class could use simulations to demonstrate important principles.

FIGURE 10.11



Virtual classrooms have been used in *Second Life* as new teaching tools.

Wikimedia Commons – CC BY-SA 3.0.

Virtual worlds have been used to relay new kinds of information as well. In 2007, specialists developed virtual-reality simulations to help patients with Asperger's syndrome navigate through social situations. Individuals with Asperger's syndrome have difficulty recognizing nonverbal cues and adapting to change. The simulations allowed these patients to create avatars that then played out social situations such as job interviews. The simulations could be adjusted to allow for more complicated interactions, and the users could replay their own performances to better understand the simulation (University of Texas at Dallas News Center, 2008). The

creation of avatars and the ability to replay scenes until the user improves performance is a direct influence of video games.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND GAMES

FIGURE 10.12



Farm Ville is integrated with Facebook and lets players grow and harvest crops to expand their farms.

tarikgore1 – farmville – CC BY 2.0.

Social media outlets such as Facebook have also used video games to expand their communication platforms. *Farm Ville*, a game in which players plant, harvest, and sell crops and expand their farm plots with the profits, is integrated with Facebook so that all users can connect with their real-life friends in the game. The game adds another aspect of communication—one centered on competition, strategy, and the aesthetics of gameplay—to the Facebook platform. In 2010, *Farm Ville* had 80 million users, an unprecedented number of people playing a

single game. Other games for Facebook include *Lexulous* (formerly *Scrabulous*), a game that mimicked the board game *Scrabble* closely enough that it had to be changed, and *Pet Society*, a game that allows users to raise virtual animals as pets. These games are unique in their demographic scope; they seek to engage literally anyone. By coupling games with social media sites, game designers have pushed the influence of video games to unprecedented levels (Walker, 2010).

Due to the increasing popularity of video games, many social networking websites have emerged in recent years that target hard-core gamers and casual gamers alike. The website GamingPassions.com describes itself as a "free online dating and social networking site for the Video Gaming community" that "allows you to meet other video game lovers who 'get it (Gaming Passions).'" Others, such as DateCraft, target players who share a love of specific games, such as *World of Warcraft*. These websites allow players to socialize outside of the confines of a video game and provide a way for fans of any game to connect (Fawkes, 2010).

MOBILE PHONES AND GAMING

The maker of *FarmVille*, a company called Zynga, has released a number of social networking games that can be played via Internet-enabled mobile phones. *Mafia Wars*, a simulated version of organized crime that originated as an online game, lets users manage their money and complete jobs from their mobile phones. This innovation is only a change of platform from the computer to the phone, but it promises to make gaming a common means of social interaction.

Phones are used to communicate directly with another person, whether through text messages, Facebook posts, or phone calls. Adding games to phones creates a new language that people can use to communicate with each other. One can imagine the ways in which a spat between friends or a couple hooking up could be communicated through this medium. During the week of Valentine's Day in 2010, the creators of *FarmVille* reported that users sent more than 500 million copies of virtual gifts to each other (Ingram, 2010). Competition, aggression, hostility, as well as generosity and general friendliness are given new means of expression with the addition of video games to the mobile platform.

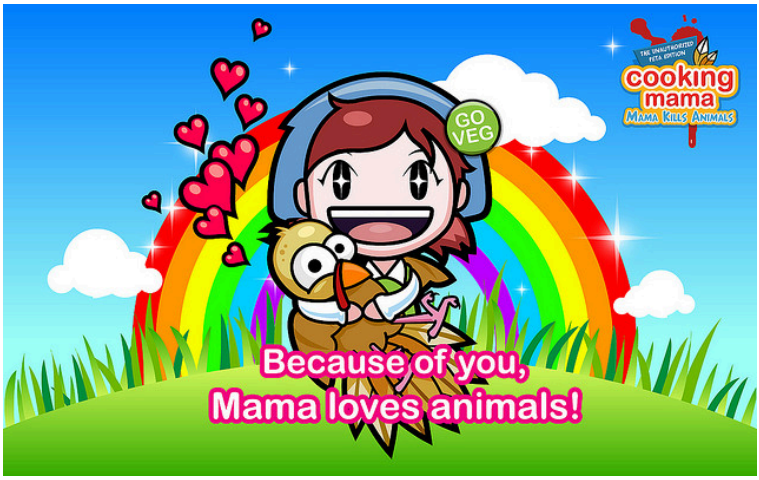
VIDEO GAMES AND THEIR MESSAGES

An important genre of games is often overlooked when focusing on the overall history and effect of video games. These games are created to get a specific point across to the player, and are generally low-budget efforts by individuals or small groups. The group Molleindustria puts out a host of these games, including *Oligarchy*, a game in which the player is an oil-drilling business executive who pursues corruption to gain profits, or *Faith Fighter*, in which religious icons fight each other (Industria). *Downing Street Fighter* is a similar game, designed as a satirical representation of the United Kingdom's 2010 elections (Verjee, 2010).

Other games in this genre include a great deal of content that informs players about current events. One example is *Cutthroat Capitalism*, where users play the part of Somali pirates who are carrying out kidnapping and piracy missions. The player must weigh the risks and rewards of their exploits given a variety of economic factors (Carney, 2009). This game allows players to understand the forces at work behind international phenomena such as piracy. Other games include the *Redistricting Game*, a game aimed at encouraging congressional redistricting reform, and *Planet Green Game*, in which players find ways to conserve energy (McGervan, 2007). These games' publishers have used their medium to transmit

information in new ways. Political satire in the medium of the video game allows the player to, in effect, play a satirical joke to its logical conclusion, exploring the entire scope of the joke. Advocacy games engage players with an interactive political message, rather than sending out traditional media ads. Mainstream groups such as PETA have also turned to video games to convey messages. During the 2008 Thanksgiving season, the animal-rights group released a parody of the popular *Cooking Mama* games to demonstrate the cruelty of eating meat (Sliwinski, 2008).

FIGURE 10.13



The unauthorized PETA edition of *Cooking Mama* tackles the issue of animal cruelty.

Shahab Zargari – Evil Cooking Mama – CC BY 2.0.

Although games of this type are not in a league with game series like *Halo*—either in design or in popularity—they are pushing the boundaries of the video game as a form of media. Political pamphlets were a major source of information and political discourse during the American Revolution. Video games may well come to serve a similar informational function.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Team-oriented video games have allowed new groups to learn skills similar to those learned in physical sports. Team building, competition, and problem solving are all major components of playing on a virtual team.
- Virtual worlds, though not video games in themselves, use the design and principles of video games to create new social spaces. These spaces are being used to create new social platforms and new ways of communicating complex ideas.
- Video games have been added to social networking sites to expand the ways in which people can communicate with each other. The medium of the game allows players to interact with their friends in new ways.

EXERCISES

Several examples of the ways in which virtual worlds could be used for education were mentioned in this section.

1. Think of ways in which this course could be taught in a virtual world. What advantages would this kind of teaching bring to a course like this?
2. What disadvantages does it carry with it?

END-OF-CHAPTER ASSESSMENT

Review Questions

1. Section 1
    1. Identify the companies that headed the video game industry in the 1970s, ’80s, ’90s, and 2000s.
    2. Name three important innovations in video games that appealed to new audiences.
    3. Name three technologies that were fundamental to the evolution of video games.
    4. Explain the importance of the Internet in the evolution of video games.
2. Section 2
    1. Name three of the games listed in this section and explain how they were innovative.
    2. Explain how *World of Warcraft* expanded the

video game as a form of media.
3. How are the latest trends in video games expanding the video game?
4. Compare music releases on *Guitar Hero* or *Rock Band* with traditional music releases such as MP3s or physical albums. What are the advantages and disadvantages of these forms?

3. Section 3

    1. Describe some of the aesthetics and ideas of gaming culture.
    2. Pick a type of media, such as film or books, and analyze the ways that video games have affected it.
    3. Describe one response of mainstream culture to the influence of video games.

4. Section 4

    1. Summarize the points in the public debate over video game violence.
    2. When do you think video game use becomes an addiction?
    3. Name one way that the controversy over video game violence could be addressed.
    4. Explain the ways in which video game and movie ratings differ.

5. Section 5

    1. Give an example of the ways in which video games have allowed people to experience new things.
    2. Give an example of the ways in which virtual worlds can be used in education.
    3. Compare games that advocate political messages with other forms of political persuasion.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. How has youth culture been influenced and even manipulated by the makers of video games?
2. How have video games influenced your communication or learning?
3. Should video games be rated in a different way than movies? Explain your answer.
4. What are the limitations of video games when compared to other forms of media?
5. Do you think the overall influence of video games on culture has been positive or negative? Explain your answer.

CAREER CONNECTION

Video games are a growing industry, and the budgets to create them are increasing every year. Video games require large production teams. The following jobs are important aspects of video game production:

- Game developer
- Art director
- Programmer
- Sound designer
- Producer
- Game tester
- Animator

Choose one of the jobs listed here or find a different job associated with the games industry and research the requirements for it online. When you have researched your job, answer the following questions:

1. What made you choose this job?
2. What strengths do you have that would help you excel at this job?
3. List the steps that you would take if you were to pursue this job.

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Chapter 11: The Internet and Social Media

11.1 The Internet and Social Media
11.2 The Evolution of the Internet
11.3 Social Media and Web 2.0
11.4 The Effects of the Internet and Globalization on Popular Culture and Interpersonal Communication
11.5 Issues and Trends

11.1 The Internet and Social Media

CLEANING UP YOUR ONLINE ACT

FIGURE 11.1



Brian Rosner –
New Friends at CU – CC BY 2.0.

It used to be that applying for a job was fairly simple: send in a resume, write a cover letter, and call a few references to make sure they will say positive things. The hiring manager understands that this is a biased view, designed to make the applicant look good, but that is all forgivable. After all, everyone applying for a particular job is going through this same process, and barring great disasters, the chances of something particularly negative reaching the desk of a hiring manager are not that great.

However, there is a new step that is now an integral part of this application process—hiding (or at least cleaning up)

the applicants' virtual selves. This could entail "Googling"—shorthand for searching on Google—their own name to see the search results. If the first thing that comes up is a Flickr album (an online photo album from the photo-sharing site Flickr) from last month's Olympian-themed cocktail party, it may be a good idea to make that album private to ensure that only friends can view the album.

The ubiquity of Web 2.0 social media like Facebook and Twitter allows anyone to easily start developing an online persona from as early as birth (depending on the openness of one's parents)—and although this online persona may not accurately reflect the individual, it may be one of the first things a stranger sees. Those online photos may not look bad to friends and family, but one's online persona may be a hiring manager's first impression of a prospective employee. Someone in charge of hiring could search the Internet for information on potential new hires even before calling references.

First impressions are an important thing to keep in mind when making an online persona professionally acceptable. Your presence online can be the equivalent of your first words to a brand-new acquaintance. Instead of showing a complete stranger your pictures from a recent party, it might be a better idea to hide those pictures and replace them with a well-written blog—or a professional-looking website.

The content on social networking sites like Facebook, where people use the Internet to meet new people and maintain old friendships, is nearly indestructible and may not actually

belong to the user. In 2008, as Facebook was quickly gaining momentum, *The New York Times* ran an article, "How Sticky Is Membership on Facebook? Just Try Breaking Free"—a title that seems at once like a warning and a big-brother taunt. The website does allow the option of deactivating one's account, but "Facebook servers keep copies of the information in those accounts indefinitely (Aspan, 2008)." It is a double-edged sword: On one hand, users who become disillusioned and quit Facebook can come back at any time and resume their activity; on the other, one's information is never fully deleted. If a job application might be compromised by the presence of a Facebook profile, clearing the slate is possible, albeit with some hard labor. The user must delete, item by item, every individual wall post, every group membership, every photo, and everything else.

Not all social networks are like this—MySpace and Friendster still require users who want to delete their accounts to confirm this several times, but they offer a clear-cut "delete" option—but the sticky nature of Facebook information is nothing new (Aspan, 2008). Google even keeps a cache of deleted web pages, and the Internet Archive keeps decades-old historical records. This transition from ephemeral media—TV and radio, practically over as quickly as they are broadcast—to the enduring permanence of the Internet may seem strange, but in some ways it is built into the very structure of the system. Understanding how the Internet was conceived may help elucidate the ways in which the Internet functions

today—from the difficulties of deleting an online persona to the speedy and near-universal access to the world's information.

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11.2 The Evolution of the Internet

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Define *protocol* and *decentralization* as they relate to the early Internet.
2. Identify technologies that made the Internet accessible.

3. Explain the causes and effects of the dot-com boom and crash.

From its early days as a military-only network to its current status as one of the developed world's primary sources of information and communication, the Internet has come a long way in a short period of time. Yet there are a few elements that have stayed constant and that provide a coherent thread for examining the origins of the now-pervasive medium. The first is the persistence of the Internet—its Cold War beginnings necessarily influencing its design as a decentralized, indestructible communication network.

The second element is the development of rules of communication for computers that enable the machines to turn raw data into useful information. These rules, or protocols, have been developed through consensus by computer scientists to facilitate and control online communication and have shaped the way the Internet works. Facebook is a simple example of a protocol: Users can easily communicate with one another, but only through acceptance of protocols that include wall posts, comments, and messages. Facebook's protocols make communication possible and control that communication.

These two elements connect the Internet's origins to its present-day incarnation. Keeping them in mind as you read

will help you comprehend the history of the Internet, from the Cold War to the Facebook era.

THE HISTORY OF THE INTERNET

The near indestructibility of information on the Internet derives from a military principle used in secure voice transmission: decentralization. In the early 1970s, the RAND Corporation developed a technology (later called "packet switching") that allowed users to send secure voice messages. In contrast to a system known as the hub-and-spoke model, where the telephone operator (the "hub") would patch two people (the "spokes") through directly, this new system allowed for a voice message to be sent through an entire network, or web, of carrier lines, without the need to travel through a central hub, allowing for many different possible paths to the destination.

During the Cold War, the U.S. military was concerned about a nuclear attack destroying the hub in its hub-and-spoke model; with this new web-like model, a secure voice transmission would be more likely to endure a large-scale

attack. A web of data pathways would still be able to transmit secure voice "packets," even if a few of the nodes—places where the web of connections intersected—were destroyed. Only through the destruction of all the nodes in the web could the data traveling along it be completely wiped out—an unlikely event in the case of a highly decentralized network.

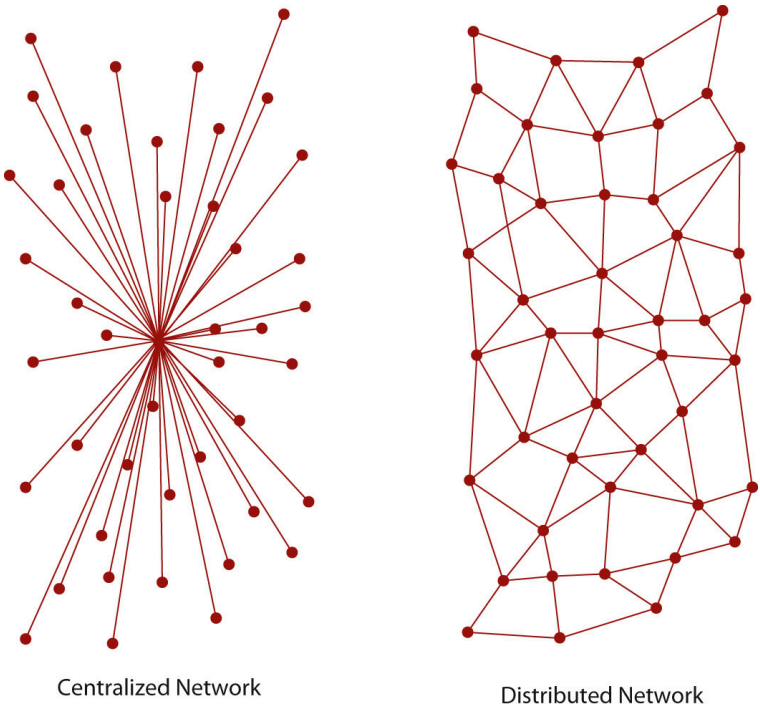
This decentralized network could only function through common communication protocols. Just as we use certain protocols when communicating over a telephone—"hello," "goodbye," and "hold on for a minute" are three examples—any sort of machine-to-machine communication must also use protocols. These protocols constitute a shared language enabling computers to understand each other clearly and easily.

THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF THE INTERNET

In 1973, the U.S. Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) began research on protocols to allow computers to communicate over a distributed network. This work paralleled work done by the RAND Corporation, particularly in the

realm of a web-based network model of communication. Instead of using electronic signals to send an unending stream of ones and zeros over a line (the equivalent of a direct voice connection), DARPA used this new packet-switching technology to send small bundles of data. This way, a message that would have been an unbroken stream of binary data—extremely vulnerable to errors and corruption—could be packaged as only a few hundred numbers.

FIGURE 11.2



Centralized versus distributed communication networks

Imagine a telephone conversation in which any static in the signal would make the message incomprehensible. Whereas humans can infer meaning from "Meet me [static] the restaurant at 8:30" (we replace the static with the word *at*), computers do not necessarily have that logical linguistic capability. To a computer, this constant stream of data is incomplete—or "corrupted," in technological terminology—and confusing. Considering the susceptibility of electronic communication to noise or other forms of

disruption, it would seem like computer-to-computer transmission would be nearly impossible.

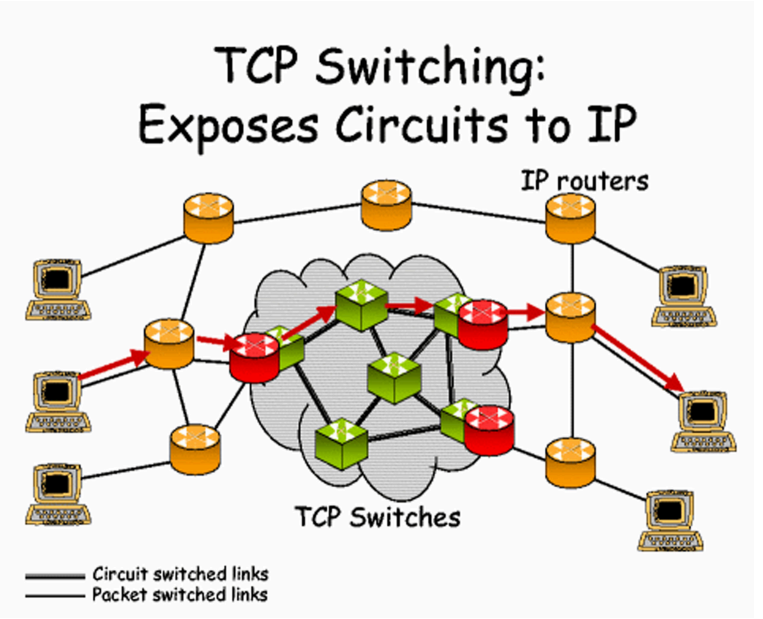
However, the packets in this packet-switching technology have something that allows the receiving computer to make sure the packet has arrived uncorrupted. Because of this new technology and the shared protocols that made computer-to-computer transmission possible, a single large message could be broken into many pieces and sent through an entire web of connections, speeding up transmission and making that transmission more secure.

One of the necessary parts of a network is a host. A host is a physical node that is directly connected to the Internet and "directs traffic" by routing packets of data to and from other computers connected to it. In a normal network, a specific computer is usually not directly connected to the Internet; it is connected through a host. A host in this case is identified by an Internet protocol, or IP, address (a concept that is explained in greater detail later). Each unique IP address refers to a single location on the global Internet, but that IP address can serve as a gateway for many different computers. For example, a college campus may have one global IP address for all of its students' computers, and each student's computer might then have its own local IP address on the school's network. This nested structure allows billions of different global hosts, each with any number of computers connected within their internal networks. Think of a campus postal system: All students share the same global address (1000 College Drive, Anywhere, VT

08759, for example), but they each have an internal mailbox within that system.

The early Internet was called ARPANET, after the U.S. Advanced Research Projects Agency (which added "Defense" to its name and became DARPA in 1973), and consisted of just four hosts: UCLA, Stanford, UC Santa Barbara, and the University of Utah. Now there are over half a million hosts, and each of those hosts likely serves thousands of people (Central Intelligence Agency). Each host uses protocols to connect to an ever-growing network of computers. Because of this, the Internet does not exist in any one place in particular; rather, it is the name we give to the huge network of interconnected computers that collectively form the entity that we think of as the Internet. The Internet is not a physical structure; it is the protocols that make this communication possible.

FIGURE 11.3



A TCP gateway is like a post office because of the way that it directs information to the correct location.

One of the other core components of the Internet is the Transmission Control Protocol (TCP) gateway. Proposed in a 1974 paper, the TCP gateway acts "like a postal service (Cerf, et. al., 1974)." Without knowing a specific physical address, any computer on the network can ask for the owner of any IP address, and the TCP gateway will consult its directory of IP address listings to determine exactly which computer the requester is trying to contact. The development of this technology was an essential building block in the interlinking of networks, as computers could now communicate with each

other without knowing the specific address of a recipient; the TCP gateway would figure it all out. In addition, the TCP gateway checks for errors and ensures that data reaches its destination uncorrupted. Today, this combination of TCP gateways and IP addresses is called TCP/IP and is essentially a worldwide phone book for every host on the Internet.

YOU'VE GOT MAIL: THE BEGINNINGS OF THE ELECTRONIC MAILBOX

E-mail has, in one sense or another, been around for quite a while. Originally, electronic messages were recorded within a single mainframe computer system. Each person working on the computer would have a personal folder, so sending that person a message required nothing more than creating a new document in that person's folder. It was just like leaving a note on someone's desk (Peter, 2004), so that the person would see it when he or she logged onto the computer.

However, once networks began to develop, things became

slightly more complicated. Computer programmer Ray Tomlinson is credited with inventing the naming system we have today, using the @ symbol to denote the server (or host, from the previous section). In other words, name@gmail.com tells the host "gmail.com" (Google's e-mail server) to drop the message into the folder belonging to "name." Tomlinson is credited with writing the first network e-mail using his program SNDMSG in 1971. This invention of a simple standard for e-mail is often cited as one of the most important factors in the rapid spread of the Internet, and is still one of the most widely used Internet services.

The use of e-mail grew in large part because of later commercial developments, especially America Online, that made connecting to e-mail much easier than it had been at its inception. Internet service providers (ISPs) packaged e-mail accounts with Internet access, and almost all web browsers (such as Netscape, discussed later in the section) included a form of e-mail service. In addition to the ISPs, e-mail services like Hotmail and Yahoo! Mail provided free e-mail addresses paid for by small text ads at the bottom of every e-mail message sent. These free "webmail" services soon expanded to comprise a large part of the e-mail services that are available today. Far from the original maximum inbox sizes of a few megabytes, today's e-mail services, like Google's Gmail service, generally provide gigabytes of free storage space.

E-mail has revolutionized written communication. The speed and relatively inexpensive nature of e-mail makes it a

prime competitor of postal services—including FedEx and UPS—that pride themselves on speed. Communicating via e-mail with someone on the other end of the world is just as quick and inexpensive as communicating with a next-door neighbor. However, the growth of Internet shopping and online companies such as Amazon.com has in many ways made the postal service and shipping companies more prominent—not necessarily for communication, but for delivery and remote business operations.

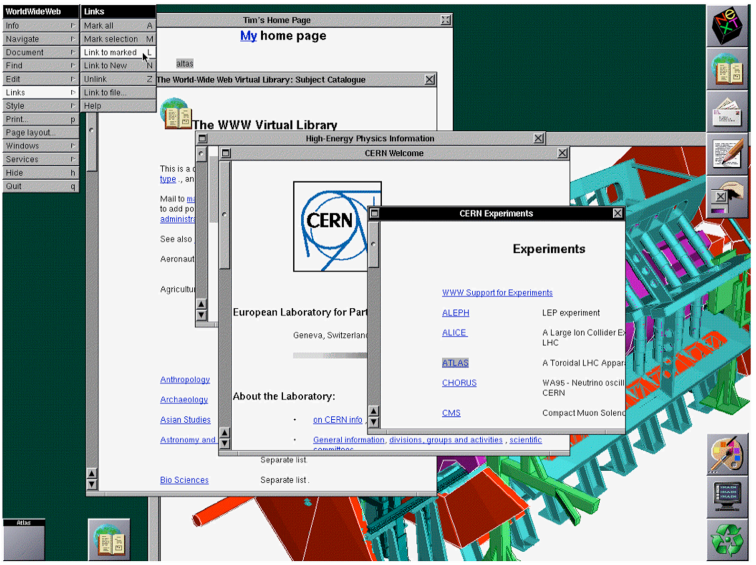
HYPERTEXT: WEB 1.0

In 1989, Tim Berners-Lee, a graduate of Oxford University and software engineer at CERN (the European particle physics laboratory), had the idea of using a new kind of protocol to share documents and information throughout the local CERN network. Instead of transferring regular text-based documents, he created a new language called hypertext markup language (HTML). *Hypertext* was a new word for text that goes beyond the boundaries of a single document. Hypertext can include links to other documents (hyperlinks), text-style formatting, images, and a wide variety of other

components. The basic idea is that documents can be constructed out of a variety of links and can be viewed just as if they are on the user's computer.

This new language required a new communication protocol so that computers could interpret it, and Berners-Lee decided on the name hypertext transfer protocol (HTTP). Through HTTP, hypertext documents can be sent from computer to computer and can then be interpreted by a browser, which turns the HTML files into readable web pages. The browser that Berners-Lee created, called World Wide Web, was a combination browser-editor, allowing users to view other HTML documents and create their own (Berners-Lee, 2009).

FIGURE 11.4



Tim Berners-Lee's first web browser was also a web page editor.

Modern browsers, like Microsoft Internet Explorer and Mozilla Firefox, only allow for the viewing of web pages; other increasingly complicated tools are now marketed for creating web pages, although even the most complicated page can be written entirely from a program like Windows Notepad. The reason web pages can be created with the simplest tools is the adoption of certain protocols by the most common browsers. Because Internet Explorer, Firefox, Apple Safari, Google Chrome, and other browsers all interpret the same code in more or less the same way, creating web pages is as simple as learning how to speak the language of these browsers.

In 1991, the same year that Berners-Lee created his web browser, the Internet connection service Q-Link was renamed America Online, or AOL for short. This service would eventually grow to employ over 20,000 people, on the basis of making Internet access available (and, critically, simple) for anyone with a telephone line. Although the web in 1991 was not what it is today, AOL's software allowed its users to create communities based on just about any subject, and it only required a dial-up modem—a device that connects any computer to the Internet via a telephone line—and the telephone line itself.

In addition, AOL incorporated two technologies—chat rooms and Instant Messenger—into a single program (along with a web browser). Chat rooms allowed many users to type live messages to a "room" full of people, while Instant Messenger allowed two users to communicate privately via text-based messages. The most important aspect of AOL was its encapsulation of all these once-disparate programs into a single user-friendly bundle. Although AOL was later disparaged for customer service issues like its users' inability to deactivate their service, its role in bringing the Internet to mainstream users was instrumental (Zeller Jr., 2005).

In contrast to AOL's proprietary services, the World Wide Web had to be viewed through a standalone web browser. The first of these browsers to make its mark was the program Mosaic, released by the National Center for Supercomputing Applications at the University of Illinois. Mosaic was offered

for free and grew very quickly in popularity due to features that now seem integral to the web. Things like bookmarks, which allow users to save the location of particular pages without having to remember them, and images, now an integral part of the web, were all inventions that made the web more usable for many people (National Center for Supercomputing Appliances).

Although the web browser Mosaic has not been updated since 1997, developers who worked on it went on to create Netscape Navigator, an extremely popular browser during the 1990s. AOL later bought the Netscape company, and the Navigator browser was discontinued in 2008, largely because Netscape Navigator had lost the market to Microsoft's Internet Explorer web browser, which came preloaded on Microsoft's ubiquitous Windows operating system. However, Netscape had long been converting its Navigator software into an open-source program called Mozilla Firefox, which is now the second-most-used web browser on the Internet (detailed in Table 11.1 "Browser Market Share (as of February 2010)") (NetMarketshare). Firefox represents about a quarter of the market—not bad, considering its lack of advertising and Microsoft's natural advantage of packaging Internet Explorer with the majority of personal computers.

TABLE 11.1 BROWSER MARKET SHARE (AS OF FEBRUARY 2010)

Browser	Total Market Share
Microsoft Internet Explorer	62.12%
Firefox	24.43%
Chrome	5.22%
Safari	4.53%
Opera	2.38%

Source: Courtesy Net Applications.com http://www.netapplications.com/

FOR SALE: THE WEB

As web browsers became more available as a less-moderated alternative to AOL's proprietary service, the web became something like a free-for-all of startup companies. The web of this period, often referred to as Web 1.0, featured many specialty sites that used the Internet's ability for global, instantaneous communication to create a new type of business. Another name for this free-for-all of the 1990s is the "dot-com boom." During the boom, it seemed as if almost anyone could build a website and sell it for millions of dollars. However, the "dot-com crash" that occurred later that decade seemed to say otherwise. Quite a few of these Internet startup companies went bankrupt, taking their shareholders down with them. Alan Greenspan, then the chairman of the U.S. Federal Reserve, called this phenomenon "irrational exuberance (Greenspan, 1996)," in large part because investors did not necessarily know how to analyze these particular business plans, and companies that had never turned a profit could be sold for millions. The new business models of the Internet may have done well in the stock market, but they were not necessarily sustainable. In many ways, investors collectively failed to analyze the business prospects of these companies, and once they realized their mistakes (and the companies went bankrupt), much of the recent market growth evaporated. The invention of new technologies can bring with it the belief that

old business tenets no longer apply, but this dangerous belief—the "irrational exuberance" Greenspan spoke of—is not necessarily conducive to long-term growth.

Some lucky dot-com businesses formed during the boom survived the crash and are still around today. For example, eBay, with its online auctions, turned what seemed like a dangerous practice (sending money to a stranger you met over the Internet) into a daily occurrence. A less-fortunate company, eToys.com, got off to a promising start—its stock quadrupled on the day it went public in 1999—but then filed for Chapter 11 "The Internet and Social Media" bankruptcy in 2001 (Barnes, 2001).

One of these startups, theGlobe.com, provided one of the earliest social networking services that exploded in popularity. When theGlobe.com went public, its stock shot from a target price of $9 to a close of $63.50 a share (Kawamoto, 1998). The site itself was started in 1995, building its business on advertising. As skepticism about the dot-com boom grew and advertisers became increasingly skittish about the value of online ads, theGlobe.com ceased to be profitable and shut its doors as a social networking site (The Globe, 2009). Although advertising is pervasive on the Internet today, the current model—largely based on the highly targeted Google AdSense service—did not come around until much later. In the earlier dot-com years, the same ad might be shown on thousands of different web pages, whereas now advertising is often specifically targeted to the content of an individual page.

However, that did not spell the end of social networking on the Internet. Social networking had been going on since at least the invention of Usenet in 1979 (detailed later in the chapter), but the recurring problem was always the same: profitability. This model of free access to user-generated content departed from almost anything previously seen in media, and revenue streams would have to be just as radical.

THE EARLY DAYS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The shared, generalized protocols of the Internet have allowed it to be easily adapted and extended into many different facets of our lives. The Internet shapes everything, from our day-to-day routine—the ability to read newspapers from around the world, for example—to the way research and collaboration are conducted. There are three important aspects of communication that the Internet has changed, and these have instigated profound changes in the way we connect with one

another socially: the speed of information, the volume of information, and the "democratization" of publishing, or the ability of anyone to publish ideas on the web.

One of the Internet's largest and most revolutionary changes has come about through social networking. Because of Twitter, we can now see what all our friends are doing in real time; because of blogs, we can consider the opinions of complete strangers who may never write in traditional print; and because of Facebook, we can find people we haven't talked to for decades, all without making a single awkward telephone call.

Recent years have seen an explosion of new content and services; although the phrase "social media" now seems to be synonymous with websites like Facebook and Twitter, it is worthwhile to consider all the ways a social media platform affects the Internet experience.

HOW DID WE GET HERE? THE LATE 1970S, EARLY 1980S, AND USENET

Almost as soon as TCP stitched the various networks together, a former DARPA scientist named Larry Roberts founded the company Telnet, the first commercial packet-switching company. Two years later, in 1977, the invention of the dial-up modem (in combination with the wider availability of personal computers like the Apple II) made it possible for anyone around the world to access the Internet. With availability extended beyond purely academic and military circles, the Internet quickly became a staple for computer hobbyists.

One of the consequences of the spread of the Internet to hobbyists was the founding of Usenet. In 1979, University of North Carolina graduate students Tom Truscott and Jim Ellis connected three computers in a small network and used a series of programming scripts to post and receive messages. In a very short span of time, this system spread all over the burgeoning Internet. Much like an electronic version of community bulletin boards, anyone with a computer could post a topic or reply on Usenet.

The group was fundamentally and explicitly anarchic, as outlined by the posting "What is Usenet?" This document says, "Usenet is not a democracy...there is no person or group in charge of Usenet ...Usenet cannot be a democracy, autocracy, or any other kind of '-acy (Moraes, et. al., 1998).'" Usenet was not used only for socializing, however, but also for collaboration. In some ways, the service allowed a new kind of collaboration that seemed like the start of a revolution: "I was able to join rec.kites and collectively people in Australia and New Zealand helped me solve a problem and get a circular two-line kite to fly," one user told the United Kingdom's *Guardian* (Jeffery, et. al., 2009).

GEOCITIES: YAHOO! PIONEERS

Fast-forward to 1995: The president and founder of Beverly Hills Internet, David Bohnett, announces that the name of his company is now "GeoCities." GeoCities built its business by allowing users ("homesteaders") to create web pages in "communities" for free, with the stipulation that the company

placed a small advertising banner at the top of each page. Anyone could register a GeoCities site and subsequently build a web page about a topic. Almost all of the community names, like Broadway (live theater) and Athens (philosophy and education), were centered on specific topics (Archive, 1996).

This idea of centering communities on specific topics may have come from Usenet. In Usenet, the domain alt.rec.kites refers to a specific topic (kites) within a category (recreation) within a larger community (alternative topics). This hierarchical model allowed users to organize themselves across the vastness of the Internet, even on a large site like GeoCities. The difference with GeoCities was that it allowed users to do much more than post only text (the limitation of Usenet), while constraining them to a relatively small pool of resources. Although each GeoCities user had only a few megabytes of web space, standardized pictures—like mailbox icons and back buttons—were hosted on GeoCities's main server. GeoCities was such a large part of the Internet, and these standard icons were so ubiquitous, that they have now become a veritable part of the Internet's cultural history. The Web Elements category of the site Internet Archaeology is a good example of how pervasive GeoCities graphics became (Internet Archaeology, 2010).

GeoCities built its business on a freemium model, where basic services are free but subscribers pay extra for things like commercial pages or shopping carts. Other Internet businesses, like Skype and Flickr, use the same model to keep

a vast user base while still profiting from frequent users. Since loss of online advertising revenue was seen as one of the main causes of the dot-com crash, many current web startups are turning toward this freemium model to diversify their income streams (Miller, 2009).

GeoCities's model was so successful that the company Yahoo! bought it for $3.6 billion at its peak in 1999. At the time, GeoCities was the third-most-visited site on the web (behind Yahoo! and AOL), so it seemed like a sure bet. A decade later, on October 26, 2009, Yahoo! closed GeoCities for good in every country except Japan.

Diversification of revenue has become one of the most crucial elements of Internet businesses; from *The Wall Street Journal* online to YouTube, almost every website is now looking for multiple income streams to support its services.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The two primary characteristics of the original Internet were decentralization and free, open protocols that anyone could use. As a result of its decentralized "web" model of organization, the Internet can store data in many different places at once. This makes it very useful for backing up data and very difficult to destroy data that might be unwanted. Protocols play

an important role in this, because they allow some degree of control to exist without a central command structure.

- Two of the most important technological developments were the personal computer (such as the Apple II) and the dial-up modem, which allowed anyone with a phone line to access the developing Internet. America Online also played an important role, making it very easy for practically anyone with a computer to use the Internet. Another development, the web browser, allowed for access to and creation of web pages all over the Internet.
- With the advent of the web browser, it seemed as if anyone could make a website that people wanted to use. The problem was that these sites were driven largely by venture capital and grossly inflated initial public offerings of their stock. After failing to secure any real revenue stream, their stock plummeted, the market crashed, and many of these companies went out of business. In later years, companies tried to diversify their investments, particularly by using a "freemium" model of revenue, in which a company would both sell premium services and advertise, while offering a free pared-down service to casual users.

EXERCISES

Websites have many different ways of paying for themselves, and this can say a lot about both the site and its audience. The business models of today's websites may also directly reflect the lessons learned during the early days of the Internet. Start this exercise by reviewing a list of common ways that websites pay for themselves, how they arrived at these methods, and what it might say about them:

- Advertising: The site probably has many casual viewers and may not necessarily be well established. If there are targeted ads (such as ads directed toward stay-at-home parents with children), then it is possible the site is successful with a small audience.
- Subscription option: The site may be a news site that prides itself on accuracy of information or lack of bias, whose regular readers are willing to pay a premium for the guarantee of quality material. Alternately, the site may cater to a small demographic of Internet users by providing them with exclusive, subscription-only content.
- Selling services: Online services, such as file hosting, or offline services and products are probably the clearest way to determine a site's revenue stream. However,

these commercial sites often are not prized for their unbiased information, and their bias can greatly affect the content on the site.

Choose a website that you visit often, and list which of these revenue streams the site might have. How might this affect the content on the site? Is there a visible effect, or does the site try to hide it? Consider how events during the early history of the Internet may have affected the way the site operates now. Write down a revenue stream that the site does not currently have and how the site designers might implement such a revenue stream.

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11.3 Social Media and Web 2.0

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify the major social networking sites, and give possible uses and demographics for each one.
2. Show the positive and negative effects of blogs on the distribution and creation of information.
3. Explain the ways privacy has been addressed on the Internet.
4. Identify new information that marketers can use because of social networking.

Although GeoCities lost market share, and although theGlobe.com never really made it to the 21st century, social networking has persisted. There are many different types of social media available today, from social networking sites like Facebook to blogging services like Blogger and WordPress.com. All these sites bring something different to the table, and a few of them even try to bring just about everything to the table at once.

SOCIAL NETWORKING

Social networking services—like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn , Google Buzz, and MySpace—provide a limited but public platform for users to create a "profile." This can range anywhere from the 140-character (that's letters and spaces, not words) "tweets" on Twitter, to the highly customizable MySpace, which allows users to blog, customize color schemes, add background images, and play music. Each of these services has its key demographic—MySpace, for example, is particularly geared toward younger users. Its huge array of features made it attractive to this demographic at first, but eventually it was overrun with corporate marketing and solicitations for pornographic websites, leading many users to abandon the service. In addition, competing social networking sites like Facebook offer superior interfaces that have lured away many of MySpace's users. MySpace has attempted to catch up by upgrading its own interface, but it now faces the almost insurmountable obstacle of already-satisfied users of competing social networking services. As Internet technology evolves rapidly, most users have few qualms about moving to whichever site offers the better experience; most users have profiles and accounts on many services at once. But as relational networks become more and more established and concentrated on a few social media sites, it becomes increasingly difficult for newcomers and lagging challengers

to offer the same rich networking experience. For a Facebook user with hundreds of friends in his or her social network, switching to MySpace and bringing along his or her entire network of friends is a daunting and infeasible prospect. Google has attempted to circumvent the problem of luring users to create new social networks by building its Buzz service into its popular Gmail, ensuring that Buzz has a built-in user base and lowering the social costs of joining a new social network by leveraging users' Gmail contact lists. It remains to be seen if Google will be truly successful in establishing a vital new social networking service, but its tactic of integrating Buzz into Gmail underscores how difficult it has become to compete with established social networks like Twitter and Facebook.

Whereas MySpace initially catered to a younger demographic, LinkedIn caters to business professionals looking for networking opportunities. LinkedIn is free to join and allows users to post resumes and job qualifications (rather than astrological signs and favorite TV shows). Its tagline, "Relationships matter," emphasizes the role of an increasingly networked world in business; just as a musician might use MySpace to promote a new band, a LinkedIn user can use the site to promote professional services. While these two sites have basically the same structure, they fulfill different purposes for different social groups; the character of social networking is highly dependent on the type of social circle.

Twitter offers a different approach to social networking, allowing users to "tweet" 140-character messages to their

"followers," making it something of a hybrid of instant messaging and blogging. Twitter is openly searchable, meaning that anyone can visit the site and quickly find out what other Twitter users are saying about any subject. Twitter has proved useful for journalists reporting on breaking news, as well as highlighting the "best of" the Internet. Twitter has also been useful for marketers looking for a free public forum to disseminate marketing messages. It became profitable in December 2009 through a $25 million deal allowing Google and Microsoft to display its users' 140-character messages in their search results (Van Buskirk, 2009). Facebook, originally deployed exclusively to Ivy League schools, has since opened its doors to anyone over 13 with an e-mail account. With the explosion of the service and its huge growth among older demographics, "My parents joined Facebook" has become a common complaint (My Parents Joined Facebook).

Another category of social media, blogs began as an online, public version of a diary or journal. Short for "web logs," these personal sites give anyone a platform to write about anything they want to. Posting tweets on the Twitter service is considered micro-blogging (because of the extremely short length of the posts). Some services, like LiveJournal, highlight their ability to provide up-to-date reports on personal feelings, even going so far as to add a "mood" shorthand at the end of every post. The Blogger service (now owned by Google) allows users with Google accounts to follow friends' blogs and post comments. WordPress.com, the company that created the

open-source blogging platform WordPress.org, and LiveJournal both follow the freemium model by allowing a basic selection of settings for free, with the option to pay for things like custom styles and photo hosting space. What these all have in common, however, is their bundling of social networking (such as the ability to easily link to and comment on friends' blogs) with an expanded platform for self-expression. At this point, most traditional media companies have incorporated blogs, Twitter, and other social media as a way to allow their reporters to update instantly and often. This form of media convergence, discussed in detail in Section 11.3 "The Effects of the Internet and Globalization on Popular Culture and Interpersonal Communication" of this chapter, is now a necessary part of doing business.

There are many other types of social media out there, many of which can be called to mind with a single name: YouTube (video sharing), *Wikipedia* (open-source encyclopedia composed of "wikis" editable by any user), Flickr (photo sharing), and Digg (content sharing). Traditional media outlets have begun referring to these social media services and others like them as "Web 2.0." Web 2.0 is not a new version of the web; rather, the term is a reference to the increased focus on user-generated content and social interaction on the web, as well as the evolution of online tools to facilitate that focus. Instead of relying on professional reporters to get information about a protest in Iran, a person could just search for "Iran" on Twitter and likely end up with hundreds of tweets linking to

everything from blogs to CNN.com to YouTube videos from Iranian citizens themselves. In addition, many of these tweets may actually be instant updates from people using Twitter in Iran. This allows people to receive information straight from the source, without being filtered through news organizations or censored by governments.

GOING VIRAL

In 2009, Susan Boyle, an unemployed middle-aged Scottish woman, appeared on *Britain's Got Talent* and sang "I Dreamed a Dream" from the musical *Les Miserables*, becoming an international star almost overnight. It was not her performance itself that catapulted her to fame and sent her subsequently released album to the top of the UK Billboard charts and kept it there for 6 weeks. What did it was a YouTube video of her performance, viewed by 87,000,000 people and counting (Youtube, 2009).

FIGURE 11.5



Susan Boyle turned from a successful TV contestant into an international celebrity when the YouTube video of her performance went viral.

Youtube.

Media that is spread from person to person when, for example, a friend sends you a link saying "You've got to see this!" is said to have "gone viral." Marketing and advertising agencies have deemed advertising that makes use of this phenomenon as "viral marketing." Yet many YouTube sensations have not come from large marketing firms. For instance, the four-piece

pop-punk band OK Go filmed a music video on a tiny budget for their song "Here It Goes Again" and released it exclusively on YouTube in 2006. Featuring a choreographed dance done on eight separate treadmills, the video quickly became a viral sensation and, as of May 2011, has over 7,265,825 views. The video helped OK Go attract millions of new fans and earned them a Grammy award in 2007, making it one of the most notable successes of viral Internet marketing. Viral marketing is, however, notoriously unpredictable and is liable to spawn remixes, spinoffs, and spoofs that can dilute or damage the messages that marketers intend to spread. Yet, when it is successful, viral marketing can reach millions of people for very little money and can even make it into the mainstream news.

Recent successes and failures in viral marketing demonstrate how difficult it is for marketers to control their message as it is unleashed virally. In 2007, the band Radiohead released their album *In Rainbows* online, allowing fans to download it for any amount of money they chose—including for free. Despite practically giving the album away, the digital release of *In Rainbows* still pulled in more money than Radiohead's previous album, *Hail to the Thief*, while the band simultaneously sold a huge number of $80 collector editions and still sold physical CDs months after the digital release became available (New Musical Express, 2008). In contrast, the food giant Healthy Choice enlisted Classymommy.com blogger Colleen Padilla to write a sponsored review of its product, leading to a featured *New York Times* article on the

blogger (not the product), which gave the product only a passing mention (Joshi, 2009). Often, a successfully marketed product will reach some people through the Internet and then break through into the mainstream media. Yet as the article about Padilla shows, sometimes the person writing about the product overshadows the product itself.

Not all viral media is marketing, however. In 2007, someone posted a link to a new trailer for *Grand Theft Auto IV* on the video games message board of the web forum 4chan.org. When users followed the link, they were greeted not with a video game trailer but with Rick Astley singing his 1987 hit "Never Gonna Give You Up." This technique—redirecting someone to that particular music video—became known as Rickrolling and quickly became one of the most well-known Internet memes of all time (Fox News, 2008). An Internet meme is a concept that quickly replicates itself throughout the Internet, and it is often nonsensical and absurd. Another meme, "Lolcats," consists of misspelled captions—"I can has cheezburger?" is a classic example—over pictures of cats. Often, these memes take on a metatextual quality, such as the meme "Milhouse is not a meme," in which the character Milhouse (from the TV show *The Simpsons*) is told that he is not a meme. Chronicling memes is notoriously difficult, because they typically spring into existence seemingly overnight, propagate rapidly, and disappear before ever making it onto the radar of mainstream media—or even the mainstream Internet user.

BENEFITS AND PROBLEMS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media allows an unprecedented volume of personal, informal communication in real time from anywhere in the world. It allows users to keep in touch with friends on other continents, yet keeps the conversation as casual as a Facebook wall post. In addition, blogs allow us to gauge a wide variety of opinions and have given "breaking news" a whole new meaning. Now, news can be distributed through many major outlets almost instantaneously, and different perspectives on any one event can be aired concurrently. In addition, news organizations can harness bloggers as sources of real-time news, in effect outsourcing some of their news-gathering efforts to bystanders on the scene. This practice of harnessing the efforts of several individuals online to solve a problem is known as crowdsourcing.

The downside of the seemingly infinite breadth of online information is that there is often not much depth to the coverage of any given topic. The superficiality of information on the Internet is a common gripe among many journalists who are now rushed to file news reports several times a day in an effort to complete with the "blogosphere," or the crowd of bloggers who post both original news stories and aggregate previously published news from other sources. Whereas traditional print organizations at least had the "luxury" of the daily print deadline, now journalists are expected to blog or tweet every story and file reports with little or no analysis, often without adequate time to confirm the reliability of their sources (Auletta, 2010).

Additionally, news aggregators like Google News profit from linking to journalists' stories at major newspapers and selling advertising, but these profits are not shared with the news organizations and journalists who created the stories. It is often difficult for journalists to keep up with the immediacy of the nonstop news cycle, and with revenues for their efforts being diverted to news aggregators, journalists and news organizations increasingly lack the resources to keep up this fast pace. Twitter presents a similar problem: Instead of getting news from a specific newspaper, many people simply read the articles that are linked from a Twitter feed. As a result, the news cycle leaves journalists no time for analysis or cross-examination. Increasingly, they will simply report, for example, on what a politician or public relations representative says

without following up on these comments or fact-checking them. This further shortens the news cycle and makes it much easier for journalists to be exploited as the mouthpieces of propaganda.

Consequently, the very presence of blogs and their seeming importance even among mainstream media has made some critics wary. Internet entrepreneur Andrew Keen is one of these people, and his book *The Cult of the Amateur* follows up on the famous thought experiment suggesting that infinite monkeys, given infinite typewriters, will one day randomly produce a great work of literature (Huxley): "In our Web 2.0 world, the typewriters aren't quite typewriters, but rather networked personal computers, and the monkeys aren't quite monkeys, but rather Internet users (Keen, 2007)." Keen also suggests that the Internet is really just a case of my-word-against-yours, where bloggers are not required to back up their arguments with credible sources. "These days, kids can't tell the difference between credible news by objective professional journalists and what they read on [a random website] (Keen, 2007)." Commentators like Keen worry that this trend will lead to young people's inability to distinguish credible information from a mass of sources, eventually leading to a sharp decrease in credible sources of information.

For defenders of the Internet, this argument seems a bit overwrought: "A legitimate interest in the possible effects of significant technological change in our daily lives can inadvertently dovetail seamlessly into a 'kids these days'

curmudgeonly sense of generational degeneration, which is hardly new (Downey, 2009)." Greg Downey, who runs the collaborative blog Neuroanthropology, says that fear of kids on the Internet—and on social media in particular—can slip into "a 'one-paranoia-fits-all' approach to technological change." For the argument that online experiences are "devoid of cohesive narrative and long-term significance," Downey offers that, on the contrary, "far from evacuating narrative, some social networking sites might be said to cause users to 'narrativize' their experience, engaging with everyday life already with an eye toward how they will represent it on their personal pages."

Another argument in favor of social media defies the warning that time spent on social networking sites is destroying the social skills of young people. "The debasement of the word 'friend' by [Facebook's] use of it should not make us assume that users can't tell the difference between friends and Facebook 'friends,'" writes Downey. On the contrary, social networks (like the Usenet of the past) can even provide a place for people with more obscure interests to meet one another and share commonalities. In addition, marketing through social media is completely free—making it a valuable tool for small businesses with tight marketing budgets. A community theater can invite all of its "fans" to a new play for less money than putting an ad in the newspaper, and this direct invitation is far more personal and specific. Many people see services like Twitter, with its "followers," as more semantically

appropriate than the "friends" found on Facebook and MySpace, and because of this Twitter has, in many ways, changed yet again the way social media is conceived. Rather than connecting with "friends," Twitter allows social media to be purely a source of information, thereby making it far more appealing to adults. In addition, while 140 characters may seem like a constraint to some, it can be remarkably useful to the time-strapped user looking to catch up on recent news.

Social media's detractors also point to the sheer banality of much of the conversation on the Internet. Again, Downey keeps this in perspective: "The banality of most conversation is also pretty frustrating," he says. Downey suggests that many of the young people using social networking tools see them as just another aspect of communication. However, Downey warns that online bullying has the potential to pervade larger social networks while shielding perpetrators through anonymity.

Another downside of many of the Internet's segmented communities is that users tend to be exposed only to information they are interested in and opinions they agree with. This lack of exposure to novel ideas and contrary opinions can create or reinforce a lack of understanding among people with different beliefs, and make political and social compromise more difficult to come by.

While the situation may not be as dire as Keen suggests in his book, there are clearly some important arguments to consider regarding the effects of the web and social media in particular. The main concerns come down to two things: the

possibility that the volume of amateur, user-generated content online is overshadowing better-researched sources, and the questionable ability of users to tell the difference between the two.

EDUCATION, THE INTERNET, AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Although Facebook began at Harvard University and quickly became popular among the Ivy League colleges, the social network has since been lambasted as a distraction for students. Instead of studying, the argument claims, students will sit in the library and browse Facebook, messaging their friends and getting nothing done. Two doctoral candidates, Aryn Karpinski (Ohio State University) and Adam Duberstein (Ohio Dominican University), studied the effects of Facebook use on college students and found that students who use Facebook generally receive a full grade lower—a half point on the GPA scale—than students who do not (Hamilton, 2009).

Correlation does not imply causation, though, as Karpinski said that Facebook users may just be "prone to distraction."

On the other hand, students' access to technology and the Internet may allow them to pursue their education to a greater degree than they could otherwise. At a school in Arizona, students are issued laptops instead of textbooks, and some of their school buses have Wi-Fi Internet access. As a result, bus rides, including the long trips that are often a requirement of high school sports, are spent studying. Of course, the students had laptops long before their bus rides were connected to the Internet, but the Wi-Fi technology has "transformed what was often a boisterous bus ride into a rolling study hall (Dillon, 2010)." Even though not all students studied all the time, enabling students to work on bus rides fulfilled the school's goal of extending the educational hours beyond the usual 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

PRIVACY ISSUES WITH SOCIAL NETWORKING

Social networking provides unprecedented ways to keep in touch with friends, but that ability can sometimes be a double-

edged sword. Users can update friends with every latest achievement—"[your name here] just won three straight games of solitaire!"—but may also unwittingly be updating bosses and others from whom particular bits of information should be hidden.

The shrinking of privacy online has been rapidly exacerbated by social networks, and for a surprising reason: conscious decisions made by participants. Putting personal information online—even if it is set to be viewed by only select friends—has become fairly standard. Dr. Kieron O'Hara studies privacy in social media and calls this era "intimacy 2.0 (Kleinman, 2010)," a riff on the buzzword "Web 2.0." One of O'Hara's arguments is that legal issues of privacy are based on what is called a "reasonable standard." According to O'Hara, the excessive sharing of personal information on the Internet by *some* constitutes an offense to the privacy of *all*, because it lowers the "reasonable standard" that can be legally enforced. In other words, as cultural tendencies toward privacy degrade on the Internet, it affects not only the privacy of those who choose to share their information, but also the privacy of those who do not.

PRIVACY SETTINGS ON FACEBOOK

With over 500 million users, it is no surprise that Facebook is one of the upcoming battlegrounds for privacy on the Internet. When Facebook updated its privacy settings in 2009 for these people, "privacy groups including the American Civil Liberties Union...[called] the developments 'flawed' and 'worrisome,'" reported *The Guardian* in late 2009 (Johnson, 2009).

Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook, discusses privacy issues on a regular basis in forums ranging from his official Facebook blog to conferences. At the Crunchies Awards in San Francisco in early 2010, Zuckerberg claimed that privacy was no longer a "social norm (Johnson, 2010)." This statement follows from his company's late-2009 decision to make public information sharing the default setting on Facebook. Whereas users were previously able to restrict public access to basic profile information

like their names and friends, the new settings make this information publicly available with no option to make it private. Although Facebook publicly announced the changes, many outraged users first learned of the updates to the default privacy settings when they discovered—too late—that they had inadvertently broadcast private information. Facebook argues that the added complexity of the privacy settings gives users more control over their information. However, opponents counter that adding more complex privacy controls while simultaneously making public sharing the default setting for those controls is a blatant ploy to push casual users into sharing more of their information publicly—information that Facebook will then use to offer more targeted advertising (Bankston, 2009).

In response to the privacy policy, many users have formed their own grassroots protest groups within Facebook. In response to critiques, Facebook changed its privacy policy again in May 2010 with three primary changes. First, privacy controls are simpler. Instead of various controls on multiple pages, there is now one main control users can use to determine who can see their information. Second, Facebook made less information publicly available. Public information is now limited to basic information, such as a user's name and profile picture. Finally, it is now easier to block applications and third-party websites from accessing user information (Lake, 2010).

Similar to the Facebook controversy, Google's social networking Gmail add-on called Buzz automatically signed up Gmail users to "follow" the most e-mailed Gmail users in their address book. Because all of these lists were public by default, users' most e-mailed contacts were made available for anyone to see. This was especially alarming for people like journalists who potentially had confidential sources exposed to a public audience. However, even though this mistake—which Google quickly corrected—created a lot of controversy around Buzz, it did not stop users from creating over 9 million posts in the first 2 days of the service (Jackson, 2010). Google's integration of Buzz into its Gmail service may have been upsetting to users not accustomed to the pitfalls of social networking, but Google's misstep has not discouraged millions of others from trying the service, perhaps due to their experience dealing with Facebook's ongoing issues with privacy infringement.

For example, Facebook's old privacy settings integrated a collection of applications (written by third-party developers) that included everything from "Which *American Idol* Contestant Are You?" to an "Honesty Box" that allows friends to send anonymous criticism. "Allowing Honesty Box access will let it pull your profile information, photos, your friends' info, and other content that it requires to work," reads the disclaimer on the application installation page. The ACLU drew

particular attention to the "app gap" that allowed "any quiz or application run by you to access information about you and your friends (Ozer, 2009)." In other words, merely using someone else's Honesty Box gave the program information about your "religion, sexual orientation, political affiliation, pictures, and groups (Ozer, 2009)." There are many reasons that unrelated applications may want to collect this information, but one of the most prominent is, by now, a very old story: selling products. The more information a marketer has, the better he or she can target a message, and the more likely it is that the recipient will buy something.

FIGURE 11.6



Zynga, one of the top social game developers on Facebook, created the game *FarmVille*. Because *FarmVille* is ad-supported and gives users the option to purchase Farmville virtual currency with actual money, the game is free and accessible for everyone to play.

Rachel – My Farmville farm – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

SOCIAL MEDIA'S EFFECT ON COMMERCE

Social media on the Internet has been around for a while, and it has always been of some interest to marketers. The ability to target advertising based on demographic information given willingly to the service—age, political preference, gender, and location—allows marketers to target advertising extremely efficiently. However, by the time Facebook's population passed the 350-million mark, marketers were scrambling to harness social media. The increasingly difficult-to-reach younger demographic has been rejecting radios for Apple's iPod mobile digital devices and TV for YouTube. Increasingly, marketers are turning to social networks as a way to reach these consumers. Culturally, these developments indicate a mistrust among consumers of traditional marketing techniques; marketers must now use new and more personalized ways of reaching consumers if they are going to sell their products.

The attempts of marketers to harness the viral spread of media on the Internet have already been discussed earlier in the chapter. Marketers try to determine the trend of things "going viral," with the goal of getting millions of YouTube views; becoming a hot topic on Google Trends, a website that measures the most frequently searched topics on the web; or even just being the subject of a post on a well-known blog. For example, Procter & Gamble sent free samples of its Swiffer

dust mop to stay-at-home-mom bloggers with a large online audience. And in 2008, the movie *College* (or *College: The Movie*) used its tagline "Best.Weekend.Ever." as the prompt for a YouTube video contest. Contestants were invited to submit videos of their best college weekend ever, and the winner received a monetary prize (Hickey, 2008).

What these two instances of marketing have in common is that they approach people who are already doing something they enjoy doing—blogging or making movies—and give them a relatively small amount of compensation for providing advertising. This differs from methods of traditional advertising because marketers seek to bridge a credibility gap with consumers. Marketers have been doing this for ages—long before breakfast cereal slogans like "Kid Tested, Mother Approved" or "Mikey likes it" ever hit the airwaves. The difference is that now the people pushing the products can be friends or family members, all via social networks.

For instance, in 2007, a program called Beacon was launched as part of Facebook. With Beacon, a Facebook user is confronted with the option to "share" an online purchase from partnering sites. For example, a user might buy a book from Amazon.com and check the corresponding "share" box in the checkout process, and all of his or her friends will receive a message notifying them that this person purchased and recommends this particular product. Explaining the reason for this shift in a *New York Times* article, Mark Zuckerberg said, "Nothing influences a person more than a trusted friend

(Story, 2007)." However, many Facebook users did not want their purchasing information shared with other Facebookers, and the service was shut down in 2009 and subsequently became the subject of a class action lawsuit. Facebook's troubles with Beacon illustrate the thin line between taking advantage of the tremendous marketing potential of social media and violating the privacy of users.

Facebook's questionable alliance with marketers through Beacon was driven by a need to create reliable revenue streams. One of the most crucial aspects of social media is the profitability factor. In the 1990s, theGlobe.com was one of the promising new startups, but almost as quickly, it went under due to lack of funds. The lesson of theGlobe.com has not gone unheeded by today's social media services. For example, Twitter has sold access to its content to Google and Microsoft to make users' tweets searchable for $25 million.

Google's Buzz is one of the most interesting services in this respect, because Google's main business is advertising—and it is a highly successful business. Google's search algorithms allow it to target advertising to a user's specific tastes. As Google enters the social media world, its advertising capabilities will only be compounded as users reveal more information about themselves via Buzz. Although it does not seem that users choose their social media services based on how the services generate their revenue streams, the issue of privacy in social media is in large part an issue of how much information users are willing to share with advertisers. For

example, using Google's search engine, Buzz, Gmail, and Blogger give that single company an immense amount of information and a historically unsurpassed ability to market to specific groups. At this relatively early stage of the fledgling online social media business—both Twitter and Facebook only very recently turned a profit, so commerce has only recently come into play—it is impossible to say whether the commerce side of things will transform the way people use the services. If the uproar over Facebook's Beacon is any lesson, however, the relationship between social media and advertising is ripe for controversy.

SOCIAL MEDIA AS A TOOL FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

The use of Facebook and Twitter in the recent political uprisings in the Middle East has brought to the fore the

question whether social media can be an effective tool for social change.

On January 14, 2011, after month-long protests against fraud, economic crisis, and lack of political freedom, the Tunisian public ousted President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. Soon after the Tunisian rebellion, the Egyptian public expelled President Hosni Mubarak, who had ruled the country for 30 years. Nearly immediately, other Middle Eastern countries such as Algeria, Libya, Yemen, and Bahrain also erupted against their oppressive governments in the hopes of obtaining political freedom (Gamba, 2011).

What is common among all these uprisings is the role played by social media. In nearly all of these countries, restrictions were imposed on the media and government resistance was brutally discouraged (Beaumont, 2011). This seems to have inspired the entire Middle East to organize online to rebel against tyrannical rule (Taylor, 2011). Protesters used social media not only to organize against their governments but also to share their struggles with the rest of the world (Gamba).

In Tunisia, protesters filled the streets by sharing information on Twitter (Taylor). Egypt's protests were organized on Facebook pages. Details of the demonstrations were circulated by both Facebook and Twitter. E-mail was used to distribute the activists' guide to challenging the regime (Beaumont). Libyan dissenters too

spread the word about their demonstrations similarly (Taylor).

Owing to the role played by Twitter and Facebook in helping protesters organize and communicate with each other, many have termed these rebellions as "Twitter Revolutions (Morozov, 2011)" or "Facebook Revolutions (Davis, 2011)" and have credited social media for helping to bring down these regimes (Beardsley, 2011).

During the unrest, social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter helped protesters share information by communicating ideas continuously and instantaneously. Users took advantage of these unrestricted vehicles to share the most graphic details and images of the attacks on protesters, and to rally demonstrators (Beaumont). In other words, use of social media was about the ability to communicate across borders and barriers. It gave common people a voice and an opportunity to express their opinions.

Critics of social media, however, say that those calling the Middle East movements Facebook or Twitter revolutions are not giving credit where it is due (Villarreal, 2011). It is true that social media provided vital assistance during the unrest in the Middle East. But technology alone could not have brought about the revolutions. The resolve of the people to bring about change was most important, and this fact should be recognized, say the critics (Taylor).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Social networking sites often encompass many aspects of other social media. For example, Facebook began as a collection of profile pictures with very little information, but soon expanded to include photo albums (like Flickr) and micro-blogging (like Twitter). Other sites, like MySpace, emphasize connections to music and customizable pages, catering to a younger demographic. LinkedIn specifically caters to a professional demographic by allowing only certain kinds of information that is professionally relevant.
- Blogs speed the flow of information around the Internet and provide a critical way for nonprofessionals with adequate time to investigate sources and news stories without the necessary platform of a well-known publication. On the other hand, they can lead to an "echo chamber" effect, where they simply repeat one another and add nothing new. Often, the analysis is wide ranging, but it can also be shallow and lack the depth and knowledge of good critical journalism.

- Facebook has been the leader in privacy-related controversy, with its seemingly constant issues with privacy settings. One of the critical things to keep in mind is that as more people become comfortable with more information out in the open, the "reasonable standard" of privacy is lowered. This affects even people who would rather keep more things private.
- Social networking allows marketers to reach consumers directly and to know more about each specific consumer than ever before. Search algorithms allow marketers to place advertisements in areas that get the most traffic from targeted consumers. Whereas putting an ad on TV reaches all demographics, online advertisements can now be targeted specifically to different groups.

EXERCISES

1. Draw a Venn diagram of two social networking sites mentioned in this chapter. Sign up for both of them (if you're not signed up already) and make a list of their features and their interfaces. How do they differ? How are they the same?

2. Write a few sentences about how a marketer might use these tools to reach different demographics.

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11.4 The Effects of the Internet and Globalization on Popular Culture and Interpersonal Communication

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe the effects of globalization on culture.
2. Identify the possible effects of news migrating to the Internet.
3. Define the Internet paradox.

It's in the name: *World Wide Web*. The Internet has broken down communication barriers between cultures in a way that could only be dreamed of in earlier generations. Now, almost any news service across the globe can be accessed on the Internet and, with the various translation services available (like Babelfish and Google Translate), be relatively understandable. In addition to the spread of American culture throughout the world, smaller countries are now able to cheaply export culture, news, entertainment, and even propaganda.

The Internet has been a key factor in driving globalization in recent years. Many jobs can now be outsourced entirely via the Internet. Teams of software programmers in India can have a website up and running in very little time, for far less money than it would take to hire American counterparts. Communicating with these teams is now as simple as sending e-mails and instant messages back and forth, and often the most difficult aspect of setting up an international video conference online is figuring out the time difference. Especially for electronic services such as software, outsourcing over the Internet has greatly reduced the cost to develop a professionally coded site.

ELECTRONIC MEDIA AND THE GLOBALIZATION OF CULTURE

The increase of globalization has been an economic force throughout the last century, but economic interdependency is not its only by-product. At its core, globalization is the lowering of economic and cultural impediments to communication between countries all over the globe. Globalization in the sphere of culture and communication can take the form of access to foreign newspapers (without the difficulty of procuring a printed copy) or, conversely, the ability of people living in previously closed countries to communicate experiences to the outside world relatively cheaply.

TV, especially satellite TV, has been one of the primary ways for American entertainment to reach foreign shores. This trend has been going on for some time now, for example, with the launch of MTV Arabia (Arango, 2008). American popular culture is, and has been, a crucial export.

At the Eisenhower Fellowship Conference in Singapore in 2005, U.S. ambassador Frank Lavin gave a defense of American culture that differed somewhat from previous

arguments. It would not be all Starbucks, MTV, or *Baywatch*, he said, because American culture is more diverse than that. Instead, he said that "America is a nation of immigrants," and asked, "When Mel Gibson or Jackie Chan come to the United States to produce a movie, whose culture is being exported (Lavin, 2005)?" This idea of a truly globalized culture—one in which content can be distributed as easily as it can be received—now has the potential to be realized through the Internet. While some political and social barriers still remain, from a technological standpoint there is nothing to stop the two-way flow of information and culture across the globe.

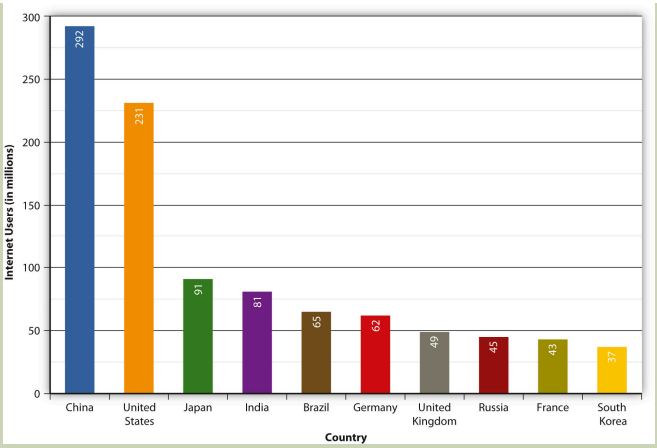
CHINA, GLOBALIZATION, AND THE INTERNET

The scarcity of artistic resources, the time lag of transmission to a foreign country, and censorship by the host government are a few of the possible impediments to

transmission of entertainment and culture. China provides a valuable example of the ways the Internet has helped to overcome (or highlight) all three of these hurdles.

China, as the world's most populous country and one of its leading economic powers, has considerable clout when it comes to the Internet. In addition, the country is ruled by a single political party that uses censorship extensively in an effort to maintain control. Because the Internet is an open resource by nature, and because China is an extremely well-connected country—with 22.5 percent (roughly 300 million people, or the population of the entire United States) of the country online as of 2008 (Google, 2010)—China has been a case study in how the Internet makes resistance to globalization increasingly difficult.

FIGURE 11.7



China has more Internet users than any other country.

On January 21, 2010, Hillary Clinton gave a speech in front of the Newseum in Washington, DC, where she said, "We stand for a single Internet where all of humanity has equal access to knowledge and ideas (Ryan & Halper, 2010)." That same month, Google decided it would stop censoring search results on Google.cn, its Chinese-language search engine, as a result of a serious cyber-attack on the company originating in China. In addition, Google stated that if an agreement with the Chinese government could not be reached over the censorship of search results, Google would pull out of China completely. Because Google has complied (albeit uneasily) with the Chinese government in the past, this change in policy was a major reversal.

Withdrawing from one of the largest expanding markets in

the world is shocking coming from a company that has been aggressively expanding into foreign markets. This move highlights the fundamental tension between China's censorship policy and Google's core values. Google's company motto, "Don't be evil," had long been at odds with its decision to censor search results in China. Google's compliance with the Chinese government did not help it make inroads into the Chinese Internet search market—although Google held about a quarter of the market in China, most of the search traffic went to the tightly controlled Chinese search engine Baidu. However, Google's departure from China would be a blow to antigovernment forces in the country. Since Baidu has a closer relationship with the Chinese government, political dissidents tend to use Google's Gmail, which uses encrypted servers based in the United States. Google's threat to withdraw from China raises the possibility that globalization could indeed hit roadblocks due to the ways that foreign governments may choose to censor the Internet.

NEW MEDIA: INTERNET CONVERGENCE AND AMERICAN SOCIETY

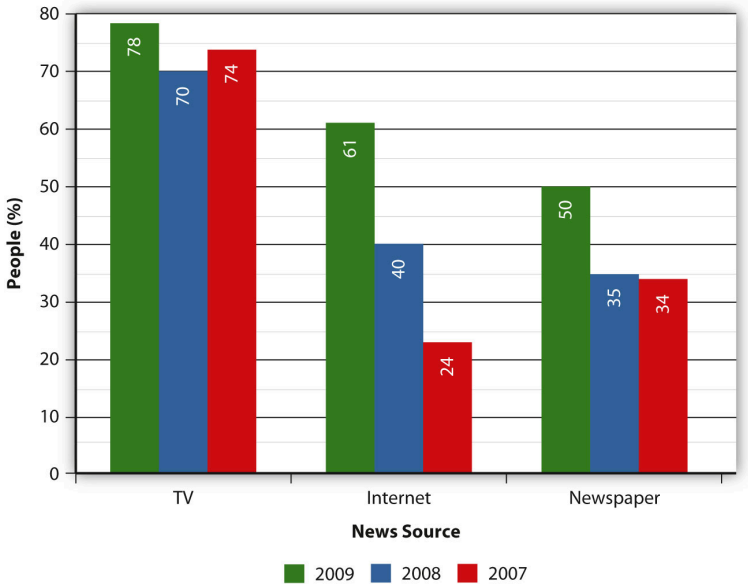
One only needs to go to CNN's official Twitter feed and begin to click random faces in the "Following" column to see the effect of **media convergence** through the Internet. Hundreds of different options abound, many of them individual journalists' Twitter feeds, and many of those following other journalists. Considering CNN's motto, "The most trusted name in network news," its presence on Twitter might seem at odds with providing in-depth, reliable coverage. After all, how in-depth can 140 characters get?

The truth is that many of these traditional media outlets use Twitter not as a communication tool in itself, but as a way to allow viewers to aggregate a large amount of information they may have missed. Instead of visiting multiple home pages to see the day's top stories from multiple viewpoints, Twitter users only have to check their own Twitter pages to get updates from all the organizations they "follow." Media conglomerates then use Twitter as part of an overall integration of media outlets; the Twitter feed is there to support the news content, not to report the content itself.

INTERNET-ONLY SOURCES

The threshold was crossed in 2008: The Internet overtook print media as a primary source of information for national and international news in the U.S. Television is still far in the lead, but especially among younger demographics, the Internet is quickly catching up as a way to learn about the day's news. With 40 percent of the public receiving their news from the Internet (see Figure 11.8) (Pew Research Center for the People, 2008), media outlets have been scrambling to set up large presences on the web. Yet one of the most remarkable shifts has been in the establishment of online-only news sources.

FIGURE 11.8



Americans now receive more national and international news from the Internet than they do from newspapers.

The conventional argument claims that the anonymity and the echo chamber of the Internet undermine worthwhile news reporting, especially for topics that are expensive to report on. The ability of large news organizations to put reporters in the field is one of their most important contributions and (because of its cost) is often one of the first things to be cut back during times of budget problems. However, as the Internet has become a primary news source for more and more people, new media outlets—publications existing entirely online—have begun to appear.

In 2006, two reporters for the *Washington Post*, John F.

Harris and Jim VandeHei, left the newspaper to start a politically centered website called Politico. Rather than simply repeating the day's news in a blog, they were determined to start a journalistically viable news organization on the web. Four years later, the site has over 6,000,000 unique monthly visitors and about a hundred staff members, and there is now a Politico reporter on almost every White House trip (Wolff, 2009).

Far from being a collection of amateurs trying to make it big on the Internet, Politico's senior White House correspondent is Mike Allen, who previously wrote for *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Time*. His daily Playbook column appears at around 7 a.m. each morning and is read by much of the politically centered media. The different ways that Politico reaches out to its supporters—blogs, Twitter feeds, regular news articles, and now even a print edition—show how media convergence has even occurred within the Internet itself. The interactive nature of its services and the active comment boards on the site also show how the media have become a two-way street: more of a public forum than a straight news service.

"LIVE" FROM NEW YORK ...

Top-notch political content is not the only medium moving to the Internet, however. *Saturday Night Live* (*SNL*) has built an entire entertainment model around its broadcast time slot. Every weekend, around 11:40 p.m. on Saturday, someone interrupts a skit, turns toward the camera, shouts "Live from New York, it's Saturday Night!" and the band starts playing. Yet the show's sketch comedy style also seems to lend itself to the watch-anytime convenience of the Internet. In fact, the online TV service Hulu carries a full eight episodes of *SNL* at any given time, with regular 3.5-minute commercial breaks replaced by Hulu-specific minute-long advertisements. The time listed for an *SNL* episode on Hulu is just over an hour—a full half-hour less than the time it takes to watch it live on Saturday night.

Hulu calls its product "online premium video," primarily because of its desire to attract not the YouTube amateur, but rather a partnership of large media organizations. Although many networks, like NBC and Comedy Central, stream video on their websites, Hulu builds its business by offering a legal way to see all these shows on the same site; a user can switch from *South Park* to *SNL* with a single click, rather than having to move to a different website.

PREMIUM ONLINE VIDEO CONTENT

Hulu's success points to a high demand among Internet users for a wide variety of content collected and packaged in one easy-to-use interface. Hulu was rated the Website of the Year by the Associated Press (Coyle, 2008) and even received an Emmy nomination for a commercial featuring Alec Baldwin and Tina Fey, the stars of the NBC comedy *30 Rock* (Neil, 2009). Hulu's success has not been the product of the usual dot-com underdog startup, however. Its two parent companies, News Corporation and NBC Universal, are two of the world's media giants. In many ways, this was a logical step for these companies to take after fighting online video for so long. In December 2005, the video "Lazy Sunday," an *SNL* digital short featuring Andy Samberg and Chris Parnell, went viral with over 5,000,000 views on YouTube before February 2006, when NBC demanded that YouTube take down the video (Biggs, 2006). NBC later posted the video on Hulu, where it could sell advertising for it.

Hulu allows users to break out of programming models controlled by broadcast and cable TV providers and choose freely what shows to watch and when to watch them. This seems to work especially well for cult programs that are no longer available on TV. In 2008, the show *Arrested*

Development, which was canceled in 2006 after repeated time slot shifts, was Hulu's second-most-popular program.

Hulu certainly seems to have leveled the playing field for some shows that have had difficulty finding an audience through traditional means. *30 Rock*, much like *Arrested Development*, suffered from a lack of viewers in its early years. In 2008, *New York Magazine* described the show as a "fragile suckling that critics coddle but that America never quite warms up to (Sternbergh, 2008)." However, even as *30 Rock* shifted time slots mid-season, its viewer base continued to grow through the NBC partner of Hulu. The nontraditional media approach of NBC's programming culminated in October 2008, when NBC decided to launch the new season of *30 Rock* on Hulu a full week before it was broadcast over the airwaves (Wortham, 2008). Hulu's strategy of providing premium online content seems to have paid off: As of March 2011, Hulu provided 143,673,000 viewing sessions to more than 27 million unique visitors, according to Nielsen (ComScore, 2011).

Unlike other "premium" services, Hulu does not charge for its content; rather, the word *premium* in its slogan seems to imply that it *could* charge for content if it wanted to. Other platforms, like Sony's PlayStation 3, block Hulu for this very reason—Sony's online store sells the products that Hulu gives away for free. However, Hulu has been considering moving to a paid subscription model that would allow users to access its entire back catalog of shows. Like many other fledgling web

enterprises, Hulu seeks to create reliable revenue streams to avoid the fate of many of the companies that folded during the dot-com crash (Sandoval, 2009).

Like Politico, Hulu has packaged professionally produced content into an on-demand web service that can be used without the normal constraints of traditional media. Just as users can comment on Politico articles (and now, on most newspapers' articles), they can rate Hulu videos, and Hulu will take this into account. Even when users do not produce the content themselves, they still want this same "two-way street" service.

TABLE 11.2 TOP 10 U.S. ONLINE VIDEO BRANDS, HOME AND WORK

Rank	Parent	Total Streams (in Millions)	Unique Viewers (in Millions)
1	YouTube	6,622,374	112,642
2	Hulu	635,546	15,256
3	Yahoo!	221,355	26,081
4	MSN	179,741	15,645
5	Turner	137,311	5,343
6	MTV Networks	131,077	5,949
7	ABC TV	128,510	5,049
8	Fox Interactive	124,513	11,450
9	Nickelodeon	117,057	5,004
10	Megavideo	115,089	3,654

Source: The Nielsen Company

THE ROLE OF THE INTERNET IN SOCIAL ALIENATION

In the early years, the Internet was stigmatized as a tool for introverts to avoid "real" social interactions, thereby increasing their alienation from society. Yet the Internet was also seen as the potentially great connecting force between cultures all over the world. The idea that something that allowed communication across the globe could breed social alienation seemed counterintuitive. The American Psychological Association (APA) coined this concept the "Internet paradox ."

Studies like the APA's "Internet paradox: A social technology that reduces social involvement and psychological well-being (Kraut, et. al., 1998)?" which came out in 1998, suggested that teens who spent lots of time on the Internet showed much greater rates of self-reported loneliness and other signs of psychological distress. Even though the Internet

had been around for a while by 1998, the increasing concern among parents was that teenagers were spending all their time in chat rooms and online. The fact was that teenagers spent much more time on the Internet than adults, due to their increased free time, curiosity, and familiarity with technology.

However, this did not necessarily mean that "kids these days" were antisocial or that the Internet caused depression and loneliness. In his critical analysis "Deconstructing the Internet Paradox," computer scientist, writer, and PhD recipient from Carnegie Mellon University Joseph M. Newcomer points out that the APA study did not include a control group to adjust for what may be normal "lonely" feelings in teenagers. Again, he suggests that "involvement in any new, self-absorbing activity which has opportunity for failure can increase depression," seeing Internet use as just another time-consuming hobby, much like learning a musical instrument or playing chess (Newcomer, 2000).

The general concept that teenagers were spending all their time in chat rooms and online forums instead of hanging out with flesh-and-blood friends was not especially new; the same thing had generally been thought of the computer hobbyists who pioneered the esoteric Usenet. However, the concerns were amplified when a wider range of young people began using the Internet, and the trend was especially strong in the younger demographics.

THE "INTERNET PARADOX" AND FACEBOOK

As they developed, it became quickly apparent that the Internet generation did not suffer from perpetual loneliness as a rule. After all, the generation that was raised on instant messaging invented Facebook and still makes up most of Facebook's audience. As detailed earlier in the chapter, Facebook began as a service limited to college students—a requirement that practically excluded older participants. As a social tool and as a reflection of the way younger people now connect with each other over the Internet, Facebook has provided a comprehensive model for the Internet's effect on social skills and especially on education.

A study by the Michigan State University Department of Telecommunication, Information Studies, and Media has shown that college-age Facebook users connect with offline friends twice as often as they connect with purely online "friends (Ellison, et. al., 2007)." In fact, 90 percent of the participants in the study reported that high school friends, classmates, and other friends were the top three groups that their Facebook profiles were directed toward.

In 2007, when this study took place, one of Facebook's most remarkable tools for studying the ways that young people

connect was its "networks" feature. Originally, a Facebook user's network consisted of all the people at his or her college e-mail domain: the "mycollege" portion of "me@mycollege.edu." The MSU study, performed in April 2006, just 6 months after Facebook opened its doors to high school students, found that first-year students met new people on Facebook 36 percent more often than seniors did. These freshmen, in April 2006, were not as active on Facebook as high schoolers (Facebook began allowing high schoolers on its site during these students' first semester in school) (Rosen, 2005). The study concluded that they could "definitively state that there is a positive relationship between certain kinds of Facebook use and the maintenance and creation of social capital (Ellison, et. al., 2007)." In other words, even though the study cannot show whether Facebook use causes or results from social connections, it can say that Facebook plays both an important and a nondestructive role in the forming of social bonds.

Although this study provides a complete and balanced picture of the role that Facebook played for college students in early 2006, there have been many changes in Facebook's design and in its popularity. In 2006, many of a user's "friends" were from the same college, and the whole college network might be mapped as a "friend-of-a-friend" web. If users allowed all people within a single network access to their profiles, it would create a voluntary school-wide directory of students. Since a university e-mail address was required for signup, there was a

certain level of trust. The results of this Facebook study, still relatively current in terms of showing the Internet's effects on social capital, show that not only do social networking tools *not* lead to more isolation, but that they actually have become integral to some types of networking.

However, as Facebook began to grow and as high school and regional networks (such as "New York City" or "Ireland") were incorporated, users' networks of friends grew exponentially, and the networking feature became increasingly unwieldy for privacy purposes. In 2009, Facebook discontinued regional networks over concerns that networks consisting of millions of people were "no longer the best way for you to control your privacy (Zuckerberg, 2009)." Where privacy controls once consisted of allowing everyone at one's college access to specific information, Facebook now allows only three levels: friends, friends of friends, and everyone.

MEETUP.COM: MEETING UP "IRL"

Of course, not everyone on teenagers' online friends lists are

actually their friends outside of the virtual world. In the parlance of the early days of the Internet, meeting up "IRL" (shorthand for "in real life") was one of the main reasons that many people got online. This practice was often looked at with suspicion by those not familiar with it, especially because of the anonymity of the Internet. The fear among many was that children would go into chat rooms and agree to meet up in person with a total stranger, and that stranger would turn out to have less-than-friendly motives. This fear led to law enforcement officers posing as underage girls in chat rooms, agreeing to meet for sex with older men (after the men brought up the topic—the other way around could be considered entrapment), and then arresting the men at the agreed-upon meeting spot.

In recent years, however, the Internet has become a hub of activity for all sorts of people. In 2002, Scott Heiferman started Meetup.com based on the "simple idea of using the Internet to get people off the Internet (Heiferman, 2009)." The entire purpose of Meetup.com is not to foster global interaction and collaboration (as is the purpose of something like Usenet,) but rather to allow people to organize locally. There are Meetups for politics (popular during Barack Obama's presidential campaign), for New Yorkers who own Boston terriers (Fairbanks, 2008), for vegan cooking, for board games, and for practically everything else. Essentially, the service (which charges a small fee to Meetup organizers) separates itself from other social networking sites by

encouraging real-life interaction. Whereas a member of a Facebook group may never see or interact with fellow members, Meetup.com actually keeps track of the (self-reported) real-life activity of its groups—ideally, groups with more activity are more desirable to join. However much time these groups spend together on or off the Internet, one group of people undoubtedly has the upper hand when it comes to online interaction: *World of Warcraft* players.

WORLD OF WARCRAFT: SOCIAL INTERACTION THROUGH AVATARS

A writer for *Time* states the reasons for the massive popularity of online role-playing games quite well: "[My generation's] assumptions were based on the idea that video games would never grow up. But no genre has worked harder to disprove that maxim than MMORPGs—Massively Multiplayer Online Games (Coates, 2007)." *World of Warcraft (WoW*, for short) is the most popular MMORPG of all time, with over 11 million subscriptions and counting. The game is inherently

social; players must complete "quests" in order to advance in the game, and many of the quests are significantly easier with multiple people. Players often form small, four-to five-person groups in the beginning of the game, but by the end of the game these larger groups (called "raiding parties") can reach up to 40 players.

In addition, *WoW* provides a highly developed social networking feature called "guilds." Players create or join a guild, which they can then use to band with other guilds in order to complete some of the toughest quests. "But once you've got a posse, the social dynamic just makes the game more addictive and time-consuming," writes Clive Thompson for *Slate* (Thompson, 2005). Although these guilds do occasionally meet up in real life, most of their time together is spent online for hours per day (which amounts to quite a bit of time together), and some of the guild leaders profess to seeing real-life improvements. Joi Ito, an Internet business and investment guru, joined *WoW* long after he had worked with some of the most successful Internet companies; he says he "definitely (Pinckard, 2006)" learned new lessons about leadership from playing the game. Writer Jane Pinckard, for video game blog *1UP*, lists some of Ito's favorite activities as "looking after newbs [lower-level players] and pleasing the veterans," which he calls a "delicate balancing act (Pinckard, 2006)," even for an ex-CEO.

FIGURE 11.9



Guilds often go on "raiding parties"—just one of the many semisocial activities in *World of Warcraft*.

monsieur paradis – gathering in Kargath before a raid – CC BY-NC 2.0.

With over 12 million subscribers, *WoW* necessarily breaks the boundaries of previous MMORPGs. The social nature of the game has attracted unprecedented numbers of female players (although men still make up the vast majority of players), and

its players cannot easily be pegged as antisocial video game addicts. On the contrary, they may even be called *social* video game players, judging from the general responses given by players as to why they enjoy the game. This type of play certainly points to a new way of online interaction that may continue to grow in coming years.

SOCIAL INTERACTION ON THE INTERNET AMONG LOW-INCOME GROUPS

In 2006, the journal *Developmental Psychology* published a study looking at the educational benefits of the Internet for teenagers in low-income households. It found that "children who used the Internet more had higher grade point averages (GPA) after one year and higher scores after standardized tests of reading achievement after six months than did children who

used it less," and that continuing to use the Internet more as the study went on led to an even greater increase in GPA and standardized test scores in reading (there was no change in mathematics test scores) (Jackson, et. al., 2006).

One of the most interesting aspects of the study's results is the suggestion that the academic benefits may exclude low-performing children in low-income households. The reason for this, the study suggests, is that children in low-income households likely have a social circle consisting of other children from low-income households who are also unlikely to be connected to the Internet. As a result, after 16 months of Internet usage, only 16 percent of the participants were using e-mail and only 25 percent were using instant messaging services. Another reason researchers suggested was that because "African-American culture is historically an 'oral culture,'" and 83 percent of the participants were African American, the "impersonal nature of the Internet's typical communication tools" may have led participants to continue to prefer face-to-face contact. In other words, social interaction on the Internet can only happen if your friends are also on the Internet.

THE WAY FORWARD: COMMUNICATION, CONVERGENCE, AND CORPORATIONS

On February 15, 2010, the firm Compete, which analyzes Internet traffic, reported that Facebook surpassed Google as the No. 1 site to drive traffic toward news and entertainment media on both Yahoo! and MSN (Ingram, 2010). This statistic is a strong indicator that social networks are quickly becoming one of the most effective ways for people to sift through the ever-increasing amount of information on the Internet. It also suggests that people are content to get their news the way they did before the Internet or most other forms of mass media were invented—by word of mouth.

Many companies now use the Internet to leverage word-of-mouth social networking. The expansion of corporations into Facebook has given the service a big publicity boost, which has no doubt contributed to the growth of its user base, which in turn helps the corporations that put marketing efforts into the service. Putting a corporation on Facebook is not without risk; any corporation posting on Facebook runs the risk of being commented on by over 500 million users, and of course there is no way to ensure that those users will say positive

things about the corporation. Good or bad, communicating with corporations is now a two-way street.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The Internet has made pop culture transmission a two-way street. The power to influence popular culture no longer lies with the relative few with control over traditional forms of mass media; it is now available to the great mass of people with access to the Internet. As a result, the cross-fertilization of pop culture from around the world has become a commonplace occurrence.
- The Internet's key difference from traditional media is that it does not operate on a set intervallic time schedule. It is not "periodical" in the sense that it comes out in daily or weekly editions; it is always updated. As a result, many journalists file both "regular" news stories and blog posts that may be updated and that can come at varied intervals as necessary. This allows them to stay up-to-date with breaking news without necessarily sacrificing the next day's more in-depth story.
- The "Internet paradox" is the hypothesis that although the Internet is a tool for communication, many

teenagers who use the Internet lack social interaction and become antisocial and depressed. It has been largely disproved, especially since the Internet has grown so drastically. Many sites, such as Meetup.com or even Facebook, work to allow users to organize for offline events. Other services, like the video game *World of Warcraft*, serve as an alternate social world.

EXERCISES

1. Make a list of ways you interact with friends, either in person or on the Internet. Are there particular methods of communication that only exist in person?
2. Are there methods that exist on the Internet that would be much more difficult to replicate in person?
3. How do these disprove the "Internet paradox" and contribute to the globalization of culture?
4. Pick a method of in-person communication and a method of Internet communication, and compare and contrast these using a Venn diagram.

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11.5 Issues and Trends

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Define *information superhighway* as it relates to the Internet.
2. Identify ways to identify credible sources online.
3. Define *net neutrality*.
4. Describe some of the effects of the Internet and social media on traditional media.

By 1994, the promise of the "information superhighway" had become so potent that it was given its own summit on the University of California Los Angeles campus. The country was quickly realizing that the spread of the web could be harnessed for educational purposes; more than just the diversion of computer hobbyists, this new vision of the web would be a constant learning resource that anyone could use.

The American video artist pioneer Nam June Paik takes credit for the term *information superhighway*, which he used during a study for the Rockefeller Foundation in 1974, long before the existence of Usenet. In 2001, he said, "If you create a highway, then people are going to invent cars. That's dialectics. If you create electronic highways, something has to happen

(The Biz Media, 2010)." Paik's prediction proved to be startlingly prescient.

Al Gore's use of the term in the House of Representatives (and later as vice president) had a slightly different meaning and context. To Gore, the promise of the Interstate Highway System during the Eisenhower era was that the government would work to allow communication across natural barriers, and that citizens could then utilize these channels to conduct business and communicate with one another. Gore saw the government as playing an essential role in maintaining the pathways of electronic communication. Allowing business interests to get involved would compromise what he saw as a necessarily neutral purpose; a freeway doesn't judge or demand tolls—it is a public service—and neither should the Internet. During his 2000 presidential campaign, Gore was wrongly ridiculed for supposedly saying that he "invented the Internet," but in reality his work in the House of Representatives played a crucial part in developing the infrastructure required for Internet access.

FIGURE 11.10



Although Al Gore did not invent the Internet, he did popularize the term *information superhighway* in an effort to build support for Internet infrastructure and neutrality.

Dan Farber – Al Gore at Web 2.0 Summit – CC BY-NC 2.0.

However, a certain amount of money was necessary to get connected to the web. In this respect, AOL was like the Model T of the Internet—it put access to the information superhighway within reach of the average person. But despite the affordability of AOL and the services that succeeded it, certain demographics continued to go without access to the Internet, a problem known as the "digital divide," which you will learn more about in this section.

From speed of transportation, to credibility of information (don't trust the stranger at the roadside diner), to security of information (keep the car doors locked), to net neutrality (toll-free roads), to the possibility of piracy, the metaphor of the information superhighway has proved to be remarkably apt. All of these issues have played out in different ways, both positive and negative, and they continue to develop to this day.

INFORMATION ACCESS LIKE NEVER BEFORE

In December 2002, a survey by the Pew Internet & American Life Project found that 84 percent of Americans believed that they could find information on health care, government, news, or shopping on the Internet (Jesdanun, 2002). This belief in a decade-old system of interconnected web pages would in itself be remarkable, but taking into account that 37 percent of respondents were not even connected to the Internet, it becomes even more fantastic. In other words, of the percentage of Americans without Internet connections, 64 percent still believed that it could be a source of information about these crucial topics. In addition, of those who expect to find such

information, at least 70 percent of them succeed; news and shopping were the most successful topics, government was the least. This survey shows that most Americans believed that the Internet was indeed an effective source of information. Again, the role of the Internet in education was heralded as a new future, and technology was seen to level the playing field for all students.

Nowhere was this more apparent than in the Bush administration's 2004 report, "Toward a New Golden Age in Education: How the Internet, the Law, and Today's Students Are Revolutionizing Expectations." By this time, the term *digital divide* was already widely used and the goal of "bridging" it took everything from putting computers in classrooms to giving personal computers to some high-need students to use at home.

The report stated that an "explosive growth" in sectors such as e-learning and virtual schools allowed each student "individual online instruction (U.S. Department of Education, 2004)." More than just being able to find information online, people expected the Internet to provide virtually unlimited access to educational opportunities. To make this expectation a reality, one of the main investments that the paper called for was increased broadband Internet access. As Nam June Paik predicted, stringing fiber optics around the world would allow for seamless video communication, a development that the Department of Education saw as integral to its vision of

educating through technology. The report called for broadband access "24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year," saying that it could "help teachers and students realize the full potential of this technology (U.S. Department of Education, 2004)."

RURAL AREAS AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION

One of the founding principles of many public library systems is to allow for free and open access to information. Historically, one of the major roadblocks to achieving this goal has been a simple one: location. Those living in rural areas or those with limited access to transportation simply could not get to a library. But with the spread of the Internet, the hope was that a global library would be created—an essential prospect for rural areas.

One of the most remarkable educational success stories in the Department of Education's study is that of the Chugach School District in Alaska. In 1994, this district was the lowest

performing in the state: over 50 percent staff turnover, the lowest standardized test scores, and only one student in 26 years graduating from college (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). The school board instituted drastic measures, amounting to a complete overhaul of the system. They abolished grade levels, focusing instead on achievement, and by 2001 had increased Internet usage from 5 percent to 93 percent.

The Department of Education study emphasizes these numbers, and with good reason: The standardized test percentile scores rose from the 1920s to the 1970s in a period of 4 years, in both math and language arts. Yet these advances were not exclusive to low-performing rural students. In Florida, the Florida Virtual School system allowed rural school districts to offer advanced-placement coursework. Students excelling in rural areas could now study topics that were previously limited to districts that could fill (and fund) an entire classroom. Just as the Interstate Highway System commercially connected the most remote rural communities to large cities, the Internet has brought rural areas even further into the global world, especially in regard to the sharing of information and knowledge.

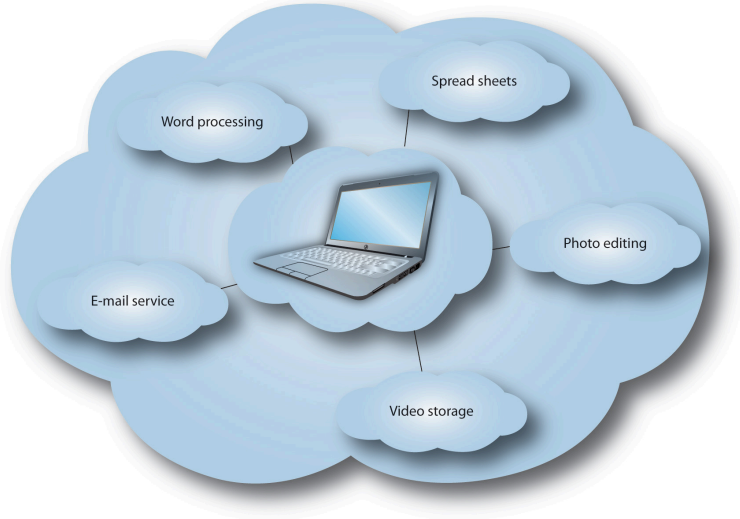
THE CLOUD: INSTANT UPDATES, INSTANT ACCESS

As technology has improved, it has become possible to provide software to users as a service that resides entirely online, rather than on a person's personal computer. Since people can now be connected to the Internet constantly, they can use online programs to do all of their computing. It is no longer absolutely necessary to have, for example, a program like Microsoft Word to compose documents; this can be done through an online service like Google Docs or Zoho Writer.

"Cloud computing" is the process of outsourcing common computing tasks to a remote server. The actual work is not done by the computer attached to the user's monitor, but by other (maybe many other) computers in the "cloud." As a result, the computer itself does not actually need that much processing power; instead of calculating "1 + 1 = 2," the user's computer asks the cloud, "What does 1 + 1 equal?" and receives the answer. Meanwhile, the system resources that a computer would normally devote to completing these tasks are freed up to be used for other things. An additional advantage of cloud computing is that data can be stored in the cloud and retrieved from any computer, making a user's files more conveniently portable and less vulnerable to hardware failures

like a hard drive crash. Of course, it can require quite a bit of bandwidth to send these messages back and forth to a remote server in the cloud, and in the absence of a reliable, always-on Internet connection, the usefulness of these services can be somewhat limited.

FIGURE 11.11



Cloud computing allows a computer to contain very little actual information. Many of the programs used by the now-popular "netbooks" are stored online.

The concept of the cloud takes into account all the applications that are hosted on external machines and viewed on a user's computer. Google Docs, which provides word processors, spreadsheets, and other tools, and Microsoft's Hotmail, which provides e-mail access, both constitute aspects of the "cloud." These services are becoming even more popular with the onset of mobile applications and netbooks, which are small laptops with relatively little processing power and storage space that rely on cloud computing. A netbook does not need the processing power required to run Microsoft Word; as long as it has a web browser, it can run the Google Docs word processor and leave (almost) all of the processing to the cloud. Because of this evolution of the Internet, computers can be built less like stand-alone machines and more like interfaces for interacting with the larger system in the cloud.

One result of cloud computing has been the rise in web applications for mobile devices, such as the iPhone, BlackBerry, and devices that use Google's Android operating system. 3G networks, which are cell phone networks capable of high-speed data transfer, can augment the computing power of phones just by giving the phones the ability to send data somewhere else to be processed. For example, a Google Maps application does not actually calculate the shortest route between two places (taking into account how highways are quicker than side roads, and numerous other computational difficulties) but rather just asks Google to do the calculation and send over the result. 3G networks have made this possible

in large part because the speed of data transfer has now surpassed the speed of cell phones' calculation abilities. As cellular transmission technology continues to improve with the rollout of the next-generation 4G networks (the successors to 3G networks), connectivity speeds will further increase and allow for a focus on ever-more-comprehensive provisions for multimedia.

CREDIBILITY ISSUES: (DIS)INFORMATION SUPERHIGHWAY?

The Internet has undoubtedly been a boon for researchers and writers everywhere. Online services range from up-to-date news and media to vast archives of past writing and scholarship. However, since the Internet is open to any user, anyone with a few dollars can set up a credible-sounding website and begin to disseminate false information.

This is not necessarily a problem with the Internet

specifically; any traditional medium can—knowingly or unknowingly—publish unreliable or outright false information. But the explosion of available sources on the Internet has caused a bit of a dilemma for information seekers. The difference is that much of the information on the Internet is not the work of professional authors, but of amateurs who have questionable expertise. On the Internet, anyone can self-publish, so the vetting that usually occurs in a traditional medium—for example, by a magazine's editorial department—rarely happens online.

That said, if an author who is recognizable from elsewhere writes something online, it may point to more reliable information (Kirk, 1996). In addition, looking for a trusted name on the website could lead to more assurance of reliability. For example, the site krugmanonline.com, the official site of Princeton economist Paul Krugman, does not have any authorial data. Even statements like "Nobel Prize Winner and Op-Ed Columnist for the *New York Times*" do not actually say anything about the author of the website. Much of the content is aggregated from the web as well. However, the bottom-left corner of the page has the mark "© 2009 W. W. Norton & Company, Inc." (Krugman's publisher). Therefore, a visitor might decide to pick and choose which information to trust. The author is clearly concerned with selling Krugman's books, so the glowing reviews may need to be verified elsewhere; on the other hand, the author biography is probably fairly accurate, since the publishing company has direct access to

Krugman, and Krugman himself probably looked it over to make sure it was valid. Taking the authorship of a site into account is a necessary step when judging information; more than just hunting down untrue statements, it can give insight into subtle bias that may arise and point to further research that needs to be done.

JUST TRUST ME: BIAS ON THE WEB

One noticeable thing on Paul Krugman's site is that all of his book reviews are positive. Although these are probably real reviews, they may not be representative of his critical reception at large. Mainstream journalistic sources usually attempt to achieve some sort of balance in their reporting; given reasonable access, they will interview opposing viewpoints and reserve judgment for the editorial page. Corporate sources, like on Krugman's site, will instead tilt the information toward their product.

Often, the web is viewed as a source of entertainment, even in its informational capacity. Because of this, sites that rely on advertising may choose to publish something more

inflammatory that will be linked to and forwarded more for its entertainment value than for its informational qualities.

On the other hand, a website might attempt to present itself as a credible source of information about a particular product or topic, with the end goal of selling something. A website that gives advice on how to protect against bedbugs that includes a direct link to its product may not be the best source of information on the topic. While so much on the web is free, it is worthwhile looking into how websites actually maintain their services. If a website is giving something away for free, the information might be biased, because it must be getting its money from somewhere. The online archive of *Consumer Reports* requires a subscription to access it. Ostensibly, this subscription revenue allows the service to exist as an impartial judge, serving the users rather than the advertisers.

Occasionally, corporations may set up "credible" fronts to disseminate information. Because sources may look reliable, it is always important to investigate further. Global warming is a contentious topic, and websites about the issue often represent the bias of their owners. For example, the Cato Institute publishes anti-global-warming theory columns in many newspapers, including well-respected ones such as the *Washington Times*. Patrick Basham, an adjunct scholar at the Cato Institute, published the article "Live Earth's Inconvenient Truths" in the *Washington Times* on July 11, 2007. Basham writes, "Using normal scientific standards, there is no proof we are causing the Earth to warm, let alone that

such warming will cause an environmental catastrophe (Basham, 2007)."

However, the website ExxposeExxon.com states that the Cato Institute received $125,000 from the oil giant ExxonMobil, possibly tainting its data with bias (Exxon, 2006). In addition, ExxposeExxon.com is run as a side project of the international environmental nonprofit Greenpeace, which may have its own reasons for producing this particular report. The document available on Greenpeace's site (a scanned version of Exxon's printout) states that in 2006, the corporation gave $20,000 to the Cato Institute (Greenpeace, 2007) (the other $105,000 was given over the previous decade).

This back-and-forth highlights the difficulty of finding credible information online, especially when money is at stake. In addition, it shows how conflicting sources may go to great lengths—sorting through a company's corporate financial reports—in order to expose what they see as falsehoods. What is the upside to all of this required fact-checking and cross-examination? Before the Internet, this probably would have required multiple telephone calls and plenty of time waiting on hold. While the Internet has made false information more widely available, it has also made checking that information incredibly easy.

WIKIPEDIA: THE INTERNET'S PRECOCIOUS PROBLEM CHILD

Nowhere has this cross-examination and cross-listing of sources been more widespread than with *Wikipedia*. Information free and available to all? That sounds like a dream come true—a dream that *Wikipedia* founder Jimmy Wales was ready to pursue. Since the site began in 2001, the Wikimedia Foundation (which hosts all of the *Wikipedia* pages) has become the sixth-most-visited site on the web, barely behind eBay in terms of its unique page views.

TABLE 11.3 TOP 10 GLOBAL WEB PARENT COMPANIES, HOME AND WORK

Rank	Parent	Unique Audience (Millions)	Active Reach %	Time
1	Google	362,006	84.29	2:27:15
2	Microsoft	322,352	75.06	2:53:48
3	Yahoo!	238,035	55.43	1:57:26
4	Facebook	218,861	50.96	6:22:24
5	eBay	163,325	38.03	1:42:46
6	Wikimedia	154,905	36.07	0:15:14
7	AOL LLC	128,147	29.84	2:08:32
8	Amazon	128,071	29.82	0:23:24
9	News Corp.	125,898	29.31	0:53:53
10	InterActiveCorp	122,029	28.41	0:10:52

Source: The Nielsen Company

Organizations had long been trying to develop factual content

for the web but *Wikipedia* went for something else: verifiability. The guidelines for editing *Wikipedia* state: "What counts is whether readers can verify that material added to *Wikipedia* has already been published by a reliable source, not whether editors think it is true (Wikipedia)." The benchmark for inclusion on *Wikipedia* includes outside citations for any content "likely to be challenged" and for "all quotations."

While this may seem like it's a step ahead of many other sources on the Internet, there is a catch: Anyone can edit *Wikipedia*. This has a positive and negative side—though anyone can vandalize the site, anyone can also fix it. In addition, calling a particularly contentious page to attention can result in one of the site's administrators placing a warning at the top of the page stating that the information is not necessarily verified. Other warnings include notices on articles about living persons, which are given special attention, and articles that may violate *Wikipedia*'s neutrality policy. This neutrality policy is a way to mitigate the extreme views that may be posted on a page with open access, allowing the community to decide what constitutes a "significant" view that should be represented (Wikipedia).

As long as users do not take the facts on *Wikipedia* at face value and make sure to follow up on the relevant sources linked in the articles they read, the site is an extremely useful reference tool that gives users quick access to a wide range of subjects. However, articles on esoteric subjects can be especially prone

to vandalism or poorly researched information. Since every reader is a potential editor, a lack of readers can lead to a poorly edited page because errors, whether deliberate or not, go uncorrected. In short, the lack of authorial credit can lead to problems with judging bias and relevance of information, so the same precautions must be taken with *Wikipedia* as with any other online source, primarily in checking references. The advantage of *Wikipedia* is its openness and freedom—if you find a problem, you can either fix it (with your own verifiable sources) or flag it on the message boards. Culturally, there has been a shift from valuing a few reliable sources to valuing a multiplicity of competing sources. However, weighing these sources against one another has become easier than ever before.

SECURITY OF INFORMATION ON THE INTERNET

As the Internet has grown in scope and the amount of personal information online has proliferated, securing this information

has become a major issue. The Internet now houses everything from online banking systems to highly personal e-mail messages, and even though security is constantly improving, this information is not invulnerable.

An example of this vulnerability is the Climategate scandal in late 2009. A collection of private e-mail messages were hacked from a server at the University of East Anglia, where much of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change research takes place. These e-mails show internal debates among the scientists regarding which pieces of data should be released and which are not relevant (or helpful) to their case (Revkin, 2009). In these e-mails, the scientists sometimes talk about colleagues—especially those skeptical of climate change—in a derisive way. Of course, these e-mails were never meant to become public.

This scandal demonstrates how easy it can be to lose control of private information on the Internet. In previous decades, hard copies of these letters would have to be found, and the theft could probably be traced back to a specific culprit. With the Internet, it is much more difficult to tell who is doing the snooping, especially if it is done on a public network. The same protocols that allow for open access and communication also allow for possible exploitation. Like the Interstate Highway System, the Internet is impartial to its users. In other words: If you're going to ride, lock your doors.

HACKING E-MAIL: FROM LOVE-LETTER-FOR-YOU TO GOOGLE IN CHINA

Another explosive scandal involving e-mail account hacking also occurred in late 2009, when Google's Gmail service was hacked by IP addresses originating in China. Gmail was one of the primary services used by human rights activists due to its location in the United States and its extra encryption. To understand the magnitude of this, it is important to understand the history of e-mail hacking and the importance of physical server location and local laws.

In 2000, a computer virus was unleashed by a student in the Philippines that simply sent a message with the subject line "I Love You." The e-mail had a file attached, called LOVE-LETTER-FOR-YOU.TXT.vbs. The suffix ".txt" is generally used for text files and was meant, in this case, as a distraction; the file's real suffix was ".vbs," which means that the file is a script. When run, this script ran and e-mailed itself across the user's entire address book, before sending any available passwords to an e-mail address in the Philippines. One of the key aspects of this case, however, was a matter of simple jurisdiction: The student was not prosecuted, due to the lack of computer crime laws in the Philippines (Zetter, 1983).

The encryption that Gmail uses resulted in only two of

the accounts being successfully hacked, and hackers were only able to see e-mail subject lines and timestamps—no message content was available (Zetter, 2010). Since the chaos that ensued after the "I Love You" virus, e-mail users and service providers have become more vigilant in their defensive techniques. However, the increased reliance on e-mail for daily communication makes it an attractive target for hackers. The development of cloud computing will likely lead to entirely new problems with Internet security; just as a highway brings two communities together, it can also cause these communities to share problems.

CAN'T WAIT: DENIAL OF SERVICE

Although many people increasingly rely on the Internet for communication and access to information, this reliance has come with a hefty price. Most critically, a simple exploit can cause massive roadblocks to Internet traffic, leading to disruptions in commerce, communication, and, as the military continues to rely on the Internet, national security.

Distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks work like cloud computing, but in reverse. Instead of a single computer going out to retrieve data from many different sources, DDoS is a coordinated effort by many different computers to bring down (or overwhelm) a specific website. Essentially, any web server can only handle a certain amount of information at once. While the largest and most stable web servers can talk to a huge number of computers simultaneously, even these can be overwhelmed.

During a DDoS attack on government servers belonging to both the United States and South Korea in July 2009, many U.S. government sites were rendered unavailable to users in Asia for a short time (Gorman & Ramstad, 2009). Although this did not have a major effect on U.S. cyber-security, the ease with which these servers could be exploited was troubling. In this case, the DDoS attacks were perpetuated by an e-mail virus known as MyDoom, which essentially turned users' computers into server-attacking "zombies." This exploit—coupling an e-mail scam with a larger attack—is difficult to trace, partly because the culprit is likely not one of the original attackers, but rather the victim of a virus used to turn vulnerable computers into an automated hacker army. Since the attack, President Barack Obama has committed to creating a new post for a head of cyber-security in the government.

NET NEUTRALITY

Most Internet users in the United States connect through a commercial Internet service provider (ISP). The major players—Comcast, Verizon, Time Warner Cable, AT&T, and others—are portals to the larger Internet, serving as a way for anyone with a cable line or phone line to receive broadband Internet access through a dedicated data line.

Ideally, ISPs treat all content impartially; any two websites will load at the same speed if they have adequate server capabilities. Service providers are not entirely happy with this arrangement. ISPs have proposed a new service model that would allow corporations to pay for a "higher tier" service. For example, this would allow AOL Time Warner to deliver its Hulu service (which Time Warner co-owns with NBC) faster than all other video services, leading to partnerships between Internet content providers and Internet service providers. The service providers also often foot the bill for expanding high-speed Internet access, and they see this new two-tiered service as a way to cash in on some of that investment (and, presumably, to reinvest the funds received).

The main fear—and the reason the FCC introduced net neutrality rules—is that such a service would hamper the ability of an Internet startup to grow its business. Defenders of net neutrality contend that small businesses (those without the ability to forge partnerships with the service providers) would be forced onto a "second-tier" Internet service, and their content would naturally suffer, decreasing inventiveness and competition among Internet content providers.

NET NEUTRALITY LEGISLATION: THE FCC AND AT&T

One of the key roadblocks to Internet legislation is the difficulty of describing the Internet and the Internet's place among communication bills of the past. First of all, it is important to realize that legislation relating to the impartiality of service providers is not unheard-of. Before the 1960s, AT&T was allowed to restrict its customers to using only its own telephones on its networks. In the 1960s, the FCC launched a series of "Computer Inquiries," stating, in effect,

that any customer could use any device on the network, as long as it did not actually harm the network. This led to inventions such as the fax machine, which would not have been possible under AT&T's previous agreement.

A key point today is that these proto–net neutrality rules protected innovation even when they "threatened to be a substitute for regulated services (Cannon, 2003)." This is directly relevant to a controversy involving Apple's iPhone that culminated in October 2009 when AT&T agreed to allow VoIP (voice over Internet protocol) on its 3G data networks. VoIP services, like the program Skype, allow a user to place a telephone call from an Internet data line to a traditional telephone line. In the case of the iPhone, AT&T did not actually block the transmission of data—it just had Apple block the app from its App Store. Since AT&T runs the phone service as well as the data lines, and since many users have plans with unlimited data connections, AT&T could see its phone profits cut drastically if all its users suddenly switched to using Skype to place all their telephone calls.

MISLEADING METAPHORS: IT'S NOT A BIG TRUCK

Senator Ted Stevens, the former head of the committee in charge of regulating the Internet, said on the floor of the Senate that the Internet is "not a big truck...it's a series of tubes (Curtis, 2006)." According to this metaphor, an e-mail can get "stuck in the tubes" for days behind someone else's material, leading to poorer service for the customer. In reality, service providers sell data-usage plans that only set a *cap* on the amount of data that someone can send over the Internet (measured in bits per second, where a bit is the smallest measurement of data). If a service is rated at 1.5 million bits per second (megabits per second, or 1.5 Mbps), it may only reach this once in a while—no one can "clog the tubes" without paying massive amounts of money for the service. Theoretically, the company will then invest this service fee in building more robust "tubes."

Net neutrality is difficult to legislate in part because it can be confusing: It relies on understanding how the Internet works and how communications are regulated. Stevens's metaphor is misleading because it assumes that Internet capacity is not already regulated in some natural way. To use the superhighway analogy, Stevens is suggesting that the highways

are congested, and his solution is to allow companies to dedicate express lanes for high-paying customers (it should be noted that the revenue would go to the service providers, even though the government has chipped in quite a bit for information superhighway construction). The danger of this is that it would be very difficult for a small business or personal site to afford express-lane access. Worse yet, the pro–net neutrality organization Save the Internet says that a lack of legislation would allow companies to "discriminate in favor of their own search engines" and "leave the rest of us on a winding dirt road (Save the Internet, 2010)." For areas that only have access to one Internet service, this would amount to a lack of access to all the available content.

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AND ELECTRONIC MEDIA

Content on the Internet competes with content from other

media outlets. Unlimited and cheap digital duplication of content removes the concept of scarcity from the economic model of media; it is no longer necessary to buy a physical CD fabricated by a company in order to play music, and digital words on a screen convey the news just as well as words printed on physical newspaper. Media companies have been forced to reinvent themselves as listeners, readers, and watchers have divided into smaller and smaller subcategories.

Traditional media companies have had to evolve to adapt to the changes wrought by the Internet revolution, but these media are far from obsolete in an online world. For example, social media can provide a very inexpensive and reliable model for maintaining a band's following. A record company (or the band itself) can start a Facebook page, through which it can notify all its fans about new albums and tour dates—or even just remind fans that it still exists. MySpace has been (and still is, to an extent) one of the main musical outlets on the Internet. This free service comes with a small web-based music player that allows people interested in the band to listen to samples of its music. Coupling free samples with social networking allows anyone to discover a band from anywhere in the world, leading to the possibility of varying and eclectic tastes not bound by geography.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- On one hand, the information superhighway has opened up rural areas to global connections and made communication and trade much easier. One downside, however, is that illicit and unwanted information can move just as quickly as positive information—it is up to the recipient to decide.
- The lack of authorial attribution on many online forums can make it difficult to find credible information. However, *Wikipedia*'s concept of "verifiability," or citing verified sources, has provided a good check to what can become a matter of mere my-word-against-yours. It is important to gauge possible bias in a source and to judge whether the author has an economic interest in the information.
- Net neutrality is a general category of laws that seek to make it illegal for service providers to discriminate among types of Internet content. One downside of content discrimination is that a service provider could potentially make competitors' sites load much more slowly than their own.

EXERCISES

1. Find a website about a single product, musician, or author. Does the site have a stated or strongly implied author?
2. Look for a copyright notice and a date, usually at the bottom of the page. How might that author's point of view bias the information on the site?
3. How can one determine the author's credibility?

END-OF-CHAPTER ASSESSMENT

Review Questions

1. Section 1

    1. What are two of the original characteristics of the Internet, and how do they continue to affect it?
    2. What were some of the technological developments that had a part in the "democratization" of the Internet, or the spread of the Internet to more people?

3. What were the causes and effects of the dot-com boom and crash? How did the dot-com boom and crash influence the Internet in later years, particularly with regards to content providers' income streams?

2. Section 2

    1. What are some of the differences between social networking sites, and how do they reflect a tendency to cater to a specific demographic?
    2. How might blogs help the flow of information around the world? How might they damage that information?
    3. How has privacy been treated on social networking sites, and how does this affect the culture?
    4. How have marketers tried to use social networking to their advantage?

3. Section 3

    1. How has globalization on the Internet changed the way culture is distributed?
    2. What are the implications of the Internet overtaking print media as a primary source for news, and how might that affect the public discourse?

3. What is the "Internet paradox," and how have various websites and services tried to combat it? How do Internet users socialize on the Internet?

4. Section 4

    1. How does the metaphor of an "information superhighway" relate to both the positive and negative aspects of the Internet?
    2. What are some threats to credibility online, and how can users proactively seek only credible sources?
    3. What is net neutrality, and how could it change the way we access information on the Internet?
    4. How has the Internet affected the music business? How has the Internet affected the music from an artistic perspective?

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. One of the repeated promises of the Internet is that it is truly democratic and that anyone can have a voice. Has this played out in a viable way, or was that a naive assumption that never really came to fruition?

2. How do the concepts of decentralization and protocol play a part in the way the Internet works?
3. How have social networks transformed marketing? What are some of the new ways that marketers can target specific people?
4. How has the Internet changed the way people socialize online? Are there entirely new forms of socializing that did not exist before the Internet?
5. How has the concept of *verifiability* changed the way that "truth" is regarded on the Internet—even in the culture at large? Has the speed and volume with which new information becomes available on the Internet made verifiable information more difficult to come by?

CAREER CONNECTION

There is a constantly growing market for people who know how to use social media effectively. Often, companies will hire someone specifically to manage their Facebook and Twitter feeds as another aspect of public relations and traditional marketing.

Read the article "5 True Things Social Media Experts Do Online," written by social media writer Glen Allsopp. You

can find it at
http://www.techipedia.com/2010/social-media-expert-skills/
.

Then, explore the site of Jonathan Fields, located at http://www.jonathanfields.com/blog/. After exploring for a bit, read the "About" section (the link is at the top). These two sites will help you answer the following questions:

1. How has Jonathan Fields made "everything else irrelevant"? What are some of the indications that he gives in his biography that he is passionate about his industry doing well?
2. Review Jonathan's Twitter feed on the right column of his site. Who are some of the other people he features, and how might this relate to Glen Allsopp's advice to "highlight others"?
3. Also look at Jonathan's "Small Business Marketing" section. What are some of the things he does to help businesses reach customers? How might this be potentially rewarding?
4. Think about the ways that you may use social media in your own life, and how you might be able to use those skills to help a business. Pick an activity that you might (or do) participate in online and write down how you might do the same thing from the perspective of a company. For example, how would you write the

"About Me" section of a company's Facebook profile? How could you start turning this skill into a career?

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Chapter 12: Advertising and Public Relations

12.1 Advertising
12.2 Public Relations

12.1 Advertising

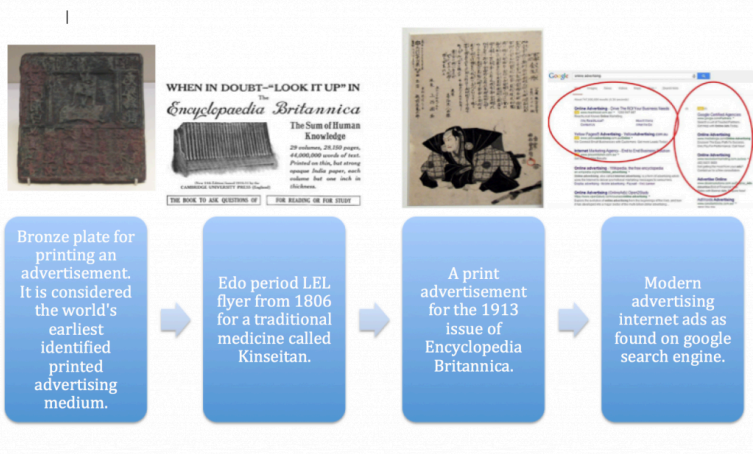
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe important eras in the history of American advertising.
2. Analyze the overall effects of government regulation on advertising.
3. Identify the types of advertising used today.
4. Describe the impact of advertising on American consumerism and cultural values.

Advertising is defined as promoting a product or service through the use of paid announcements (Dictionary). These announcements have had an enormous effect on modern culture, and thus deserve a great deal of attention in any treatment of the media's influence on culture.

HISTORY OF ADVERTISING

FIGURE 12.1



History of Advertising Wikimedia Commons – CC BY-SA 3.0; Wikimedia Commons – CC BY-SA 3.0; Wikimedia Commons – public domain; Vanguard Visions – Search Engine Online Advertising – CC BY 2.0.

Advertising dates back to ancient Rome's public markets and forums and continues into the modern era in most homes around the world. Contemporary consumers relate to and identify with brands and products. Advertising has inspired an independent press and conspired to encourage carcinogenic addictions. An exceedingly human invention, advertising is an unavoidable aspect of the shared modern experience.

ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL ADVERTISING

In 79 CE, the eruption of Italy's Mount Vesuvius destroyed and, ultimately, preserved the ancient city of Pompeii. Historians have used the city's archaeological evidence to piece together many aspects of ancient life. Pompeii's ruins reveal a world in which the fundamental tenets of commerce and advertising were already in place. Merchants offered different brands of fish sauces identified by various names such as "Scaurus' tunny jelly." Wines were branded as well, and their manufacturers sought to position them by making claims about their prestige and quality. Toys and other merchandise found in the city bear the names of famous athletes, providing,

perhaps, the first example of endorsement techniques (Hood, 2005).

The invention of the printing press in 1440 made it possible to print advertisements that could be put up on walls and handed out to individuals. By the 1600s, newspapers had begun to include advertisements on their pages. Advertising revenue allowed newspapers to print independently of secular or clerical authority, eventually achieving daily circulation. By the end of the 16th century, most newspapers contained at least some advertisements (O'Barr, 2005).

SELLING THE NEW WORLD

European colonization of the Americas during the 1600s brought about one of the first large-scale advertising campaigns. When European trading companies realized that the Americas held economic potential as a source of natural resources such as timber, fur, and tobacco, they attempted to convince others to cross the Atlantic Ocean and work to harvest this bounty. The advertisements for this venture

described a paradise without beggars and with plenty of land for those who made the trip. The advertisements convinced many poor Europeans to become indentured servants to pay for the voyage (Mierau, 2000).

NINETEENTH-CENTURY ROOTS OF MODERN ADVERTISING

FIGURE 12.2



Early penny press papers such as the *New York Sun* took advantage of advertisements, which allowed them to sell their issues for a penny or two.

Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

The rise of the penny press during the 1800s had a profound effect on advertising. The *New York Sun* embraced a novel advertising model in 1833 that allowed it to sell issues of the paper for a trifling amount of money, ensuring a higher circulation and a wider audience. This larger audience in turn justified greater prices for advertisements, allowing the paper to make a profit from its ads rather than from direct sales (Vance).

P. T. BARNUM AND ADVERTISING

The career of P. T. Barnum, cofounder of the famed Barnum & Bailey circus, gives a sense of the uncontrolled nature of advertising during the 1800s. He began his career in the 1840s writing ads for a theater, and soon after, he began promoting his own shows. He advertised these shows

any way he could, using not only interesting newspaper ads but also bands of musicians, paintings on the outside of his buildings, and street-spanning banners.

Barnum also learned the effectiveness of using the media to gain attention. In an early publicity stunt, Barnum hired a man to wordlessly stack bricks at various corners near his museum during the hours preceding a show. When this activity drew a crowd, the man went to the museum and bought a ticket for the show. This stunt drew such large crowds over the next 2 days, that the police made Barnum put a halt to it, gaining it even wider media attention. Barnum was sued for fraud over a bearded woman featured in one of his shows; the plaintiffs claimed that she was, in fact, a man. Rather than trying to keep the trial quiet, Barnum drew attention to it by parading a crowd of witnesses attesting to the bearded woman's gender, drawing more media attention—and more customers.

FIGURE 12.3



P. T. Barnum used the press to spark interest in his shows.

trialsanderrors –

The marvelous foot-ball dogs, poster for Barnum & Bailey, 1900 – CC BY 2.0.

Barnum aimed to make his audience think about what they had seen for an extended time. His Feejee mermaid—actually a mummified monkey and fish sewn together—was not necessarily interesting because viewers thought the creation was really a mermaid, but because they weren't sure if it was or not. Such marketing tactics brought Barnum's shows out of his establishments and into social conversations and newspapers (Applegate, 1998). Although most companies today would eschew Barnum's outrageous style, many have used the media and a similar sense of mystery to promote their products. Apple, for example, famously keeps its products such as the iPhone and iPad under wraps, building media anticipation and coverage.

In 1843, a salesman named Volney Palmer founded the first U.S. advertising agency in Philadelphia. The agency made money by linking potential advertisers with newspapers. By 1867, other agencies had formed, and advertisements were being marketed at the national level. During this time, George Rowell, who made a living buying bulk advertising space in

newspapers to subdivide and sell to advertisers, began conducting market research in its modern recognizable form. He used surveys and circulation counts to estimate numbers of readers and anticipate effective advertising techniques. His agency gained an advantage over other agencies by offering advertising space most suited for a particular product. This trend quickly caught on with other agencies. In 1888, Rowell started the first advertising trade magazine, *Printers' Ink* (Gartrell).

In Chapter 5 "Magazines", you read about *McClure's* success in 1893 thanks to an advertising model: selling issues for nearly half the price of other magazines and depending on advertising revenues to make up the difference between cost and sales price. Magazines such as *Ladies' Home Journal* focused on specific audiences, so they allowed advertisers to market products designed for a specific demographic. By 1900, *Harper's Weekly*, once known for refusing advertising, featured ads on half of its pages (All Classic Ads).

THE RISE OF BRAND NAMES

FIGURE 12.4

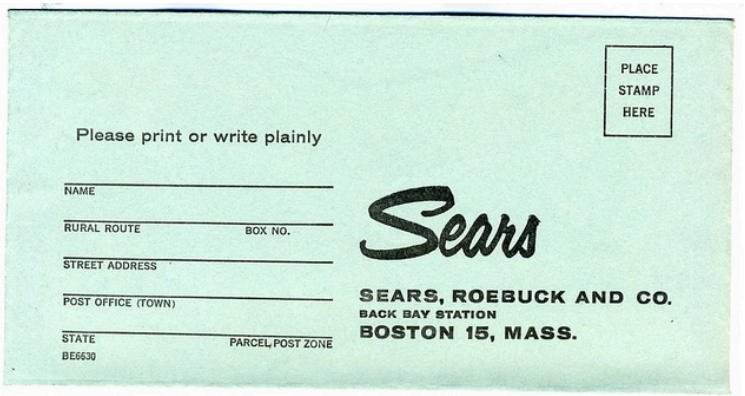


In the early 1900s, brand-name food items, such as this one, began making a household name for themselves.

Stuart Rankin – Payn's Sure-Raising Flour – CC BY-NC 2.0.

Another ubiquitous aspect of advertising developed around this time: brands. During most of the 19th century, consumers purchased goods in bulk, weighing out scoops of flour or sugar from large store barrels and paying for them by the pound. Innovations in industrial packaging allowed companies to mass produce bags, tins, and cartons with brand names on them. Although brands existed before this time, they were generally reserved for goods that were inherently recognizable, such as china or furniture. Advertising a particular kind of honey or flour made it possible for customers to ask for that product by name, giving it an edge over the unnamed competition.[1]

FIGURE 12.5



Department stores such as Sears, Roebuck and Co. reached consumers outside of the city through mail-order catalogs.

Nesster – 1961 Sears: Mail Order Envelope – CC BY 2.0.

The rise of department stores during the late 1800s also gave brands a push. Nationwide outlets such as Sears, Roebuck & Company and Montgomery Ward sold many of the same items to consumers all over the country. A particular item spotted in a big-city storefront could come to a small-town shopper's home thanks to mail-order catalogs. Customers made associations with the stores, trusting them to have a particular kind of item and to provide quality wares. Essentially, consumers came to trust the store's name rather than its specific products.[2]

ADVERTISING GAINS STATURE DURING THE 20TH CENTURY

Although advertising was becoming increasingly accepted as an element of mass media, many still regarded it as an unseemly occupation. This attitude began to change during the early 20th century. As magazines—widely considered a highbrow medium—began using more advertising, the advertising profession began attracting more artists and writers. Writers used verse and artists produced illustrations to embellish advertisements. Not surprisingly, this era gave rise to commercial jingles and iconic brand characters such as the Jolly Green Giant and the Pillsbury Doughboy.

The household cleaner Sapolio produced advertisements that made the most of the artistic advertising trend. Sapolio's ads featured various drawings of the residents of "Spotless Town" along with a rhymed verse celebrating the virtues of this fictional haven of cleanliness. The public anticipated each new ad in much the same way people today anticipate new TV episodes. In fact, the ads became so popular that citizens passed "Spotless Town" resolutions to clean up their own jurisdictions. Advertising trends later moved away from flowery writing and artistry, but the lessons of those

memorable campaigns continued to influence the advertising profession for years to come (Fox, 1984).

ADVERTISING MAKES ITSELF USEFUL

World War I fueled an advertising and propaganda boom. Corporations that had switched to manufacturing wartime goods wanted to stay in the public eye by advertising their patriotism. Equally, the government needed to encourage public support for the war, employing such techniques as the famous Uncle Sam recruiting poster. President Woodrow Wilson established the advertiser-run Committee on Public Information to make movies and posters, write speeches, and generally sell the war to the public. Advertising helped popularize World War I on the home front, and the war in turn gave advertising a much-needed boost in stature. The postwar return to regular manufacturing initiated the 1920s as an era of unprecedented advertising.[3]

NEW MEDIA

The rising film industry made celebrity testimonials, or product endorsements, an important aspect of advertising during the 1920s. Film stars including Clara Bow and Joan Crawford endorsed products such as Lux toilet soap. In these early days of mass-media consumer culture, film actors and actresses gave the public figures to emulate as they began participating in popular culture.[4]

As discussed in Chapter 7 "Radio", radio became an accepted commercial medium during the 1920s. Although many initially thought radio was too intrusive a medium to allow advertising, as it entered people's homes by the end of the decade, advertising had become an integral aspect of programming. Advertising agencies often created their own programs that networks then distributed. As advertisers conducted surveys and researched prime time slots, radio programming changed to appeal to their target demographics. The famous *Lux Radio Theater*, for example, was named for and sponsored by a brand of soap. Product placement was an important part of these early radio programs. Ads for Jell-O appeared during the course of the *Jack Benny Show* (JackBennyShow.com), and *Fibber McGee and Molly* scripts often involved their sponsor's floor wax (Burgan, 1996). The relationship between a sponsor and a show's producers was not always harmonious; the producers of radio

programs were constrained from broadcasting any content that might reflect badly on their sponsor.

THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND BACKLASH

Unsurprisingly, the Great Depression, with its widespread decreases in levels of income and buying power, had a negative effect on advertising. Spending on ads dropped to a mere 38 percent of its previous level. Social reformers added to revenue woes by again questioning the moral standing of the advertising profession. Books such as *Through Many Windows* and *Our Master's Voice* portrayed advertisers as dishonest and cynical, willing to say anything to make a profit and unconcerned about their influence on society. Humorists also questioned advertising's authority. The Depression-era magazine *Ballyhoo* regularly featured parodies of ads, similar to those seen later on *Saturday Night Live* or in *The Onion*.

These ads mocked the claims that had been made throughout the 1920s, further reducing advertising's public standing.[5]

This advertising downturn lasted only as long as the Depression. As the United States entered World War II, advertising again returned to encourage public support and improve the image of businesses.[6] However, there was one lasting effect of the Depression. The rising consumer movement made false and misleading advertising a major public policy issue. At the time, companies such as Fleischmann's (which claimed its yeast could cure crooked teeth) were using advertisements to pitch misleading assertions. Only business owners' personal morals stood in the way of such claims until 1938, when the federal government created the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and gave it the authority to halt false advertising.

In 1955, TV outpaced all other media for advertising. TV provided advertisers with unique, geographically oriented mass markets that could be targeted with regionally appropriate ads (Samuel, 2006). The 1950s saw a 75 percent increase in advertising spending, faster than any other economic indicator at the time.[7]

Single sponsors created early TV programs. These sponsors had total control over programs such as *Goodyear TV Playhouse* and *Kraft Television Theatre*. Some sponsors went as far as to manipulate various aspects of the programs. In one

instance, a program run by the DeSoto car company asked a contestant to use a false name rather than his given name, Ford. The present-day network model of TV advertising took hold during the 1950s as the costs of TV production made sole sponsorship of a show prohibitive for most companies. Rather than having a single sponsor, the networks began producing their own shows, paying for them through ads sold to a number of different sponsors.[8] Under the new model of advertising, TV producers had much more creative control than they had under the sole-sponsorship model.

The quiz shows of the 1950s were the last of the single-sponsor–produced programs. In 1958, when allegations of quiz show fraud became national news, advertisers moved out of programming entirely. The quiz show scandals also added to an increasing skepticism of ads and consumer culture (Boddy, 1990).

Advertising research during the 1950s had used scientifically driven techniques to attempt to influence consumer opinion. Although the effectiveness of this type of advertising is questionable, the idea of consumer manipulation through scientific methods became an issue for many Americans. Vance Packard's best-selling 1957 book *The Hidden Persuaders* targeted this style of advertising. *The Hidden Persuaders* and other books like it were part of a growing critique of 1950s consumer culture. The U.S. public was becoming increasingly wary of advertising claims—not to mention increasingly weary of ads themselves. A few

adventurous ad agencies used this consumer fatigue to usher in a new era of advertising and American culture (Frank, 1998).

THE CREATIVE REVOLUTION

Burdened by association with Nazi Germany, where the company had originated, Volkswagen took a daring risk during the 1950s. In 1959, the Doyle Dane Bernbach (DDB) agency initiated an ad campaign for the company that targeted skeptics of contemporary culture. Using a frank personal tone with the audience and making fun of the planned obsolescence that was the hallmark of Detroit automakers, the campaign stood apart from other advertisements of the time. It used many of the consumer icons of the 1950s, such as suburbia and game shows, in a satirical way, pitting Volkswagen against mainstream conformity and placing it strongly on the side of the consumer. By the end of the 1960s, the campaign had become an icon of American anticonformity. In fact, it was such a success that other automakers quickly emulated it. Ads

for the Dodge Fever, for example, mocked corporate values and championed rebellion.[9]

This era of advertising became known as the **creative revolution** for its emphasis on creativity over straight salesmanship. The creative revolution reflected the values of the growing anticonformist movement that culminated in the countercultural revolution of the 1960s. The creativity and anticonformity of 1960s advertising quickly gave way to more product-oriented conventional ads during the 1970s. Agency conglomeration, a recession, and cultural fallout were all factors in the recycling of older ad techniques. Major TV networks dropped their long-standing ban on comparative advertising early in the decade, leading to a new trend in positioning ads that compared products. Advertising wars such as Coke versus Pepsi and, later, Microsoft versus Apple were products of this trend.[10]

Innovations in the 1980s stemmed from a new TV channel: MTV. Producers of youth-oriented products created ads featuring music and focusing on stylistic effects, mirroring the look and feel of music videos. By the end of the decade, this style had extended to more mainstream products. Campaigns for the pain reliever Nuprin featured black-and-white footage with bright yellow pills, whereas ads for Michelob used grainy atmospheric effects (New York Times, 1989).

ADVERTISING STUMBLES

During the late 1980s, studies showed that consumers were trending away from brands and brand loyalty. A recession coupled with general consumer fatigue led to an increase in generic brand purchases and a decrease in advertising. In 1983, marketing budgets allocated 70 percent of their expenditures to ads and the remaining 30 percent to other forms of promotion. By 1993, only 25 percent of marketing budgets were dedicated to ads (Klein, 2002).

These developments resulted in the rise of big-box stores such as Wal-Mart that focused on low prices rather than expensive name brands. Large brands remade themselves during this period to focus less on their products and more on the ideas behind the brand. Nike's "Just Do It" campaign, endorsed by basketball star Michael Jordan, gave the company a new direction and a new means of promotion. Nike representatives have stated they have become more of a "marketing-oriented company" as opposed to a product manufacturer.[11]

FIGURE 12.7



In the 1990s, Nike was the target of protests due to its questionable labor practices.

WBUR Boston's NPR News Station – Protest – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

As large brands became more popular, they also attracted the attention of reformers. Companies such as Starbucks and Nike bore the brunt of late 1990s sweatshop and labor protests. As these brands attempted to incorporate ideas outside of the scope of their products, they also came to represent larger global commerce forces (Hornblower, 2000). This type of

branding increasingly incorporated public relations techniques that will be discussed later in this chapter.

THE RISE OF DIGITAL MEDIA

Twenty-first-century advertising has adapted to new forms of digital media. Internet outlets such as blogs, social media forums, and other online spaces have created new possibilities for advertisers, and shifts in broadcasting toward Internet formats have threatened older forms of advertising. Video games, smartphones, and other technologies also present new possibilities. Specific new media advertising techniques will be covered in the next section.

TYPES OF ADVERTISING

Despite the rise of digital media, many types of traditional advertising have proven their enduring effectiveness. Local advertisers and large corporations continue to rely on billboards and direct-mail fliers. In 2009, Google initiated a billboard campaign for its Google Apps products that targeted business commuters. The billboards featured a different message every day for an entire month, using simple computer text messages portraying a fictitious executive learning about the product. Although this campaign was integrated with social media sites such as Twitter, its main thrust employed the basic billboard (Ionescu, 2009).

FIGURE 12.8



Google billboards targeted commuters, creating a story that spanned the course of a month.

Danny Sullivan – Ask Versus Google In Billboards – CC BY 2.0.

NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES

Although print ads have been around for centuries, Internet growth has hit newspaper advertising hard. A 45 percent drop in ad revenue between 2007 and 2010 signaled a catastrophic decline for the newspaper industry (Sterling, 2010). Traditionally, newspapers have made money through commercial and classified advertising. Commercial advertisers, however, have moved to electronic media forms, and classified ad websites such as Craigslist offer greater geographic coverage for free. The future of newspaper advertising—and of the newspaper industry as a whole—is up in the air.

Print magazines have suffered from many of the same difficulties as newspapers. Declining advertising revenue has contributed to the end of popular magazines such as *Gourmet* and to the introduction of new magazines that cross over into other media formats, such as *Food Network Magazine*. Until a new, effective model is developed, the future of magazine advertising will continue to be in doubt.

RADIO

Compared to newspapers and magazines, radio's advertising revenue has done well. Radio's easy adaptation to new forms of communication has made it an easy sell to advertisers. Unlike newspapers, radio ads target specific consumers. Advertisers can also pay to have radio personalities read their ads live in the studio, adding a sense of personal endorsement to the business or product. Because newer forms of radio such as satellite and Internet stations have continued to use this model, the industry has not had as much trouble adapting as print media have.

TELEVISION

TV advertisement relies on verbal as well as visual cues to sell items. Promotional ad time is purchased by the advertiser, and a spot usually runs 15 to 30 seconds. Longer ads, known as infomercials, run like a TV show and usually aim for direct viewer response. New technologies such as DVR allow TV watchers to skip through commercials; however, studies have

shown that these technologies do not have a negative effect on advertising (Gallagher, 2010). This is partly due to product placement. Product placement is an important aspect of TV advertising, because it incorporates products into the plots of shows. Although product placement has been around since the 1890s, when the Lumière brothers first placed Lever soap in their movies, the big boom in product placement began with the reality TV show *Survivor* in 2000 (Anderson, 2006). Since then, product placement has been a staple of prime-time entertainment. Reality TV shows such as *Project Runway* and *American Idol* are known for exhibiting products on screen, and talk-show host Oprah Winfrey made news in 2004 when she gave away new Pontiacs to her audience members (Stansky, 2008). Even children's shows are known to hock products; a new cartoon series recently began on Nickelodeon featuring characters that represent different Sketchers sneakers (Freidman, 2010).

DIGITAL MEDIA

Emerging digital media platforms such as the Internet and mobile phones have created many new advertising possibilities.

The Internet, like TV and radio, offers free services in exchange for advertising exposure. However, unlike radio or TV, the Internet is a highly personalized experience that shares private information.

VIRAL ADS

As you read in Chapter 11 "The Internet and Social Media", new advertising techniques have become popular on the Internet. Advertisers have tried to capitalize on the shared-media phenomenon by creating viral ads that achieve spontaneous success online. Fewer than one in six ads that are intended to go viral actually succeed, so marketers have developed strategies to encourage an advertisement's viral potential. Successful spots focus on creativity rather than a hard-selling strategy and generally target a specific audience (Fox Business, 2010). Recent Old Spice ads featured former NFL player Isaiah Mustafa in a set of continuous scenes, from a shower room to a yacht. The commercial ends with the actor on horseback, a theatrical trick that left viewers wondering how the stunt was pulled off. As of July 2010, the ad was the most popular video on YouTube with more than 94 million views, and Old Spice sales had risen 106 percent (Neff, 2010).

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media sites such as Facebook use the information users provide on their profiles to generate targeted advertisements. For instance, if a person is a fan of Mariah Carey or joined a group associated with the singer, he or she might see announcements advertising her new CD or a local concert. While this may seem harmless, clicking on an ad sends user data to the advertising company, including name and user ID. Many people have raised privacy concerns over this practice, yet it remains in use. Free e-mail services such as Gmail also depend on targeted advertising for their survival. Indeed, advertising is the only way such services could continue. Given the ongoing privacy debates concerning targeted Internet advertising, a balance between a user's privacy and accessibility of services will have to be settled in the near future.

MOBILE PHONES

Mobile phones provide several different avenues for advertisers. The growing use of Internet radio through mobile-phone platforms has created a market for advertisements tapped by radio advertising networks such as TargetSpot. By using the radio advertising model for mobile phones, users receive increased radio broadcast options and advertisers reach new targeted markets (Marketwire, 2010).

Another development in the mobile-phone market is the use of advertising in smartphone apps. Free versions of mobile-phone applications often include advertising to pay for the service. Popular apps such as WeatherBug and Angry Birds offer free versions with ads in the margins; however, users can avoid these ads by paying a few dollars to upgrade to "Pro" versions. Other apps such as Foursquare access a user's geographic location and offer ads for businesses within walking distance (Fairlee, 2010).

FIGURE 12.9



Free smartphone apps often contain ads to help pay for the service.

David Berkowitz – Beck's Campaign on Pandora iPhone App – Music Screen – CC BY 2.0.

GOVERNMENT REGULATION OF ADVERTISING

Advertising regulation has played an important role in advertising's history and cultural influence. One of the earliest federal laws addressing advertising was the Pure Food and Drug Law of 1906. A reaction to public outcry over the false claims of patent medicines, this law required informational labels to be placed on these products. It did not, however, address the questionable aspects of the advertisements, so it did not truly delve into the issue of false advertising.[12]

THE FORMATION OF THE FTC

Founded in 1914, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) became responsible for regulating false advertising claims. Although federal laws concerning these practices made plaintiffs prove that actual harm was done by the advertisement, state laws passed during the early 1920s allowed prosecution of misleading advertisements regardless of harm done.[13] The National Association of Attorneys General has helped states remain an important part of advertising regulation. In 1995, 13 states passed laws that required sweepstakes companies to provide full disclosure of rules and details of contests (O'Guinn, et. al., 2009).

During the Great Depression, New Deal legislation threatened to outlaw any misleading advertising, a result of the burgeoning consumer movement and the public outcry against advertising during the period (Time, 1941). The reformers did not fully achieve their goals, but they did make a permanent mark on advertising history. The 1938 Wheeler-Lea Amendment expanded the FTC's role to protect consumers from deceptive advertising. Until this point, the FTC was responsible for addressing false advertising complaints from competitors. With this legislation, the agency also became an important resource for the consumer movement.

TRUTH IN ADVERTISING

In 1971, the FTC began the Advertising Substantiation Program to force advertisers to provide evidence for the claims in their advertisements. Under this program, the FTC gained the power to issue cease-and-desist orders to advertisers regarding specific ads in question and to order corrective advertising. Under this provision, the FTC can force a company to issue an advertisement acknowledging and correcting an earlier misleading ad. Regulations under this program established that supposed experts used in advertisements must be qualified experts in their field, and celebrities must actually use the products they endorse.[14] In 2006, Sunny Health Nutrition was brought to court for advertising height-enhancing pills called HeightMax. The FTC found the company had hired an actor to appear as an expert in its ads, and that the pills did not live up to their claim. Sunny Health Nutrition was forced to pay $375,000 to consumers for misrepresenting its product (Consumer Affairs, 2006).

In 1992, the FTC introduced guidelines defining terms

such as *biodegradable* and *recyclable*. The growth of the environmental movement in the early 1990s led to an upsurge in environmental claims by manufacturers and advertisers. For example, Mobil Oil claimed their Hefty trash bags were biodegradable. While technically this statement is true, a 500- to 1,000-year decomposition cycle does not meet most people's definitions of the term (Lapidos, 2007). The FTC guidelines made such claims false by law (Schneider, 1992).

REGULATION OF THE INTERNET

The FTC has also turned its attention to online advertising. The Children's Online Privacy Act of 1998 was passed to prohibit companies from obtaining the personal information of children who access websites or other online resources. Because of the youth orientation of the Internet, newer advertising techniques have drawn increasing criticism. Alcohol companies in particular have come under scrutiny. Beer manufacturer Heineken's online presence includes a virtual city in which users can own an apartment and use

services such as e-mail. This practice mirrors that of children's advertising, in which companies often create virtual worlds to immerse children in their products. However, the age-verification requirements to participate in this type of environment are easily falsified and can lead to young children being exposed to more mature content (Gardner, 2010).

Consumer and privacy advocates who are concerned over privacy intrusions by advertisers have also called for Internet ad regulation. In 2009, the FTC acted on complaints against Sears that resulted in an injunction against the company for not providing sufficient disclosure. Sears offered $10 to consumers to download a program that tracked their Internet browsing. The FTC came down on Sears because the downloaded software tracked sensitive information that was not fully disclosed to the consumer. Similar consumer complaints against Facebook and Google for their consumer tracking have, at present, not resulted in FTC actions; however, the growing outcry makes new regulation of Internet advertising likely (Shields, 2010).

ADVERTISING'S INFLUENCE ON CULTURE

Discussing advertising's influence on culture raises a long-standing debate. One opinion states that advertising simply reflects the trends inherent in a culture, the other claims advertising takes an active role in shaping culture. Both ideas have merit and are most likely true to varying degrees.

ADVERTISING AND THE RISE OF CONSUMER CULTURE

George Babbitt, the protagonist of Sinclair Lewis's 1922 novel *Babbitt*, was a true believer in the growing American consumer culture:

Just as the priests of the Presbyterian Church determined his every

religious belief...so did the national advertisers fix the surface of his life, fix what he believed to be his individuality. These standard advertised wares—toothpastes, socks, tires, cameras, instantaneous hot-water heaters—were his symbols and proofs of excellence; at first the signs, and then the substitutes, for joy and passion and wisdom (Lewis, 1922).

Although Lewis's fictional representation of a 1920s-era consumer may not be an actual person, it indicates the national consumer culture that was taking shape at the time. As it had always done, advertising sought to attach products to larger ideas and symbols of worth and cultural values. However, the rise of mass media and of the advertising models that these media embraced made advertising take on an increasingly influential cultural role.

Automobile ads of the 1920s portrayed cars as a new, free way of life rather than simply a means of transportation. Advertisers used new ideas about personal hygiene to sell products and ended up breaking taboos about public discussion of the body. The newly acknowledged epidemics of halitosis and body odor brought about products such as mouthwash and deodorant. A Listerine campaign of the era transformed bad breath from a nuisance into the mark of a sociopath (Ashenburg, 2008). Women's underwear and menstruation went from being topics unsuitable for most family conversations to being fodder for the pages of national magazines.[15]

FIGURE 12.10



New Yodora helps keep you bath-fresh around the clock.

You are never daintier than when you step out of your bath or shower. Now a remarkably pure white deodorant helps you stay that way all day long. It's new Yodora—with hexachlorophene, world's number one deodorant. With Yodora's protection, you never need doubt you are at your fresh and dainty best all day long...the woman you

Advertisements for deodorants and other hygiene products broke social taboos about public discussion of hygiene.

Classic Film – 1964 Beauty Ad, Yodora Deodorant – CC BY-NC 2.0.

CREATING THE MODERN WORLD

World War I bond campaigns had made it clear that advertising could be used to influence public beliefs and values. Advertising focused on the new—making new products and ideas seem better than older ones and ushering in a sense of the modernity. In an address to the American Association of Advertising Agencies in 1926, President Coolidge went as far as to hold advertisers responsible for the "regeneration and redemption of mankind (Marchand, 1985)."

Up through the 1960s, most advertising agencies were owned and staffed by affluent white men, and advertising's portrayals of typical American families reflected this status

quo. Mainstream culture as propagated by magazine, radio, and newspaper advertising was that of middle- or upper-class White suburban families (Marchand, 1985). This sanitized image of the suburban family, popularized in such TV programs as *Leave It to Beaver*, has been mercilessly satirized since the cultural backlash of the 1960s.

A great deal of that era's cultural criticism targeted the image of the advertiser as a manipulator and promulgator of superficial consumerism. When advertisers for Volkswagen picked up on this criticism, turned it to their advantage, and created a new set of consumer symbols that would come to represent an age of rebellion, they neatly co-opted the arguments against advertising for their own purposes. In many instances, advertising has functioned as a codifier of its own ideals by taking new cultural values and turning them into symbols of a new phase of consumerism. This is the goal of effective advertising.

Apple's 1984 campaign is one of the most well-known examples of defining a product in terms of new cultural trends. A fledgling company compared to computer giants IBM and Xerox, Apple spent nearly $2 million on a commercial that would end up only being aired once (McAloney, 1984). During the third quarter of the 1984 Super Bowl, viewers across the United States watched in amazement as an ad unlike any other at the time appeared on their TV screens. The commercial showed a drab gray auditorium where identical individuals sat in front of a large screen. On the screen was a

man, addressing the audience with an eerily captivating voice. "We are one people, with one will," he droned. "Our enemies shall talk themselves to death. And we will bury them with their own confusion. We shall prevail (McAloney, 1984)!" While the audience sat motionlessly, one woman ran forward with a sledgehammer and threw it at the screen, causing it to explode in a flash of light and smoke. As the scene faded out, a narrator announced the product. "On January 24, Apple Computer will introduce the Macintosh. And you'll see why 1984 won't be like *1984* (Freidman, 1984)." With this commercial, Apple defined itself as a pioneer of the new generation. Instead of marketing its products as utilitarian tools, it advertised them as devices for combating conformity (Freidman, 1984). Over the next few decades, other companies imitated this approach, presenting their products as symbols of cultural values.

In his study of advertising's cultural impact, *The Conquest of Cool*, Thomas Frank compares the advertising of the 1960s with that of the early 1990s:

> How [advertisers] must have rejoiced when the leading minds of the culture industry announced the discovery of an all-new angry generation, the "Twenty-Somethings," complete with a panoply of musical styles, hairdos, and verbal signifiers ready-made to rejuvenate advertising's sagging credibility.... The strangest aspect of what followed wasn't the immediate onslaught of even hipper advertising, but that the entire "Generation X" discourse repeated...the

discussions of youth culture that had appeared in *Advertising Age*, *Madison Avenue*, and on all those youth-market panel discussions back in the sixties.[16]

To be clear, advertisers have not set out to consciously manipulate the public in the name of consumer culture. Rather, advertisers are simply doing their job—one that has had an enormous influence on culture.

ADVERTISING STEREOTYPES

The White, middle-class composition of ad agencies contributed to advertisements' rare depictions of minority populations. DDB—the agency responsible for the Volkswagen ads of the 1960s—was an anomaly in this regard. One of its more popular ads was for Levy's rye bread. Most conventional advertisers would have ignored the ethnic aspects of this product and simply marketed it to a mainstream White audience. Instead, the innovative agency created an ad campaign that made ethnic diversity a selling point, with spots featuring individuals from a variety of racial backgrounds

eating the bread with the headline "You don't have to be Jewish to love Levy's."

During the 1950s, stereotypical images of African Americans promulgated by advertisers began to draw criticism from civil rights leaders. Icons such as Aunt Jemima, the Cream of Wheat chef, and the Hiram Walker butler were some of the most recognizable black figures in U.S. culture. Unlike the African Americans who had gained fame through their artistry, scholarship, and athleticism, however, these advertising characters were famous for being domestic servants.

During the 1960s, meetings of the American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA) hosted civil rights leaders, and agencies began to respond to the criticisms of bias. A New York survey in the mid-1960s discovered that Blacks were underrepresented at advertising agencies. Many agencies responded by hiring new African American employees, and a number of Black-owned agencies started in the 1970s.[17]

Early advertising frequently reached out to women because they made approximately 80 percent of all consumer purchases. Thus, women were well represented in advertising. However, those depictions presented women in extremely narrow roles. Through the 1960s, ads targeting women generally showed them performing domestic duties such as cooking or cleaning, whereas ads targeting men often placed women in a submissive sexual role even if the product lacked any overt sexual connotation. A National Car Rental ad from

the early 1970s featured a disheveled female employee in a chair with the headline "Go Ahead, Take Advantage of Us." Another ad from the 1970s pictured a man with new Dacron slacks standing on top of a woman, proclaiming, "It's nice to have a girl around the house (Frauenfelder, 2008)."

An advertising profile printed in *Advertising Age* magazine gave a typical advertiser's understanding of the housewife at the time:

> She likes to watch TV and she does not enjoy reading a great deal. She is most easily reached through TV and the simple down-to-earth magazines.... Mental activity is arduous for her.... She is a person who wants to have things she can believe in rather than things she can think about (Rodnitzky, 1999).

The National Organization for Women (NOW) created a campaign during the early 1970s targeting the role of women in advertisements. Participants complained about the ads to networks and companies and even spray-painted slogans on offensive billboards in protest.

Representation of minorities and women in advertising has improved since the 1960s and '70s, but it still remains a problem. The 2010 Super Bowl drew one of the most diverse audiences ever recorded for the event, including a 45 percent female audience. Yet the commercials remained focused strictly on men. And of 67 ads shown during the game, only four showed minority actors in a lead role. Despite the obvious

economic benefit of diversity in marketing, advertising practices have resisted change (Ali, 2010).

ADVERTISING TO CHILDREN

The majority of advertisements that target children feature either toys or junk food. Children under the age of eight typically lack the ability to distinguish between fantasy and reality, and many advertisers use this to their advantage. Studies have shown that most children-focused food advertisements feature high-calorie, low-nutrition foods such as sugary cereals. Although the government regulates advertising to children to a degree, the Internet has introduced new means of marketing to youth that have not been addressed. Online video games called advergames feature famous child-oriented products. The games differ from traditional advertising, however, because the children playing them will experience a much longer period of product exposure than they do from the typical 30-second TV commercial. Child advocacy groups have been pushing for

increased regulation of advertising to children, but it remains to be seen whether this will take place (Calvert, 2008).

POSITIVE EFFECTS OF ADVERTISING

Although many people focus on advertising's negative outcomes, the medium has provided unique benefits over time. Early newspaper advertising allowed newspapers to become independent of church and government control, encouraging the development of a free press with the ability to criticize powerful interests. When newspapers and magazines moved to an advertising model, these publications became accessible to large groups of people who previously could not afford them. Advertising also contributed to radio's and TV's most successful eras. Radio's golden age in the 1940s and TV's golden age in the 1950s both took place when advertisers were creating or heavily involved with the production of most of the programs.

Advertising also makes newer forms of media both useful and accessible. Many Internet services, such as e-mail and smartphone applications, are only free because they feature advertising. Advertising allows promoters and service providers to reduce and sometimes eliminate the upfront purchase price, making these services available to a greater number of people and allowing lower economic classes to take part in mass culture.

Advertising has also been a longtime promoter of the arts. During the Renaissance, painters and composers often relied on wealthy patrons or governments to promote their work. Corporate advertising has given artists new means to fund their creative efforts. In addition, many artists and writers have been able to support themselves by working for advertisers. The use of music in commercials, particularly in recent years, has provided musicians with notoriety and income. Indeed, it is hard to imagine the cultural landscape of the United States without advertising.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Advertising has existed since ancient times but began to take on its modern form during the Age of Exploration. By the 19th century, newspapers and magazines had begun printing advertising to generate

needed revenues.

- Although many considered advertising to be lowbrow or immoral up to the early 20th century, it saw greater acceptance after its use during World War I to encourage support for the war.
- Up to the mid-20th century, advertising featured stereotypical affluent White families and was sale driven. Criticism of advertiser manipulation became the basis of a new style of advertising during the creative revolution of the 1960s.
- The rise of the Internet has caused print advertising revenues to decline but allows for personally targeted ads. Such tracking practices have aroused concern from privacy groups.
- The Federal Trade Commission is charged with ensuring that advertisements make verifiable claims and do not overtly mislead consumers.
- Advertising has infused American culture with mass images and ideas, creating a nation of consumers and shaping how people view themselves and others.

EXERCISES

Please answer the following short-answer questions. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. What are the important eras in the history of American advertising?
2. How does government regulation affect advertising?
3. What types of advertising are in use today?
4. What influence does advertising have on American consumerism and culture?
5. How has advertising affected newspapers?

[1]Mierau, 42.
[2]Hood, 28–51.
[3]Fox, 74–77.
[4]Fox, 89.
[5]Fox, 121–124.
[6]Fox, 168.
[7]Fox, 173.
[8]Fox, 210–215.
[9]Frank, 60–67, 159.
[10]Fox, 324–325.
[11]Klein, 12–22.
[12]Fox, 65–66.

[13]Hood, 74–75.
[14]O'Guinn, Allen, and Semenik, 131–137.
[15]Fox, 95–96.
[16]Frank, 233–235.
[17]Fox, 278–284.

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12.2 Public Relations

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe the four models of public relations and the four stages of a typical public relations campaign.
2. Analyze the role of public relations in media and culture.
3. Analyze the ways public relations is taking the place of traditional advertising.
4. Explain the concept of branding.
5. Describe the uses of public relations in politics, government, and news media.

Whereas advertising is the paid use of media space to sell something, public relations (PR) is the attempt to establish and maintain good relations between an organization and its constituents (Theaker, 2004). Practically, PR campaigns strive to use the free press to encourage favorable coverage. In their

book *The Fall of Advertising and the Rise of PR*, Al and Laura Ries make the point that the public trusts the press far more than they trust advertisements. Because of this, PR efforts that get products and brands into the press are far more valuable than a simple advertisement. Their book details the ways in which modern companies use public relations to far greater benefit than they use advertising (Ries & Ries, 2004). Regardless of the fate of advertising, PR has clearly come to have an increasing role in marketing and ad campaigns.

THE FOUR MODELS OF PR

TABLE 12.1 GRUNIG AND HUNT'S FOUR PR MODELS

Type of Model	Description	Example
Traditional publicity model (the press agentry model)	Professional agents seek media coverage for a client, product, or event.	Thong-clad actor Sacha Baron Cohen promotes *Bruno* by landing in Eminem's lap at the 2009 MTV Video Music Awards.
Public information model	Businesses communicate information to gain desired results.	Colleges send informational brochures to potential students; a company includes an "about" section on its website.
Persuasive communication model (the two-way asymmetric model)	Organizations attempt to persuade an audience to take a certain point of view.	Public service announcements like the one that shows "your brain" and "your brain on drugs."

Source: James E. Grunig and Todd Hunt, Managing Public Relations (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1984).

Type of Model	Description	Example
Two-way symmetric model	Both parties make use of a back-and-forth discussion.	A company sends out customer satisfaction surveys; company Facebook groups and message boards.

Source: James E. Grunig and Todd Hunt, Managing Public Relations (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1984).

Todd Hunt and James Grunig developed a theory of four models of PR. This model has held up in the years since its development and is a good introduction to PR concepts (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

TRADITIONAL PUBLICITY MODEL

Under the traditional publicity model, PR professionals seek

to create media coverage for a client, product, or event. These efforts can range from wild publicity stunts to simple news conferences to celebrity interviews in fashion magazines. P. T. Barnum was an early American practitioner of this kind of PR. His outrageous attempts at publicity worked because he was not worried about receiving negative press; instead, he believed that any coverage was a valuable asset. More recent examples of this style of extreme publicity include controversy-courting musicians such as Lady Gaga and Marilyn Manson. More restrained examples of this type of PR include the modern phenomenon of faded celebrities appearing on TV shows, such as Paula Abdul's long-running appearances on *American Idol*.

PUBLIC INFORMATION MODEL

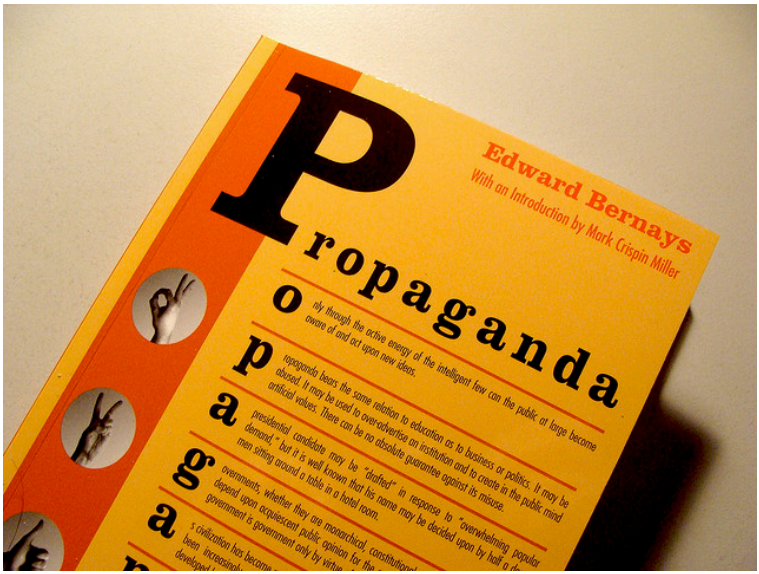
The goal of the public information model is to release information to a constituency. This model is less concerned with obtaining dramatic, extensive media coverage than with disseminating information in a way that ensures adequate

reception. For example, utility companies often include fliers about energy efficiency with customers' bills, and government agencies such as the IRS issue press releases to explain changes to existing codes. In addition, public interest groups release the results of research studies for use by policy makers and the public.

PERSUASIVE COMMUNICATION: TWO-WAY ASYMMETRIC

The persuasive communication model, or the two-way asymmetric, works to persuade a specific audience to adopt a certain behavior or point of view. To be considered effective, this model requires a measured response from its intended audience.

FIGURE 12.12



Edward Bernays created campaigns using the persuasive communication model.

chrisch_ – Rule the World! – CC BY-NC 2.0.

Government propaganda is a good example of this model. Propaganda is the organized spreading of information to assist or weaken a cause (Dictionary). Edward Bernays has been called the founder of modern PR for his work during World War I promoting the sale of war bonds. One of the first professional PR experts, Bernays made the two-way asymmetric model his early hallmark. In a famous campaign

for Lucky Strike cigarettes, he convinced a group of well-known celebrities to walk in the New York Easter parade smoking Lucky Strikes. Most modern corporations employ the persuasive communication model.

TWO-WAY SYMMETRIC MODEL

The two-way symmetric model requires true communication between the parties involved. By facilitating a back-and-forth discussion that results in mutual understanding and an agreement that respects the wishes of both parties, this PR model is often practiced in town hall meetings and other public forums in which the public has a real effect on the results. In an ideal republic, Congressional representatives strictly employ this model. Many nonprofit groups that are run by boards and have public service mandates use this model to ensure continued public support.

Commercial ventures also rely on this model. PR can generate media attention or attract customers, and it can also ease communication between a company and its investors,

partners, and employees. The two-way symmetric model is useful in communicating within an organization because it helps employees feel they are an important part of the company. Investor relations are also often carried out under this model.

PR FUNCTIONS

Either private PR companies or in-house communications staffers carry out PR functions. A PR group generally handles all aspects of an organization's or individual's media presence, including company publications and press releases. Such a group can range from just one person to dozens of employees depending on the size and scope of the organization.

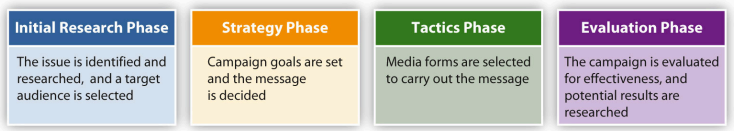
PR functions include the following:

- Media relations: takes place with media outlets
- Internal communications: occurs within a company between management and employees, and among subsidiaries of the same company

- Business-to-business: happens between businesses that are in partnership
- Public affairs: takes place with community leaders, opinion formers, and those involved in public issues
- Investor relations: occurs with investors and shareholders
- Strategic communication: intended to accomplish a specific goal
- Issues management: keeping tabs on public issues important to the organization
- Crisis management: handling events that could damage an organization's image[1]

ANATOMY OF A PR CAMPAIGN

FIGURE 12.13



Anatomy of a PR campaign

PR campaigns occur for any number of reasons. They can be a quick response to a crisis or emerging issue, or they can stem from a long-term strategy tied in with other marketing efforts. Regardless of its purpose, a typical campaign often involves four phases.

INITIAL RESEARCH PHASE

The first step of many PR campaigns is the initial research phase. First, practitioners identify and qualify the issue to be addressed. Then, they research the organization itself to clarify issues of public perception, positioning, and internal dynamics. Strategists can also research the potential audience of the campaign. This audience may include media outlets, constituents, consumers, and competitors. Finally, the context

of the campaign is often researched, including the possible consequences of the campaign and the potential effects on the organization. After considering all of these factors, practitioners are better educated to select the best type of campaign.

STRATEGY PHASE

During the strategy phase, PR professionals usually determine objectives focused on the desired goal of the campaign and formulate strategies to meet those objectives. Broad strategies such as deciding on the overall message of a campaign and the best way to communicate the message can be finalized at this time.

TACTICS PHASE

During the tactics phase, the PR group decides on the means to implement the strategies they formulated during the strategy phase. This process can involve devising specific communication techniques and selecting the forms of media that suit the message best. This phase may also address budgetary restrictions and possibilities.

EVALUATION PHASE

After the overall campaign has been determined, PR practitioners enter the evaluation phase. The group can review their campaign plan and evaluate its potential effectiveness. They may also conduct research on the potential results to better understand the cost and benefits of the campaign. Specific criteria for evaluating the campaign when it is completed are also established at this time (Smith, 2002).

EXAMPLES OF PR CAMPAIGNS

Since its modern inception in the early 20th century, PR has turned out countless campaigns—some highly successful, others dismal failures. Some of these campaigns have become particularly significant for their lasting influence or creative execution. This section describes a few notable PR campaigns over the years.

DIAMONDS FOR THE COMMON MAN

During the 1930s, the De Beers company had an enormous amount of diamonds and a relatively small market of luxury

buyers. They launched a PR campaign to change the image of diamonds from a luxury good into an accessible and essential aspect of American life. The campaign began by giving diamonds to famous movie stars, using their built-in publicity networks to promote De Beers. The company created stories about celebrity proposals and gifts between lovers that stressed the size of the diamonds given. These stories were then given out to selected fashion magazines. The result of this campaign was the popularization of diamonds as one of the necessary aspects of a marriage proposal (Reid, 2006).

BIG TOBACCO AIDS RESEARCHERS

FIGURE 12.14

Grimaults Indian Cigarettes for asthma



Recommended by Medical Authorities for the immediate relief of **Asthma** and **Bronchial trouble, Hay Fever, Laryngitis** and **Irritation** of the air passages.

GRIMAULT'S CIGARETTES

ease the feeling of tightness across the chest and give à relief from gasping for breath.

GRIMAULT & Cie, 8, r. Violenne, Paris.

In response to the increasing number of health concerns surrounding smoking, tobacco companies began running ads that argued the benefits of smoking their brand.

Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

In 1953, studies showing the detrimental health effects of smoking caused a drop in cigarette sales. An alliance of tobacco manufacturers hired the PR group Hill & Knowlton to develop a campaign to deal with this problem. The first step of the campaign Hill & Knowlton devised was the creation of the Tobacco Industry Research Committee (TIRC) to promote studies that questioned the health effects of tobacco use. The TIRC ran advertisements featuring the results of these studies, giving journalists who were addressing the subject an easy source to quote. The groups working against smoking were not familiar with media relations, making it harder for journalists to quote them and use their arguments.

The campaign was effective, however, not because it denied the harmful effects of smoking but because it stressed the disagreements between researchers. By providing the press with information favorable to the tobacco manufacturers and publicly promoting new filtered cigarettes, the campaign aimed to replace the idea that smoking was undeniably bad with the idea that there was disagreement over the effects of smoking. This strategy served tobacco companies well up through the 1980s.

TACO BELL TARGETS *MIR*

When the Russian space station *Mir* was set to crash land in the Pacific Ocean in 2001, Taco Bell created a floating vinyl target that the company placed in the Pacific. Taco Bell promised to give every American a free taco if the space station hit the target. This simple PR stunt gave all the journalists covering the *Mir* crash landing a few lines to add to their stories. Scientists even speculated on the chances of the station hitting the target—slim to none. Ultimately, the stunt gained Taco Bell global advertising (BBC World, 2001).

PR AS A REPLACEMENT FOR ADVERTISING

In some cases, PR has begun overtaking advertising as the preferred way of promoting a particular company or product. For example, the tobacco industry offers a good case study of the migration from advertising to PR. Regulations prohibiting radio and TV cigarette advertisements had an enormous effect on sales. In response, the tobacco industry began using PR techniques to increase brand presence.

Tobacco company Philip Morris started underwriting cultural institutions and causes as diverse as the Joffrey Ballet, the Smithsonian, environmental awareness, and health concerns. Marlboro sponsored events that brought a great deal of media attention to the brand. For example, during the 1980s, the Marlboro Country Music Tour took famous country stars to major coliseums throughout the country and featured talent contests that brought local bands up on stage, increasing the audience even further. Favorable reviews of the shows generated positive press for Marlboro. Later interviews with country artists and books on country music history have also mentioned this tour.

On the fifth anniversary of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in 1987, Marlboro's PR groups organized a celebration hosted by comedian Bob Hope. Country music legends the Judds and Alabama headlined the show, and Marlboro paid for new

names inscribed on the memorial. By attaching the Marlboro brand to such an important cultural event, the company gained an enormous amount of publicity. Just as importantly, these efforts at least partially restored the stature that the brand lost due to health concerns (Saffir, 2000).

BRANDING

While advertising is an essential aspect of initial brand creation, PR campaigns are vital to developing the more abstract aspects of a brand. These campaigns work to position a brand in the public arena in order to give it a sense of cultural importance.

SHIFT FROM ADVERTISING TO PR

Pioneered by such companies as Procter & Gamble during the 1930s, the older, advertising-centric model of branding focused on the product, using advertisements to associate a particular branded good with quality or some other positive cultural value. Yet, as consumers became exposed to ever-increasing numbers of advertisements, traditional advertising's effectiveness dwindled. The ubiquity of modern advertising means the public is skeptical of—or even ignores—claims advertisers make about their products. This credibility gap can be overcome, however, when PR professionals using good promotional strategies step in.

The new PR-oriented model of branding focuses on the overall image of the company rather than on the specific merits of the product. This branding model seeks to associate a company with specific personal and cultural values that hold meaning for consumers. In the early 1990s, for example, car company Saturn marketed its automobiles not as a means of transportation but as a form of culture. PR campaigns promoted the image of the Saturn family, associating the company with powerful American values and giving Saturn owners a sense of community. Events such as the 1994 Saturn homecoming sought to encourage this sense of belonging. Some 45,000 people turned out for this event; families gave up

their beach holidays simply to come to a Saturn manufacturing plant in Tennessee to socialize with other Saturn owners and tour the facility.

Recently Toyota faced a marketing crisis when it instituted a massive recall based on safety issues. To counter the bad press, the company launched a series of commercials featuring top Toyota executives, urging the public to keep their faith in the brand (Bernstein, 2010). Much like the Volkswagen ads half a century before, Toyota used a style of self-awareness to market its automobiles. The positive PR campaign presented Toyotas as cars with a high standard of excellence, backed by a company striving to meet customers' needs.

STUDIES IN SUCCESS: APPLE AND NIKE

Apple has also employed this type of branding with great effectiveness. By focusing on a consistent design style in which every product reinforces the Apple experience, the computer company has managed to position itself as a mark of individuality. Despite the cynical outlook of many Americans

regarding commercial claims, the notion that Apple is a symbol of individualism has been adopted with very little irony. Douglas Atkin, who has written about brands as a form of cult, readily admits and embraces his own brand loyalty to Apple:

> I'm a self-confessed Apple loyalist. I go to a cafe around the corner to do some thinking and writing, away from the hurly-burly of the office, and everyone in that cafe has a Mac. We never mention the fact that we all have Macs. The other people in the cafe are writers and professors and in the media, and the feeling of cohesion and community in that cafe becomes very apparent if someone comes in with a PC. There's almost an observable shiver of consternation in the cafe, and it must be discernable to the person with the PC, because they never come back.

Brand managers that once focused on the product now find themselves in the role of community leaders, responsible for the well-being of a cultural image (Atkin, 2004).

Kevin Roberts, the current CEO of Saatchi & Saatchi Worldwide, a branding-focused creative organization, has used the term "lovemark" as an alternative to trademark. This term encompasses brands that have created "loyalty beyond reason," meaning that consumers feel loyal to a brand in much the same way they would toward friends or family members. Creating a sense of mystery around a brand generates an aura that bypasses the usual cynical take on commercial icons. A great deal of Apple's success comes from the company's mystique.

Apple has successfully developed PR campaigns surrounding product releases that leak selected rumors to various press outlets but maintain secrecy over essential details, encouraging speculation by bloggers and mainstream journalists on the next product. All this combines to create a sense of mystery and an emotional anticipation for the product's release.

Emotional connections are crucial to building a brand or lovemark. An early example of this kind of branding was Nike's product endorsement deal with Michael Jordan during the 1990s. Jordan's amazing, seemingly magical performances on the basketball court created his immense popularity, which was then further built up by a host of press outlets and fans who developed an emotional attachment to Jordan. As this connection spread throughout the country, Nike associated itself with Jordan and also with the emotional reaction he inspired in people. Essentially, the company inherited a PR machine that had been built around Jordan and that continued to function until his retirement (Roberts, 2003).

BRANDING BACKLASHES

An important part of maintaining a consistent brand is preserving the emotional attachment consumers have to that brand. Just as PR campaigns build brands, PR crises can damage them. For example, the massive Gulf of Mexico oil spill in 2010 became a PR nightmare for BP, an oil company that had been using PR to rebrand itself as an environmentally friendly energy company.

In 2000, BP began a campaign presenting itself as "Beyond Petroleum," rather than British Petroleum, the company's original name. By acquiring a major solar company, BP became the world leader in solar production and in 2005 announced it would invest $8 billion in alternative energy over the following 10 years. BP's marketing firm developed a PR campaign that, at least on the surface, emulated the forward-looking two-way symmetric PR model. The campaign conducted interviews with consumers, giving them an opportunity to air their grievances and publicize energy policy issues. BP's website featured a carbon footprint calculator consumers could use to calculate the size of their environmental impact (Solman, 2008). The single explosion on BP's deep-water oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico essentially nullified the PR work of the previous 10 years, immediately putting BP at the bottom of the list of environmentally concerned companies.

A company's control over what its brand symbolizes can also lead to branding issues. The Body Shop, a cosmetics company that gained popularity during the 1980s and early 1990s, used PR to build its image as a company that created natural products and took a stand on issues of corporate ethics. The company teamed up with Greenpeace and other environmental groups to promote green issues and increase its natural image.

By the mid-1990s, however, revelations about the unethical treatment of franchise owners called this image into serious question. The Body Shop had spent a great deal of time and money creating its progressive, spontaneous image. Stories of travels to exotic locations to research and develop cosmetics were completely fabricated, as was the company's reputation for charitable contributions. Even the origins of the company had been made up as a PR tool: The idea, name, and even product list had been ripped off from a small California chain called the Body Shop that was later given a settlement to keep quiet. The PR campaign of the Body Shop made it one of the great success stories of the early 1990s, but the unfounded nature of its PR claims undermined its image dramatically. Competitor L'Oréal eventually bought the Body Shop for a fraction of its previous value (Entine, 2007).

Other branding backlashes have plagued companies such as Nike and Starbucks. By building their brands into global symbols, both companies also came to represent unfettered capitalist greed to those who opposed them. During the 1999

World Trade Organization protests in Seattle, activists targeted Starbucks and Nike stores for physical attacks such as window smashing. Labor activists have also condemned Nike over the company's use of sweatshops to manufacture shoes. Eventually, Nike created a vice president for corporate responsibility to deal with sweatshop issues.[2]

BLACKSPOT: THE ANTIBRAND BRAND

Adbusters, a publication devoted to reducing advertising's influence on global culture, added action to its criticisms of Nike by creating its own shoe. Manufactured in union shops, Blackspot shoes contain recycled tire rubber and hemp fabric. The Blackspot logo is a simple round dot that looks like it has been scribbled with white paint, as if a typical logo had been covered over. The shoes also include a symbolic red dot on the toe with which to kick Nike. Blackspot shoes use the Nike brand to create their own antibrand, symbolizing progressive labor reform and

environmentally sustainable business practices (New York Times, 2004).

FIGURE 12.16



Blackspot shoes developed as an antibrand alternative to regular sneakers.

Geoff Stearns – Black spot sneakers – CC BY 2.0.

RELATIONSHIP WITH POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

Politics and PR have gone hand in hand since the dawn of political activity. Politicians communicate with their constituents and make their message known using PR strategies. Benjamin Franklin's trip as ambassador to France during the American Revolution stands as an early example of political PR that followed the publicity model. At the time of his trip, Franklin was an international celebrity, and the fashionable society of Paris celebrated his arrival; his choice of a symbolic American-style fur cap immediately inspired a new style of women's wigs. Franklin also took a printing press with

him to produce leaflets and publicity notices that circulated through Paris's intellectual and fashionable circles. Such PR efforts eventually led to a treaty with France that helped the colonists win their freedom from Great Britain (Isaacson, 2003).

Famous 20th-century PR campaigns include President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Fireside Chats, a series of radio addresses that explained aspects of the New Deal. Roosevelt's personal tone and his familiarity with the medium of radio helped the Fireside Chats become an important promotional tool for his administration and its programs. These chats aimed to justify many New Deal policies, and they helped the president bypass the press and speak directly to the people. More recently, Blackwater Worldwide, a private military company, dealt with criticisms of its actions in Iraq by changing its name. The new name, Xe Services, was the result of a large-scale PR campaign to distance the company from associations with civilian violence (Associated Press, 2009).

The proliferation of media outlets and the 24-hour news cycle have led to changes in the way politicians handle PR. The gap between old PR methods and new ones became evident in 2006, when then–Vice President Dick Cheney accidentally shot a friend during a hunting trip. Cheney, who had been criticized in the past for being secretive, did not make a statement about the accident for three days. Republican consultant Rich Galen explained Cheney's silence as an older PR tactic that tries to keep the discussion out of the media.

However, the old trick is less effective in the modern digital world.

> That entire doctrine has come and gone. Now the doctrine is you respond instantaneously, and where possible with a strong counterattack. A lot of that is because of the Internet, a lot of that is because of cable TV news (Associated Press, 2006).

PR techniques have been used in propaganda efforts throughout the 20th century. During the 1990s, the country of Kuwait employed Hill & Knowlton to encourage U.S. involvement in the Persian Gulf region. One of the more infamous examples of their campaign was a heavily reported account by a Kuwaiti girl testifying that Iraqi troops had dumped babies out of incubators in Kuwaiti hospitals. Outrage over this testimony helped galvanize opinion in favor of U.S. involvement. As it turned out, the Kuwaiti girl was really the daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador and had not actually witnessed any of the alleged atrocities (Parsons, 2005).

Lobbyists also attempt to influence public policy using PR campaigns. The Water Environment Federation, a lobbying group representing the sewage industry, initiated a campaign to promote the application of sewage on farms during the early 1990s. The campaign came up with the word *biosolids* to replace the term *sludge*. Then it worked to encourage the use of this term as a way to popularize sewage as a fertilizer, providing information to public officials and representatives. In 1992, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency adopted

the new term and changed the classification of biosolids to a fertilizer from a hazardous waste. This renaming helped New York City eliminate tons of sewage by shipping it to states that allowed biosolids (Stauber & Rampton, 1995).

POLITICAL BRANDING

Politics has also embraced branding. Former President Bill Clinton described his political battles in terms of a brand war:

> [The Republicans] were brilliant at branding. They said they were about values.... Everybody is a values voter, but they got the brand...they said they were against the death tax...what a great brand.... I did a disservice to the American people not by putting forth a bad plan, but by not being a better brander, not being able to explain it better (Kiley, 2008).

Branding has been used to great effect in recent elections. A consistently popular political brand is that of the outsider, or reform-minded politician. Despite his many years of service in the U.S. Senate, John McCain famously adopted this brand during the 2008 presidential election. McCain's competitor, Barack Obama, also employed branding strategies. The Obama campaign featured several iconic portraits and slogans

that made for a consistent brand and encouraged his victory in 2008. Before Obama's inauguration in January 2009, an unprecedented amount of merchandise was sold, a further testament to the power of branding (Alberts, 2009).

FIGURE 12.17



The 2008 Obama campaign used logos as a way to publicize Obama's brand.

Phillip Jeffrey – Obama '08 Logo – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

BRANDING AS A NEW FORM OF COMMUNICATION

That so many different groups have adopted branding as a means of communication is a testament to its ubiquity. Even anticommercial, antibrand groups such as *Adbusters* have created brands to send messages. Social media sites have also encouraged branding techniques by allowing users to create profiles of themselves that they use to communicate their core values. This personal application is perhaps the greatest evidence of the impact of advertising and PR on modern culture. Branding, once a technique used by companies to sell their products, has become an everyday means of communication.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The four models of PR include traditional publicity, public information, persuasive communication, and two-way symmetrical models.
- PR campaigns begin with a research phase, develop objectives during a strategy phase, formulate ways to meet objectives during the tactics phase, and assess the proposed campaign during the evaluation phase.
- Branding focuses on the lifestyles and values inherent in a brand's image as opposed to the products that are manufactured. It can be quickly undone by PR crises such as the BP oil spill.
- PR has always been an important part of political campaigning and activity. In recent years, branding has become an important part of national political campaigns.

EXERCISES

Please answer the following short-answer questions. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. What are the four models of PR and the four stages of a typical PR campaign?
2. Analyze the role (or roles) of PR in media and culture.
3. In what ways is PR taking the place of traditional advertising?
4. What is branding and how is it important to PR?
5. How is PR used in the news media?
6. In which ways is PR used in politics?

END-OF-CHAPTER ASSESSMENT

Review Questions

1. Section 1
    1. How did advertising shape early consumer culture during the 1920s?
    2. Explain how government legislation has regulated advertisements and their claims.
    3. How did the creative revolution of the 1960s change advertising?
    4. How did the multiple-sponsor format change TV?
    5. Give an example of a digital media format and

explain how it has incorporated advertising.

2. Section 2

    1. What PR model did P. T. Barnum utilize the most?
    2. Which phase of a PR campaign involves creating objectives?
    3. What was the focus of BP's PR campaign before the 2010 oil spill?
    4. What are some of the key components of Apple's branding strategy?
    5. How would you describe Barack Obama's brand during the 2008 presidential campaign?

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. Do you think that government regulation of advertising is justified? Explain your answer.
2. In your opinion, would most Americans give up their privacy in order to retain free, advertiser-supported services such as e-mail? Explain your answer.
3. Do you think that print media can survive without traditional forms of advertising? Explain your answer.

4. How do you think branding has affected American culture?
5. How has branding affected political discourse in the United States?

CAREER CONNECTION

Advertising has had an enormous influence on the ways that people present and imagine themselves. Personal branding has become an industry, with consultants and coaches ready to help anyone find his or her own brand. Creating a personal brand is a useful way to assess your skills and feelings about the advertising or PR professions.

Research the term *personal brand* using a search engine. Look for strategies that would help you construct your own brand. Imagine that you are a brand and describe what that brand offers. This does not need to be limited to professional capacities, but should represent your personal philosophy and life experiences. In 15 words or less, write a description of your brand.

Answer the following questions about your brand description:

1. How well does the brand description capture your personality?
2. How appealing do you think this brand would be to potential employers?
3. How appealing do you think this brand would be to potential friends?
4. Are you comfortable with the idea of promoting your own brand? Explain your answer.
5. How do you think the personal branding process is different from or similar to the corporate branding process?

[1]Theaker, 7.

[2]Klein, 366.

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SOURCE EDITION - CHAPTERS 13-16

Chapter 13: Economics of Mass Media

13.1 Economics of Mass Media
13.2 Characteristics of Media Industries
13.3 The Internet's Effects on Media Economies
13.4 Digital Divide in a Global Economy
13.5 Information Economy
13.6 Globalization of Media
13.7 Cultural Imperialism

13.1 Economics of Mass Media

MEDIA CONGLOMERATE OR MONOPOLY?

FIGURE 13.1



Mike Mozart – Comcast – CC BY 2.0.

In the late 19th century, Andrew Carnegie had a brilliant idea. Instead of buying materials and manufacturing steel, Carnegie bought up mines, railways, and all other aspects of the industry, pioneering a business model that later became known as vertical integration, in which a company owns both its suppliers and buyers. Gathering, manufacturing, and delivering raw materials and finished goods all under the control of a single corporation allowed Carnegie's profits to soar by cutting out the middleman and allowing him to drive the competition out of certain markets. A century later, this same strategy still works; it may not drive industrialization, but its effects are just as powerful.

In late 2009, cable company Comcast announced a plan to purchase a controlling ownership stake in NBC Universal to allow Comcast to join with NBC (Arango, 2009). This multibillion-dollar deal would give Comcast a 51 percent stake in the company, with present owners General Electric (GE) retaining control of the other 49 percent. The proposed venture brought together all NBC Universal content—including Universal Pictures and Focus Features; Spanish-language network Telemundo and the cable networks USA, Bravo, CNBC, and MSNBC—with Comcast's cable channels, which include E! Entertainment, the Golf Channel, and the sports network Versus. Already one of the nation's largest cable and broadband Internet providers, Comcast would then conceivably have the power to restrict these hugely popular NBC-owned networks to its own cable service, thus

forcing consumers to adopt Comcast in order to watch them, or to charge huge premiums to competitors' cable subscribers for the channels, thereby making their own cable service more desirable.

The most concerning—or beneficial, for Comcast—aspect of this merger is how it may integrate online content with traditional cable media. NBC Universal cofounded Hulu, the second-largest online video channel in the United States. If Comcast sees ad-driven sites such as Hulu as a threat to its cable business, then ownership over the online video portal would allow Comcast to restrict the site and all of NBC's online content to its own cable subscribers. In effect, Comcast would be allowed to create a subscription model for Internet content, just as it sells subscriptions for cable content. For years, viewers have been able to pick and choose from a wide variety of sources, selecting only the online content that they want; now, some fear that Comcast could bring the problems of a cable subscription—hundreds of channels but only some worth watching—to the Internet (Chasick, 2009).

This merger has the potential to reshape the way that mass media is produced and distributed to consumers. When most Internet users subscribed to America Online (AOL), the company set up its own site simply as a portal to other companies' content. The proposed integration of content producers and service providers, however, allows for unprecedented control of Internet content. Net neutrality poses another problem; Comcast could potentially grant its

own content channels—such as a subscription-only version of Hulu—privileges over competing channels. While this does not necessarily pose a problem when there is healthy competition, in many regions Comcast is the only provider of broadband Internet, thus raising concerns of a potential monopoly. No matter what happens with this particular merger, it seems that the economics of mass media are becoming even more tangled as the rapid rise of new technology threatens to transform or replace traditional media outlets.

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13.2 Characteristics of Media Industries

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify the three basic media business models.
2. Identify the business models of several media industries.
3. Describe the differences between the two ways in which media receives revenue.

The merger of Comcast and NBC is just one example of the myriad ways media companies do business. Television, print publishing, radio broadcasting, music, and film all have their own economic nuances and distinct models. However, these business models fall into three general categories: monopoly, oligopoly, and monopolistic competition.

Of these three basic media business models, monopoly is probably the most familiar. A monopoly occurs when one controls a product or service—for example, a small town with only one major newspaper. Oligopoly, or the control of a product or service by just a few companies, commonly occurs in publishing; a few major publishers put out most best-selling books, and relatively few companies control many of the

nation's highest-circulating magazines. Television is much the same way, as the major broadcast networks—Comcast and GE's NBC, Disney's ABC, National Amusements's CBS, and News Corporation's Fox—own nearly all broadcast and cable outlets. Finally, monopolistic competition takes place when multiple companies offer essentially the same product or service. For example, Ticketmaster and Live Nation were longtime competitors until they merged in 2010, with both providing basically the same set of event-management services for music and other live entertainment industries.

The last few decades have seen increasing conglomeration of media ownership, allowing for economies of scale that previously could not be achieved. Instead of individual local radio stations competing for advertising revenue among a range of local companies, for example, large corporations can now buy wholesale advertising for any or all of their brands on a dozen different radio stations in a single media market all owned by a conglomerate such as Clear Channel. The economics of mass media has become a matter of macroeconomic proportions: GE now makes everything from jet engines to cable news. The implications of this go beyond advertising. Because major corporations now own nearly every media outlet, ongoing fears of corporate control of media messaging have intensified.

However, these fears are often channeled into productive enterprises. In many media industries, an ongoing countercurrent exists to provide diversity not found in many

corporate-owned models. Independent radio stations such as those affiliated with nonprofit organizations and colleges provide news and in-depth analysis as well as a variety of musical and entertainment programs that are not found on corporate stations. Likewise, small music labels have had recent success promoting and distributing music through online CD sales or digital distribution services such as iTunes appliance program. YouTube makes it easier for videographers to reach a surprisingly large market, often surpassing even professional sites such as Hulu.

RAISING REVENUE

Companies employ many different ways to raise revenue for their services, but all boil down to two fundamental ideas: The money comes either from consumers or from advertising. In practice, many outlets combine the two to give themselves a flexible stream of income. Equally, consumers may be willing to pay slightly more for fewer ads, or to sit through more advertising in exchange for free content.

Traditional book publishers, which make practically all of their money by selling their products directly to consumers, lie on one extreme end of the spectrum. In some respects, cable

companies use a related model under which they directly sell consumers the delivery and subscription of a bundled package of programming channels. However, cable channels primarily rely on a mix of media revenue models, receiving funding from advertising along with subscription fees. Magazines and newspapers may fall into this middle-ground category as well, although online classified advertising has caused print publications to lose this important revenue stream in recent years. Broadcast television is the clearest example of advertising-driven income, as there are no subscription fees for these channels. Because this lack of direct fees increases the potential audience for the network, networks can sell their advertising time at a premium, as opposed to a cable channel with a more limited and likely more narrow viewership.

PRINT MEDIA

Print media fall into three basic categories: books, newspapers, and magazines. The book publishing industry is basically an oligopoly; the top 10 trade publishers made up 72 percent of the total market in 2009, with the top 5 alone comprising 58 percent of this (Hyatt, 2010). Newspapers tend toward local monopolies and oligopolies, as there are generally few

local news sources. In the past classified advertising made up a substantial portion of newspaper revenue. However, the advent of the Internet—particularly free classified services such as Craigslist—has weakened the newspaper industry through dwindling classified advertising revenues.

NEWSPAPERS

The newspaper industry also entails a mix of initial, or first copy costs, and relatively low marginal costs. Journalistic and editorial costs are relatively high, whereas the costs of newsprint and distribution are fairly low. The transition from the labor-intensive process of mechanical typesetting to modern electronic printing greatly reduced the marginal costs of producing newspapers. However, the price of newsprint still goes through cyclical ups and downs, making it difficult to price a newspaper in the long run.

The highest costs of publishing a paper remain the editorial and administrative overheads. Back-office activities such as administration and finance can often be combined if a company owns more than one paper. Unlike the historical restrictions on broadcast media that limited the number of stations owned by a single network, print media has faced no

such ownership limits. Because of this, a company such as Gannett has come to own *USA Today* as well as mostly local newspapers in 33 states, Guam, and the United Kingdom (Columbia Journalism Review, 2008). Other companies, such as McClatchy, also run their own wire services, partly as a way of reducing the costs of providing national journalism to many local markets.

MAGAZINES

Like newspapers, magazines are largely owned by just a few companies. However, unlike newspapers, many magazine chains are themselves owned by much larger media conglomerates. Time Warner—the highest-ranking media company in 2003—owns numerous magazines, including *Time*, *Fortune*, and *Sports Illustrated*. Taking all of its publications into account, Time Warner controls a 20 percent share of all magazine advertising in the United States. However, many smaller publishers produce niche publications, many of which do not aspire to a wider market. In all, magazines seem to be undergoing a period of economic

decline, with a net loss of some 120 publications in 2009 alone (Flamm, 2009).

TELEVISION AND RADIO

As discussed in Chapter 9 "Television", large media conglomerates own nearly all television networks. Both national networks and local affiliates are typically owned by conglomerates; however, stations such as Fox-owned WNYW in New York or CBS-owned KCNC in Denver are able to mix local content with national reporting and programming, much as large newspaper companies do.

In a local market, one cable company usually dominates the cable service market. In many places, one cable company, such as Comcast—the largest of the cable companies—is the only option. Over the past several years, however, satellite companies such as Dish Network and DirecTV, which are able to reach any number of consumers with limited local infrastructure, have introduced increased, albeit limited, levels of competition.

Even as cable is expanding, radio has become heavily consolidated. Since the 1990s, massive radio networks such as Clear Channel Communications have bought up many local stations in an effort to control every radio station in a given media market. However, the FCC has designated the lower part of the FM radio band for noncommercial purposes, including nonprofit programming such as educational, religious, or public radio stations—and continues to hold public discussion on frequency allocations. These practices help retain a certain level of programming diversity in the face of increased homogenization, largely because such stations are not supported through advertising. Because they are funded by donations or nonprofit institutions, these stations benefit economically from catering to a minority of listeners who may support the station directly, rather than a larger majority that has other options for entertainment.

MUSIC AND FILM

Because both the music and film industries face unique business opportunities and challenges, each operates on an economic model unlike either print or broadcast media. Just

like those forms of media, however, music and film have undergone significant changes due to consolidation and technological and consumer shifts in recent years.

THE BIG FOUR

The music industry is closely related to the radio industry, and the two have a high degree of codependence. Without music, radio would not be quite as lively or nearly as popular; without radio, music would be more difficult for listeners to discover, and perhaps be limited to a local consumer base.

As radio companies have consolidated, so has the music industry. A total of four record companies, popularly called the "Big Four" within the industry, dominate the recorded music business and thus most mainstream radio airwaves. Because a conglomerate such as Clear Channel is ill-equipped to handle local tastes and musical acts—and because it tends to be easier to manage programming across a large regional area than on a station-by-station basis—the Big Four record companies tend to focus on national and international acts. After all, if a label can convince a single radio conglomerate to play a particular act's music, that performer instantly gains access to a broad national market.

Music is therefore widely considered an oligopoly, despite the presence of countless small, independent companies. A handful of major record labels dominate the market, and they are all basically structured the same way. Universal is owned by NBC, which was in turn owned by GE and now Comcast; Sony Music is owned by the eponymous Japanese technology giant; Warner Music Group, although now its own entity, was previously under the umbrella of Time Warner; and the EMI Group is owned by a private investment firm.

CONSOLIDATION AND TICKETING

Although the Big Four dominate the recorded music industry, they have surprisingly little to do with live performances. Traditionally, musicians have toured to promote their albums—and sell enough copies to pay off their advances—and the live show was a combination of self-promotion and income. An artist's record company provided financial support, but a concert ticket generated significantly more income per sale than a CD. Since the merger of ticketing

companies Ticketmaster and Live Nation, the ticketing services for large venues have practically been monopolized. For example, Madison Square Garden, one of the largest venues in New York City, does not handle its booking in-house, and with good reason; the technology to manage tens of thousands of fans trying to buy tickets to a soon-to-be-sold-out concert the day they go on sale would likely break the system. Instead, Ticketmaster handles all of the ticketing for Madison Square Garden, adding a 10 percent to 20 percent fee to the face value of the ticket for its exclusive service, depending on the venue and price of the show.

FILM

Because of the nature of film, the economics of the medium are slightly different from those of music. The absence of film in broadcasting, the lack of a live performance, and the exponentially higher budgets are just some of its unique facets. As with music, however, large companies tend to dominate the market. These massive studios are now connected corporately with other media outlets. For example, Sony and Universal both have partners in the music industry, while Fox and Disney

control major television broadcast and cable networks as well as film studios.

Just as record labels do with radio conglomerates, film distribution companies tend to sell to large chains, such as the over 6,000-screens-strong Regal Entertainment Group and the over 4,000-screens-strong AMC Entertainment, which have national reach (National Association of Theater Owners, 2009). However, independent filmmakers still provide limited competition to these larger studios.

FROM MIRAMAX TO THE WEINSTEIN COMPANY

FIGURE 13.2

MIRAMAX

The founders of Miramax, brothers Bob and Harvey Weinstein, had a messy breakup with major studio Disney.

Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

Brothers Bob and Harvey Weinstein founded Miramax in 1979 with the intention of independence. Over the ensuing years, they released films that were off-limits to major distributors, such as Quentin Tarantino's violent *Reservoir Dogs* and Steven Soderbergh's controversial *Sex, Lies, and Videotape*. After Disney bought the smaller studio in 1993, Miramax gained access to even larger financial backing, albeit somewhat begrudgingly. Miramax had cultivated relationships with the now-blockbuster directors Tarantino and Kevin Smith—the director of *Clerks*, *Dogma*, and *Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back*—and when Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* made more than $100 million at the box office within 2 years of Disney's purchase of Miramax, it seemed like a good deal. As a result, Disney signed the Weinsteins to a new contract, giving them an annual budget of $700

million, and in 2003 Disney gave the Weinsteins permission to raise additional hundreds of millions of dollars from Goldman Sachs in order to make even more expensive movies (New York Times, 2005).

By 2004, however, relations between Miramax and Disney were turning sour. In May of that year, Disney would not allow Miramax to release Michael Moore's incendiary documentary *Fahrenheit 9/11*. In response, the Weinsteins sought outside funding and released it themselves to great success; the film became the highest-grossing documentary of all time, with revenue of $222 million on a mere $6 million budget (Box Office Mojo). A year later, the Weinsteins dissolved their relationship with Disney. Disney, however, kept the Miramax brand and the entire Miramax library of films.

Yet this fissure did not end the Weinsteins' careers. In 2005, the brothers founded a new independent film company, the Weinstein Co., which has had some success with films including *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* and *The Queen*, as well as the Michael Moore documentaries *Sicko* and *Capitalism: A Love Story*. However, when even independent film legends such as the Weinsteins have only limited success, it's clear that success is hard to come by. The *A.V. Club*—a companion to the satirical newspaper *The Onion*—asked in January 2010, just after Disney closed Miramax for good, "How much longer will the studio 'indie' model be viable

at all (Tobias, 2010)?" Today, there are few true "indie" studios left, and several major studios have closed their boutique studios, such as Warner Independent and Paramount Vantage. But even if some are questioning the economics of the indie-studio models of the 1980s and 1990s, it seems that there will always be an artistic drive for independent film—and, eventually, someone's bound to make the economics of it work again.

NEW MEDIA, OLD MODELS

In many ways, the Internet has been a game-changer throughout the media industry. However, a few things have

stayed the same; major media companies own popular media content sites such as Hulu and YouTube and control access to a great deal of online information. Even bloggers, who have found a new role as drivers of the media cycle, are at a disadvantage when it comes to the ability to generate original content. They tend to drive much of their traffic by reposting and adding commentary to news stories from established media outlets. One large and relatively influential outlet, the *Drudge Report*, is mainly composed of links to outside news organizations rather than original journalism. It gained fame during the late 1990s for breaking the Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky scandal—albeit by posting about how *Newsweek* killed reporter Michael Isikoff's story on the matter (BBC News, 1998). Still, the economic complications of the Internet have changed the calculus of media permanently, a status made clear by the drastic increase in free content over the past decade.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The three main media business models are monopoly, oligopoly, and monopolistic competition.
- The print, recorded music, and film industries are generally oligopolies; television is generally monopolistic competition; and live event ticketing is

essentially a monopoly.

- Media companies employ two main methods of generating revenue. Advertising builds income by selling time or space where a viewer will see it. Consumers may also provide a direct revenue stream by purchasing a good or service.

EXERCISES

Choose a media outlet such as the *Washington Post* or CNN and visit its website to determine its parent company. Often this will be in the "*Corporate*" or "*About Us*" sections. Then visit the *Columbia Journalism Review*'s resource "Who Owns What?" at http://www.cjr.org/resources/index.php. Consider and respond to the following questions:

1. Into which of the three basic media business models does this media outlet fall?
2. How does this media outlet employ each of the two ways that media receives revenue? Does it exclusively use one way or does it use a blend of the two?
3. How large is the parent company of this media outlet? Does it own any other outlets?

4. How might the parent company be using vertical integration to its advantage?
5. Were there any surprises to what you found? Were there any corporate connections that you did not expect to see? Explain.

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13.3 The Internet's Effects on Media Economies

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize the ways synergy is used on the Internet.
2. Summarize the purpose and impact of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act.

The challenge to media economics is one of production. When print media was the only widely available media, the concept was simple: Sell newspapers, magazines, and books. Sales of these goods could be gauged like any other product, although in media's case, the good was intangible—information—rather than the physical paper and ink. The transition from physical media to broadcast media presented a new challenge, because consumers did not pay money for radio and, later, television programming; instead, the price was an interruption every so often by a "word from our sponsors." However, even this practice hearkened back to the world of print media; just as newspapers and magazines sell advertising space, radio and television networks sell space on their airwaves.

The fundamental shift in Internet economics has been the miniscule price of online space compared to that in print or broadcast media. Combined with the instantaneous proliferation of information, the Internet seems to pose a grave threat to traditional media. Media outlets have responded by establishing themselves online, and it is now practically unheard of for any media company to lack an Internet presence. Companies' archives have opened up, and aside from a few holdouts such as *The Wall Street Journal*, nearly every newspaper allows free online access, although some papers, like *The New York Times*, are going to experiment with a paid subscription model to solve the problem of dwindling revenues. Newspapers now offer video content online, and radio and television networks have published traditional text-and-photo stories. Through Internet portals, media companies have synergized their content; they are no longer merely television networks or local newspapers but instead are quickly moving to become a little bit of everything.

ONLINE SYNERGY

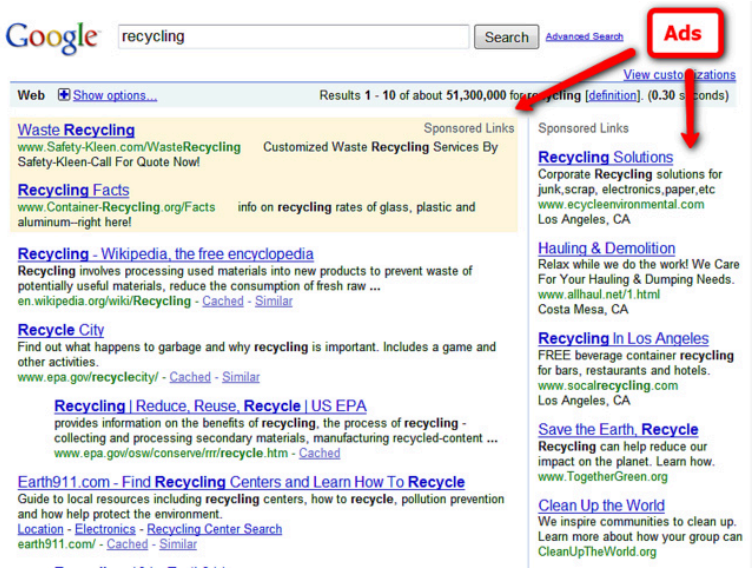
Although the Internet has had many effects on media economics, ranging from media piracy to the lowered costs of

distribution, arguably the greatest effect has been the synergy of different forms of media. For example, the front page of *The New York Times* website contains multiple short video clips, and the front page of Fox News' website contains clips from the cable television network along with relevant articles written by FoxNews.com staff. Media outlets offer many of these services for free to consumers, if for no other reason than because consumers have become accustomed to getting this content for free elsewhere on the Internet.

The Internet has also drastically changed the way that companies' advertising models operate. During the early years of the Internet, many web ads were geared toward sites such as Amazon and eBay, where consumers purchased products or services. Today, however, many ads—particularly on sites for high-profile media outlets such as Fox News and *The New York Times*—are for products that are not typically bought online, such as cars or major credit cards. However, another category of advertising that is tailored toward individual web pages has also gained prominence on the Internet. In this form of advertising, marketers match advertisers with particular keywords on particular web pages. For example, if the page is a how-to guide for fixing a refrigerator, some of the targeted ads might be for local refrigerator repair shops.

INTERNET BY GOOGLE

FIGURE 13.3



Google makes almost all of its money through advertising, allowing it to provide many services such as e-mail and document sharing for free.

search-engine-land – Google Ads – CC BY 2.0.

Search-engine company Google has been working to perfect this type of targeted advertising search. Low-cost text ads may appear next to its search results, on various web pages, and in the sidebar of its free web-based e-mail service, Gmail. More than just using algorithms to sort through massive amounts of data and matching advertising to content, Google has lowered the cost barrier to advertising, as well as the volume barrier to hosting advertising. Because Google automatically matches sites with advertisers, an independent site can sign up for its advertising service and get paid for each person who follows the text links. Likewise, relatively small companies can buy advertising space in specialized niches without having to go through a large-volume ad buyer. This business has proven extremely productive; the bulk of Google's revenue comes from advertising even as it gives away services such as e-mail and document sharing.

PROBLEMS OF DIGITAL DELIVERY

Search engines like Google and video-sharing sites like YouTube (which is owned by Google) allow access to online information, but they do not actually produce that information themselves. Thus, the propensity of these sites to gather information and then make it available to consumers free of charge does not necessarily sit well with those who financially depend on the sale of this information.

GOOGLE NEWS

One of Google's more controversial projects is Google News, a news aggregator that automatically collects news stories from various sources on the Internet. This service allows users to view the latest news from many different sources conveniently in one location. However, the project has been met with opposition from a number of those news sources, who contend that Google has infringed on their copyrights and cost them revenue. The *Wall Street Journal* has been one of

the more vocal critics of Google News. In April 2009, editor Robert Thomson said that news aggregators are "best described as parasites (Schulze, 2009)." In December 2009, Google responded to these complaints by allowing publishers to set a limit on the number of articles per day a reader can view for free through Google.

MUSIC AND FILE SHARING

The recent confrontation between Google and the traditional news media is only one of many problems resulting from digital technology. Digital technology can create exact copies of data so that one copy cannot be distinguished from the other. In other words, although a printed book might be nicer than a photocopy of that book, a digitization of the book is exactly the same as all other digitized copies and can be transmitted almost instantly. Similarly, although cassette tape copies of recorded music offered lower sound fidelity than the originals, the emergence of writable CD technology during the

1990s allowed for the creation of a copy of a digital audio CD that was identical to the original.

As data storage and transmission costs dropped, CDs no longer had to be physically copied to other CDs. With the advent of MP3 digital encoding, the music information on a CD could be compressed into a relatively small, portable format that could be transmitted easily over the Internet, and music file sharing took off. Although these recordings were not exactly the same as their CD-quality counterparts, most listeners could not tell the difference—or they just didn't care, because they were now able to share music files conveniently and for free. The practice of transmitting music over the Internet through services such as Napster quickly ballooned.

VIDEO STREAMING

As high-bandwidth Internet connections proliferated, video-sharing and streaming sites such as YouTube started up. Although these sites were supposedly intended for users to upload and share their own amateur videos, one of the big draws of the site was the high quantity of television show episodes, music videos, and other commercial content that has

been posted illegally. The replication potential inherent in digital technology combined with online transmission has caused a sea change in media industries that rely on income directly from consumers, such as books and recorded music. However, as the next section will show, the shift of media and information to the Internet can pose the risk of a digital divide, where those without Internet access are at an even greater disadvantage than they were before.

DIGITAL MILLENNIUM COPYRIGHT ACT (DMCA)

Producers of content are not without protection under the law. In 1998, Congress enacted the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) in an effort to stop the illegal copying and distribution of copyrighted material. The legislation defined many digital gray areas that previously may not have been explicitly covered, such

as circumventing antipiracy measures in commercial software; requiring webcasters to pay licensing fees to record companies; and exempting libraries, archives, and some other nonprofit institutions from some of these rules under certain circumstances. Since 1998, this legislation has been the bedrock of a variety of claims against sites such as YouTube. Under the law, copyright holders may send letters to Internet hosts distributing their copyrighted material. Certifying that they have a good-faith belief that the host does not have prior permission to distribute the content, copyright holders may request a removal of that material from the site (U.S. Copyright Office, 1998).

Although much of the law has to do with the rights of copyright holders to request the removal of their works from unlicensed sites, much of the DMCA also enacts protections for Internet service providers (ISPs). Although before there had been some question as to whether ISPs could be charged with copyright infringement merely for allowing reproducers to use their bandwidth, the DMCA made it clear that ISPs are not expected to police their own bandwidth for illegal use and are therefore not liable. Although the DMCA is not necessarily to everyone's liking—requiring individual takedown notices is time-consuming for corporations, and the relative lack of safeguards can allow large companies to bully ISPs into shutting down smaller sites, given a good-faith notice—the protections and clarifications that it has created have

cleared up some of the confusion surrounding digital media (Vance, 2003). However, as the price of bandwidth drastically drops and as more media goes digital, copyright laws will inevitably need to be amended again.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The Internet has allowed media companies to synergize their content, broadcasting the same ideas and products across multiple platforms. This significantly helps with reducing relative first copy costs because the Internet's marginal costs are minimal.
- The DMCA exempts Internet service providers from liability in policing their own services for illegal downloads. However, it also enacts copyright protection for digital media, thereby allowing copyright holders to send takedown notices. As long as they profess a good-faith belief that the works were not used with permission, the recipient is generally required to take them down.

EXERCISES

Navigate to a traditional media outlet's online portal, such as NYTtimes.com or FoxNews.com. Print out a hard copy of the home page and write on it, or save it to your computer and open it in a document editor such as Microsoft Word to annotate it. Note items such as these:

1. Are there any media formats on the page aside from the outlet's normal ones? Why might this traditional media outlet choose to produce different media formats on the Internet?
2. Does the media outlet promote its other products? If so, how? How does the Internet enable this type of synergy?
3. What types of personalization options are there? Does social networking show any influence?
4. Under the DMCA, what recourse would this media outlet have if its copyrighted content were being hosted elsewhere without its permission?

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13.4 Digital Divide in a Global Economy

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify ways that digital communication is changing

international economics, particularly in developing countries.
2. Identify difficulties that face those without adequate Internet access in developed countries.
3. Evaluate the relative success of various plans for closing the "digital divide."

More than just a tool for information transfer, the Internet has become a conduit for a globalized workforce. A corporation in New York can outsource electronically based work to a highly connected developing country like India without incurring the sort of shipping charges or communication delays that previously impeded such efforts. Internet access, particularly for business, has made development possible in remote areas, allowing corporations access to less expensive labor and allowing money to flow into developing countries. However, as the Internet has become integrated into daily business life, a digital divide has emerged: Some derive the benefits from Internet access, but many others do not.

Many U.S. and international leaders and nongovernmental organizations have identified the digital divide as an area of concern. A globalized workforce does not separate the world into easily divisible political territories but rather into those that have useful access to technology to reach a wider market and those that do not. As the 21st century develops, worldwide communication has become increasingly

imperative for a healthy economy, creating a new challenge to make sure that rapid technological changes do not preclude economic success for less developed economies.

However, the problem extends beyond simple access or even competency. The 80/20 effect, under which 80 percent of profit is created for the most affluent 20 percent, exacerbates the digital divide. In other words, the Internet—created in large part by and for the rich—is practically useless for the poor, particularly in developing countries. Thus, bridging the digital divide is about helping those with little or no access to the digital world gain the ability to use technology in economically advantageous ways.

THE INFORMATIONAL SHIFT

As information and media move online, those without ready access to the Internet are increasingly being left behind. Even in developed countries such as the United States, the digital divide is readily apparent. Often, older and less educated workers do not have computer skills or home Internet access. In June 2009, the Pew Research Center studied the

demographic differences in broadband Internet adoption and found that 45 percent of those without Internet access were age 65 and over (Horrigan, 2009). Even more significantly, a quarter of the unconnected were between the ages of 50 and 64. These workers are at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to finding and being hired for jobs.

As classified advertisements and job postings have left newspapers for the web, Internet access has become vital to even finding a job to apply for. In the above-mentioned Pew survey, 20 percent of respondents had incomes of less than $20,000 per year. However, these 20 percent made up a disproportionately high 48 percent of the survey's non-Internet users; a full 64 percent of low-income survey participants did not have access to the Internet. These numbers drastically dropped as wages increased—while those making under $40,000 per year made up 80 percent of non-Internet users, those making over $50,000 made up 50 percent of high-speed Internet users. As the Internet is becoming an integral part of our daily lives, a lack of access among certain groups could severely hamper upward economic mobility.

COMPUTER SKILLS AND OLDER WORKERS

Access to the Internet is an essential aspect of many successful job hunts, but it is also important to consider computer skills themselves. Many older adults who grew up without the Internet lack the computer and technology skills that contemporary jobs require. MSNBC reported in October 2009 that unemployment rates for older workers were at a 60-year high, having doubled in the period between late 2007 and the fall of 2009 (Johnson, 2009). While the overall unemployment rate at that time had reached a 26-year high, older workers who lacked the skills of younger, computer-savvy adults were suffering disproportionately. Lack of computer skills can be a crippling impediment to job success, even if a person can find a job in difficult economic times.

In response to these challenges, libraries and other nonprofit groups have taken on the task of training older unemployed workers to effectively use the Internet for job-related needs. These training courses, beginning with turning on a computer and using the mouse and ranging into advanced office program use, seek to provide skills necessary to allow older workers to reenter the work force. These organizations also aim to show users that they can increase their quality of life by setting up e-mail for communication with friends and family members.

THE DIGITAL DIVIDE ABROAD

While the digital divide in the United States is largely a matter of education, cost barrier, and lack of adoption of new technology, the digital divide in economically underdeveloped countries adds the complication of infrastructure. Internet service requires the existence of widespread stable networks to handle large computer centers, and electronic access to the outside world needs a constant data connection. Therefore, in many developing countries, practically no residents have access to computers and the Internet; this cuts them off not only from information but from the entire global economy.

TABLE 13.1 INTERNET CONNECTIVITY BY COUNTRY

Country	Population (Millions)	Internet Users (Millions)	Percent Connected
China	1,330	298	22
India	1,173	81	7
United States	310	231	75
Indonesia	243	30	12
Brazil	201	65	32
Japan	127	91	72
Afghanistan	29	0.5	2
Mongolia	3.1	0.3	10

Source: *CIA World Factbook*, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/ (accessed July 27, 2011).

The Digital Divide Institute has launched a campaign to integrate Indonesia into the global digital network as a representative solution to this problem. Indonesia is the

world's fourth-largest country in terms of population and already has wide cell-phone coverage—a significant advantage when it comes to rural information access (Digital Divide Institute, 2010). The organization claims that by expanding these wireless communication networks to encompass 3G and high-speed Internet access, access to the Internet could rise so much that Indonesia could become a fully emerging market for global services. To put this in perspective, connecting 20 percent of Indonesians to the Internet brings the total connected population of Indonesia to 48 million users, equivalent to all of South Korea, one of the most connected countries in the world (Central Intelligence Agency). The economic and political benefits of widespread Internet connectivity to nations like Indonesia are huge. The Digital Divide Institute points to Ireland as an example of how increasingly high-tech jobs can accompany the decline of terrorism—evidence that bridging the digital divide can be an issue of international security as well as global prosperity.

THE BOTTOM BILLION

One contentious issue in bridging the digital divide is which billion to focus on—of the 6.8 billion people in the world,

only an estimated 1.6 billion are connected to the Internet (Central Intelligence Agency). Therefore, the discussion of bridging the digital divide is quickly complicated by this question: To whom should we build the bridge? While some organizations such as the Digital Divide Institute suggest that the global "pyramid" should focus on the next billion—countries such as Indonesia with wide cell-phone coverage but little access to useful, global digital technology. Other organizations see it differently.

FIGURE 13.4



The One Laptop per Child project aims to put one of these XO computers in the hands of many children in developing countries.

One Laptop per Child – Papau New Guinea: Gaire #5 – CC BY 2.0.

Many believe that everyone in the world can benefit from technology if it is deployed properly. The organization One Laptop per Child (OLPC) seeks to achieve exactly what its name implies with a low-cost design that runs on free software and requires very little energy (Labtop). Central to OLPC's goal is the idea that learning to use technology needs to be recalibrated toward learning through technology. Another

crucial idea is the organization's conception of networks as essentially localized with the potential to be expanded. OLPC's XO laptop connects to its neighbors, creating many small networks through a fairly wide wireless range. In addition, its ability to access the Internet through this wide wireless range allows remote educational opportunities for children in developing countries. Although it may seem to leap directly from no communication access to wireless Internet video streaming, this program has shown that it may even be more cost effective than traditional connective technologies like phone lines.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Digital communication allows workers in developing countries with adequate infrastructure to perform remote computer tasks.
- Those without Internet access are essentially left out of much of the new economy. A lack of computer skills or Internet access can make it very difficult to find jobs. Computer skills are required for many jobs, so a lack of those skills may restrict someone to low-paying work.
- The plan to close the digital divide for the next billion people unconnected to the Internet effectively capitalizes on existing resources; however, plans such as

the One Laptop per Child project work to provide a comprehensive hardware and software solution for everyone who lacks Internet access.

EXERCISES

Please respond to the following short-answer writing prompts. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. Consider trying to search for a job without digital technology. How many newspapers would you need to buy? What would you have to do to actually get your application to the company?
2. What barriers exist that make it difficult to close the digital divide in developing economies like India and China?
3. What efforts have been made to spread Internet access to more parts of the world? How successful have these efforts been?

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13.5 Information Economy

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Determine how switching costs influence the information economy.
2. Summarize the tenets of the three major founding pieces of antitrust legislation.
3. Determine how a company might use vertical integration.

The modern theory of the information economy was expressed in the 1998 publication of *Information Rules: A Strategic Guide to the Network Economy*, written by Cal Shapiro, an economics professor at the University of California, Berkeley, and Hal Varian, now chief economist at Google. Their fundamental argument was simple: "Technology changes. Economic laws do not (Shapiro & Varian, 1998)."

While economic laws may not change, the fundamentals of the business of information are far different from the fundamentals of most traditional businesses. For example, the cost of producing a single sandwich is relatively consistent, per sandwich, with the cost of producing multiple sandwiches.

As discussed in the first section of this chapter, information works differently. With a newspaper, the first copy costs are far higher than the marginal costs of secondary copies. The high first costs and low marginal costs of the information economy contribute very heavily to the potential for large corporations gaining dominance. The confluence of these two costs creates a potential economy of scale, favoring the larger of the competitors.

In addition, information is what economists refer to as an experience good, meaning that consumers must actually experience the good to judge its value. The problem with information is that the experience is the good; how do you know, for example, that a movie has high-quality acting and an interesting plot before you've watched it? The solution to this is branding, which was discussed in the previous chapter. Although it may be difficult to judge a movie before watching, knowing that a given film was made by a certain director or stars an actor you like increases its value. Marketers use movie trailers, press coverage, and other marketing tools to communicate this branding message in the hopes of convincing you to watch the films they are promoting.

Another important facet of information technology is the associated switching costs. When economists consider switching costs, they take into account the difference between the cost of one technology and the cost of another. If this difference is less than the cost it would take to switch—for information, the cost of moving all of the relevant data to

the new technology—then it is deemed possible to switch. A classic example is moving a music collection from vinyl LPs to CDs. For a consumer to switch systems—that is, to buy a CD player and stereo—that person would also have to rebuild his or her entire music collection with the new format. Luckily for the CD player, the increase in convenience and quality was great enough that most consumers were inclined to switch technologies; however, as is apparent to anyone going to a thrift store or garage sale, old technologies are still being used because the information on the records was important enough for some people to keep them around.

REGULATION OF THE INFORMATION ECONOMY

Although Chapter 15 "Media and Government" will discuss government regulation in greater depth, a basic understanding of the interaction between government and media over time is essential to understanding the modern information economy. Public policy and governmental intervention exacerbate an

already complicated system of information economics, but for good reason—unlike typical goods and services, the information economy has many significant side effects. The consequences of one hamburger chain outcompeting or buying up all other hamburger chains would surely be fairly drastic for the hamburger-loving world, but not altogether disastrous; there would be only one type of hamburger, but there would still be many other types of fast food remaining. On the contrary, the consequences of monopolization by one media company could be alarming. Because distributed information can influence public policy and public opinion, those in charge of the government have an interest in ensuring fair distribution of that information. The bias toward free markets has been mitigated—even in the United States—when it comes to the information economy.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is largely responsible for this regulation. Established by the Communications Act of 1934, the FCC is charged with "regulating interstate and international communications" for nearly every medium except for print (Federal Communications Commission). The FCC also attempts to maintain a nonpartisan, or at least bipartisan, outlook, with a maximum of three of its five commissioners belonging to the same political party. Although the FCC controls many important things—making sure that electronic devices don't emit radio waves that interfere with other important tools, for

example—some of its most important and most contentious responsibilities relate to the media.

As the guardian of the public interest, the FCC has called for more competition among media companies; for example, the ongoing litigation of the merger between Comcast and NBC is not concerned with whether consumers will like streaming Hulu over the Internet, but rather whether one company should own both the content and the mode of distribution. The public good is not served if consumers' ability to choose is taken away when a service provider like Comcast restricts access to only the content that the provider owns, especially if that service provider is the consumers' only choice. In other words, the idea of public good is concerned not with the end result of competition, but with its process. The FCC protects consumers' ability to choose from a wide variety of media products, and the competition among media producers hopefully results in better products for consumers. If the end result is that all customers choose Hulu anyway, either because it has the shows they like or because it offers the best video-streaming capability, then the process has worked to create the best possible model; there was a winner, and it was a fair fight.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ANTITRUST LEGISLATION

The main tool that the government employs to keep healthy competition in the information marketplace is antitrust legislation. The seminal Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890 helped establish modern U.S. antitrust legislation. Although originally intended to dissolve the monopolistic enterprises of late-19th-century industrialists such as Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller, the law's basic principles have applied to media companies as well. The antitrust office has also grown since the original Sherman Act; although the Office of the Attorney General originally brought antitrust lawsuits after the act's passage, this responsibility shifted to its own Antitrust Division in 1933 under President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890 outlined many propositions and goals that legislators deemed necessary to foster a competitive marketplace. For example, Chapter 1 "Media and Culture", Section 13.2 "The Internet's Effects on Media Economies", of the act states that "Every person who shall monopolize, or attempt to monopolize, or combine or conspire with any other person or persons, to monopolize any part of the trade or commerce among the several States...shall be deemed guilty

of a felony (Cornell University Law School, 2009)." This establishment of monopolization as a felony was remarkable; before, free-market capitalism was the rule regardless of the public good, making the Sherman Antitrust Act an early proponent of the welfare of people at large.

Two additional pieces of legislation, the Clayton Antitrust Act of 1911 and the Celler-Kefauver Act of 1950, refined the Sherman Antitrust Act in order to make the system of antitrust suits work more effectively. For instance, the Clayton Act makes it unlawful for one company to "acquire...the whole or any part of the stock" of another company when the result would encourage the development of a monopoly (Legal Information Institute, 2009). More than just busting trusts, the Clayton Act thus seeks to stop anticompetitive practices before they take hold. The Celler-Kefauver Act made it more difficult for corporations to get around antitrust legislation; while the Clayton Act allowed the government to regulate the purchase of a competitor's stock, the Celler-Kefauver Act extended this to include the competitor's assets.

DEREGULATION AND THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACT OF 1996

Although the early part of the 20th century seemed to be devoted to breaking up trusts and keeping monopolies in check, the media—particularly in the latter part of the century—was still able to move steadily toward conglomeration (companies joining together to form a larger, more diversified corporation). Widespread deregulation (the removal of legal regulations on an industry) took place during the 1980s, in large part through the efforts of free-market economists who argued that deregulation would foster more competition in the information marketplace. However, possibly due in large part to the media economy's focus on economies of scale, this was not the case in practice. Companies became increasingly conglomerated, and corporations such as Comcast and Time Warner came to dominate the marketplace. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 helped solidify this trend. Although touted as a way to let "any communications business compete in any market against any other" and to foster competition, this act in practice sped

up the conglomeration of media (Federal Communications Commission, 2008).

MEDIA CONGLOMERATES AND VERTICAL INTEGRATION

The extension of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 of corporate abilities to vertically integrate was a primary driving factor behind this increased conglomeration. Vertical integration has proven particularly useful for media companies due to their high first costs and low marginal costs. For example, a television company that both produces and distributes content can run the same program on two different channels for nearly the same cost as only broadcasting it on one. Because of the localized nature of broadcast media, two broadcast television channels will likely reach different geographical areas. This results in cost savings for the company,

but also somewhat decreases local diversity in media broadcasting.

In fact, the Telecommunications Act made some changes in authority for these local markets. The concept of Section 253 is that no state may prohibit "the ability of any entity to provide any interstate or intrastate telecommunications service (Federal Communications Commission, 1996)." Thus, since state and local governments cannot prohibit any company from entering into a marketplace, there are checks on the amount of a local market that any one company can reach. In addition, the Telecommunications Act capped the share of U.S. television audience for any one company at 35 percent. However, the passage of additional legislation in 1999 allowing any one company to own two television stations in a single market greatly diluted the effect of this initial ruling. Although CBS, NBC, and ABC may be declining in popularity, they "still offer the only means of reaching a genuinely mass television audience" in the country (Doyle, 2002).

CORPORATE ADVANTAGES OF VERTICAL INTEGRATION

Almost all of the major media players in today's market practice extensive vertical integration through either administrative management or content integration.

Administrative management refers to the potential for divisions of a single company to share the same higher-level management structure, which presents opportunities for increased operational efficiency. For example, Disney manages theme parks and movie studios. Although these two industries are not very closely connected through content, both are large, multinational ventures. Placing both of these divisions under a single corporation allows them to share certain structural similarities, accounting practices, and any other administrative resources that may be helpful across multiple industries.

Content integration—an important practice for media industries—is the ability of these companies to use the same content across multiple platforms. Disney's theme parks would lose much of their charm and meaning without Mickey Mouse and Cinderella's castle; the integration of these two industries—Disney's theme parks and Disney's animated characters—proves profitable for both. Behind the scenes, Disney is also able to reap some excellent benefits from their

consolidation. For example, Disney could release a movie through its studio, and then immediately book the stars on news programs that air on Disney-owned broadcast television network ABC. Beyond just the ABC broadcast network, Disney also has many cable channels that it can use to directly market its movies and products to the targeted demographics. Unlike a competitor that might be wary of promoting a Disney movie, Disney's ownership of many different media outlets allows it to single-handedly reach a large audience.

ETHICAL ISSUES OF VERTICAL INTEGRATION

However, this high level of vertical integration raises several ethical concerns. In the above situation, for example, Disney could entice reviewers on its television outlets to give positive reviews to a Disney studio movie. Therefore, this potential for misused trust and erroneous information could be harmful.

In many ways, the conglomeration of media companies takes place behind the scenes, with only a minority of consumers aware of vertically integrated holdings. Media

companies often try to foster a sense of independence from a larger corporation. Of course, there are exceptions to this rule; the NBC sitcom *30 Rock* often delves into the troubles of running a satirical sketch-comedy show (a parody of NBC's *Saturday Night Live*) under the ownership of GE, NBC's real-life owner.

THE ISSUES OF THE INTERNET

Although media companies are steadily turning into larger businesses than ever before, many of them have nevertheless fallen on hard times. The instant, free content of the Internet is largely blamed for this decline. From the shift of classified advertising from newspapers to free online services to the decline in physical music sales in favor of digital downloads, the Internet has transformed traditional media economics.

One of the main issues with an unregulated Internet is that it allows digital files to be replicated and sent anywhere else in

the world. Large music companies, which traditionally made almost all of their money from selling physical music formats such as vinyl records or compact discs, find themselves at a disadvantage. Consumers can share and distribute music files to anyone, and Internet service providers are exempted from liability under the DMCA. With providers freed of liability and media consumption a driving factor in the rise of high-speed Internet services, ISPs have no incentive to deter illegal sharing along with legal downloads.

DIGITAL DOWNLOADS AND DRM

Although music companies have had some success selling music through digital outlets, they have not been pioneers in online music sales. Rather, technology companies such as Apple and Amazon.com, sensing a large market for digital downloads coupled with a sleek delivery system, have led the way. Already accustomed to downloading MP3s, consumers readily adopted the model. However, record companies believed that the lack of digital rights management (DRM) protection offered by MP3s represented a major downside.

Apple provided a way to strike a compromise between accessibility and rights control. Having already captured much of the personal digital audio player market with the iPod, which uses other Apple products, Apple has also long prided itself on creating highly integrated systems of both software and hardware. Because so many people were already using the iPod, Apple had a huge potential market for a music store even if it offered DRM-locked tracks that would only play on Apple devices. This inflexibility even offered a small benefit for consumers; Apple succeeded in convincing companies to price their digital downloads lower than CDs.

This compromise may have sold a lot of iPods and MP3s, but it did not satisfy the record companies. When consumers started to download one hit single for 99 cents—rather than buying the whole album for $15 on CD—the music industry felt the pain. Still, huge monetary advances in digital music have taken place. Between 2004 and 2008, digital music sales increased from $187 million to $1.8 billion.

PIRACY

The music industry has wasted no amount of firepower to

blame piracy for the decline in album sales: "There's no minimizing the impact of illegal file-sharing. It robs songwriters and recording artists of their livelihoods, and it ultimately undermines the future of music itself," said Cary Sherman, president of the Recording Industry Association of America (Sherman, 2003). However, economists see the truth of the matter as significantly more ambiguous. Analyzing over 10,000 weeks of data distributed over many albums, a pair of economists at the Harvard Business School and University of North Carolina found that "Downloads have an effect on sales which is statistically indistinguishable from zero (Oberholzer-Gee & Strumpf, 2007)." Either way, two things are clear: Consumers are willing to pay for digital music, and digital downloads are on the market to stay for the foreseeable future.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Switching costs and economies of scale play major roles in the information economy. The former helps determine whether a new technological format will take hold, and the latter encourages the growth of large media conglomerates.
- The three founding pieces of antitrust legislation were the Sherman Antitrust Act (1890), which laid the foundation of antitrust legislation; the Clayton

Antitrust Act (1911), which allowed the government to regulate the purchase of a company's stock; and the Celler-Kefauver Act (1950), which allowed the government to regulate the purchase of another company's assets.

- Vertical integration occurs when a company controls all aspects of an industry: procuring raw materials, manufacturing, and delivering. Media companies benefit from vertical integration, but the practice raises numerous ethical issues.

EXERCISES

Visit the *Columbia Journalism Review*'s "Who Owns What?" web page at http://www.cjr.org/resources/index.php. Choose a company from the drop-down menu. Make a chart of all the company's different media outlets and complete the following activities:

1. Choose two subsidiaries of the parent company and discuss how they might be able to use vertical integration to their advantage.
2. How might the larger corporation be using an

economy of scale?

3. How might the company be attempting to lessen switching costs? For example, does the company offer the same content on multiple platforms in order to reach customers who may have only one of these platforms? Give an example.
4. How might the three founding pieces of antitrust legislation affect the company's decisions?

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13.6 Globalization of Media

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify three ways that technology has helped speed globalization.
2. Explain how media outlets employ globalization to their advantage.
3. Describe some advances that can be made in foreign markets.

The media industry is, in many ways, perfect for globalization, or the spread of global trade without regard for traditional political borders. As discussed above, the low marginal costs of media mean that reaching a wider market creates much larger profit margins for media companies. Because information is not a physical good, shipping costs are generally inconsequential. Finally, the global reach of media allows it to be relevant in many different countries.

However, some have argued that media is actually a partial cause of globalization, rather than just another globalized industry. Media is largely a cultural product, and the transfer of such a product is likely to have an influence on the recipient's culture. Increasingly, technology has also been

propelling globalization. Technology allows for quick communication, fast and coordinated transport, and efficient mass marketing, all of which have allowed globalization—especially globalized media—to take hold.

GLOBALIZED CULTURE, GLOBALIZED MARKETS

Much globalized media content comes from the West, particularly from the United States. Driven by advertising, U.S. culture and media have a strong consumerist bent (meaning that the ever-increasing consumption of goods is encouraged as an economic virtue), thereby possibly causing foreign cultures to increasingly develop consumerist ideals. Therefore, the globalization of media could not only provide content to a foreign country, but may also create demand for U.S. products. Some believe that this will "contribute to a one-way transmission of ideas and values that result in the displacement of indigenous cultures (Santos, 2001)."

Globalization as a world economic trend generally refers to the lowering of economic trade borders, but it has much to do with culture as well. Just as transfer of industry and technology

often encourages outside influence through the influx of foreign money into the economy, the transfer of culture opens up these same markets. As globalization takes hold and a particular community becomes more like the United States economically, this community may also come to adopt and personalize U.S. cultural values. The outcome of this spread can be homogenization (the local culture becomes more like the culture of the United States) or heterogenization (aspects of U.S. culture come to exist alongside local culture, causing the culture to become more diverse), or even both, depending on the specific situation (Rantanen, 2005).

Making sense of this range of possibilities can be difficult, but it helps to realize that a mix of many different factors is involved. Because of cultural differences, globalization of media follows a model unlike that of the globalization of other products. On the most basic level, much of media is language and culture based and, as such, does not necessarily translate well to foreign countries. Thus, media globalization often occurs on a more structural level, following broader "ways of organizing and creating media (Mirza, 2009)." In this sense, a media company can have many different culturally specific brands and still maintain an economically globalized corporate structure.

VERTICAL INTEGRATION AND GLOBALIZATION

Because globalization has as much to do with the corporate structure of a media company as with the products that a media company produces, vertical integration in multinational media companies becomes a necessary aspect of studying globalized media. Many large media companies practice vertical integration: Newspaper chains take care of their own reporting, printing, and distribution; television companies control their own production and broadcasting; and even small film studios often have parent companies that handle international distribution.

A media company often benefits greatly from vertical integration and globalization. Because of the proliferation of U.S. culture abroad, media outlets are able to use many of the same distribution structures with few changes. Because media rely on the speedy ability to react to current events and trends, a vertically integrated company can do all of this in a globalized rather than a localized marketplace; different branches of the company are readily able to handle different markets. Further, production values for single-country distribution are basically the same as those for multiple countries, so vertical integration allows, for example, a single film studio to make higher-budget movies than it may otherwise be able to produce without a distribution company that has as a global reach.

FOREIGN MARKETS AND *TITANIC*

FIGURE 13.5



The movie *Titanic*, which became the highest-grossing movie of all time, made twice as much internationally as it did domestically.

Scott Smith – Best In Film: American Film Institute Showcase – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Worth considering is the reciprocal influence of foreign culture on American culture. Certainly, American culture is increasingly exported around the world thanks to globalization, and many U.S. media outlets count strongly on their ability to sell their product in foreign markets. But what Americans consider their own culture has in fact been tailored to the tastes not only of U.S. citizens but also to those of worldwide audiences. The profit potential of foreign markets is enormous: If a movie does well abroad, for example, it might make up for a weak stateside showing, and may even drive interest in the movie in the United States.

One prime example of this phenomenon of global culture and marketing is James Cameron's 1997 film *Titanic*. One of the most expensive movies ever produced up to that point, with an official budget of around $200 million, *Titanic* was not anticipated to perform particularly well at the U.S. box office. Rather, predictions of foreign box-office receipts allowed the movie to be made. Of the total box-office receipts of *Titanic*, only about one-third came from the domestic

market. Although *Titanic* became the highest-grossing film up to that point, it grossed just $140 million more domestically than *Star Wars* did 20 years earlier (Box Office Mojo). The difference was in the foreign market. While *Star Wars* made about the same amount—$300 million—in both the domestic and foreign markets, *Titanic* grossed $1.2 billion in foreign box-office receipts. In all, the movie came close to hitting the $2 billion mark, and now sits in the No. 2 position behind Cameron's 2009 blockbuster, *Avatar*.

One reason that U.S. studios can make these kinds of arrangements is their well-developed ties with the worldwide movie industry. Hollywood studios have agreements with theaters all over the world to show their films. By contrast, the foreign market for French films is not nearly as established, as the industry tends to be partially subsidized by the French government. Theaters showing Hollywood studio films in France funnel portions of their box-office receipts to fund French films. However, Hollywood has lobbied the World Trade Organization—a largely pro-globalization group that pushes for fewer market restrictions—to rule that this French subsidy is an unfair restriction on trade (Terrill, 1999).

In many ways, globalization presents legitimate concerns about the endangerment of indigenous culture. Yet simple concerns over the transfer of culture are not the only or even the biggest worries caused by the spread of American culture and values.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Technology allows for quick communication, transport, and mass marketing, greatly contributing to a globalized marketplace.
- Media economies of scale achieve much larger profit margins by using digital technology to sell information instantly over a global market.
- Foreign markets offer excellent profit potential as they contribute to media companies' economies of scale. The addition of new audiences and consumer markets may help a company build a global following in the long run.

EXERCISES

Think of a U.S. product that is available throughout the world, such as an athletic brand like Nike or a food product like Pepsi or Coca-Cola. Now go online to the different country-specific branches of the company's web site.

1. What differences are there?

2. How might the company be attempting to tailor its globalized product to a specific culture?
3. What advances into the foreign market does this use of the Internet allow the company to make?
4. What advantages does this globalization of its products give the company?
5. In what other ways has technology helped speed this globalization?

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13.7 Cultural Imperialism

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe how hegemony applies to different aspects of global culture.
2. Identify the attributes of McDonaldization.
3. Analyze the ways that local cultures respond to outside forces.

Cultural imperialism was around long before the United States became a world power. In its broadest strokes, imperialism describes the ways that one nation asserts its power over another. Just as imperial Britain economically ruled the American colonists, so did Britain strongly influence the culture of the colonies. The culture was still a mix of nationalities—many Dutch and Germans settled as well—but

the ruling majority of ex-Britons led British culture to generally take over.

Today, cultural imperialism tends to describe the United States' role as a cultural superpower throughout the world. American movie studios are generally much more successful than their foreign counterparts not only because of their business models but also because the concept of Hollywood has become one of the modern worldwide movie business's defining traits. Multinational, nongovernmental corporations can now drive global culture. This is neither entirely good nor entirely bad. On one hand, foreign cultural institutions can adopt successful American business models, and corporations are largely willing to do whatever makes them the most money in a particular market—whether that means giving local people a shot at making movies, or making multicultural films such as 2008's *Slumdog Millionaire*. However, cultural imperialism has potential negative effects as well. From a spread of Western ideals of beauty to the possible decline of local cultures around the world, cultural imperialism can have a quick and devastating effect.

CULTURAL HEGEMONY

To begin discussing the topic of cultural imperialism, it is important to look at the ideas of one of its founding theorists, Antonio Gramsci. Strongly influenced by the theories and writings of Karl Marx, Italian philosopher and critic Gramsci originated the idea of cultural hegemony to describe the power of one group over another. Unlike Marx, who believed that the workers of the world would eventually unite and overthrow capitalism, Gramsci instead argued that culture and the media exert such a powerful influence on society that they can actually influence workers to buy into a system that is not economically advantageous to them. This argument that media can influence culture and politics is typified in the notion of the American Dream. In this rags-to-riches tale, hard work and talent can lead to a successful life no matter where one starts. Of course, there is some truth to this, but it is by far the exception rather than the rule.

Marx's ideas remained at the heart of Gramsci's beliefs. According to Gramsci's notion, the **hegemons** of capitalism—those who control the capital—can assert economic power, while the hegemons of culture can assert cultural power. This concept of culture is rooted in Marxist class struggle, in which one group is dominated by another and conflict arises. Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony is pertinent in the modern day not because of the likelihood of

a local property-owning class oppressing the poor, but because of concern that rising globalization will permit one culture to so completely assert its power that it drives out all competitors.

SPREADING AMERICAN TASTES THROUGH MCDONALDIZATION

A key danger of cultural imperialism is the possibility that American tastes will crowd out local cultures around the globe. The McDonaldization of the globe applies not just to its namesake, McDonald's, with its franchises in seemingly every country, but to any industry that applies the technique of McDonald's on a large scale. Coined by George Ritzer in his book *The McDonaldization of Society* (1993), the concept is rooted in the process of rationalization. With McDonaldization, four aspects of the business are taken to the extreme: efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control. These four things are four of the main aspects of free markets. Applying the concepts of an optimized financial market to cultural and human items such as food, McDonaldization

enforces general standards and consistency throughout a global industry.

FIGURE 13.6



McDonald's has opened up many culturally specific versions of its chain, all employing its famous Golden Arches.

Mike Mozart – McDonald's – CC BY 2.0.

Unsurprisingly, McDonald's is the prime example of this concept. Although the fast-food restaurant is somewhat different in every country—for example, Indian restaurants offer a pork-free, beef-free menu to accommodate regional

religious practices—the same fundamental principles apply in a culturally specific way. The branding of the company is the same wherever it is; the "I'm lovin' it" slogan is inescapable, and the Golden Arches are, according to Eric Schlosser in *Fast Food Nation*, "more widely recognized than the Christian cross (Schlosser, 2001)." Yet, more importantly, the business model of McDonald's stays relatively the same from country to country. Although culturally specific variations exist, any McDonald's in a particular area has basically the same menu as any other. In other words, wherever a consumer is likely to travel within a reasonable range, the menu options and the resulting product remain consistent.

MCDONALDIZING MEDIA

Media works in an uncannily similar way to fast food. Just as the automation of fast food—from freeze-dried french fries to prewrapped salads—attempts to lower a product's marginal costs, thus increasing profits, media outlets seek to achieve a certain degree of consistency that allows them to broadcast

and sell the same product throughout the world with minimal changes. The idea that media actually spreads a culture, however, is controversial. In his book *Cultural Imperialism*, John Tomlinson argues that exported American culture is not necessarily imperialist because it does not push a cultural agenda; it seeks to make money from whatever cultural elements it can throughout the world. According to Tomlinson, "No one really disputes the dominant presence of Western multinational, and particularly American, media in the world: what is doubted is the cultural implications of this presence (Tomlinson, 2001)."

There are, of course, by-products of American cultural exports throughout the world. American cultural mores, such as the Western standard of beauty, have increasingly made it into global media. As early as 1987, Nicholas Kristof wrote in *The New York Times* about a young Chinese woman who was planning to have an operation to make her eyes look rounder, more like the eyes of Caucasian women. Western styles—"newfangled delights like nylon stockings, pierced ears and eye shadow"—also began to replace the austere blue tunics of Mao-era China. The pervasiveness of cultural influence is difficult to track, however, as the young Chinese woman says that she wanted to have the surgery not because of Western looks but because "she thinks they are pretty (Kristof, 1987)."

CULTURAL IMPERIALISM, RESENTMENT, AND TERRORISM

FIGURE 13.7



After September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush

framed the issue of terrorism as a cultural conflict as much as a military one.

Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

Not everyone views the spread of American tastes as a negative occurrence. During the early 21st century, much of the United States's foreign policy stemmed from the idea that spreading freedom, democracy, and free-market capitalism through cultural influence around the world could cause hostile countries such as Iraq to adopt American ways of living and join the United States in the fight against global terrorism and tyranny. Although this plan did not succeed as hoped, it raises the question of whether Americans should truly be concerned about spreading their cultural system if they believe that it is an ideal one.

Speaking after the attacks of September 11, 2001, then-President George W. Bush presented two simple ideas to the U.S. populace: "They [terrorists] hate our freedoms," and "Go shopping (Bush, 2001)." These twin ideals of personal freedom and economic activity are often held up as the prime exports of American culture. However, the idea that other local beliefs need to change may threaten people of other cultures.

FREEDOM, DEMOCRACY, AND ROCK 'N' ROLL

The spread of culture works in mysterious ways. Hollywood probably does not actually have a master plan to export the American way of life around the globe and displace local culture, just as American music may not necessarily be a progenitor of democratic government and economic cooperation. Rather, local cultures respond to the outside culture of U.S. media and democracy in many different ways. First of all, media are often much more flexible than believed; the successful exportation of the film *Titanic* was not an accident in which everyone in the world suddenly wanted to experience movies like an American. Rather, the film's producers had judged that it would succeed on a world stage just as on a domestic stage. Therefore, in some ways U.S. media have become more widespread, and also more worldwide in focus. It could even be argued that American cultural exports promote intercultural understanding; after all, to sell to a culture, a business must first understand that culture.

By contrast, some local cultures around the world have taken to Western-style business models so greatly that they have created their own hybrid cultures. One well-known example of this is India's Bollywood film industry. Combining traditional Indian music and dance with American-style filmmaking, Bollywood studios release around 700 major films

each year, three times the rate of the major Hollywood studios. India's largest film industry mixes melodrama with musical interludes, lip-synced by actors but sung by pop stars. These pop songs are disseminated well before a movie's release, both to build up hype and to enter multiple media markets. Although similar marketing tactics have been employed in the United States, Bollywood seems to have mastered the art of cross-media integration. The music and dance numbers are essentially cinematic forms of music videos, both promoting the soundtrack and adding variety to the film. The numbers also feature many different Indian national languages and a hybrid of Western dance music and Indian classical singing, a certain departure from conventional Western media (Corliss, 1996).

While cultural imperialism might cause resentment in many parts of the world, the idea that local cultures are helpless under the crushing power of American cultural imposition is clearly too simplistic to hold water. Instead, local cultures seem to adopt American-style media models, changing their methods to fit the corporate structures rather than just the aesthetics of U.S. media. These two economic and cultural aspects are clearly intertwined, but the idea of a foreign power unilaterally crushing a native culture does not seem to be entirely true.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Cultural hegemony refers to the power of the dominant culture to overshadow and even overtake local cultures.
- McDonaldization is characterized by efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control. These four attributes—more than any specific cultural ideas—are the primary features of globalized American businesses.
- Local cultures can respond to outside forces in many ways. In some circumstances, there may be a backlash against what can be seen as a hostile culture. However, cultures such as India have adopted American cultural and economic ideas to create a hybrid of foreign business models and local cultures.

EXERCISES

Please respond to the following short-answer writing prompts. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. Pick a media company that interests you, such as a magazine, a television station, or a record label. In what ways has this company undergone the process of McDonaldization throughout its history? Has this process made the company more efficient? How so? What, if anything, has been lost because of this process? Why?
2. In what ways does the United States act as a cultural hegemon?
3. How do local cultures respond to the influence of foreign culture? What are some examples of local cultures resisting the influence of foreign culture? What are some examples where local cultures have embraced foreign culture?

END-OF-CHAPTER ASSESSMENT

Review Questions

1. Section 1
    1. What are the three basic business models of media?
    2. Using the models you listed above, classify the

following media industries: book publishing, television broadcasting, and live-event ticketing.
3. What are the two ways that media companies make money?

2. Section 2

    1. What is synergy, and how can media companies use it?
    2. Explain the purpose and influence of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act.

3. Section 3

    1. What is the effect of digital communication in developing countries?
    2. How are citizens of developed countries who lack useful Internet access affected?
    3. What is the digital divide, and who is trying to close it? How?

4. Section 4

    1. How does the information economy differ from the traditional economy?
    2. What are switching costs?
    3. How does vertical integration relate to globalized media?

5. Section 5

    1. What effects has technology had on international economics?
    2. What is globalization, and how does it affect the media?
    3. How do the media increase profit margins in foreign countries?

6. Section 6

    1. What is hegemony?
    2. What are the main traits of media McDonaldization?
    3. Name a positive and a negative way in which culture may respond to an outside force.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. How do vertical integration, first copy costs, and the information economy relate to one another?
2. How does the digital divide affect developed and developing countries differently? What predictions can you make about its effects in the future?

3. How has the Internet changed the value of experience goods?
4. Is the application of antitrust legislation to media companies positive or negative? How does having a larger, more efficient media company help society? How does it damage society?
5. What is the effect of globalized media on world cultures? Do you think that the current trends will continue, or do you see local cultures reasserting their power? Give examples.

CAREER CONNECTION

Media now rely heavily on synergy, or cross-platform media distribution. Because of this, one of the industry's quickly expanding career fields employs people who manage the online outlets of a more traditional media outlet such as radio or television. Although such jobs used to require extensive technological knowledge, modern online project managers, online media editors, and web producers spend much of their time determining how best to display the content online.

In this activity, you will research a media outlet and then

answer questions about the choices that the web producer, editor, or manager made regarding its content. Some possible websites to research include the following:

- *Time*, http://www.time.com/
- *Adult Swim*, http://www.adultswim.com/
- *MSNBC*, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/
- *BBC*, http://www.bbc.co.uk/

Now answer the following questions regarding the site that you picked:

1. What sort of multimedia content does the site use that might relate to its main product?
2. Is there anything that might not relate to its main product? What might its purpose be?
3. How do the editorial decisions of the site reflect the influence of the Internet?
4. Are there any online-only content sections of the site? How might these relate to the corporation's main purpose?

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Chapter 14: Ethics of Mass Media

14.1 Ethics of Mass Media
14.2 Ethical Issues in Mass Media

14.3 News Media and Ethics
14.4 Ethical Considerations of the Online World

14.1 Ethics of Mass Media

TMZ, TABLOIDS, AND CELEBRITY GOSSIP: FREEDOM OF THE PRESS OR INVASION OF PRIVACY?

FIGURE 14.1



Maryland GovPics – Press Gaggle – CC BY 2.0.

The U.S. Constitution's First Amendment guarantees Americans freedom of the press, which many would agree is an important ingredient in upholding democratic principles. Freedom from government censorship allows the news media to keep citizens informed about the state of their society. But when does the press take this freedom from censorship and restriction too far? The death of Princess Diana in 1997 brought fierce criticism against the paparazzi, and tabloid reporting in general, when it was found that the princess's car had been pursued by paparazzi vehicles before the crash that caused her death. Since then, the public's interest in celebrity

gossip has not diminished; rather, the growth of online news sources has led to a proliferation of celebrity gossip websites.

A potential concern regarding this trend is that tabloid-style gossip is not confined to public figures in the entertainment industry; it can have far-reaching consequences. The firing of General Stanley McChrystal from his post as commander of all U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan in June 2010 was nearly the direct result of an article in *Rolling Stone*, in which he made less-than-flattering comments about Vice President Joe Biden (Hastings, 2010). McChrystal himself did not directly criticize the president or the administration's policies; instead, his views were inferred from comments made by his aides (MSNBC, 2010). However, this was sufficient to cost him his job. In recent years, tabloid reporting has become increasingly invasive and sometimes dangerous.

Should the government begin placing stronger regulations on tabloid reporting as privacy advocates have argued? The Constitution, after all, while guaranteeing freedom of the press, also guarantees individuals certain rights to privacy, and most journalists would agree that standards of ethical journalism include efforts to protect these rights. However, some paparazzi photographers and celebrity journalists disregard journalistic codes of ethics in their efforts to get a story (Alach, 2008). Many argue that because celebrities are "public figures," the same privacy rights that protect the general public don't apply. *Us Weekly*'s editor in chief, Janice Min, has argued, "A celebrity is like an elected official. If you're

getting paid $20 million a movie, you have to rely on public goodwill to stay in office. You have to accept the fact that you're a public commodity (Freydkin, 2004)." Harvey Levin, editor in chief for the popular celebrity gossip blog TMZ, would agree. When discussing invasions into the private lives of stars like Britney Spears, Levin proclaimed that "Britney is gold; she is crack to our readers. Her life is a complete train-wreck and I thank God for her every day (New York Times, 2009)."

On the other side of the debate, many argue that the public-figure limitation should be balanced with the consideration of a story's newsworthiness. As law professor Patrick J. Alack has argued, "If 'social value' is what constitutes newsworthiness, it is hard to imagine a more perverse concept of social value that incorporates...Paris Hilton's late-night dining preferences or Lindsay Lohan's driving habits."[1]

TMZ, a website that publishes celebrity news in real time, was launched in 2005, and since its creation the site has received numerous criticisms from more prestigious news sources like *The Washington Post* and ABC News. Yet Thane Burnett, reporter for *The Toronto Sun*, admits that "despite the sideways glances, mainstream news services prowl TMZ's site for coverage (Burnett, 2009)." With the immediacy of Internet news coverage, mainstream media outlets face increasing pressure to release major news while it is still fresh. That pressure is compounded by celebrity gossip sites like TMZ that

may resort to unorthodox methods to gather information; the shelf life of breaking news is growing increasingly shorter.

[1]Alach, "Paparazzi and Privacy," 237.

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14.2 Ethical Issues in Mass Media

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Explain the importance of racial and gender diversity in mass media.
2. Identify the ethical concerns associated with race and gender stereotypes.
3. List some common concerns about sexual content in the media.

In the competitive and rapidly changing world of mass-media

communications, media professionals—overcome by deadlines, bottom-line imperatives, and corporate interests—can easily lose sight of the ethical implications of their work. However, as entertainment law specialist Sherri Burr points out, "Because network television is an audiovisual medium that is piped free into ninety-nine percent of American homes, it is one of the most important vehicles for depicting cultural images to our population (Burr, 2001)." Considering the profound influence mass media like television have on cultural perceptions and attitudes, it is important for the creators of media content to grapple with ethical issues.

STEREOTYPES, PRESCRIBED ROLES, AND PUBLIC PERCEPTION

The U.S. population is becoming increasingly diverse. According to U.S. Census statistics from 2010, 27.6 percent of the population identifies its race as non-White (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Yet in network television broadcasts, major

publications, and other forms of mass media and entertainment, minorities are often either absent or presented as heavily stereotyped, two-dimensional characters. Rarely are minorities depicted as complex characters with the full range of human emotions, motivations, and behaviors. Meanwhile, the stereotyping of women, gays and lesbians, and individuals with disabilities in mass media has also been a source of concern.

The word *stereotype* originated in the printing industry as a method of making identical copies, and the practice of stereotyping people is much the same: a system of identically replicating an image of an "other." As related in Chapter 8 "Movies" about D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, a film that relied on racial stereotypes to portray Southern Whites as victims in the American Civil War, stereotypes—especially those disseminated through mass media—become a form of social control, shaping collective perceptions and individual identities. In American mass media, the White man is still shown as the standard: the central figure of TV narratives and the dominant perspective on everything from trends, to current events, to politics. White maleness becomes an invisible category because it gives the impression of being the norm (Hearne).

MINORITY EXCLUSION AND STEREOTYPES

In the fall of 1999, when the major television networks released their schedules for the upcoming programming season, a startling trend became clear. Of the 26 newly released TV programs, none depicted an African American in a leading role, and even the secondary roles on these shows included almost no racial minorities. In response to this omission, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), an advocacy group for Hispanic Americans, organized protests and boycotts. Pressured—and embarrassed—into action, the executives from the major networks made a fast dash to add racial minorities to their prime-time shows, not only among actors, but also among producers, writers, and directors. Four of the networks—ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox—added a vice president of diversity position to help oversee the networks' progress toward creating more diverse programming (Baynes, 2003).

Despite these changes and greater public attention regarding diversity issues, minority underrepresentation is still an issue in all areas of mass media. In fact, the trend in recent years has been regressive. In a recent study, the NAACP reported that the number of minority actors on network television has actually decreased, from 333 during the

2002–2003 season to 307 four years later (WWAY, 2009). Racial minorities are often absent, peripheral, or take on stereotyped roles in film, television, print media, advertising, and even in video games. Additionally, according to a 2002 study by the University of California, Los Angeles, the problem is not only a visible one, but also one that extends behind the scenes. The study found that minorities are even more underrepresented in creative and decision-making positions than they are on screen (Media Awareness Network, 2010). This lack of representation among producers, writers, and directors often directly affects the way minorities are portrayed in film and television, leading to racial stereotypes.

Though advocacy groups like the NCLR and the NAACP have often been at the forefront of protests against minority stereotypes in the media, experts are quick to point out that the issue is one everyone should be concerned about. As media ethicist Leonard M. Baynes argues, "Since we live in a relatively segregated country...broadcast television and its images and representations are very important because television can be the common meeting ground for all Americans."[1] There are clear correlations between mass media portrayals of minority groups and public perceptions. In 1999, after hundreds of complaints by African Americans that they were unable to get taxis to pick them up, the city of New York launched a crackdown, threatening to revoke the licenses of cab drivers who refused to stop for African American customers. When interviewed by reporters, many cab drivers blamed their

actions on fears they would be robbed or asked to drive to dangerous neighborhoods.[2]

Racial stereotypes are not only an issue in entertainment media; they also find their way into news reporting, which is a form of storytelling. Journalists, editors, and reporters are still predominately White. According to a 2000 survey, only 11.6 percent of newsroom staff in the United States were racial and ethnic minorities (Media Awareness Network, 2010). The situation has not improved dramatically during the past decade. According to a 2008 newsroom census released by the American Society of Newspaper Editors, the percentage of minority journalists working at daily newspapers was a scant 13.52 percent (National Association of Hispanic Journalists, 2010). Because of this underrepresentation behind the scenes, the news media is led by those whose perspective is already privileged, who create the narratives about those without privilege. In the news media, racial minorities are often cast in the role of villains or troublemakers, which in turn shapes public perceptions about these groups. Media critics Robert Entman and Andrew Rojecki point out that images of African Americans on welfare, African American violence, and urban crime in African American communities "facilitate the construction of menacing imagery (Christians, 2005)." Similarly, a study by the National Association of Hispanic Journalists found that only 1 percent of the evening news stories aired by the three major U.S. television networks cover Latinos or Latino issues, and that when Latinos are featured,

they are portrayed negatively 80 percent of the time.[3] Still others have criticized journalists and reporters for a tendency toward reductive presentations of complex issues involving minorities, such as the religious and racial tensions fueled by the September 11 attacks. By reducing these conflicts to "opposing frames"—that is, by oversimplifying them as two-sided struggles so that they can be quickly and easily understood—the news media helped create a greater sense of separation between Islamic Americans and the dominant culture after September 11, 2001 (Whitehouse, 2009).

Since the late 1970s, the major professional journalism organizations in the United States—Associated Press Managing Editors (APME), Newspaper Association of America (NAA), American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE), Society for Professional Journalists (SPJ), Radio and Television News Directors Association (RTNDA), and others—have included greater ethnic diversity as a primary goal or ethic. However, progress has been slow. ASNE has set 2025 as a target date to have minority representation in newsrooms match U.S. demographics.[4]

Because the programming about, by, and for ethnic minorities in the mainstream media is disproportionately low, many turn to niche publications and channels such as BET, Univision, Telemundo, *Essence*, *Jet*, and others for sources of information and entertainment. In fact, 45 percent of ethnic-minority adults prefer these niche media sources to mainstream television, radio programs, and

newspapers.(Whitehouse, 2009) These sources cover stories about racial minorities that are generally ignored by the mainstream press and offer ethnic-minority perspectives on more widely covered issues in the news (State of the Media, 2010). Entertainment channels like BET (a 24-hour cable television station that offers music videos, dramas featuring predominately Black casts, and other original programming created by African Americans) provide the diverse programming that mainstream TV networks often drop (Zellars, 2006). Print sources like *Vista*, a bilingual magazine targeting U.S. Hispanics, and *Vivid*, the most widely circulated African American periodical, appeal to ethnic minority groups because they are controlled and created by individuals within these groups. Though some criticize ethnic niche media, claiming that they erode common ground or, in some instances, perpetuate stereotypes, the popularity of these media has only grown in recent years and will likely continue in the absence of more diverse perspectives in mainstream media sources (Tran; Flint, 2010).

FEMININITY IN MASS MEDIA

In the ABC sitcom *The Donna Reed Show* (1958–1966), actress Donna Reed plays a stay-at-home mother who fills her days with housework, cooking for her husband and children, decorating, and participating in community organizations, all while wearing pearls, heels, and stylish dresses. Such a traditional portrayal of femininity no doubt sounds dated to modern audiences, but stereotyped gender roles continue to thrive in the mass media. Women are still often represented as subordinate to their male counterparts—emotional, noncompetitive, domestic, and sweet natured. In contrast to these types, other women are represented as unattractively masculine, crazy, or cruel. In TV dramas and sitcoms, women continue to fill traditional roles such as mothers, nurses, secretaries, and housewives. By contrast, men in film and television are less likely to be shown in the home, and male characters are generally characterized by dominance, aggression, action, physical strength, and ambition (Chandler). In the mainstream news media, men are predominately featured as authorities on specialized issues like business, politics, and economics, while women are more likely to report on stories about natural disasters or domestic violence—coverage that does not require expertise (Media Awareness Network).

Not only is the White male perspective still presented as the standard, authoritative one, but also the media itself often comes to embody the male gaze. Media commentator Nancy Hass notes that "shows that don't focus on men have to feature the sort of women that guys might watch (Media Awareness Network)." Feminist critics have long been concerned by the way women in film, television, and print media are defined by their sexuality. Few female role models exist in the media who are valued primarily for qualities like intelligence or leadership. Inundated by images that conform to unrealistic beauty standards, women come to believe at an early age that their value depends on their physical attractiveness. According to one *Newsweek* article, eating disorders in girls are now routinely being diagnosed at younger ages, sometimes as early as eight or nine. The models who appear in magazines and print advertising are unrealistically skinny (23 percent thinner than the average woman), and their photographs are further enhanced to hide flaws and blemishes. Meanwhile, the majority of women appearing on television are under the age of 30, and many older actresses, facing the pressure to embody the youthful ideal, undergo surgical enhancements to appear younger (Derenne & Beresin, 2006). One recent example is TV news host Greta Van Susteren, a respected legal analyst who moved from CNN to Fox in 2002. At the debut of her show, *On the Record*, Van Susteren, sitting behind a table that allowed viewers to see her short skirt, had undergone not only a hair and wardrobe makeover, but also

surgical enhancement to make her appear younger and more attractive.[5]

In addition to the prevalence of gender stereotypes, the ratio of men to women in the mass media, in and behind the scenes, is also disproportionate. Surprisingly, though women slightly outnumber men in the general population, over two-thirds of TV sitcoms feature men in the starring role (Media Awareness Network). Among writers, producers, directors, and editors, the number of women lags far behind. In Hollywood, for instance, only 17 percent of behind-the-scenes creative talent is represented by women. Communications researcher Martha Lauzen argues that "when women have more powerful roles in the making of a movie or TV show, we know that we also get more powerful female characters on-screen, women who are more real and more multi-dimensional (Media Awareness Network)."

SEXUAL CONTENT IN PUBLIC COMMUNICATION

Creators of all forms of media know that sex—named, innuendoed, or overtly displayed—is a surefire way to grab an audience's attention. "Sex sells" is an advertising cliché; the list of products that advertisers have linked to erotic imagery or innuendo, from cosmetics and cars to vacation packages and beer, is nearly inexhaustible. Most often, sexualized advertising content is served up in the form of the female body, in part or in whole, featured in provocative or suggestive poses beside a product that may have nothing to do with sexuality. However, by linking these two things, advertisers are marketing desire itself.

FIGURE 14.2





Sex Sells: Commodifying Desire, Past and Present

Wikimedia Commons – public domain; Bryan Ward – GAW: Big Kahuna Burger – CC BY-SA 2.0.

Sex is used to sell not just consumer goods; it sells media, too. Music videos on MTV and VH1, which promote artists and their music, capture audience attention with highly suggestive dance moves, often performed by scantily clad women. Movie trailers may flash brief images of nudity or passionate kissing to suggest more to come in the movie. Video games feature female characters like Lara Croft of *Tomb Raider*, whose tightly fitted clothes reveal all the curves of her Barbie-doll figure. And partially nude models grace the cover of men's and women's magazines like *Maxim*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Vogue* where cover lines promise titillating tips, gossip, and advice on bedroom behavior (Reichert & Lambiase, 2005).

In the 1920s and 1930s, filmmakers attracted audiences to

the silver screen with the promise of what was then considered scandalous content. Prior to the 1934 Hays Code, which placed restrictions on "indecent" content in movies, films featured erotic dances, male and female nudity, references to homosexuality, and sexual violence (for more information on the Hays Code, see Chapter 8 "Movies" and Chapter 15 "Media and Government"). D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916) includes scenes with topless actresses, as does *Ben Hur* (1925). In Warner Bros.' *Female* (1933), the leading lady, the head of a major car company, spends her evenings in sexual exploits with her male employees, a story line that would never have passed the Hays Code a year later (Morris, 1996). *Trouble in Paradise*, a 1932 romantic comedy, was withdrawn from circulation after the institution of the Hays Code because of its frank discussion of sexuality. Similarly, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1931), which featured a prostitute as one of the main characters, was also banned under the code (Hauesser, 2007).

In the 1960s, when the sexual revolution led to increasingly permissive attitudes toward sexuality in American culture, the Hays Code was replaced with the MPAA rating system. The rating system, designed to warn parents about potentially objectionable material in films, allowed filmmakers to include sexually explicit content without fear of public protest. Since the replacement of the Hays Code, sexual content has been featured in movies with much greater frequency.

The problem, according to many media critics, is not that

sex now appears more often, but that it is almost always portrayed unrealistically in American mass media (Galician, 2004). This can be harmful, they say, because the mass media are important socialization agents; that is, ways that people learn about the norms, expectations, and values of their society.[6] Sex, as many films, TV shows, music videos, and song lyrics present it, is frequent and casual. Rarely do these media point out the potential emotional and physical consequences of sexual behavior. According to one study, portrayals of sex that include possible risks like sexually transmitted diseases or pregnancy only occur in 15 percent of the sexually explicit material on TV (Parents Television Council). Additionally, actors and models depicted in sexual relationships in the media are thinner, younger, and more attractive than the average adult. This creates unrealistic expectations about the necessary ingredients for a satisfying sexual relationship.

Social psychologists are particularly concerned with the negative effects these unrealistic portrayals have on women, as women's bodies are the primary means of introducing sexual content into media targeted at both men and women. Media activist Jean Kilbourne points out that "women's bodies are often dismembered into legs, breasts or thighs, reinforcing the message that women are objects rather than whole human beings." *Adbusters*, a magazine that critiques mass media, particularly advertising, points out the sexual objectification of women's bodies in a number of its spoof advertisements, such as the one in Figure 14.3, bringing home the message that

advertising often sends unrealistic and harmful messages about women's bodies and sexuality. Additionally, many researchers note that in women's magazines, advertising, and music videos, women are often implicitly—and sometimes explicitly—given the message that a primary concern should be attracting and sexually satisfying men (Parents Televison Council). Furthermore, the recent increase in entertainment featuring sexual violence may, according to some studies, negatively affect the way young men behave toward women (Gunter, 2002).

FIGURE 14.3



Sexual objectification: Women's bodies are often headless or dismembered into legs, breasts, or thighs in media portrayals (Adbusters).

Chelsea K – Adbust – CC BY-NC 2.0.

Young women and men are especially vulnerable to the effects of media portrayals of sexuality. Psychologists have long noted that teens and children get much of their information and many of their opinions about sex through TV, film, and online media. In fact, two-thirds of adolescents turn to the media first when they want to learn about sexuality.[7] The media may help shape teenage and adolescent attitudes toward sex, but they can also lead young people to engage in sexual activity before they are prepared to handle the consequences. According to one study, kids with high exposure to sex on television were almost twice as likely to initiate sexual activity compared to kids without exposure (Collins, et. al., 2004).

Cultural critics have noted that sexually explicit themes in mass media are generally more widely accepted in European nations than they are in the United States. However, the increased concern and debates over censorship of sexual content in the United States may in fact be linked to the way sex is portrayed in American media rather than to the presence of the sexual content in and of itself. Unrealistic portrayals that fail to take into account the actual complexity of sexual relationships seem to be a primary concern. As Jean Kilbourne has argued, sex in the American media "has far more to do with trivializing sex than with promoting it. We are offered a pseudo-sexuality that makes it far more difficult to discover our own unique and authentic sexuality."[8] However, despite

these criticisms, it is likely that unrealistic portrayals of sexual content will continue to be the norm in mass media unless the general public stops consuming these images.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- In American mass media, where the White male perspective is still presented as the standard, stereotypes of those who differ—women, ethnic minorities, and gays and lesbians—are an issue of ethical concern.
- Racial minorities are often absent, peripheral, or stereotyped in film, television, print media, advertising, and video games.
- Racial stereotypes occur in news reporting, where they influence public perceptions.
- Underrepresentation of women and racial and ethnic minorities is also a problem in the hiring of creative talent behind the scenes.
- The media still often subordinate women to traditional roles, where they serve as support for their male counterparts.
- The objectification of women in various visual media has particularly led to concerns about body image, unrealistic social expectations, and negative influences

on children and adolescent girls.
- "Sex sells" consumer products and media such as movies and music videos.
- The issue of sexual content in the media has become a source of concern to media critics because of the frequency with which it occurs and also because of the unrealistic way it is portrayed.

EXERCISES

Choose a television show or movie you are familiar with and consider the characters in terms of racial and gender diversity. Then answer the following short-answer questions. Each response should be one to two paragraphs.

1. Does the show or movie you've chosen reflect racial and gender diversity? Why or why not? Explain why this kind of diversity is important in media.
2. Are there any racial or gender stereotypes present in the show or movie you've chosen? If so, identify them and describe how they are stereotypical. If not, describe what elements would prevent the portrayal of a female or ethnic minority characters from being stereotypical.

3. Does the show or movie you've selected feature any sexual content? If so, do you think that the content is gratuitous or unrealistic, or does it serve the story? Explain your answer. Then explain why the use of sexual content in media is a concern for many media critics.

[1]Baynes, "White Out," 293.

[2]Burr, "Television and Societal Effects," 159.

[3]Media Awareness Network, "Ethnic and Visible Minorities in the News."

[4]Whitehouse, "Why Diversity Is an Ethical Issue," 102.

[5]Media Awareness Network, "Media Coverage."

[6]Galician, *Sex, Love & Romance*, 82.

[7]Media Awareness Network, "Sex and Relationships in the Media."

[8]Media Awareness Network, "Sex and Relationships in the Media."

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14.3 News Media and Ethics

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe the role of media in delivering news to the public.
2. Identify the important characteristics of reliable journalism.
3. Summarize the effects of bias in news presentations.

Now more than ever, with the presence of online news sources, news delivery is expected to be instantaneous, and journalists and news agencies face pressure to release stories rapidly to keep up with competing media sources. With this added pressure, standards of accuracy and fairness become more difficult to uphold. What wins when ethical responsibility and bottom-line concerns are at odds? Columnist Ellen Goodman notes that there has always been a tension in journalism between being first and being right. She argues, "In today's amphetamine world of news junkies, speed trumps thoughtfulness too often (Goodman, 1993)." As you read the following sections, decide if you agree with Goodman's assessment of the state of the news media today.

IMMEDIATE NEWS DELIVERY

In 1916, audiences across America tuned in to their radios to hear the first-ever breaking-news coverage of an event as the results of the presidential election between Woodrow Wilson and Charles Evans Hughes were announced from the offices of *The New York American*. Until that broadcast, news was

delivered to American homes once per day in the form of a newspaper, and often this coverage lagged a day or more behind the actual incidents it reported. Whereas much of radio news coverage even into the 1930s involved the reading of newspaper stories and news wires on the air, radio offered something that the newspapers could not: live coverage of special events (Govier, 2007).

For decades, the public turned to the family radio when they wanted to hear the most recent coverage of important news. All of that changed, however, in 1963 with the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. CBS correspondent Dan Rather took television audiences live to "the corner window just below the top floor, where the assassin stuck out his 30 caliber rifle," and for the first time, people were able to see an event nearly as it occurred. This was the beginning of round-the-clock news coverage, and the American public, while still relying on print news for detailed coverage, came to expect greater immediacy of major event reporting through TV and radio broadcasts (Holguin, 2005).

Today, with the widespread availability of Internet news, instant coverage is the norm rather than the exception, and the Internet has generally replaced TV and radio as the source of immediate information. Visitors to ABCNews.com can watch an evening newscast three and a half hours before it airs on television (Sullivan, 2006). RSS (which stands for *Really Simple Syndication*, a standard for the easy syndication of online content) feeds, home pages for major news-delivery sites

like Yahoo! News and CNN.com, news tickers, live video streams, blogs, Twitter, and a host of other media outlets ensure that news—and rumors of news—circulates within minutes of its occurrence. Additionally, with smartphone applications like those for *The New York Times* and *USA Today*, people can access the latest news coverage from almost anywhere.

The development of the Internet as a source of free and immediate access to information has forever changed the structure of the news media. Newspaper, television, and radio news programs have all had to adapt and diversify to compete for a share of the market. As Jeffrey Cole, director of the Center for Digital Communication put it, "For the first time in 60 years, newspapers are back in the breaking news business." Online, newspapers can compete with broadcast media for immediate coverage, posting articles on their home pages as soon as the stories are written, and supplementing the articles on their websites with audiovisual content. Gone is the era of single-medium newsrooms with predictable deadlines (USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, 2009).

Not only are traditional news media restructuring, but news consumers are also changing the way they access information. Increasingly, audiences want news on demand; they want to get news when they want it, and they want to be able to gather it from a variety of sources. This is having a significant effect on media revenues. News aggregators, websites like Yahoo! News

and Google News that compile news headlines from an array of legacy news organizations to display on their pages, have become popular information outlets. Although these websites don't hire reporters to produce news stories themselves, they get about the same amount of online traffic as websites for legacy news organizations like CNN and *The Wall Street Journal*. Moreover, many subscribers to print newspapers and magazines are canceling their subscriptions because they can get more current information online at no cost (State of the Media, 2010). Print advertising is down as well. In 2004, *The San Francisco Chronicle* reported losing $50 million in classified advertising to free online options like Craigslist.[1]

This loss of revenue has become a problem in recent years because while newspapers and magazines generate some income from advertisements on their websites, the money is not enough to compensate for lost readership and print ads. Subscriptions and advertising in traditional print media still account for 90 percent of industry funds, which means with less revenue in these areas, the support base for news organizations is dwindling. Newspapers and magazines across the country have had to restructure and scale down. Newspapers now spend $1.6 billion less annually on reporting and editing than they did 10 years ago (State of the Media, 2010).

Additionally, reduced budgets combined with greater pressure for immediacy have changed the way information gets reported and disseminated. Newsrooms are asking their staffs

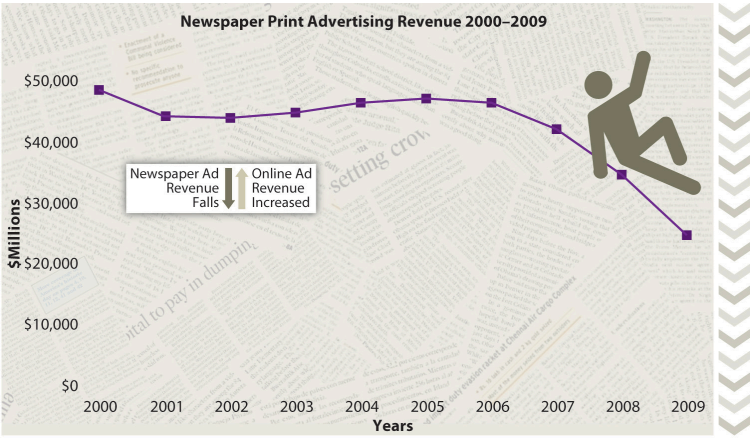
to focus on producing first accounts more quickly to feed multiple platforms. This often means that more resources go into distributing information than gathering it. Once news is released online by one source, it spreads rapidly, and other organizations scramble to release accounts, too, in order to keep up, often leaving staff less time for fact-checking and editing. The initial story is then followed quickly by commentary from both professional news organizations and nonprofessional sources on blogs, Twitter, and other social networks.

As a result of this restructuring, certain stories may get distributed, replayed, and commented on almost excessively, while other stories go unnoticed and in-depth coverage that would unearth more facts and context gets neglected. This has led a number of industry professionals to become anxious over the future of the news industry. The Center for Excellence in Journalism has called the news industry today "more reactive than proactive (State of the Media, 2010)." Journalist Patricia Sullivan complains, "Right now, almost no online news sites invest in original, in-depth and scrupulously edited news reporting."[2] While some may disagree with Sullivan, in-depth journalism remains an expensive and time-consuming venture that many online news sites, faced with uncertain revenue streams and a growing consumer demand for real-time news updates, are reluctant to bankroll extensively.

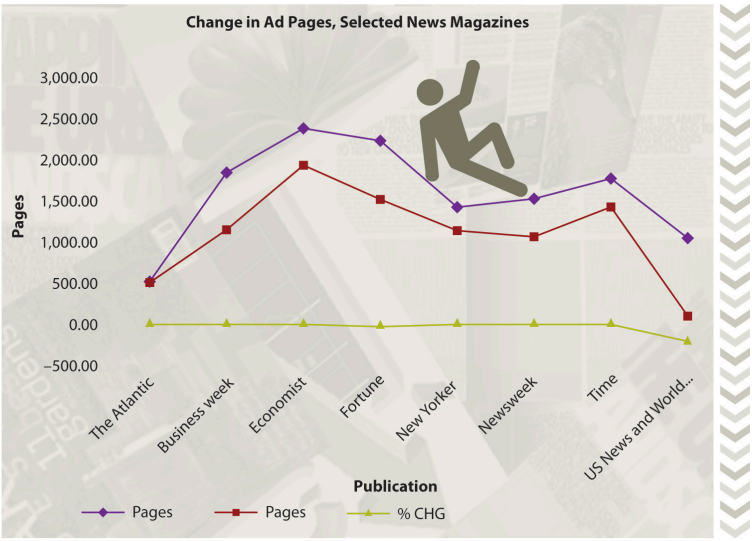
Already strapped for funds, news organizations know they have to cater to public demands, and foremost among these

demands is speed. When pop-music icon Michael Jackson died on June 26, 2009, at 2:26 p.m., news of his death hit cyberspace by 2:44 p.m. and soon spread nationwide via Twitter. Surprisingly, the initial report of Jackson's death was released by celebrity gossip website TMZ. Legacy news sources were slower to publish accounts. The *Los Angeles Times*, wary of the sourcing of the story, waited to confirm the news and didn't publish the story on its website until 3:15 p.m., by which time, thanks to the speed of social media, the star's death was already "old news (Collins & Braxton, 2009)."

FIGURE 14.4



Source: Research Dept., Newspaper Association of America



Source: MPA, The Association of Magazine Media.

American news organizations are losing their audiences to online media and have lost billions in advertising income.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF NEWS MEDIA

In the preamble to its statement of purpose, the Committee of Concerned Journalists lists as the central purpose of journalism "to provide citizens with accurate and reliable information they need to function in a free society (Committee of Concerned Journalists)." This theory of the social responsibility of the press is often referred to as the vital information premise. Though sometimes worded differently by different organizations, it is widely accepted in the journalism community as the foundation for any principles of media ethics (Iggers, 1999). What are those specific principles? Here are some that are particularly important for journalists in the current media climate.

PRESENT NEWS STORIES THAT INFORM AND SERVE THE NEEDS OF CITIZENS

If the basis for the principles of ethical news reporting is giving citizens the information they need to function in a democratic society, then that information must be presented accurately. Journalists should be careful to verify the facts before they report them. As the Committee of Concerned Journalists asserts, "Accuracy is the foundation upon which everything else is built—context, interpretation, comment, criticism, analysis and debate," so reliable news sources are essential if citizens are to have a clear understanding of the society in which they live.[3] Furthermore, although news organizations have a professional responsibility toward advertisers and shareholders, their commitment is always to citizens first. This means that journalists must report the facts truthfully and without omission, even if they are not in the best interest of advertisers, shareholders, or friends.

PRESENT ISSUES FAIRLY

Reporting issues fairly requires not only factual accuracy, but also lack of favoritism toward any organization, political group, ideology, or other agenda. The Society of Professional Journalists stipulates that journalists should refuse gifts and favors and avoid political involvement or public office if these things compromise journalistic integrity (Society of Professional Journalists). Additionally, journalists should avoid inflating stories for sensation and be as transparent as possible about their sources of information so that the public can investigate the issues further on their own.[4]

All sides of an issue should be presented in a news story. Of course, all journalists have a perspective from which they write, but a clear distinction should be made between news reports and editorial content (American Society of News Editors, 2009).

PRESENT STORIES IN A WAY THAT ADDRESSES THEIR COMPLEXITY

Many issues in the news are layered and highly complex. Developing a thorough understanding of issues requires dedication and a sometimes lengthy investigation, and, especially in a world where rapid reporting is the norm, there can be a temptation to gloss over the finer points of an issue for the sake of efficiency. Additionally, most consumers of news, increasingly busy and overwhelmed by the amount of information available, want stories that can be quickly digested and easily comprehended. However, as the Committee of Concerned Journalists points out, the media must balance what readers want with what they need but cannot anticipate.[5] Oversimplifying issues, whether for the sake of a quick story or to satisfy public tastes, becomes a violation of the vital information premise.[6]

PRESENT DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES

When discussing what he considers to be one of the key issues in professional journalism, media ethicist Jeremy Iggers points out that because democracy means the widest possible participation of citizens in public life, diversity in journalism is of fundamental importance.[7] Not only should newsroom staff represent a diversity of gender and races, but journalists should also speak for all groups in society—"not just those with attractive demographics," as the Committee for Concerned Journalists puts it. Journalists should represent the underrepresented because ignoring citizens is a form of disenfranchisement.[8]

MONITOR GOVERNMENT AND CORPORATIONS

When the framers of the U.S. Constitution guaranteed

freedom of the press, one of the things they had in mind was the ability of the news media to serve as a watchdog over those in positions of power (Committee of Concerned Journalists). It is the duty of the press to ensure that business is conducted in the open and that government actions are public. One famous example of the media fulfilling its watchdog role was *The Washington Post*'s investigation of the 1972 Watergate scandal. During Richard Nixon's presidency, journalists at the *Post* uncovered information linking government agencies and officials to the break-in at the Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate complex as part of an attempt to sabotage the Democratic campaign and guarantee Nixon's reelection (Flanagan & Koenig, 2003). Media coverage of the scandal increased publicity and ultimately put pressure on the government that led to an investigation and the prosecution of many who were involved (Baughman, et. al., 2001).

CHARACTERISTICS OF RELIABLE JOURNALISM

While CNN and other news networks took some criticism

for their delay in reporting Michael Jackson's death in 2009, others commended the news organizations for waiting for official confirmation. For many journalists and members of the public, ensuring accuracy, even when it means delays, is a hallmark of responsible journalism.

More than 400 journalistic codes of ethics have been produced by various unions and associations worldwide (White, 2008). Where they may differ on specifics, these codes of ethics agree that the news media's top obligation is to report the truth. When journalists say this, of course, they don't mean truth in an absolute, philosophical sense; they mean practical truth, the truth that involves reporting the facts as faithfully and accurately as possible. This notion of truth includes an accurate representation of information from reliable sources, but it also includes a complete representation, one that presents multiple perspectives on an issue and does not suppress vital information.

Many codes of ethics stress that the press has a duty to continue its investigation of the facts, even after initially reporting them, and to rectify any inaccuracies that may have occurred in the initial coverage of an issue (White). One example is *The Huffington Post*, a news website that, with over 2,000 bloggers, has the world's most linked-to blog. Blogging is sometimes criticized by more traditional journalists for the tendency, among some blogs, to include biases, unreliable information, and unfounded opinions—in other words, for instances of violating journalistic codes of ethics.

However, *The Huffington Post* requires all of its pass-holding writers to fact check and to correct any factual errors within 24 hours or lose their privileges.[9]

Along with an emphasis on the truth, codes of ethics stress loyalty to citizens as a standard of primary importance. Of course, truth telling is an essential component of this loyalty, but additionally, the concern here is in reminding journalists whom their work serves. Especially in the current environment, in which media outlets face increased financial pressure, there is a tension between responsible journalism and the demands for profit. Aiden White notes that corporate and political influences are of increasing concern in this environment, but he reminds journalists that while they have duties to other constituencies, "media products are not just economic." Journalists must hold the larger public interest above other interests (White).

Another challenge often posed by bottom-line concerns and the pressure for a good story is sensitivity toward, and protection of, those involved in the news. Responsible journalists should strive to balance disclosure of the news with a respect for individual privacy. Finding this balance can sometimes be a challenge. On one hand, journalists should never expose private information that could be harmful to individuals for the sake of sensationalizing a story. Issues like family life, sexual behavior, sexual orientation, or medical conditions, for instance, are generally considered tabloid material that would violate the privacy of those involved.

On the other hand, there are times when the private lives of individuals must be made public in the interests of serving the common good. One example was the 2009 media scandal surrounding South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford, who, after media investigations over his weeklong disappearance in June of that year, admitted to flying to Argentina to visit his mistress. After it was revealed that Sanford had used public funds for his private travel, he resigned from his office as the chairman of the Republican Governors' Association (Associated Press, 2009). Although the publicity surrounding this private matter was clearly painful for the governor and his family, releasing information about the incident, particularly regarding the misuse of public funds, was in the best interest of the citizens. The International Federation of Journalists offers three factors as a rough guideline in cases where privacy is in danger of being violated: the nature of the individual's place in society, the individual's reputation, and his or her place in public life. Politicians, judges, and others in elected office often must forgo their expectations of privacy for reasons of democracy and accountability—the public's right to know if their elected officials are engaged in unethical or criminal conduct generally trumps an individual's right to privacy.[10]

FIGURE 14.5



As shown in the scandal surrounding former South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford, drawing the line between exploiting individuals' private lives to sell stories and disclosing information in the public interest is not always clear.

Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

Because the press has a duty to serve the best interests of the citizens in a democracy, it is important that journalists act independently and that they remain neutral in their presentation of information. *Objectivity* was once the common term used to support this notion. More recently, however, there has been wider acceptance of the fact that reporting always occurs through a lens of personal experience, culture, beliefs, and background that ultimately all influence the way any individual perceives a situation (Myrick, 2002). If this were not the case—if there were only one standard way everyone perceived, investigated, and reported on a story—what would be the value of including racial and gender diversity in the newsroom? Nevertheless, responsible journalism requires journalists to avoid favoritism and to present news that is fair and offers a complete picture of the issue.

The principle of journalistic independence is an important component of the news media's watchdog role. Journalists should avoid conflicts of interest—financial, political, or otherwise—and, when conflicts of interest are unavoidable, it

is a journalist's ethical responsibility to disclose those.[11] One example involving conflict of interest centers on recent talk of government bailouts for the news media, similar to the bailouts for the auto and banking industries. However, many journalists are concerned that government support of this kind would present a conflict of interest and interfere with the media's watchdog role (Nicklaus, 2010).

In addition to maintaining independence, the news media should allow for commentary and opposition. Leaving space for citizens to voice concerns about journalistic conduct is an important part of serving the public interest and keeping the public's trust.

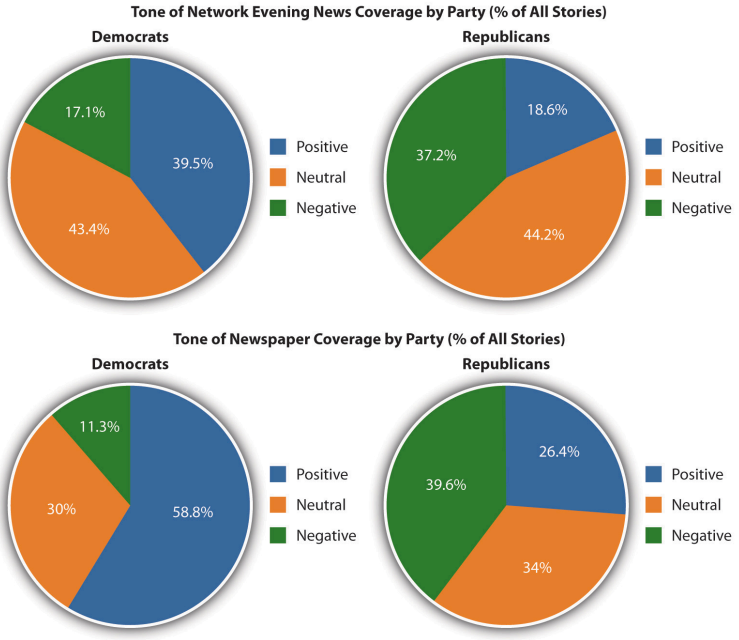
THE EFFECTS OF BIAS IN NEWS PRESENTATIONS

While principles of ethical journalism require journalists to remain neutral in their reporting, there is, as previously mentioned, always a degree of bias that will be present in any news reporting due to the element of personal perspective that

any journalist will naturally bring to his or her work. A 2005 in-depth study by political scientists at UCLA found that, of 20 media outlets, 18 had a perspective in their news reporting that was left of the national average. Of those 20, only Fox News and *The Washington Times* scored to the right of the average U.S. voter (Sullivan, 2005).

What, exactly, does political bias in the media look like? In the UCLA study, news sources were scored based on their sources of information and expert opinion. The news outlets with the most liberal slant—CBS News and *The New York Times*—cited liberal think tanks and policy groups with a much greater frequency than they cited conservative ones (Groseclose & Milyo, 2005). Political bias can also be observed by examining which stories a network or newspaper chooses to report. According to media analyst Seth Ackerman, the right-leaning Fox News network reports news stories that favor the Republican Party or show the Democratic Party in a negative light. Additionally, Fox's panels of pundits who offer commentary after the news tend to be politically conservative or moderate far more often than liberal (Ackerman, 2001).

FIGURE 14.6



Source: Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism

Some argue that there is a politically left bias in the news media.

Of course, such biases in news media have an effect on public opinion. However, while the picture a journalist or particular news outlet creates may not be entirely objective, journalists with integrity will strive to be fair and comprehensive, offering opposing views and citing their sources of information. Members of the public should remember that they also have a responsibility to be active, rather than passive, consumers of information. Good media consumers use critical analysis skills while reading news reports. If a story is presented conscientiously in the news, a reader or viewer will have the

resources he or she needs to research an issue further and draw his or her own conclusions. As you continue reading the chapter, keep in mind the ethical obligations of those who work in mass media and the potential consequences of their failure to uphold them.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The Internet has brought about profound and rapid changes in the structuring, delivery, and economics of news media.
    - Immediate news delivery has become the norm.
    - The pressure for immediate delivery increases the tension between factual accuracy and "getting there first" in news reporting.
    - Because people can get instant news for free online, subscriptions to print media are down, and so are advertising revenues.
- Most journalistic codes of ethics are based on the premise that the news media exists to provide citizens with the information they need to function in a free and democratic society. Journalists should conform to several ethical obligations:

    - Present news stories that inform and serve the needs of citizens.
    - Present issues fairly.
    - Present stories in a way that addresses their complexity.
    - Present diverse perspectives.
    - Monitor government and corporations.

- Responsible journalism

    - ensures accuracy (even if it means causing delays);
    - reports the truth;
    - stays loyal to citizens by putting the public interest above all else;
    - is protective and sensitive to those involved in the news;
    - remains objective and presents information in a neutral way; and
    - allows for commentary and opposition.

- All news stories contain some bias because of the diversity of journalists' perspectives. While the news media is often criticized for representing a political bias in reporting, ethical journalists always strive to present issues in a fair and comprehensive way.

EXERCISES

Conduct your own survey of political bias in the news. Choose either a television network or newspaper known for more liberal tendencies, such as CNN or *The New York Times*, and a network or newspaper known for more conservative reporting, such as Fox News or *The Washington Times*. Examine both sources' coverage of the same news story (*not* a column or editorial). Then answer the following short-answer questions. Each response should be one to two paragraphs.

1. What differences do you notice between the two sources' news coverage?
2. What evidence, if any, do you find of political bias? If it does exist, what effect do you think this bias has on readers?
3. Consider the role of the media in delivering news to the public. In your opinion, can both sources' coverage still be characterized as fair and accurate? Why or why not?

[1]Sullivan, "As the Internet Grows Up."

[2]Sullivan, "As the Internet Grows Up."

[3]Committee of Concerned Journalists, "Statement of Shared Purpose."

[4]Committee of Concerned Journalists, "Statement of Shared Purpose."

[5]Committee of Concerned Journalists, "Statement of Shared Purpose."

[6]Society of Professional Journalists, "SPJ Code of Ethics."

[7]Iggers, *Good News, Bad News*, 138.

[8]Committee of Concerned Journalists, "Statement of Shared Purpose."

[9]White, *To Tell You the Truth*, 76.

[10]White, *To Tell You the Truth*, 136.

[11]Society of Professional Journalists, "SPJ Code of Ethics."

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14.4 Ethical Considerations of the Online World

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Explain concerns related to surveillance and personal privacy rights introduced by the Internet.
2. Differentiate between copyright infringement and fair use.
3. Identify plagiarism and copyright concerns introduced by the Internet.

Online media has developed rapidly, with technology advancing at a rate that often surpasses the ability of legislation and policy to keep up with it. As a result, issues like individuals' rights to privacy, copyright protections, and fair use restrictions have become the subject of numerous court cases and public debates as lawmakers, judges, and civil liberties organizations struggle to define the limits of

technology and the access it provides to previously restricted information. In the following section you will look at some of the most prominent issues in today's online media environment. You should reflect on the ethical issues in mass media raised in the two preceding sections and how they are manifested in the areas of personal privacy, copyright law, and plagiarism.

PRIVACY AND SURVEILLANCE

Concerns about online privacy issues in recent years have led some people to wonder whether the collection of personal information on websites has begun to infringe on individuals' constitutional rights. While the U.S. Constitution does not explicitly guarantee a general right to privacy, the Bill of Rights establishes privacy of beliefs, privacy of the home, and privacy of person and possessions from unreasonable searches. Additionally, in a number of court cases, the "right to liberty" clause has also been read as a guarantee of personal privacy (Linder, 2010). What do these constitutional rights mean when it comes to storing a person's credit card data online, or

tracking his or her Internet searches, or using cookies to collect information about his or her purchasing habits? Because online media is developing so rapidly, many of these issues have not been settled by federal legislation and remain the source of numerous courtroom battles. Consider the 2010 case in which the online services company Yahoo! entered into a legal struggle with government officials who wanted to search the e-mail account of a Yahoo! user for incriminating evidence. While Yahoo! claimed the government would need a search warrant to access a user's e-mail, the government investigators claimed the Fourth Amendment does not apply in the case of an e-mail account (Electronic Frontier Foundation, 2010).

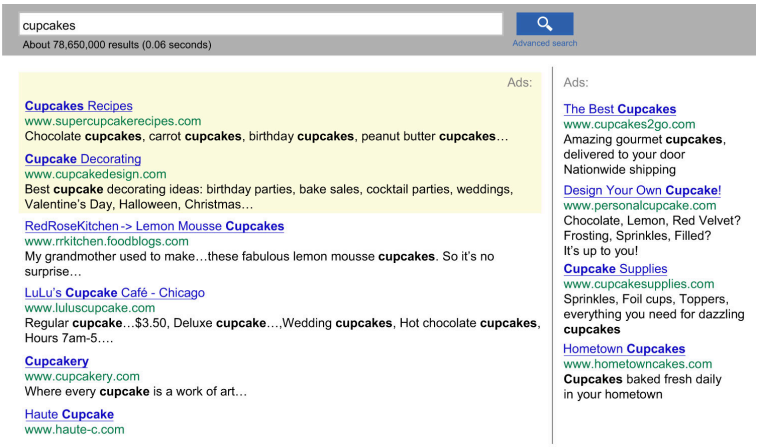
In defense of information collection and surveillance, many websites argue that, by using their services, individuals are agreeing to make their personal information available. However, many people don't realize the extent of surveillance capabilities or know how to protect certain personal information while using online tools. The more people rely on the Internet for shopping, communication, social networking, and media consumption, the more their personal data is stored online. Every time a person subscribes to a magazine, joins an organization, donates money to charity, gives to a political cause, or searches the pages of a government agency, that information is stored in a computer (Privacy Rights Clearinghouse, 2010). For example, cookies, text files that web page servers embed in users' hard drives, help search engines like Google and Yahoo! track their customers' search histories,

buying habits, and browsing patterns. Cookies stored by Google last for 30 years (Godoy, 2006). These search engine cookies are used to customize users' searches and to deliver customized third-party ads based on a particular user's demographics and behavior. However, privacy advocates claim this practice fosters predatory advertising (Spring, 2010). Additionally, considering that search engines receive multiple requests per day for specific information on their users (requests that are often tied to criminal investigations and lawsuits), there is a growing concern that unfair or even erroneous profiling may result.[1] Much of this information is stored without users' knowledge or informed consent—although agreements for most software inform users when their data is being collected, few people have the patience or time to read and understand the dense legalistic language of these agreements. And even when users invest the time and effort to understand the agreements, they are left with the difficult choice of either agreeing to have their data recorded or going without useful software.

Internet users concerned about their privacy may also be unaware of another growing trend: the combination of online data with offline information to build profiles of web surfers. Data providers like BlueKai, Datalogic, and Nielsen are now able to pool offline data and demographics to create "digital dossiers" (detailed digital records of a particular subject or market) for online advertisers who want to reach a target market.[2] This combination of online and offline information

provides a nearly complete picture of someone's life. If advertisers are looking for a 56-year-old retired female educator who is divorced, owns a home and a dog, suffers from arthritis, and plays tennis at the local fitness club, they can now find her. While advertisers have been careful to point out that people are identified by demographic subgroup but never by name, many organizations that advocate for privacy, such as the Electronic Frontier Foundation, believe that protections and greater transparency should be enforced (Spring, 2010).

FIGURE 14.7



Online ads like these target users based on pools of very specific information.

Users also supply a wide range of information about themselves through online social networks that are connected with their names, contact information, and photographs. Creditors now look at individuals' social networks to determine whether they would be good credit customers, and banks may access social network information to make loan decisions (Mies, 2010). If users aren't careful about their privacy settings on MySpace, Twitter, or Facebook, photographs and other private information may be easily accessible to anyone performing a Google search. Of even greater concern is the growing trend to publicize information that was previously private as the networking sites evolve and change their interfaces.

Surveillance can range from the monitoring of online activity by employers and other institutions that want to make sure users are following guidelines, to high-level government investigations of terrorist activity. The USA PATRIOT Act, passed just 6 weeks after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, expanded the federal government's rights to access citizens' personal information. Under the Patriot Act, authorities have access to personal records held by Internet service providers and other third parties, and government officials can tap in to an individual's e-mail communications and web searches if he or she is suspected of terrorist activity or of having connections to terrorist activity (American Civil

Liberties Union, 2003; Olsen, 2001). One concern among civil liberties organizations is that the Patriot Act might become a back door for the government to conduct undisclosed surveillance that doesn't necessarily involve the threat of terrorism. For instance, under the Patriot Act the government can wiretap Internet communications even if the primary purpose is a criminal investigation, as long as intelligence gathering is a significant purpose of the investigation (Harvard Law School).

FAIR USE AND PLAGIARISM

Now that a large amount of research can easily be conducted online, and content can be copied and pasted from one platform to another with no more than the click of a button, concerns about plagiarism and copyright infringement are more relevant than ever. The concepts of copyright infringement and plagiarism can easily be confused with each other. The following provides an overview of copyright, its issues and limitations, and its distinction from plagiarism.

COPYRIGHT INFRINGEMENT

Copyright is a form of protection provided by U.S. law, under which the creator of an original artistic or intellectual work is automatically granted certain rights, including the right to distribute, copy, and modify the work (U.S. Copyright Office). If someone rents a movie from Netflix, for example, and watches it with his friends, he hasn't violated any copyright laws because Netflix has paid for a license to loan the movie to its customers. However, if the same person rents a movie and burns himself a copy to watch later, he has violated copyright law because he has not paid for nor obtained the film creators' permission to copy the movie. Copyright law applies to most books, songs, movies, art, essays, and other pieces of creative work. However, after a certain length of time (70 to 120 years depending on the publication circumstances), creative and intellectual works enter the public domain; that is, they are free to be used and copied without permission.

GOOGLE BOOKS: TURNING COPYRIGHT LAW ON ITS HEAD?

In 2002, Google began scanning millions of books in academic libraries to make them available online in digital format. Of the more than 12 million books Google has digitized since then—and made searchable through Google Book Search—2 million are in the public domain. Those 2 million books are available in "full view" and free for users to download, while books still under copyright are available as limited previews, where users can access about 20 percent of the texts. According to Google, the project will pave the way for greater democratization of knowledge, making texts available to readers who formerly wouldn't have had access to them. However, many authors, publishers, and legal authorities claim the project represents a massive copyright violation. In 2005, the Authors Guild and the Association

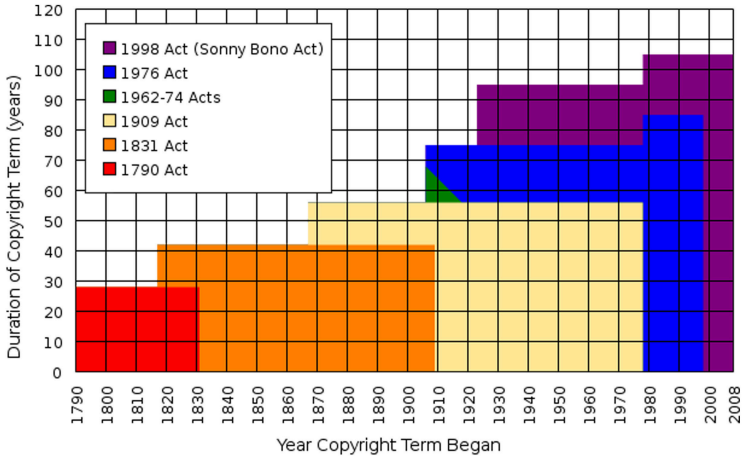
of American Publishers filed class-action lawsuits against Google (Newitz, 2010).

William Cavanaugh, a lawyer with the U.S. Department of Justice, claims that the Google Books Settlement, an agreement partially reached in 2008, "turns copyright law on its head." According to the settlement agreement, in exchange for $125 million, part of which would go to authors and publishers, Google was released from liability for copying the books and was granted the right to charge money for individual and institutional subscriptions to its Google Books service (which gives subscribers full access to the copied books—even those under copyright). Authors have the choice to opt out of the agreement, asking to have their books removed from Google's servers. However, more than 30,000 publishers have already made deals with Google, which override the authors' rights to opt out (Oder, 2010).

Some works are in the public domain because the creator has chosen to make them available to anyone without requiring permission. However, most works are in the public domain because their copyright has expired; in the United States, anything published before 1923 is automatically in the public domain. Additionally, there have been changes to U.S. copyright law over the years that caused some works to enter

the public domain earlier. Before 1964, for instance, any published work had to have its copyright renewed during the 28th year after its publication. If no renewal was filed, the copyright was lost. Figure 14.8 shows significant changes to U.S. copyright law since 1790 (Press, 2007).

FIGURE 14.8



Changes to U.S. Copyright Law

While it is illegal to violate the rights granted by copyright law, the copyright holder's rights are not unlimited. One of the significant limitations is the policy of "fair use," under which

the public is entitled to freely use copyrighted information for purposes such as criticism, commentary, news reporting, teaching, scholarship, research, or parody (U.S. Copyright Office, 2009). If a critic were writing a book review for a magazine, for instance, according to fair use, she would be allowed to summarize and quote from the book she wanted to review, whether or not the author of the book agreed to this use. According to the U.S. government, there are four issues to consider when determining fair use:

1. The purpose and character of the use, including whether such use is of commercial nature or is for nonprofit educational purposes
2. The nature of the copyrighted work
3. The amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole
4. The effect of the use on the potential market for, or value of, the copyrighted work (U.S. Copyright Office, 2009)

The distinction between what is considered fair and what constitutes copyright infringement is not always clearly defined. For one thing, there are no guidelines that specify a number of words, lines, or notes that can be taken without permission. Table 14.1 "Cases Involving Fair Use" provides some examples of distinctions between fair use and copyright infringement.

TABLE 14.1 CASES INVOLVING FAIR USE

Fair Use	Not Fair Use
***Wright v. Warner Books Inc.* (1991):** In a biography of Richard Wright the biographer quoted from six of Wright's unpublished letters and 10 unpublished journal entries. CONSIDERATIONS: The copied letters amounted to less than 1 percent of Wright's total letter material. Additionally, the biographer's purpose in copying the documents was informational.	***Castle Rock Entertainment Inc. v. Carol Publication Group* (1998):** Carol Publication published a book of trivia questions about the TV series *Seinfeld*. The book included direct quotes from the show and based its questions on characters and events in the series. CONSIDERATIONS: The book infringed on the ability of Castle Rock (the copyright holder) to make its own trivia books.

Source: Stanford University Libraries. "Copyright & Fair Use." http://fairuse.stanford.edu/Copyright_and_Fair_Use_Overview/chapter9/9-c.html

Fair Use	Not Fair Use
***Perfect 10 Inc. v. Amazon.com Inc.* (2007):** A Google search engine displayed thumbnail-sized photos of nude models from a subscription-only website. CONSIDERATIONS: The search engine's use of the photos transformed them into "pointers," directing users to the photos' original source. The transformative use was more important than any factors that would allow Google to make money from displaying the images.	***Los Angeles News Service v. KCAL-TV Channel 9* (1997):** A TV news station used a 30-second segment of a four-minute video that depicted the beating of a Los Angeles man. The video was copyrighted by the Los Angeles News Service. CONSIDERATIONS: The segment used by the news station was a significant portion of the total video. Additionally, the use was for commercial reasons and infringed on the Los Angeles News Service's ability to market the video.

Source: Stanford University Libraries. "Copyright & Fair Use." http://fairuse.stanford.edu/Copyright_and_Fair_Use_Overview/chapter9/9-c.html

PLAGIARISM

Sometimes plagiarism becomes confused with copyright violation. However, the two words are not synonymous; while there can be some overlap between them, not every instance of plagiarism involves copyright violation, and not every instance of copyright violation is an act of plagiarism. For one thing, while copyright violation can involve a wide range of acts, plagiarism is defined more narrowly as using someone else's information, writing, or speech without properly documenting or citing the source. In other words, plagiarism involves representing another person's work as one's own.

As the U.S. Copyright Office points out, it is possible to cite a copyrighted source of information without obtaining permission to reproduce that information.[3] In such a case, the user has violated copyright law even though she has not plagiarized the material. Similarly, a student writing a paper could copy sections of a document that is in the public domain without properly citing his sources, in which case he would not have broken any copyright laws. However, representing the information as his own work would be an instance of plagiarism.

Plagiarism, a perennially serious problem at academic institutions, has recently become even more prevalent. The ease of copying and pasting online content into a word-processing document can make it highly tempting for students

to plagiarize material for research projects and critical papers. Additionally, a number of online "paper mills" contain archives where students can download papers for free or, in some cases, purchase them (Denhart, 1999). In 2003, *The New York Times* surveyed students at 23 college campuses and reported that 38 percent of students admitted to having committed copy-and-paste plagiarism within the previous year (De Leon, 2007).

To combat the rise in plagiarism, many schools and universities now subscribe to services that allow instructors to check students' work for plagiarized material. Plagiarism.org, for instance, offers an analytics tool that compares student writing against a database that includes work from online paper mills, academic databases, documents available through major search engines, and other student papers submitted to Plagiarism.org.[4] According to many researchers, part of the issue may be that students don't understand what constitutes plagiarism. Some students, for instance, claim they think information available online is in the public domain (Auer & Krupar, 2001). The following list offers suggestions for ways to avoid plagiarism in your own work.

- Don't procrastinate.
- Avoid taking shortcuts.
- Take thorough notes and keep accurate records.
- Rephrase ideas in your own words.
- Provide citations or attributions for all sources.

- Ask your instructor when in doubt (Longman Publishers).

While plagiarism is an issue of concern in academia, it occurs in print media as well. Writers, whether through carelessness or laziness, may lift content from existing materials without properly citing or reinterpreting them. In an academic setting, plagiarism may lead to consequences as severe as failure or even expulsion from an institution. However, outside of academia the consequences may be even more damaging. Writers have lost publishing contracts, permanently damaged their reputations, and even ruined their careers over instances of plagiarism. For example, the late George Harrison, of the Beatles, was successfully sued by Ronald Mack for copyright infringement of his song "He's So Fine."[5] It was determined by the court that Harrison unconsciously plagiarized the musical essence of Mack's song for his composition "My Sweet Lord."

You should now have an understanding of the key issues in media ethics, particularly as they relate to privacy rights, plagiarism, and copyright laws. Please ensure you understand the key concepts listed below.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Concerns about the public's right to privacy have increased in recent years, as more personal information has become available online.
    - Every time someone makes a purchase, performs a web search, accesses a web page, downloads files, sends an e-mail, or engages in social networking, that information is stored in a computer and may be accessed by third parties under certain conditions.
    - The USA PATRIOT Act, passed after the September 11, 2001, attacks, has broadened the federal government's rights to access individuals' personal records.
    - Civil liberties organizations are concerned about clauses of the Patriot Act, such as the one that stipulates that the government can wiretap Internet communications as long as intelligence gathering is a significant purpose of the investigation.
- Rules that distinguish copyright violation from fair use are not always entirely clear and have been the subject

of debate now that a greater amount of copyrighted work is easily accessible via the Internet.

  - Works enter the public domain once their copyright has expired, at which point they can be altered, copied, and distributed freely.
  - Because of numerous changes in U.S. copyright laws, some works have entered the public domain earlier than others.
  - According to the U.S. government, when distinguishing between fair use and copyright infringement, there are four things to consider: whether or not the use is for profit, the nature of the copyrighted work, the percentage of the copyrighted material being used, and the effect of that use on the value of the copyrighted work.

- Plagiarism is also a growing concern because of the ease of copying and pasting texts from online sources into computer documents. It is important to keep in mind that plagiarism and copyright infringement are different issues: Plagiarism involves not giving credit to a work's creator, whereas copyright deals with the legality of using a created work.

EXERCISES

You will now examine several cases in detail to further explore your understanding of the concepts and key ideas covered in this chapter. Respond to the questions asked, and provide evidence or examples to defend and support your answer. Each response should be one or two paragraphs.

Case 1. Research the USA PATRIOT Act. You can read what the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has to say about the act here: http://www.aclu.org/pdfs/safefree/patriot_report_20090310.pdf . You can read what the federal government has to say about the act here: http://www.justice.gov/archive/ll/highlights.htm

- What are its major stipulations?
- What are some major concerns of civil liberties advocates?
- Do you agree with the ACLU that "the Patriot Act eroded our most basic right—the freedom from unwarranted government intrusion into our private lives?" Or do you agree with the acronym the federal government created to explain the act: Uniting and

Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism? Explain your reasons.

Case 2. Consider the following case:

After the publication of author J. K. Rowling's popular *Harry Potter* novels, one fan created an elaborate website for Harry Potter enthusiasts. The website includes an encyclopedia of information about the books; indexed lists of people, places, and things; fan art; discussion forums; essays; timelines; and other features. Much of the content of the website's encyclopedia entries comes directly from the books. Use of the website is free and unrestricted, and while the site includes some ads, the income they generate only goes to offset the site's operating costs.

- Decide whether you believe the website represents an instance of fair use or whether the action was a copyright violation. Defend your response.

END-OF-CHAPTER ASSESSMENT

Review Questions

1. Section 1

    1. Why was the NAACP unhappy with the schedule of programs for the 1999 season of major television network entertainment?
    2. List at least four common characteristics of the way women are often presented in TV and movie entertainment.
    3. Why is it considered problematic that so few women and ethnic minorities are represented "behind the scenes" in the creation of mass-media products?
    4. Explain how mass media as a socialization agent relates to public attitudes toward sexual behavior.

2. Section 2

    1. How does online news content put added pressure on news organizations?
    2. Explain the media's watchdog role.
    3. When is it considered acceptable for journalists to expose details about an individual's private life?
    4. How does political bias influence the way news gets presented?

3. Section 3

    1. Identify cookies. Why are cookies a concern for privacy advocates?

2. What are some reasons a created work might be in the public domain?
3. List the four considerations the federal government lists for determining whether an action is fair use or copyright violation.
4. Give an example of an act that could be considered plagiarism but not copyright violation.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

Answer the following critical thinking questions. Your responses should be one to two pages for each prompt.

1. Watch segments of the evening news on three of the major television networks. Based on the information presented here about representations of women and racial minorities, what do you observe? Do your observations corroborate claims of stereotyping and underrepresentation? Do you notice important differences among the three networks where these issues are concerned?
2. Create a mock advertisement that breaks with common racial stereotypes, gender myths, or media representations of sexuality.

3. A number of prominent journalists and news experts have argued that the newspaper industry must find a new model for generating revenue if it hopes to survive. Create a short proposal in which you outline a plan for newspaper agencies to earn money from sources other than subscriptions and print advertising.
4. Develop an argument in which you defend the use of information gathering and profiling for the placement of Internet ads and the creation of customized web pages.
5. What might be some implications of the Google Books settlement? Why do you think William Cavanaugh claimed that it "turns copyright law on its head"?

CAREER CONNECTION: POLITICAL BLOGGER

Research what it takes to be a professional political blogger for a news site like CNN.com or *The Huffington Post*. Then answer the following short-answer questions. Each response should be one to two paragraphs.

1. How much and what kind of research would you need to perform on a daily basis?

2. Where would you go for your information?
3. What are some elements that make for a successful blog?
4. What are some particular ethical concerns surrounding this form of journalism?

[1]Godoy, "Google Records Subpoena."

[2]Spring, "Good-Bye to Privacy?"

[3]U.S. Copyright Office, "Fair Use."

[4]Denhart, "The Web's Plagiarism Police."

[5]Bright Tunes Music v. Harrisongs Music, 420 F. Supp. 177 (S.D.N.Y. 1976).

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Chapter 15: Media and Government

15.1 Media and Government
15.2 Government Regulation of Media
15.3 The Law and Mass Media Messages
15.4 Censorship and Freedom of Speech
15.5 Ownership Issues in the Mass Media
15.6 Digital Democracy and Its Possible Effects
15.7 Media Influence on Laws and Government

15.1 Media and Government

FACEBOOK VERSUS THE FTC

FIGURE 15.1



Brian Solis – Mark Zuckerber f8 Keynote – CC BY 2.0.

In May 2010, the social networking website Facebook was thrown into the news when its chief executive officer, Mark Zuckerberg, announced new changes to the site's privacy policy. Although the announcement alone did not necessarily garner heavy attention from the news media, the involvement of the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) ramped up public interest.

The previous month, several watchdog groups had sent letters to Congress and the FTC asking for an investigation of Facebook's privacy policy. The letters attacked the site's privacy policies, which dated from December 2009 and had been designed to provide users more control over privacy settings. However, *PC Magazine* noted, "given Facebook's

move toward a more open format as it integrates status updates with search engines like Google and Bing, the site encouraged its users to make more of their data public, and made some of the default settings more open (Albanesius, 2010)."

Essentially, Facebook provides three default options for sharing information: with "everyone," "friends of friends," or "friends only." Zuckerberg explained the privacy policy by saying,

> We recommended that there be large pieces of information in each of these buckets. For friends only, that's all of the really sensitive stuff. For friends of friends, it could be who can see the photos and videos of you, which is actually the majority of the content people share on the site. And then for everyone, it's basic information and status updates and posts like that (Fletcher, 2010).

Concern grew that some of Facebook's default privacy settings allowed everyone, regardless of their level of connection to a user, to access some personal information. In their open letter to Congress, privacy watchdog groups addressed these concerns by stating, "Facebook continues to manipulate the privacy settings of users and its own policy so that it can take personal information provided by users for a limited purpose and make it widely available for commercial purposes.... The company has done this repeatedly and users are becoming increasingly angry and frustrated (Hachman, 2010)." In light of users' outrage, the letter asked the FTC to get involved.

The FTC is a congressional commission designed to oversee and enforce consumer protections. Despite—or perhaps because of—this stated goal, the FTC's lack of involvement in Facebook's privacy settings frustrated many individuals; one letter to Congress "openly worried that the FTC either lacked the power or the motivation to pursue questions of privacy at Facebook (Hachman, 2010)." The FTC responded that the issue was of "particular interest" to them, but as of this writing, no official action has been taken.

The issue has prompted a broader discussion of the government's role in regulating information disseminated on the Internet. *The New York Times* articulated the discussion's central questions: "What can government do to ensure that users have control of their own information, which might live on indefinitely on the web? Would regulation work? Or should government stay out of this arena (New York Times, 2010)?" Facebook stands by the rights of its users, arguing that "adult users should be free to publish information about their lives if they choose to do so (New York Times, 2010)." However, Facebook did respond to the open letter and modified its privacy settings to make it easier for individuals to control their online identities. Yet the debate continues over online privacy and the government's role in maintaining this privacy. The recent buzz over Facebook's privacy policies is just one of many examples of the debate over government's place in the world of media. How is copyright protected across different media outlets? What material is considered

appropriate for broadcast? Does the U.S. government have the right to censor information? This chapter explores these and other questions regarding the long and complex relationship between media and the government.

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15.2 Government Regulation of Media

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe the role of the FTC.
2. Explain the major duties of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).
3. Describe deregulation and its effect on the media landscape.

The U.S. federal government has long had its hand in media regulation. Media in all their forms have been under governmental jurisdiction since the early 1900s. Since that time, regulatory efforts have transformed as new forms of media have emerged and expanded their markets to larger audiences.

MAJOR REGULATORY AGENCIES

Throughout the 20th century, three important U.S. regulatory agencies appeared. Under the auspices of the federal government, these agencies—the FTC, the Federal Radio Commission (FRC), and the FCC—have shaped American media and their interactions with both the government and audiences.

FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION

The first stirrings of the FTC date from 1903, when President Theodore Roosevelt created the Bureau of Corporations to investigate the practices of increasingly larger American businesses. In time, authorities determined that an agency with more sweeping powers was necessary. Founded on September 26, 1914, the FTC came into being when President Woodrow Wilson signed the FTC Act into law, creating an

agency designed to "prevent unfair methods of competition in commerce (Federal Trade Commission)." From the beginning, the FTC absorbed the work and staff of the Bureau of Corporations, operating in a similar manner, but with additional regulatory authorization. In the words of the FTC,

> Like the Bureau of Corporations, the FTC could conduct investigations, gather information, and publish reports. The early Commission reported on export trade, resale price maintenance, and other general issues, as well as meat packing and other specific industries. Unlike the Bureau, though, the Commission could...challenge "unfair methods of competition" under Section 5 of the FTC Act, and it could enforce...more specific prohibitions against certain price discriminations, vertical arrangements, interlocking directorships, and stock acquisitions (Federal Trade Commission).

Although its primary focus was on the prevention of anticompetitive business practices, in its early years, the FTC also provided oversight on wartime economic practices. During World War I, for example, President Wilson frequently turned to the FTC for advice on exports and trading with foreign nations, resulting in the Trading with the Enemy Act, which restricted trade with countries in conflict with the United States.

FEDERAL RADIO COMMISSION

First established with the passage of the Radio Act of 1927, the FRC was intended to "bring order to the chaotic situation that developed as a result of the breakdown of earlier wireless acts passed during the formative years of wireless radio communication (Messere)." The FRC comprised five employees who were authorized to grant and deny broadcasting licenses and assign frequency ranges and power levels to each radio station.

In its early years, the FRC struggled to find its role and responsibility in regulating the radio airwaves. With no clear breakdown of what could or could not be aired, nearly everything was allowed to play. As you learned in Chapter 7 "Radio", the FRC lasted only until 1934, when it was absorbed by the FCC.

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

FIGURE 15.2



President Franklin D. Roosevelt established the Federal

Communications Commission in 1934 as part of the New Deal.

FDR Presidential Library & Museum – 61-406 – CC BY 2.0.

Since its creation by the Communications Act in 1934, the FCC has been "charged with regulating interstate and international communications by radio, television, wire, satellite and cable (Federal Communications Commission)." Part of the New Deal—President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Great Depression–era suite of federal programs and agencies—the commission worked to establish "a rapid, efficient, Nation-wide, and world-wide wire and radio communication service (Museum of Broadcast Communications)."

The responsibilities of the FCC are broad, and throughout its long history the agency has enforced several laws that regulate media. A selection of these laws include the 1941 National TV Ownership Rule, which states that a broadcaster cannot own television stations that reach more than 35 percent of the nation's homes; the 1970 Radio/TV Cross-Ownership Restriction, which prohibits a broadcaster from owning a radio station and a TV station in the same market; and the 1975 Newspaper/Broadcast Cross-Ownership Prohibition, which discourages ownership of a newspaper and a TV station in the same market (PBS, 2004).

REGULATION TODAY

Today, the FCC continues to hold the primary responsibility for regulating media outlets, with the FTC taking on a smaller role. Although each commission holds different roles and duties, the overall purpose of governmental control remains to establish and bring order to the media industry while ensuring the promulgation of the public good. This section examines the modern duties of both commissions.

THE STRUCTURE AND PURPOSES OF THE FCC

The FCC contains three major divisions: broadcast, telegraph,

and telephone. Within these branches, subdivisions allow the agency to more efficiently carry out its tasks. Presently, the FCC houses 7 operating bureaus and 10 staff offices. Although the bureaus and offices have varying specialties, the bureaus' general responsibilities include "processing applications for licenses and other filings; analyzing complaints; conducting investigations; developing and implementing regulatory programs; and taking part in hearings (Federal Communications Commission)." Four key bureaus are the Media Bureau, the Wireline Competition Bureau, the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau, and the International Bureau.

The Media Bureau oversees licensing and regulation of broadcasting services. Specifically, the Media Bureau "develops, recommends and administers the policy and licensing programs relating to electronic media, including cable television, broadcast television, and radio in the United States and its territories (Federal Communications Commission)." Because it aids the FCC in its decisions to grant or withhold licenses from broadcast stations, the Media Bureau plays a particularly important role within the organization. Such decisions are based on the "commission's own evaluation of whether the station has served in the public interest," and come primarily from the Media Bureau's recommendations.[1] The Media Bureau has been central to rulings on children's programming and mandatory closed captioning.

The Wireline Competition Bureau (WCB) is primarily

responsible for "rules and policies concerning telephone companies that provide interstate—and, under certain circumstances, intrastate—telecommunications services to the public through the use of wire-based transmission facilities (i.e. corded/cordless telephones) (Federal Communications Commission)." Despite the increasing market for wireless-based communications in the United States, the WCB maintains its large presence in the FCC by "ensuring choice, opportunity, and fairness in the development of wireline telecommunications services and markets (Federal Communications Commission)." In addition to this primary goal, the bureau's objectives include "developing deregulatory initiatives; promoting economically efficient investment in wireline telecommunications services; and fostering economic growth (Federal Communications Commission)." The WCB recently ruled against Comcast regarding blocked online content to the public, causing many to question the amount of authority that the government has over the public and big businesses.

Another prominent bureau within the FCC is the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau (WTB). The rough counterpart of the WCB, this bureau oversees mobile phones, pagers, and two-way radios, handling "all FCC domestic wireless telecommunications programs and policies, except those involving public safety, satellite communications or broadcasting, including licensing, enforcement, and regulatory functions (Federal Communications Commission)." The

WTB balances the expansion and limitation of wireless networks, registers antenna and broadband use, and manages the radio frequencies for airplane, ship, and land communication. As U.S. wireless communication continues to grow, this bureau seems likely to continue to increase in both scope and importance.

Finally, the International Bureau is responsible for representing the FCC in all satellite and international matters. A larger organization, the International Bureau's goal is to "connect the globe for the good of consumers through prompt authorizations, innovative spectrum management and responsible global leadership (Federal Communications Commission)." In an effort to avoid international interference, the International Bureau coordinates with partners around the globe regarding frequency allocation and orbital assignments. It also concerns itself with foreign investment in the United States, ruling that outside governments, individuals, or corporations cannot own more than 20 percent of stock in a U.S. broadcast, telephone, or radio company.

THE STRUCTURE AND PURPOSES OF THE FTC

Although the FCC provides most of the nation's media regulations, the FTC also has a hand in the media industry. As previously discussed, the FTC primarily dedicates itself to eliminating unfair business practices; however, in the course of those duties it has limited contact with media outlets.

One example of the FTC's media regulatory responsibility is the National Do Not Call Registry. In 2004, the agency created this registry to prevent most telemarketing phone calls, exempting such groups as nonprofit charities and businesses with which a consumer has an existing relationship. Although originally intended for landline phones, the Do Not Call Registry allows individuals to register wireless telephones along with traditional wire-based numbers.

ROLE OF ANTITRUST LEGISLATION

As discussed in Chapter 13 "Economics of Mass Media", the federal government has long regulated companies' business practices. Over the years, several antitrust acts (law discouraging the formation of monopolies) have been passed into law.

During the 1880s, Standard Oil was the first company to form a trust (a unit of business made up of a board of trustees, formed to monopolize an industry), an "arrangement by which stockholders...transferred their shares to a single set of trustees (Our Documents, 1890)." With corporate trustees receiving profits from the component companies, Standard Oil functioned as a monopoly (a business that economically controls a product or a service). The Sherman Antitrust Act was put into place in 1890 to dissolve trusts such as these. The Act stated that any combination "in the form of trust or otherwise that was in restraint of trade or commerce among the several states, or with foreign nations" was illegal (Our Documents, 1890).

The Sherman Antitrust Act served as a precedent for future antitrust regulation. As discussed in Chapter 13 "Economics of Mass Media", the 1914 Clayton Antitrust Act and the 1950 Celler-Kefauver Act expanded on the principles laid out in the Sherman Act. The Clayton Act

helped establish the foundation for many of today's business and media competition regulatory practices. Although the Sherman Act established regulations in the United States, the Clayton Act further developed the rules surrounding antitrust, giving businesses a "fair warning" about the dangers of anticompetitive practice (Gongol, 2005). Specifically, the Clayton Act prohibits actions that may "substantially lessen competition or tend to create a monopoly in any line of commerce (Gongol, 2005)."

The problem with the Clayton Act was that, while it prohibited mergers, it offered a loophole in that companies were allowed to buy individual assets of competitors (such as stocks or patents), which could still lead to monopolies. Established in 1950 and often referred to as the Antimerger Act, the Cellar-Kefauver Act closed that loophole by giving the government the power to stop vertical mergers. (Vertical mergers happen when two companies in the same business but on different levels—such as a tire company and a car company—combine.) The act also banned asset acquisitions that reduced competition (Financial Dictionary).

These laws reflected growing concerns in the early and mid-20th century that the trend toward monopolization could lead to the extinction of competition. Government regulation of businesses increased until the 1980s, when the United States experienced a shift in mind-set and citizens called for less governmental power. The U.S. government responded as deregulation became the norm.

MOVE TOWARD DEREGULATION

Media deregulation actually began during the 1970s as the FCC shifted its approach to radio and television regulation. Begun as a way of clearing laws to make the FCC run more efficiently and cost effectively, deregulation truly took off with the arrival of the Reagan administration and its new FCC chairman, Mark Fowler, in 1981. The FCC began overturning existing rules and experienced "an overall reduction in FCC oversight of station and network operations (Museum of Broadcast Communications)." Between 1981 and 1985, lawmakers dramatically altered laws and regulation to give more power to media licensees and to reduce that of the FCC. Television licenses were expanded from 3 years to 5, and corporations were now allowed to own up to 12 separate TV stations.

The shift in regulatory control had a powerful effect on the media landscape. Whereas initially laws had prohibited companies from owning media entities in more than one

medium, consolidation created large mass-media companies that increasingly dominated the U.S. media system. Before the increase in deregulation, eight major companies controlled phone services to different regions of the United States. Today, however, there are four (Kimmelman). Companies such as Viacom and Disney own television stations, record companies, and magazines. Bertelsmann alone owns more than 30 radio stations, 280 publishing outlets, and 15 record companies (Columbia Journalism Review). Due to this rapid consolidation, Congress grew concerned about the costs of deregulation, and by the late 1980s, it began to slow the FCC's release of control.

Today, deregulation remains a hotly debated topic. Some favor deregulation, believing that the public benefits from less governmental control. Others, however, argue that excessive consolidation of media ownership threatens the system of checks and balances.[2] Proponents on both sides of the argument are equally vocal, and it is likely that regulation of media will ebb and flow over the years, as it has since regulation first came into practice.

INTERNET CENSORSHIP AROUND THE WORLD

Is what you see on the Internet being censored? In Chapter 11 "The Internet and Social Media", you read about the debate between the search engine Google and China. However, Internet censorship is much more widespread, affecting people from Germany to Thailand to the United States. And now, thanks to a new online service, you can see for yourself.

In September 2010, Google launched its new web tool, Google Transparency. This program allows users to see a map of online censorship around the world. With this tool, people can view the number of times a country requests data to be removed, what kind of data they request be removed, and the percentage of requests that Google complies with. In some cases, the content is minor—YouTube videos that violate copyright, for

example, are frequent offenders. In other cases, the requests are more formidable; Iran blocked all of YouTube after the disputed 2009 elections, and Pakistan blocked the site for more than a week in response to a 2010 online protest. Perhaps most surprising is the amount of requests from countries not normally associated with strict censorship. Germany, for example, has banned content it deems to be affiliated with neo-Nazism, and Thailand refuses to allow videos of its king that it finds offensive. Between January and June 2010, the United States asked Google 4,287 times for information regarding its users, and sent 128 requests to the search engine to remove data. Eighty percent of the time, Google complied with the requests for data removal (Sutter, 2010).

What is the general trend in Internet censorship? According to Google, it's becoming more and more commonplace every year. However, the search engine hopes that its new tool will combat this trend. A spokesperson for the company said, "The openness and freedom that have shaped the internet as a powerful tool has come under threats from governments who want to control that technology." By giving users access to censorship numbers, Google allows them to witness the amount of Internet censorship that they are subject to in their everyday lives. As censorship increases, many predict that citizen outrage will increase as well. The future of Internet censorship may be

unsure, but for now, at least, the numbers are visible to all (Sutter, 2010).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The FTC was established in 1914 and is designed to "protect America's consumers" and "prevent unfair methods of competition in commerce."
- Established in 1934 as part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, the FCC is charged with regulating interstate and international communications.
- During the 1980s, the U.S. government began the process of deregulating many existing FCC radio and television laws, allowing the FCC to run more effectively but also setting the stage for increased media consolidation.

EXERCISES

Visit the FCC's web page (http://www.fcc.gov/) and explore some of the regulations that currently exist. Think about television or radio programs that you watch or listen to. Then write a one-page paper addressing the following:

1. Describe the role of the FTC.
2. Explain the major duties of the FCC.
3. Describe deregulation and its effect on the media landscape.

[1]Museum of Broadcast Communications, "Federal Communications Commission."

[2]Kimmelman, "Deregulation of Media."

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15.3 The Law and Mass Media Messages

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify important laws that relate to different aspects of the media.
2. Explain the effects of important laws on media outlets and audiences.

Media law has been a much-debated topic ever since the first U.S. media industry laws appeared in the early 1900s. The contention surrounding media law largely stems from the liberties guaranteed under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which includes the freedom of the press.

Generally speaking, media law comprises two areas: telecommunications law, which regulates radio and television broadcasts, and print law, which addresses publications such as books, newspapers, and magazines. Despite differences between the two areas, many media laws involve First Amendment protections. This section explores several areas of media law: privacy, libel and slander, copyright and intellectual

property, freedom of information, and equal time and coverage.

In 1974, Congress passed the Privacy Act, which "protects records that can be retrieved by personal identifiers such as a name, social security number, or other identifying number or symbol (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services)." This act also regulates how agencies can collect, store, and use information and requires agencies to tell individuals when they are collecting information about them. Designed to ensure that all First Amendment guarantees remain honored, the act requires all public and private agencies to function within its boundaries.

Under the Privacy Act, media personnel must be careful to avoid revealing certain information about an individual without his or her permission, even if that portrayal is factually accurate. Privacy laws, including the Privacy Act, "limit...your ability to publish private facts about someone and recognize...an individual's right to stop you from using his or her name, likeness, and other personal attributes for certain exploitative purposes (Citizen Media Law Project)." Members of the media can avoid the pitfalls of privacy laws by maintaining a professional relationship with a community. To avoid liability, journalists and other media professionals are encouraged to report or comment only on "matters of legitimate public interest and only portray people who have a reasonable relationship to [their] topic (Citizen Media Law Project)." In 2005, a legal dispute arose between congressional

aides Robert Steinbuch and Jessica Cutler. Steinbuch sued Cutler for publishing information about their intimate relationship; however, the case was dismissed when the court decided that Cutler had only provided facts that were already publically known (Citizen Media Law Project).

LIBEL AND SLANDER

Media outlets also must be wary of committing acts of defamation. These occur when false statements about an individual are printed, broadcast, spoken, or otherwise communicated to others. Two different types of legal protections, libel and slander laws, exist to prevent such defamation from taking place. Although defamation encompasses both categories, they are separate concepts. Libel refers to written statements or printed visual depictions, while slander refers to verbal statements and gestures (Media Law Resource Center). State jurisdiction largely covers libel and slander laws, but they are nearly identical throughout the United States.

As with privacy laws, print and broadcast journalists can protect themselves from defamation lawsuits by carrying out responsible reporting. Media personnel are legally protected

when communicating a report outweighs any potential damage to a person's reputation. However, when journalists do not report responsibly, the legal and financial consequences can be devastating. In the 2007 case *Murphy vs. Boston Herald*, the *Boston Herald* newspaper was sued for misquoting Massachusetts Superior Court Judge Ernest Murphy. The court ruled that the false quote was published with a malicious intent and awarded Murphy $2.1 million in damages (Wall, 2005). In the more famous case of Linda Tripp in 1998, Tripp was charged with secretly recording phone conversations between President Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky. Tripp faced a prison sentence of 10 years for slander and illegal documentation; however, the case was dropped in early 2000 due to witness bias (Van Natta Jr., 2000).

COPYRIGHT AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Copyright laws fall under federal jurisdiction and are,

therefore, identical across the country. As you learned in Chapter 4 "Newspapers", Congress first established U.S. copyright and patent protections in 1790 and, despite revisions and updates, has maintained some form of copyright law to this day. With coverage of a wide range of materials, copyright law encompasses "almost all creative work that can be written down or otherwise captured in a tangible medium (Citizen Media Law Project)." This includes literary works; musical works; dramatic works; pictorial, graphic, and sculptural works; motion pictures and other audiovisual works; sound recordings; and even architectural works. Once a work has achieved copyright, the copyright owner must grant permission for that work to be legally reproduced. After a certain number of years, a copyright expires and the work enters the public domain.

Copyright does not, however, protect facts. This is of particular importance for news media. Despite the length of time it takes to uncover facts, no individual or company can own them. Anyone may repeat facts as long as that person does not copy the written story or broadcast in which those facts were communicated.

Intellectual property law protects "products of the mind," including copyrights, patents, open licenses, trademarks, trade secrets, URLs, domain names, and even components of television programs (as David Letterman found out when he moved from NBC to CBS, and was forced to leave certain aspects of his TV show behind). Intellectual property law

generally follows the same guidelines as copyright law, and the associated legislation seeks "to encourage innovation and creativity, with an ultimate aim of promoting a general benefit to society (Citizen Media Law Project)." The role of copyright and intellectual property in the mass media will be covered in greater detail later in this chapter.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT

President Lyndon B. Johnson first signed the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) into law in 1966. By requiring full or partial disclosure of U.S. government information and documents, the act "helps the public keep track of its government's actions, from the campaign expenditures of city commission candidates to federal agencies' management of billions of dollars in tax revenues (Citizen Media Law Project)." Because it allows everyone access to federal documents and information that otherwise would go unreleased, FOIA is particularly important for those working in the news media.

Although the act covers a large range of agencies, some offices are exempt from FOIA. The act provides access to the public records of the executive branch of the U. S. government but does not include documents from the current president, Congress, or the judicial branch (Citizen Media Law Project). Because FOIA pertains to individuals and information in high levels of government, the process of accessing information can be complicated. Those who are interested must become skilled at navigating the complex set of procedures to offer citizens accurate information. Although FOIA allows any person for any reason access to the records, journalists who work for mainstream media organizations often receive perks such as the waiving of fees and expedited processing (Citizen Media Law Project).

THE EQUAL TIME RULE

Falling under broadcast regulations, the Communication Act's Section 315—also known as the Equal Time Rule—requires radio and television stations to give equal opportunity for airtime to all candidates. Essentially, Section

315 ensures that TV and radio stations cannot favor any one political candidate over another.

Passed by Congress in 1927, the equal opportunity requirement was the first major federal broadcasting law. Even then, legislators feared that broadcasters and stations would still be able to manipulate elections. Although candidates cannot receive free airtime unless their opponents do as well, the law doesn't take into consideration campaign funding. Well-funded candidates who can afford to pay for airtime still have an advantage over their poorly funded peers.

News programs, interviews, and documentaries are exempt from the requirements of Section 315. This allows media outlets to report on the activities of a candidate without also having to cover the activities of his or her opponent. Presidential debates fall under this exemption as well and are not required to include third-party candidates.

Section 315 also prohibits media from censoring what a candidate says or presents on air. Recently there has been controversy over campaign ads picturing aborted fetuses. Citing Section 315, the FCC allowed these television ads to continue to run (Museum of Broadcast Communications).

THE FAIRNESS DOCTRINE

As discussed in Chapter 7 "Radio", the Fairness Doctrine was enacted in 1949, when applications for radio broadcast licenses outpaced the number of available frequencies. At the time, concerns that broadcasters might use their stations to promote a particular perspective encouraged the creation of the radio-specific version of Section 315. The FCC thus instituted the Fairness Doctrine to "ensure that all coverage of controversial issues by a broadcast station be balanced and fair (Museum of Broadcast Communications)."

The FCC took the view...that station licensees were "public trustees," and as such had an obligation to afford reasonable opportunity for discussion of contrasting points of view on controversial issues. The commission later held that stations were also obligated to actively seek out issues of importance to their community and air programming that addressed those issues (Museum of Broadcast Communications).

The Fairness Doctrine was considered controversial among journalists who felt that it infringed on the rights of free speech and freedom of press granted in the First Amendment. The doctrine was dissolved during the 1980s with the Reagan administration's deregulatory efforts. We can see these effects today with the popularity of political talk radio.

THE DIGITAL MILLENNIUM COPYRIGHT ACT

In 1998, Congress passed the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) to bring order to the then-largely-unregulated online arena. As discussed in Chapter 13 "Economics of Mass Media", the DMCA prohibits individuals from either circumventing access-control measures or trafficking devices that may help others circumvent copyright measures. Under this act, it is illegal to use code-cracking devices to illegally copy software, and websites are required to take down material that infringes on copyrights. (You've experienced this regulation yourself if you've ever visited YouTube or Google Video and found that a video has been removed due to copyright claims.)

The DMCA does allow webcasting (the broadcasting of media over the Internet) as long as webcasters pay licensing fees to the companies that own the material. This allows sites such

as Hulu to legally stream movies and TV shows to viewers. The DMCA also protects institutes of higher education, including distance-learning programs, from certain copyright liabilities (Online Institute for Cyberspace Law and Policy).

One of the most controversial aspects of the DMCA is that, while it requires websites to remove copyrighted material, it does not require websites to monitor their content. A 3-year-long court battle between media giant Viacom and the Google-owned website YouTube was recently waged over this factor. Viacom argued that YouTube infringed on its rights by hosting copyrighted videos. Google responded that while YouTube may include copyrighted material, it is not required to scan every user-uploaded video for copyright infringement. When a claim is brought against a YouTube video, the video is removed—beyond that, the website is not responsible for content. The judge ruled in favor of Google, stating that it was indeed protected under the DMCA. While many saw this as a victory for Internet freedom, others warned that it would have future consequences for the protection of copyright holders (Rosenbaum, 2010).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The Privacy Act works to guarantee privacy to

individuals and controls how personal information is used. Defamation in the written form (libel) or the spoken form (slander) is illegal in the United States.

- Section 315 (Equal Time Rule) ensures that broadcast media cannot favor any one candidate over another by granting one more time than another. The Fairness Doctrine ensured that radio stations offered equal time to opposing viewpoints.
- The Freedom of Information Act grants the public, including the news media, access to many government documents. The Digital Millennium Copyright Act, established in 1998, extended existing copyright laws to encompass and protect information online.

EXERCISES

Visit the website of a major media outlet and examine the coverage of a recent local, state, or national election. Compare the coverage of different candidates. Then write answers to the short-response questions below. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. Identify and describe important laws that relate to different aspects of the media.

2. Explain the effects of the Privacy Act, Section 315, the Fairness Doctrine, and the Digital Millennium Copyright Act on media outlets and audiences.
3. Using information gathered from the media website, do you think there was equal coverage of candidates during the recent election? Why or why not? How do you think this balance would have differed if Section 315 were not in existence?

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15.4 Censorship and Freedom of Speech

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Explain the FCC's process of classifying material as indecent, obscene, or profane.
2. Describe how the Hay's Code affected 20th-century American mass media.

FIGURE 15.3



Attempts to censor material, such as banning books, typically attract a great deal of controversy and debate.

Timberland Regional Library – Banned Books Display At The Lacey Library – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

To fully understand the issues of censorship and freedom of speech and how they apply to modern media, we must first explore the terms themselves. Censorship is defined as suppressing or removing anything deemed objectionable. A common, everyday example can be found on the radio or television, where potentially offensive words are "bleeped" out. More controversial is censorship at a political or religious level.

If you've ever been banned from reading a book in school, or watched a "clean" version of a movie on an airplane, you've experienced censorship.

Much as media legislation can be controversial due to First Amendment protections, censorship in the media is often hotly debated. The First Amendment states that "Congress shall make no law...abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press (Case Summaries)." Under this definition, the term "speech" extends to a broader sense of "expression," meaning verbal, nonverbal, visual, or symbolic expression. Historically, many individuals have cited the First Amendment when protesting FCC decisions to censor certain media products or programs. However, what many people do not realize is that U.S. law establishes several exceptions to free speech, including defamation, hate speech, breach of the peace, incitement to crime, sedition, and obscenity.

CLASSIFYING MATERIAL AS INDECENT, OBSCENE, OR PROFANE

To comply with U.S. law, the FCC prohibits broadcasters from airing obscene programming. The FCC decides whether or not material is obscene by using a three-prong test.

Obscene material:

1. causes the average person to have lustful or sexual thoughts;
2. depicts lawfully offensive sexual conduct; and
3. lacks literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.

Material meeting all of these criteria is officially considered obscene and usually applies to hard-core pornography (Federal Communications Commission). "Indecent" material, on the other hand, is protected by the First Amendment and cannot be banned entirely.

Indecent material:

1. contains graphic sexual or excretory depictions;
2. dwells at length on depictions of sexual or excretory organs; and
3. is used simply to shock or arouse an audience.

Material deemed indecent cannot be broadcast between the hours of 6 a.m. and 10 p.m., to make it less likely that children will be exposed to it (Federal Communications Commission).

These classifications symbolize the media's long struggle with what is considered appropriate and inappropriate material. Despite the existence of the guidelines, however, the process of categorizing materials is a long and arduous one.

There is a formalized process for deciding what material falls into which category. First, the FCC relies on television audiences to alert the agency of potentially controversial material that may require classification. The commission asks the public to file a complaint via letter, e-mail, fax, telephone, or the agency's website, including the station, the community, and the date and time of the broadcast. The complaint should "contain enough detail about the material broadcast that the FCC can understand the exact words and language used (Federal Communications Commission)." Citizens are also allowed to submit tapes or transcripts of the aired material. Upon receiving a complaint, the FCC logs it in a database, which a staff member then accesses to perform an initial review. If necessary, the agency may contact either the station licensee or the individual who filed the complaint for further information.

Once the FCC has conducted a thorough investigation, it determines a final classification for the material. In the case of profane or indecent material, the agency may take further actions, including possibly fining the network or station

(Federal Communications Commission). If the material is classified as obscene, the FCC will instead refer the matter to the U.S. Department of Justice, which has the authority to criminally prosecute the media outlet. If convicted in court, violators can be subject to criminal fines and/or imprisonment (Federal Communications Commission).

Each year, the FCC receives thousands of complaints regarding obscene, indecent, or profane programming. While the agency ultimately defines most programs cited in the complaints as appropriate, many complaints require in-depth investigation and may result in fines called notices of apparent liability (NAL) or federal investigation.

TABLE 15.1 FCC INDECENCY COMPLAINTS AND NALS: 2000–2005

Year	Total Complaints Received	Radio Programs Complained About	Over-the-Air Television Programs Complained About	Cable Programs Complained About	Total Radio NALs	Tota Tele NAL
2000	111	85	25	1	7	0
2001	346	113	33	6	6	1
2002	13,922	185	166	38	7	0
2003	166,683	122	217	36	3	0
2004	1,405,419	145	140	29	9	3
2005	233,531	488	707	355	0	0

Source

VIOLENCE AND SEX: TABOOS IN ENTERTAINMENT

Although popular memory thinks of old black-and-white movies as tame or sanitized, many early filmmakers filled their movies with sexual or violent content. Edwin S. Porter's 1903 silent film *The Great Train Robbery*, for example, is known for expressing "the appealing, deeply embedded nature of violence in the frontier experience and the American civilizing process," and showcases "the rather spontaneous way that the attendant violence appears in the earliest developments of cinema (Film Reference)." The film ends with an image of a gunman firing a revolver directly at the camera, demonstrating that cinema's fascination with violence was present even 100 years ago.

Porter was not the only U.S. filmmaker working during the early years of cinema to employ graphic violence. Films such as *Intolerance* (1916) and *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) are notorious for their overt portrayals of violent activities. The director of both films, D. W. Griffith, intentionally portrayed content graphically because he "believed that the portrayal of violence must be uncompromised to show its consequences for humanity (Film Reference)."

HAYS CODE

Although audiences responded eagerly to the new medium of film, some naysayers believed that Hollywood films and their associated hedonistic culture was a negative moral influence. As you read in Chapter 8 "Movies", this changed during the 1930s with the implementation of the Hays Code. Formally termed the Motion Picture Production Code of 1930, the code is popularly known by the name of its author, Will Hays, the chairman of the industry's self-regulatory Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association (MPPDA), which was founded in 1922 to "police all in-house productions (Film Reference)." Created to forestall what was perceived to be looming governmental control over the industry, the Hays Code was, essentially, Hollywood self-censorship. The code displayed the motion picture industry's commitment to the public, stating:

> Motion picture producers recognize the high trust and confidence which have been placed in them by the people of the world and which have made motion pictures a universal form of entertainment.... Hence, though regarding motion pictures primarily as entertainment without any explicit purposes of teaching or propaganda, they know that the motion picture within its own field of entertainment may be directly responsible for spiritual or moral progress, for higher types of social life, and for much correct thinking (Arts Reformation).

Among other requirements, the Hays Code enacted strict guidelines on the portrayal of violence. Crimes such as murder, theft, robbery, safecracking, and "dynamiting of trains, mines, buildings, etc." could not be presented in detail (Arts Reformation). The code also addressed the portrayals of sex, saying that "the sanctity of the institution of marriage and the home shall be upheld. Pictures shall not infer that low forms of sex relationship are the accepted or common thing (Arts Reformation)."

FIGURE 15.4



As the chairman of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association, Will Hays oversaw the creation of the industry's self-censoring Hays Code.

Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

As television grew in popularity during the mid-1900s, the strict code placed on the film industry spread to other forms of

visual media. Many early sitcoms, for example, showed married couples sleeping in separate twin beds to avoid suggesting sexual relations.

By the end of the 1940s, the MPPDA had begun to relax the rigid regulations of the Hays Code. Propelled by the changing moral standards of the 1950s and 1960s, this led to a gradual reintroduction of violence and sex into mass media.

RATINGS SYSTEMS

As filmmakers began pushing the boundaries of acceptable visual content, the Hollywood studio industry scrambled to create a system to ensure appropriate audiences for films. In 1968, the successor of the MPPDA, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), established the familiar film ratings system to help alert potential audiences to the type of content they could expect from a production.

FILM RATINGS

Although the ratings system changed slightly in its early years, by 1972 it seemed that the MPAA had settled on its ratings. These ratings consisted of G (general audiences), PG (parental guidance suggested), R (restricted to ages 17 or up unless accompanied by a parent), and X (completely restricted to ages 17 and up). The system worked until 1984, when several major battles took place over controversial material. During that year, the highly popular films *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* and *Gremlins* both premiered with a PG rating. Both films—and subsequently the MPAA—received criticism for the explicit violence presented on screen, which many viewers considered too intense for the relatively mild PG rating. In response to the complaints, the MPAA introduced the PG-13 rating to indicate that some material may be inappropriate for children under the age of 13.

Another change came to the ratings system in 1990, with the introduction of the NC-17 rating. Carrying the same restrictions as the existing X rating, the new designation came at the behest of the film industry to distinguish mature films from pornographic ones. Despite the arguably milder format of the rating's name, many filmmakers find it too strict in practice; receiving an NC-17 rating often leads to a lack of promotion or distribution because numerous movie theaters and rental outlets refuse to carry films with this rating.

TELEVISION AND VIDEO GAME RATINGS

Regardless of these criticisms, most audience members find the rating system helpful, particularly when determining what is appropriate for children. The adoption of industry ratings for television programs and video games reflects the success of the film ratings system. During the 1990s, for example, the broadcasting industry introduced a voluntary rating system not unlike that used for films to accompany all TV shows. These ratings are displayed on screen during the first 15 seconds of a program and include TV-Y (all children), TV-Y7 (children ages 7 and up), TV-Y7-FV (older children—fantasy violence), TV-G (general audience), TV-PG (parental guidance suggested), TV-14 (parents strongly cautioned), and TV-MA (mature audiences only).

TABLE 15.2 TELEVISION RATINGS SYSTEM

Rating	Meaning	Examples of Programs
TV-Y	Appropriate for all children	*Sesame Street*, *Barney & Friends*, *Dora the Explorer*
TV-Y7	Designed for children ages 7 and up	*SpongeBob SquarePants*, *Captain Planet*
TV-Y7-FV	Directed toward older children; includes depictions of fantasy violence	*The Powerpuff Girls*, *Pokémon*, *Avatar: The Last Airbender*
TV-G	Suitable for general audiences; contains little or no violence, no strong language, and little or no sexual material	*Hannah Montana*, *The Price Is Right*, *American Idol*
TV-PG	Parental guidance suggested	*The Simpsons*, *Seinfeld*, *Tyler Perry's House of Payne*
TV-14	Parents strongly cautioned; contains suggestive dialogue, strong language, and sexual or violent situations	*Saturday Night Live*, *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*, *Jersey Shore*
TV-MA	Mature audiences only	*South Park*, *The Boondocks*, *The Shield*

Source: http://www.tvguidelines.org/ratings.htm

At about the same time that television ratings appeared, the Entertainment Software Rating Board was established to provide ratings on video games. Video game ratings include EC (early childhood), E (everyone), E 10+ (ages 10 and older), T (teen), M (mature), and AO (adults only).

TABLE 15.3 VIDEO GAME RATINGS SYSTEM

Rating	Meaning	Examples of Games
EC	Designed for early childhood, children ages 3 and older	*Nickelodeon BINGO*, *Winnie the Pooh ABC's*, *Elmo's World*
E	Suitable for everyone over the age of 6; contains minimal fantasy violence and mild language	*Tiger Woods PGA Tour*, *Little Big Planet*, *Frogger*, *Myst*
E 10+	Appropriate for ages 10 and older; may contain more violence and/or slightly suggestive themes	*Dance Dance Revolution*, *Tales of Monkey Island*, *Rock Band*, *Scribblenauts*
T	Content is appropriate for teens (ages 13 and older); may contain violence, crude humor, sexually suggestive themes, use of strong language, and/or simulated gambling	*Final Fantasy XIV*, *The Sims 3*, *Super Smash Bros. Brawl*
M	Mature content for ages 17 and older; includes intense violence and/or sexual content	*Quake*, *Grand Theft Auto IV*, *God of War*, *Fallout 3*
AO	Adults (18+) only; contains graphic sexual content and/or prolonged violence	*Playboy Mansion: Private Party*, *Manhunt 2*

Source: http://www.esrb.org/ratings/ratings_guide.jsp

Even with these ratings, the video game industry has long endured criticism over violence and sex in video games. One of the top-selling video game series in the world, *Grand Theft Auto*, is highly controversial because players have the option to solicit prostitution or murder civilians (Media Awareness). In 2010, a report claimed that "38 percent of the female characters in video games are scantily clad, 23 percent baring breasts or cleavage, 31 percent exposing thighs, another 31 percent exposing stomachs or midriffs, and 15 percent baring their behinds (Media Awareness)." Despite multiple lawsuits, some video game creators stand by their decisions to place graphic displays of violence and sex in their games on the grounds of freedom of speech.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The U.S. Government devised the three-prong test to determine if material can be considered "obscene." The FCC applies these guidelines to determine whether broadcast content can be classified as profane, indecent, or obscene.
- Established during the 1930s, the Hays Code placed strict regulations on film, requiring that filmmakers

avoid portraying violence and sex in films.

- After the decline of the Hays Code during the 1960s, the MPAA introduced a self-policed film ratings system. This system later inspired similar ratings for television and video game content.

EXERCISES

Look over the MPAA's explanation of each film rating online at http://www.mpaa.org/ratings/what-each-rating-means. View a film with these requirements in mind and think about how the rating was selected. Then answer the following short-answer questions. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. Would this material be considered "obscene" under the Hays Code criteria? Would it be considered obscene under the FCC's three-prong test? Explain why or why not. How would the film be different if it were released in accordance to the guidelines of the Hays Code?
2. Do you agree with the rating your chosen film was given? Why or why not?

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15.5 Ownership Issues in the Mass Media

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Determine the importance of ethical and legal compliance in online interactions.
2. Identify the role of copyright protection in cyberspace.
3. Describe the RIAA's antipiracy efforts.
4. Explain why complete privacy does not exist online.

Since its inception, the Internet has posed problems of ownership. Over the years, the government has struggled to find ways to introduce copyright protections into the online environment because, unlike other forms of media, the Internet enables users to make an unlimited number of copies of material and to transmit that information around the world (Rosenblatt, 1997). In this section, we explore the unique

challenges presented in dealing with online copyright and intellectual property and the U.S. government's role in regulating those fields.

ONLINE CREATIVITY AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS

Congress passed the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) in 1998 to establish a protocol for online copyright matters. Yet the nature of the Internet causes very different copyright and intellectual property issues than older forms of media do. Because of the ease of sharing information online, for example, the DMCA has not worked as Congress expected (Electronic Frontier Foundation). Copying and sharing materials online is relatively simple and, as such, piracy and rights infringement run rampant. In fact, many have argued that despite the DMCA's attempt to stop piracy, in practice, it has done nothing (Electronic Frontier Foundation). Additionally, because information is disseminated so rapidly

online, piracy opponents struggle with determining the rightful owner of a particular copyright.

The DMCA and its role in Internet policing have frustrated many online users and watchdog groups. The Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) claims that "the DMCA has become a serious threat that jeopardizes fair use, impedes competition and innovation, chills free expression and scientific research, and interferes with computer intrusion laws (Electronic Frontier Foundation)." In 2004, comic book company Marvel Entertainment sued game publishers NCsoft and Cryptic for copyright infringement in their online game *City of Heroes*. Marvel argued that players could use the character customization system in *City of Heroes* to make characters look almost identical to Marvel characters (Jenkins, 2004). Situations like this led groups such as the EFF to publically call for DMCA reform. Such disputes serve as reminders of the challenges inherent in issuing copyrights and intellectual property rights for the online industry.

COPYRIGHT PROTECTION IN CYBERSPACE

Certainly, the DMCA brought about major transformations by establishing copyright protection guidelines for the digital arena. However, in 1996—prior to the passage of the DMCA—the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) established two treaties designed to "update and supplement the major existing WIPO treaties on copyright and related rights, primarily in order to respond to developments in technology and in the marketplace (World Intellectual Property Organization)." The first of these, the WIPO Copyright Treaty (WCT), was created to protect authors of literary and artistic works, including computer programs, original databases, and fine art (World Intellectual Property Organization). The second, the WIPO Performances and Phonograms Treaty (WPPT), deals with "related rights," or rights connected to copyright. This law was created to protect the rights of performers and producers of sound recordings (World Intellectual Property Organization). These treaties both ensure basic rights, such as compensation and acknowledgement for those who create works, and extend further protections (World Intellectual Property Organization).

Supported by the WIPO and the DMCA, new forms of communication now enjoy copyright protections. Copyright laws cover blogs and website content, provided that these sites contain original writing (U.S. Copyright Office). Despite these developments, however, the Internet still poses challenges for copyrighted material. Because the web changes so quickly, maintaining copyright protection with the Copyright Office can be difficult. Presently, a work must be fixed and in a tangible form to be protected under copyright. Different, altered versions of the same work might not be covered under an original filed copyright claim. As such, authors publishing online must be careful to ensure that their work is protected.

THE RIAA VERSUS PIRACY

Widespread piracy problems arose during the late 1990s with the popularization of technology allowing peer-to-peer (P2P) music sharing. Suddenly, software such as Napster, Scour, Aimster, AudioGalaxy, Morpheus, Grokster, Kazaa, iMesh, and LimeWire popped up on computers everywhere, allowing access to free music around the world—and fueling online

piracy. However, in 2003, the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) put the laws established by the DMCA into practice and began a campaign to stop music piracy. In response to the growing number of users, the organization announced that it had been gathering evidence against users sharing music on P2P networks. Rather than go after the software engineers, "the RIAA investigators targeted 'uploaders'—individuals who were allowing others to copy music files from their 'shared' folders (U.S. Copyright Office)."

This data collection led to the RIAA filing more than 250 lawsuits against individuals in what has been called "an unprecedented legal campaign against its own customers (Electronic Frontier Foundation)." Among the first of these lawsuits was one against a 12-year-old girl who had to pay $2,000 and publicly apologize to settle her case. Since then, the recording industry has filed, settled, or threatened legal actions against over 28,000 individuals (Electronic Frontier Foundation). Recently, the popular torrent site The Pirate Bay found itself under attack for allowing users to search for pirated copies of material. This case mirrors the case of Viacom versus YouTube, because the prosecution argued that The Pirate Bay was responsible for the material its users posted and downloaded. These lawsuits raise the question of whether websites are responsible for the actions of their users, an issue that looks to be central to future Internet legislation (Masnick, 2009).

THE LAW AND ONLINE INTERACTIONS

Many Americans use the Internet on a regular basis. However, although the Internet is a relatively new form of media, it is not exempt from media laws. Terms of service agreements, as well as legislation such as the 1986 Computer Fraud and Abuse Act, regulate Internet use. As you will see in the following case studies, when it comes to criminal use, the Internet is not as anonymous as it seems.

TOS AGREEMENTS

All software and most Internet sites have a terms of service agreement to which its users must comply. Terms of Service

(TOS) are legally binding rules that an individual must adhere to in order to use a particular piece of software or service. iTunes, for instance, makes users agree to use their downloadable material for noncommercial use only and states that Apple is not responsible for lost or corrupted files. Anyone who has installed a new piece of software or logged on to social networking sites has agreed to a TOS. Entrance into these sites or use of a program typically requires a user to read through legal guidelines and then click a box agreeing to abide by the stated rules.

Deterred by the length and legal jargon of the standard TOS, however, many people skip to the end and simply accept the terms without reading them carefully. iTunes, for instance, has a clause that states:

> You may not use or otherwise export or re-export the Licensed Application [iTunes] except as authorized by United States law...the Licensed Application may not be exported or re-exported...into any U.S.-embargoed countries...You also agree that you will not use these products for any purposes prohibited by United States law, including, without limitation, the development, design, manufacture, or production of nuclear, missile, or chemical or biological weapons (Apple).

While not all Terms of Service are as extensive, an individual's breach of any TOS may result in suspension, restriction, or cancellation of account privileges, depending on the severity of the offense. As individuals become increasingly

reliant on Internet services such as e-mail, calendars, and social networks, the potential for disruption is enormous.

THE CASE OF MEGAN MEIER

In 2008, a compelling court case arose regarding TOS violation. Lori Drew, a 49-year-old woman, was accused of using a fake MySpace account to convince 13-year-old Megan Meier to commit suicide. After Drew's daughter had a confrontation with Meier, Drew created an account pretending to be a teenage boy. At first she used the persona to flirt with Meier and uncover information about the teenager's social life and relationship to her daughter. Later, when Drew decided she had enough information, she broke off her friendship, telling Meier that the world would be better off without her. Later that day, a distraught Megan Meier hanged herself (Steinhauer, 2008). After Lori Drew's identity was revealed, Meier's shocked parents filed charges against her. Despite the tragic events, whether Drew had actually

committed a crime remained questionable. Eventually, prosecutors decided that:

> Since there were no laws that applied in Missouri, the state where this tragedy occurred, [Drew] will face trial in California (the home of MySpace) where she will be charged with—of all things—TOS violations. Creating a false identity goes against MySpace's terms of service and...as a result she will be facing 1 count of conspiracy and 3 counts of accessing a computer without authorization (Spalding, 2008).

The case is complicated and the charge unprecedented. As one author writes, "This raises the questions as to how much weight do online 'contracts' hold (Spalding, 2008)."

Prosecutors charged Drew under the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act (CFAA), although that law is designed primarily to reduce hacking into computer systems. In August 2009, a jury found Drew guilty of "misdemeanor counts of unauthorized access," but commented that "the CFAA was not devised as a vehicle for criminalizing simple contractual violations on the Internet (Paul, 2009)." Although many believe that prosecutors pushed the charge too far, the Drew case brought TOS agreements to the attention of the public, shedding light on the complicated laws associated with Internet use.

CRIMES ON THE INTERNET

Although cases such as Drew's have brought about unexpected challenges, other online cases have had less ambiguous results. One newly clarified aspect of online law involves the use of the Internet to commit a crime. Regardless of the supposed anonymity of online use, law enforcement agencies and courts can requisition Internet protocol (IP) addresses of suspected lawbreakers and trace their computers to discover their identities. This practice has brought many individuals to trial for criminal offenses committed over the Internet.

ONLINE HATE CRIMES AND ANONYMITY

In 1998, a federal court found a 21-year-old Los Angeles man, Richard Machado, guilty of sending racist death threats to 59 Asian students. This case set a precedent because Machado was

the first person to be convicted of an online hate crime for sending the message via e-mail. Machado had used a campus computer to send an e-mail to a group of mostly Asian students at University of California, Irvine, saying, "I personally will make it my life career to find and kill every one of [you]." Machado, a former UC Irvine student, signed the e-mail "Asian Hater." Prosecutors charged Machado with sending the threat based on the recipients' race or ethnicity and interfering with their right to attend a public university (Macavinta, 1998).

The case signaled a new legal development because it was the first trial regarding hate crimes online. Prosecutor Michael Gennaco said of Machado's sentencing, "The jury has spoken that a line needs to be drawn in cyberspace. If you cross that line, you'll be subjected to the same criminal penalties you would be as if you use a telephone or post mail to do these kinds of acts (Macavinta, 1998)." Internet law specialists agree with Gennaco that the Internet is not and should not be treated differently from other communication methods; something posted online carries the same weight as a phone conversation or face-to-face interaction. This means that online anonymity is, in fact, not anonymous.

Despite the precedent of Machado's case, many people still mistakenly believe that the Internet will protect them from prosecution. Such was the case of Walter Edward Bagdasarian, who discovered that the government can trace supposedly anonymous posts using IP addresses. U.S. Secret Service agents

arrested Bagdasarian, a Southern California man, in 2009 for "posting a racist note to a Yahoo message board in October [2008] expressing displeasure over Barack Obama's candidacy, and predicting 'he will have a 50 cal in the head soon (Poulsen, 2009).'" The case exemplifies both the ease with which authorities can and do trace criminal behavior online and their propensity to take such cases seriously.

What does the future hold for Internet legislation? Many say that it will closely mirror that of other media outlets. Already there have been cases regarding Internet monopolies, defamation of users, and copyright infringement on message boards and personal websites (Netlitigation). Others argue that Internet regulation should take into account the differences between the use of the Internet and the use of other media; for example, an Arizona radio station that violates broadcasting laws is tried in Arizona, but where should an Internet podcaster be charged? If a user posts information on a community forum, is it protected under copyright? Does e-mail spam fall under the same regulations as telemarketing? What privacy rights should Internet users have? As the Internet grows and more issues are taken to court, authorities must come to terms with media issues in a constantly changing digital landscape.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The DMCA and the WIPO provide basic legal guidelines for copyright and intellectual property protections online. Nevertheless, regulating and enforcing such statutes remains a complicated, difficult process due to the rapid change and shared authorship inherent to online content.
- In 2003, the RIAA began a campaign against illegal peer-to-peer sharing of music. Its actions resulted in hundreds of lawsuits and greater awareness of issues pertaining to digital copyrights.
- Law enforcement agencies and courts can requisition IP addresses and trace computers to discover the identity of online users suspected of committing crimes. Seemingly anonymous Internet activities may be subject to severe legal consequences.

EXERCISES

Thoroughly read a terms of service agreement from a major website you use frequently, such as a social networking site.

How do the terms fit with your expectations? Is there anything that you find surprising? Is there anything that causes any concerns? With this in mind, answer the short-answer questions below. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. Describe the importance of ethical and legal compliance in online interactions. What would happen if you violated the terms of service that you read?
2. Describe the RIAA's antipiracy efforts.
3. Explain why complete privacy does not exist online.

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15.6 Digital Democracy and Its Possible Effects

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Explain how the Internet has changed citizens' role in the political process.
2. Determine the differences between traditional campaigning and digital campaigning.

In an era when work, discourse, and play are increasingly experienced via the Internet, it is fitting that politics have surged online as well in a recent phenomenon known as digital democracy. Digital democracy—also known as e-democracy—engages citizens in government and civic action through online tools. This new form of democracy began as an effort to include larger numbers of citizens in the democratic process. Recent evidence seems to confirm a rising popular belief that the Internet is the most effective modern way to engage individuals in politics. "Online political organizations...have attracted millions of members, raised tens of millions of dollars, and become a key force in electoral politics. Even more important, the 2004 and 2008 election

cycles show that candidates themselves can use the Internet to great effect (Hindman, 2008)."

PRESIDENT OBAMA'S DIGITAL CAMPAIGN

FIGURE 15.6



President Barack Obama has been called "the digital candidate" for his use of digital technology during his 2008 presidential campaign.

shutterblog – YES WE DID! – CC BY 2.0.

Perhaps the best example of a political candidate putting digital democracy to use is the successful 2008 presidential campaign of Barack Obama. On June 8, 2008, following Obama's victory in the Democratic presidential primaries, *The New York Times* published an article discussing the candidate's use of the Internet in his nomination bid. Titled "The Wiki-Way to the Nomination," the article credits Obama's success to

his employment of digital technology: "Barack Obama is the victor, and the Internet is taking the bows (Cohen, 2008)."

Obama's campaign certainly is not the first to rely on the Internet. Another Democratic presidential hopeful, Howard Dean, famously built his campaign online during the 2004 election cycle. But the Obama campaign took full advantage of the possibilities of digital democracy and, ultimately, secured the Oval Office partially on the strength of that strategy. As one writer puts it, "What is interesting about the story of his digital campaign is the way in which digital was integrated fully into the Obama campaign, rather than [being] seen as an additional extra (Williams, 2009)." President Obama's successful campaign serves as an excellent example of the possibilities of digital democracy.

TRADITIONAL WEBSITES

Several existing political websites proved beneficial to the Obama campaign. Founded in 1998, the liberal website MoveOn.org has long used its popularity and supporter base to mobilize citizens to vote, lobby, or donate funds to

Democratic campaigns. With more than 4 million members, MoveOn.org plays a noticeable role in U.S. politics and serves as inspiration for other like-minded digital efforts.

The Obama campaign gave a nod to the success of such sites by building a significant web presence. Websites such as MyBarackObama.com formed the foundation of these online efforts. However, the success of the Obama digital campaign came from its use of online media in all its forms. The campaign turned not only to traditional websites but also to social networking sites, e-mail outreach, text messages, and viral videos.

SOCIAL NETWORKING

More and more, digital democracy demands that its users rely on these alternative forms of Internet outreach. Social networking site Facebook was the hub of many digital outreach efforts during the 2008 campaign. As of 2010, Barack Obama's official Facebook page boasts more than 9 million fans, and the Obama administration uses the page to send messages about the current political climate.

Individuals not part of the official campaign also established

Facebook pages supporting the candidate. Mamas for Obama emerged just prior to the election, as did Women for Obama and the Michelle Obama Fan Club. The groups range in size, but all speak to a new wave of digital democracy. Other political candidates, including 2008 Republican presidential contender John McCain, have also turned to Facebook, albeit in less comprehensive ways.

E-MAIL OUTREACH

The Obama campaign also relied on e-mail. In 2009, an article was published titled "The Story Behind Obama's Digital Campaign" discussing the success of Obama's use of the Internet. According to the article, 13.5 million people signed up for updates on Obama's progress via the MyBarackObama.com website. The campaign regularly sent out e-mails to reach its audience.

Emails were short—never longer than 300 words—and never anonymous, there was always a consistency of voice and tone. Obama and other key figures in the campaign also contributed emails to be sent—"Michelle wrote her own emails...and more people opened

those than her husband's"—giving the campaign a personal touch and authenticity, rather than the impression of being simply churned out by the PR machine (Williams, 2009).

A combination of message and financial appeal, the e-mails were successful not only in reaching target audiences but also in earning valuable campaign dollars.

Two billion emails were then sent out, although...this email content was carefully managed, with individuals targeted with different "tracks" depending on their circumstances and whether they had already donated to the campaign.... By the end of the campaign the website had mobilized over 3 million people to contribute over $500 million online (Williams, 2009).

TEXT MESSAGING

Additionally, Obama used text messaging to reach out to his supporters. During the campaign, supporters could sign up to receive text messages, and attendees at rallies and other events were asked to send text messages to friends or potential supporters to encourage them to participate in Obama's campaign. Members of MyBarackObama.com were the first to discover his running mate selection via text message

(Organizing for America). This tool proved helpful and demonstrated the Obama campaign's commitment to fully relying on the digital world.

E-DEMOCRACY

Perhaps even more impressive than the campaign's commitment to digital democracy were the e-democracy efforts of Obama's supporters. Websites such as Barackobamaisyournewbicycle.com, a gently mocking site "listing the many examples of Mr. Obama's magical compassion. ('Barack Obama carries a picture of you in his wallet'; 'Barack Obama thought you could use some chocolate'),"[1] emerged, but viral videos offered even stronger examples of Obama's grassroots campaign.

FIGURE 15.7



will.i.am #willpower Wrap Party at the Avalon in Hollywood, CA on August 13, 2012

The music video "Yes We Can," created by the Black Eyed Peas' will.i.am, was viewed more than 20 million times leading up to

the 2008 presidential election. It is just one example of digital campaigning used by supporters of political candidates.

Wikimedia Commons – CC BY-SA 3.0.

One example of a supporter-created video was "Barack Paper Scissors," an interactive game inspired by rock-paper-scissors. Posted on YouTube, the video logged some 600,000 views. The success of videos such as "Barack Paper Scissors" did not go unnoticed by the Obama campaign. The viral video "Yes We Can," in which Barack Obama's words were set to music by will.i.am (of the Black Eyed Peas), has been viewed more than 20 million times online. Capitalizing on the popularity of the clip, the campaign brought it from YouTube to its main website, thus generating even more views and greater exposure for its message.

POLITICAL RUMORS ONLINE

Although the Internet is a powerful tool for candidates, it also propagates rumors that can derail—or at least hinder—a politician's career. Blog posts and mass e-mails can be created within minutes and then reposted or forwarded in seconds. Thus, ideas spread like wildfire regardless of their relative truth. Snopes.com, a website dedicated to verifying or debunking urban legends and Internet rumors, has an entire search section dedicated to political rumors, ranging from shooting down a list of books supposedly banned by Sarah Palin to investigating whether actress Nancy Cartwright, best known as the voice of Bart Simpson, was once elected mayor of Northridge, California. The pages dedicated to major political figures such as President Obama can be huge; Obama's page, for example, lists more than 60 debunked rumors. Some of these rumors include the questioning of his U.S.

citizenship, his decision to ban recreational fishing, and his refusal to sign Eagle Scout certificates.

Many of these online rumors are accompanied by "photographic evidence," thanks to technology such as Photoshop, which allows photographs to be manipulated with the click of a mouse. With such a spread of online rumors, savvy media consumers must be wary of what they read and seek out legitimate sources of information to verify the news that they receive.

DIGITAL DEMOCRACY AND THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Just as digital technology access issues can create the kinds

of problems discussed in Chapter 13 "Economics of Mass Media", the digital divide can equally split the country's involvement with politics along tech-savvy lines. Certainly, the Obama campaign's reliance on modern technology allowed it to reach a large population of young voters; but in doing so, the campaign focused much of its attention in an area out of reach to other voters. In *The Myth of Digital Democracy*, author Matthew Hindman wonders, "Is the Internet making politics less exclusive?"[2] The answer is likely both yes and no. While the Internet certainly has the power to inform and mobilize many individuals, it also denies poorer citizens without digital access an opportunity to be part of the new wave of e-democracy.

Nevertheless, digital democracy will continue to play a large role in politics, particularly after the overwhelming success of President Obama's largely digital campaign. But politicians and their supporters must consider the digital divide and work to reach out to those who are not plugged in to the digital world.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The Internet has dramatically changed citizens' involvement in the political process by giving them

greater access to issues and candidates.

- Candidates can now communicate with individuals via websites, e-mail, text messages, and viral videos, offering citizens a more personal experience with the election process.
- Savvy consumers question the truth of unverified online information such as that contained in e-mails or blog posts.

EXERCISES

Visit YouTube and search for a local or national candidate with whom you are familiar. If possible, compare the video message to those available on a candidate's website. Then answer the following short-answer questions. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. How does this video support the overall theme of the candidate's campaign?
2. How might access to videos such as these alter the way campaigns are run?
3. Explain how the growth of the Internet has changed citizens' roles in the political process.

[1]Cohen, "The Wiki-Way to the Nomination."

[2]Hindman, 4.

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15.7 Media Influence on Laws and Government

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe how radio transformed the political process.
2. Discuss the impact of the televised debates on presidential campaigns.

FIGURE 15.8



In 2007, *The Washington Post* published a critical exposé on the Walter Reed Army Medical Center. In response to the public outcry, the U.S. Army launched an investigation and set about improving the facility. As demonstrated in this case, media coverage can directly influence people's lives.

Max Borge – The Washington Post – CC BY-NC 2.0.

Media have long had a voice and a role in politics. As you have read in earlier chapters, even some of the earliest newspapers and magazines used their pages as a forum for political discourse. When broadcast media emerged during the 20th century, radio briefs and television reports entered the conversation, bringing political stories to the public's living rooms.

In addition to acting as a watchdog, media provide readers and viewers with news coverage of issues and events, and also offer public forums for debate. Thus, media support—or lack thereof—can have a significant influence on public opinion and governmental action. In 2007, for example, *The Washington Post* conducted a 4-month investigation of the substandard medical treatment of wounded soldiers at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, DC. Because of the ensuing two-part feature, the Secretary of the Army and the two-star general in charge of the medical facility lost their jobs.

However, an ongoing debate exists over media's role in politics. Many individuals wonder who is really behind certain stories. William James Willis, author of *The Media Effect: How the News Influences Politics and Government* discusses this debate:

> Sometimes the media appear willing or unwitting participants in chasing stories the government wants them to chase; other times politicians find themselves chasing issues that the media has enlarged by its coverage. Over the decades, political scientists, journalists, politicians, and political pundits have put forth many arguments about the media's power in influencing the government and politicians (Willis, 2007).

Regardless of who is encouraging whom, media coverage of politics certainly raises questions among the public. Despite laws put in place to prevent unbalanced political coverage,

such as Section 315, a large majority of the public is still wary of the media's role in swaying political opinion. In a January 2010 survey, two-thirds of respondents said that the media has too much influence on the government. Additionally, 72 percent of respondents agreed that "most reporters try to help the candidate they want to win (Rasmussen Reports, 2010)." This statistic demonstrates the media's perceived political power along with the road the media must carefully navigate when dealing with political issues.

POLITICS, BROADCAST MEDIA, AND THE INTERNET

Throughout their respective histories, radio, television, and the Internet have played important roles in politics. As technology developed, citizens began demanding greater levels of information and analysis of media outlets and, in turn, politicians. Here we explore the transformation of politics with the development of media.

RADIO

As discussed in Chapter 7 "Radio", radio was the first medium through which up-to-the-minute breaking news could be broadcast, with its popularization during the 1920s. On November 2, 1920, KDKA in East Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, became the first station to broadcast election results from the Harding-Cox presidential race, "becoming a pioneer in a brand new technology (American History)." Suddenly, information that would previously have been available only later in the newspapers was transmitted directly into American living rooms. The public responded positively, wanting to be more involved in U.S. politics.

As radio technology developed, "Americans demanded participation in the political and cultural debates shaping their democratic republic (Jenkins)." Radio provided a way to hold these debates in a public forum; it also provided a venue for politicians to speak directly to the public, a phenomenon that had not been possible on a large scale prior to the invention of the radio. This dynamic changed politics. Suddenly, candidates and elected officials had to be able to effectively communicate their messages to a large audience. "Radio brought politicians into people's homes, and many politicians went to learn effective public-speaking for radio broadcasts (ThinkQuest)."

TELEVISION

Today, television remains Americans' chief source of political news, a relationship that dates back almost to the very beginning of the medium. Political candidates began using TV commercials to speak directly to the public as early as 1952. These "living room candidates," as they are often called, understood the power of the television screen and the importance of reaching viewers at home. In 1952, Dwight D. Eisenhower became the first candidate to harness television's popularity. Eisenhower stepped onto the television screen "when Madison Avenue advertising executive Rosser Reeves convinced [him] that short ads played during such popular TV programs as *I Love Lucy* would reach more voters than any other form of advertising. This innovation had a permanent effect on the way presidential campaigns are run (Living Room Candidate)."

NIXON–KENNEDY DEBATES OF 1960

The relationship between politics and television took a massive step forward in 1960 with a series of four televised "Great Debates" between presidential candidates John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon. Seventy million U.S. viewers tuned into the first of these on September 26, 1960. The debates gave voters their first chance to see candidates debate, marking television's entry into politics.

FIGURE 15.9



In 1960, candidates John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon brought presidential debating to television screens around the nation.

judy_and_ed – Replay – CC BY-NC 2.0.

Just as radio changed the way politicians thought about their speeches, television emphasized the importance of their appearance. Shortly before the first debate, Nixon had spent 2 weeks in the hospital with a knee injury. By the day of the debate he was extremely underweight. In addition, he wore an ill-fitting shirt and refused to wear makeup. Kennedy, however, was fit, tan, and confident. The visual difference between the two candidates was staggering; Kennedy appeared much more presidential. Indeed, those who watched the first broadcast declared that Kennedy had clearly won the debate, while those who listened by radio said that Nixon had won. A record number of viewers watched the debates, and many historians have attributed Kennedy's success at the polls that November to the public perception of the candidates formed during these debates (Mary Ferrell Foundation).

WAR AND TELEVISION

Later in the decade, rising U.S. involvement in Vietnam brought television and public affairs together again in a significant way. The horrors of battle were broadcast directly into U.S. homes on a large scale for the first time; although

television had been invented prior to the Korean War, "the medium was in its infancy...[and] its audience and technology [were] still too limited to play a major role (Museum of Broadcast Communications)." As such, in 1965 the Vietnam War became the first "living-room war."

Early in the war, the coverage was mostly upbeat:

> It typically began with a battlefield roundup, written from wire reports based on the daily press briefing in Saigon...read by the anchor and illustrated with a battle map.... The battlefield roundup would normally be followed by a policy story from Washington, and then a film report from the field.... As with most television news, the emphasis was on the visual and above all the personal: "American boys in action" was the story, and reports emphasized their bravery and their skill in handling the technology of war (Museum of Broadcast Communications).

In 1969, however, television coverage began to change as journalists grew more and more skeptical of the government's claims of progress, and there was more emphasis on the human costs of war (Museum of Broadcast Communications). Although gore typically remained off screen, a few major violent moments were caught on film and broadcast into homes. In 1965, CBS aired footage of U.S. Marines setting village huts on fire, and in 1972, NBC audiences witnessed Vietnamese civilians fall victim to a napalm strike. Such scenes altered America's perspective of the war, generating antiwar sentiment.

POLITICAL NEWS PROGRAMMING

The way that news is televised has dramatically changed over the medium's history. For years, nightly news broadcasts dominated the political news cycle; then round-the-clock cable news channels appeared. Founded by Ted Turner in 1980, CNN (Cable News Network) was the first such network. Upon the launch of CNN, Turner stated, "We won't be signing off until the world ends. We'll be on, and we will cover the end of the world, live, and that will be our last event...and when the end of the world comes, we'll play 'Nearer, My God, to Thee' before we sign off (TV Tropes)."

Twenty-four-hour news stations such as CNN have become more popular, and nightly news programs have been forced to change their focus, now emphasizing more local stories that may not be covered by the major news programs. Additionally, the 21st century has seen the rise of the popularity and influence of satirical news shows such as *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*. The comedic news programs

have, in recent years, become major cultural arbiters and watchdogs of political issues thanks to the outspoken nature of their hosts and their frank coverage of political issues.

ONLINE NEWS AND POLITICS

Finally, the Internet has become an increasingly important force in how Americans receive political information. Websites such as the Huffington Post, Daily Beast, and the Drudge Report are known for breaking news stories and political commentary. Additionally, political groups regularly use the Internet to organize supporters and influence political issues. Online petitions are available via the Internet, and individuals can use online resources to donate to political causes or connect with like-minded people.

Media and government have had a long and complicated history. Each influences the other through regulations and news cycles. As technology develops, the relationship between

media and politics will likely become even more intermeshed. The hope is that the U.S. public will benefit from such developments, and both media and the government will seek out opportunities to involve the public in their decisions.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Election results were broadcast on the radio in 1920, granting listeners access to political information as it was being made public and transforming the way that citizens viewed politics and political involvement.
- The televised Nixon–Kennedy debates of 1960 brought politics into the living rooms of Americans, forever changing U.S. citizens' understanding of the political process and making television a valuable platform for candidates and issues.

EXERCISES

Choose a political topic that interests you, such as conflict in the Middle East, the legalization of marijuana, or gay marriage. Find a radio story, a television story, and an

Internet story about this topic. Then write a one-page paper answering the questions below.

1. Describe how radio transformed the political process. How was your topic presented differently on the radio than it was on television or the Internet?
2. Discuss the effect of televised debates on presidential campaigns. Was your issue addressed in the 2008 presidential campaign? Was it discussed on the televised debates?
3. How do different media tell the same story? Do any present a more balanced story? Which covered your topic the most in depth? Which covered it the least?

END-OF-CHAPTER ASSESSMENT

Review Questions

1. Section 1

    1. What are the major duties of the FTC?
    2. What are the major duties of the FCC?
    3. Describe the effects of Reagan-era deregulation on the mass media.

2. Section 2

    1. Explain the difference between libel and slander.
    2. What is Section 315, and how does it affect the media's relationship with politics?
    3. What is the purpose and scope of the Freedom of Information Act?

3. Section 3

    1. Define censorship.
    2. Briefly list the steps in the process that the FCC uses to classify materials as profane, indecent, or obscene.
    3. How did the Hays Code affect mass media during the 20th century?

4. Section 4

    1. How and why has the RIAA worked to eliminate piracy?
    2. What is a TOS and why is it important?
    3. Why might authorities request personal information about an Internet user?

5. Section 5

    1. What is digital democracy?
    2. List three ways that digital democracy affects

modern political activity.

6. Section 6

    1. How did the invention of the radio transform politics?
    2. What are two examples of the influence of television on government?

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. Evaluate the role of the FCC in modern media. Do you think regulation should increase or decrease? Why?
2. Compare and contrast Section 315 and the Fairness Doctrine.
3. Discuss why profane and indecent material can be broadcast during certain time slots, but obscene material cannot be broadcast at all.
4. Explain the importance of compliance with terms of service agreements.
5. Describe the effects of the digital divide on political campaigning.
6. Discuss the role that television has played in swaying

public opinion on issues of war.

CAREER CONNECTION

Some media professionals work closely with political candidates to help them craft their public images and messages. Suppose that you were going to advise the campaign of a candidate for local, state, or national office. Choose a candidate who interests you and visit his or her existing website. Explore any other digital outreach efforts. Then answer the following questions to help you make recommendations for the campaign.

1. How does he or she employ social networking sites?
2. How does he or she target varying age groups on the Internet?
3. What could you do to strengthen his or her digital outreach?

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Chapter 16: The Future of Mass Media

16.1 Changes in Media Over the Last Century
16.2 Information Delivery Methods
16.3 Modern Media Delivery: Pros and Cons
16.4 Current Trends in Electronic Media

16.5 Privacy Laws and the Impact of Digital Surveillance
16.6 Mass Media, New Technology, and the Public

16.1 Changes in Media Over the Last Century

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe the types of new media.
2. Identify how the Internet has affected media delivery.
3. Explain why new media is often more successful than traditional forms of media.

Life has changed dramatically over the past century, and a major reason for this is the progression of media technology. Compare a day in the life of a modern student—let's call her Katie—with a day in the life of someone from Katie's great-grandparents' generation. When Katie wakes up, she immediately checks her smartphone for text messages and finds out that her friend will not be able to give her a ride to class. Katie flips on the TV while she eats breakfast to check the news and learns it is supposed to rain that day. Before

she leaves her apartment, Katie goes online to make sure she remembered the train times correctly. She grabs an umbrella and heads to the train station, listening to a music application on her smartphone on the way. After a busy day of classes, Katie heads home, occupying herself on the train ride by watching YouTube clips on her phone. That evening, she finishes her homework, e-mails the file to her instructor, and settles down to watch the TV show she digitally recorded the night before. While watching the show, Katie logs on to Facebook and chats with a few of her friends online to make plans for the weekend and then reads a book on her e-reader.

Katie's life today is vastly different from the life she would have led just a few generations ago. At the beginning of the 20th century, neither TV nor the Internet existed. There were no commercial radio stations, no roadside billboards, no feature films, and certainly no smartphones. People were dependent on newspapers and magazines for their knowledge of the outside world. An early-20th-century woman the same age as Katie—let's call her Elizabeth—wakes up to read the daily paper. Yellow journalism is rife, and the papers are full of lurid stories and sensational headlines about government corruption and the unfair treatment of factory workers. Full-color printing became available in the 1890s, and Elizabeth enjoys reading the Sunday comics. She also subscribes to *Good Housekeeping* magazine. Occasionally, Elizabeth and her husband enjoy visiting the local nickelodeon theater, where they watch short silent films accompanied by accordion music.

They cannot afford to purchase a phonograph, but Elizabeth and her family often gather around a piano in the evening to sing songs to popular sheet music. Before she goes to sleep, Elizabeth reads a few pages of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Separated by nearly a century of technology, Elizabeth's and Katie's lives are vastly different.

NEW MEDIA

Traditional media encompasses all the means of communication that existed before the Internet and new media technology, including printed materials (books, magazines, and newspapers), broadcast communications (TV and radio), film, and music. New media, on the other hand, includes electronic video games and entertainment, and the Internet and social media. Although different forms of mass media rise and fall in popularity, it is worth noting that despite significant cultural and technological changes, none of the media discussed throughout this text has fallen out of use completely.

ELECTRONIC GAMES AND ENTERTAINMENT

First popularized in the 1970s with Atari's simple table-tennis simulator *Pong*, video games have come a long way over the past four decades. Early home game consoles could play only one game, a limitation solved by the development of interchangeable game cartridges. The rise of the personal computer in the 1980s enabled developers to create games with more complex story lines and to allow players to interact with each other via the computer. In the mid-1980s, online role-playing games developed, allowing multiple users to play at the same time. A dramatic increase in Internet use helped to popularize online games during the 1990s and 2000s, both on personal computers and via Internet-enabled home console systems such as the Microsoft Xbox and the Sony PlayStation. The Internet has added a social aspect to video gaming that has bridged the generation gap and opened up a whole new audience for video game companies. Senior citizens commonly gather in retirement communities to play Nintendo's Wii bowling and tennis games using a motion-sensitive controller, while young professionals and college students get together to play in virtual bands on games such as *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band*. No longer associated with an isolated subculture, contemporary video games are bringing friends and families together via increasingly advanced gaming technology.

THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA

It is almost impossible to overstate the influence the Internet has had on media over the past two decades. Initially conceived as an attack-proof military network in the 1960s, the Internet has since become an integral part of daily life. With the development of the World Wide Web in the 1980s and the introduction of commercial browsers in the 1990s, users gained the ability to transmit pictures, sound, and video over the Internet. Companies quickly began to capitalize on the new technology, launching web browsers, offering free web-based e-mail accounts, and providing web directories and search engines. Internet usage grew rapidly, from 50 percent of American adults in 2000 to 75 percent of American adults in 2008 (Pew Research Center, 2010). Now that most of the industrialized world is online, the way we receive our news, do business, conduct research, contact friends and relatives, apply for jobs, and even watch TV has changed completely. To provide just one example, many jobs can now be performed

entirely from home without the need to travel to a central office. Meetings can be conducted via videoconference, written communication can take place via e-mail, and employees can access company data via a server or file transfer protocol (FTP) site.

In addition to increasing the speed with which we can access information and the volume of information at our fingertips, the Internet has added a whole new democratic dimension to communication. Becoming the author of a printed book may take many years of frustrated effort, but becoming a publisher of online material requires little more than the click of a button. Thanks to social media such as blogs, social networking sites, wikis, and video-sharing websites, anyone can contribute ideas on the web. Social media has many advantages, including the instantaneous distribution of news, a variety of different perspectives on a single event, and the ability to communicate with people all over the globe. Although some industry analysts have long predicted that the Internet will render print media obsolete, mass-media executives believe newspapers will evolve with the times. Just as the radio industry had to rethink its commercial strategy during the rise of TV, newspaper professionals will need to rethink their methods of content delivery during the age of the Internet.

NEW MEDIA VERSUS TRADITIONAL MEDIA

New technologies have developed so quickly that executives in traditional media companies often cannot retain control over their content. For example, when music-sharing website Napster began enabling users to exchange free music files over the Internet, peer-to-peer file sharing cost the music industry a fortune in lost CD sales. Rather than capitalize on the new technology, music industry executives sued Napster, ultimately shutting it down, but never quite managing to stamp out online music piracy. Even with legal digital music sales through online vendors such as Apple's iTunes Store, the music industry is still trying to determine how to make a large enough profit to stay in business.

The publishing industry has also suffered from the effects of new technology (although newspaper readership has been in decline since the introduction of TV and radio). When newspapers began developing online versions in response to competition from cable TV, they found themselves up against a new form of journalism: amateur blogging. Initially dismissed as unreliable and biased, blogs such as *Daily Kos* and *The Huffington Post* have gained credibility and large readerships over the past decade, forcing traditional journalists to blog and tweet in order to keep pace (which allows less time to check that sources are reliable or add in-depth analysis to

a story). Traditional newspapers are also losing out to news aggregators such as Google News, which profit from providing links to journalists' stories at major newspapers without offering financial compensation to either the journalists or the news organizations. Many newspapers have adapted to the Internet out of necessity, fighting falling circulation figures and slumping advertising sales by offering websites, blogs, and podcasts and producing news stories in video form. Those that had the foresight to adapt to the new technology are breathing a sigh of relief; a 2010 Pew Research Center report found that more Americans receive their news via the Internet than from newspapers or radio sources, and that the Internet is the third most popular news source behind national and local TV news (see Section 6.3 "Current Popular Trends in the Music Industry") (Pew Research Center, 2010).

PAY-FOR-CONTENT: WILL IT WORK?

Critics of the pay-for-content model point to the failure of *Newsday*, a Long Island, New York, daily that was one of the first nonbusiness publications to use the pay-for-content model. In October 2009, *Newsday* began charging readers $5 a week ($260 a year) for unlimited access to its online content. Three months later, an analysis of the move indicated that it had been a total failure. Just 35 people had signed up to pay for access to the site. Having spent $4 million redesigning and relaunching the *Newsday* website in preparation for the new model, the owners grossed just $9,000 from their initial readership.

However, the lack of paying consumers may be partly accounted for by the number of exceptions granted by the company. Subscribers to the print version of the paper can access the site for free, as can those with Optimum Cable. According to *Newsday* representatives, 75 percent of Long

Island residents have either a newspaper subscription or Optimum Cable. "Given the number of households in our market that have access to *Newsday*'s website as a result of other subscriptions, it is no surprise that a relatively modest number have chosen the pay option," said a Cablevision spokeswoman (Koblin, 2010). Even though most Long Island residents have access to the site, traffic has dropped considerably. A Nielsen Online survey revealed that traffic fell from 2.2 million visits in October 2009 to 1.5 million visits in December 2009. Publishing executives will be watching closely to see whether *The New York Times* meets a similar fate when it adopts the pay-for-content model in 2011.

New media has three major advantages over traditional media. First, it is immediate, enabling consumers to find out the latest news, weather report, or stock prices at the touch of a button. Digital music can be downloaded instantly, movies can be ordered via cable or satellite on-demand services, and books can be read on e-readers. In an increasingly fast-paced world, there is little need to wait for anything. The second advantage is cost. Most online content is free, from blogs and social networking sites to news and entertainment sources. Whether readers are willing to pay for content once they are used to receiving it for free is something that the *The New York*

Times set to find out in 2011, when it introduces a metered fee model for its online paper. Finally, new media is able to reach the most remote parts of the globe. For example, if a student is looking for information about day-to-day life in Iran, there is a high probability that a personal web page about living in that country exists somewhere on the Internet. Around three-fourths of Americans, half of Europeans, and just over one-fourth of the world's population overall have Internet access (Internet World Stats). This widespread reach makes the Internet an ideal target for advertisers, who can communicate with their desired niche audiences via tracking devices such as profile information on social networking sites.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Traditional media includes printed materials (books, magazines, and newspapers), broadcast communications (TV and radio), film, and music. New media includes all forms of communication in the digital world, including electronic video games, the Internet, and social media. The Internet has added a social aspect to video gaming that has bridged the generation gap and opened up a whole new audience for video game companies, including senior citizens and families. The prevalence of the Internet in modern

daily life affects us in nearly every way, from how we receive our news, to the way we do business, conduct research, contact friends and relatives, apply for jobs, and even how we watch TV.

- New media frequently trumps traditional media for three main reasons: It is more immediate, it is often free, and it can reach a wider number of people.

EXERCISES

Review the traditional and emerging forms of media. Then answer the following short-answer questions. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. Think of three examples of traditional or new media. What are the advantages of each type of media? What are the disadvantages?
2. Which of these types of media has been around the longest? Which is the most modern?
3. How has the Internet affected the delivery of other types of media?
4. Do you believe that new media are more successful than traditional forms? Why or why not?

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16.2 Information Delivery Methods

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1. Explain why the Internet has become a primary source of news and information.

FIGURE 16.1



OLYMPUS DIGITAL CAMERA

Michael Jackson's death at age 50 caused a frenzy of media attention. Here, fans and the media have gathered at Jackson's mansion hoping to catch a glimpse of Jackson's family.

Wikimedia Commons – CC BY-SA 3.0.

When superstar Michael Jackson died of a cardiac arrest in June 2009, the news sent media outlets all over the world into a frenzy, providing journalists, bloggers, authors, and TV news anchors with months of material. The pop singer's death is a good example of how information is disseminated through the various media channels. Unafraid to publish unconfirmed rumors that may have to be retracted later, blogs and gossip websites are often first to produce celebrity news stories. Digital sources also have the advantage of immediacy—rather

than waiting for a physical newspaper to be printed and delivered, a time-consuming process that occurs just once a day, bloggers and online reporters can publish a story on the Internet in the time it takes to type it out. Within 40 minutes after the Los Angeles Fire Department arrived at Jackson's home, a small entertainment website called X17online posted the news that Jackson had suffered a cardiac arrest. Twenty minutes later, larger entertainment site TMZ picked up the information and distributed it to hundreds of thousands of people via RSS (which stands for Really Simple Syndication)—a web publishing technology that enables users to automatically receive new digital content from the provider. Multiple *Wikipedia* members updated Jackson's biographical entry to include the news of his cardiac arrest before any major news networks or broadcasters had announced the news. By the time the cardiac arrest was reported on CNN's official Twitter account 2 hours after the 911 call, Twitter users and TMZ reporters were already posting reports of the star's death. The story created such a surge in online traffic that microblogging site Twitter temporarily shut down and Google returned an error message for searches of the singer's name because it assumed it was under attack. An hour after the news of Jackson's death hit the Internet, mainstream news sources such as *The Los Angeles Times*, MSNBC, and CNN confirmed the information, and it was immediately disseminated among local and national TV and radio stations.

The order in which the news broke among the major media

outlets was a source of contention. Many outlets around the world were reluctant to rely on the TMZ report, because the website was primarily known for its frivolous content, aggressive paparazzi tactics, and embarrassing celebrity photographs. Many of the more reputable news sources, including CNN, waited until both the coroner's office and *The Los Angeles Times* had confirmed Jackson's death before announcing it as a fact to viewers, preferring to release an accurate story rather than to gain an edge over other news outlets (even though both TMZ and CNN are owned by Time Warner). "Given the nature of the story, we exercised caution," said CNN spokesman Nigel Pritchard (Collins & Braxton, 2009). However, Harvey Levin, managing editor of TMZ, denied that his site was less credible than any other news source. "TMZ is a news operation and we are fact based," he said. "Our goal is always to take stories and factually source them and present them. We're not a gossip site.... We have things researched, we have things lawyered, we make lots of phone calls.... I mean it's the same principle (Karlinsky & Harper, 2009)." Despite Levin's protests, it appears that, for now at least, old media stalwarts such as the Associated Press and *The LA Times* have the advantage of reliability over (sometimes) faster sources with less credibility. As Adam Fendelman, founder of entertainment news site HollywoodChicago.com, noted, "The Web and TV phenomenon that TMZ is is very good at fast-breaking and late-breaking news, but there's an inherent problem with trust

in the everyday consumer's mind (Wong, 2009)" (see Section 6.4 "Influence of New Technology" for more advantages and disadvantages of new media).

Once news of Michael Jackson's death had been reported through all the major international media outlets, a tabloid war broke out, with newspapers and magazines determined to get the "story behind the story." Speculation about the cause of death and the role played by prescription drugs fed salacious media reports in the tabloids and news and gossip magazines long after the initial news story broke. Other newspapers and magazines, including *Time* and *Entertainment Weekly*, focused on tribute articles that reviewed Jackson's long list of accomplishments and reflected on his musical legacy, and the four major broadcast networks (ABC, NBC, Fox, and CBS) aired documentaries covering the pop star's life. In the days and weeks following Jackson's death, radio stations abandoned their playlists in favor of back-to-back Michael Jackson hits, contributing to a huge upswing in record sales. Media coverage continued for many months, saturating newspapers, magazines, and TV and radio stations—when the coroner's report ruled Jackson's death a homicide in August 2009, during the funeral service a month later, and again in February 2010 when Jackson's doctor was charged with involuntary manslaughter for administering a powerful sedative to help the star sleep.

Although the book-publishing industry was at a disadvantage because of the time delay between receiving news

of Jackson's death and the ability to physically place books on shelves, many authors, agents, and publishers were able to capitalize on the star's tragic story. Numerous biographies were published in the months following Jackson's death, along with several explosive "tell-all" books by people close to the star that provided intimate details about his private life. To compensate for their lack of immediacy, books have several advantages over other print and web sources, primarily the ability to include greater depth of information on a subject than any other form of media. Fans eager for more information about their idol and his life eagerly purchased Jackson biographies, including his 1988 autobiography *Moonwalk*, which was re-released in October 2009.

Other, less immediate forms of media were also commercially successful, including a posthumous film titled *This Is It*, named after the much-anticipated comeback tour that was supposed to start just 3 weeks after Jackson's death. Composed of rehearsal footage from the concerts, the documentary was shown on more than 3,400 domestic screens during a sold-out 2-week run in October and November 2009. An accompanying two-disc soundtrack album, featuring classic Jackson hits along with new track "This Is It," topped the *Billboard* 200 chart upon its release in November 2009, selling 373,000 copies in its first week of release. A spin-off DVD also topped the U.S. sales chart in February 2010, selling more than 1.2 million copies the week of its release. Posthumous sales of Jackson's earlier material also generated

huge amounts of revenue. In the first 4 months after Jackson's death, *Forbes* magazine estimated that his estate made $90 million in gross earnings. Music industry consultant Barry Massarsky commented, "Nothing increases the value of an artist's catalog [more] than death...an untimely death (Streib, 2009)." This cross-media approach is typical of every major news story, although the controversy surrounding Jackson throughout his life, the circumstances of his death, and the sheer magnitude of his contribution to pop history meant that the performer's demise had a particularly widespread effect.

CHANGING DELIVERY METHODS

As the Michael Jackson example shows, the number of people receiving news from the Internet is rapidly growing, although TV remains the dominant source of information. Currently, most Americans use multiple resources for news. In a 2010 survey, 92 percent of people said they obtained their daily news from a variety of sources, including online news sites, blogs, social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook, TV, newspapers, and radio (Choney, 2010). On a typical day, 6 in

10 American adults get their news online, placing the Internet third behind local TV news and national or cable TV news (Choney, 2010). The use of smartphone technology is contributing to the ease with which people can access online news; more than a third of cell phone owners use their phones to check for weather, news, sports, and traffic information (Choney, 2010).

For young people in particular, the rise in social networking use is transforming the news from a one-way passage of information into a social experience. People log on to their Facebook or Twitter accounts, post news stories to their friends' web pages, comment on stories that interest them, and react to stories they have recently read. During a survey of students at the University of Texas at Austin, senior Meg Scholz told researchers that she scanned news websites and blogs every time she went online to check her e-mail, eliminating the need to pick up a newspaper or watch TV news. "It's not that I have anything against a printed newspaper," she said. "But for my lifestyle the Internet is more accessible (Johnson, 2006)." Other Internet users appreciate the ability to filter news and information that is relevant to them; 28 percent of those surveyed said they customize their social networking home pages to include news from sources or on topics that interest them.[1] Researchers at the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, the organization that conducted the survey, speculate that this personalization of news is a result of the constant stream of information in

modern life. Pew Research Center Director Lee Rainie commented, "People feel more and more pressed about the volume of information flowing into their lives. So, they customize the information flow in order to manage their lives well and in order to get the material that they feel is most relevant to them (Johnson, 2006)." Although TV remains the primary source of news for most Americans, Internet and mobile technology are changing the structure of information delivery methods to audiences, making it more portable, more personalized, and more participatory.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Information delivery methods to audiences include print (newspapers, books, magazines), broadcast (radio, TV), new media (Internet, social media, blogs), and documentary films. When a big news story breaks, digital media sources have the advantage of speed over traditional media sources—but are not yet considered completely accurate or trustworthy. Established newspapers and magazines still have the advantage of credibility. A big news story passes through every media outlet, starting with the Internet and online newspapers, moving to print newspapers, magazines, TV, and radio, and finally on to slower, more detailed

types of media such as books and documentaries.

- Information delivery methods are changing. Most people still get their news from local and national TV stations, but the Internet is the third most popular source of information, and its popularity is increasing. Smartphone technology is making Internet news more portable, while social networking sites provide a participatory aspect, enabling people to comment on or share news stories of interest. The ability to customize social networking home pages to filter news topics and sources is making news more personalized, allowing consumers to read only the information that interests them.

EXERCISES

Conduct a survey among your friends, family, and classmates to find out where they get their news on a regular basis. Then respond to the following short-answer questions. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. What is the most common source of news among the population sample you surveyed?

2. Do most people obtain their news from a variety of sources or from a single source?
3. Does the main source of news vary according to age group? Create a line graph or bar graph to illustrate your results, and write a brief report of your findings.
4. Which group uses the Internet as a source of news and information the most? Why do you think this is?

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16.3 Modern Media Delivery: Pros and Cons

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe the advantages of modern media delivery methods.
2. Describe the disadvantages of modern media delivery methods.

In October 2009, 17-year-old child-care student Ashleigh Hall made friends with a handsome 19-year-old man on Facebook. Ashleigh, from Darlington, England, and her new friend began chatting online and exchanged mobile phone numbers so they could text each other. The excited teenager soon told her friends that she was going on a date with her new boyfriend, Pete, and that his father would be picking her up in his car. Unfortunately, Pete and his "father" were one and the same person—convicted rapist Peter Chapman. The 33-year-old homeless sex offender used his Facebook alter ego (which included photographs of an unknown teenage boy) to lure Ashleigh to a secluded location, where he raped and murdered

her. Chapman was arrested by chance shortly after the event, and in court he pleaded guilty to kidnap, rape, and murder.

Ashleigh's tragic story illustrates some disadvantages of modern media delivery: anonymity and unreliability. Although social networking sites such as Facebook are a convenient way to create new relationships and reconnect with old friends, there is no way of knowing whether users are who they claim to be, leaving people (particularly impressionable youths) vulnerable to online predators. Since much of the content on the Internet is unregulated, this lack of reliability spans the entire online spectrum, from news stories and *Wikipedia* articles to false advertising claims and unscrupulous con artists on websites such as Craigslist.

However, modern media can also work to mobilize efforts to stop crime. The popular NBC TV series *Dateline: To Catch a Predator* followed police investigators who used Internet chat rooms to identify potential child molesters. Posing as young teens, police officers entered chat rooms and participated in conversations with various users. If an adult user began a sexual dialogue and expressed interest in meeting the teen for sexual purposes, the police set up a sting operation, catching the would-be pedophile in the act. In cases such as these, the rapid transmission of information and the global nature of the Internet made it possible for criminals to be apprehended.

ADVANTAGES OF MODERN MEDIA DELIVERY

If Ashleigh's story highlights some of the most negative aspects of modern media, the quick dissemination of news and information are some of the most beneficial aspects of the World Wide Web. As we noted earlier in the chapter, speed can be a huge advantage of online media delivery. When a news story breaks, it can be delivered almost instantaneously through RSS feeds and via many major outlets, enabling people all over the world to learn about a breaking news story mere minutes after it happens.

Once an Internet user has paid for a monthly service provider, most of the content on the web is free, allowing people access to an unlimited wealth of information via news websites, search engines, directories, and home pages for numerous topics ranging from cooking tips to sports trivia. When all this information became readily available at the touch of a button, many journalists and technology experts wrote articles claiming the information overload was bad for people's health. Fears that the new technology would cause attention deficit disorder, stunt people's reasoning, and damage their ability to empathize were raised by some highly respected publications, including *The Times* of London and

the *The New York Times*. However, there is no consistent evidence that the Internet causes psychological problems; in fact, statistics show that people who use social networking sites have better offline social lives, and people who play computer games are better at absorbing and reacting to information than those who do not, and they experience no loss of accuracy or increased impulsiveness (Bell, 2010). As Vaughan Bell points out in his article about the history of media scares, "Worries about information overload are as old as information itself, with each generation reimagining the dangerous impacts of technology on mind and brain (Bell, 2010)."

In addition to speed, reach, and cost, online media delivery enables a wider range of voices and perspectives on any subject. Through nontraditional media such as blogs and Twitter, people can put their own personal slant on current events, popular culture, and issues that are important to them without feeling obliged to remain neutral. A study by the Pew Research Center found that nontraditional media sources report on a wider variety of stories than traditional media, enabling individual sites to develop their own personality and voice. The study also discovered that these online sources focus on highly emotional subject matter that can be personalized by the writers and shared in the social forum (Pew Research Center, 2010). By opening up blogs and social media sites to online discussion or debate, bloggers enable readers to generate their own content, turning audiences from passive consumers into active creators. In this way, knowledge becomes a social

process rather than a one-way street—the blogger posts an opinion, a reader comments on the blogger's opinion, the blogger then evaluates the reader's comment and revises his or her perspective accordingly, and the process repeats itself until an issue has been thoroughly explored. Many bloggers also provide links to other blogs they support or enjoy reading, enabling ideas with merit to filter through various channels on the Internet.

DISADVANTAGES OF MODERN MEDIA DELIVERY

Along with a growing number of online predators misrepresenting themselves on social networking sites, the Internet is responsible for a lot of other types of misinformation circulating the web. Unless users are able to distinguish between reliable, unbiased sources and factual information, they may find themselves consuming inaccurate news reports or false encyclopedia entries. Even so-called

reliable news sources are subject to occasional errors with their source material. When French composer Maurice Jarre died in 2009 at the age of 84, Irish sociology and economics student Shane Fitzgerald decided to try an experiment with Wikipedia. He added fictional quotes to Jarre's *Wikipedia* entry and then watched as newspapers worldwide (including reputable sources such as the *The Guardian*) copied his quotes word for word and attributed them to the composer. Red-faced journalists were later forced to correct their errors by retracting the quotes. Writing a follow-up report for *The Irish Times*, Fitzgerald commented, "If I could so easily falsify the news across the globe, even to this small extent, then it is unnerving to think about what other false information may be reported in the press (Lytle, 2009)."

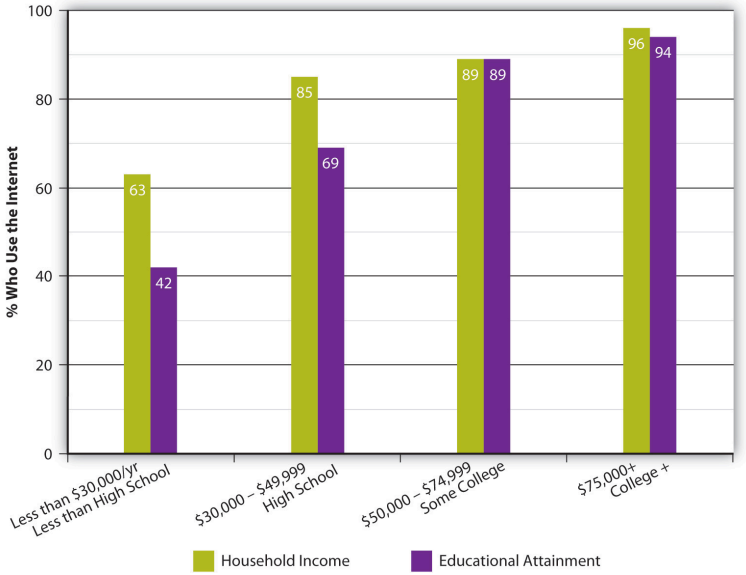
Although most traditional media strive for nonpartisanship, many newer online sources are fervently right wing or left wing. With websites such as the *Huffington Post* on the left of the political spectrum and the *Drudge Report* on the right, consumers need to be aware when they are reading news with an ideological slant. Critics fear the trend toward social media sources may lead to the restriction of the movement of ideas. If consumers choose their media circle exclusively consistent with their own political biases, they will be limited to a narrow political viewpoint.

Along with practical disadvantages, the Internet also has several economic disadvantages. An increasing gap between people who can afford personal computers and access to the

web and people who cannot, known as the digital divide, separates the haves and the have-nots. Although about 75 percent of U.S. households are connected to the Internet, there are gaps in access in terms of age, income, and education. For example, a recent study found that 93 percent of people aged 18–29 have Internet access, compared with 70 percent of people aged 50–64 and just 38 percent of people over 65 (Pew Research Center, 2010). Similar disparities occur with income and education (see Figure 16.2).

These disparities mean that people with lower incomes and educational levels are at a disadvantage when it comes to accessing online job listings, information, news, and computer-related skills that might help them in the workplace. The digital divide is even more prominent between developed and developing countries. In nations such as Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Syria, the government permits little or no access to the Internet. In other countries, such as Mexico, Brazil, and Columbia, poor telecommunications infrastructure forces users to wait extremely inconvenient lengths of time to get online. And in many developing countries that have poor public utilities and intermittent electrical service, the Internet is almost unheard of. Despite its large population, the entire continent of Africa accounts for less than 5 percent of Internet usage worldwide.[1]

FIGURE 16.2



The digital divide places people with lower incomes and lower educational levels at a disadvantage when it comes to Internet access.

Traditional media also face economic disadvantages when it comes to profiting from the Internet. Having freely given away much of their online content, newspapers are struggling to transition to an entirely ad-based business model. Although publishers initially envisioned a digital future supported entirely by advertising, 2 years of plummeting ad revenue (the Newspaper Association of America reported that online advertising revenues fell 11.8 percent in 2009) has caused some papers to consider introducing online fees (see Section 6.5).

Although modern media delivery is quick and efficient, companies are still trying to establish a successful economic model to keep them afloat in the long term.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Modern media delivery has numerous advantages, including the speed at which content is delivered, the widespread reach of the Internet, and the low cost—most online content is free. The sheer amount of information available online has caused many critics to claim the information overload is bad for people's health; however, studies have not substantiated this theory. Online media delivery enables a wide range of voices and perspectives to be heard via blogs and social networking sites. These sites are also changing the way knowledge is consumed: from a one-way system (for example, through passively reading newspaper articles) to a dynamic process that involves an entire online community.
- Modern media delivery also has several disadvantages. Not all web pages are reliable sources of information; many are subject to user error (for example, on sites such as *Wikipedia*) or bias (for example, on partisan political blogs). The Internet also has economic

disadvantages; it widens the digital divide between those who have access to the technology and those who do not (usually older people, people of lower economic means or educational status, or people in developing countries with poor infrastructure), and causes problems for traditional media, which are finding it difficult to profit from digital technology.

EXERCISES

Choose two online newspaper articles or blogs on the same subject, one from a liberal website such as the *Huffington Post* and one from a conservative website such as the *Drudge Report*. Read through both articles and underline examples of political bias or prejudice. Then answer the following short-answer questions. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. How does each article use selective facts to support its argument?
2. What information is missing from each article?
3. How might reading just one of these articles unfairly sway someone looking for nonpartisan information on the topic you have chosen?

4. What are the advantages of modern media delivery methods? How might you have found both articles if the Internet did not exist?

[1]Internet World Stats, "Internet Usage Statistics."

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16.4 Current Trends in Electronic Media

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Determine popular trends in social networking.
2. Describe the concept of membership-only websites that cater to specific audiences.
3. Explain the use and appeal of electronic applications.

What do your former high school classmates do for a living? What does your favorite celebrity think about the current administration? What do other professionals in your field think about industry trends? Which restaurant do your coworkers frequent? Five years ago, these questions would most likely have been met with blank stares, but thanks to the exponential growth of electronic media—social networking in particular—it is now possible to keep track of past and present contacts via the Internet, sometimes in exhaustive detail. As social media continues to grow in popularity, marketers, advertisers, and businesses are looking for ways to use the new technology to increase revenue and improve customer service. Meanwhile, social networking sites are expanding into

commerce, connecting businesses and consumers via third-party sites so that people can bring a network of friends to partner websites. Facebook Connect, for example, enables a consumer to visit a partner site such as Forever 21, find a pair of jeans on sale, and broadcast the information to everyone on her Facebook network. If a few Facebook friends do the same thing, the information can create an effective viral marketing campaign for the partner site. A more secure version of the ill-fated Beacon (see Chapter 11 "The Internet and Social Media"), Facebook Connect extends the Facebook platform out of the social network's walls, creating one giant network on the web.

The current trend toward immediacy (instant Twitter updates, instant Google searches, instant driving directions from Yahoo! Maps) is compounded by the development of smartphone applications, which allow users to access or post information wherever they happen to be located. For example, a person shopping for a particular product can instantly compare the price of that product across an entire range of stores using the Android ShopSavvy app, while someone new to an area can immediately locate a gas station, park, or supermarket using iPhone's AroundMe app. Industry insiders have coined the term nowism to describe the instant gratification that can be achieved by real-time content on the web. Sparked by social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, the real-time trend looks set to continue, with

companies from all types of industries jumping on the immediacy bandwagon.

SOCIAL NETWORKING CONTINUES TO GROW

The growth of social media over the past few years has been exponential; according to Nielsen, Twitter alone grew 1,382 percent in February 2009, registering 7,000,000 unique visitors in the United States for the month. By February 2010, Twitter had 75,000,000 registered users and between 10,000,000 and 15,000,000 active tweeters (Gaudin, 2010). Meanwhile, Facebook has more than 400 million active users worldwide, according to its website, with each user averaging 130 Facebook friends. In February 2010, Facebook was declared the web's most popular site, with users spending an average of more than 7 hours a month on the site; more than the amount of time spent on Google, Yahoo!, YouTube, Amazon.com, *Wikipedia*, and MSN combined (Parr, 2010).

FIGURE 16.3

Top 10 Web Brands for January 2010 (U.S., Home and Work)

Rank	Brand	Unique Audience (000)	Time Per Person (hh:mm:ss)	MOM UA % Change	MOM Time % Change
1	Google	153,056	1:26:22	4.3%	-14.4%
2	Yahoo!	137,459	2:29:04	6.5%	-15.6%
3	MSN/WindowsLive/Bing	116,804	1:50:14	8.0%	-5.6%
4	Facebook	116,329	7:01:41	5.8%	9.7%
5	YouTube	99,525	1:02:27	7.6%	-10.3%
6	Microsoft	98,180	0:41:36	7.5%	-6.8%
7	AOL Media Network	87,629	2:14:12	-0.8%	-7.5%
8	Apple	68,877	1:18:58	7.9%	-10.0%
9	Wikipedia	64,917	0:15:59	10.7%	-2.7%
10	Fox Interactive Media	63,925	1:23:09	3.9%	-9.5%

Source: The Nielsen Company

The average U.S. user spends more than 7 hours a month on social networking site Facebook.

Initially conceived in 2004 as a website for students to keep in touch over the Internet and get to know each other better, Facebook has since developed into the world's largest social networking site. In addition to connecting friends and acquaintances and enabling users to share photos, links, and multimedia, the site (along with other social networking sites such as MySpace) has branched out into social gaming, a rapidly growing industry that allows users to download free games through the site and play online with friends and family members. Appealing to a wide demographic—including people who rarely play video games—social games such as FarmVille and Mafia Wars are free to play, but generate revenue for developers by offering additional bonuses or virtual goods for paying players. A recent survey found that most of the revenue generated by the social gaming audience comes from a small percentage of players (around 10 percent) who are

willing to actually spend money on social networking games. Out of that 10 percent, just 2 percent of people, described as the "whales" of the social gaming industry, spend more than $25 a month on social games. Inside Network founder Justin Smith, who coauthored the survey, said, "It is clear that people either spend a lot of money or spend nothing (Takahashi, 2010)." The games, which primarily appeal to the female over-40 demographic, are designed so that Facebook users can spend a few minutes playing several times a day. In the United States, 55 percent of social network game players are women, and the average age is 48 (Johnson, 2010).

Other continuing trends in social networking include microblogging on sites such as Twitter, which is rapidly becoming the fastest source of news on the Internet. The site acts as a personal newswire, passing on information about shared world events as they affect people in real time. For example, when an earthquake shook Los Angeles in 2008, people began tweeting personal accounts from their homes 9 minutes before the Associated Press picked up the story. In 2009, citizens of Iran bypassed government censorship by tweeting news of the election results across the world. Organizations such as the Associated Press communicated with Twitter users to receive information about the resulting protests and demonstrations (Santana, 2009).

Business owners are also beginning to realize the power of Twitter; online shoe merchant Zappos.com provides more than 500 of its employees with Twitter accounts to humanize

the people behind the sales and help them connect with their customers. Feedback from Twitter users provides companies with valuable information about how they can improve their products and services. Celebrities have also attached themselves to Twitter as a means of publicizing forthcoming projects and keeping in touch with fans. Actor Ashton Kutcher is particularly media savvy; beating news outlet CNN to become the first Twitter user with more than 1,000,000 followers in 2009, the star used his popularity to raise awareness for medical charity Malaria No More, donating 10,000 mosquito nets to the organization following his success as Twitter's first "millionaire." Kutcher's social media consultancy, Katalyst Films, maximizes the use of social networking technology by working with entertainment content, advertising, and online conversation in an effort to generate money from the web. "Entertainment, really, is a dying industry," Kutcher said in a 2009 interview. "We're a balanced social-media studio, with revenue streams from multiple sources—film, TV, and now digital. For the brand stuff, we're not replacing ad agencies but working with everyone to provide content and the monetization strategies to succeed on the Web (McGirt, 2009)."

In addition to brand marketing and cross-promotions infiltrating social networking sites, digital experts predict social media will become more exclusive, with people filtering out clutter from unwanted sources. David Armano, senior vice president of Edelman Digital, said, "Not everyone can fit on

someone's newly created Twitter list and as networks begin to fill with noise, it's likely that user behavior such as 'hiding' the hyperactive updaters that appear in your Facebook news feed may become more common (Armano, 2009)."

EXCLUSIVITY ON THE WEB

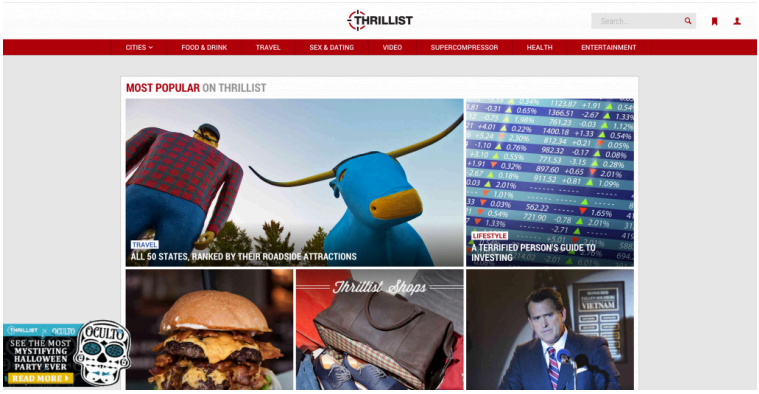
Armano's prediction for social networking sites may filter across other areas of the web. Membership-only sites that cater to a specific audience are becoming increasingly popular. Based on e-commerce models such as Gilt and Rue La La, which sell luxury brand clothing at below-retail prices by invitation only, websites such as Thrillist offer exclusive clothing deals in addition to providing information on food, drink, entertainment, nightlife, and gadgets by subscription newsletter. Aimed at young, affluent male professionals, Thrillist reaches more than 2,200,000 subscriptions across the United States and the United Kingdom, and has reached over $10,000,000 in revenue in 2010. Cofounder and CEO Ben Lerer believes that Thrillist represents the future of media.

"It's what modern media looks like," he said. "Content plus commerce (McMahan, 2010)." In 2010, Thrillist acquired members-only online retailer JackThreads.com, enabling the company to offer its user base exclusive access to JackThreads' private shopping community as a benefit to subscribing.

Another highly targeted web trend is the emergence of micro magazines—digital publications aimed at a specific audience that attract advertisers wanting to reach a particular group of people. For example, the magazine *Fearless* is an online magazine entirely dedicated to stories of overcoming fear. Marketing expert Seth Godin believes that whereas publications such as *Newsweek* and *Time* are "slow and general, the world is fast and specific," which creates a need for online subscription magazines that can provide targeted material to interested individuals (Godin, 2010). "The big difference is that instead of paying for an office building and paper and overhead, the money for an ad in a micro-magazine can go directly to the people who write and promote it and the ad itself will be seen by exactly the right audience," Godin writes (Godin, 2010). The possibilities for micro magazines are endless, with focus topics covering every travel destination, interest group, and profession. Operating in a similar way to traditional subscription magazine models, micro magazines are distributed via e-mail or RSS and are supported by a forum or blog. This interactive aspect provides readers with a sense of community—rather than passive consumers of general-

interest news, they are part of a network of readers who can communicate with others who have a shared interest.

FIGURE 16.4



The website Thrillist provides subscribers with a chic urban guide.

AN EXCESS OF APPS

In April 2009, Apple celebrated the 1 billionth download from its App Store. Launched in July 2008, the online venue for third-party iPhone and iPod Touch applications initially offered consumers 500 apps, ranging from shortcuts to websites such as Facebook and eBay to games and useful online services. Although competing smartphones such as the Treo and BlackBerry offered similar application facilities, Apple's App Store quickly became the most successful platform for mobile software, averaging around $1,000,000 a day in iPhone application sales during the first month of its existence (Morrison, 2008). Under a revenue-sharing agreement, the company keeps 30 percent of any income generated and gives the other 70 percent to third-party app developers. By April 2011, the App Store offered around 350,000 applications, aiding iPhone and iPad users with numerous daily activities, ranging from identifying an unknown song, to finding a nearby gas station, to matching the color of a photograph taken by the iPhone with a database of paint colors. Unlike many commercials that exaggerate a products' abilities, Apple's tagline "There's an app for that" is usually on the mark.

One recent trend in smartphone applications is the use of location-sharing services such as Foursquare, Gowalla, Brightkite, and Google Latitude. Utilizing the GPS function

in modern smartphones, these apps enable users to "check in" to a venue so that friends can locate each other easily. The apps also encourage users to explore new places in their area by following other users' suggestions on places to go. Users have the option of automatically updating their Facebook and Twitter accounts when they check in, and are able to earn points or badges according to how many times they check into a location, adding a competitive element to the service. Users with the most check-ins at a location become the "mayor" of that place, and some businesses offer rewards to users who achieve this status.

Although many apps stand alone, some are tied to other forms of media. For example, popular musical-comedy TV show *Glee* has its own application that enables users to sing their favorite musical numbers from the show, upload their efforts to Facebook or MySpace, and invite friends to sing with them. The application also provides a voice-enhancing feature to correct users' pitch and harmonize their voices while they sing. Other cross-media applications include game versions of TV quiz shows *Are You Smarter Than a 5th Grader?* and *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*, apps for individual celebrities such as country singer Reba McEntire, and apps for TV news channels, including CNN and MSNBC. Making life easier for users while providing them with endless entertainment options, apps have become a huge part of everyday life for many people; by June 2010, Apple's App Store had generated total revenue of $1.4 billion (Elmer-DeWitt, 2010).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Social networking sites continue to grow in popularity; Facebook is the largest social networking site on the web with more than 400 million users worldwide. Social gaming is a popular trend on networking sites, and many users are not typical video game players; instead, they fit the female over-40 demographic. Developers generate revenue from social networking sites by charging gamers real money for bonuses or virtual goods. Microblogging is another popular social networking trend. Key events around the world are often reported on microblog Twitter first by users who experience the events firsthand. Business owners use Twitter to connect with their customers more effectively. Celebrities such as Ashton Kutcher are media savvy and use Twitter to promote worthy causes. Digital experts predict social networking will become more exclusive in the future, with people filtering out clutter from unwanted sources.
- The Internet is moving in a more exclusive direction through membership-only sites such as Thrillist, which cater to specific audiences via subscription newsletters. Micro magazines such as *Fearless*, which target very specific audiences and are distributed via e-

mail or RSS feed, are also becoming more popular.

- Applications for smartphones and tablet computers such as the iPad are hugely popular, offering consumers numerous shortcuts to their favorite websites in addition to games and services. Two current trends are location-sharing applications, facilitated by the GPS functionality on modern smartphones, and cross-media applications such as those that tie in with particular TV shows, celebrities, or music radio stations.

EXERCISES

Poll a group of friends or colleagues about the amount of time they spend on social networking sites, and write a one- to two-page report on the answers to the following questions.

1. How often do most people spend on each site at one time?
2. For what purpose do they primarily use social networking sites? Does this differ from the popular trends in social networking that you read about in this section?

3. How many people play social networking games, and are they willing to spend money on them?
4. How many people use smartphone apps to connect to social networking sites? What is the appeal of such electronic applications?
5. Describe the concept of membership-only websites. Does anyone you interviewed subscribe to a membership-only website?

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16.5 Privacy Laws and the Impact of Digital Surveillance

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe the impact of the USA PATRIOT Act on privacy.
2. Explain the consequences of social networking in terms of privacy and employment.
3. Describe current attempts to restore privacy at home and in the workplace.

When a young waitress named Ashley was having a tough time at work, she decided to vent about her job on Facebook. The 22-year-old had finished an overtime shift at a North Carolina pizza parlor and discovered that the demanding customer who had stayed late had left a meager tip. Feeling frustrated, Ashley posted a short status update on her Facebook profile, calling the anonymous customer an unflattering name. Unfortunately for Ashley, she had connected with her coworkers on the social networking site. Two days after her angry post, Ashley's manager called her in to show her a copy of her comments and promptly fired her (Lai, 2010). Ashley's story is one of many examples of employers terminating their

employees as a result of inappropriate comments or photographs on social networking sites; a study by Internet security firm Proofpoint found that 8 percent of companies have dismissed an employee for his or her behavior on social networking sites (Ostrow, 2010). These cases highlight a blurring of personal and professional life in the Internet age, leaving many people uncomfortable with the notion that their employer can monitor what they say or do in their free time and use it as a reason for dismissal.

Since the passing of the USA PATRIOT Act, which extended the government's surveillance powers over communication devices, privacy has become a fiercely controversial issue in the United States, with supporters arguing the legal measures are necessary to prevent terrorist attacks, and opponents claiming that the act infringes on civil liberties. Privacy issues raised by the USA PATRIOT Act, combined with the growing problem of identity theft and increased monitoring in the workplace, make privacy a greater concern now than ever before.

THE USA PATRIOT ACT: WEAKENING PRIVACY LAWS OR PROTECTING CITIZENS?

FIGURE 16.5



President George W. Bush signs the USA PATRIOT Act. http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/10/images/20011026-5.html – public domain.

The USA PATRIOT Act has generated a huge amount of debate and controversy since its approval by President George W. Bush in October 2001. Signed into law with little debate or congressional review just 43 days after the September 11 attacks, the act's provisions enable the government, with permission from a special court, to obtain roving wiretaps over multiple communication devices, seize suspects' records without their knowledge, monitor an individual's web-surfing and library records, and conduct surveillance on a person deemed to be suspicious but without known ties to a terrorist group. Approving the House of Representatives' decision to renew 16 of the act's provisions in 2005, President Bush said, "The [USA] PATRIOT Act is essential to fighting the war on terror and preventing our enemies from striking America again. In the war on terror, we cannot afford to be without this law for a single moment (CNN, 2005)."

However, not everyone agrees with the former president's opinion. While proponents of the act cite the need to disrupt or prevent terrorist attacks, New York City Council member Bill Perkins, who sponsored a 2004 resolution condemning the law, says, "The [USA] PATRIOT Act is really unpatriotic, it undermines our civil rights and civil liberties. We never give up our rights, that's what makes us Americans (Garcia, 2004)." Opposition to the USA PATRIOT Act sparked a wave of protest across the United States. More than 330 communities

in 41 states passed resolutions condemning the act (Egan, 2004). Librarians in Detroit reported that Muslim children had stopped checking out books on Islam out of fear they were being monitored, while librarians in New Jersey and California shredded records and computer sign-up sheets in an attempt to thwart the legislation. While citizens can protect against invasions of privacy on the Internet by limiting personal information and being careful about the information they share, the invasion of privacy through other lines of communication is more difficult to prevent. Despite fierce objections to the act, President Barack Obama signed an unamended 1-year extension of several key provisions of the PATRIOT Act (including the use of roving wire taps) in 2010. In the near future, politicians will have to decide whether citizen protection is worth the loss of liberties in the United States.

SOCIAL NETWORKING: THE BLURRING OF PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL

The privacy issue has strayed well beyond government legislation; it affects anyone who is currently employed or even just looking for a job. When employers consider whether or not to hire an individual, they no longer need to rely on just a résumé to obtain pertinent information. A simple Google search often reveals that a potential employee has a social networking site on the Internet, and unless privacy settings have been put in place, the employer can access everything the candidate has posted online. A 2010 survey by CareerBuilder.com revealed that 53 percent of companies check out candidates' profiles on social networking sites such as MySpace, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook before deciding to employ them, and a further 12 percent of companies intend to review social networking sites of potential employees in the future (Skinner, 2010). Factors that affect an employer's decision whether or not to hire candidates based on their social networking page include the use of drugs or drinking, the posting of discriminatory comments, or the posting of photographs deemed to be inappropriate or provocative. The

survey also revealed that some candidates posted information on their social networking page that proved they had lied on their résumé (Skinner, 2010).

Once employees are hired, they still need to be careful about what they post on social networking sites, particularly in relation to their jobs. Cheryl James, a hospital worker from Michigan, was fired in 2010 after she posted a message on Facebook describing a patient as a "cop killer" and hoping that he would "rot in hell (Dahl, 2010)." A few years earlier, Virgin Atlantic Airlines terminated 13 crew members for describing passengers as "chavs" (a derogatory British term similar to "white trash"). A Virgin spokesman commented, "There is a time and a place for Facebook. But there is no justification for it to be used as a sounding board for staff of any company to criticize the very passengers who pay their salaries (Conway, 2008)."

Although employees might reasonably expect to be disciplined for using social networking sites on company time—a 2009 study discovered that 54 percent of U.S. companies have banned workers from using social networks during work hours—the issue of whether companies can influence how their employees behave in their private lives is a little trickier (Gaudin, 2009). The outcome of a 2009 federal court case in New Jersey may have some bearing on whether companies have the right to spy on their employees while the employees are on password-protected sites using nonwork computers. The case, between restaurant employees Brian

Pietrylo and Doreen Marino and managers at Houston's in Hackensack, New Jersey, centered on a forum set up by Pietrylo on MySpace. The forum, which was password-protected and required an e-mail invitation to join, made fun of the restaurant décor and patrons and included sexual jokes and negative comments about restaurant supervisors. Restaurant hostess Karen St. Jean, who had received an invitation to the forum, showed the supervisors the site and believed they found it amusing; however, the information was passed further up the management chain, and Pietrylo and Marino were fired. The restaurant claimed that the pair's online posts violated policies set out in the employee handbook, including professionalism and a positive attitude. Marino and Pietrylo filed for unfair dismissal, claiming that the restaurant managers had violated their privacy under New Jersey law. Following a trial in June 2009, a federal jury agreed that the restaurant had violated state and federal laws that protect the privacy of web communications. The jury awarded Pietrylo and Marino a total of $3,400 in back pay and $13,600 in punitive damages (Toutant, 2009).

Although the outcome of the New Jersey case may have some bearing on the use of social networking sites outside of work, employees should still exercise caution in the office. Companies are increasingly using technological advances to monitor Internet usage, track employees' whereabouts through GPS-enabled cell phones, and even film employees' movements via webcam or miniature video cameras. Lewis

Maltby, author of workplace rights book *Can They Do That?*, says, "There are two trends driving the increase in monitoring. One is financial pressure. Everyone is trying to get leaner and meaner, and monitoring is one way to do it. The other reason is that it's easier than ever. It used to be difficult and expensive to monitor employees, and now, it's easy and cheap (Petrecca, 2010)." Whereas employees using their own equipment outside of work hours might have a reasonable expectation of privacy, the situation changes when using company property. Nancy Flynn, founder of training and consulting firm ePolicy Institute, said, "Federal law gives employers the legal right to monitor all computer activity. The computer system is the property of the employer, and the employee has absolutely no reasonable expectations of privacy when using that system (Petrecca, 2010)." Because this lack of privacy covers everything from instant messages sent to coworkers to e-mails sent from personal accounts when employees are logged onto the company network, the prudent action for employees to take is to separate their work life from their personal life as much as possible.

RESTORATION OF PRIVACY

Social networking sites have come under fire in recent years for violating users' privacy. In 2009, Facebook simplified its settings to keep up with the popularity of microblogging sites such as Twitter. One consequence of this action was that the default setting enabled status updates and photos to be seen across the entire Internet (see Chapter 11 "The Internet and Social Media" for more information about Facebook privacy settings). The social networking site has also come under criticism for a temporary glitch that gave users unintended access to their friends' private instant messages, and for a new feature in 2010 that enabled the company to share private information with third-party websites. Although Facebook simplified its controls for sharing information by consolidating them on a single page and making it easier for users to opt out of sharing information with third-party applications, public concern prompted 14 privacy groups to file an unfair-trade complaint with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in May 2010 (Ashford, 2010). Congress is currently investigating whether more government regulation of social networking sites is necessary to protect people's privacy.

FIGURE 16.6



Google Street View cars breached privacy by inadvertently collecting private communications data from unsecured Wi-Fi networks.

F Delventhal – Top Contributors Summit 2013 Opening Event – CC BY 2.0.

Other companies, including Google, are actively attempting to restore users' privacy. In response to revelations that the company had accidentally captured and archived wireless data with its Google Street View cars (which are equipped with cameras to provide panoramic views along many streets around the world), Google announced in 2010 that it was launching an encrypted search facility. The technology uses

SSL (secure sockets layer) to protect Internet searches from being intercepted while traveling across the web. Users can activate the secure search facility by typing "https" at the beginning of the URL instead of "http." Although the technology provides a measure of security—the search will not be archived in the computer's history or appear in the AutoFill during a subsequent search—it is not entirely private. Google maintains a record of what people search for, and Internet users will still need to rely on the company's promise not to abuse the data. However, if the encrypted search facility proves successful, it may become a role model for social networking sites, which could offer encryption for more than just log-ins.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Privacy issues have become increasingly important in recent years with the rise of identity theft, workplace monitoring, and the passing of the USA PATRIOT Act in 2001. The PATRIOT Act was signed in the wake of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. It gave the federal government extended surveillance rights, including the ability to obtain roving wiretaps over multiple communication devices, seize suspects' records without their knowledge, monitor an individual's web-surfing and library records, and

conduct surveillance of a person deemed to be suspicious but without known ties to a terrorist group. Supporters of the act claimed the provisions were essential in the efforts to prevent further terrorist attacks; however, opponents claimed that the act breached civil liberties and unfairly infringed on people's privacy.

- Monitoring employees in the workplace has begun to stray outside of office hours, and employees are now finding their social networking sites being scanned by employers for offensive material. Inappropriate comments or photos on a social networking site may negatively affect a person's chance of finding a job if employers use sites such as Facebook and Twitter as a means of screening applicants. The issue of whether employers are allowed to discriminate against employees based on their out-of-work activities has not been fully decided; however, in general, anything that takes place on company property or on company time may be scrutinized and used as a reason for dismissal.
- Some websites are attempting to restore privacy settings in light of recent scandals in which personal information was divulged on the Internet. Google has established an encrypted search facility that enables users to browse the web without running the risk of sensitive information being intercepted. The encryption also prevents websites from being stored on

the computer's history and stops them from appearing on the AutoFill function during future searches. However, the encryption is not entirely private because Google still retains a record of search information.

EXERCISES

Visit the website located at http://www.eff.org/wp/effs-top-12-ways-protect-your-online-privacy . Read through the 12 tips and use them to evaluate your security on the Internet. How many of the tips do you already follow? What can you do to protect your privacy further? Keep these answers in mind as you respond to the following short-answer questions. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. How does the USA PATRIOT Act affect your privacy? Do you think your privacy is more secure on the Internet or through other lines of communication? Why?
2. Have you experienced one of the consequences of social networking discussed in this section? How might social networking sites affect your current or

future employment?

3. What suggestions do you have for restoring privacy at home or in the workplace? What policies are already in effect?

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16.6 Mass Media, New Technology, and the Public

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

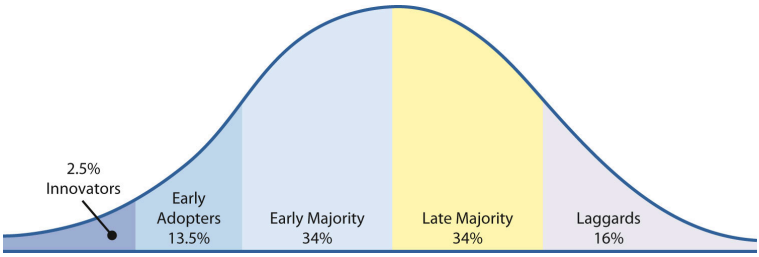
1. Explain the technology diffusion model.
2. Identify technological failures over the past decade.
3. Describe the relationship between mass media and new technology.

When the iPad went on sale in the United States in April 2010, 36-year-old graphic designer Josh Klenert described the device as "ridiculously expensive [and] way overpriced (Guglielmo, 2010)." The cost of the new technology, however, did not deter Klenert from purchasing an iPad; he preordered the tablet computer as soon as it was available and ventured down to Apple's SoHo store in New York on opening weekend to be one of the first to buy it. Klenert, and everyone else who stood in line at the Apple store during the initial launch of the iPad, is described by sociologists as an early adopter: a tech-loving pioneer who is among the first to embrace new technology as soon as it arrives on the market. What causes a person to be an early adopter or a late adopter? What are the

benefits of each? In this section you will read about the cycle of technology and how it is diffused in a society. The process and factors influencing the diffusion of new technology is often discussed in the context of a diffusion model known as the technology adoption life cycle.

DIFFUSION OF TECHNOLOGY: THE TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION LIFE CYCLE

FIGURE 16.7



Like other cultural shifts, technological advances follow a fairly standard diffusion model.

The technology adoption life cycle was originally observed during the technology diffusion studies of rural sociologists during the 1950s. University researchers George Beal, Joe Bohlen, and Everett Rogers were looking at the adoption rate of hybrid seed among Iowa farmers in an attempt to draw conclusions about how farmers accept new ideas. They discovered that the process of adoption over time fit a normal growth curve pattern—there was a slow gradual rate of adoption, then quite a rapid rate of adoption, followed by a leveling off of the adoption rate. Personal and social characteristics influenced when farmers adopted the use of hybrid seed corn; younger, better-educated farmers tended to adapt to the new technology almost as soon as it became available, whereas older, less-educated farmers waited until most other farms were using hybrid seed before they adopted the process, or they resisted change altogether.

In 1962, Rogers generalized the technology diffusion model in his book *Diffusion of Innovations*, using the farming

research to draw conclusions about the spread of new ideas and technology. Like his fellow farming model researchers, Rogers recognizes five categories of participants: innovators, who tend to be experimentalists and are interested in the technology itself; early adopters such as Josh Klenert, who are technically sophisticated and are interested in using the technology for solving professional and academic problems; early majority, who constitute the first part of the mainstream, bringing the new technology into common use; late majority , who are less comfortable with the technology and may be skeptical about its benefits; and laggards, who are resistant to the new technology and may be critical of its use by others (Rogers, 1995).

When new technology is successfully released in the market, it follows the technology adoption life cycle shown in Figure 16.7. Innovators and early adopters, attracted by something new, want to be the first to possess the innovation, sometimes even before discovering potential uses for it, and are unconcerned with the price. When the iPad hit stores in April 2010, 120,000 units were sold on the first day, primarily as a result of presales (Oliver, 2010). Sales dropped on days 2 and 3, suggesting that demand for the device dipped slightly after the initial first-day excitement. Within the first month, Apple had sold 1,000,000 iPads, exceeding industry expectations (Goldman, 2010). However, many mainstream consumers (the early majority) are waiting to find out just how popular the device will become before making a purchase. Research

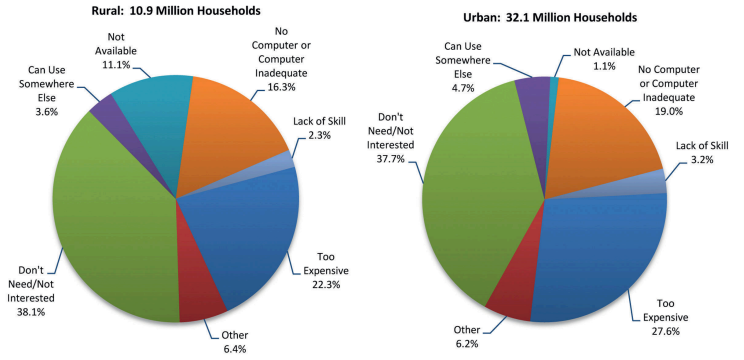
carried out in the United Kingdom suggests that many consumers are uncertain how the iPad will fit into their lives—the survey drew comments such as "Everything it does I can do on my PC or my phone right now" and "It's just a big iPod Touch...a big iPhone without the phone (O'Hear, 2010)." The report, by research group Simpson Carpenter, concludes that most consumers are "unable to find enough rational argument to justify taking the plunge (O'Hear, 2010)."

However, as with previous technological advances, the early adopters who have jumped on the iPad bandwagon may ultimately validate its potential, helping mainstream users make sense of the device and its uses. Forrester Research notes that much of the equipment acquired by early adopters—laptops, MP3 players, digital cameras, broadband Internet access at home, and mobile phones—is shifting into the mainstream. Analyst Jacqueline Anderson, who works for Forrester, said, "There's really no group out of the tech loop. America is becoming a digital nation. Technology adoption continues to roll along, picking up more and more mainstream consumers every year (Wortham, 2009)." To cite just one example, in 2008 nearly 10 million American households added HDTV, an increase of 27 percent over the previous year (Wortham, 2009). By the time most technology reaches mainstream consumers, it is more established, more user-friendly, and cheaper than earlier versions or prototypes. In June 2010, Amazon.com slashed the price of its Kindle e-

reader from $259 to $189 in response to competition from Barnes & Noble's Nook (Bartash, 2010). Companies frequently reduce the price of technological devices once the initial novelty wears off, as a result of competition from other manufacturers or as a strategy to retain market share.

Although many people ultimately adapt to new technology, some are extremely resistant or unwilling to change at all. When Netscape web browser user John Uribe was repeatedly urged by a message from parent company AOL to switch to one of Netscape's successors, Firefox or Flock, he ignored the suggestions. Despite being informed that AOL would stop providing support for the web browser service in March 2008, Uribe continued to use it. "It's kind of irrational," Mr. Uribe said. "It worked for me, so I stuck with it. Until there is really some reason to totally abandon it, I won't (Helft, 2008)."Uribe is a self-confessed late adopter—he still uses dial-up Internet service and is happy to carry on using his aging Dell computer with its small amount of memory. Members of the late majority make up a large percentage of the U.S. population—a 2010 survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau found that despite the technology's widespread availability, 40 percent of households across the United States have no high-speed or broadband Internet connection, while 30 percent have no Internet at all (Whitney, 2010). Of 32.1 million households in urban areas, the most common reason for not having high-speed Internet was a lack of interest or a lack of need for the technology (Whitney, 2010).

FIGURE 16.8



The most common reason that people in both rural and urban areas do not have high-speed Internet is a lack of interest in the technology.

Experts claim that, rather than slowing down the progression of new technological developments, laggards in the technology adoption life cycle may help to control the development of new technology. Paul Saffo, a technology forecaster, said, "Laggards have a bad rap, but they are crucial in pacing the nature of change. Innovation requires the push of early adopters and the pull of laypeople asking whether something really works. If this was a world in which only early adopters got to choose, we'd all be using CB radios and quadraphonic stereo."[1] He added that aspects of the laggard and early adopter coexist in most people. For example, many consumers buy the latest digital camera and end up using just a fraction of its functions. Technological laggards may be the reason that

not every new technology becomes a mainstream trend (see sidebar).

NOT CONSUMER-APPROVED: TECHNOLOGICAL FLOPS

Have you ever heard of the Apple Newton? How about Microsoft Bob? Or DIVX? For most people, the names probably mean very little because these were all flash-in-the-pan technologies that never caught on with mainstream consumers.

The Apple Newton was an early PDA, officially known as the MessagePad. Introduced by Apple in 1993, the Newton contained many of the features now popularized by modern smartphones, including personal information management and add-on storage slots. Despite clever advertising and relentless word-of-mouth campaigns, the

Newton failed to achieve anything like the popularity enjoyed by most Apple products. Hampered by its large size compared to more recent equivalents (such as the PalmPilot) and its cost—basic models cost around $700, with more advanced models costing up to $1,000—the Newton was also ridiculed by talk show comedians and cartoonists because of the supposed inaccuracy of its handwriting-recognition function. By 1998, the Newton was no more. A prime example of an idea that was ahead of its time, the Newton was the forerunner to the smaller, cheaper, and more successful PalmPilot, which in turn paved the way for every successive mobile Internet device.

Even less successful in the late 1990s was DIVX, an attempt by electronics retailer Circuit City to create an alternative to video rental. Customers could rent movies on disposable DIVX discs that they could keep and watch for 2 days. They then had the choice of throwing away or recycling the disc or paying a continuation fee to keep watching it. Viewers who wanted to watch a disc an unlimited amount of times could pay to convert it into a "DIVX silver" disc for an additional fee. Launched in 1998, the DIVX system was promoted as an alternative to traditional rental systems with the promise of no returns and no late fees. However, its introduction coincided with the release of DVD technology, which was gaining traction over the DIVX format. Consumers feared that the choice between DIVX and DVD might turn into another Betamax versus VHS

debacle, and by 1999 the technology was all but obsolete. The failure of DIVX cost Circuit City a reported $114,000,000 and left early enthusiasts of the scheme with worthless DIVX equipment (although vendors offered a $100 refund for people who bought a DIVX player) (Mokey, 2009).

Another catastrophic failure in the world of technology was Microsoft Bob, a mid-1990s attempt to provide a new, nontechnical interface to desktop computing operations. Bob, represented by a logo with a yellow smiley face that filled the *o* in its name, was supposed to make Windows more palatable to nontechnical users. With a cartoon-like interface that was meant to resemble the inside of a house, Bob helped users navigate their way around the desktop by having them click on objects in each room. Microsoft expected sales of Bob to skyrocket and held a big advertising campaign to celebrate its 1995 launch. Instead, the product failed dismally because of its high initial sale price, demanding hardware requirements, and tendency to patronize users. When Windows 95 was launched the same year, its new Windows Explorer interface required far less dumbing down than previous versions, and Microsoft Bob became irrelevant.

Technological failures such as the Apple Newton, DIVX, and Microsoft Bob prove that sometimes it is better to be a mainstream adopter than to jump on the new-product

bandwagon before the technology has been fully tried and tested.

MASS MEDIA OUTLETS AND NEW TECHNOLOGY

As new technology reaches the shelves and the number of early majority consumers rushing to purchase it increases, mass media outlets are forced to adapt to the new medium. When the iPad's popularity continued to grow throughout 2010 (selling 3,000,000 units within 3 months of its launch date), traditional newspapers, magazines, and TV networks rushed to form partnerships with Apple, launching applications for the tablet so that consumers could directly access their content. Unconstrained by the limited amount of space available in a physical newspaper or magazine, publications such as *The New*

York Times and *USA Today* are able to include more detailed reporting than they can fit in their traditional paper, as well as interactive features such as crossword puzzles and the use of video and sound. "Our iPad App is designed to take full advantage of the evolving capabilities offered by the Internet," said Arthur Sulzberger Jr., publisher of *The New York Times*. "We see our role on the iPad as being similar to our traditional print role—to act as a thoughtful, unbiased filter and to provide our customers with information they need and can trust (Brett, 2010)."

Because of Apple's decision to ban Flash (the dominant software for online video viewing) from the iPad, some traditional TV networks have been converting their video files to HTML5 in order to enable full TV episodes to be screened on the device. CBS and Disney were among the first networks to offer free TV content on the iPad in 2010 through the iPad's built-in web browser, while ABC streamed its shows via an iPad application. The iPad has even managed to revive forms of traditional media that had been discontinued; in June 2010, Condé Nast announced the restoration of *Gourmet* magazine as an iPad application called Gourmet Live. As more media content becomes available on new technology such as the iPad, the iPod, and the various e-readers available on the market, it appeals to a broader range of consumers, becoming a self-perpetuating model.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The technology adoption life cycle offers a diffusion model of how people accept new ideas and new technology. The model recognizes five categories of participants: innovators, who tend to be experimentalists and are interested in the technology itself; early adopters, who are technically sophisticated and are interested in using the technology for solving professional and academic problems; early majority, who constitute the first part of the mainstream, bringing the new technology into common use; late majority, who are less comfortable with the technology and may be skeptical about its benefits; and laggards, who are resistant to the new technology and may be critical of its use by others.
- When new technology is released in the market, it follows the technology adoption life cycle. Innovators and early adopters want to be the first to own the technology and are unconcerned about the cost, whereas mainstream consumers wait to find out how popular or successful the technology will become before buying it. As the technology filters into the mainstream, it becomes cheaper and more user-friendly. Some people remain resistant to new

technology, however, which helps to control its development. Technological flops such as Microsoft Bob and DIVX result from skeptical late adopters or laggards refusing to purchase innovations that appear unlikely to become commercially successful.

- As new technology transitions into the mainstream, traditional media outlets have to adapt to the new technology to reach consumers. Recent examples include the development of traditional media applications for the iPad, such as newspaper, magazine, and TV network apps.

EXERCISES

Choose a technological innovation from the past 50 years and research its diffusion into the mass market. Then respond to the following short-answer questions. Each response should be a minimum of one paragraph.

1. Does it fit the technology diffusion model?
2. How quickly did the technology reach the mass market? In what ways did mass media aid the spread of this technology?
3. Research similar inventions that never caught on. Why

do you think this technology succeeded when so many others failed?

END-OF-CHAPTER ASSESSMENT

Review Questions

1. Section 1
    1. What are the main types of traditional media, and what factors influenced their development?
    2. What are the main types of new media and what factors influenced their development?
    3. Why are new media often more successful than traditional media?
2. Section 2
    1. What were the main types of media used at the beginning of the 20th century?
    2. What factors led to the rise of a national mass culture?
    3. How has the Internet affected media delivery?
3. Section 3

1. What are the main information delivery methods in modern media?
2. Why has the Internet become a primary source of news and information?

4. Section 4

    1. What are the main advantages of modern media delivery methods?
    2. What are the main disadvantages of modern media delivery methods?

5. Section 5

    1. What factors influenced the development of the print industry? What factors contributed to its decline?
    2. How has the Internet affected the print industry?
    3. What is likely to happen to the print industry in the future? How is print media transitioning into the digital age?

6. Section 6

    1. What are the current trends in social networking?
    2. How is the Internet becoming more exclusive?
    3. What are the effects of smartphone applications on modern media?

7. Section 7

    1. What effects did the USA PATRIOT Act have on privacy in the United States?
    2. What are some of the consequences of social networking sites in terms of privacy and employment?
    3. How are some websites attempting to restore privacy?

8. Section 8

    1. What is the technology adoption life cycle and how does it relate to new media?
    2. How do mass-media outlets respond to new technology?

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. Is there a future for traditional media, or will it be consumed by digital technology?
2. Do employers have the right to use social networking sites as a method of selecting future employees? Are employees entitled to voice their opinion on the

Internet even if it damages their company's reputation?

3. Did the USA PATRIOT Act make the country a safer place, or did it violate privacy laws and undermine civil liberties?
4. One of the disadvantages of modern media delivery is the lack of reliability of information on the Internet. Do you think online journalism (including blogging) will ultimately become a respected source of information, or will people continue to rely on traditional news media?
5. Will a pay-for-content model work for online newspapers and magazines, or have consumers become too used to receiving their news for free?

CAREER CONNECTION

As a result of rapid change in the digital age, careers in media are constantly shifting, and many people who work in the industry face an uncertain future. However, the Internet (and all the various technologies associated with it) has created numerous opportunities in the media field. Take a look at the following website and scroll down to the

"Digital" section:
http://www.getdegrees.com/articles/career-resources/top-60-jobs-that-will-rock-the-future/

The website lists several media careers that are on the rise, including the following:

- Media search consultant
- Interface designer
- Cloud computing engineer
- Integrated digital media specialist
- Casual game developer
- Mobile application developer

Read through the description of each career, including the links within each description. Choose one career that you are interested in pursuing, research the skills and qualifications it requires, and then write a one-page paper on what you found. Here are some other helpful websites you might like to use in your research:

- Digital Jobs of the Future: Integrated Digital Media Specialist: http://www.s2m.com.au/news/2009/11/26/digital-jobs-of-the-future-integrated-digital-media-specialist/?403
- Cloud Computing Jobs: http://cloudczar.com/
- Top Careers for College Graduates: Casual Game Development:

http://www.examiner.com/x-11055-San-Diego-College-Life-Examiner~y2009m5d27-Top-careers-for-college-graduates-Casual-Game-Development

- How to Become a Mobile Application Developer: http://www.ehow.com/how_5638517_become-mobile-application-developer.html
- Mobile App Development: So Many Choices, So Few Guarantees: http://www.linuxinsider.com/story/70128.html?wlc=1277823391
- 20 Websites to Help You Master User Interface Design: http://sixrevisions.com/usabilityaccessibility/20-websites-to-help-you-master-user-interface-design/

[1]Helft, "Tech's Late Adapters."

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