The Mass Media Landscape

THE MASS MEDIA LANDSCAPE

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University of Arkansas Libraries
Fayetteville, Arkansas



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CONTENTS

About This OER vii

Meet the Authors and Editor ix

Introduction 1

Part I. Main Body

1. Opening Concepts 9
2. Media Technology and the Evolution of Language 25
3. Traversing Our Mass Media Landscape 36
4. The Media Business: Conglomerates and Control 47
5. Journalism: Occupation or Skillset? 58
6. Media Law 64
7. Media Ethics 76
8. Books 86
9. News and Newspapers: Then and Now 96
10. Magazines 109
11. Radio and Audio 117
12. Popular Music and American Culture 129
13. Television 139
14. Movies 152
15. Internet 166
16. Public Relations 178
17. Advertising 188
18. Social Media Influencers 203
19. Generational Patterns and Social Media 215

20. Media Literacy and Gen Z 221
21. Public Health (part 1) 226
22. Public Health (part 2) 237

Part II. Resources

AI Prompts for Chapter 1: Jokes 253
AI Prompts for Chapter 2: Analogies 254
AI Prompt for Chapter 7: Media Ethics 255
AI Prompt for Chapter 10: Magazine Startup Concept 256
AI Prompt for Chapter 16: Crisis PR Role Play 257
AI Prompt for Chapter 18: Affordable Fashion or Hockey 258

ABOUT THIS OER

Compiled and written by Dave Bostwick and Alyssa Riley

Edited by Dominique Andrea Montiel Valle

This OER project is a compilation of lessons to help readers understand the evolution of U.S. mass media and disruptive media technologies, including overviews of media law, media ethics and media literacy. Following are four points of emphasis:

- Media literacy extends beyond the ability to identify misinformation and disinformation or follow reliable news sources.
- A crucial part of media literacy is understanding mass media history.
- Media literacy skills help both consumers and professionals create and publish reliable content, including on social media, in an ethical manner and with an understanding of long-term effects and potential consequences.
- All students, not just those who seek careers in the industry, benefit from learning about media history, media law, media ethics, and media literacy.

Because this Open Educational Resource (OER) is presented in a book-like structure, the **interactive elements may be more convenient on a standard screen, such as a laptop or tablet computer.** However, the display will automatically reformat for reading on a smaller screens, such as a smartphone.

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Just send an email:

Dave Bostwick
bostwick@uark.edu

A Note About First-Person Content – Several chapters in this OER text begin with first-person narratives as a means of using authentic storytelling to engage, inform and educate audiences. While it may seem odd to read brief first-person accounts in a text focused on a specific curriculum, I hope this **gives audiences a chance to reflect on their own personal stories about the evolution of media** as it has affected their lives. In a

classroom setting, this may facilitate students or faculty sharing their own stories. Within Blackboard, online faculty will have the option to tell their own brief first-person narratives related to chapter topics.

A Note About External Content – This online guidebook includes embedded multimedia content and links to external articles. These were verified as functioning upon initial publication of this text and may be periodically checked and updated during the lifespan of this OER text. Occasionally, website addresses may change or content may no longer be available. **Please email bostwick@uark.edu** if you encounter any problems.

This OER text includes links to content from The New York Times. If you are a University of Arkansas student, you have free access to The New York Times through a confirmation link.

MEET THE AUTHORS AND EDITOR

Authors



Lead author **Dave Bostwick** is the associate director and online course coordinator for the School of Journalism and Strategic Media at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville. He has a doctoral degree in higher education leadership with an emphasis in instructional design from Baker University in Kansas. He earned a master's degree in English from Fort Hays State University in Kansas and a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Oklahoma. When he was a college undergraduate, he had a lot more hair and aspired to be an international rock star.



Collaborating author **Alyssa Riley** earned her bachelor's and master's degrees in Journalism from the School of Journalism and Strategic Media at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville. She was a staff writer for *Walton Insights* and a field journalist for *Overflow Co. Zero Reasons Why* campaign. She has been published by *Hogs+ Content Network, Celebrate! Arkansas Magazine,* and *The Diamond Line magazine,* as well as by student media outlets *Hill Magazine* and *The Razorback Yearbook*. During her graduate studies, she was a graduate teaching assistant for the Media and Society course. In 2025, she became an assistant editor with *Gulfshore Life Magazine*.

Editor



Dominique M. Valle is a Ph.D. graduate from the School of Journalism and Media at the University of Texas at Austin. Her research interests include emerging technologies, user cultures, and media representation, particularly within the Latin American region. She grew up in Nicaragua, lived in Malaysia, and has been in the United States for seven years, which has given her a varied perspective on global and local media ecosystems.

Special thanks to University of Arkansas OER Librarian Christine Rickabaugh.

Additional thanks to Hanna Williams for contributing the drawing used on the cover.

INTRODUCTION

By Dave Bostwick

An influential article in the Chronicle of Higher Education asked a crucial question about undergraduate college coursework: Is this the end of reading?

A source in the article suggested that "we're entering into a hybrid oral-written culture." Supporting statistics included one estimate that only 20% of college students actually read anything that's assigned to them outside of class.

One quote in the article provided this advice to college educators: "If you design a class based on the assumption that students will do the readings, you'll get nowhere."

Here's a video with additional perspective from the Chronicle of Higher Education.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=4#oembed-1

This OER was built with multi-modal content to increase audience engagement, but it does not abandon static text. Reading is still an important skill to develop and maintain for critical thinking and personal enjoyment.

Media Literacy and History

Media content creators and educators share a similar purpose to inform their audiences, and a primary focus of this OER text is to help you make informed decisions that improve your media literacy. Here's a related flip-card question.

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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=4#h5p-118

That's an important distinction. And keep in mind that media literacy is more than just gaining skills to identify misinformation and disinformation or follow reliable news sources.

You also need to understand that many of our current ethical concerns and debates about mass media are not unique.

Or put another way, **a crucial component of gaining media literacy is understanding mass media history**.

Ultimately, media literacy skills help both consumers and professionals create, publish, broadcast and share reliable content, including via social media, in an ethical manner and with an understanding of the long-term effects.

A Personal Approach



Although we're in a brave new world of AI content and immediate media gratification, the present can still resemble the past.

When I was a child, I could manually dial a phone number hosted by a local business to hear an automated voice that gave me the current time and temperature along with a brief weather forecast.

Many of us have a similar routine today, except we consult apps on our smartphone screens instead of dialing numbers on a rotary phone.

Throughout this text, you'll have opportunities to share your own reflections about media changes in your lifetime.

What About AI?

The rapid evolution of AI-generated content has further complicated the concept of instructional design.

In the audio below, an AI voice conversation agent, Sarah (with a British accent), will read my brief summary of the approach used in this OER text.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=4#h5p-117

Or if you prefer to read, here's the audio transcript:

> *It's still important for students to develop and hone their reading skills, but it's also critical for them to develop fluency in decoding other media forms, such as audio and video along with emerging interactive and immersive platforms. With that in mind, this OER text incorporates paragraph text along with interactive presentations, audio and video embeds, self-check quizzes, and a variety of digital flip cards. You'll find that the OER chapters are designed to avoid long blocks of uninterrupted paragraph text.*

Is it appropriate to include AI-generated narration in an educational project such as this OER? That's a question the educational community will decide in the next decade or so.



AI has also affected students' attitudes toward learning. A video from Gizmodo included the following observation:

> ***"American students are increasingly viewing homework and testing more like a high-stakes video game to solve rather than learn from."***

Do you agree with that assessment, and does it reflect your attitude?

To combat students using AI tools on writing assignments, some faculty members have even started requiring students to use old-fashioned blue books to compose handwritten essays during class.

Some chapters in this OER include observations about how AI is affecting our media platforms. You'll even see and hear a few examples of AI-generated content so you can form your own opinions about the value of AI in today's media landscape.

Thinking About AI



Public Domain Image

Here's an analogy about our AI usage. Many of us jog or lift weights for exercise. Sure, we have automated machines that could lift the weight for us or vehicles that transport us. However, our bodies won't benefit without the physical exercise of moving our own muscles.

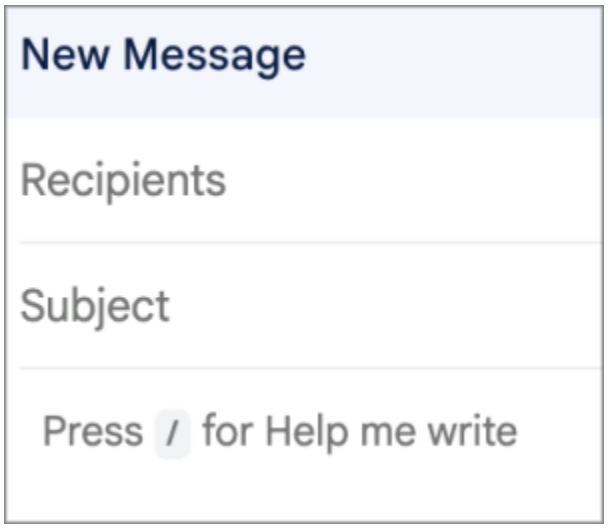
Similarly, perhaps we shouldn't rely too heavily on AI for critical thinking and problem-solving, even though AI seems to require less effort. We need to exercise our brains regularly so that AI isn't doing all our thinking for us.

A press release from the American Association of Colleges and Universities cited survey results showing that more than 80% of college faculty believe the use of AI will diminish students' critical thinking skills and attention spans.

And a New York Times case example illustrates how reliant some students have become on AI for writing. Professors from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign received identically written apologies from students who had cheated in an introductory data science course.

Because the apologies themselves were not graded, this wasn't necessarily a case of academic misconduct. However, you can consider whether it was appropriate for students to use AI tools to craft a sincere personal apology.

Future examples such as this are likely inevitable due to AI being embedded in many popular writing tools, as illustrated in the screenshot below.



As a trial, I entered the following prompt into the embedded AI help tool in my Gmail account.

> *I am a college professor who was late for the first day of class because my dentist appointment lasted much longer than I had expected. Help me write an email to apologize to the class.*

It yielded the following text that I could copy/paste, add a date, and send to students.

Dear Students,

Please accept my sincere apologies for being late to our first day of class. My scheduled dentist appointment lasted much longer than I had anticipated, which unfortunately delayed my arrival.

I understand the importance of our first meeting and regret any inconvenience or confusion this may have caused. I am looking forward to a productive semester with all of you and will see you at our next scheduled class on [Date].

Thank you for your patience and understanding.

Best regards,

Professor Bostwick

Here are three questions to ponder.

- Would you recognize the use of AI if you received this?
- If you were a student in my class, how would you feel about receiving an AI-generated email from a faculty member?
- Do you think your attitude will evolve over the next few years?

Enjoy!

As you learned in the opening comments, some education analysts wonder whether we've reached "the end of reading." Thanks to those of you who did read to the end of this page.

I hope you enjoy this OER project as much as our team enjoyed creating it. Send any feedback or suggestions to Dave Bostwick (bostwick@uark.edu).

PART I

MAIN BODY

1.

OPENING CONCEPTS

by Dave Bostwick

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=22#h5p-68

Curtain Raiser

OPENING NOTE – To help you reflect on your own media interactions and media literacy, many chapters in this OER text will begin with narrative examples and introductory first-person observations (such as the one below).

I'll raise the curtain and introduce myself by taking you back to the 1980s when I first attended college. Below is a photo of me singing from way back then (when I had much more hair).



Like a few of my peers, I watched a lot of MTV, which made me want to become an international rock star more than a news journalist. In less than a decade, my generation went from 8-track tapes to cassette tapes to compact discs (CDs).

Of course, there was no internet for consumers. Small-screen personal computers were a clunky novelty item, high-quality stereo speakers were huge, and it would have been impossible for us to imagine a streaming service like Spotify.

I spent my childhood in a rural area of Oklahoma, and my family used a directional TV antenna to pick up one station at a time. For example, if you wanted to watch shows broadcast on a TV station in Wichita Falls, Texas, you had to point the antenna toward Wichita Falls.

I remember moving to a larger city and getting a cable TV box connected to a controller with a physical cord. At the time, it seemed almost unbelievable that my roommates and I could sit on the couch and change the TV channel without getting up to turn a knob on the TV set itself.

Regardless of your age, you probably have memories of changes in your media consumption habits. This Open Educational Resource (OER) text will explore how mass media technologies have evolved over many centuries, from the printing press to artificial intelligence. We'll also look at how mass media affects users (and vice versa), paying special attention to ethical concerns.

Your Media Landscape

How would you rate your own media literacy skills?

- very low
- somewhat low
- moderate
- somewhat high
- very high

You can compare your response to a Student Voice survey published in 2025 by Inside Higher Ed and Generation Lab. We'll discuss this in more detail later in the chapter.

Opening Concepts

This chapter includes several interactive exercises to introduce some key concepts. Here's your first flip-card question.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=22#h5p-1

As a current example, it's an oversimplification to refer to a singular idea of *media* as liberal or conservative. No single entity controls American media, so it's best to think of the word *media* as plural. The U.S. media landscape is extremely diverse in content and ownership. It is not a singular concept, and it includes a variety of liberal and conservative outlets.

Whenever possible, be specific about the type of medium or media outlets that you discuss. In most cases, you should avoid using singular references to "the media."

The Long View of Media Literacy

Many modern media critics complain that social media platforms and artificial intelligence devalue accuracy and make it difficult for consumers to gain reliable information. Several chapters will mention this and similar concerns about media literacy.

Here's a warm-up question to help you think about whether this is a new or old problem.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=22#h5p-2

You can read more about Ben Franklin's fabrication in "Hoax: Franklin's Forgery" published by John Hopkins University Press.

Fake News: An Origin Story (NPR)

The following audio from National Public Radio detailed the history of fake news in American journalism, including an example from Pea Ridge, Arkansas.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=22#h5p-3

In particular, pay attention to the opening case example and analysis beginning at the 2-minute mark progressing through the brief overview of the Pea Ridge case and the Ida B. Wells example ending at the 10:30 mark.

Later, the NPR audio also mentioned that some audience members seek information that confirms their beliefs or identity, so they (perhaps unconsciously) don't mind if journalists lie to them.

One could say that "making stuff up" is an American tradition that began long before the 2016 election.

Writing for Harvard's Nieman Foundation, Jon Grinspan described how a 19th-century news revolution sparked activists, influencers, disinformation, and the Civil War. As newspaper printing technology improved, American newspapers became more widely available, increasing from only a few printed newspapers in 1800 to 4,000 by 1860. As a result, literacy rates increased, and Grinspan said that many Americans became "news junkies" with strong political opinions:

> *In fact, the most divided period in the history of U.S. democracy — the mid-1800s — coincided with a sudden boom in new communications technologies, confrontational political influencers, widespread disinformation, and nasty fights over free speech. This media landscape helped bring about the Civil War.*

Here are two additional resources about the legacy of fake news in the United States.

- The Real History of Fake News – Columbia Journalism Review
- An Independence Day Salute to Our Founding Fathers of Fake News – Thom Fladung of Hennes Communications

Most Americans ignore or dismiss much of the political disinformation that they encounter on a daily basis, but that's not the case for everyone.



CC0 Image

As a result, ethical media professionals and civic-minded media consumers should feel a sense of duty to positively impact the U.S. media landscape through their media interactions. That means they have a duty to avoid spreading disinformation.

In a TED talk about the future of media, Substack cofounder Hamish McKenzie said this:

> *The chaos of our current media moment cannot last. but then no one's quite sure what the new landscape is going to ultimately bring. And that's why our choices today matter so much. Every subscription, every share and every minute of our attention is a vote for the culture we want to flourish.*

The Evolution of Media Technology

This OER text will emphasize that, when it comes to disruptive technology, media history repeats itself. Here is a media history question that may give you some perspective on that concept.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=22#h5p-4



Creative Commons Image

The contraption in the picture above is a telegraph, used to send coded messages electronically beginning in the 1800s. If you are a history buff, you can read the History Channel's explanation of " Morse Code & the Telegraph."

As a side note, in his book *The Gutenberg Parenthesis*, Jeff Jarvis wrote that because the telegraph allowed "instantaneous communication with unseen strangers," there were initial concerns about "stranger danger." Some stakeholders thought jobs in the new telegraph industry were inappropriate for women.

So media history tells us that concerns about stranger danger didn't begin with the internet and social media.

Next comes a question about image manipulation.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=22#h5p-5

As an example, compare the two images below. In the 1940s manipulated photo on the left, it appears no one is holding the reins of a horse ridden by Italian Prime Minister Benito Mussolini. In the original photo on the right, we see there actually was someone handling the horse while Mussolini posed.





Photoshop was not developed until the 1980s, and this is one of many famous examples of image manipulation that came before digital photography.

You can peruse lots of interesting image-manipulation case studies, starting with an 1860s example involving Abe Lincoln, in the following document from Georgia Tech University.

- Photo Tampering Through History

Are We Slightly Arrogant?

Here's an irony about personal perceptions of media literacy.

- Over 70% of surveyed college students said they have somewhat high or very high media literacy skills.
  BUT
- Only 32% the same students rated the media literacy of their peers as somewhat high or very high.

Also, according to a Student Voice survey, over 60% said they are concerned about the spread of misinformation among their classmates.

Beyond college students, the irony likely reflects a larger psychological trend of individual Americans overvaluing their own media literacy skills while assuming that other people aren't as media savvy.



Creative Commons Image

Our Personal Biases

Media researchers have consistently found that our biases affect our interpretation of the information we consume. According to an analysis published by Harvard's Nieman Lab, a more recent trend is that "our evaluations of external reality are increasingly partisan" based on our political beliefs.

For example, despite widespread statistical data showing declines in most nationwide crimes since 2021, especially fewer violent crimes, most Americans in the first half of the 2020s believed crime was steadily increasing.



Public Domain Image

According to a Gallup survey, 90 percent of Republicans in 2024 said there was more crime in the United States than there was in the previous year, while only 29% of Democrats said there was more crime.

Surveys showed that Americans typically had a rosier view of crime in their own locations but still believed that the nation as a whole was becoming more dangerous.

This phenomenon can be explained partly because of a partisan difference in trust. A Pew Research report found that Democrats trust a wider range of news sources than Republicans. Among traditional news outlets, Republicans place greater trust in Fox News.

One research study published in 2026 found "clear support for a hostile misinformation effect, as citizens believe their own political party was much more targeted than the political opponent."

A related summary from Harvard's Nieman Lab said that "the more politically committed someone is to a party or ideology, the more likely they are to see the news media as biased against them."

We'll learn more about the origins of hostile media phenomenon in chapter 3.

Media Technology in the 2020s

Here's a poem about a special dog, adopted from an animal shelter, who is one of my best friends.

Harvey the Mutt, a dog of mixed breed,
With a wagging tail, and a heart full of need.
Though not a pedigree pup, you see,
His loyalty and love are pure and truly free.
He'll be your companion, through thick and thin,
Harvey the Mutt, a true friend within.

You may be wondering why this poem appears in our OER text as part of this chapter. Here's a flip card that may explain that.



Actual photo of Harvey, an adopted dog.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=22#h5p-70

Content-creation tools using artificial intelligence, such as ChatGPT, are disruptive media technologies in the 2020s. If media history is a guide, we can predict that most people will adjust and adapt to the new technology. It will lead to the elimination of some jobs and the creation of others.

However, our media landscape will forever be changed, much like it was with the advent of the printing press, the telegraph, radio, movies, television and the internet.

Is Artificial Intelligence Really *#*#?

You may be surprised to learn that there is an academic definition of the term *bullshit* based largely on the pioneering work of a Princeton professor, Harry Frankfurt, who wrote an influential book titled *On Bullshit*.

Three academicians at the University of Glasgow in Scotland applied Frankfurt's principles to publish a research work titled "ChatGPT Is Bullshit." They argued that, rather than hallucination, the more appropriate term to describe the output of large language models, such as ChatGPT, is *bullshit*. Here is part of their argument:

> *The problem here isn't that large language models hallucinate, lie, or misrepresent the world in some way. It's that they are not designed to represent the world at all; instead, they are designed to convey convincing lines of text.*

In the audio below, one of the co-authors, Joe Slater explained the challenges of truth and verification related to text generated by large language models such as ChatGPT.

Audio: Truth and Verification

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=22#h5p-120

(transcript of the audio)

Slater also provided a brief warning about unintended plagiarism resulting from text generated by AI-generated text.

Audio: Unintended Plagiarism

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=22#h5p-121

(transcript of the audio)

In a similar vein, Zeynep Tufekci, a noted sociologist and columnist, wrote that "large language models are not reasoning machines. They're plausibility engines."

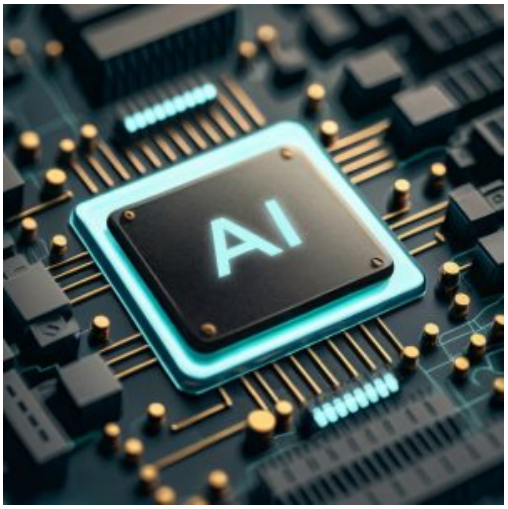
In an article explaining why AI won't steal our jobs, Tufekci provided this additional perspective:

> *So long as we continue to rely on L.L.M.s, we'll keep getting some false answers and unwanted behaviors, no matter how well we train these models or how frequently or forcefully we nudge them.*

More Concerns About AI

The argument from the Scottish researchers above is one of many evolving viewpoints about AI-generated content, which likely will be both reviled and embraced by future media professionals and educators.

If you are a student in academic courses, I strongly recommend that you consult your instructor before using any AI tools to complete assigned work. This will help you avoid a breach of academic integrity.



Public Domain Image

Accuracy is frequently a concern. In a research study conducted by the startup company Vectara, AI chatbots invented information at least 3 percent of the time. In some situations, that number climbed as high as 27%.

More recently, research suggests that as artificial intelligence is getting more powerful, its hallucinations are getting worse. Amr Awadallah, an executive with Vectara, said that AI systems "will always hallucinate. That will never go away."

A BBC study about the misrepresentation of BBC News in AI content included these two statistical concerns:

- 19% of AI answers which cited BBC content introduced factual errors – incorrect factual statements, numbers and dates.
- 13% of the quotes sourced from BBC articles were either altered from the original source or not present in the article cited.

Also, consumers often cannot tell the difference between authentic online reviews and ones produced by AI. This contributes to a media landscape in which we become skeptical of everything we see.



CC0 image

To combat AI-generated fake reviews, the Federal Trade Commission banned the sale or purchase of fake reviews and testimonials, saying they "pollute the marketplace and divert business away from honest competitors."



Image generated with ChatGPT using "online hellscape" as a key term in the prompt.

An Online Hellscape?

Beyond fake reviews, a New York Times feature story chronicled an extreme example of the chaotic AI landscape in an article titled "Let's Rescue Book Lovers From This Online Hellscape."

> *Internet sleuths figured out that an author named Cait Corrain, whose debut novel was scheduled for 2024, had created fake accounts on Goodreads in order to review-bomb other books — overwhelming them with negative one-star reviews. When confronted online, she concocted a fake online chat to divert blame to a nonexistent friend; when that hoax was uncovered, she confessed, citing a "complete psychological breakdown.*

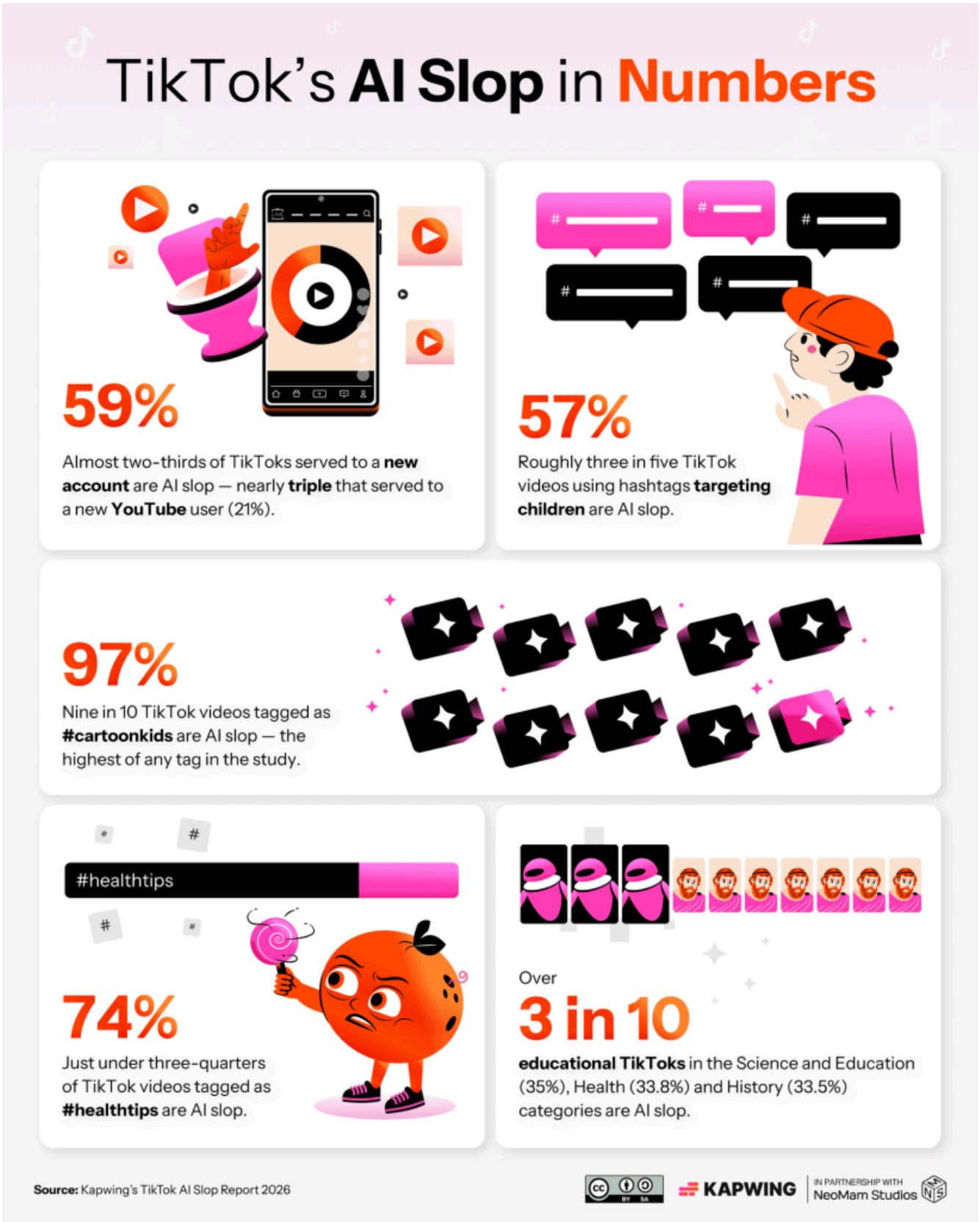
Furthermore, AI-generated videos have flooded social media to the point that even on-the-street interviews can be fake, as a New York Times multimedia feature demonstrated

A research study published in 2026 found that approximately 35 percent of all new websites were either AI-generated or AI-assisted as "AI slop is making the internet fake-happy."

And speaking of slop, a research study from Kapwing estimated that nearly 60% of TikToks served to new

users and children were AI slop, which was defined as "careless, low-quality content generated using automatic computer applications and distributed to farm views and subscriptions or sway political opinion."

The statistics below provide additional details.



CC0 graphic from [Kapwing's TikTok AI Slop Report 2026]

Finally, there are environmental concerns with the evolution of AI technologies. A summary from MIT said that "rapid development and deployment of powerful generative AI models comes with environmental consequences," including increased electricity demand to run software and water consumption to cool hardware.

Why You Should Embrace AI (carefully)

On the other hand, many professionals already use AI tools to complete tedious tasks and sift through data, so it's a good idea for you to experiment with AI tools now.

For example, there are a limited number of ways to phrase a brief promotional description of a typical apartment with two bedrooms and two bathrooms. As long as the advertising pitch for the apartment is accurate, readers may not care if it is generated by an AI tool.

Despite concerns about accuracy and ethics, future professionals can probably benefit from understanding how artificial intelligence is used to generate text, audio and visual content.

Quiz Yourself



Consumers face many challenges with judging the authenticity of online photos and videos. You can quiz yourself with the following interactive exercise from The New York Times:

- A.I. Is Getting Better Fast. Can You Tell What's Real Now?

And you can test your ability to identify AI-generated parts of images:

- Which Parts of These Images Are A.I.-Generated?

This quiz checks your skill in spotting AI-generated videos:

- A.I. Videos Have Never Been Better. Can You Tell What's Real?

Finally, you can assess your judgment of AI writing vs. human writing:

- Who's a Better Writer: A.I. or Humans?

(The OER text includes content from The New York Times. If you are University of Arkansas student, you have free access to The New York Times through a confirmation link.)

If you missed several of the questions in the quizzes above, you're not alone. The New York Times reported that even the world's leading deepfake expert no longer trusts his own eyes.

Today broadcast an inside look at feel-good fake videos and the revenue they potentially generate.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=22#oembed-1

Two Closing Jokes (an experiment with ChatGPT)

One drizzly Friday, my collaborator on this textbook project, Alyssa Riley, found some online jokes to share with a few students who needed comic relief. Here are two of the jokes:

JOKE 1 – What did the police officer say to his belly button?

You're under-a-vest

JOKE 2 – How do you get a country girl's attention?

a-tractor

As an informal experiment, Alyssa then asked ChatGPT (free version) to answer those two questions in the context of a joke.

ChatGPT provided a verbatim punch line on the first joke, meaning that the language used for Joke 1 was stored someplace that ChatGPT could locate and replicate.

ChatGPT's response on the second joke, however, demonstrated how a large language model (LLM) can generate odd or unexpected content in ways we may not fully understand.

JOKE 2 – How do you get a country girl's attention?

(ChatGPT Answer) Play a tune on your banjo and ask her if she wants to two-step with you under the stars, but make sure to bring a sweet tea and a pickup truck – because nothing says romance like a tailgate serenade!

I'll admit this was just an amusing experiment with an AI tool. Consider, though, the broader implications when an AI tool generates a similarly random response in a query for specific medical or financial advice instead of the punchline to a joke.

TRUE or FALSE

The following questions highlight a few tidbits of information from the chapter. Use the forward button to advance through the questions.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=22#h5p-45

Short Opening Reflection

Write approximately 300 words summarizing changes in mass media technology that you've observed in your lifetime. In what ways do the media changes you've experienced relate to information and concepts mentioned in the opening chapter?

Include at least one paragraph about the concept of disinformation and the extent to which you previously knew that news content has been manipulated throughout U.S. history. Be sure you have listened to the assigned NPR audio about fake news, and incorporate support from that audio in your response.

Based on the "Quiz Yourself" section in this chapter, you may want to include brief commentary on how you rate your skills in identifying media content that has been manipulated. You can also discuss how often you encounter manipulated content in your daily media routines.

Over your lifetime, do you think changes in your media habits have led you to information that is more reliable or less reliable?

To follow journalistic style, you should write crisply with no more than three or four sentences per paragraph.

(If you are using this OER text as part of an academic course, your instructor may provide additional details or alter the parameters of this writing assignment.)

2.

MEDIA TECHNOLOGY AND THE EVOLUTION OF LANGUAGE

By Dave Bostwick

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=110#h5p-71



When silent movies became popular early in the 20th century, my grandmother (pictured here) had a part-time job improvising mood music on the piano to accompany the action on the screen. But when popular movies began to include sound in the 1930s, local musicians like my grandmother lost their jobs as movie accompanists.

Meanwhile, the advent of recorded sound in movies led to new jobs for script writers, who could now craft language creatively in new formats. At the expense of some musicians, recorded words became an integral part of making movies.

This chapter shows how media history often repeats itself. The disruptive nature of media technology, which can affect jobs as well as language usage, did not start with my grandmother and silent films, though. For the next section, we'll go back somewhere in the vicinity of 400 B.C.

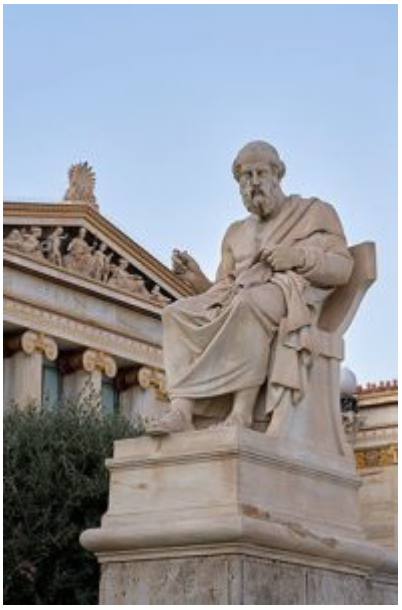
But first, here's a quick question about you.

Your Media Landscape

To help you reflect on your own media interactions and literacy, many chapters in this OER text will open with narrative examples and first-person observations (such as the one above).

Related to the chapter introduction, how could your career and future work duties be impacted by current trends and advancements in mass media technology?

Letters



In Plato's Phaedrus, Socrates recounts a legend about an Egyptian god whose "great discovery" was the use of letters for writing. He showed his discovery to a pharaoh, who feared the discovery would not lead people to wisdom. The pharaoh says ...

> *"... this discovery of yours will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters and not remember of themselves. The specific which you have discovered is an aid not to memory, but to reminiscence, and you give your disciples not truth, but only the semblance of truth; they will be hearers of many things and will have learned nothing."*

You should especially note the line saying that the introduction of letters for writing will give people "not truth, but only the semblance of truth." That sounds a bit like our debates about misinformation and disinformation in digital media today.

Over the centuries, widespread adoption of written words led to less emphasis on oral storytelling traditions passed from generation to generation. The best storytellers and philosophers eventually became writers.

And as writing became a way for information and ideas to spread, some rulers sought to control what their people read. Way back in approximately 200 B.C., China's first emperor, Qin Shi Huang, directed his officials to destroy classic cultural books in history and education. Today's historians believe the emperor did not want the Chinese people to compare his rules to the teachings of Confucius.

Movable Metal Type



Most historians credit the Chinese with the first printing technology that used movable type. In Europe, Johannes Gutenberg's 15th-century innovations using movable metal type enabled mass distribution via the printing press.

The invention of the printing press led to attempts to regulate who could have one. In *The Death of Truth*, Steven Brill wrote that the early printing press "was seen as a breakthrough in advancing learning and knowledge, but also seen as a powerful weapon if used by the wrong people."

The printing press soon impacted language evolution. Before the printing press, spellings were inconsistent due to regional dialects and evolved quickly with pronunciations. If you study the English author Chaucer, for example, you may come across old texts that use *cnicht* or *knyght* where today we consistently spell *knight*.

Here's a brief video that emulates spelling and pronunciation from Chaucer's day, around the year 1400.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=110#oembed-1

Back then, speakers would have pronounced *knyght* (commonly spelled *knight* today) to include all those consonants. As one English instructor said in a video tutorial, you have to pronounce everything and "get phlegmy with it."

Over the centuries, as printed materials were commonly distributed, the spelling of English words became more formalized, and dictionaries became part of the language landscape.

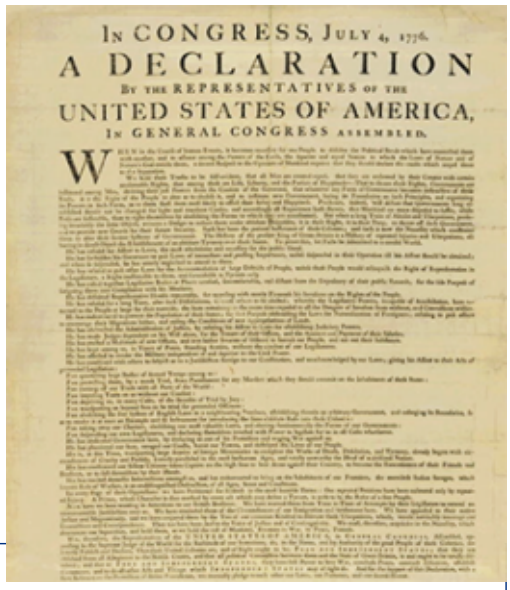
Some linguists use the term *fossilized* to describe words that are spelled the way they were pronounced during the adoption of the printing press. Consider, for example, the inconsistent sounds in these examples that all end in *-ough*:

- Through
- Thorough
- Trough
- Rough
- Bough

Because of the printing press, many English spellings remain largely unchanged from centuries ago, while

pronunciations have evolved. The printing press also led to the need for a new group of language workers, called lexicographers, to compile dictionaries.

Sentence Length


IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776.
A DECLARATION
BY THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,
IN GENERAL CONGRESS ASSEMBLED.
W

Let's focus on the infancy of American English, specifically the year 1776. Here is the opening of The Declaration of Independence:

> *When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.*

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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=110#h5p-14

Compare the opening sentence of the U.S. Declaration of Independence to this excerpt of four sentences from Ernest Hemingway's novel *The Sun Also Rises*, which was published in 1926.

> *It was a fine morning. The horse-chestnut trees in the Luxembourg gardens were in bloom. There was the pleasant early-morning feeling of a hot day. I read the papers with the coffee and then smoked a cigarette.*

In 150 years, how did American English evolve from the free-flowing structure of the Declaration of Independence to Hemingway's sparse style?

Part of the answer lies with advances in media technology. The brief presentation below chronicles a few developments that affected the evolution of our language.

Study the following presentation slides by using the forward button or clicking on sections of the control bar. To enlarge any interactive presentation in this book, click on the lower-right full-screen option (arrows).

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=110#h5p-13

Radio, Television, the Internet …

Our media technology continues to affect our language usage in ways we don't fully realize yet. Here are a few current examples.

- Texting*(capitalization, shortened spellings, emojis)*
- Search-engine optimization techniques that emphasize keywords
- AI-generated text
- Generative-engine optimization *(such as writing text intended for AI large-language models, not humans)*

Many Americans today fear the consequences of our 21st-century tech evolution, much like philosophers feared the danger of written text in Socrates' day. Similarly, in the late 20th century, some research suggested that watching too much television would hinder children's language development.

As another example related to language development, a few state legislatures have mandated cursive writing in public schools so that students do not rely entirely on digital keyboards for writing. One theory holds that cursive writing is more conducive to individual student thinking and learning.

The *Today* video below examines the debate about the need for schools to emphasize cursive writing in schools.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=110#oembed-2

Beyond cursive writing, consider how the communication devices you use today may affect how you write in the future.

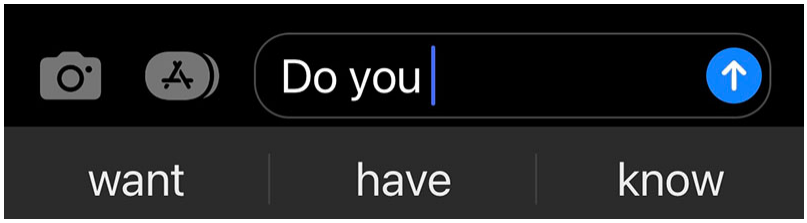
@emojis
FWIW: i think declare of indy wld be diff today ⁄ LMK ur thoughts

Will all 📚 soon be printed with emojis that represent 😿 or 💩 or 🏈?

How could that change the way we define literacy?

More About AI and Writing

We can only guess how AI tools may change our future language usage. Large language models (LLMs) use algorithms that can analyze speech and generate words and phrases in context. If you text on a smartphone, for example, you may have noticed that as you type a text message, the app displays commonly used words that attempt to predict what you may want to type next.



In an online journalism course sponsored by the Knight Center, Sil Hamilton, a language-model researcher, provided the simple example summarized below.

The United States of _____

In a large percentage of instances, an AI tool (such as Chat GPT) will generate **America** as the next word. You can ask the tool to regenerate a response multiple times, but you may never get the word **Pizza**.

On the other hand, if I'm looking for something interesting to read, I'm more likely to engage in a story with this title:

The United States of Pizza

AI tools can work well to give us predictable (sometimes boring) text, but their level of creativity is debatable.

For a conceptual overview of language models, study the following interactive presentation.

Advance through the presentation slides by using the forward button or clicking on sections of the control bar. To enlarge any interactive presentation in this book, click on the lower-right full-screen option (arrows).

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=110#h5p-119

We've seen new employment opportunities and job titles for people who can skillfully use AI tools to generate, edit and publish useful and reliable text. For example, AI programs already require a vast amount of gig workers who sift through and clean language banks that train large language models.

Ironically, there are jobs for copy editors who rewrite AI-generated text to make it sound more human and thereby avoid AI-detection software.

And some media platforms embed AI text-generating and editing tools. One analysis summarized in Wired magazine estimated that "over half of longer English-language posts on LinkedIn are AI-generated."

Future Concerns about LLMs

One impending concern for LLM developers is that their products are consuming high-quality data faster than it is produced. According to Epoch, a research institute, tech companies could run out of data in the late 2020s.



Creative Commons Image from Unsplash

In their search for more and more language data, both Google (Gemini) and OpenAI (ChatGPT) have harvested text from YouTube videos, brushing aside some copyright considerations along the way.

OpenAI founder Sam Altman predicted that tech companies will eventually train their AI products on previous text generated by AI — also known as synthetic data. According to a New York Times article about AI data harvesting, "Since an A.I. model can produce humanlike text, Mr. Altman and others have argued, the systems can create additional data to develop better versions of themselves."

However, some analysts fear that AI-generated text derived from synthetic data will be less reliable and more prone to algorithmic manipulation.

Also, a research analysis from Columbia Journalism Review, titled "How ChatGPT Search (Mis)represents Publisher Content," found that human journalists face a great risk of

their work being misattributed or misrepresented. Experiments with ChatGPT "revealed numerous instances where content from publishers has been cited inaccurately, raising concerns about the reliability of the tool's source attribution features."

And as a closing example of the continuing evolution of large-language models, Americans have mixed opinions about the increasing popularity of religion-based chatbots such as Text with Jesus, Bible Chat and Jesus AI.

These chatbots rely on religious texts as data sources to engage users in spiritual conversations, in some cases including user confessions. Axios compiled details about how churches tap AI to save souls — and time.

The Jesus AI site disclaimer: "The Jesus AI is not meant to replace or represent any religious figure. The generated content is for educational purposes only and may contain inaccuracies and biases."



Screenshot of 2026 start page – Jesus AI

Lots of New Words

Recent choices for Merriam Webster's Word of the Year show the tight connection between our technology and our language.

Gaslighting (2022) – selected in response to the "age of misinformation — of 'fake news,' conspiracy theories, Twitter trolls, and deepfakes."

Authentic (2023) – the selection was "driven by stories and conversations about AI, celebrity culture, identity, and social media," as media audiences struggle to separate truly authentic, desirable content from fake or manipulated content.

Polarization (2024) – selected because the word is "widely used across the media landscape," referring to an environment in which "the opinions, beliefs, or interests of a group or society no longer range along a continuum but become concentrated at opposing extremes."

Slop (2025) – selected in the context of media platforms, referring to "digital content of low quality that is produced usually in quantity by means of artificial intelligence."

Here are two additional examples.

Rage bait – Oxford Word of the Year in 2025. Defined as "online content deliberately designed to

elicit anger or outrage by being frustrating, provocative, or offensive, typically posted in order to increase traffic to or engagement with a particular web page or social media content".

Enshittification – American Dialect Society Word of the Year in 2023. Coined by Cory Doctorow, it describes how digital platforms often become worse over time because they evolve to focus on profit rather than user-friendliness. Doctorow published a best-selling book about enshittification in 2025.

One last term to mention is **brain rot**, which Bottom Line described as the process of users consuming "too much trivial or worthless content online or on social media."

According to a New York Times analysis of how AI and social media contribute to brain rot, "People who rely heavily on chatbots and A.I. search tools for tasks like writing essays and research are generally performing worse than people who don't use them."

Some research related to brain rot is based on the effects of short-form videos. One study cited by NBC News showed that "heavy consumption of short-form video was associated with poorer cognition, especially in regard to attention spans and impulse control."

Recap

Here's a simple chronological overview to hammer home the disruptive nature of media technology.

- Letters disrupted an oral tradition.
- The printing press disrupted the tradition of handwritten manuscripts.
- The telegraph disrupted tangible (printed) media.
- Radio disrupted the evolution of the telegraph.
- Television disrupted the entertainment model of radio.
- The internet disrupted the evolution and popularity of TV, radio, movies, newspaper, books and magazines. It has changed how we define them.
- Computer-generated words and images have forced us to reconsider ownership and appropriate use of content derived from non-human sources. *(However, we don't yet know the extent of disruption caused by AI-generated content.)*

Because of this continually disruptive process over hundreds of years, many workers, such as piano players for silent movies, have been forced to adapt to new media environments.

Closing: A New Declaration

The opening sentence from the Declaration of Independence seems clunky today. Let's use an AI tool to rewrite it as a hipster version.

ChatGPT

Yo, like, we the people of this rad land, totally want to declare our independence and break free from the mainstream vibes imposed by that old-school British scene. It's time to embrace our own groove and pursue life, liberty, and the pursuit of coolness, man! #IndieNation 🇺🇸✌️

Fill in the Blanks

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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=110#h5p-43

Predicting the Future

You've read two chapters that discuss media technology and evolution. Now, your mission is to reflect on recent changes in your own media usage to help you predict the evolution of media tech in the next 25 years, including effects on how we use language.

- Based on the first two chapters and your personal experiences, what significant changes do you foresee in the delivery of information and entertainment? Do recent changes in your own media consumption habits reflect any future trends in delivery of future content?
- How will today's newest media technologies affect how we communicate and use language in the future? Have you noticed any recent changes in your own language usage that has been affected by the evolution of technology?
- How will future consumers determine which media content has value for them? How has your judgment about the value of media content changed in recent years due to the evolution of our technology?

Try to cite supporting information from the first two chapters and/or linked sources.

You can write your response in paragraph text, typically between 200 and 300 words. To follow journalistic style, you should write crisply with no more than three or four sentences per paragraph.

For this assignment, you may prefer to respond through audio or narrated video.

(If you are using this OER text as part of an academic course, your instructor may provide additional submission details.)

3.

TRAVERSING OUR MASS MEDIA LANDSCAPE

By Dave Bostwick

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=1452#h5p-129

We're All Vulnerable

I want to give you a very personal example about my father. He read two newspapers every day, watched a local news broadcast every evening, and remained highly informed his entire life.



A few years before he died, media coverage of bed bugs spiked, and one morning he woke up with itchy ankles. He was convinced his house had been invaded by bed bugs, and thus began two years of expenditures on a variety of bed-bug eradication strategies, even though he lived alone with few visitors and there was never any physical evidence that bed bugs were in the house.

He didn't suffer from dementia, but it became difficult to have a conversation with him to suggest that, in fact, there might not be any bed bugs in the house. His age may have had something to do with this, but I think our media landscape contributed to the problem as well.

By studying audience analytics, editors and advertisers at the time knew that bed bugs were a trending topic, so my father continued seeing and reading content about bed bugs, such as the following:


LIFESTYLE

Mom's 70th birthday cruise ruined by massive bed bug infestation: 'Literally crawling on me'

Headline – New York Post

- National news articles about bed bug outbreaks in major cities, especially in hotels
- Local news stories that piggy-backed on the bed bug phenomenon
- Advertisements for products to combat bed bugs with sales pitches to make it seem like bed bugs are everywhere

To some extent, we're all susceptible to media manipulation. Part of being media literate may be acknowledging that we're not as invulnerable as we think we are.

And to be fair, as the screenshot below suggests, there are companies that spend ad money in a good-faith attempt to help consumers avoid problems such as bed bugs in the first place.



YOUR MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Can you think of an instance when social media posts, news coverage or advertisements caused personal fear or anxiety that you had not previously experienced?

More Than One Viewpoint

The following introductory presentation outlines a few key points about the importance of finding multiple points of view.

Study the following presentation slides by using the forward button or clicking on sections of the control bar. To enlarge any interactive presentation in this book, click on the lower-right full-screen option (arrows).



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=1452#h5p-73

If you were intrigued by the opening flip-card question that asked how you define news, you can study more by perusing the following summary from the Pew Research Center.

- What Is News? – How Americans decide what 'news' means to them – and how it fits into their lives in the digital era

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Broad Perspective

In the first chapter, you read about how some early American historical figures, such as Ben Franklin, concocted stories to gain political support. In future chapters, you'll learn about sensationalized newspaper stories during the period of yellow journalism, and you'll study how television quiz show scandals in the 1950s led some Americans to distrust what they saw on television.

For additional perspectives, read content under the the following four tabs, keeping in mind that many of us are both media consumers and content creators, especially via social media.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=1452#h5p-74

Trust and News Availability

Many Americans say they want objective, facts-only news. They complain about seeing too much biased coverage. However, there is often a difference between what we say and what we do, especially when you consider that social media has overtaken television as Americans' top news source.

For example, the Associated Press News and Reuters offer mostly traditional, objective news content. Both outlets have loyal followers, but not huge audience shares.

Conversely, MS NOW (formerly MSNBC) on the political left and Fox News on the right have generally been successful and profitable in offering subjective viewpoints and commentary based on their audience preferences.

In addition, clickbait articles and ads seem ubiquitous online, mainly because they sometimes work. That's the opposite of what many Americans *say* they want.

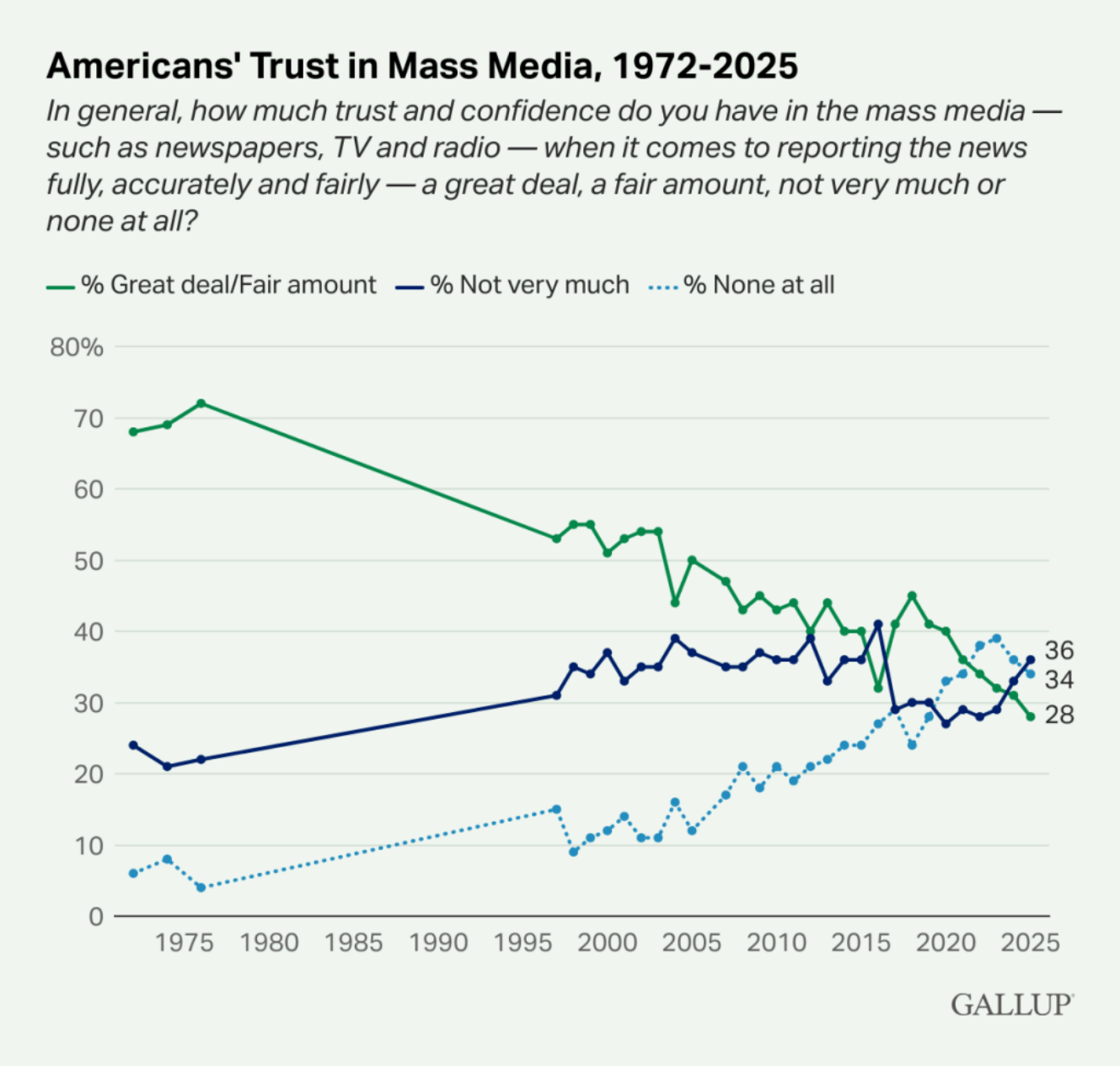


Wikimedia image

The outlook for objective news on the local level isn't encouraging. One article from Harvard's Nieman Lab reported that most Americans say local news is important, but they're consuming less of it. A declining interest in news altogether is "most pronounced among younger Americans."

Furthermore, Americans' trust in media is at an all-time low. In a 2025 Gallup poll, only 28% of Americans expressed a "great deal" or "fair amount" of confidence in news outlet to report the news "fully, accurately and fairly,"

The chart below from Gallup illustrates the decline in media trust.



Gallup chart (available for download)

Not surprisingly, a Pew Research study found the 90% of U.S. adults said they encounter news they think is inaccurate. Slightly more than half of them said it is difficult to determine what is true when they get news.

Due to declining audiences and diminishing trust, a New York Times analysis predicted the U.S. news business will become grimmer.

> *The pain is particularly pronounced at the community level. An average of five local newspapers are closing every two weeks, according to Northwestern University's Medill School, with more than half of all American counties now so-called news deserts with limited access to news about their hometowns. Of 1,100 public radio stations and affiliates, only about one in five is producing local journalism.*

A separate report from a non-profit group found that more than 1,000 U.S. counties — one out of three in the nation — do not have the equivalent of even one full-time local journalist. This impacts local citizens and may be a consideration for students interested in local journalism as a career.

In a related trend, news avoidance has increased in the United States and worldwide. According to survey results published in the Reuters Institute's 2026 Digital News Report, 42 percent of respondents from 48 countries said that they sometimes or often actively avoid the news. Only 29 percent gave a similar response in 2017.

A Firehose of Content

As artificial intelligence impacts our lives in ways we may not fully comprehend, it's harder to define and categorize which daily media interactions count as part of the mass media landscape.

The following video from Vox emphasizes that we're already using AI more than we realize. Appropriately enough, the video is sponsored by an AI platform.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=1452#oembed-1

Before the internet led to 24/7 connectivity and paved the way for social media and AI, most Americans only consumed media content through traditional outlets like newspapers, magazines, television, movies and radio.

Today, almost everyone contributes to the media landscape. We're no longer just consumers; we're also creators and contributors on social media and various interactive websites.

We have avenues to share photos with friends on Instagram or post an AI-generated deepfake image of Taylor Swift on X. We can share important safety updates to a community group on Facebook or create a counterfeit robo-call that impersonates a U.S. president.

What's really different today is the firehose of content that washes over us each day and the increasing complexity in determining which content is authentic and truthful.

In an essay titled "Your AI Use Is Breaking My Brain," Jason Koebler summarized today's digital media landscape.

> *Our brains are now performing untold numbers of calculations per day: Is this AI? Do I care if it's AI? Why does this sound or look or read so weird? Does this person just write like this? Is this a person at all?*

An AI Statement With Impact

Here's a fascinating courtroom example that illustrates both the potential and the complexity of creating and interpreting impactful AI content.

Gabriel Paul Horcasitas fatally shot Christopher Pelkey at a red light in 2021. As part of a sentencing hearing, Pelkey's sister created an AI-generated video to depict how her late brother likely would have addressed the courtroom before Horcasitas' formal sentencing. According to an NPR report, Pelkey's sister said that she "could hear Chris' voice in my head and he's like, 'I forgive him.'"

In the video below, the AI-generated version of Christopher Pelkey speaks directly to his shooter: "It is a shame we encountered each other that day in those circumstances. In another life, we probably could have been friends. I believe in forgiveness and in God who forgives. I always have and I still do."



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=1452#oembed-2

Poison Screens

I opened the chapter with a personal example about my father. But it's not just the elderly who can suffer negative consequences from our media ecosystem. Recent research suggests that teenagers are often negatively impacted, as you'll see in the following presentation.

Study the following presentation slides by using the forward button or clicking on sections of the control bar. To enlarge any interactive presentation in this book, click on the lower-right full-screen option (arrows).



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=1452#h5p-76

This is a theme you'll see in future chapters as well. A few government officials have even called for tobacco-style warning labels on social media platforms to advise parents about the potential risks for adolescents' mental health.

Some states set up protocols for eliminating students' access to social media during school hours, such as the "Bell to Bell No Cell" law in Arkansas.

And some state legislatures and public schools have gone beyond social media bans and set limits for classroom screen time in general. For example, according to guidelines adopted in 2026 for public schools in Fayetteville, Arkansas, kindergartners and first graders are limited to 30 minutes of screen time per school day, while that limit increases to 45 minutes for second and third graders.

Beyond U.S. borders, Australia passed a law barring everyone under the age of 16 from social media, and France was the first European country to implement a similar social-media ban for anyone under 15. The British government passed its own law taking effect in 2027. Other countries are limiting children's access to smartphones as well, including South Korea, Denmark, Brazil and New Zealand.



Public Domain Image

However, critics of these social media bans say they will cause children to be less informed on news and politics.

Social media companies may be partly to blame for this backlash. New York Times reporter Jennifer Valentino-DeVries analyzed how tech giants tried to grab children's attention throughout the day. Her reporting revealed the following insights:

- "Snapchat sent phone alerts to adolescents during school hours, urging them to share what was going on in their classrooms."
- "Meta paid 'teen ambassadors' to promote Instagram and hand out swag to their friends at school."
- "TikTok gave the National PTA millions of dollars, in part to throw school events about online safety and provide favorable comments to journalists."

Of course, it's not just teenagers who can be negatively affected by social media usage. According to one economic research study, social media users perceive that social media has negative economic value and is often addictive rather than helpful.



Creative Commons Image – Unsplash

A summary of the research from Harvard's Nieman Lab said, "The findings suggest social media is worth less to us than the zero we pay for it. That we would be better off without it."

In a New York Times analysis of smartphone usage, some sources suggested we need to recalibrate our relationship with technology. It's hard to differentiate between correlation and causation, but the analysis included this observation:

> *By many measures, American society has become angrier, more polarized and less healthy during the same period that smartphones have revolutionized daily life.*

Perspectives on Media Literacy

Our media technology continues to impact our language usage, our daily routines, and our tools for finding reliable information.

As comedian John Mulaney observed about online bots, "We spend most of our day telling them that we're NOT a robot just to log on and look at our own stuff."

Even media professionals don't fully understand the increasingly complex landscape in which they work, especially related to AI-generated content.

With this firehose of good and bad content in mind, our chapter should end with some perspectives about media literacy.

Study the following presentation slides by using the forward button or clicking on sections of the control bar. To enlarge any interactive presentation in this book, click on the lower-right full-screen option (arrows).



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=1452#h5p-77

The presentation above should also come with a disclaimer, though.

One widely publicized research study concluded that asking people to "do the research" on fake news stories can make the stories seem more believable, not less. Algorithms and AI tools sometimes give people more of the same intentionally erroneous or misleading information that they are trying to fact-check.

You'll have additional perspectives about media literacy in future chapters.

A Better Society Through Media?

In *The Death of Truth*, Steven Brill explained why it is imperative for Americans to work collectively toward re-establishing trust in today's media landscape.

Living together fruitfully and happily is about trust. Enough people must trust the same facts and trust each other to rely on facts for societies to make decisions based on those facts.

True or False

The following questions highlight a few tidbits of information from the chapter. Use the forward button to advance through the questions.



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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=1452#h5p-78

Media Diary Assignment

Before you begin this assignment, I encourage you to read a New York Times account of "one week without smartphones on a college campus," also called a "tech fast." The article could give you ideas for contemplating your own media habits.

THE TASK

Track your own interaction with mass media for at least three days, including radio, television, books, newspapers and magazines as well as your use of computers, tablets and smartphones as they relate to mass media consumption. Your digital consumption can include social media, websites and smartphone apps.

- If you are mindlessly web surfing or checking Facebook, TikTok or Instagram, that counts.
- If you are typing a personal essay on your laptop or using your smartphone as a calculator for a math project, that does NOT count.
- If you are texting on your smartphone, that does NOT count unless you are sending a message to a very large group.

- If you are reading a book/magazine/newspaper (online or in print) either for pleasure or for a class assignment, that counts. And if you studied this OER chapter, that counts.
- Of course, if you are consuming any media for entertainment, that counts (including streaming video from outlets such as Netflix or YouTube).

You should record specific amounts of time spent and information about content consumption so that your written analysis can include actual data.

Also, discuss the types of advertisements that you see, and note any unexpected places where you see ads. As an example, you may play a video game that doesn't seem to clearly fit this assignment. However, if the game includes ads, that would count.

RESPONSES

Write a short (approximately 400 to 500 words) paper summarizing the highlights of your findings. Include some specific data in your paper, and feel free to include a chart or graph. You can also add supporting details from this chapter for comparison with your own media usage.

Following are some recommended discussion points for your response:

- What patterns and habits did you find in your media usage? (include specific data, including news vs. entertainment)
- What benefits do you derive from media consumption?
- In what ways, if any, does your media consumption hinder your personal productivity?
- How do you think your media consumption affects your personal viewpoints?
- How much of your media interaction involves news and information as opposed to entertainment.
- In what ways do your media consumption habits differ from the typical American consumer? *(feel free to conduct additional research to answer this question)*
- What observations can you make about advertising in your daily media consumption, and in what ways does advertising affect your media habits?

You can organize your submission with a short, engaging introduction followed by a Q&A format and a brief conclusion. Feel free to include visuals, such as a chart. In the conclusion, explain what you learned about yourself and the media you consume.

4.

THE MEDIA BUSINESS: CONGLOMERATES AND CONTROL

By Dave Bostwick

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=194#h5p-80

Opening Example: The Business of ESPN

Most U.S. sports fans spend a lot of time watching ESPN. Beyond the on-air broadcasters, commentators, analysts and reporters, many other media workers contribute to what ESPN's audiences see and hear. Writers, editors and graphic artists prepare special video packages for live games and various other shows, including SportsCenter. Camera operators and producers are crucial contributors, especially for live game coverage.



Walt Disney Company owns ESPN, and executives from Disney and ESPN have made strategic decisions about when to air certain games on which outlets, such as ESPN, ESPN2, ESPNU, ESPN Select and the SEC Network. Disney also owns ABC, so occasionally audiences can choose between competing broadcasts of the same big-time game offered live on ESPN and ABC, with different commentary and analysis on each network.

Furthering its dominance in sports broadcasting, ESPN acquired the NFL Network in 2025 to form a strategic partnership between the NFL and ESPN.

At some point during ESPN game broadcasts, a promotional item may suggest that viewers seek more live game info from the ESPN website or through a social media platform.

Viewers may also see in-game promotions for DraftKings, which is ESPN's official sportsbook and odds provider. (As a side note, one research study showed that sports fans spend up to 20% of every game watching various gambling advertisements).

For the most part, companies and their employees, not the U.S. government, make business decisions about

the media content we consume. These decisions are often tied to revenue. No governmental officials have told ESPN executives that they have to air certain games at certain times or promote specific items or actions while broadcasting a game.

Your Media Landscape

If you are planning a media-related career, how do you envision money will be generated to pay your salary?

If you are NOT planning a media-related career, in what ways could mass media content and technologies still impact your employer's business model?

Media Control

Let's shift from ESPN to the broader landscape of U.S. media as a whole.

In the United States, direct governmental media control is limited compared to most other countries. A 2026 survey of internet censorship showed the United States as one of the less-censored countries in the world, but still ranked behind Canada and several European and South American countries.

Since Donald Trump was elected U.S. president in 2024, however, Americans' opinions about free press have increasingly depended on political affiliation. A Pew survey showed that among Republicans, the share who described the press as "completely free" increased from 29% to 42% between April 2024 and March 2025. Among Democrats, the number decreased from 38% to 25%.

The following presentation explains some governmental influences on American media content.

Study the presentation slides by using the forward button or clicking on sections of the control bar. To enlarge any interactive presentation in this book, click on the lower-right full-screen option (arrows).



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=194#h5p-130

From a global perspective, the most restrictive countries include North Korea, China, Iran, Iraq, and Russia,

where content may be subject to government approval or created entirely by the governments themselves. This typically is not the case in the United States.

For example, Russian law prohibited the use of "war" or "invasion" in coverage of Russia's military conflict with Ukraine. The government-approved term: "special military operation."



CC0 Image

Many governments with internet infrastructure suppress criticism and protect power by banning foreign websites and platforms. For example, the government in India forced social networks to limit content that was critical of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

And in 2024, Brazilian authorities banned X (formerly Twitter) and ordered Apple and Google to remove the X app from iOS and Android devices in Brazil, although the ban was later lifted.

The organization Reporters Without Borders observed the concerning trend that "press freedom around the world is being threatened by the very people who should be its guarantors – political authorities."

Here's a flip-card question to emphasize a key distinction.

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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=194#h5p-82

That's not to say that governmental entities never intervene in media matters, as you saw in the in the presentation above and you'll read later in this chapter's section about TikTok. Generally speaking, though, business owners have more control over media content than the U.S. government.

Freedom of Speech for Whom?

In the heyday of U.S. print newspapers and the printing press, a popular expression said that freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one. That concept from U.S. media history repeated itself in 2013 when Amazon founder Jeff Bezos purchased The Washington Post and in 2022 when Tesla co-founder Elon Musk acquired Twitter (which was soon rebranded as X).

Today, one could update the expression to say that freedom of speech is guaranteed to those who own communications satellites. According to an analysis from the Space Daily website, by mid-2026 roughly two

out of every three active satellites orbiting Earth belonged to Starlink, a company run by Elon Musk through SpaceX.



Cartoon by Ann Telnaes

It can be difficult to judge the extent to which powerful media figures and businesses directly control what we see and read. For example, in early 2025, editors of The Washington Post rejected a cartoon (shown above) that depicted Bezos, Musk and other media figures (including Mickey Mouse to represent Disney) offering money and/or loyalty to a statue of Donald Trump. The Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist, Ann Telnaes, immediately resigned and wrote a column on Substack titled "Why I'm Quitting the Washington Post."

A Post editor said he disagreed with Telnaes' interpretation of the events that led to the cartoon being rejected. Telnaes, however, said the decision to kill her cartoon was "dangerous for a free press."

One month later, the newspaper's opinions editor resigned in protest after Bezos sent an office memo to the

the staff. Bezos memo told the opinions staff that "we are going to be writing every day in support and defense of two pillars: personal liberties and free markets."

Media Conglomerates

Some companies are so gargantuan that they own lots of other large companies. The chapter introduction mentioned that the Disney conglomerate owns ESPN and ABC, for example.

Please spend some time exploring the labeled web links in the following presentation slides, paying attention to the companies and assets owned by each media conglomerate.

Study the presentation slides by using the forward button or clicking on sections of the control bar. To enlarge any interactive presentation in this book, click on the lower-right full-screen option (arrows).



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=194#h5p-15

You may be wondering why Netflix didn't appear in the presentation slides above. For now, Netflix is a single huge company focusing primarily on one business through one medium, which is entertainment video. Netflix does not own a bunch of other subsidiary media companies.

Conglomerates occasionally grow so large that the federal government intervenes. In 2024, for example, a judge ruled that Google had become a monopoly that prevented fair competition. One concern involved Google making deals with Apple for Google to be the default search engine for the Safari web browser on iPhones, iPads and Mac computers, thus limiting consumers' choices for online search tools and dissuading other companies from developing new search products.

Another case brought by the Justice Department questioned Google's monopoly in online advertising markets.

And as an addendum to the impact of governmental figures on social media platforms, Meta agreed to pay President Donald Trump $25 million in 2025 to settle a lawsuit that Trump originally filed in 2021 shortly after Trump's Facebook and Instagram accounts had been suspended.

What About TikTok?

Until 2026, the version of TikTok used by Americans was owned and operated by the Chinese media conglomerate ByteDance. TikTok has an interesting regulatory history in the United States.

As TikTok rose to popularity in the 2020s, many U.S. parents and politicians became concerned about TikTok's collection of private data as well as its influence on users, especially teenagers. A New York Times article said U.S. lawmakers and regulators feared that "TikTok could share sensitive data about the location, personal habits and interests of Americans with the Chinese government," and that the app could be used to spread propaganda.

The NY Times article also noted that "TikTok itself is not available in China — users there must access a different ByteDance app, which follows Chinese government directives on censorship and propaganda."

In 2023, the chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee said on *Face the Nation* that the Chinese equivalent of TikTok gives Chinese youth far more STEM-related content to shape their interests toward those careers. Conversely, in the United States, popular social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, X and Snapchat are not required to shape their content to push younger users toward educational goals, such as promoting STEM careers.

In 2024, members of the U.S. Congress passed legislation, signed into law by President Joe Biden, to ban TikTok nationwide or force ByteDance to sell TikTok. This decision relates to the earlier chapter section titled "Media Control," as the Chinese government can require Chinese companies (such as ByteDance) to share user data and run businesses in a manner that benefits the Chinese government. This is typically not the case for U.S. media companies.

In January 2024, Shou Zi Chew, who was TikTok's CEO at the time, testified during a U.S. Senate inquiry about Online Child Safety , which led to this confrontation between Missouri Republican Sen. Josh Hawley and Chew.

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Hawley's style at times was confrontational, but this was not just a politically partisan debate. Democrats also criticized TikTok.

In January 2026, TikTok announced an agreement between U.S. and Chinese officials so that an American version of TikTok will remain available to more than 150 million active TikTok users in the United States.

As a result of the 2026 agreement, the U.S. version of TikTok became a jointly owned venture among several companies, and ByteDance's ownership stake was reduced to approximately 20%.

Due to state (not federal) laws, TikTok is still banned from Wi-Fi connections on some college campuses, including the University of Arkansas.

Net Neutrality

Now we'll look at a long-evolving debate related to internet control and access in the United States.

Differing views about net neutrality have raged for more than two decades. Here's a fun (but maybe opinionated) 2018 video from Burger King that tried to explain net neutrality via the Whopper.



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The video is humorous and provides an interesting case study in corporate advertising for public relations advocacy. The video isn't directly trying to sell Whoppers; instead, it tries to make viewers feel as if Burger King is on their side about the need for net neutrality.

For our purpose in this chapter, though, the video effectively frames one part of the net neutrality debate: Should media companies be allowed to control tiers of internet access and content?

As a simple example, if Media Business A pays an internet service company to prioritize speedy online connections for consumers to access streaming content from Media Business A, does this put the much smaller Media Business B at an unfair disadvantage? Media Business B may be new and unable to pay an internet service company so that consumers enjoy speedier connections.

(Or put another way, would it be OK for Netflix to pay internet service companies more money to ensure the Netflix subscribers have a faster, more reliable connection, even if that puts some of Netflix's smaller competitors at a disadvantage?)

Let's consider a few policy questions in the following presentation.

Study the presentation slides by using the forward button or clicking on sections of the control bar. To enlarge any interactive presentation in this book, click on the lower-right full-screen option (arrows).



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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=194#h5p-16

One net neutrality group, the Electronic Frontier Foundation, provides this definition: "Network neutrality is the idea that internet service providers (ISPs) should treat all data that travels over their networks fairly, without discrimination in favor of particular apps, sites or services."

The evolving debate has already taken several twists and turns. Federal net neutrality laws were repealed in 2018. However, in 2024 the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) reclassified broadband as a public utility, much like water and electricity, which would have strengthened the government's ability to monitor and enforce net neutrality regulations.

In early 2025, though, a federal appeals court struck down the FCC regulations, ending governmental attempts to regulate broadband internet providers as utilities. This ended net neutrality on the federal level, for now, but the debate continues as a matter of philosophical fairness.

A key question is whether internet access should be considered a right or a privilege.

Data Collection and Protection

We've briefly discussed who controls what we see, watch, read, and hear in U.S. media**.** Due to widespread adoption of the internet, we could add one more question. Who controls and safeguards the data that is collected as we consume and interact with mass media platforms?



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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=194#h5p-83

Through IP addresses and other personal identifiers, it's easy for media conglomerates to collect data for future research or sales. With artificial intelligence, some of these processes become more automated.

A programmer for Research Company A can collect data and include a privacy statement about data usage for research only. That may not prevent Data Company B from purchasing Research Company A's data and then selling it to advertisers (now twice removed from the source) or Advertising Company C.

For example, an investigative article in Vice described how the U.S. military bought location data from ordinary apps. It featured this subheadline:

> *A Muslim prayer app with over 98 million downloads is one of the apps connected to a wide-ranging supply chain that sends ordinary people's personal data to brokers, contractors, and the military.*

The article noted that several app developers "did not know their users' location data was being sent to defense contractors."

More recently, a New York Times report chronicled how the Pentagon tried to hide that it bought Americans' data without a warrant. The article detailed the workaround for law enforcement officials to purchase broad swaths of data rather than target individual users' phone records.

> *Obtaining location data from U.S. phones normally requires a warrant, but police and intelligence agencies routinely pay companies instead for the data, effectively circumventing the courts.*

Closing Thought

Consider two competing interests that surfaced in this chapter.

- Large global media conglomerates seek to profit from worldwide consumers.
- Many countries attempt to limit or control citizens' access to outside information.

You may occasionally hear the term "walled gardens" referring to each country having its own regulations for governmental control of media.

In the future, large media companies may be forced to alter products, entertainment and information based on the conflicting regulations in hundreds of worldwide walled gardens.

Fill in the Blanks

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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=194#h5p-56

Media Conglomerates

Pick two of the major conglomerates included in this chapter's presentation about media conglomerates. As a reminder, here are your choices.

- Disney
  (Focus on media-related companies by scrolling down the web page to the section titled "Disney Entertainment.")
- Google
  (Scroll down the web page to the section titled "Google Products.")
- Meta
  (Includes Facebook, Instagram and more)
- USA Today Co.
  (Formerly Gannett, the company's brands include specialty content and local publications)
- Paramount
  (Recently merged with Skydance to become Paramount Skydance Corporation)
- Warner Bros. Discovery
  (*Remains a separate entity for now but may be acquired by Paramount Skydance in the future)*

- NBCUniversal
  (Media subsidiary of an even larger conglomerate, Comcast, but it could become a standalone company in 2027)

- Versant
  (Mostly cable networks previously owned by NBCUniversal)

The links above and in the chapter presentation about media conglomerates will be good starting points, but you can search for additional information outside the chapter content if needed. Be sure to explore each conglomerate thoroughly. Don't just rely on copying or rephrasing website promotional text in your responses.

Task A

List five prominent media outlets, companies or products that each one of your two selected conglomerates owns. Write a one-sentence description for each of the 10 media properties that you list for your two conglomerates. Pick examples with which you are familiar or want to learn more about; don't automatically list the first five you see on each conglomerate website.

(You will list 5 properties for each conglomerate for a total of 10 properties, with a one-sentence description for each of your 10 properties.)

Task B

Write at least two separate paragraphs (at least one paragraph for each conglomerate) detailing what you learned in your research about the two conglomerates you studied, especially related to your personal media usage. Detail ways you interact with content from these conglomerates, and what surprised you most from this assignment.

Avoid repeating PR content from the conglomerate websites, especially if that content is used to promote how a conglomerate contributes to the health and well-being of society. Focus on your own media consumption related to content provided by your two selected conglomerates.

Follow journalistic style with no more than three sentences per paragraph.

5.

JOURNALISM: OCCUPATION OR SKILLSET?

By Dave Bostwick

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=277#h5p-84

From Rodeo Photographer to OER Author

I began my career as a small-town newspaper reporter. My primary role was in sports, but I also did some general news reporting, editing, photography and page design. Occasionally, I even had to write stock-market updates, edit wedding announcements and deliver printed newspapers to homes in the area.



(public domain image)

I was thrilled with the occasional opportunities to cover major college football games across Texas and Oklahoma. However, most of my duties were local, including rodeos, dirt-track car racing, and lots of high school sports. I was required to wear cowboy boots and a cowboy hat before I was allowed to take pictures in most rodeo arenas.

Today, my journalistic passion is to compile Open Educational Resource (OER) texts such as this one, and I am decades removed from my early days as a newspaper reporter.

Like me, many of you will expect a smooth, straight path as you begin your professional journey, only to encounter winding roads or bumpy detours as your career progresses.

Your Media Landscape

Whether you're covering rodeos or updating a company's personnel policy, the journalistic ability to collect and verify accurate information can be valuable.

In the career that you envision for yourself, whether it's related to mass media or not, when will collecting and verifying accurate information be a helpful skill?

Occupation or Skillset?

Jobs in traditional journalistic realms, especially print newspapers, have been dwindling for more than a decade.

As a result, companies and organizations often produce their own feature stories, videos, social media posts and other content. Job opportunities have increased in a variety of areas that emphasize giving consumers timely, accurate information beyond traditional news.

Overall, the demand for workers in media-related jobs has remained surprisingly robust despite some struggles in the journalism industry.

This leads to a key question: Is journalism an occupation or a skillset?

Journalistic skills, especially the ability to communicate clearly and concisely, can be helpful in almost any occupation.

For the purposes of this chapter, we'll treat journalism as a skillset and explore some jobs beyond traditional newsrooms. These jobs still require journalistic skills that are covered in the presentation below.

Study the following presentation slides by using the forward button or clicking on sections of the control bar. To enlarge any interactive presentation in this book, click on the lower-right full-screen option (arrows).



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=277#h5p-18

Colleges are responding to this change. For example, in 2022 the School of Journalism and Strategic Media at the University of Arkansas launched a new major concentration called Multimedia Storytelling and Production. It falls under the umbrella of journalism, but it is geared toward students who don't picture themselves working as traditional news reporters.

Forecasts

The Occupational Outlook Handbook, published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, provides the following overall pay data for media and communication jobs.

> *The median annual wage for media and communication workers (such as public relations specialists, news analysts, and writers and authors) was $70,300 in May 2024, which was higher than the median annual wage for all occupations of $49,500.*

The brief presentation below provides data for few specific jobs that typically require a bachelor's degree:

Study the following presentation slides by using the forward button or clicking on sections of the control bar. To enlarge any interactive presentation in this book, click on the lower-right full-screen option (arrows).



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=277#h5p-19

And here's a New York Times forecast about the future of job interviews:

- Welcome to Your Job Interview. Your Interviewer Is A.I. – *You thought artificial intelligence was coming for your job? First, it's coming for your job interviewer.*

The article said that as organizations try to operate more efficiently, more job candidates should expect more interviews conducted through AI tools.

It's perhaps ironic that some job-seekers will use AI to generate their resumes, and those resumes may in turn be initially reviewed through an AI interview process.

One Professor's Perspective

Cindy Royal, the director of the Media Innovation Lab at Texas State University, wrote for Harvard's Nieman Lab that most journalism graduates in the 2020s "probably aren't going to work as reporters and editors."

> *The good news is that there are jobs (journalism graduates) can fill. Important jobs. Jobs that influence storytelling and affect democratic ideals. These are jobs across industries that rely on the conception, development, and maintenance of digital products. And these products aren't going to manage themselves!*

Echoing the earlier chapter presentation about journalistic skills. Royal added that employers are looking for the following:

> *... people who can integrate the rigor of strong communication skills and ethics with technology savvy to develop digital products.*
>
> *... people who can understand audience needs and the ways in which the elements of digital products affect information dissemination, audience engagement, and civic participation.*
>
> *"... people who can influence the direction of digital products and platforms in all industries, hopefully for the greater good.*

The Jobs Landscape

If journalism, including strategic media, is among your career considerations, it's a good idea to check employment sites such as Indeed every month to familiarize yourself with job descriptions and availability. That can help you assess skills you need to develop and prepare you for the day you actually enter the job market.

Indeed has also compiled specific career advice about journalistic skills.

- Which Journalism Skills Are in Demand? – Indeed

I checked media-related Indeed jobs in a large Midwestern city and found lots of interesting openings:

- content editors at a non-profit hospital
- communications strategist for a medical association
- senior writer for a research group
- web specialist for a department store chain.

And here's a sample of job titles for positions outside of traditional newsrooms:

- digital content producer
- communications coordinator
- social media manager
- motion designer
- video producer
- documentary filmmaker
- content coordinator

What About AI?

AI tools that generate words and images are like digital parrots. They process and repeat words, phrases and pixels, but they can't interpret or understand meaning and values.

With that in mind, professional judgment about appropriate use of AI content has become a hirable skill. For example, NBC described how humans are being hired to make AI look less sloppy.

A related trend is an expansion of media job duties to include generating, fact-checking and editing AI-driven content.

Final Thoughts

If you seek a media-related career, your professional path probably won't be a smooth, straight road. That doesn't mean you can't enjoy the journey.

Also, consider how your media habits as a consumer might be inconsistent with your goals as a media professional.

As consumers, we often seek free content, and we may avoid advertising. We want to save money and time.

However, if you assume a role as a media professional, you may need to entice paying consumers, attract audiences with promotions, and make pitches to potential advertisers. Otherwise, where will the money for your salary come from?

TRUE or FALSE

The following questions highlight a few tidbits of information from the chapter. Use the forward button to advance through the questions.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=277#h5p-58

Career Contemplation

After you've read the chapter, here are a few questions to ponder.

1. What are your career aspirations and how are they related to your perception of journalism?
2. Which journalistic skills are your strengths?
3. Which journalistic skills do you need to improve the most?
4. Are you discouraged or encouraged about the evolution of journalism?
5. How important is salary in your career choice?

6.

MEDIA LAW

By Dave Bostwick

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=306#h5p-86



Like many Americans, when I see a speed limit of 55 miles per hour on a long stretch of highway, I often drive a bit faster than that. I may be breaking the law at 60, but I do not feel ethically obligated to drive 55 or slower, especially when other cars whiz by me going much faster.

On the other hand, if I were to drive 85 mph on that same highway, I would become anxious about endangering myself and others. Driving that fast would feel unethical and selfish to me.

Conversely, if a dire emergency arose and I needed to transport a friend or family member to a hospital immediately (no time for an ambulance), I might consider it an ethical imperative to exceed the speed limit by a wider margin, even though I would be breaking the law.

Our laws are often based on ethical behavior for an orderly society. However, my opening examples suggest that we sometimes perceive differences between law and ethics.

Our legal systems are based on external rules to govern members of a society. Everyone is supposed to follow these rules or risk legal consequences, which may involve punishment.

On the other hand, our ethical codes are internal guidelines for morality and conduct. The guidelines often are not binding.

This chapter focuses primarily on media law, and then in the following chapter, we'll spend more time studying media ethics.

Your Media Landscape

Which of the following concepts do you support more?

Concept 1 – Americans would benefit from additional legal restrictions and legislative oversight of media content, especially if it helps prevent chaos and misinformation.

Concept 2 – Due to the importance of the First Amendment, restrictions on U.S. media content should be extremely limited, even if some content seems intentionally offensive or untrustworthy.

The Fourth Estate

Journalists have traditionally functioned as an unofficial fourth estate (or branch) of government, acting as a watchdog over government affairs. When journalists cover city council meetings or state legislative sessions, for example, they ideally represent all citizens to hold elected officials accountable for their actions and ensure that our democratic processes are transparent.

The First Amendment specifically says that Congress cannot make laws that abridge freedom of the press.

When you hear politicians complain about news media coverage, keep in mind that the Bill of Rights' original purpose was to protect citizens' rights. By design, the First Amendment creates a sometimes-adversarial relationship between government entities and journalists.

> 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.
>
> The First Amendment

(Mostly) Free Speech

The U.S. Bill of Rights guarantees freedom of speech and press, but there are a few exceptions for media

content that is published or broadcast. The interactive presentation below explains some legal exceptions when we can't just publish or broadcast anything we want.

Study the presentation slides by using the forward button or clicking on sections of the control bar. To enlarge any interactive presentation in this book, click on the lower-right full-screen option (arrows).

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=306#h5p-22

In the presentation above, the concept of libel is applied to people. However, in certain instances, **a company can sue for libel as well.** For example, in 2023, Fox News paid Dominion Voting Systems $787 million to settle a libel suit.

Dominion executives said the reputation of their company had been damaged because Fox News had broadcast false claims about the reliability of Dominion voting machines in the 2020 election.

According to a PBS summary of the settlement between Fox News and Dominion, the lawsuit records showed how Fox hosts and executives did not believe that Dominion machines were unreliable but aired false claims anyway.

Social Media Addiction and Legal Trends

As you saw in chapter 3, legislators have passed laws to curb children's social media usage. Judges and juries have entered the legal fray as well.

For example, a jury in New Mexico ordered Meta to pay $375 million for violating state consumer protection laws , in part because jurors found that Meta had enabled the sexual exploitation of younger users. In the same court case, a judge later ordered Meta to pay an additional $567 million for a fund to remedy damages caused by the company's social media platforms.



Public Domain Image

In a Los Angeles trial, a jury found that Meta (which owns Facebook and Instagram) and YouTube (owned by Google) were negligent in designing features that led to addiction and mental-health distress for a 20-year-old

woman. She said her social-media addiction began in grade school and led to depression and anxiety as she grew older. Meta was ordered to pay $4.2 million, while YouTube was on the hook for $1.8 million.

Some analysts compared these cases to the 1970s legal environment that led to cigarettes being labeled as addictive and banned from broadcast television advertising.

Can a Chatbot Be Sued for Libel?

One emerging technology question is whether AI companies can be held accountable for libel or slander. Large-language models may occasionally generate false information that damages the reputation of a person or company.



Graphic art created with Google Gemini

Similarly, it's legally unclear whether an AI company's chatbot can be held responsible for harm deriving from interactions with users. For example, a New York Times feature story described how a teenager fell in love with a chatbot and killed himself. The article included an explanation of the chatbot company's legal defense:

> *The company argues that the words produced by its chatbots are speech, like a poem, song or video game. And because they are speech, they are protected by the First Amendment. You can't win a negligence case against a speaker for exercising their First Amendment rights.*

Plagiarism and Copyright

For presentations, blogging and social media posts, many people assume it is OK to recycle any images that they find on the Internet. That's not true, and it's important for media professionals to understand legal and ethical implications for using images, text, audio or video from outside sources.

Including popular songs as background music is often a copyright violation as well.

The video below, from Adelphi University's Mark Grabowski, provides a solid introduction to plagiarism and copyright.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=306#oembed-1

FYI – As a courtesy, I emailed Mark Grabowski to let him know that I appreciated his videos and planned to embed them in some educational resources. However, I was not legally required to get permission.

Content creators who post videos to YouTube have the option to make those videos publicly available so they can be embedded and viewed beyond YouTube's website and mobile app. In effect, this automatically gives others permission to share those YouTube videos on other platforms (such as this OER text).

To review a few key takeaways about copyright, study the true-false questions on the following flip cards.

Click on Turn to see the answers, and use the forward button to advance through additional flip-card questions.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=306#h5p-23

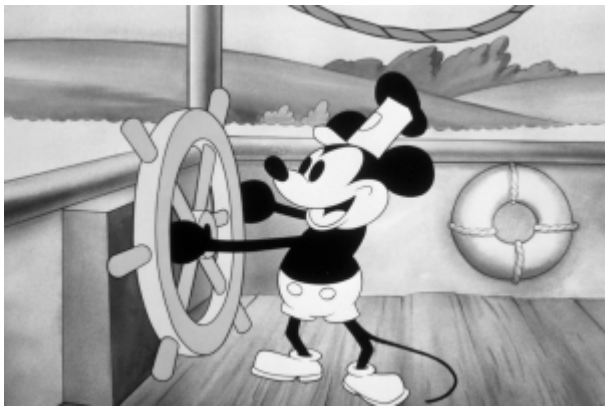
As an additional resource, the Student Press Law Center published a guide to copyright and fair use.

For historical context, more than a century after printing presses had begun churning out books in Europe, copyright was still not well defined. Media historian Jeff Jarvis wrote that "Shakespeare himself had limited control over the printing of his works. Often plays were published without authors' names."

Today, however, we have some important numbers attached to U.S. copyright law.

Copyright protection typically lasts 70 years after the author or creator's death or 95 years after the work was published. In 2026, for example, thousands of copyrighted works entered the U.S. public domain, including William Faulkner's novel *As I Lay Dying*, which was published in 1930.

As another example, the earliest black-and-white versions of Mickey Mouse, from 1928, are in the public domain. However, the more-familiar color versions of Mickey Mouse are still copyright-protected.



Mickey Mouse in Steamboat Willie

The Next Frontier

The next legal frontier in plagiarism and copyright likely will focus on content generated by artificial intelligence. Some content creators, both individuals and companies, want compensation if any AI tool scrapes copyrighted material to generate text responses, images, audio or video. For example, The New York Times filed a lawsuit for copyright infringement against OpenAI, which developed and owns ChatGPT, in an effort to protect the Times' intellectual property.

An NPR article noted that "if a federal judge finds that OpenAI illegally copied the *Times*' articles to train its AI model, the court could order the company to destroy ChatGPT's dataset, forcing the company to recreate it using only work that it is authorized to use."

On the other hand, OpenAI representatives can argue that ChatGPT's reliance on newsworthy content (such as NY Times articles) should be considered fair use, in part because it broadly benefits the public.

The doctrine of fair use allows journalists and others to use small amounts of copyrighted material without collecting the copyright holder's permission, mostly for public comment, news reporting, teaching, or research. However, any fair use of copyrighted material should not decrease the economic value of the original work.

Developing and enforcing uniform regulations for AI products will be especially challenging because of the many global conglomerates that dominate the industry, including Google, Microsoft, Disney and OpenAI.



CC0 Graphic – Resources for Life

In 2025, Disney invested $1 billion in OpenAI, including licensed use of Disney characters to be used in Sora, OpenAI's AI-generated video platform. Around the same time, Disney attorneys sent a cease-and-desist letter to Google, demanding that Google AI models stop using Disney's copyrighted work without authorization.

Here are a few other notable developments in copyright agreements and legal battles related to AI.



Graphic art created with Google Gemini

- Meta struck financial deals with multiple news outlets, including CNN, Fox News and USA Today. According to Axios, "the new agreements allow Meta to access content from its partners to provide real-time answers to user queries about news and current events in its Meta AI chatbot."

- Disney and NBCUniversal sued Midjourney for copyright infringement in some of Midjourney's AI-generate images. The lawsuit called Midjourney a "bottomless pit of plagiarism" and specifically mentioned characters from Marvel, DreamWorks, Pixar, and Disney, such as Buzz Lightyear, Shrek, Homer Simpson, Iron Man and Darth Vader.

- The AI company Anthropic agreed to pay a group of authors at least $1.5 billion in an AI copyright settlement. According to *Wired* magazine, Anthropic had downloaded unauthorized copies of books in

early efforts to gather training data for its AI tools such as the Claude chatbot.

- More locally, the Arkansas Democrat Gazette joined a lawsuit arguing that OpenAI and Microsoft "systematically and willfully stole copyrighted news articles" to train AI platforms.

A recurring challenge in legal cases involving AI-generated content and fair use: Technology is fast and the courts are slow.

Another point of legal confusion is whether individual states can pass their own laws to regulate artificial intelligence. In December 2025, President Donald Trump signed an executive order to create a federal regulatory framework for AI that would override state laws.

Instant Music, Fake Listeners and Slop

For an example of media law's complexity in the AI era, consider the case of Michael Smith from North Carolina. Smith used AI tools to create what he called "instant music" that he credited to fake bands. He uploaded the music to popular streaming services such as Spotify and Apple Music.

Smith created thousands of fake streaming accounts and then programmed computer bots to loop the fake songs through those accounts.

According to a description of the allegations in a press release from the U.S. Justice Department, Smith "fraudulently obtained more than $10 million in royalty payments through his scheme."

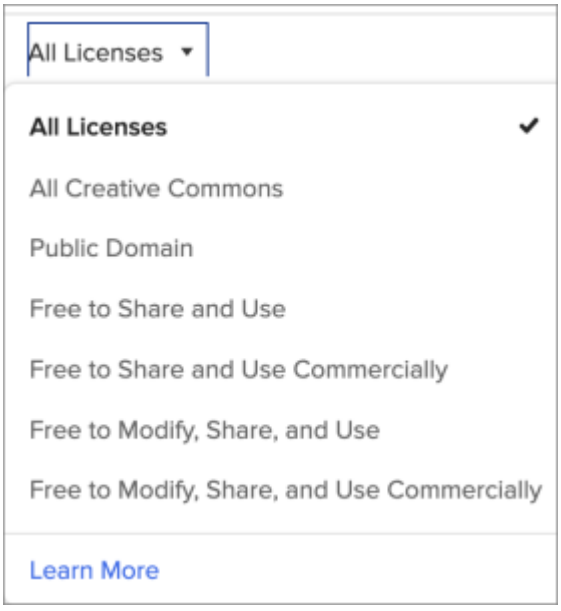
The press release called this the "first criminal case involving artificially inflated music streaming." Smith pleaded guilty in 2026.

Beyond legal cases (for now), a *Wired* magazine article noted that " AI slop music is getting harder to avoid" as AI-generated music becomes more ubiquitous but authorship is less transparent.

As an example, the article cited a song titled "I Caught Santa Claus Sniffing Cocaine." On Spotify, the song is credited to Nick Hustles. Major news outlets have not yet reported on whether Santa Claus plans to file a libel lawsuit.



Finding Usable Images



The Internet is full of copyrighted images that you should NOT use without permission, but there are also several online sites where you can find ready-to-use images.

For example, DuckDuckGo features a simple search process for Creative Commons (CC0) images. Here's the step-by-step process that I use:

1. Enter a search term in DuckDuckGo.
2. When the results appear, click on "Images" in the top list of options.
3. A list of sub-options will appear. Go to the drop-down menu for "All Licenses" and select an appropriate license, such as "Free to Share and Use" (for non-commercial work) or "Public Domain."
4. From there, you should be able to click on links that give you access to image files along with information on how to credit sources. For some public domain images, you may not need to credit the source, although it's always helpful to provide a link to the original image.

If you are partial to Google, please do not use a standard Google image search. Instead, you can enter a search term in Google's Advanced Image Search. Before you conduct your search, scroll down the page to the drop-down options for usage rights. If you are not benefiting financially from use of the images, you can select "Creative Commons licenses."

Many sites that host creative commons (CC0) images, such as Wikimedia, Wikipedia, Pixabay and Flickr, will provide guidance or copy-and-paste text for giving credit. Otherwise, make a good-faith effort to cite an owner and/or web address for any Creative Commons image that you use, and you should be OK.

Freedom of Information

According to the U.S. government's FOIA website, the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), established in 1967, gives ordinary citizens "the right to request access to records from any federal agency. It is often described as the law that keeps citizens in the know about their government."

The following video from the U.S. Justice Department provides a brief overview of FOIA.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: *https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=306#oembed-2*

Individual states can have their own freedom-of-information laws pertaining to state and local governments.

For example, the Arkansas Freedom of Information Act is generally considered one of the country's strongest in giving journalists and others access to public records and meetings. It also was written to ensure that journalists and other citizens should be notified about public meetings, which must be held in public view.

The Arkansas FOIA stipulates that "governing bodies may only enter into closed sessions for the purpose of considering employment, appointment, promotion, demotion, disciplining or resignation of an individual officer or employee."

As a whole, freedom of information laws increase transparency by ensuring citizens can follow governmental decision-making processes and monitor how governmental bodies spend tax money.

Closing Perspective

A key theme of this OER text is that media history often repeats itself.

For example, when radio surged in national popularity approximately one century ago, newspaper publishers sought legal remedies so that radio hosts couldn't broadcast daily news updates merely by reading newspaper stories on air.

Similarly, many news organizations today are seeking legal remedies to protect their copyrighted content from AI companies that auto-generate text, images and videos.

In an opinion article written for Harvard's Nieman Foundation, Jeff Jarvis included the following analysis:

> *The real question at hand is whether artificial intelligence should have the same right that journalists and we all have: the right to read, the right to learn, the right to use information once known. If it is deprived of such rights, what might we lose?*

Fill in the Blanks

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=306#h5p-57

Media Law Responses

Part A – Short Reflection

Based on content and links in this chapter, respond to the following prompt.

Summarize some key information that was new to you or that contradicted ideas you previously assumed about media law. Feel free to share self-confessions about when you have not properly followed copyright guidelines in giving presentations or posting your own online content. *(If you initially struggle with this response, review the linked CNN explanatory article with hypothetical examples: "The First Amendment doesn't guarantee you the rights you think it does.."*)

Your response in Part A should contain approximately three paragraphs with three or four sentences per paragraph.

Part B – Chatbot Rights

Should AI chatbots enjoy the same First Amendment rights as U.S. citizens?

Be sure you've studied concepts in the chapter before you respond to that question with approximately three paragraphs (three or four sentences per paragraph). You should paraphrase and cite (not plagiarize) a key point or two from this chapter to support your viewpoint.

Please be sure to compose your own response. It would be unethical and hugely ironic if you used an AI tool

in Part B to outsource your decision-making. For example, don't let ChatGPT decide whether it should have First Amendment rights.

Part C – Social Media Addiction

Should social media companies be held legally responsible for users becoming addicted to their platforms (such as Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, X or YouTube) over their lifetimes? Do you think "addiction" is an appropriate term in the legal realm?

Similar to Part B, be sure you've studied the cases cited in the chapter before you respond with approximately three paragraphs (three or four sentences per paragraph). And avoid using AI tools to outsource your critical thinking.

Bonus Challenge

This chapter included suggestions for how to use DuckDuckGo and Google's Advanced Image Search to find images (Creative Commons/public domain) that you can use without getting advance permission.

For any of the three sections in this assignment, locate an image that you can freely publish with appropriate credit. Embed the image in your submission and provide details about how you found it and how you would format an image credit if you were actually publishing it on a public platform.

7.

MEDIA ETHICS

By Dave Bostwick

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=343#h5p-88

When I was working as a news reporter and later as a faculty adviser for a collegiate student newspaper, I observed a few situations when journalists knew much more than they included in their stories. As an extreme example, I remember a case in which police helicopters were scouring a wooded area beside an apartment complex. They were trying to locate the body parts of a murder victim.

It was a high-profile local case, but the journalists did not publish or broadcast specific details about what police hoped to find. It seemed too gruesome and would have caused extreme emotional harm to the victim's family.

This incident occurred before social media and our modern-day emphasis on immediate publishing. I don't know whether that would factor into reporters' decision-making process in a similar situation today.

In the previous chapter, we studied how laws can be based on ethical principles, but there are some distinctions between media law and media ethics. We'll open this chapter with a hypothetical situation that furthers that distinction.

Study the following presentation slides by using the forward button or clicking on sections of the control bar. To enlarge any interactive presentation in this book, click on the lower-right full-screen option (arrows).

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=343#h5p-25

As you can surmise from this opening hypothetical, ethical decisions are rarely easy for media professionals.

Your Media Landscape

To be an ethical professional in your chosen career, what is the single most important ethical trait you should exhibit on a daily basis?

SPJ Code of Ethics

In journalism, freedom of speech comes with responsibility. That's why we need ethical guidelines, and a good place to start is the Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics.

The preamble to the SPJ Code of Ethics says, "The Society declares these four principles as the foundation of ethical journalism and encourages their use in its practice by all people in all media." Thus, the SPJ Code of Ethics can apply to professionals working in advertising and public relations as well as traditional newsroom journalists.

The following presentation briefly examines the four principles in the SPJ Code of Ethics.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=343#h5p-26

Why Not Professional Licenses?

Lawyers and certified public accountants earn professional licenses by passing standardized exams. The licenses can raise the stature of the profession. Why not journalists?

While this might seem like a good idea, it would clash with the First Amendment. Everyone, not just journalists, enjoys freedom of speech.

Also, if governmental officials set licensing standards, as would likely be the case, what happens when journalists publish information that reflects poorly on those officials? For example, journalists who report regularly on government corruption might risk losing their licenses for reporting the truth.



Social media post from University of Arkansas Professor Larry Foley

Ethics in Advertising and Public Relations

The SPJ Code of Ethics applies to all media professionals, but ethical concerns can be trickier for those in the fields of advertising and public relations. PR and advertising professionals must be loyal to clients as well as the public. In some situations, telling the entire truth to the public can harm a client's sales or public image.

Here's another way to frame this friction. Pick the concept below that better aligns with your personal viewpoint.

- A company exists to generate profit for its owners and/or shareholders.
- A company exists to support and sustain its community and key stakeholders, including employees.

As a PR example, let's say an energy company wants to increase profit for shareholders by drilling for oil on local land. However, this drilling may negatively impact some local wildlife and detract from tourist-related businesses in the area. Thus, the drilling would harm some community stakeholders who have minimal control over the energy company's business decisions, but it would benefit shareholders.



Public Domain Image

In this example, the oil company executives would have to decide between the two competing interests. And then a PR professional would have to communicate the executives' decision to both the local community and the shareholders.

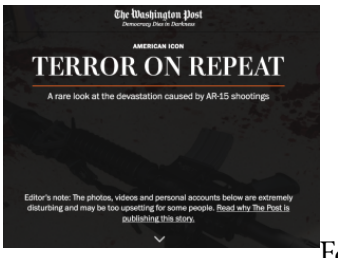
In advertising and public relations, one frequently cited ethical concept, called **corporate social responsibility**, attempts to reconcile a company's need for profit with its duty to support and sustain community and stakeholders.

According to one management training video, "Corporate social responsibility is about balancing profit-making against social and environmental concerns."

You can also watch a staged video from Fenrir Media that illustrates the importance of sincerity in promoting corporate social responsibility. Using today's digital media platforms, it's easy to say you promote corporate social responsibility. It's much harder to remain socially responsible on a daily basis.

Real Ethical Dilemmas

An ethical dilemma occurs when two ethical principles compete against each other. In these cases, media professionals may not agree on the proper ethical decision.



For instance, most editors avoid showing bloody photos from mass shootings and wars because they want to minimize harm to the victims' families, who may not want to see visual reminders of horrific scenes.

On the other hand, news outlets occasionally publish carefully selected graphic photos because they think it has a meaningful impact on viewers.

In 2023, The Washington Post published "Terror on Repeat: A rare look at the devastation caused by AR-15 shootings," which included blood-stained classrooms after the 2022 school shooting in Uvalde, Texas. In an explanation to readers, editors included the following:

> *"..most Americans have no way to understand the full scope of an AR-15's destructive power or the extent of the trauma inflicted on victims, survivors and first responders when a shooter uses this weapon on people."*

This is a legitimate ethical dilemma that pits reporting truthfully against minimizing harm.

In live sports broadcasting, similar dilemmas can occur when producers have to decide whether to replay scenes from competition in which athletes suffer gruesome injuries or concussions.

As a political example, journalists have historically debated whether it is ethically acceptable to publish details about politicians' extramarital affairs. Some argue for truthful reporting because this type of behavior reflects on a politician's moral fitness for public office.

However, others believe this information is not newsworthy and will unnecessarily harm affected family members.

Unpublishing the News: A Real Ethical Dilemma



As a consequence of internet archiving, people occasionally request that news websites unpublish stories about minor crimes they committed a decade or more ago. The damaging stories may resurface when, for example, employers conduct a web search about a job candidate.

For journalists, the real ethical dilemma pits reporting truthfully and providing a reliable history of events (don't unpublish) against minimizing harm (unpublish).

Also, Poynter reported about some people in vulnerable situations who, fearing retribution from the federal government, asked editors to remove their names from old news stories.

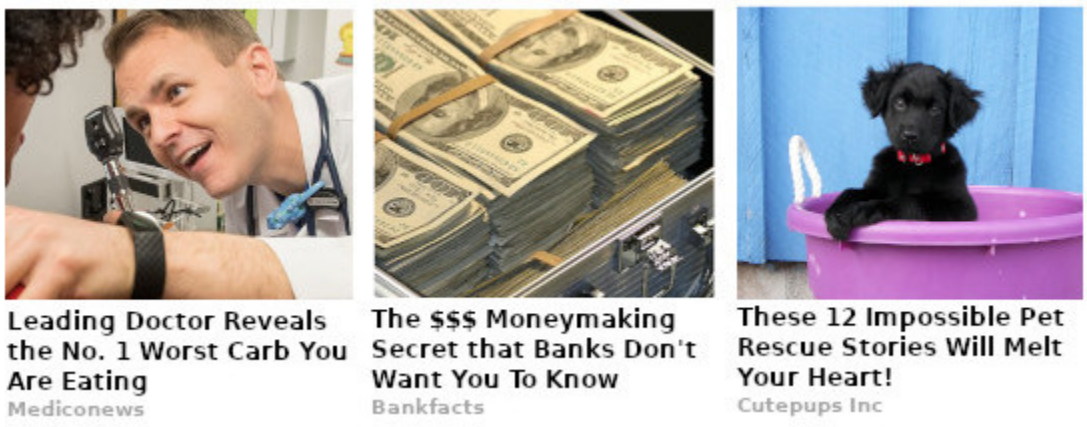
False Ethical Dilemmas

A false ethical dilemma often implies that there are only two options. When we closely analyze the ethical considerations, though, there may be more options or there may be only one proper choice.

It's OK to pursue fame, prestige or money as long as that pursuit does not lead to unethical behavior. However, a journalist should not prioritize fame, prestige or money over ethical conduct. This is a false dilemma. Ethical conduct should always be a priority.

For example, a journalism photographer may take pride in winning photography contests. If the photographer manipulates the content of a photo in order to win a contest, though, the photographer has fallen victim to a false ethical dilemma.

The photographer in this scenario incorrectly perceives two mutually exclusive choices: 1) gain prestige by winning the contest with a manipulated image; or 2) follow ethical codes and lose the contest. In fact, the photographer could follow ethical codes and still win the contest with an engaging, authentic photo.



CC0 Image – Wikimedia

Similarly, editors who write clickbait headlines prioritize a large audience (and accompanying revenue) over the ethical standard of truthfulness. This is a false ethical dilemma, though, because a catchy but truthful headline can gain a large audience as well. In this case, the clickbait headline can be viewed as an unethical shortcut.

Unethical Influencer Ads



The unethical abandonment of truth in return for money and a large audience sometimes surfaces among social media influencers. For example, a Wall Street Journal investigation revealed how Polymarket, a prediction market that resembles gambling on future events, paid social media creators to stage winning bets on fake websites.

Polymarket's influencers could earn $2,500 a month, and they were told not to disclose their pay or how an ad was staged. Many of these influencers were college-aged, which suggests that Polymarket was trying to appeal to that demographic.

It's important to note that deceptive, sensationalized media content existed centuries before the digital age. In his book *The Gutenberg Parenthesis*, Jeff Jarvis cited a 16th-century fictional tale in which a tradesman reflects on the profit to be gained from selling content that today we would call fake news. The tradesman offers these lines:

> *It doesn't much matter whether the story's true.*
> *The world wants to be deceived,*
> *they buy lies for good money.*
> *The more outrageous the lie, the better the sales,*
> *as all singers know very well.*

Ethics and Diversity

The following quote comes from the Online News Association's statement on diversity.

> *Many journalists see diversity as an issue that overlaps with journalism ethics. It may be a social issue and/or a business issue, but they say it is an ethical issue because failure to reflect the diversity of a community is a matter of accuracy.*

Ninette Sosa was a CNN journalist who later became a professor of practice and the director of outreach for the School of Journalism and Strategic Media at the University of Arkansas. In the audio below, she shared her thoughts on the relationship between diversity and ethics.



Ninette Sosa

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=343#h5p-37

Here is a script of the audio.

Media Ethics and Artificial Intelligence

In the next decade, we'll no doubt see a parade of AI-related case studies that test ethical boundaries (or trample them). Media companies may be held accountable for mistakes, or untruthful reporting, in AI-generated content. To achieve transparency, media professionals need to apply clear standards for acknowledging when content has been created using AI tools.

As an extreme example of unethical AI usage in journalism, Futurism reported that Sports Illustrated "published content from nonexistent writers with AI-generated headshots."

- Sports Illustrated published articles by fake, AI-generated writers – Futurism

The investigation concluded that some writers' headshots and profile photos were fake, and some story content may have been AI-generated as well. The Futurism article included this perspective on media ethics.

> *Bylines exist for a reason: they give credit where it's due, and just as importantly, they let readers hold writers accountable. The undisclosed AI content is a direct affront to the fabric of media ethics, in other words, not to mention a perfect recipe for eroding reader trust.*

TRUE or FALSE

The following questions highlight a few tidbits of information from the chapter. Use the forward button or click on sections of the control bar to advance through the questions.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=343#h5p-59

Applying Ethical Codes

Review the opening hypothetical about emails that were illegally hacked but contain important information that citizens should know about their elected mayor.

Now that you've read the chapter and become familiar with ethical principles, including the SPJ Code of Ethics, pretend that you are the television reporter.

You have fully verified the information. Would you broadcast what you've learned from the emails?

Use content from this chapter, especially the SPJ Code of Ethics, to support your response. Which ethical principles are involved in this case?

Write at least 250 words in journalistic style with approximately three sentences per paragraph.

For this assignment in particular, keep in mind that it would be unethical to use AI tools to formulate decisions about human ethics.

More Codes of Ethics and Principles

If you are interested in learning more about professional media ethics, peruse the following websites:

- News Values and Principles – Associated Press
- PRSA Code of Ethics – Public Relations Society of America
- SPJ Code of Ethics – Society of Professional Journalists
- Media Ethics – Purdue OWL

8.

BOOKS

By Dave Bostwick

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=417#h5p-91

When I began planning my first online Open Educational Resource (OER) project in 2020, I made a few assumptions about books and my target audience of college students. Consider whether you agree with these three initial assumptions.

- Printed books are in decline.
- Students (and Americans in general) don't want to buy physical books when they can find similar online information for free.
- As a whole, modern readers prefer the convenience of reading from a screen.



(image from Pixabay)

Current statistics about U.S. book consumption tell a much more complex story than my assumptions in the bullet points above. For example, Publisher's Weekly reported that "book sales have settled at levels higher than before the pandemic."

Furthermore, a New York Times article reported that in the post-pandemic book market, "as the number of stores has grown, the book selling business — traditionally overwhelmingly white — has also become much more diverse."

Customers aren't just buying books through online sites such as Amazon.com. The U.S. bookstore chain Barnes & Noble, which relies heavily on bricks-and-mortar stores, announced plans to open 60 new locations in 2026.

Despite the proliferation of digital reading options, it seems unlikely that the fate of printed books will resemble the near extinction of the telegraph, silent movie reels, 8-track audiotapes, or more recently, printed newspapers. Devoted print readers are passionate about turning paper pages, so they'll keep buying physical books.

I'm still devoted to my OER work and happy that I can help students save $100 or more per course. However, I'm now more fully aware that not everyone prefers to read from a screen.

Your Media Landscape

In the future, do you think you will read books primarily for entertainment? Or will you read books for a deeper understanding of history and society? Or will you simply not read books?

Opening Perspective on Print Media

As has been noted in previous chapters, media history often repeats itself. Several centuries ago, the widespread adoption of the printing press forever changed the control and flow of information. The printing press gave writers and publishers the power to change the process by which ordinary people accessed information and entertainment, but it also led to criticism that information had become less reliable.

In a 2020 *Atlantic* article titled "Our Predictions About the Internet Are Probably Wrong," Cullen Murphy wrote the following:

> *When people can publish whatever they want, they do. The printing press made individual books more uniform and more numerous, but it also put the idea of universal truth up for grabs.*

We see a similar process playing out with online publishing. Some media critics argue that digital books are generally less reliable (or even less truthful) than printed books. An online-only book can be published with minimal costs and no printing press involved, so in theory anyone can become an author.

Here's a key takeaway I want to emphasize for this chapter:

> **More than 500 years ago, printed books triggered public concerns about truth in mass media.**

Keep that perspective in mind as we study the evolution of print media in the next few chapters.

A Brief History Lesson

Next, a quick history lesson is in order. The following interactive timeline provides an overview of print technology.

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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=417#h5p-27

Most historians consider the printing press as the beginning of mass media. SFBook, a books-focused website, credited the printing press with playing "a key role in the development of the Renaissance, Reformation and the Scientific Revolution while at the same time spreading a means of learning to the masses and forming the basis for the modern knowledge-based economy we see today."

However, as noted in this chapter's opening perspective, concerns about misinformation and disinformation in mass media began with the printing press, not with computers and social media.

In his book *The Gutenberg Parenthesis*, Jeff Jarvis provided this historical viewpoint:

> *In its youth, print was seen as less reliable than what we would now call rumor. With word-of-mouth, one could judge the source: the Courier who had just written in from Florence, whose word has been proven reliable before, and the Innkeeper and postmaster who pass on reports, mindful of maintaining their own reputations. Relationships were the wires that connected early, oral news networks. Print, on the other hand, was new and suspicious because its provenance was opaque; someone unseen had produced it.*

Jarvis suggested that the situation is reversed today, as "print conveys authority while content and conversation on social media are regarded as unreliable rumor, and users there are viewed as naive and inexperienced speakers."

For those who want a more in-depth chronicle of book history, an SFBook summary, titled " The Evolution of the Book," begins with an explanation of symbols on tablets and advances through paper, printing presses, paperbacks and Amazon's Kindle.

Also related to this chapter's opening perspective, the SFBook summary mentions "the burning of books by the Nazi regime in an effort to control the German history, culture, belief and ideology" to fit with Nazi party goals beginning in 1933.

Copycat Concern

The history of books also shows how popular media impacted audience behavior long before radio and television. Writing for the Society of Professional Journalists, Julie Scelfo described an early glimpse of the copycat phenomenon that still concerns ethical journalists today.

> *More than two centuries ago in Europe, officials in multiple countries noticed a dreadful pattern: soon after local residents read a popular novel by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe featuring a protagonist who takes his own life, there was a spike in actual suicides.*

Statistics About Americans and Books

See how well you can answer the following flip-card questions about American book-reading habits. The statistics in these questions are from the Pew Research Center.

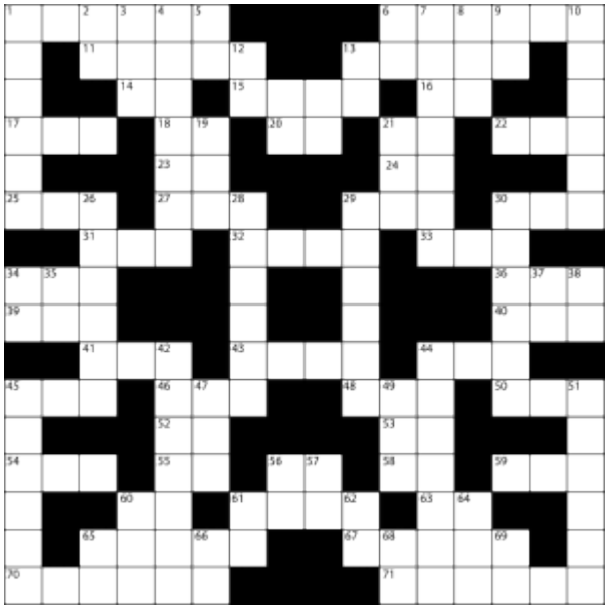
Click on Turn to see the answers, and use the forward button to advance through additional questions.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=417#h5p-29

Based on data in the flip-card questions above, one general observation emerges: Some Americans avoid books altogether, but others read enough books each year to maintain a thriving book industry.

The Crossword Craze



As we've seen in the history of media technology, many innovations and fads that decades ago seemed disruptive and counterproductive can be viewed less critically today. One interesting example is crossword puzzle books, which were first published in the 1920s.

Detractors feared crossword puzzles were so addictive that they harmed U.S. society and decreased people's productivity. A 1924 New York Times editorial labeled the crossword-puzzle fad as a "sinful waste in the utterly futile finding of words the letter of which will fit into a prearranged pattern."

One historical narrative said that a woman in Chicago divorced her husband due to his addiction to crossword puzzles, while a man in New York "shot his wife when she wouldn't help with a crossword puzzle."

Today, however, Americans typically consider a daily routine of one or two crossword puzzles – via a book or newspaper – as worthwhile "intellectual labor" that can help sharpen our minds. Most parents would encourage their children to complete crossword puzzles as a productive alternative to scrolling through social media feeds.

Books and Learning



Illustrative artwork created with ChatGPT

The debate between printed books and e-books began around 2010 as educators began adopting digital textbooks to save money for their institutions or for their students.

However, as you read in chapter 3, some schools have set limits on screen time, especially for elementary and junior high students.

At the college level, as more college professors have adopted digital sources for their courses, students rely less on physical books in their campus libraries. In an essay for *The Atlantic*, Dan Cohen wrote that "university libraries across the country, and around the world, have seen stead declines in the use of the books on their shelves."

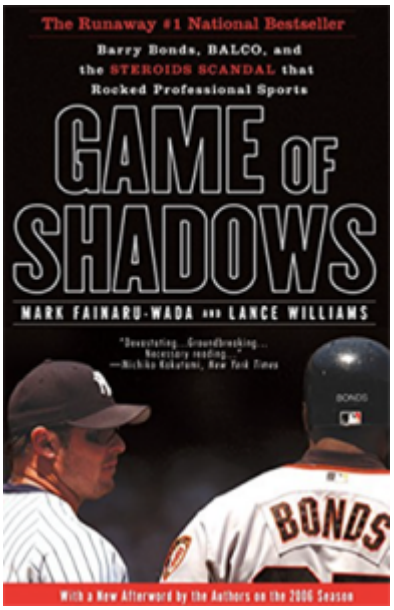
At the University of Arkansas in 2018, for example, a library annex was deployed to store books that were previously held in the main library. A major reason cited for an annex system was that the use of printed materials had decreased by 68% in a 10-year span. The annex allowed more space on main floors of Mullins Library to be utilized for student study spaces and meetings.

On other college campuses across the country, similar debates have surfaced about the evolving use of campus libraries as multi-use facilities rather than repositories for printed books.

On the other hand, a strong argument can be made that digital platforms and file types are transitory, so physical books provide a more reliable archive of history.

A Pew Research Center study found that 38% of webpages that existed in 2013 were no longer accessible a decade later.

Trickle-Down Effect



Books traditionally have a trickle-down effect to other media. One good example from the current century involves coverage of the steroid scandal in baseball. In 2006, Mark Fainaru-Wade and Lance Williams, who were reporters for The San Francisco Chronicle, published an investigative book titled *Game of Shadows*. Most Americans did not read the book but instead learned about the investigative reporting through summaries and excerpts in newspapers, magazines, cable news coverage (think ESPN) and on websites.

Another example is author Susan Patton, better known on popular media sites at the time as "Princeton Mom." In 2013, Patton wrote a guest-contributor letter to the Daily Princetonian student newspaper advocating that many college women should focus on finding a husband before they graduate.

The letter sparked nationwide attention and led Patton to write a book titled *Marry Smart*. Promotions for her book included numerous television interviews, including some network talk shows such as the interview below with CBS.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=417#oembed-1

The following list outlines instances of the trickle-down effect from books to other media platforms:

1. Magazines and newspapers (print and online) publish excerpts from books.
2. Newspapers and online sites publish reviews of books or stories about author appearances, such as book signings.

3. Authors appear on television and radio shows to discuss their work.

4. Movies are scripted and produced based on books.

For casual media consumers, examples of #4 abound. Here are just a few notable movies based on books.

- *The Color Purple*
- *The Godfather*
- *Twilight*
- *To Kill a Mockingbird*
- *The Harry Potter series*
- *Gone With the Wind*
- *The Lord of the Rings*
- *Schindler's List*
- *Forrest Gump*
- *Jurassic Park*
- *The Exorcist*
- *The Hunger Games*

Another fascinating example applicable to this list is the 2023 movie *American Fiction*, which was based on the 2001 novel *Erasure* by Percival Everett. It's a movie about an author whose novel is being made into a movie. If you are OK with edgy humor and a bit of profanity, you may enjoy watching the movie trailer for *American Fiction*.

The trickle-down effect from books to movies isn't likely to end soon, as Axios reported how BookTok is reshaping Hollywood. Movie executives can monitor BookTok analytics to identify popular new books with audience appeal for a potential movie version.

Defining Books

Are you reading a book right now? This Open Educational Resource (OER) text is organized in chapters like a traditional textbook, but it's not printed on paper, and it includes videos and interactive elements.

I'd like to think my OER project fits the expanded concept of books in the digital age. However, this OER text is published through an online platform that may not exist a decade or two from now when I want to explain my work to my grandchildren. A printed book still seems like a more dependable medium for long-term archiving compared to a PDF or web address.

Our definition of books will no doubt evolve in future decades, but printed books seem likely to remain an impactful part of the American media landscape. Author Ted Gioia, a former Stanford faculty member, made an argument for the glorious future of books:

> *In this coming dark age of bogus media, the physical book is more important than ever. My humble bookshelf is a fail-safe bunker where bots and AI agents and intrusive technocrats cannot enter.*

True or False

The following questions highlight a few tidbits of information from the chapter. Use the forward button or click on sections of the control bar to advance through the questions.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=417#h5p-49

Reading Habits and the Trickle-Down Effect

Part A

In approximately four paragraphs, analyze your own reading habits and preferences compared to the content in this chapter. Here are a few sample questions you can address, although you are not restricted to this list.

- How do your book reading habits compare to statistics cited in the chapter?
- Do you prefer reading in print or on screen, or does it vary by situation?
- Which book format (electronic or print) best helps you to understand content and retain knowledge?

- Do you think parents and educators do a disservice to elementary and junior high students when they promote consumption on digital devices rather than printed materials
- Should colleges and universities still dedicate lots of space and money to provide students with immediate access to printed books?

Part B

One section in this chapter discusses the trickle-down effect of books to other forms of mass media.

In approximately three paragraphs, discuss an example of when you consumed media content that trickled down to you from a book, even though you did not originally read the book (or you never read the book at all). Provide context and analysis on how initially reading the book might have changed your perception.

Writing Reminder

For both Part A and Part B, write crisply in journalistic style with approximately three sentences per paragraph. You are providing some of your own ideas and opinions here based on your life experiences, so please do not outsource your critical thinking to AI tools.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: *https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=417#h5p-90*

9.

NEWS AND NEWSPAPERS: THEN AND NOW

By Dave Bostwick



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=567#h5p-92

While working for small-town newspapers early in my career, my job was to write sports and news stories, but I often had other duties. When needed, I collected daily stock market prices, edited obituaries and wedding summaries for the society section, maintained a darkroom for printing photos, collected information for ads, and helped load newspapers onto delivery trucks.

Before widespread internet usage, a local daily newspaper was a one-size-fits all publication with something to interest almost everyone in the community, including local news, national news, restaurant coupons, help-wanted ads, movie listings, police and government records (often with weddings and divorces), high-school sports coverage, comics and puzzles.

Readers would complain, sometimes for good reasons, about mistakes or biased coverage. However, they kept subscribing to the newspaper because it served as an unofficial record of each day's important events as well as a valued source of information and entertainment. Local newspapers were convenient and usually credible.


USA TODAY

Carnage in New York

Pentagon in flames

'Act of war'

Terrorists strike; death toll 'horrendous'

Minute by minute, fear envelops the country

USA Today front page on Sept. 12, 2001.

Today, restaurant owners can more easily post coupons on social media, commercial websites offer localized job openings, movie theaters list movies and sell tickets online directly to the public, smartphone apps give us a variety of puzzles to solve, sports teams maintain their own websites that offer statistics and promotional stories, and large online news outlets can publish breaking news updates multiple times per day.

Perhaps the hardest part of this digital transition has been keeping consumers interested in local news when the other parts of the traditional newspaper no longer have as much value.

Your Media Landscape

In your day-to-day media habits, where do you get local news? Do you think your sources are accurate and reliable?

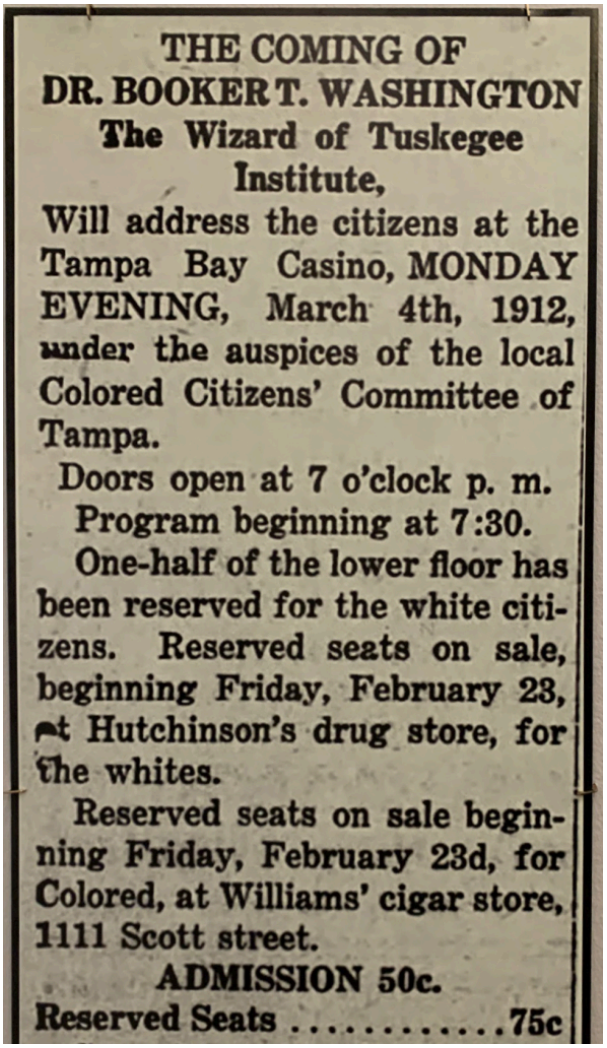
History's First Draft

Philip L. Graham, former president and publisher of The Washington Post, is often cited for this famous quotation:

"Journalism is the first rough draft of history."

The USA Today front page (shown above) from Sept. 12, 2001, is an example of newspaper editors attempting to capture a first draft of what we now refer to as 9-11.

Below is another example, a 1912 newspaper clipping on display at the Henry B. Plant Museum in Tampa Bay, Florida. It illustrates the value of newspapers to document history and provide glimpses of societal norms from bygone eras.



THE COMING OF
DR. BOOKER T. WASHINGTON
The Wizard of Tuskegee Institute,
Will address the citizens at the Tampa Bay Casino, MONDAY EVENING, March 4th, 1912, under the auspices of the local Colored Citizens' Committee of Tampa.

Doors open at 7 o'clock p. m.
Program beginning at 7:30.

One-half of the lower floor has been reserved for the white citizens. Reserved seats on sale, beginning Friday, February 23, at Hutchinson's drug store, for the whites.

Reserved seats on sale beginning Friday, February 23d, for Colored, at Williams' cigar store, 1111 Scott street.

ADMISSION 50c.
Reserved Seats 75c

Newspaper Evolution

As you read this chapter, consider the effects of technology, especially the internet, on the newspaper industry's role in chronicling local and national history.

The following presentation provides a brief overview of U.S. newspapers.

Study the following presentation slides by using the forward button or clicking on sections of the control bar. To enlarge any interactive presentation in this book, click on the lower-right full-screen option (arrows).

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=567#h5p-31

Today's Big 4

Even as print newspaper subscriptions have declined, the four legacy brands discussed in the following presentation have remained relevant nationwide during their transition to digital delivery.



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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=567#h5p-30

A Steady Local Decline

Although the four large national newspapers discussed above have survived and sometimes flourished in the past 15 years, most local newspapers are struggling. Hundreds of smaller newspapers have closed.

As one Axios analysis said, "The inequity between giants like The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal and their local counterparts represents a growing problem in America as local communities no longer have the power to set the agenda for the news that most affects them."

Research from Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism showed that "more than half of the nation's 3,143 counties have little to no local news," creating what have been called **news deserts** where a community has no newspaper coverage.

An Associated Press summary of Northwestern's past research noted that "areas of the country that find themselves without a reliable source of local news tend to be poorer, older and less educated than those covered well." Furthermore, newspaper employment has decreased 70% since 2006, and newspaper revenues have fallen approximately 60% since 2005.



Image made with Microsoft Image Creator

One newspaper editor, Mary Beth Schneider, summed up the declining newspaper industry like this:

> *People who got their news online for free for decades balk at paying for it. And people who still subscribe grumble about cancelling because the paper has shrunk — a direct result of the routine and massive layoffs that have affected newspapers across the nation. Fewer dollars equals fewer reporters equals less news coverage.*

Local newspapers have traditionally functioned as an unofficial fourth estate (or branch) of government, serving as a watchdog over government affairs. However, as Schneider noted, news deserts contribute to lower participation in elections and increased government corruption.

A grave concern in the 2020s is that consumers are no longer interested in local news, even if it's free. For example, Columbia Journalism Review summarized a research study in which 2,529 people were offered a free subscription to their local newspaper, either the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette or the Philadelphia Inquirer. Only 44 people, or less than 2 percent, accepted the free subscription.

As a summary from Harvard's Nieman Lab noted, "Worldwide, people in all age groups are ditching news sites and publishers' apps in favor of social media and video networks."

A glimmer of good news is that locally focused newspapers that survive are growing their online traffic and digital revenue even as print revenue declines.

And ironically, many collegiate journalism students are reluctant to give up print in their campus newspapers. This is in part because they think the print edition is more distinctive and provides better opportunities for creativity.



"All the News That's Fit to Print."

The New York Times.

TITANIC SINKS FOUR HOURS AFTER HITTING ICEBERG; 866 RESCUED BY CARPATHIA, PROBABLY 1250 PERISH; ISMAY SAFE, MRS. ASTOR MAYBE, NOTED NAMES MISSING

Col. Astor and Bride, Isidor Straus and Wife, and Maj. Butt Aboard.

"RULE OF SEA" FOLLOWED

Biggest Liner Plunges to the Bottom at 2:20 A.M.

RESCUERS THERE TOO LATE

The Lost Titanic Being Towed Out of Belfast Harbor.

Archiving the First Draft of History

In the previous chapter on books, we studied drawbacks with digital archiving. This is even more true for local newspapers, so let's re-examine archiving from a newspaper perspective.

To consider advantages of print archiving and concerns with digital archiving, click on the two topic titles in the interactive graphic below.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=567#h5p-32

Related to preserving newspapers as the first rough draft of history, digital curator Giulia Carla Rossi provided valuable perspective for the Guardian.

> *There is a misconception that when something is on the internet it is there forever. We've found that's definitely not the case and there are so many websites that – for a variety of reasons, including people just not paying for their domain any more, or some kind of update that goes wrong – have completely disappeared.*

For example, thousands of FiveThirtyEight articles seemingly vanished from the Internet. The New York Times reported that articles with election analysis and data, stretching back to FiveThirtyEight's founding in 2008, are no longer accessible.

The State of Local Newspapers

The newspaper industry in Arkansas mirrors national trends. The Arkansas Democrat-Gazette and the Northwest Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, under the same ownership, have ceased daily print publication. Instead, subscribers can subscribe to view a replica of a weekday printed newspaper on an iPad provided by the newspaper. In promoting this offering, the newspaper's publisher said, "They can keep the iPads as long as they continue to subscribe."

Some publications have focused on non-profit journalism. For example, Arkansas Advocate, which launched in 2022, labels itself as an "independent, nonpartisan news organization" that reports on "how state government affects the lives of everyday Arkansans so they can make informed decisions about themselves, their families and their communities."

Arkansas Advocate, which is supported by grants and donations, is one of many state-focused news sites affiliated with the national nonprofit States Newsroom. Content is free, and readers are encouraged to make donations.

A Shortage of Younger Readers

The apathy and cynicism of younger audiences is a challenge for newspapers in particular and the news industry as a whole.

For example, the News Literacy Project found that 84% of U.S. teens had a negative view of news media. Some of the most common one-word descriptions of news were "biased," "boring," "crazy," and "fake." Also, the research report said that "more teens believe journalists are skilled at lying and deceiving than informing the public."



Graphic from the News Literacy Project

A research study from Harvard described how young adults have developed "algorithmic cynicism." Those who get news from social media platforms are often aware of how algorithms shape their social media experiences, but "they may come to believe that individual efforts to resist or correct algorithmic influence are ineffective, leading to inaction rather than engagement."

Furthermore, a report fromReuters Institute for the Study of Journalism found that "younger groups, especially those aged 18-24, are much more likely than older ones to prefer watching — or listening to — the news." This helps explain why social media overtook television in 2025 as Americans' top news source.

Simply put, one research report found that "young people want their news to be more fun" and more entertaining.

Is Google Zero Inevitable?



Artwork generated with ChatGPT

AI-generated search responses and chatbot overviews are an immediate challenge for news organizations. For example, if a search tool such as Google Gemini generates an AI overview before providing a list of relevant links, many users will skip the links.

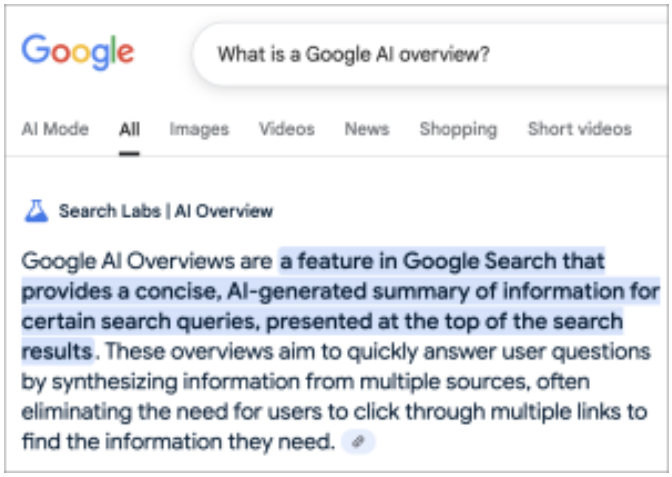
According to one industry analysis published in the Logic, news executives are concerned about "Google Zero," an informal term that describes the theoretical moment when AI platforms could distribute all information and no longer send Google search traffic to third-party news sites.

The New York Times reported that due to Google's adoption of AI-generated summaries, " people are spending more time with Google than ever." As a result, they are spending less time outside of Google and on the larger internet, where online news publishers need audiences to generate revenue.

According to the 2026 Digital News Report from the University of Oxford's Reuters Institute, 16% of respondents under age 35 said they had used a chatbot for news in the past week.

A previous Reuters survey of news consumers found that people who use chatbots for news consider them unbiased and good enough.

If you are a casual consumer, you may appreciate the instantaneous response you get from an AI-generated news overview. However, if you are a media professional, especially at a local level, you should be worried that AI search summaries could impede your ability to reach audiences directly.



Research results published in 2026 said that people who rely on AI chatbot summaries are " willing to make the trade-off" for convenience and speed over accuracy. They know AI summaries are sometimes inaccurate, but they still prefer using AI summaries over clicking on actual news stories.

A research project from the Pew Research Center featured these four takeaways:

- Google users who encounter an AI summary are less likely to click on links to other websites than users who do not see one.
- Google users are more likely to end their browsing session entirely after visiting a search page with an AI

summary than on pages without a summary.

- The most frequently cited sources in both Google AI summaries and standard search results are Wikipedia, YouTube and Reddit.
- Google searches that contain more words, ask questions or use full sentences tend to produce AI summaries more often.

Amid this forecast for a "zero-click future," AdWeek reported that a few publishers have considered opting out of Google search so that they do not just give free content to search and AI platforms.

Furthermore, Digiday explained how "publishers are now beginning to treat AI answer engines less as a source of human referrals and more as a distribution layer." The article suggested that future websites may be designed for an AI-based ecosystem "where mentions and citations matter more than clicks."

New York Times publisher A.G. Sulzberger said the news industry must "make the case that original reporting is an essential ingredient in healthy societies, secure nations and strong democracies— and show how the actions of the tech giants are putting it at risk."

What Is a Newspaper Today?

Although printed newspapers may not seem as prevalent or impactful today, they have a prominent place in the evolution of U.S. mass media

Most consumers still use the word "newspaper" when describing online content from legacy newspaper sites.

Thus, online "newspaper" journalists may still provide the first draft of history, even when there's little or no ink and paper involved,

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Fill in the Blanks

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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=567#h5p-52

News and You

Part A: News Quiz

Wired published a short article suggesting that interactive news quizzes can make us smarter, and have become a way to deepen our understanding of current events.

With that in mind, The New York Times offers a weekly quiz that can be helpful to gauge how well you follow the news.

Take the most recent quiz and reflect on your score in two or three tightly-written paragraphs. How would your rate your overall knowledge of current events? What sources help you keep track of current events?

If you are submitting this as part of a course assignment, your instructor may ask you to include a screenshot of your news quiz results.

(NOTE – If you are a student at the University of Arkansas, you have free New York Times access through the NY Times registration link and your campus email account.)

Part B: Personal Reflection

Write a short reflection about your own regular interactions with local news and compare/contrast those interactions with content from this chapter. Here are some considerations:

- How much do you prioritize keeping up with local news?

- How often do you seek out local news? Conversely, how often does local news just appear to you through your daily media interactions (even though you did not seek it)?
- If a situation arises when you need reliable information about local news events, which local sources do you most trust?
- To what extent, if any, do you rely on AI search summaries for news, thereby avoiding a direct connection with the original news sources? Do you have algorithmic cynicism?
- Do you agree with one suggestion in this chapter that news should be more fun and entertaining? Is that possible?

You can use a Q&A format with two or three sentences per response, or craft an essay of approximately 150 words in journalistic style (three or four sentences per paragraph).

10.

MAGAZINES

By Dave Bostwick

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=609#h5p-95

If you visit the magazine area of a bookstore or grocery store today, you'll probably find a variety of magazines that do NOT interest you. However, you may see at least one or two magazine titles that grab your attention because they focus on jobs, hobbies, celebrities or current events that you are passionate about.

Here are a few examples of current magazines that target narrow interests and audiences.



Cover of *People* – July 27, 2026

- *Southern Living*
- *Golf Digest*
- *Better Homes and Gardens*
- *Family Handyman*
- *Taste of Home* *(recipes)*
- *The American Legion Magazine* (for veterans)
- *AARP the Magazine* (American Association of Retired Persons)
- *Costco Connection* (for Costco members)

- *Fender Bender* (for workers in the field of auto body repair)

Although specialized magazines are common today, American magazines haven't always been so narrowly focused. Before Americans fell in love with television and the internet, general-interest magazines were an effective way for advertisers to reach a broad national audience. Popular national magazines often focused on current events and featured many of the best writers of their time.

When I was in high school, for example, a highlight of each week came when *Time* magazine arrived in our family's mailbox. It was an easy and entertaining way to keep up with current events. Today, however, not many Americans check their mailboxes each day to see if their favorite national news magazine has arrived.

This chapter looks at the evolution of U.S. magazines and explains why magazines have become more specialized. You'll also consider how online-only publications are changing the concept of a magazine.



Cover of *Fender Bender* – April 2026

Your Media Landscape

If you pick up a magazine, are you more likely to read the text closely OR just look at the pictures and graphics? Does the type of magazine affect your answer to that question?

Broad Appeal

The presentation below provides visual examples from some of the most popular general-interest magazines of the 20th century. These magazines offered a broad array of content for multiple members of a typical American household.

Study the presentation slides by using the forward button or clicking on sections of the control

bar. To enlarge any interactive presentation in this book, click on the lower-right full-screen option (arrows).

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=609#h5p-34

Television's Impact on Magazines

As television increased in popularity, national advertisers and consumers were not as interested in general-interest magazines. However, the magazine industry adapted and became more specialized.

Television and radio ads could more easily draw consumers' attention to a product or service, but a printed magazine ad allowed readers to study details before making a purchase.

Categories of specialization can vary. The online textbook *Understanding Media and Culture* lists the following types of specialized magazines:

- Magazines based on hobbies, interests and groups
- Professional trade magazines (for people in jobs and industries)
- Scholarly magazines (such as academic research journals)
- Religious magazines (such as *Christianity Today* magazine)
- Political magazines
- Magazines focused on pulp and genre fiction



The American Legion Magazine – 1951 cover

The presentation below gives examples of magazines and how they target specific, narrow audiences.

Study the presentation slides by using the forward button or clicking on sections of the control bar.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=609#h5p-33

Specialized magazines help advertisers reach their target audiences more efficiently.

Here's an example that may help you understand this concept. Let's say I own a company that makes walking canes. I could pay $7 million to buy a 30-second Super Bowl ad, but I would be wasting most of that money reaching people who have no interest in walking canes.

However, I could purchase an ad in *AARP The Magazine* at a fraction of the cost of a Super Bowl ad, plus my AARP ad is more likely to reach my intended target audience, most of whom are 50 or older.

Here are three more simple examples of how specialized magazines can guarantee that advertisers will reach a targeted demographic.

- Teen fashion and beauty products in *Seventeen* magazine
- Trendy men's clothing in *GQ* magazine
- Insurance (especially insurance plans to cover delivery drivers) in *Pizza Today* magazine

Reader-Friendly Content

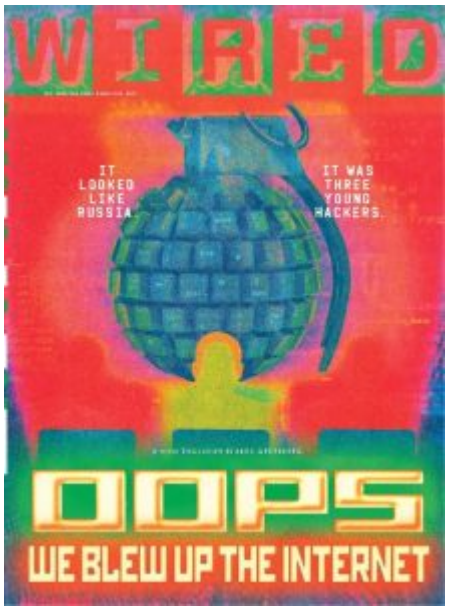


Magazines today can still include long feature stories in standard paragraphs, but you'll also see quick-hitting content that makes it easier for readers to browse and find items of interest to them. Here are three quick-hitting strategies found in many magazines:

- **Brief profiles** of celebrities, experts and other prominent people (often in a Q&A format)
- Stories and graphics formatted with **lists, tips and maps**
- Photojournalism and/or artistic **photography**

Today's Magazine Landscape

In 2022 the CEO of Condé Nast, which publishes *Vogue*, *Wired*, *The New Yorker*, and *GQ*, said Condé Nast is "no longer a magazine company." He said that audiences for the company's publications primarily come through websites and social media.



As an example, one of my favorite magazines is *Wired*. I still get printed copies of *Wired* magazine delivered to my mailbox. However, I subscribe to the *Wired* daily email newsletter and visit the magazine website regularly, so by the time I get a print issue, I've already read many of the articles.

Not all the news about print magazines is bad, though. Axios reported that print magazines were making a "surprise comeback as a marketing tool," including a print relaunch of the fashion magazine *Nylon*. Modern print magazines have even been called "a luxury good."

Stephen Casimiro, founder of the outdoor magazine *Adventure Journal*, described the limitations of online-only publications. "The screen experience is so reductionist," Casimiro said. "It just flattens the world, so that a Pulitzer Prize-winning story feels the same as spam. Some things deserve better."



Another success story is *Costco Connection*, which has attracted interest from celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey, Jimmy Kimmel, Bruce Springsteen and Tom Hanks. It's easy to see why companies that offer products through Costco might want to advertise in the magazine. A New York Times feature said that *Costco Connection* readers have an average household income of over $175,000, and more than 90 percent of them own a home.

Magazine closures litter the landscape as well, though. In 2025, McClatchy Media Company announced that it would halt publication of four magazines – *In Touch*, *Life and Style*, *Closer* and *First for Women*.

Similar to discussions in previous chapters about books and newspapers, the concept of a magazine is evolving. When we hear the word *magazine*, we may envision a glossy cover of one of our favorite print publications. However, the 21st century has given us digital newsstands and online-only magazines.

As readers access more content on screens, we are left to ponder the blurry lines of distinctions among online newspapers, online magazines and online books.

True or False

The following questions highlight a few tidbits of information from the chapter. Use the forward button to advance through the questions.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=609#h5p-53

Magazine Analysis

Purchase a specialized magazine that contains advertising, or visit a local library to find one.

Based on content in this chapter, you should select a U.S.-based magazine that falls under the general parameters of one the following:

- Magazines based on hobbies and interests
- Magazines that target specific demographics
- Lifestyle magazines
- Professional trade magazines (for people in jobs and industries)

Using a Q&A format, respond to the following prompts:

1. What is the title of the magazine, and how often is it published? *(Provide a web link if possible.)*
2. What is the cost of an annual subscription compared to the cost of a single issue?
3. Describe the target demographic.

4. In what ways do the advertisements reach out to the target demographic? *(briefly discuss at least two specific ad examples in an issue that you study and explain how the ads might appeal to the target demographic)*

5. How are visual add-ons such as supporting artwork and photography incorporated into the magazine? *(Provide details about one or two specific examples of artwork or photography in an issue that you study)*

6. What types of reader-friendly magazine devices are used, such as lists, tips, Q&A or standalone infographics that provide content in a manner other than long-form narrative paragraphs? *(Provide details about one or two specific examples in an issue that you study)*

7. Are there any personality profiles about prominent figures related to the specialization? *(if so, provide details about one or two specific profile examples in an issue that you study)*

8. Do you think this publication is positioned well to survive more than a decade? *(support your answer with specific details based on your assessment – not AI)*

For this assignment, you have the option to create presentation slides instead of relying on a static text document. Also, if your work on this assignment will be limited to educational purposes for an instructor and classmates, it would be considered fair use if your slides include a limited number of visuals (possibly screenshots) from your chosen magazine.

11.

RADIO AND AUDIO

By Dave Bostwick



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=642#h5p-98

If you're like many Americans, you sometimes listen to radio in a vehicle or while shopping in a store that has a radio station playing on overhead speakers. Today, radio is often in the background, but it wasn't always that way.

Watch the scene below from *A Christmas Story*. It helps illustrate the Golden Age of Radio (approximately 1925 to 1950) when a radio receiver was a dominant form of entertainment, and the radio itself was a vital piece of furniture in many American living rooms. It also shows us that complaints about misleading ads and "crummy" commercials didn't start with television.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=642#oembed-1

In this chapter, you'll gain an overview of radio's place in the mass media landscape from the early 1900s to today. We'll also briefly look at how advancements in audio recording technology impacted the evolution of radio.

Your Media Landscape

Spotify introduced and later expanded a personalized disc jockey (DJ) powered by artificial intelligence. Spotify's initial promotional text said, "The DJ knows you and your music taste so well that it will scan the latest releases we know you'll like, or take you back to that nostalgic playlist you had on repeat last year."

Do you classify this as radio?

Early Evolution of Radio

The early days of radio's development facilitated point-to-point communication, especially for ship-to-ship messages. Radio did not begin as a commercial platform for mass communications.

The Radio Act of 1912 required all wireless operators to obtain a broadcast license from the federal government. The legislation was partly a reaction to the sinking of the Titanic. According to one government website, "Following the Titanic investigation, which found that radio interference contributed to delays in rescue operations, Congress began regulating transmissions with the Radio Act of 1912."



A few years later, though, companies began exploring the potential for radio as a mass medium. In 1920, Westinghouse set up the first commercial broadcast station (KDKA in Pittsburgh) partly as a way to sell more radio receivers. AT&T began airing advertisements (called toll radio) on its radio stations in 1922. Until then, people viewed radio as a public information service.

An article from Harvard's Nieman Lab describes how a magazine in 1924 published a contest asking, "Who is to pay for broadcasting and how?" One century and many disruptive digital technologies later, we can perhaps ask the same question.

By 1925, more than 5 million radio sets were in use across America, and there were hundreds of stations.

The Radio Act of 1927, which later evolved into the Federal Communications Act of 1934, said that licensees did not own their channels but could license them as long as they served the "public interest, convenience or necessity."

The Federal Radio Commission, established for industry oversight in 1927, eventually became the Federal Communications Commission of today.

The Advent of Radio Shows

The following video provides a brief overview of radio's heyday in 1930s.



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Many of the first television programs, including soap operas and situation comedies, began as radio shows. Soap operas gained their name because, in some cases, a soap company would sponsor an entire daily or weekly drama.

The Guiding Light was the most prominent soap-opera example, debuting on radio in 1937. According to *Smithsonian* Magazine, the show premiered as a 15-minute radio spot and then became a half-hour television program in 1952. When it was cancelled after 72 years in 2009, it was an hour-long show owned by Procter & Gamble.

For a sense of entertainment in the Golden Age of Radio, listen to an episode of *The Shadow* (or at least listen to the first few minutes). The show featured this question for its catchphrase: "Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men?"



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If you want more perspective, a video from the Needham Channel chronicles early radio programming and shows how several early radio shows were recorded before live audiences.

'The War of the Worlds'

One of the most historic events in radio's history came on Oct. 30, 1938. Orson Welles' radio production of *The War of the Worlds*, based on a science-fiction novel by H.G. Welles, was a news-style drama about a Martian invasion of Earth. Some listeners believed the fictional drama, broadcast by CBS, was a live news account. Here's a brief audio clip from the show as police investigate a mysterious crash site.

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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=642#h5p-134

In the weeks following the broadcast, the FCC conducted an investigation of the panic caused by the radio drama but did not take action against CBS. According to a History summary of the incident, "The networks did agree to be more cautious in their programming in the future."



Creative Commons Image

A chronicle of Welles' broadcast by *Smithsonian* magazine called it an early example of "the art of fake news" as well as "a magnificent fluke."

Approximately 10 years after Welles' broadcast, a radio station in Quito, Ecuador, aired its own version of "The War of the Worlds" with dramatized Martian invaders. Local listeners, furious that the show's producers had tricked them, formed a mob and burned down the station.

Radio News vs. Newspapers

On the real news side, as radio stations began competing with established newspapers for audiences in the 1930s, publishers felt threatened and sought to protect their print product. For example, newspaper owners did not appreciate how some radio announcers would read newspaper highlights word-for-word on air.

In his book *The Gutenberg Parenthesis*, Jeff Jarvis wrote, "Newspaper publishers tried to disadvantage their new competitors, strong-arming radio executives to agree to abandon news gathering, to buy and use only reports supplied by three wire services, to limit news bulletins to five minutes, and to sell no sponsorship of news."

However, approximately two decades later, both the radio and newspaper industries would be threatened by a new media technology: television.

The Impact of Television



Beginning in the 1950s, when TV began taking radio's program ideas and sponsors, radio became dependent on recorded music to survive. Playing recorded music was much cheaper than paying voice actors and technicians to produce original radio content. Thus began a marriage of the radio and sound-recording industries

Luckily for the radio industry, Texas Instruments marketed the first transistor radios in 1953. Because transistor radios were much smaller, they could go places where television could not.

According to *Car and Driver*'s timeline of the history of car radios, the first all-transistor car radio debuted in 1963.

When they weren't listening in their vehicles, consumers could carry small portable transistor radios (such as the one picture here) to the beach or the park, where they could listen to stations that played recorded music.

As a cost-cutting measure today, radio disc jockeys often record their audio in advance. During overnight hours and weekends, many smaller radio outlets pre-program their content so that no one is actually broadcasting live or working at the station.

Evolution of Sound Recording

Because radio relies on audio, it's difficult to study radio in isolation. Let's take a quick detour here to look at a condensed timeline of sound-recording technology.

Study the following presentation slides by using the forward button or clicking on sections of the control bar. To enlarge any interactive presentation in this book, click on the lower-right full-screen option (arrows).



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=642#h5p-35

For a video re-enactment of what Thomas Edison's initial experiment with tinfoil phonograph might have looked like, you can watch the following excerpt from the 1940 movie Edison, the Man, which starred Spencer Tracy.



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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=642#oembed-4

Music Piracy

As audio recording technologies have evolved, so too have industry concerns about music theft. Pirated music involves copying and distributing recorded music without the consent of the copyright owner. Following are a few examples from the past 60 years.

FM Radio to Cassette Tape – In the 1970s and early 1980s, some FM radio stations in the United States and beyond would attract listeners by playing entire albums uninterrupted by advertising. Station directors knew that audience members could record those albums on cassette tapes and thus avoid buying the albums. Beyond FM radio, one consumer could buy an album and then record cassette copies for friends.

Ripping from CDs – As compact discs (CDs) became popular, piracy went digital. Some tech-savvy music enthusiasts experimented with ripping or transferring songs from CDs to computers and other electronic devices, prompting a few copyright battles along the way.



The British Phonographic Industry launched a 1980s campaign titled "Home Taping Is Killing Music."

Napster and P2P – Fast-forward to 1999 when the peer-to-peer file-sharing service Napster was launched and soon gained widespread popularity. Napster users could download and share digital music files with others. Eventually, the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) won a series of court cases that led to Napster's music-sharing service being shut down in 2001.

Ripping from YouTube – Although Napster is no longer an industry concern, music piracy still exists today. The research firm Muso reported a steady global increase in music piracy, especially involving websites that rip audio from YouTube videos and then convert that audio into downloadable music files.

For a more complete summary, you can visit the website for History of Music Piracy – A Brief Explanation.

Radio Conglomerates

Most local radio stations are now owned by conglomerates. Here are three of today's prominent conglomerates. You can use these links to find stations they own in geographic regions:

1. Audacy
2. Cumulus
3. iHeart *(iHeart owns many stations and may also provide streaming services for additional stations.)*

Conglomerates typically own several stations with a variety of formats in the same market. These stations'

operations can be housed in the same building, thus reducing operating expenses. Plus, sales executives can offer ad packages with multiple station formats catering to a local business's target demographics.

Here are some of today's most common radio-station formats:

- Country
- News/Talk
- Religion/Christian
- Spanish
- Classic Rock
- Sports
- Top 40
- Adult Contemporary

In an example of the ever-changing market dynamics of the media industry, Audacy emerged from bankruptcy in 2024 and subsequently laid off hundreds of workers in early 2025. Similarly, iHeart Radio went through the bankruptcy process in 2018-19, while Cumulus survived bankruptcy in 2017-18. Nevertheless, Cumulus and iHeart laid off employees in late 2024 through 2025.

FM vs. AM

You're probably familiar with the terms AM and FM to describe radio stations. AM stands for amplitude modulation, while FM stands for frequency modulation.

Next, you can consider this related flip-card question.



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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=642#h5p-36

Early U.S. radio stations used AM. Although the first FM radio station debuted in 1936, FM didn't gain popularity until the '50s and '60s, when FM signals could be broadcast in stereo. For a more-detailed explanation, you can visit ScienceABC.

After some automakers stopped selling vehicles with AM radios in 2024, Congress began considering variations of an AM Radio for Every Vehicle Act, which would require all automakers to install AM radios as a matter of public interest. As of July 2026, Congress was still debating the AM Radio for Every Vehicle Act.

The Rise of Podcasts

Podcasts have become increasingly popular, especially for younger listeners. According to Edison Research, Americans now listen to podcasts more often than talk radio.

Listeners/viewers can play podcasts in the background of their daily routines, and some of the most popular podcasts last an hour or more and are also available in a video format.

New York Times writer Joseph Bernstein wrote that "if cable news is the background noise of choice for many boomers, video podcasts have the potential to become the same for younger audiences, who often consume media with a smartphone in hand."

Also, portions of a long-form podcast can be extracted for brief clips on short-content platforms such as TikTok, Facebook or Instagram Reels.



The Joe Rogan Experience has become one of the most popular U.S. podcasts.

Epic Narration Through AI

Radio and audio are not immune to disruptions caused by AI companies.

For example, an AI production company, ElevenLabs, licensed actor Michael Caine's British voice to generate narration for an audiobook of *The Odyssey*.

Here's a video trailer for the audiobook.

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A related NY Times feature story noted that "some listeners may find it unsettling to hear an oral masterpiece from ancient Greece recounted by A.I.-generated voices."

You can consider your own reaction to an AI voice reading a Greek classic. And if you are fascinated by this project, you can listen to the entire 13-hour audiobook.

Thumbs Up or Thumbs Down to AI Music?

In theory, AI allows anyone to produce a song about a specific topic, no musical instruments or poetry skills required.

Using Google's Lyria, I created the following '90s-style rap song, titled "Ask the Streets," about the pros and cons of AI-generated music. Lyria also provided cover art.



You can consider whether this AI-generated line is prophetic or painful:

"The algorithm's got a soul, spitting' fire on the hook."

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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=642#h5p-136

And if you prefer guitar-driven rock, here's an alternative version that riffs on that same algorithm theme:

"Gonna let the algorithm wear the crown."

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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=642#h5p-137

The larger question is whether AI-generated songs such as this will devalue the music industry's future or place a greater premium on authentic content.

Closing Tidbits

Here are two factoids to wrap up this chapter.

- Now that more consumers stream popular music rather than buying albums or downloading individual songs, typical musicians aren't necessarily enjoying a digital fortune. For example, an artist on Spotify may make in the vicinity of $0.004 each time a song is streamed, which translates to $4 for 1,000

streams. To make $400, the artist would need 100,000 streams.

- Data from the Pew Research Center shows that an increasing percentage of Americans say they get at least some news from podcasts. Also, younger adults are more likely to get news from podcasts.

Fill in the Blanks

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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=642#h5p-54

Radio Market Analysis

Choose a metro area either nearest to where you live or one that interests you, and list the area's radio stations. The conglomerate links below are a starting point.

1. Audacy
2. Cumulus
3. iHeart *(iHeart owns many stations and may also provide streaming services for additional stations.)*

With additional research, you may find there are additional area stations not owned by these three conglomerates.

For your assignment, include the following two parts.

Part A – List at least 8 stations in your selected metro area along with each station's format and ownership. Your list of stations in that metro area should include at least two conglomerates.

(For example, your selected metro area could include stations owned by Audacy along with other stations owned by Cumulus. Or your list could include stations owned by one or two of the conglomerates listed above along with additional stations that are outside of these conglomerates.)

Just be sure to select a metro area that has a variety of ownership in the market.

Part B – Write a brief analysis of the radio market in your chosen metro area.

- Do listeners and advertisers have an adequate number of choices? Which formats are most popular, and why do you think they are popular?
- Are there any formats that seem to be missing or would improve the market options? Are there any formats that seem odd or out of place?
- What was the most unexpected information that you found?

Write approximately two or three sentences per item in Part B.

12.

POPULAR MUSIC AND AMERICAN CULTURE

By Alyssa Riley

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=487#h5p-100

Music is a constant in my life, whether I'm listening to Kings of Leon while driving, the Lumineers while studying, Fleetwood Mac when getting dressed for a night out, or Frank Sinatra when cooking. I remain loyal to many of the musicians I grew up listening to, observing how their styles, sounds and brand images changed over the years.



Public Domain Image

Recorded music ascended into American culture thanks to the inventions of the phonograph and gramophone. Of the many popular styles today – including but not limited to alternative, indie, bluegrass, rap, blues, contemporary pop, country and classic rock – there is at least one genre of musical culture for everyone. Recorded music is in films, in stores, on the radio, on smartphones, and on streaming services.

Music is part of our cultural identity and a universal language. Popular music allows people to dance and sing with others and feel connected through favorite songs. Much of this chapter offers a brief historical overview of American popular music's evolution in the 20th century, beginning with the 1920s. At the end of the chapter, we'll turn our attention to today's musical landscape.

Your Media Landscape

Outside of musical artists from your own generation, can you name an artist or band that you admire and identify with? Why do you feel this connection?

1920s

This decade was renowned for its excessive party lifestyle, technological advancements, an abundance of money and property after World War I, and resistance to Prohibition. A new generation, including flapper women, sought freedom from societal restrictions. The 1920s paved the way for the Golden Age of Radio and the emergence of jazz music.

A few years before the Roaring ’20s began, the Original Dixieland Jazz Band released the pioneering jazz recording “Livery Stable Blues.” Also, jazz artists King Oliver and Louis Armstrong changed the American musical landscape by incorporating African rhythms, gospel and blues.



Public Domain Image

To gain a sense of 1920s music, you can listen to Fascinating Rhythm: Great 1920s Vintage Jazz Music Hits (Past Perfect) on YouTube.

1930s

Jazz became even more popular in the ’30s as jazz artists played on Mississippi River steamboats or performed illegally in speakeasies during the Prohibition era. Many Americans began viewing jazz music as immoral, claiming it threatened the country’s cultural values.

Alongside jazz was blues music, which originated when Black slaves adapted their musical heritage to the American environment. When the blues infiltrated Northern states in the late ’30s and early ’40s, it developed

into specific regional styles: jazz-oriented Kansas City blues, swing-based West Coast blues, Chicago's urban-style classic Southern blues, and more.

The following video shows Louis Armstrong and his touring band performing "Dinah" in 1933 in Copenhagen.



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1940s

Thanks to a developing alliance between the sound recording and radio industries, artists like Frank Sinatra and Ella Fitzgerald profited from wide exposure to listeners. Their popularity coincided with a renewed emphasis on American family values during and after World War II. Big-name artists like Bing Crosby, Sammy Kaye and the Andrews Sisters regularly referenced the military and the war, and the United Service Organizations (USO) enabled the big names in music to contribute to war efforts by performing for soldiers and their families.

Mixing sounds to appeal to both the returning soldiers and everyday Americans, rockabilly was born from the fusion of country with rhythm and blues. Alongside rockabilly, country music became more popular during this decade with the help of Western films and singing cowboys such as Roy Rogers and Gene Autry.

For a taste of the times, you can watch Frank Sinatra perform "Come Fly With Me" or learn more about the connection between movies and music in the careers of Roy Rogers and Gene Autry. The Frank Sinatra video is shown below.



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1950s

In 1955, the Top 40 format was born; radio station playlists were based on popularity (usually the *Billboard*

Top 40 singles chart), and a popular song could be played as often as 15 times a day on the same station. Radio stations began influencing record sales, resulting in increased competition for spots on station playlists.

Elvis Presley became a radio and television phenomenon, especially after a 1956 television appearance on the Ed Sullivan Show. You can watch that performance below.



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Unlike popular music predecessors such as Frank Sinatra, whose focus was primarily on singing and musicality, Elvis's performances were far more visual. By today's standards, Elvis Presley gyrating his hips in the '50s seems tame, but it was extremely controversial among parents at the time and contributed to a generational gap in attitudes toward popular music of the day.

During one of his television performances, his body wasn't shown from the waist down. A few cities even sought to ban or cancel his performances due to "provocative music and suggestive dance moves."

Many historians credit Elvis Presley with integrating popular music and rock 'n' roll. His musical style, heavily influenced by blues and rockabilly, paved the way for Black artists such as Chuck Berry and Little Richard to gain widespread popularity among white audiences.

Also, the birth of Motown Records in 1959 led to a best-selling '60s mixture of soul and pop music by Black groups such as the Temptations and the Supremes with Diana Ross.

1960s

Rock 'n' roll took flight in this decade.

Although rock 'n' roll began primarily as an American genre, and many U.S. artists reached the top of the charts overseas, the Beatles' overnight fame signaled what became known as music's British Invasion.

The Beatles paved the way for other British bands to reach American charts, including the Kinks, the Zombies, the Animals, Herman's Hermits and the Rolling Stones. Many bands shifted from pure pop to an intersection of urban rock and blues. A developing sub-genre was surf music, which was especially popular in California and is best heard through artists like the Beach Boys, Jan and Dean, and Dick Dale.

In the latter years of the 1960s, popular music reflected the emerging fault lines in American culture, such as civil rights, women's rights, Vietnam War protests, and environmentalism. Folk music, which prioritized meaningful lyrics over elaborate musical style, became the genre of choice for much social activism. Early in his career, Bob Dylan was a musical leader in this genre.

Likewise, protest music became popular among the hippies of the ’60s, as many listeners of Jimi Hendrix and the Grateful Dead took to drug use for personal expression and freedom of speech. The belief was that mind-altering drugs could heighten the musical experience and create a bond between bands and their listeners.

Romanticism of psychedelic culture, including its emphasis on free thinking and free living, came to a head at 1969’s Woodstock Festival in New York.

Below is a video of Jimi Hendrix performing his version of “The Star-Spangled Banner” at Woodstock.



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You can also watch the following video to learn more about how the 1960s and its music changed America.



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1970s

Three ’60s music icons – Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin and Jim Morrison of the Doors – died in the early ’70s, ushering in a decade of splintering styles.

The wide range of ’70s genres included heavy metal (Black Sabbath and Led Zeppelin), progressive rock (Pink Floyd and Queen), disco (the Bee Gees and Donna Summer), and punk (the Sex Pistols and the Ramones).

As a ’70s blast from the past, you can watch John Travolta dance to the Bee Gees’ “You Should Be Dancing” in a scene from the popular 1977 movie *Saturday Night Fever*.



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1980s and 1990s

MTV, which stood for Music Television, launched in 1981 with a constant stream of single-song music videos, which soon placed more emphasis on entertaining visuals, dialing back on the social protest from the previous two decades. The ’80s can be described as a decade of digital innovation with electronic bands such as Eurythmics, Duran Duran and Depeche Mode.

R&B songs – performed by artists such as Michael Jackson, Barry White, Salt-N-Pepa and Diana Ross – regularly topped the music charts in the ’70s through the ’90s. Originally termed for recording companies to market to African American communities, R&B incorporated aspects of funk and soul music into a nationally popular genre. Branching out from R&B, hip-hop music boomed in the 1990s and included such notable performers as 2Pac, Biggie and Jay-Z.

Watch the following video to learn about the transformation of R&B and hip-hop through the decades.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: *https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=487#oembed-2*

Impactful in the 21st Century

When we think of musicians who have left their mark on American culture, many of the performers previously mentioned in this chapter come to mind, whether it’s due to boy-band frenzies, sexual awakenings or rebellion.



TAYLOR SWIFT – Eva Rinaldi, CC BY-SA 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons

Fifty years from now, when someone is writing a summary of American music and culture, which of today’s musical artists will be prominently mentioned? Ed Sheeran, The Weeknd, or Selena Gomez? Is it someone whose artistry is not yet fully recognized? Ultimately, the determination will be about more than sales, revenue and social media. It will also involve subjective judgment, through the lens of time, about artists who had a lasting impact on society’s attitudes and norms.

One artist who has clearly influenced 21st-century pop culture is Taylor Swift. Since her debut in 2006, she

has won 14 Grammys, and in 2023 she was named Time's Person of the Year, a title never given to the Beatles or Elvis Presley. Only the Beatles have more No. 1 albums than Swift.

Despite her reputation for writing breakup and love songs, Swift's music includes storytelling and folklore in a wide range of genres – country, pop, rock, indie folk, and alternative/indie. For many fans, she created a globally popular culture of girlhood, friendship, longing, regret, innocence, and revenge.

You can learn more by watching a *Good Morning America* video: "The Evolution of Taylor Swift's Music."

Another influential artist is Beyoncé, who is not only a singer but also a songwriter, actor and entrepreneur. She has been building her career since leading and writing songs for the '90s musical group Destiny's Child. Starting her solo career in 2003 with her first album *Dangerously In Love*, Beyoncé has won 35 Grammys, the most in Grammy history, and appeared in numerous movies. In 2024, she even released a country album, titled *Cowboy Carter*, to critical acclaim.

Watch Beyoncé – The Music Evolution to learn more.

Will both Taylor Swift and Beyoncé be artists who are remembered 50 years from now for having a strong impact on American culture? Their repertoires suggest that the answer may be yes.



CC0 Image – Wikimedia

The Devil's Music

Beginning as early as the 1950s, some evangelical Christians in the United States complained that rock 'n' roll music was satanic. In an academic essay titled "The Devil Has the Best Tunes," Nathan Dickey examined this phenomenon, including the following excerpt from Eric Holmberg's documentary *Hell's Bells*.

> *Like an invisible cancer that inevitably leads to death, so the satanic seed in rock and roll has culminated in a blatant obsession with the occult. Cryptic allusions to the Devil in the music of Blues artist Robert Johnson a generation ago have given place to an open worship of Satan and hell that comes complete with the symbols, liturgies, rituals, and messianic personalities that attend any religious order. No longer the stuff of small underground cults, millions of young people have been caught in its evil sway.*

Over the decades, some musicians have embraced this cultural conflict in their music. For example, the Rolling Stones' "Sympathy for the Devil" can still be heard on classic rock radio stations today.

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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=487#oembed-8

Also, a few evangelicals suggested that the most offensive rock songs, when played backward, yielded Satanic messages. As an amusing response, in 1975 the band Electric Light Orchestra released the song "Fire on High ," which included an eerie opening with a backwards message that (in reverse) said: "The music is reversible, but time is not. Turn back! Turn back!"

More recently, Sam Smith wore a devil costume with plastic horns sticking out of a top hat while performing the song "Unholy" with Kim Petras at the 2023 Grammy Awards show. Some conservatives criticized the outfit, but Smith gained free publicity along with increased name recognition as a result of the performance.

The "Montero (Call Me By Your Name)" music video by Lil Nas X received similar criticism in 2021 for being immoral and harmful to children, mainly because it appeared to encourage devil worshipping.

Perspective: Beyond U.S. Borders

In the 1950s, Elvis Presley was threatened with jail time for his allegedly obscene dancing. For an expanded global understanding of how popular music and dance can impact culture and be a form of protest today, it may help to step outside of the United States and look toward Iran. Multiple news outlets reported that the five Iranian girls in the video below were detained in 2023 for dancing to a Selena Gomez song and having their heads uncovered.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=487#oembed-9

Also, Instagram videos such as the one below, featuring an Iranian nicknamed Booghy, led to the arrests of 12 men in late 2023. The New York Times reported that Booghy "was detained for several hours and accused of instigating against the government. As part of the crackdown police swarmed street musicians performing in Rasht, arrested some and confiscated their instruments." To conservative Iranians, dancing can be interpreted as a symbol of civil disobedience.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: *https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=487#oembed-10*

Similarly, a dissident rapper in Iran was charged with "spreading corruption on earth' and "propaganda against the state." He was sentenced to death in 2023, but that sentence was overturned in 2024.

Closing Thoughts

Popular music as far back as the 1920s pushed against social standards of the day. For at least a century, U.S. parents and other adults have complained about kids' music and dancing. One could argue it's become part of American culture.

Additional Video Links

We'll close this chapter with some additional examples of how music crosses American media boundaries. Here are some video links that show the cultural intersection of music, television and fashion for younger audiences.

American Bandstand – Top 10 from one week in 1969

Soul Train – Line dancing to Michael Jackson's 1979 hit "Don't Stop Til You Get Enough"

Midnight Special – David Bowie and Marianne Faithfull in 1973

True or False

The following questions highlight a few tidbits of information from the chapter. Use the forward button to advance through the questions.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=487#h5p-55

Music and Culture – Living History

It's your turn to collect some living history about music and culture.

Interview someone whose lifetime has spanned a broad spectrum of changes in popular music. Age 50 is probably a minimum, but the older the better.

In most journalism settings, it is not appropriate to interview family members and friends, but for this assignment it is OK. Do not interview your parents or guardians. Grandparents could work well, though, if available.

Visit with your interviewee about how their consumption of popular music has evolved over the past decades, both through technology and their own personal musical tastes. How and when did they listen to music and find new artists when they were younger, and in what ways has that changed over the years?

You also may be interested in learning roughly how much they spent on purchasing music over the years, and what formats they bought (8-track and cassette tapes, vinyl records, CDs, mp3s, streaming services).

You should ask questions about the extent to which the music they enjoy helps define their personal identity or their generation.

Summarize the highlights and key takeaways from your interview in a short narrative of approximately six to eight paragraphs, with three or four sentences per paragraph. There is no template for your writing, but be sure to include the most interesting information that you gleaned from the interview.

NOTE – This is a journalistic assignment, so it is especially crucial that you NOT use AI. Interview a real person about their actual life experiences and then write your own accurate summary based on the instructions above.

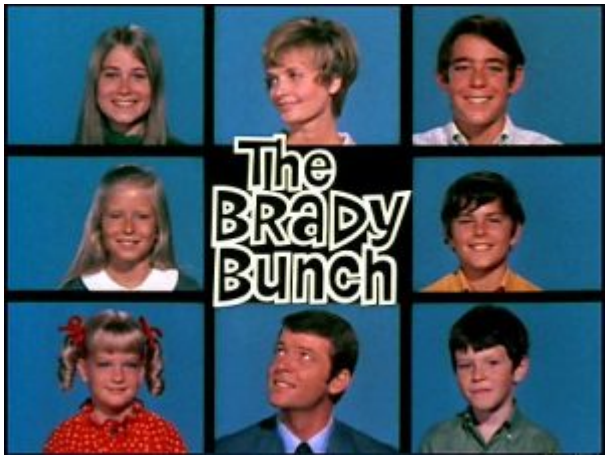
13.

TELEVISION

By Dave Bostwick

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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=683#h5p-102

When I was an annoying little kid in the early 1970s, we had one TV set in our house and three choices for watching television each evening – whatever was broadcast on ABC, CBS or NBC.



The Sunday morning newspaper included a weekly TV schedule. Under my mother's supervision, my sister and I would use different colored pens to circle the shows we wanted to watch that week, thus reserving our TV time in advance. I always circled *The Brady Bunch*.

A decade later, I was fascinated that a cable network that only showed music videos (MTV) or sports (ESPN) could become popular so quickly. Their specialization broke the mold of television's broad appeal and family focus.

As you study this chapter, you'll understand that television's history in some ways repeats the history of radio. Both enjoyed broad nationwide appeal as the medium of choice, but disruptive technology and economic models caused them to evolve toward specialization. For radio, the disruptive technology was television.

For network television, the first disruptive technologies were satellite and cable transmission, which led to more channels and more choices. Next came the internet's impact on the nationwide television industry, which led to an increasing variety of screens, some portable and much smaller, for consumers to view video content.

Your Media Landscape

Seeing is believing OR reading is believing?

Generally speaking, do you have greater trust in content that you see and hear through video and television, or do you place more trust in what you read? How does the evolution of AI-generated video affect your response?

Invention

A teenager from Idaho is often credited with inventing television, although there were other contributors along with the way. Below is a History Channel documentary about Philo Farnsworth and his early experiments with television. This video is also an example of a documentary that relies partly on staged re-enactments. Consider how that affects your impression of the video.



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Television Notes and Tidbits

American television began to dominate the mass media landscape in the 1950s. According to one historical summary, "The number of television sets in use rose from 6,000 in 1946 to some 12 million by 1951. No new invention entered American homes faster than black and white television sets."

By 1955 half of all U.S. homes had a television. And by the late 1990s, 98 percent of U.S. homes had a television.

For additional perspective, here are a few bullet points, in chronological order, about the evolution of television between the 1930s and the 1970s.

- **In the 1930s, television had small screens**, typically no larger than 12 inches.
- Early black-and-white TV sets ranged from $200 to $600 in cost, while the average American's annual salary was $1,368. **Only the rich could afford one**. As a comparison, if someone today makes $50,000 per year, they probably would not spend $15,000 on a television set.
- NBC was the first national network with regular television broadcasts, including 1939 during the World's Fair in New York. **The first three major networks – NBC, CBS and ABC – began as radio networks and transitioned to television.** (Fox's television network did not launch until 1986.)



Creative Commons Image

- In the 1940s, **the Federal Communications Commission set technical standards** so that content from all networks could be viewed on the same television. Otherwise, people might have needed one TV for NBC and another for CBS, for example.
- Although experimentation with color television was part of the 1950s, **the Big Three networks (CBS, NBC and ABC) did not broadcast all of their evening shows in color until 1966**.
- **By 1972, color TV sets outnumbered black-and-white** TV sets in the United States.
- HBO Thanks to satellite transmission and cable, Home Box Office (HBO) launched in 1972 and, by offering premium content, has become the longest-running subscription television service. WTBS became the first cable superstation in 1976, and **television's revenue model gradually shifted to include cable subscription fees instead of relying solely on advertising on the Big Three networks.**

From Radio to TV

Many early programs were merely TV-versions of content that began on radio, including soap operas and variety shows. For example, Jack Benny began hosting radio shows in 1932 and made the transition to television in 1950. Below is the debut episode of *The Jack Benny Show* on television. The video includes an embedded advertisement for cigarette-maker Lucky Strikes, the show's sponsor, and then a musical sketch so you can gain a sense of early television production.



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Surviving Shows

A few remnants from the pioneering days of network television survive today. *Meet the Press* first aired in 1947, *Today* in 1952, and*The Tonight Show* in 1954.

You may enjoy watching the start of this archived weather forecast from the first broadcast of the *Today* show.



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The Significance of *I Love Lucy*

In 1951, *I Love Lucy* became the first television program filmed before a live studio audience. A PBS feature story listed other ways *I Love Lucy* transformed television, such as casting a Hispanic co-star, setting the standard for filming a comedy show with three cameras, and incorporating Lucy's pregnancy prominently in some episodes.

In the excerpt below, other characters prepare to take a pregnant Lucy to the hospital.

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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=683#oembed-4

And notice the switching of camera angles in the the next excerpt, set in a chocolate factory.

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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=683#oembed-5

Quiz Show Scandals

Many early shows were created, produced and sponsored by a single company, but longer, segmented programs such as *Today* and *The Tonight Show* started forcing advertisers out of producing their own content.

This change was related to the quiz show scandals of the 1950s. One prominent case involved Geritol's *Twenty-One*. A contestant who won more than $100,000 later admitted that he had been given answers in advance. Here's a video that summarizes the case.

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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=683#oembed-6

Partly because of rigged quiz shows, television lost credibility. Americans could no longer consider television more honest than printed text. A little over a decade later, this lack of trust likely caused some Americans to believe that TV producers had colluded with the government to stage footage of U.S. astronauts walking on the moon.

On the other hand, as we see repeated throughout media history, audiences sometimes crave entertainment at the expense of truth (such as modern "reality" TV shows). A PBS analysis of the quiz show scandals summarized the perspective of Manhattan Assistant District Attorney Joseph Stone:

> *The true victims were not the contestants, Stone writes, many of whom made money, but the television*

viewers hoodwinked into believing that the fiction they were watching was actually real-life drama. But even television viewers seemed not to mind.

Impact of Television on Newspaper and Radio

TV's immense popularity impacted other media. For example, before television, radio stations and radio networks could afford to produce lots of original shows for large audiences. As advertisers and audiences left radio for television, radio began to rely heavily on recorded music for programming because that was a more cost-effective strategy.

As another example, when evening news broadcasts gained popularity, large-city newspapers began concentrating on morning rather than afternoon delivery of their print product. The afternoon newspaper could not compete with the immediacy of television news.



Also, the onset of color television hastened the need for newspaper publishers to print in color, even though it was more costly.

Evening news shows on the major networks became an integral part of many Americans' daily lives. Prominent news anchors such as **Walter Cronkite** (pictured at right) became extremely influential. In the 1960s, Cronkite was sometimes called "the most trusted man in America."

Cronkite was also known for his closing catchline at the end of each newscast: "And that's the way it is."

The Decline of the Major Networks

Networks often pay a fee to affiliate stations to carry network programs. In return, networks sell advertising time. Networks usually do not own their affiliates.

The three major networks — ABC, CBS and NBC — thrived through the ’60s and ’70s, accounting for 95 percent of prime-time viewing. When News Corporation launched Fox in 1986, its entertainment targeted younger viewers. Fox also recognized the importance of sports, specifically the NFL, in establishing its brand.

By 2005, the percentage of prime-time viewers for the four major networks had dropped below 45 percent. This decline was caused partly by communications satellites facilitating the growth of cable television. Also, Americans increasingly enjoyed more at-home movie options — first VHS, then DVR and internet streaming.

In 1977, only 14 percent of all U.S. homes received cable. By the summer of 1997, a landmark shift had occurred as basic cable channels had captured a larger prime-time audience than the broadcast networks.

CNN – the Cable News Network — began in 1980 and gained credibility in 1991 with coverage of the Gulf War. Even Iraq’s leaders watched CNN’s continuous live coverage (something the major networks could not provide).

Also, as cable news networks (first, CNN, and later Fox News) became more popular, the legacy networks (NBC, CBS, and ABC) concentrated more on newsmagazines such as *Dateline* and *20/20* in an attempt to replicate the success of CBS’s *60 Minutes*.

The Rise and Fall of Cable Television

As viewership for the major networks declined, cable networks that focused on specialized entertainment content began to rule the television landscape.

Examples include MTV, the Cooking Channel, HGTV, CMT, BET, VH1, TNT, Comedy Central, Lifetime, Nickelodeon, and the USA Network.

In a feature story from the Associated Press, Eric Degas, an NPR television critic, discussed the popularity of specialized cable television from the ’80s to the early 2000s:

> *People who were previously marginalized by the focus on mass culture suddenly got a voice and a connection with other people like them. So young music fans*

> *worldwide bonded over MTV, Black people and folks who love Black culture bonded over BET, middle-aged women bonded over Lifetime and fans of home remodeling convened around HGTV and old-school TLC.*

Cable television viewership peaked in the early 2000s but then began a slow decline due to competition from internet streaming services such as Netflix and Hulu. Today, some of these once-powerful cable network brands can be described as TV's ghosts — networks that somehow survive with little reason to watch them anymore.

For example, many younger viewers today are not even aware that MTV stands for Music Television Television or that in its heyday, MTV exclusively played new music videos and did not air reality-TV shows.

Other Significant Events

These three time stamps are worth mentioning.

1. **The Telecommunications Act of 1996 allowed regional phone companies, long-distance carriers, internet service providers and cable television companies to enter each other's markets.** Today, for example, your internet provider, phone provider and cable television provider can be the same company. This led to massive industry consolidation.

2. **The switch from analog to digital became complete in 2009** with all stations broadcasting digital signals. Television sets no longer receive analog signals via antenna. The FCC has reclaimed and auctioned unused analog frequencies.

3. **The debut of Hulu Plus in 2010 allowed viewers to stream favorite shows to a variety of devices**, opening up a new market area and redefining the concept of television. Today, the distinction between the computer screen and the television screen is melding, partly because of the emergence of streaming services such as Hulu and Netflix.

On the other hand, many streaming services now offer ad-free streaming for a premium price and ad-supported versions for those who prefer to save their money. The Atlantic's Lora Kelley made this observation:

> *One by one, most of the major streaming services have introduced ads to their subscription offerings. Now consumers face a choice: Pay up, or sit through commercial breaks like it's 1999.*

Similarly, the Verge explained why ad-free streaming is a luxury now as price increases have pushed viewers toward cheaper, ad-supported tiers.

Sports, Mainly Football

As television has become specialized and viewers have more on-demand streaming options beyond large-network shows, there are fewer moments when many millions of Americans are watching the same thing at the same time — with one notable exception.

A Wall Street Journal analysis observed that for television networks, "sports content is outrageously expensive but also critical to own in an industry in which it is one of the few reliable ways to draw in audiences."

In 2025, NFL games claimed 15 of the first 16 slots on Variety magazine's list of most-watched prime-time telecasts in the United States, including the Super Bowl at more than 126,000 viewers. The lone exception to the NFL's dominance, in the fifth slot, was a World Series baseball game.

The top 30 telecasts also included the NCAA men's basketball championship game and and game 7 of the NBA finals.

And in 2026, the World Cup final drew more than 50 million soccer viewers on Fox and Telemundo, which is a similar number to the audience for an NFL playoff game.

Let's briefly go to the wayback machine to catch a glimpse (no sound in this clip) of the first televised NFL game.



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Cord Cutting



CC0 Image

Today's on-demand streaming options have radically changed consumers' viewing habits. Many Americans have been labeled "cord cutters" because they use only wireless devices to access streaming video content, which has threatened the future of traditional cable and network television.

Streaming viewership reached a historic television milestone in 2025 when, according to a Nielsen report, total streaming usage overtook the combined share of broadcast and cable content.

Streaming platforms – such as Netflix, YouTube, Peacock, Paramount+, Amazon Prime, Disney Plus, Apple TV, and HBO Max – have become the video platforms of choice for many Americans, blurring the lines of distinction among television, movies and broadcast networks.

As personal examples, I watch the NBC Nightly News on YouTube TV, and I sometimes watch live broadcasts of soccer matches through Apple TV.

Wrapup

Television has had a profound social and cultural impact on Americans. Traditionally, television has given us "common ground," and until the last 25 years it had not been as specialized as other media. There have been historic moments when the majority Americans watched in unison. Here are some examples through time:

- immediate coverage of the Kennedy assassination
- the final episode of M*A*S*H*
- O.J. Simpson chase
- immediate coverage of 9/11
- the beginning of the Iraq wars
- Hurricane Katrina
- Super Bowls
- presidential election coverage
- Jan. 6, 2021

And I'll close with some geezer perspective to echo the chapter introduction. I was once a kid with a choice of watching ABC, CBS or NBC during prime time (7 to 10 p.m., central time) on a box-shaped television with a rotary dial.

Back then, I couldn't have imagined a television landscape with hundreds of on-demand options and networks based entirely on shows about home and garden (HGTV), cooking (Food Network), or vacations (Travel Channel).

And I certainly couldn't have imagined that 50 years later I'd be able to watch rerun episodes of *The Brady Bunch* on a portable phone screen, with no connecting cord involved.

Television has evolved rapidly.

True or False

The following questions highlight a few tidbits of information from the chapter. Use the forward button to advance through the questions.

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Drag and Drop – Television History

(last half of 20th century)

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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=683#h5p-41

Reflection on Television and Video

Write a short reflection based on the following prompts.

- How much television-style programming do you watch in a typical week? Do you watch more shows from legacy broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox) or are you mostly viewing content from other platforms and outlets? Provide a few personal examples.
- Are you concerned about the authenticity of modern game shows and reality TV series? *(Be sure to review the embedded chapter video about quiz show scandals during the '50s. For example, in the '50s, some viewers didn't seem overly concerned when they later learned that a quiz show had been rigged.)*
- Generally speaking, do you have greater trust in content that you see and hear through video and television, or do you place more trust in what you read?
- Does AI-generated content, especially video, change your attitude about trusting television and other video content?
- Based on the evolution of television that you studied in this chapter, how do you define the concept of ***television*** today?
- Based on the evolution of television that you studied in this chapter, predict some future changes about what we will watch and how we will access it?

You have the option to use a Q&A format with approximately three sentences per response, OR you can write a short essay of at least 250 words in journalistic style with approximately three or four sentences per paragraph.

14.

MOVIES

By Alyssa Riley

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=314#h5p-104

Cinema has been a constant source of fascination for me, with films such as *Interstellar*, *Parasite*, *Whiplash* and the complete *Harry Potter* series among my all-time favorites. Yet these cinematic gems are a tiny slice of more than 500,000 movies that have graced the big screens since the creation of the first film in 1888. The movie industry evolved from technological breakthroughs in photography, the exploration of motion illusion, and the study of human and animal locomotion during its early era.

Movie-watching is one of my pastimes. I can be transported into different lives, breathtaking stories and other worlds. Sometimes I feel as though I know the characters on a personal level.



Eight movies were produced in the Harry Potter film series.

In over two decades of my life, the cinematic landscape has gone through a remarkable transformation. Visual quality has improved significantly, animation has become more lifelike, and advancements in green-screen technology and computer-generated graphics have expanded creative possibilities.

And it all began over 130 years ago with one invention capable of capturing moving images, forever altering the future of entertainment. In this chapter, I'll take you through the history of the movie industry, from inventions and innovations to cultural persuasion through film.

Your Media Landscape

Some textbooks suggest that movies remain the most immersive media experience for consumers, meaning we are more likely to pay attention and less likely to seek distractions when we are watching a movie.

Is this true for you in a movie theater? Is it true for you in other settings where you watch movies, television or other video content?

Early Inventions and Effects

The pre-classical era of cinema started with the invention of the Kinetoscope, but there were subsequent innovations that steered the industry toward what we know today. The following slideshow summarizes the earliest technologies in the development of cinema:

Study the following presentation slides by using the forward button or clicking on sections of the control bar. To enlarge any interactive presentation in this book, click on the lower-right full-screen option (arrows).



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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=314#h5p-20

Next, watch the following video for a more in-depth look at pre-classical cinema:



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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=314#oembed-1

Thanks to YouTube, you can watch one of the first science-fiction movies ever made: *A Trip to the Moon*, directed by Georges Méliès. This may help you appreciate production techniques for silent films when there was no dialogue to further a movie's plot.



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The 2011 movie *Hugo*, directed by Martin Scorsese, includes scenes based on the work of Georges Méliès. The video below is cued to start at one of the scenes that may help you envision how *A Trip to the Moon* was made.



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1900s: The Movie Industry

Early in the 20th century, movies began changing rapidly. Films became more narrative in nature and included color and sound. Production companies popped up, and Hollywood emerged as the unofficial capital of the U.S. movie industry.

Motion Picture Theaters

Edwin S. Porter, a projectionist and engineer for the Edison Company, created *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), utilizing Méliès' stage-like composition style through editing, camera pans, rear projections and diagonally composed shots.

Establishing the realistic narrative as a new cinema standard, *The Great Train Robbery* can be considered the U.S. first major box-office hit and paved the way for industry growth. The video below is cued to start with a robbery scene.

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Production Companies

With a surge in demand for movies, production companies gained prominence. The Motion Picture Patents Company (MPPC) was created in 1908. It pooled the most significant motion picture patents and established an exclusive contract between the 10 leading companies and Eastman Kodak Company, a supplier of film stock. By 1910, there were at least 20 production companies in the United States.

The Art of Silent Film

U.S. films gained popularity in Europe, Russia and Scandinavia from 1911 to 1926, as movies became longer and had more editing and production value for narrative-driven dramas, romances and comedies. With the use of phonographic cylinders and discs, music and soundtracks could be played as background sound in films.

Technicolor

Color was initially brought to films through hand coloring, tinting, toning and stenciling. But beginning in the early 1900s, the British Kinemacolor process – with principles of color separation – began to be used for "natural color"" moving images. Because the technicolor process was expensive and tedious, it was mostly used for documentaries from 1915 until 1932, when the three-color (red, green and blue) technicolor process was introduced. Classic films like *Gone With the Wind* and *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) were among the first to implement technicolor for broad audiences.

1920s-1950s: The Bright and Shiny Hollywood

The Rise of the Hollywood Studios

When the stock market crashed and the Great Depression began, most of the country was hit hard. An exception, however, was the Hollywood movie industry.

In 1927, *The Jazz Singer* became the first feature-length film to have synchronized dialogue. By the early 1930s, a majority of feature-length films had sound, and by the mid-'30s, some had full color, too. American

film companies now dominated the worldwide industry as five major studios reigned supreme with only one real rival: India.

The Golden Age of Hollywood, or the rise of the Hollywood studios, came in the '30s, '40s and '50s as cinema became the primary form of popular entertainment. Many Americans began visiting the cinemas at least two times a week. During World War II, the U.S. government sought help from Hollywood movie studios in creating films with patriotic content.



Outside the Warners' Theatre in 1926 before the premiere of "Don Juan," starring John Barrymore (Creative Commons Image – Wikimedia)

Appropriate Content and Codes

The Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) was formed in 1922 to combat government censorship and promote artistic freedom and self-regulation through a rating system. By 1930, criticisms resurfaced, and conservative groups called for censorship. As a result, the Motion Picture Production Code, sometimes called "The Hays Code" for MPAA President Will H. Hays, was implemented. It remained in place until 1967 to ensure movies were "directly responsible for spiritual or moral progress, for higher types of social life, and for much correct thinking."

You can watch the following video to learn more about the Golden Age of Hollywood:

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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=314#oembed-5

An important legal side note from this era came in 1948. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that movie studios could not have absolute control over which theaters would show their movies.

Prior to this ruling, major film studios often owned the theaters where their movies were shown. Formally titled United States v. Paramount Pictures, Inc., it also came to be known as the Hollywood Antitrust Case of 1948. If not for this ruling, you can imagine a U.S. movie landscape, decades later, in which moviegoers who wanted to see *Toy Story* and *Finding Nemo* could have only seen those Pixar movies in cities that had a Pixar-owned theater.

1960s-1980s: Youth Culture and the Start of Sequels

The Graduate, released in 1967, was one of the first U.S. films to reflect the attitudes of a younger generation, whom we now call Baby Boomers. Many Baby Boomers were dissatisfied with the repressive social codes established by older conservatives as well as U.S. participation in the Korean and Vietnam wars. In that same year, *Bonnie and Clyde* featured resistance toward patriotism and institutional authority.

Below is the 1967 trailer for *The Graduate*.



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A New Ratings System

You may recognize these movie terms:

- G for general audiences
- PG for parental guidance suggested
- PG-13 for parents strongly cautioned
- R for restricted
- NC-17 for adults only

Established by the Motion Picture Association (MPA) in 1968, the Film Rating System was created to label movies and help parents determine the appropriateness of a film for their children.

Before these labels were introduced, parents across the nation were calling for government action to censor movies. Jack Valenti, then CEO of MPAA, listened to the concerns and established the Classification and Rating Administration (CARA).

CARA is composed of parents who rate 600 to 900 films a year to help other parents make informed decisions on what is appropriate for children of various ages to view. Additionally, CARA continuously engages with parents to consider changes in their attitudes. Here are a few brief facts about the MPAA's Film Rating System:



Signage for movie ratings at an Arkansas movie theater

- In 1984, 'PG-13' was introduced.
- In the '90s, rating descriptors were included for movies 'PG' or higher.
- In 2007, tobacco imagery was included as a rating factor.
- By the end of 2023, more than 28,000 films had been rated under the MPAA.

Thanks to changes that began in the 1960s, a board of parents established by the Motion Picture Association still rates new movies today based on their suitability for children and teenagers. Kelly McMahon, the chair of the M.P.A.'s ratings division, said this in a New York Times interview:

> *"I never loved the perception of we're this faceless secret society who's just doling out these ratings without really any rhyme or reason, because the reality is we're a group of parents who are just trying to do right by other parents, and we don't really have anything to hide."*

Blockbusters, Knockoffs and Sequels

The dawn of the modern film industry – including blockbusters, knockoffs and sequels – came in the '70s with a new wave of directors, many of whom explored digital and computerized special effects. *Star Wars* (1977), directed by George Lucas, was historically significant in this realm.

Sequels were increasingly popular during this decade, many becoming multi-million-dollar franchises. For example, *Rocky* debuted in 1976, and in 2023 *Creed III* was released – the ninth *Rocky* sequel.

Another popular example, *Indiana Jones Raiders of the Lost Ark,* debuted in 1981, and *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny,* the fifth sequel, came out in 2023. An interesting fact about Indiana Jones is that Harrison Ford played Dr. Henry Walton "Indiana" Jones Jr. in each film.

Here's a trailer for the original *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark.*



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The 1990s and Beyond

Released in 1993, *Jurassic Park* relied heavily on special effects and serves as a good example for a movie trend of the 1990s. You can watch an original trailer below.



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Two divergent U.S. cinema strands began to grow in the last decade of the 20th century and the first decades of the 21st century.

1. **More blockbusters began relying on special effects**, including *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991) and *Jurassic Park* (1993). Also, the first fully computer-animated film, *Toy Story* (1995), demonstrated what could be done with computer-generated animation in large-market movies, and animated films soon gained popularity. Beginning in 2001, the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy relied heavily on computer-generated scenes to gain wide popularity. A few years later, beginning with *Iron Man* in 2008, Marvel's series of superhero movies used special effects to dominate ticket sales for well over a decade.

2. **Independent, low-budget films, including activist documentaries, were released to influence public opinion**. The documentary *Bowling for Columbine* (2002) sought to change attitudes toward American gun culture after the Columbine High School shootings of 1999. The documentary *Super Size Me* (2004) called attention to fast-food consumption and Americans' unhealthy eating habits. Beyond documentaries, another dramatic example was *Hotel Rwanda* (2004).

Below is the 2004 trailer for *Hotel Rwanda*.



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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=314#oembed-9

And here's a side note about the 1990s — As file sharing evolved, digital piracy spread from music to movies. However, it was more difficult to quantify how much revenue the movie industry was losing from piracy, partly because many pirated digital files were significantly lower in quality.

The next video is an example of a national anti-piracy ad from the era.



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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=314#oembed-10

After the Pandemic

In response to the COVID pandemic, Americans increasingly watched movies at home through streaming services rather than going to theaters. A report from Axios summarized how the streaming boom fueled the U.S. film industry's pandemic recovery.

Who will make and market future movies? The paradigm may be changing. In summer 2023, Mattel partially rebranded itself as a movie company with the success of *Barbie*, which was about much more than selling toys, according to a feature article from Variety magazine.

Below is a 2023 trailer for *Barbie*.



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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=314#oembed-11

The hype surrounding 2023 concert movies by Taylor Swift and Beyoncé may also marked a change in movie marketing and distribution. One Associated Press report at the time noted that the two movies were "first-

of-their-kind deals made directly with AMC Theaters that circumvent Hollywood studios" and initially left streamers waiting on the sidelines.

Hollywood saw a a horror heist in 2026. *Backrooms*, made with a modestly low budget of $10 million, and *Obsessions*, made on a $750,000 budget, were horror hits, especially with Gen Z audiences. Both films were made by directors in their 20s who initially gained fame through YouTube and TikTok.

Here is the trailer for *Backrooms*.



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But 2026 also showed that audiences still like high-tech, large-budget epics. Directed by Christopher Nolan, *The Odyssey* had an estimated production cost of $250 million and generated over $1 billion globally within its first four weeks.

The Odyssey featured a star-studded cast including Anne Hathaway, Zendaya, Tom Holland, Robert Pattinson and Matt Damon. Nolan previously directed several award-winning big-budget movies, including *Oppenheimer*, *The Dark Knight* and *Interstellar*.

On the technology side, *The Odyssey* was the first feature film shot entirely with IMAX film cameras and became the highest-grossing IMAX movie ever.

Below is a trailer for *The Odyssey*.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=314#oembed-13

Another big-money blockbuster in summer 2026 was *Spider-Man: Brand New Day*, which surpassed $2 billion in global ticket sales just three weeks after it was released.

As for trends in theater atmosphere, many U.S. movie houses have become a luxury experience for consumers willing to pay more for comfortable seats, food and drinks. An Axios article said that the the success of several U.S. chains, "prioritizing a higher-end experience for moviegoers, illustrates much about where cinema is going."

And one movie plot trend involves alternative versions for different global markets. As an extreme example, a New York Times article explained that in China's version of *Minions*, morality triumphs.

The Rise and Fall of Redbox

Consider the brief history of Redbox as an example of how quickly we've evolved from physical media to digital streaming. When Redbox launched in 2004 with rental kiosks in front of McDonald's restaurants, the strategy seemed sustainable. Redbox, which started with DVD rentals and later expanded to video games, soon surpassed its competitors. By 2013, it had taken over approximately half of the movie rental market in the United States.

Soon after that, though, the demand for DVD movie rentals began declining due to the emergence of Netflix and other streaming options. The surge in streaming accelerated during the pandemic. Redbox's parent company declared bankruptcy in 2024 and began shutting down the red kiosks.



Creative Commons Image

Future Innovations

Movies are becoming more technologically advanced, frequently surprising audiences. Here are six innovations that could affect movie production in the future.

Virtual Reality: Like 3D technology, VR is used to boost audience engagement, allowing viewers to see a film with greater sensory stimulation.

Glasses-free 3D: Audiences can see a movie as close as a meter away from the screen, and without the cheap paper glasses.

Augmented Reality: Combining real-time interaction between virtual and real worlds, AR aids in creating realistic 3D representations. In other words, audiences view superimposed images of real objects.

Internet of Things: A network of connected devices and technology that facilitates communication, IoT enables highly immersive and personalized movie experiences, with a possible shift from creator-driven to audience-driven content.



Promo graphic for a short AI-generated film, Relatively Disconnected

Voice Synthesis with AI: It is no surprise that some movie makers have started experimenting with AI to synthesize voices, sounds and scenes in movies.

3D Printing: This can create props, designs and sets, taking digital visions and producing fine-grained physical realities. Additionally, it aids in reducing the costs for building sets.

Interested in AI-generated video as an art form? You can watch Yossi Galanti's "Echoed in Water." Labeled a "short video art piece," the video below "reimagines the 15th-century painting, *Saint Elizabeth's Day Flood*" as both historical trauma and contemporary omen.

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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=314#oembed-14

Best of Show

Click through the following slideshow to see a subjectives list of the best movies every year from 1980 to 2025, based on compilations from Rotten Tomatoes and IMBd:

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Fill in the Blanks

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Movie Impact

This chapter included several examples of noteworthy movies and sequels.

Choose one movie or a series of movies/sequels and explain its impact on you personally. You can use an example mentioned in the chapter, or you are free to select a different movie.

Why was it impactful? Did the impact involve technology, scripting, film style, reflection of its historic era, or other elements?

Related to the chapter preview question, you should include why this movie engaged you to the extent that you still remember its content.

To strengthen your essay, rewatch the movie and find specific supporting details in the scenery, dialog and presentation.

Write approximately 250 words. Use journalistic style with no more than three or four sentences per paragraph.

This assignment is about the human you. Write your analysis with your own ideas and observations, not by using an AI large-language model.

15.

INTERNET

By Dave Bostwick

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=747#h5p-105

About a decade ago, I taught a lesson about web searches to a group of graduating high school seniors who were using their own smartphones to experiment in class. I wanted to show them that Google search results often varied depending on data that Google had collected about individual users (and this is now true for many platforms beyond Google).

At one point, I asked students to type their school mascot for a Google search. Several students attended a school with the panthers as their mascot, so they did a one-word search for *panthers*. The results were fascinating.



Some students saw a Wikipedia entry for panthers (the animals) at the top of their search results. Some students' results included links related to the NFL's Carolina Panthers. One young woman who was active in cheerleading saw several web pages about "Panther Cheerleaders" on her page-one search results.

At the top of one Black student's search was a link to information about the Black Panther political party, which gained prominence while advocating for Black rights in the 1960s. This student had never heard of the Black Panthers until that day in my class.

Keep in mind this was a few years before the Marvel movie *The Black Panther*, and the search results would no doubt yield different results today.

My retro rewind from a past class helps me establish my opening point for this chapter. The internet has evolved to make our mass media consumption customized and personalized, which is often helpful. We peruse popular media platforms to locate content that algorithms suggest to us.

On the other hand, the internet creates partitions among Americans based on their interests and beliefs, a

trend which has only increased as AI tools increasingly generate responses to users based on their locations and opinions.

Or as technology writer Brian X. Chen noted, AI is giving us a personalized internet, but we have no say in it.

Your Media Landscape

Can you think of personal examples when you sensed that a media platform gave you extremely personalized content based on your past media usage? To what extent does it concern you?

Chapter Overview

As we've studied in previous chapters, radio, magazines and television all evolved to become more specialized. One could argue that the internet has taken us from specialization to personalization because much of the internet content we see is based on our personal information and data.

The internet is a broad concept, and we could cover several chapters about connectivity and terminology. Instead, though, we'll devote this one chapter to a basic understanding of the following:

- Brief history of the internet's birth and evolution
- General idea of how the internet works
- Ethical and psychological concerns for society

Thanks to the internet, we have streaming video, so parts of this chapter will rely on Google's YouTube to deliver key perspectives.

In the Beginning

Much like radio, the internet did not begin as a medium for entertainment. And I'm sure the pioneers of the

World Wide Web did not envision that one day Americans would have Bluetooth internet connectivity and touchscreen control through a vaping device.

The internet is an open-ended technology that began as a means for researchers to share information securely and more efficiently. Here's a brief supporting video from History.

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Making Connections

The internet has rapidly evolved to become an essential part of Americans' lives for job applications, education, daily communication and entertainment.

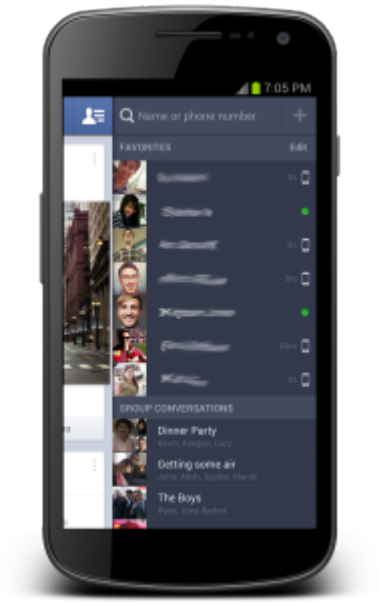
A simple analogy with phone numbers may help you understand how domains work.

We usually don't need to type a 10-digit phone number when we call a friend or family member. Within smartphone communication apps and other online platforms, names have already been attached to phone numbers and user devices. You select a name, and the tool makes the call for you. The same process applies to text messaging.

Likewise, you don't have to type a bunch of numbers to visit a website, even though, behind the scenes, a web server is identifiable as a set of numbers (similar to a phone number).

For example, when you type espn.com in your web browser address bar or click on this text link to espn.com, you are automatically directed to ESPN's web server. There's no need to memorize or type a long string of numbers to make the connection.

Below is a short animated video from Simple Things that explains how the internet works. It includes an overview of how the Domain Name System associates a numbered IP address with a lettered address (such as google.com).



Web addresses function much like contact lists on a smartphone. (CC0 Image)

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The video emphasizes that the internet relies heavily on underwater cables and thus is not really a magic cloud. In fact, the internet is "glass, copper, electricity and logic."

The Digital Divide

Much of this chapter will focus on ethical and psychological issues related to the internet. We'll start with the digital divide.

Not everyone has internet access. Americans who can afford smartphones, tablets and computers typically have no problems staying informed. That is not the case for some low-income Americans, however, especially after the federal Affordable Connectivity Program expired in 2024.

The State of Local News Project at Northwestern University suggested that



The Digital Divide – Investopedia.com

wealthier, urban Americans have access to more local news. Previous research also showed that a reliable internet connection was essential for many Americans during the pandemic, but not everyone could afford it.

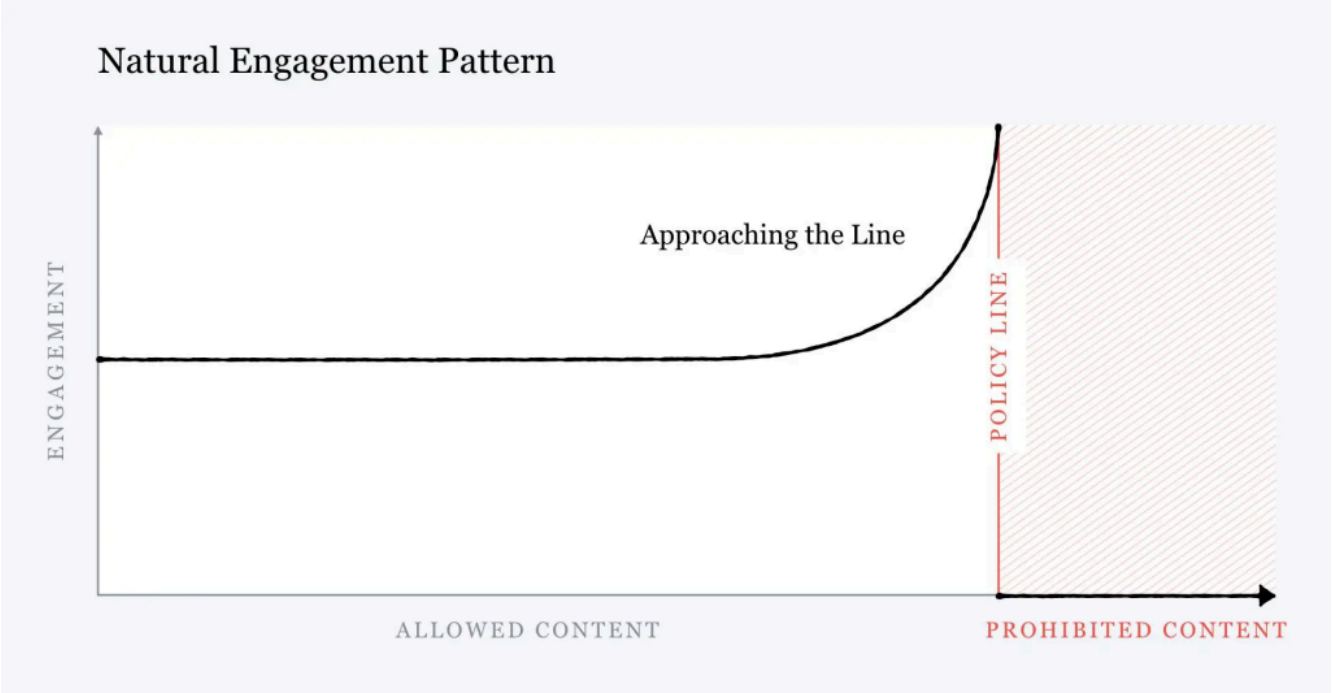
As more of our daily media content becomes digital, including textbooks and government documents, a primary concern is that Americans who can't afford high-speed internet access and smart devices will be at an informational disadvantage compared to wealthier Americans.

Furthermore, artificial intelligence has created a global digital divide, "fracturing the world between nations with the computing power for building cutting-edge A.I. systems and those without," according to

a New York Times interactive analysis. Data showed that American and Chinese companies operate more than 90 percent of data centers used for AI work worldwide.

Popularity vs. Quality

An MIT Technology Review article about how Facebook got addicted to spreading misinformation included the following chart based on information that Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg first shared in 2018.



The chart illustrates why it can be so difficult for social media platforms and websites to regulate users' posts and minimize harm. The most popular content is often the closest to violating community standards.

Social media and search algorithms tend to reward popularity. Consumers may say they dislike controversial posts and disinformation, but many of them are still lured by clickbait headlines and thus view misleading information or hate speech.

The New York Times' Shira Ovide made an observation about Zuckerberg's chart that seems pertinent to this chapter:

> *... no matter where Facebook drew the line at activity that went too far — dangerous lies, bullying, calls for violence, sexually suggestive photos — people tended to post material that went right up to the line. And they did that because, again, people found it engaging.*

Writing for Gateway Journalism Review, William H. Freivogel had a related observation about social media in general:

> *Content creators are paid more by advertisers when posts go viral, regardless of their truth, so creators*

are incentivized to produce and amplify eye-catching content. False claims often are more eye-catching than truthful ones, studies have shown.

Online Child Safety

In the past decade, social media executives have frequently been accused of ignoring the potential dangers for children who use social media platforms, including psychological damage, addiction and sexploitation. A New York Times article cited government documents showing that Meta rejected efforts to improve children's safety.

In 2024, U.S. senators questioned executives from five companies – Meta, TikTok, X, Snap and Discord – about online child safety. A few senators even compared social media companies to cigarette makers. The most dramatic moment came when Missouri Sen. Josh Hawley spoke to Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg (and remember from a previous chapter that Facebook is part of the Meta conglomerate).



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Despite the drama in the video clip above, senators and representatives sometimes struggled over the years to pass enforceable legislation protecting teens online, setting rules for appropriate content, and safeguarding all users' data.

However, in 2026 Meta agreed to pay as much as $17 billion to settle a nationwide lawsuit involving social media addiction. Meta agreed to limit how much time U.S. teens can spend on Instagram and Facebook. Also, Meta said it would silence notifications to teens during school hours.

As part of the settlement with 47 states, U.S. territories and Washington, D.C., Meta sought guarantees that YouTube, TikTok and Snapchat would implement similar restrictions for teen usage.

If You Aren't the Customer, You're the Product

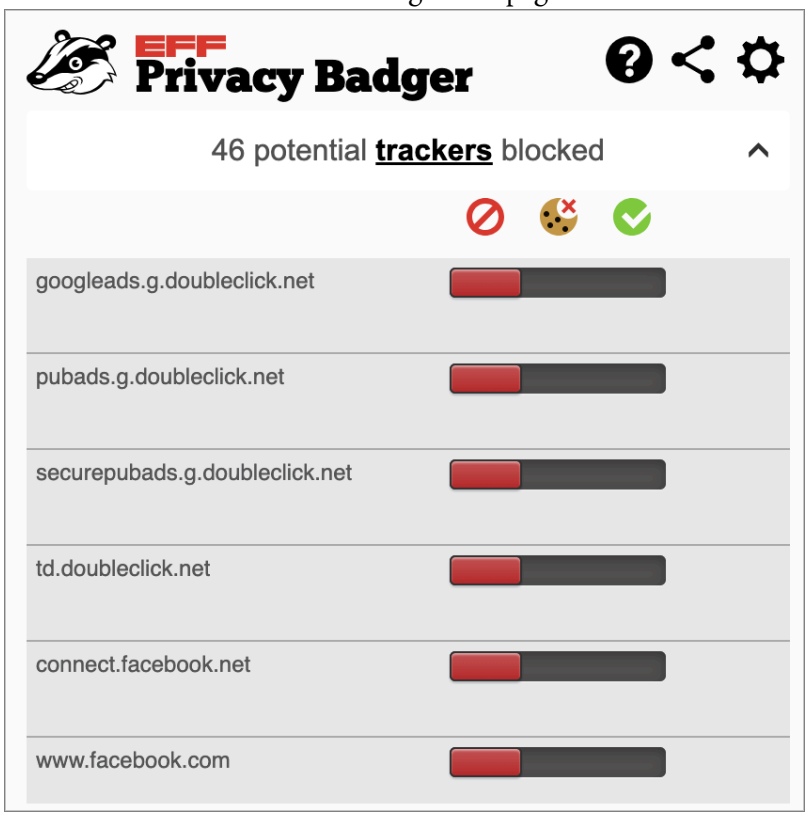
When we use search engines, social media and websites, we typically allow companies to collect data about our

internet usage, such as sites we visit and items we search for. As a trade-off for much of our online content being free, we see lots of ads that can be based on the data that companies have collected about us.

You can say, then, that each American internet user is a product that can be sold to advertisers.

In *The Death of Truth*, Steven Brill wrote that "the publisher and the publisher's content are not the product. The product is you – the person whose data has been harvested so exquisitely that you are the advertiser's target."

Below is a partial screenshot of Privacy Badger, a browser extension I sometimes use to see hidden trackers that monitor my web browsing activity on various sites. The screenshot shows that, in this case, there were 46 potential trackers connected to a single web page that I visited.



As the Privacy Badger screenshot illustrates, trackers want to invisibly send information about our internet usage to advertisers and data brokers.

Online tracking isn't always a bad thing, though. Here's a kinder explanation from the All About Cookies website.

> *When you visit a website, it gives your browser a cookie to store in a cookie file that's placed in your browser's folder on your hard drive. The next time you visit the same website, the browser will give back the cookie to identify you. Then the website loads with a personalized experience.*

Online tracking and cookies can help advertisers and public relations professionals measure effectiveness. For example, here are two website addresses that will in theory take readers to the same New York Times article.

ADDRESS 1 – https://www.nytimes.com/2026/08/04/t-magazine/important-sculptures-modern-

age.html?campaign_id=190&emc=edit_ufn_20260817&instance_id=180455&nl=from-the-times&regi_id=86965914&segment_id=827350&user_id=3544579ce1fb22c0827e722878b6f520

ADDRESS 2 – https://www.nytimes.com/2026/08/04/t-magazine/important-sculptures-modern-age.html

Why is the first address longer? The first address enables tracking. After the letters *html*, the first address is coded so that media trackers can collect data about how many people click on the link (which was originally embedded in an email newsletter) and where individual visitors go on the website after they click on the link. *(Note: For privacy concerns, I altered a few numbers and letters in the user_id of the first address before publishing this chapter.)*

Private for Now (but maybe not forever)

A good case example for data privacy and the risk of consumers becoming products is 23andMe, a biotechnology company that offers genetic testing. Customers can provide a saliva sample, which is then analyzed to deliver personalized information about ancestry and health.



When 23andMe declared bankruptcy in 2025, it led to headlines about users whose genetic data was suddenly at risk.

As a hypothetical scenario, 23andme's immense trove of user data could be a valuable asset for companies that use targeted online advertising to promote health-related products and services. When they initially provided a saliva sample to 23andMe, most users probably did not consider that their DNA data could become part of data sets used for targeted-ad campaigns.

Beyond 23andMe, a larger question surfaced about what happens to any of our personal online data (including on social media) when companies collapse and we potentially lose control of our private information, which may even include location tracking.

A Post-Human Internet?

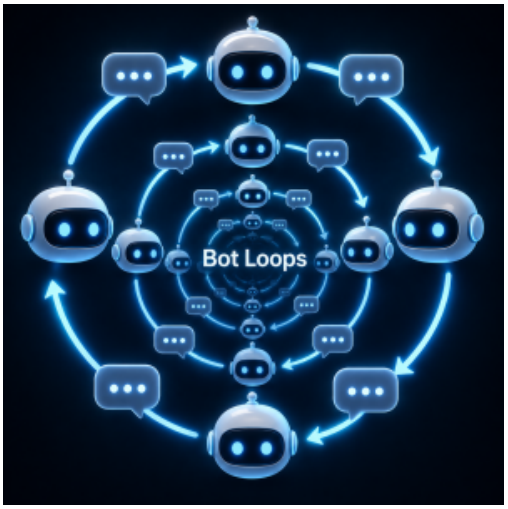
Impersonal online interactions have proliferated in the past decade. For example, some job-seekers use AI tools to write their applications, and then companies use AI to screen job applicants.

As another example, some college students use AI to generate content for written assignments, and then faculty can use AI tools to evaluate the quality of student work and assign grades.

Will the internet of the future still be built for people? An analysis from the tech company Cloudflare said that "more than 50% of traffic on the Internet is now non-human."

You may even hear the term "bot loops" to describe internet sites and AI agents that interact with no human involvement. Pop culture writer Callie Holtermann suggested that the proliferation of bot loops could lead to a post-human internet.

Some online content specialists now intentionally craft their websites to generate traffic from AI agents. Attracting the attention of non-human digital eyeballs can be more profitable than attracting human eyeballs.



Artwork created with ChatGPT

Media history says that emerging forms of media technology often spawn experiments in advertising. We may already be seeing that with AI-generated content on the Internet.

The Conversation reported on two computer scientists who set up a research study about chatbot responses with embedded advertising.

For example, research participants could ask a chatbot for suggestions about diet or exercise plans. An ad-supported chatbot in the experiment could then suggest a specific app for tracking calories. For research participants, the chatbot appeared to be making an unbiased recommendation, even though the chatbot response actually pointed users toward a specific product.

Here was a key finding from the research:

> *Although ads made the chatbot perform 3% to 4% worse on many tasks, numerous users indicated they preferred the advertising chatbot responses over the nonadvertising responses. They even said the ad-infused responses felt more friendly and helpful.*

In the next few years, we'll no doubt see ethical and legal debates about the transparency of embedded advertising in some AI tools and chatbots.

Popularity Contest

We'll wrap up this chapter with a video from Global Stats charting the most popular worldwide websites from 1996 to 2025. The video data is based on total monthly visits.



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Consider how valuable it can be for a platform to gain users' loyalty as their initial landing spot for online interactions. In the video above, the top slot shifted from America Online (AOL.com) to Yahoo to Google as the Internet moved from mostly human-curated content in the heyday of Yahoo to algorithms beginning with Google.

Although the video shows lots of chart movement until 2012, Google then claimed the top spot for the remainder of the decade and beyond, while Facebook and YouTube battled for the second and third positions and all other platforms lagged far behind.

That doesn't mean Google will remain entrenched at the top. For example, in the next decade we could see a new AI-focused company dominate the web market, perhaps thanks in part to embedded advertising in AI-generated search results.

NOTE: Due to the range of screen sizes (computers, tablets, smartphones) and platforms (websites, mobile apps), metrics used to gauge online traffic across multiple years are imprecise. The video above is merely intended to illustrate broad trends.

Closing Perspective

If you are a prisoner of the moment, you may think that most mass media content was reliable back in the good old days before the internet ruined everything with fake news. As we've studied several times in this OER text, that's an oversimplification.

Here's an additional perspective from *The Gutenberg Parenthesis* by Jeff Jarvis:

> *But it is important to recognize that many of the problems attributed to the internet are ultimately human problems, our failings. We bring to the net a long unbroken history of racism, misogyny, mistrust, and fear. The net did not suddenly teach us to hate. Turn off the internet tomorrow and the hate will still burn.*

On a more positive note, the internet has given more people a means to express their ideas and feelings. We can all be media creators and consumers from our homes, and that's not always a bad thing.

Plus, the ubiquity of the internet still offers hope for some of us that, collectively, we can improve the world through our evolving media tools.

Fill in the Blanks

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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=747#h5p-48

The Internet's Impact on Reading and Viewing

Living History

Several of our chapters have included stories about the the disruptive impact of the internet on traditional media platforms. Now it's your turn to collect some living history about the internet.

The instructions are similar to a previous interview assignment about music and culture, except this time you are covering media evolution outside of music.

Interview someone whose lifetime has spanned a broad spectrum of changes in media consumption habits. Age 45 is probably a minimum for this assignment.

In most journalism settings, it is not appropriate to interview family members and friends, but for this assignment it is OK. You should not, however, interview parents or immediate guardians.

Visit with your interviewee about how their use of internet-connected media devices has evolved over the past decades. Ask questions about how they think the internet has changed their reading and viewing habits:

- Newspapers
- Books
- Magazines
- Movies
- Television
- Advertisements

Discuss the ways they think internet connectivity has changed American culture for better and for worse, including websites, social media and smartphones.

Summarize the highlights and key takeaways from your interview in a short narrative of approximately five paragraphs, with three or four sentences per paragraph.

Your summary does not necessarily need to mention all items in the bullet list above, but share the most interesting information that you gleaned from the interview.

Reminder — Do NOT use large-language models such as ChatGPT or other AI tools to generate content for this assignment.

16.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

By Dave Bostwick

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=5#h5p-107



Although I earned my bachelor's degree in journalism, I took several courses about public relations along the way. So when I first graduated from college, I applied for a few PR positions.

I got an immediate call for one of those PR jobs and went to an on-site interview the next day. I was disappointed to see that this job involved sitting in a cubicle, along with approximately 20 other telemarketers, making unsolicited sales calls. This call-center work didn't align with the engaging lessons I learned about PR in my college classes.

Fortunately, PR professionals today are held in much higher esteem, but the term "public relations" can still seem squishy or broad.

What does public relations really mean? How do we identify authentic PR jobs that require professional skills?

Here's how the Public Relations Society of America defines the profession:

> ***Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics.***

The call-center position that I interviewed for didn't fit that definition, mainly because making cold calls no doubt annoyed most people who picked up their old-fashioned phones in the days before caller ID. Also, there

was no long-term strategy to build mutually beneficial relationships. The goal was for the company to make money as quickly as possible.

Here's a simpler description:

> ***PR is delivering the right information to the right audience at the right time on behalf of a client.***

In this chapter, you'll focus on the growing realm of professional public relations and examine a few brief case studies. You'll also examine ways that public relations is distinct from advertising.

Your Media Landscape

How would you define and explain public relations to a 12-year-old? What's an example you would include?

(If you're planning a career in public relations, you should be able to do this. And no fair using a web search or AI text generator for your response.)

Lots to Do

Public relations can be a rewarding career because of its complexity and variety. The following presentation shows the broad range of professional PR activities.

Study the following presentation slides by using the forward button or clicking on sections of the control bar. To enlarge any interactive presentation in this book, click on the lower-right full-screen option (arrows).

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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=5#h5p-39

It may be helpful to make a distinction between public relations and advertising.

A PR campaign attempts to increase audience awareness or strengthen people's attitudes about a client – such as a public figure, a company or an organization – often by securing favorable media publicity. However, PR professionals sometimes can't control that narrative.

For example, a PR office can send a news release to a local television station and hope for some positive (and free) publicity IF the station's journalists decide to cover information from the news release. However, the PR office has minimal control over how the TV station frames its coverage.

On the other hand, advertising typically involves buying media space or time to publicize products or services. Unlike the example of the PR news release in the previous paragraph, if an organization buys a television or social media advertisement, the organization controls the content of the initial ad.

The effectiveness of an ad campaign often can be measured by increased sales, name recognition or visibility, while it is more difficult to measure the effectiveness of a PR campaign.

Positive Vibes

Here's an example of a PR campaign that generated publicity and positive vibes for a company, even though it wasn't directly connected to company sales or revenue. In 2023, Airbnb committed to provide short-term housing for thousands of Ukrainian refugees. The good-will gesture garnered publicity and eventually gave Airbnb co-founder Joe Gebbia an interview with ABC News.



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As an additional example from Northwest Arkansas, after tornadoes caused extensive damage in June 2024, Tyson Foods Inc. distributed 21,000 free meals to area residents in need. The initiative involved a partnership with Walmart, and it generated positive publicity for both companies.

Publics (plural)

The PRSA definition of public relations uses the plural noun *publics* instead of the singular *public*. PR professionals craft targeted messages to multiple groups and often have different goals and strategies for effectively communicating with each group.

As an example, the interactive presentation below examines the various publics that a university PR staff might target in its communication plans.

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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=5#h5p-40

A Good Example

Two or three decades from now, when people debate the most culturally important music of the 2020s, maybe someone could mention the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (probably not, but there's always a chance).

The commission dropped an album titled We're Safety Now Haven't We. Besides emphasizing safer habits for a teenage target audience, the album generated lots of positive publicity from media outlets such as NPR.

Here's a lyrical sample from the chorus of the opening song, which advocates wearing a helmet while riding a bike.

When you're in these streets,
Take caution.
Protect your neck and your noggin.

Listeners are free to download, remix and reuse songs from the album, including on social media.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=5#oembed-2

And if you didn't catch those lyrics, here's a condensed text version.

I'm classifying this as a good example because it shows how an organization can creatively reach a target audience in an informational campaign. However, PR staffers from governmental agencies often need to be prepared for public criticism about inappropriate use of taxpayer funding.

A Bad Example

Conversely, here's an example of a PR message that did more harm than good.

In February of 2023, Vanderbilt's Peabody College's Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion released a statement intended to show support for the campus community at Michigan State University, where a gunman had killed three students. The statement was sent via email to Vanderbilt students and included this call to action:

> *In the wake of the Michigan shootings, let us come together as a community to reaffirm our commitment to caring for one another and promoting a culture of inclusivity on our campus. By doing so, we can honor the victims of this tragedy and work towards a safer, more compassionate future for all.*

One problem: The statement was generated by ChatGPT, which angered many students who received the email. One student gave the following quote to The Vanderbilt Hustler student newspaper.

> *"There is a sick and twisted irony to making a computer write your message about community and togetherness because you can't be bothered to reflect on it yourself."*

Another student provided this critique:

> *"It's hard to take a message seriously when I know that the sender didn't even take the time to put their genuine thoughts and feelings into words."*

An Oldie but a Goodie

I want to share one of my all-time favorite examples of a company's PR efforts turning bad publicity into good publicity. It was also one of the first PR case studies that showed the power of the internet and social media to create headaches for large companies that don't pay close enough attention to customer service.

Canadian musician Dave Carroll was upset with United Airlines. He said that one of his prized guitars had been badly damaged during a flight from Nova Scotia to Nebraska. He was most frustrated with the lack of help he received from United's customer service.

After repeated failures to get people from United Airlines to listen to his problem, Carroll turned to YouTube. He wrote a song and then created and posted an accompanying video in 2009. You can still watch his video on YouTube.



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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=5#oembed-3

Soon, United Airlines was facing a PR crisis. Carroll's video, made with a budget of only $150 and volunteer help from others who sympathized with his plight, collected a million YouTube views in four days and became a topic of discussion on national talk and news shows.

United Airlines publicly fixed the problem by offering Carroll $1,200 in flight vouchers and $1,200 in cash. Carroll later summarized the significance of his song as a PR case study:

> *'United Breaks Guitars' was an early sign that in this new digital world, one customer can affect the profitability of the world's biggest brands on a budget of, in my case, $150. Companies now are listening much more closely than they ever did before, consumers are feeling more empowered and every customer can have a voice ... even if he or she can't sing.*

Chatbot Concerns

You can contrast United Airlines' approach above with a more recent response to a customer complaint at AirCanada. In that case, an AirCanada customer used AirCanada's support chatbot to get information about the airline's bereavement discount policy.

The chatbot gave him erroneous guidance about the steps required to get a partial refund. Due to the chatbot's bad advice, the customer ended up having to pay full price with no refund. The customer eventually filed a lawsuit.

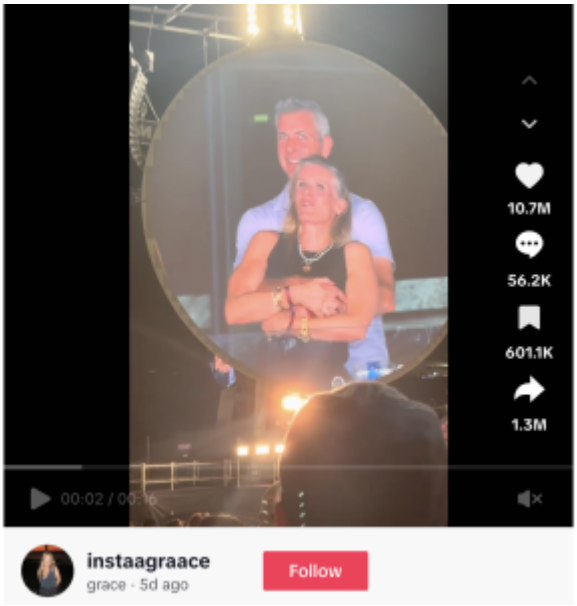
AirCanada representatives argued that the company's chatbot was "a separate legal entity that is responsible for its own actions." However, the court ruled that because the chatbot was part of a company website, AirCanada was responsible for giving the customer a partial refund due to the chatbot's mistake.

Additionally, AirCanada collected a lot of negative publicity along the way.

Coldplaygate

A high-profile example of crisis PR was the Coldplaygate incident in 2025, when a kiss-cam briefly showed a company CEO embracing a female co-worker who was not his wife. The two were startled and immediately sought to avoid being shown on camera. Their reaction led to thousands of social media memes and public embarrassment for the now-former CEO's company, Astronomer.

Astronomer responded to the crisis through subtle humor in the video ad below featuring Gwyneth Paltrow, the ex-wife of Coldplay singer Chris Martin. The video tried to turn a negative into a positive for Astronomer.



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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=5#oembed-4

The Timing of Negative News

As another example of crisis communications, rock musician Dave Grohl made a public statement about becoming the father of a daughter outside his marriage. One PR executive praised Grohl's admission as being clean, smart and simple, especially because it came before any media outlets had reported on the child's birth.

Grohl's statement was published in September 2024 on the same day as a presidential debate, perhaps making it less likely to gain widespread attention. You can read more here:



Dave Grohl – Public Domain Image

- A

Rock Star's Mystery Baby Offers a Lesson in Crisis Communication – The New York Times

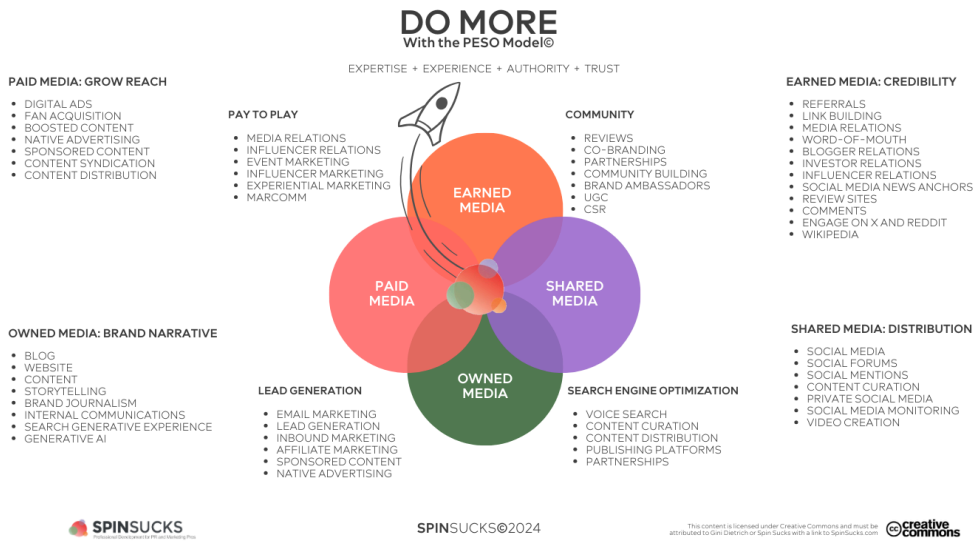
Beyond crisis communications, a New York Times article about AI data harvesting explained how Google employees updated the company's privacy policy in 2024, making a broader range of user data available to train Google's AI products. The article included details about strategic public notification to minimize negative feedback.

> *The team was told specifically to release the new terms on the Fourth of July weekend, when people were typically focused on the holiday, the employees said. The revised policy debuted on July 1, at the start of the long weekend.*

Spin Sucks

If you are planning a career related to public relations, you may be interested in the work of Gini Dietrich. She wrote an influential book titled *Spin Sucks* and introduced the PESO Model for public relations.

Spin Sucks emphasizes the need for honest, open communications within public relations. The model, shown below, illustrates four intersecting facets of modern public relations.



Creative Commons Graphic from Spin Sucks

Review Questions

The following questions highlight a few tidbits of information from the chapter. Use the forward button to advance through the questions.

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PR Considerations

If you are a student who is planning a career in advertising and public relations, you likely will receive much more thorough guidance about crisis/image management in future coursework. In this assignment, the following hypothetical scenarios merely give you an introductory taste of PR considerations.

OPENING NOTE – The two scenarios in this assignment are hypothetical, and Glory State University does not actually exist.

Pick one of the following options:

OPTION 1. A local television station has just reported that the Glory State University budget is so bad that the university is expected to lay off nearly 500 employees (mainly administrative assistants, custodians, food service workers and part-time staff members) within the next six months. You are the head of PR at Glory State. Several other area reporters have asked for interviews to cover this story, and inaccurate information has spread quickly on social media. Some current students are convinced that the university will close at the end of the semester.

Your president has told you that the layoffs are likely but not inevitable. Last month during an informal

campus meeting with faculty, she said she shared a chart with information about budget deficits and potential layoffs. She now regrets sharing the chart but says that any information in the chart is already outdated.

- How do you respond to reporters' requests?
- What information do you release to the public via a news release and/or social media?
- What other steps will you take?

OPTION 2. You are the public relations specialist at Glory State University. One of the university's researchers, Dr. Clarence Mellow, has discovered what could be a cure for skin cancer. It truly could be one of the greatest discoveries of this decade. Science reporters from all over the country are heading to your campus to interview Dr. Mellow.

However, Dr. Mellow is extremely shy, stutters when nervous, and has no desire to be a media darling. You have been asked to work with him over the next 24 hours to prepare him for an onslaught of interviews ranging from the Associated Press to National Public Radio to Fox News.

- How do you spend the next 24 hours with Dr. Mellow?
- What other strategic ideas do you have to create a positive public image for Glory State University and Dr. Mellow's work?

Your Task

Explain how you would handle ONE of these hypothetical situations. Use assigned content from this lesson to support your decision-making process.

Your explanation should be written in journalistic style. Write five or six paragraphs with approximately three sentences per paragraph.

The PR realm often requires some creative and less-predictable approaches. As such, avoid using AI tools for this task.

17.

ADVERTISING

By Dave Bostwick



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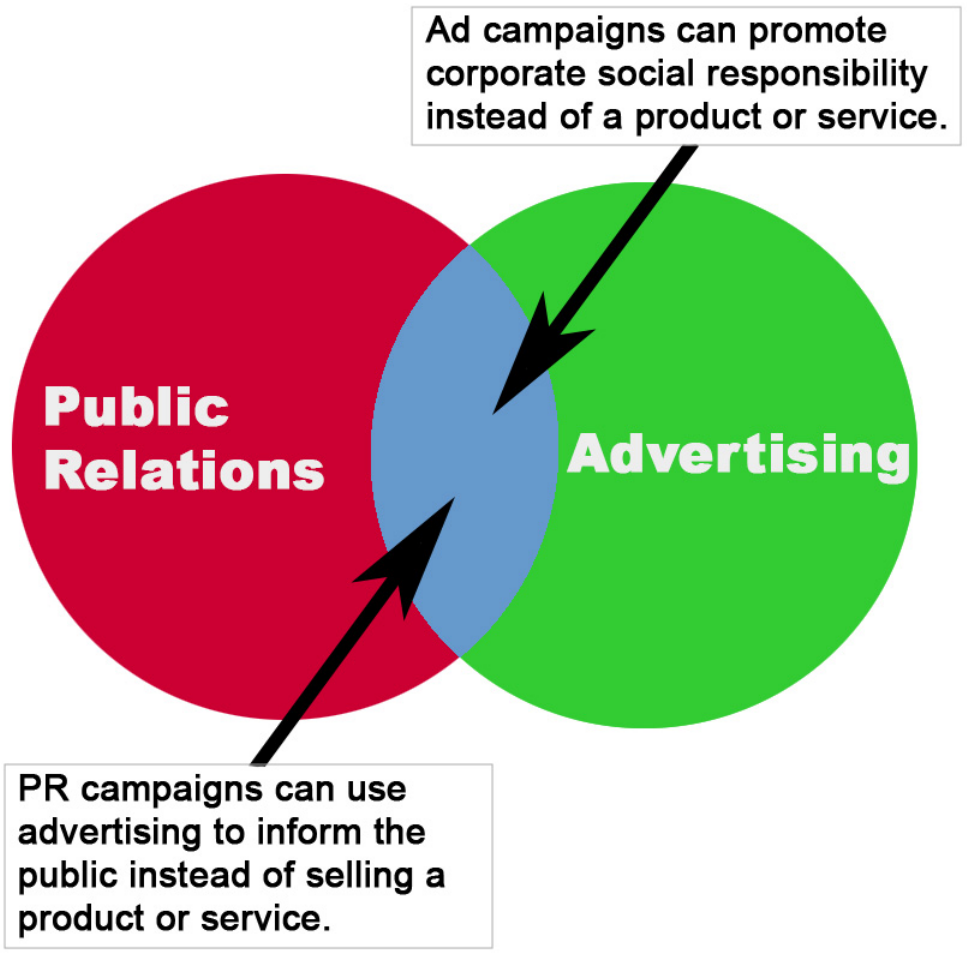
Revenue streams are embedded in much of the mass media we consume.

HBO, for example, relies primarily on viewers paying for access to its programming via paid subscriptions. On the other hand, the major U.S. broadcast television networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox) generate revenue from advertisers instead of charging a direct subscription fee to viewers.

Movie theaters show a few advertisements before a feature film begins but primarily rely on patrons to pay for tickets before entering the theater. And, of course, movie theaters get some auxiliary revenue from food and drink sales.

This chapter focuses on the second revenue stream in the opening flip card: advertising.

After studying public relations in the previous chapter, it may be helpful to see a simple visualization of how advertising and public relations are separate concepts but sometimes intersect.



Simply put, advertisers sometimes focus on PR goals instead of sales, and PR professionals sometimes use ads to promote goodwill and educate consumers.

Your Media Landscape

1. What kinds of ads are most likely to lead you to spend money on a product or service? Why? Where do you see or hear these ads?
2. What kinds of ads annoy you, maybe to the point that you avoid them? Why? Where do you see or hear these ads?

Ads Everywhere

It's impossible to accurately calculate the number of ads we are exposed to each day, but a summary analysis from the University of Southern California estimates that the number is as high as 5,000.

John Wanamaker, who opened the first U.S. department store in the 1870s, is often cited for this quote:

> *"Half the money I spend on advertising is wasted; the trouble is, I don't know which half."*

Marketing and advertising researchers have spent more than a century studying media stimuli that lead consumers to spend money on products and services, so that advertising money is not wasted.

Another famous saying related to advertising is that "if you aren't the customer, you're the product." In other words, many of our free online services, especially social media platforms, make money by collecting our personal data and selling our attention to advertisers.



CC0 Image

Proton, a tech company, used advertising data to determine that "the average American generates about $1,605 a year in advertising value." The Proton report included these parameters:

> *A 35- to 44-year-old man in Bozeman, Montana, without children, using a desktop and making high-value corporate searches, generates an estimated $17,929.30. An 18- to 24-year-old father in Fort Smith, Arkansas, using an Android phone and making low-value searches, generates $31.05.*

Words That Make Ads Memorable

Some catchy ad campaigns stick in our heads for a lifetime and can even affect our language usage. Here's an oldie-but-goodie from Rice Krispies.



(As a side note, the letter K seems especially popular in branded spelling of product names, as in Rice Krispies, Kleenex, Kool-Aid, Krispy Kreme and Kit Kat.)

Here's a more recent example of ad branding through product packaging and a slogan, courtesy of Liquid Death. The campaign also included a 2025 Super Bowl commercial.



For the 2026 Super Bowl, Liquid Death changed its verbal pitch to "The Easy-Drinking Energy Drink," as seen in the ad below:



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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=926#oembed-1

Next, you can watch a television example of a song that many older Americans heard as children and can probably sing word-for-word (and letter-for-letter, in this case) for the rest of their lives.



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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=926#oembed-2

Another older example helped audiences in the 1970s memorize the ingredients in a Big Mac.



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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=926#oembed-3

As a more recent example of a catchphrase used to frame visual images in modern advertising, watch this Chevrolet video, titled "The Heartbeat of America."



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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=926#oembed-4

Slogans and catchphrases – such as "Red Bull gives you wings" or "Like a good neighbor, State Farm is there" – are still a key strategy in many of today's advertising campaigns.

They typically sell products and services, but they can also create branding imagery for non-profits and even the military, as in the catchphrase for the U.S. Marine Corps: "The Few. The Proud. The Marines."

Now, let's have some fun testing your abilities to identify some popular ad slogans from the past and present.

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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=926#h5p-61

Even news media outlets can promote themselves through slogans. Here are two examples.

- The New York Times: All the news that's fit to print
- The Washington Post: Democracy dies in darkness

And if you want more slogans and related commentary, here are three links to explore.

- 30 Companies with Famous Brand Slogans & Taglines – Adobe
- 21 Unforgettable Advertising Slogans (with Takeaway Tips!) – Wordstream
- The 50 Best Slogans of All Time – Something Great

Slightly Cringeworthy (by today's standards)

As we learned in a previous chapter, early U.S. television shows were often sponsored and produced by a single company. As programming evolved beyond the quiz show scandals of the 1950s, however, the major television networks (ABC, CBS and NBC) began producing more of their own entertainment content and sold advertising spots for 30 or 60 seconds.

Admittedly, some of the 1950s ads in the following video are cringeworthy or haven't aged well, but they'll give you a sense of early American TV advertising.

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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=926#oembed-5

Note that these ads were product-specific, and the audience had fewer options to avoid or ignore an ad. They were made in an era when most households had only one television and, of course, there were no smartphones, which meant less competition for a viewer's attention.

Beyond television, some cigarette ads in magazines from the mid-20th century may seem strange by today's standards. Below are two examples.





Image Source

As you learned in a previous chapter, cigarette ads haven't appeared on U.S. television stations since 1971, when the FCC banned them on public airwaves.

Super Bowl Advertising

According to a statistical compilation from USA Today, a 30-second slot during the Super Bowl I broadcast in 1967 would have cost an advertiser $37,500. Fast forward to 2026, and a 30-second ad slot cost as much as $10 million.

Between 1967 and the 1990s, the Super Bowl evolved to become the most high-profile advertising event of each year in the United States. As media content has become more specialized, the Super Bowl is perhaps the only time each year when more than 100 million Americans are watching the same thing at the same time.

One of the most historically significant Super Bowl ads came in 1984. An Apple Macintosh ad produced by Ridley Scott (the director of *Blade Runner*) alluded to George Orwell's novel *1984*, which was a warning against totalitarianism. Apple was hinting at the totalitarianism that IBM had developed in the computer tech industry at that time. As a stark contrast to the 1950s ad strategies you saw earlier in this chapter, the ad below is often considered the beginning of fully produced storytelling in TV ads.

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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=926#oembed-6

Nationally, Apple's 1984 ad was broadcast nationally just once, during the Super Bowl, at a cost of $1 million. The ad cost almost $1 million to produce as well. A 2016 documentary video from NFL Films chronicled the impact of the 1984 Apple ad.

Long before Nike's Just Do It campaign, the Apple 1984 ad prioritized selling a brand's image instead of detailing the features of a specific product. The new Macintosh computer itself did not even appear in the ad.

Advertising Appeals

Some advertising analysts cite 20-or-more kinds of strategic appeals to consumers. For simplification in this brief chapter, though, we'll boil those down to two broad categories.

1. Emotional appeal
2. Rational appeal

As the name suggests, ads using emotional appeals attempt to evoke strong emotions from the audience. These ads may rely on appeals to a consumer's moral principles, personal aspirations, hidden fears, or sense of humor.

Emotional Appeal

An example of an emotional appeal would be ads using the Subaru slogan "Dog Tested. Dog Approved."

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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=926#oembed-7

And this 2019 example from SimpliSafe shows how fear can be used as an emotional appeal in an ad.

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More recently, as advertisers explore the potential of AI content, Coca-Cola produced an AI-generated holiday ad that relied on emotional appeal.

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For several decades, Coca-Cola ads have used polar bears for emotional appeal. But to give equal time to Coca-Cola's main competitor, here's how Pepsi had some fun with a polar bear for the 2026 Super Bowl. This example also relies heavily on the emotional appeal of humor.

https://youtu.be/pPHI2zNf_ww?si=AlQ26FT59C7GZOwc

Rational Appeal

Ads based on rational appeal focus more on logical reasons a consumer should consider purchasing a product or service, and they can include specific details for support. Following are two examples of rational appeal.





Here's a video example of a toothpaste ad filled with rational appeal.

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Deception, Data, Greenwashing and Weasels

Of course, as with almost all aspects of U.S. media, portions of the advertising industry are occasionally deceptive or unethical. as projected to increase to $170 billion by 2028.

For example, an investigation by Reuters news service found that Meta has earned a fortune on fraudulent ads. Reuters cited internal company documents showing that, in late 2024, Meta internally projected that it "would earn about 10% of its overall annual revenue – or $16 billion – from running advertising for scams and banned goods."

Also, online ads create **ethical concerns about data privacy** for users. For example, Apple Computer agreed to pay $95 million to settle a lengthy lawsuit involving the Siri voice assistant. The lawsuit alleged that

"Apple shared some of the conversations that Siri secretly recorded with advertisers looking to connect with consumers who were more likely to buy their products and services."

Claims within ads themselves are sometimes deceptive as well. As a 21st-century example, some companies like to advertise that their products are eco-friendly, or green.

Truth in Advertising explained that the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has declined to define the terms "sustainable" and "organic" in advertising. As a result, companies can use those terms in product packaging and advertising with minimal fear of legal consequences.



Creative Commons Image

The term **greenwashing** now refers to companies that make eco-friendly claims about their products and services even though the environmental evidence in the ads is misleading or unclear. Greenwashed ads for cleaning and beauty products have been more common in the past decade.

An essay from the Center for Media Engagement at the University of Texas suggested that "corporations should care about their environmental footprint, but some rely on greenwashing rather than genuine solutions for addressing the climate crisis, which can also make it difficult for the public to trust the companies that are seemingly keeping their promises to work toward greener business practices."

And advertisers have historically used **weasel words** to make product claims that can't be proven. For example, Papa John's has used this ad slogan: "Better Ingredients. Better Pizza." Logically, the slogan merely suggests that better ingredients lead to better pizza. We infer that Papa John's uses better ingredients, but the word "better" is a matter of opinion and cannot be proven on a factual basis.



The question in this case: Better than what?

An Ad in Outer Space

Product Placement and Sponsored Content



Creative Commons Image

In 2000 Pizza Hut paid $1 million for its logo to be placed on a Russian rocket that was sending supplies to the International Space Station. The company also sent a pizza into space for astronauts to cook and eat.

Randy Gier, Pizza Hut's chief marketing officer at the time, said, "From this day forward, Pizza Hut pizza will go down in history as the world's first pizza to be delivered to and eaten in space."

This was a high-profile example of **product placement**, a strategy by which ads are embedded within other media content instead of appearing or being broadcast separately as advertising. As a similar example, in 2024 an inflatable green dragon was temporarily attached to the Empire State Building as a promotion for HBO's *House of the Dragon*, which prompted publicity from outlets such as NBC's Today Show.

A simple example would be when you see a character in a movie or TV show drink a specific brand of soda or beer. A company may have paid for that product placement. As another example, Macintosh computers appeared in *Mission Impossible* movies, and Apple paid for that product placement.

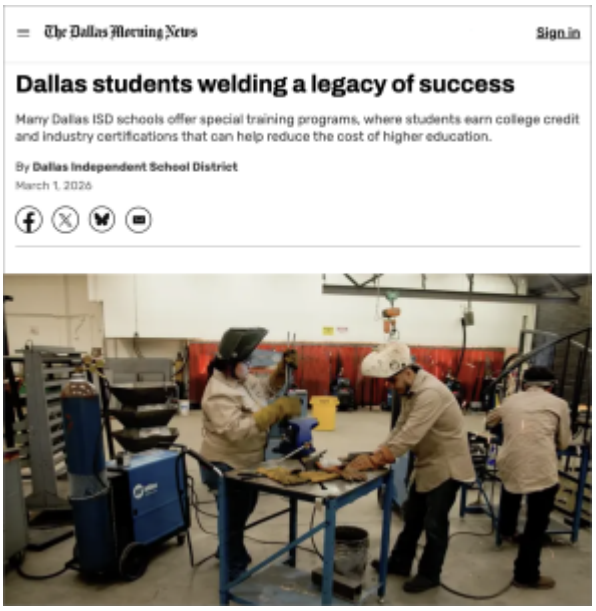
Occasionally, a movie or show mocks product placement in an entertaining manner so that the audience is aware of product placement but still enjoys it. The 1992 movie *Wayne's World* debuted at a time when U.S. audiences were becoming more aware of product placement in television shows and movies, and the following clip turned that into a parody.

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The New York Times published "Anatomy of a Product Placement" to help readers understand the concept. An industry argument in favor of product placement is that many people no longer pay attention to traditional ads.

Product placement is categorized as one type of **native advertising**. Another type of native advertising sometimes appears in online and print publications when a company or organization pays for story content that resembles a news or feature story. This is often called **sponsored content**.

For example, the Dallas Morning News provides sponsored content opportunities for advertisers who believe they will benefit from paid articles that resemble news. One article, titled "Dallas Students Welding a Legacy of Success," was sponsored by Dallas Independent School District. The article is clearly labeled as "sponsor content" with the school district in the byline.



Another example, titled "Young Alumni Pay It Forward With Co-branded Coffee," appeared on the Inside Higher Ed website. In small print under the byline, close readers may see "Content sponsored and provided by NC State University." However, the article's content is written much like a news story, especially in the use of sources and attributions.

A Cultural Shift

One Guardian article cited 2025 as a landmark year worldwide when social media creators overtook traditional media in advertising revenue, marking a "huge cultural shift" in the ad industry.

An analysis found that ad revenue from user-generated material – such as videos, podcasts and social media posts by individual creators – eclipsed revenue from professional media produced by TV networks, movie theaters and news companies.

The article acknowledged that the distinction between user-generated content and professional production can be blurry because some content creators use high-quality production techniques and tools.

Ads filled with AI art?

Speaking of user-generated content, we should consider the potential effects of AI-generated visuals in the future of advertising. For example, will graphic designers be more in demand to create distinctive, non-AI content? Or will AI-generated visual content become the norm?

Below is an example of a graphic that one of my students made to promote our Media and Society course to an audience of beagles (my favorite dog breed).



Peace, Little Girl

As a reminder about the impact of advertising on American society, we'll close this chapter with an ad that some historians consider the most effective political commercial ever. It aired as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's successful 1964 campaign against Barry Goldwater, and it drips with emotional appeal to create fears about what might happen if voters pick the wrong candidate.

Formally titled "Peace, Little Girl," the ad below was informally known as the "Daisy" ad.

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Fill in the Blanks

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Advertising Impact Assignment

The ultimate goal of most advertising is to convince you to spend your money for a product or service. Think of a specific instance when you saw or heard an advertisement that enticed you to purchase something.

What sparked your initial interest? What aspects of the ad motivated you? In what ways did the ad fit appeals or strategies discussed in this chapter, especially concerning rational or emotional appeal?

Write approximately five journalistic paragraphs (approximately three sentences per paragraph) with specific details about the ad and its effective components as well as the eventual outcome of your purchase.

This assignment is about you and your personal experiences. No AI tools needed.

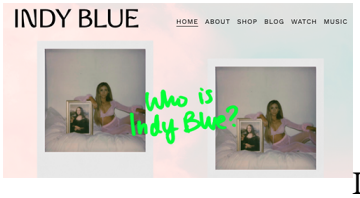
18.

SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS

By Alyssa Riley

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I vividly remember when influencers began taking over social media. I was 15 years old when I came across the YouTube page of Indy Blue. Originally known for her visually appealing travel compilation videos, she quickly climbed the social media ladder, becoming something of an obsession for teenage girls like me. I found her life captivating. Here was this girl, only a few years older than me, going viral while doing all the things I dreamed of.



Indy Blue later founded an apparel line (Lonely Ghost), participated in numerous marketing campaigns, and gained an audience base of more than 300,000 Instagram followers.

Influencing has massively intensified in the past decade. Now I keep up with influencers whose brands specifically cater to my interests, whether that be fashion, travel or food. They can influence what we eat, which products we buy and how we dress ourselves to fit current fashion trends.

Your Media Landscape

What characteristics or patterns cause you to trust or distrust a social media influencer?

The Basics

Now known as a standard strategy on social media platforms, influencer marketing is no longer restricted primarily to fashion. Influencers market everything from healthy, delivered meals and exercise supplements to Korean facial care.

The following brief presentation covers the most common elements of a social media influencer.

Use the forward button or click on sections of the control bar. To enlarge any interactive presentation in this book, click on the lower-right full-screen option (arrows).



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Brands have expectations for marketing, and audiences are vocal about what they want to see. If an influencer's content does not meet those expectations, it can lead to negative feedback.

The 2017 Fyre Festival is an extremely negative example. The festival's goal was largely to promote the Fyre app, used for booking and promoting music talent. Organized by con artist Billy McFarland and rapper Ja Rule, promotions encouraged potential festival attendees to enjoy the "best in food, art, music and adventure" in the Bahamas.

Some notable influencers, like Kendall Jenner and Bella Hadid, promoted the festival, but it turned out to be nothing more than a half-finished construction zone and a complete scam. McFarland was sentenced to six years in prison for fraud, and many locals lost money contributing to the festival.

Here's a trailer for a documentary titled *Fyre Fraud*.



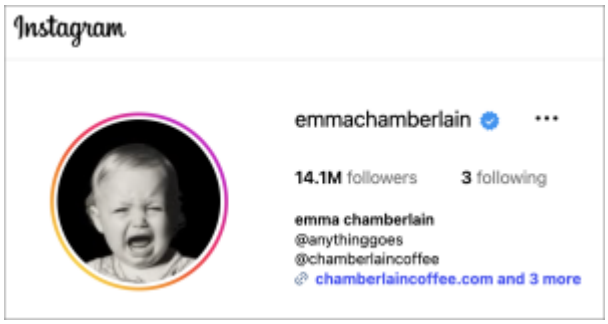
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After serving time in prison, Fyre Festival organizer Billy McFarland announced that he would organize Fyre Festival II, which was later canceled. And then in 2025 McFarland sold the Fyre Festival brand and social media assets on eBay for just under $250,000.

The Fyre Festival echoed a common problem with social media influencers. A study sponsored by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) found that

a majority of social media influencers don't verify information before sharing it. More than four in 10 influencers said they judged a source's credibility based on popularity, not accuracy.

Levels, Followers and Qualities



Successful influencers can evolve from being typical social media users to garnering millions of followers. For instance, Emma Chamberlain used to record YouTube videos of herself doing mundane, teenager things. But as she gained followers, she attended Paris Fashion Week dressed head-to-toe in Gucci products, was the founder of Chamberlain Coffee, and appeared on the cover of prominent magazines such as *Vogue*, although she eventually decided to stop relying on YouTube videos.

Blurring the lines further is someone like Selena Gomez, who started at celebrity status with her acting and singing career but can now be described as an influencer as well. With an Instagram account that showing more than 400 million followers, Gomez has influenced large audiences through global fashion campaigns with Louis Vuitton, Puma Coach, and Pantene, to name a few.

Generally speaking, though, we can make a subtle distinction between influencers and celebrities. **Celebrities, especially performing artists, are more likely to share and promote their own work**, such as movie roles or upcoming albums and concerts. Celebrities often want to manage their own public persona through social media.

Influencers, on the other hand, are more likely to post content promoting brand awareness and sales for external clients.

The complicating factors are that some influencers gain followers and fame, thus becoming celebrities in their own right. And some celebrities are more active in the influencer realm by actively seeking promotional deals with external clients.

The table below shows some generalized categories and statistics.

LEVEL	Nano-Influencer	Micro-Influencer	Macro-Influencer	Celebrities
FOLLOWERS	Up to 10k	10k-50k	500k-1 million	5 million+
QUALITIES	Personal relationship with the audience	Genuine brand connections and relationships with the audience	Specific skills, from travel to company development	Their standing and personal brand.

The next presentation covers how influencers use social media platforms for different purposes.

Use the forward button or click on sections of the control bar. To enlarge any interactive presentation in this book, click on the lower-right full-screen option (arrows).



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=104#h5p-10

Becoming an Influencer

Social media influencing is not just about making fun videos and getting paid for it. Without a loyal following, an influencer doesn't have much. To gain this audience, a personal brand and appealing content are crucial. There will always be others with similar interests, so influencers must stay up-to-date with the social media landscape. Coursera's guide for how to become an influencer lists 11 steps:

1. Adopt basic business approaches.
2. Identify your niche.
3. Get to know your audience.
4. Create an influencer brand.
5. Explore content strategy.
6. Optimize your online presence.
7. Select the right channels.
8. Post unique content regularly.
9. Engage with your audience.
10. Collaborate with other brands.
11. Refine skills and strategies regularly.

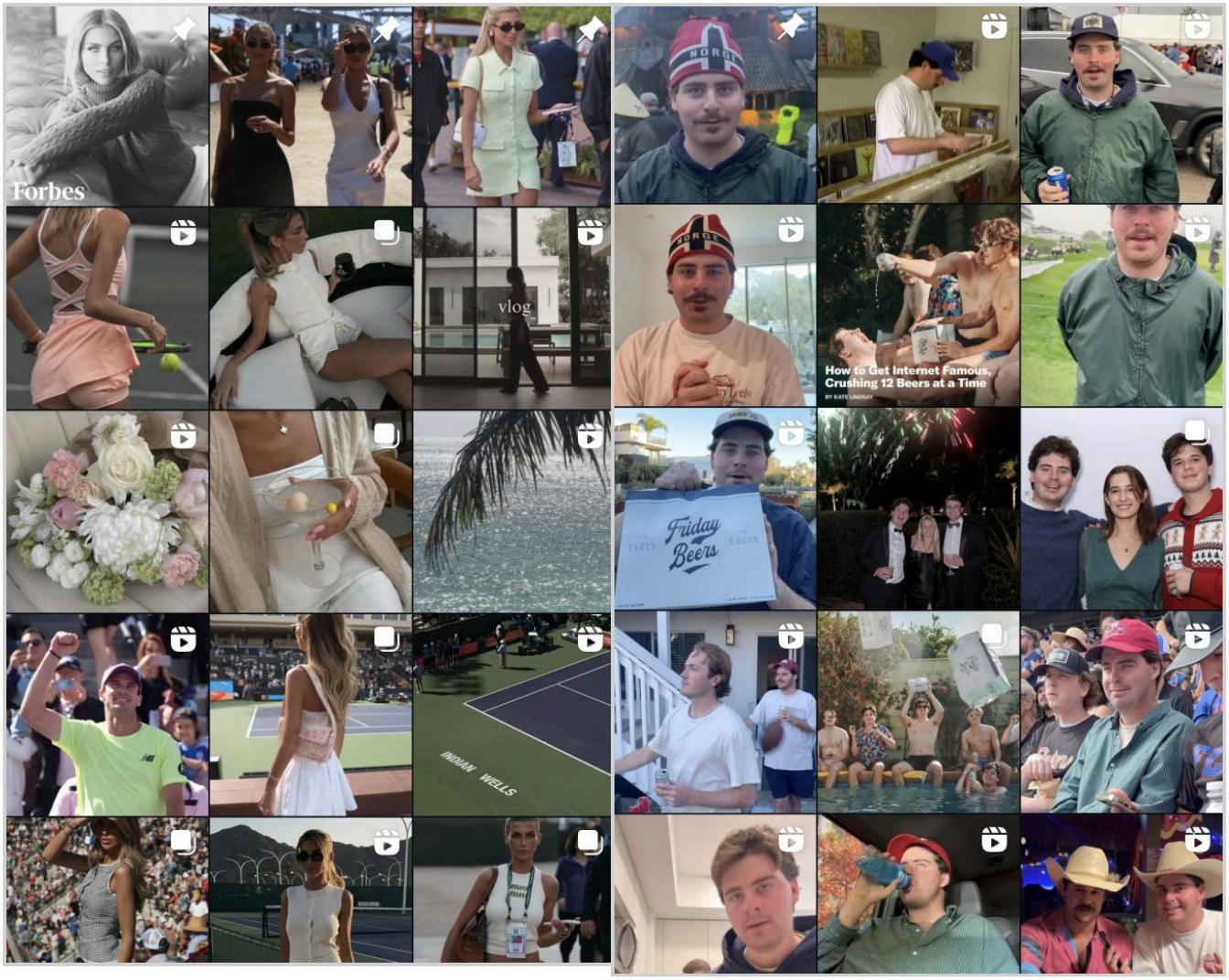
Pay particular attention to #2 about identifying a niche. Rather than creating broad content about a variety of topics, most successful influencers develop expertise and credibility in narrow, specific areas of audience interest. Even broccoli is a potential theme for social media influencing.



Popular Influencers

With so many influencers on social media today, you can expect each to have their own niche, whether it be through their style, brand, expertise, or passions. What's more, there are different genres of influencers, such as health, beauty, fashion, books and travel. With that being said, social media users follow different influencers to align with their individual tastes and interests.

I tend to follow fashion and travel influencers for the sake of inspiration; I may see a cute outfit I want to wear or aesthetic living space that I want to imitate, or I may look for restaurant and shopping recommendations when visiting a city. Some influencers that I interact with regularly include Matilda Djerf, Kiel James Patrick, Paige Paul (formerly Paige Lorenze) and Rusty Featherstone.



Paige Paul's IG Account

Rusty Featherstone's IG Account.

Other high-trending influencers include Alix Earle and Jake Paul. Earle gained her social media personality status through TikTok, where she created "Get Ready With Me" conversational videos and was coined the "It girl." She now has more than 6 million followers across social media platforms and is a primary investor and promoter for SipMARGS sparkling margaritas.

Paul's influencing career dates back to Vine in 2013 and then, when the app was discontinued, YouTube in 2014. Amassing millions of followers and making it on Forbes' highest-paid Youtube creators list numerous times, he is labeled a "social media powerhouse," as well as someone who blurred the lines between social media and sports with his professional boxing career.

The following video from *Forbes* listed the top creators of 2026, which directly correlates with their popularity on social media.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: *https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=104#oembed-2*

As a previous previous *Forbes*' publication noted, "The borders between Creators and showbiz are blurring."

Virtual Influencers

As with many other chapters in this OER text, artificial intelligence deserves a brief mention here. A few virtual influencers have generated loyal followings for various brands, campaigns and social causes. For example, Pete Zaroll is billed as a social media spokesperson for Totino's pizza rolls, and even the Geico Gecko can be considered a virtual influencer on Instagram. AI fashion influencer Mia Zelu even appeared to attend Wimbledon.

Virtual influencers can help some companies control their social-media production costs. For example, a New York Times feature story chronicled how "face-tuned" virtual influencers, mostly women, are used as travel influencers.

Below is a screenshot from an Instagram account for Radhika that was cited in the article.



AI fashion influencer Mia Zelu



The article said that "travel companies, tourism boards and other businesses are turning to A.I.-created influencers like Radhika to lower costs, control messaging and create content more quickly, and human influencers fear they're being elbowed out."

Now for a quick history lesson. The first virtual influencer to receive abundant publicity was Miquela Sousa, popularly known as Lil Miquela. Soon after her debut, she was listed in TIME Magazine's 25 Most Influential People on the Internet in 2018. She later introduced herself more formally to U.S. audiences on YouTube in 2021.

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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=104#oembed-3



More recently, Lil Miquela posted that she had leukemia as part of an awareness campaign for the National Marrow Donor Program.

A representative for the tech company that created Lil Miquela said her social media posts are "very transparent about the fact that she isn't real."

If you're interested in seeing a few more examples of virtual influencers, you can peruse a list from Virtual Humans.

While virtual influencers generate human followers, an opposite dynamic is emerging as well. **Human influencers are trying to attract the attention of chatbots.** This is similar to the business emphasis on search-engine optimization that started in the late 1990s.

Online audiences increasingly rely on AI tools as a gateway to accessing media content. As a result, a New York Times feature story surmised that "businesses can no longer simply promote themselves to potential customers — they have to win over the robots, too."

Shopping and Impact

The influencer field has become a multi-billion-dollar industry. Here are a few statistical factoids about social media shopping to reinforce how social media influencers can impact point-of-purchase decisions.

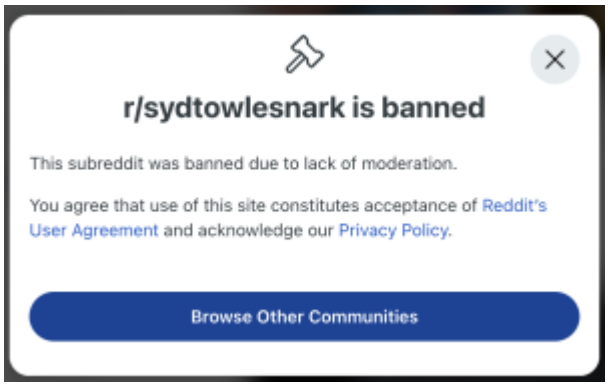
- Research shared by Capital One showed that **30% of digital consumers have purchased an item in response to an influencer or creator's post.** Also, 40% of U.S. digital consumers follow an influencer or content creator on social media,
- In a YouGov survey of U.S. adults aged 18-44, **Instagram and Facebook tied as the top shopping platforms**, each capturing 15% of responses, with TikTok next at 7%.
- According to a survey from the marketing platform GRIN, **67% of U.S. consumers make at least one purchase per month through social media**.

The accuracy of marketing research can be difficult to corroborate at precise levels, so the numbers above provide more of a broad overview.

A Cancerous Condition

Many of the pros and cons of high-profile social media influencing are evident in the case example of TikTok star Sydney Towle, who revealed that she had cancer in 2023. She chronicled her health travails in the following months, mostly via TikTok videos, including a trip to Jamaica and a scuba diving adventure.

According to a New York Times feature story, a group of Reddit users believed Towle was a "cancer scammer" and formed a group titled SydTowleSnark, which "pointed to her long hair and her penchant for travel and fitness as proof that she could not possibly have the illness she claimed."



Screenshot of banned Reddit group

However, Towle's doctor confirmed that she had cancer and said that even during chemotherapy, some younger patients can keep up their normal routines. Reddit eventually shut down SydTowleSnark.

In the NY Times feature story, Towle said that creating the videos gave her purpose when she did not want to get out of bed and connected her to others for mutual inspiration. In the video below, Towle shared details and fears about a scheduled surgery and treatment.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: *https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=104#oembed-4*

Towle died in August 2026 from complications of metastatic bile duct cancer. She was 26 years old.

One obituary noted that "for an audience that grew to more than a million followers, she challenged assumptions about how people with serious illnesses should look and live."

True or False

The following questions highlight a few tidbits of information from the chapter. Use the forward button to advance through the questions.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=104#h5p-51

Influencer Analysis

Identify a social media influencer who interests you. Answer the following questions for analysis.

1. Why did you choose this influencer to analyze?
2. Summarize the types of content the influencer shares and include anything else that's important to know for someone who is not familiar with this influencer's work.
3. How would you describe the influencer's content style? What appeals to you in the content?
4. Who is the influencer's target audience, and what are some strategies you see that might appeal to the target audience?
5. How does the influencer's use of social media connect to any concepts and information presented in this chapter?

Write approximately three sentences for each of your five responses.

19.

GENERATIONAL PATTERNS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

By Alyssa Riley

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=67#h5p-112

Generations, or age cohorts, are distinct groups with common experiences and characteristics related to the period in which they were born in the United States. They provide a framework for understanding how historical events, technological advancements and cultural shifts have shaped the values, attitudes and behaviors of each group. As a valuable tool for sociologists and marketers, generations help explain how people in different age groups interact with the world around them.

Below are the generational categories used by Pew Research. The exact years often vary slightly across research organizations.

- **Generation Alpha** – born in 2013 or later.
- **Generation Z** – born from 1997 to 2012.
- **Millennials** – born from 1981 to 1996.
- **Generation X** – born from 1965 to 1980.
- **Baby Boomers** – born from 1946 to 1964.
- **The Silent Generation** – born from 1928 to 1945.



Graphic created from multiple prompts with Bing Image Creator (Dall-E 3)

Surviving members of the Silent Generation spent most of their lives with no social media. After that, social media usage varies greatly across the generations:

- Baby Boomers and Gen X adopted early social media platforms like Facebook to connect with friends and family, share life updates and stay informed.
- Millennials were early adopters of Instagram, Snapchat and similar platforms, valuing visual content and personal expression.
- Born into a digital world of smartphones, members of Gen Z were early adopters of TikTok and prefer short-form, visually engaging content.

Understanding generational preferences is crucial for marketers, as it allows them to tailor their messages and engagement strategies to specific generations, optimizing their reach and impact in an increasingly digital and interconnected world.

If you are interested in a more in-depth analysis of generational differences, you may want to study this explainer:

What Generation Am I? Birth Years, Age Ranges and Key Differences – Bottom Line

Your Media Landscape

In what ways, if any, does your online self differ from your offline self, especially in how you portray yourself to others?

Generational Targets

As an example of a campaign with a generational target audience, Apple commissioned Olivia Rodrigo to market the iPhone 15 during the fresh release of her second album "GUTS" with her new music video "get him back!" On Instagram, she posted a photograph taken with the product, announcing to followers that she made her new music video using the iPhone 15. This marketing tactic allowed Apple to reach Rodrigo's almost 35 million followers, mostly Gen Z and Millennials, with the marketing campaign video below.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=67#oembed-1

Like much social media content, Rodrigo's video and Instagram post prompted reactions across various other media platforms. For example, you can watch a YouTube video by a Washington Post tech reporter who tried to re-enact the creative process for Rodrigo's video.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=67#oembed-2

Generations and Their Preferred Platforms

Statistics for social media usage can be difficult to track accurately over time. The Pew Research Center regularly publishes comprehensive social media user analysis across age groups. The interactive presentation below includes some research highlights.

Study the following presentation slides by using the forward button or clicking on sections of the control bar. To enlarge any interactive presentation in this guidebook, click on the lower-right full-screen option (arrows).

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=67#h5p-6

You can study the Pew Research Center's Social Media Fact Sheet to view much more demographic information about U.S. social media usage, including gender, race and ethnicity, income, education, community and political affiliation. Consider how detailed information like this can be useful for advertisers and social media influencers to plan targeted campaigns.

The Long, Broad View

For informal perspective on the evolution of social media, the video below shows the most popular platforms from 2004 to 2025.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=67#oembed-3

Engagement for Marketing

Social media marketing has become a crucial avenue for brands to engage with audiences, and each generation has distinct expectations for the brands they follow. To profit from social media marketing, brands must ensure they are reaching their targeted audiences with the appropriate marketing tactics. Score, a non-profit resource partner of the U.S. Small Business Administration, compiled statistics about how different generations act on social media.

Here are a few broad takeaways about generational social media usage.

- **Gen Z** likes visuals of how things are made and business owners' testimonials for the brand's growth. Therefore, they are more likely to try/buy something if many have reviewed it (#Tiktokmademebuyit). They are also more likely to use social media instead of a search engine to find information.
- **Millennials** follow brands for entertainment and information. Moreover, they are the most likely to unfollow a business due to a bad experience, or if they found its marketing to be annoying.
- **Gen X** follows brands for contests and deals/promotions. They are also more likely to unfollow a business if it offends them or opposes their beliefs.
- **Baby Boomers** are similar to Gen X in the way that they follow brands for deals/promotions, but they also follow for information. They are likely to unfollow brands if they receive too much spam/irrelevant posts.

Across all generations, there is an emphasis on genuine, two-way communication, and a demand for responsive

customer service. In this evolving landscape, brands must adapt their social media strategies to meet the unique preferences and values of each generation, fostering lasting relationships and trust with their audience.

As a review from chapter 4, a single media conglomerate can own more than one social media platform. For example, Meta owns both Facebook and Instagram and can sell targeted ads on both platforms.

Targeted Takeaway

For anyone who plans to pursue a career in advertising and public relations, this chapter illustrates the importance of identifying the generation(s) of your target audience as you build a campaign. As a simple example, if you primarily want to reach Gen X and Baby Boomers, Pinterest probably won't be the most effective and cost-efficient strategy. If you're trying to reach a younger audience to establish brand loyalty, though, Pinterest or Instagram might be a good choice.

In simple terms, keep in mind that, due partly to generational differences, not everyone likes the content that you like.

Review Questions

The following questions highlight a few tidbits of information from the chapter. Use the forward button to advance through the questions.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=67#h5p-44

Self-Reflection on Social Media

This chapter looked at social media consumption patterns for different generations and age groups. Now you should compose a short essay reflecting on your own social media usage. Here are some suggestions to include in your essay:

- Which platforms do you use?
- Approximately how much time do you spend on social media each day?
- What benefits, if any, do you derive from your social media usage?
- What concerns, if any, do you have about negative effects of your social media usage?
- Generally speaking, how does your online self differ from your offline self?
- Most importantly, in what ways do you fit the patterns discussed in this chapter, and in what ways do you differ?

If you avoid social media platforms or use them in an extremely limited manner, explain your reasons for not embracing social media.

Use specific examples when possible to support your reflection.

Write approximately 250 words. Use journalistic style with no more than three or four sentences per paragraph.

This assignment is supposed to be about the human you. Avoid using AI platforms to generate your content.

20.

MEDIA LITERACY AND GEN Z

By Alyssa Riley

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=928#h5p-114

As a Gen Zer growing up since the turn of the 21st century, I have witnessed the technological evolution of many media devices and platforms.

The first iPod hit the market before I was 10 years old, but despite my pleas, it wasn't until the release of the iPod Nano that my parents caved in. When e-readers became available, it wasn't long before my parents gifted me a Nook for Christmas, even though I was fearful that print books would soon become extinct. Additionally, because I wasn't allowed a cellphone until I was 13 years old, I regularly utilized digital cameras and my friends' iPads for photos and videos.

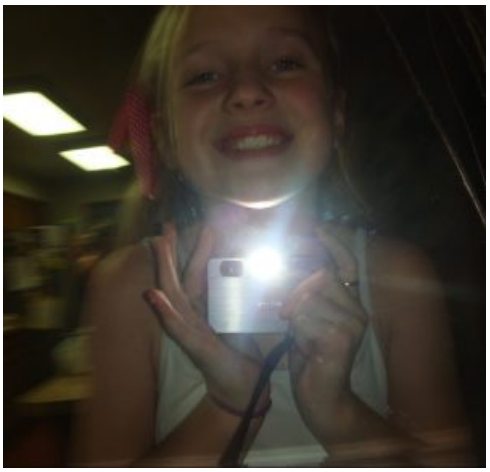


Using an iPad to take pictures (2012).

Today, it seems inevitable that advances in AI will further impact the devices we use and how we consume media content. But we also face potential risks due to AI damaging the credibility of mass media content.

Because media consumption has become integral to our daily lives, it shapes our beliefs, attitudes, values and identity. Additionally, media content entertains, informs, and engages users – both in negative and positive ways. Better understanding the effects of our media usage is integral to media literacy, something that is learned and mindfully grown.

This brief chapter explores the concept of media literacy with an emphasis on Generation Z.



Using a digital camera to take pictures (2010)

Your Media Lancscape

In your personal media usage, do you ever sense that you become more like a lab rat than an independent-thinking consumer? If so, when does that happen, and what media habits could or should you change?

What Is Media Literacy?

Most definitions of media literacy focus on our ability to access and analyze media messages. One study from the Knight Foundation defines it as creating and sharing messages in a manner that promotes "independent thinking, authentic dialogue, collaboration, reflection, creativity, and social responsibility."

The concepts of media literacy are constantly evolving and expanding. Therefore, it is crucial that we, as media users, sharers and creators, are able to understand and practice it.

Click through the following slideshow to learn more about the concepts of media literacy:

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=928#h5p-46

Things We Care About

Part of media literacy is understanding how our media usage affects each of us individually, so we don't just study the broad societal impact of med technology.

For example, many of us want to prevent our attention spans from declining so that we maintain our focus on the things we care about each day. In the following video, writer and philosopher Jared Henderson provides advice on how to do just that.



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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=928#oembed-1

Media Literacy Education

As with traditional subjects like mathematics, history, English, and science, media literacy involves skills that we must learn and practice if we want to keep up with emerging research and evolving technology.

The organization Media Literacy Now stresses the need for enhanced education and skills training long before students arrive at college.

> *The ability to navigate within our complex and ever-changing media landscape depends on acquiring skills and tools to know how to consume and evaluate information, ask critical questions, avoid manipulation, and engage in digital spaces safely and confidently. Unfortunately, these skills are not widely taught to our young people – yet.*

The idea of actively practicing media literacy may seem vague or daunting. Thankfully, there are resources that aid in decoding, analyzing, and practicing media literacy.

According to Ithaca College's Project Look Sharp, there are nine categories for decoding media, regardless of form, message, or platform. Click through the following slideshow about ways to decode media through questions to ask yourself:



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=928#h5p-66

You can study more from Project Look Sharp's objectives of media literacy for students.

Media Platforms

The term *media* can encompass digital, print, audio, video, social media and a variety of interactive content. Advertising is included as well. This makes it impossible to create a one-size-fits-all approach to media literacy, as the following perspective from the Center for Media Literacy suggests:

> *Although some groups urge families to just turn the TV off, the fact is, media are so ingrained in our cultural milieu that even if you turn off the set, you still cannot escape today's media culture.* ***Media no longer just influence our culture. They ARE our culture.***

Similarly for Gen Z, media literacy isn't as simple as unsubscribing from social media platforms.

Overcoming Deep Doubt

Members of Gen Z navigate a media landscape that could be called the Era of Deep Doubt, according to one Wired magazine essay.

Due to the rapid growth of media manipulation and AI-generated content, "people can now more credibly claim that real events did not happen and suggest that documentary evidence was fabricated using AI tools." This makes media-literacy skills more important than ever.

> *Ultimately, our trust in what we see or read depends on how much we trust the source.*

Media Consumption Assignment

First, be sure you've watched the chapter's embedded video from Jared Henderson about "why we can't focus."

Next, reflect on your own media habits based on these questions:

- Do you agree with the Henderson's perspectives about how and why we amuse ourselves to death? Based on content in this chapter and throughout this OER text, do you think this is more prevalent for Gen Z, or does it apply equally to everyone?
- What benefits do you derive from media consumption?
- In what ways, if any, does your media consumption hinder your personal productivity? Is this common to your generation or more universal?
- How do you think your media consumption affects your personal viewpoints?
- To what extent do you intentionally try to increase your media literacy on a regular basis?

Use specific personal examples to support your reflection. When possible, refer briefly to content from this chapter or elsewhere in this OER text.

Use a Q&A format for the bulleted items above with approximately three or four sentences per personal response.

This assignment is supposed to be about the human you. Avoid using AI platforms to generate your content.

21.

PUBLIC HEALTH (PART 1)

By Alyssa Riley

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=2498#h5p-123

Introduction

Through billboards, social media posts and other online ads, content about public health permeate my daily life, spreading mixed messages about mental, physical and dietary health.

Growing up, my sisters and I were regular customers of clothing stores like Hollister and Abercrombie & Fitch. Even in my youthful preteen years, I noticed that their models were all exclusively a size 2 and below..

Today, as clothing brands like Brandy Melville are more inclusive of all shapes and sizes, it's still impossible to avoid some depictions of wafer-thin models.

I've also seen social media content creators in the 2020s who have been obsessed with the mukbang trend, posting videos of themselves overeating – often unhealthy foods – for views. Conversely, other content creators and influencers idealize losing weight quickly and "glowing up," sometimes to attain unhealthy body standards.

When I was 15 years old with my first part-time job and bank account, I stumbled across an advertisement for fast-acting weight loss pills. I was at a perfectly healthy weight for my age, but I was naïve and impressionable. I purchased the pills and, ultimately, got my bank account hacked because of it.



Public Domain Image

Today, "fast-acting weight loss pills" still flood the Internet. Even more alarming, celebrity magazines such as *People* and *Us* often include content about the weight loss or gain of celebrities, scrutinizing their physiques or promoting an unrealistic diet culture.



Creative Commons Image

Much like during the mid-20th century when advertisements used doctors and attractive models to promote the health benefits of cigarettes (granted, the world did not yet have the complete scientific evidence to prove otherwise), vaping companies today utilize the "healthier alternative" argument to advertising their addictive, nicotine-packed devices. Moreover, they target youth with student discounts, fun flavors, reward systems, and catchy phrases like "social buzz."

While promoting the best skin care routines, diet plans, or other products for consumption, some U.S. advertisers and other content creators target vulnerable demographics to mislead audiences. As a result, media literacy is no longer limited to news. It has expanded into the realm of public health.



Public Domain by Dede Avez on pexels.com

As William L. Roper, a former head of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), once said, media content "is vital in conveying health information to the public, changing people's perceptions of what's healthy and what's not."

As an example of a public-health message direct from the CDC, below is a video about the risks of mixing drugs.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=2498#oembed-1

Conflicting Health Messages

The field of public health faces the same struggles with verification and trust that you've seen in previous

chapters. For example, a 2025 White House report about children's health released by the Make America Healthy Again Commission initially contained references to supporting scientific papers that did not exist.

Also, political polarization has entered the realm of public health, especially skepticism about the reliability of childhood vaccines. In November 2025, the website for Centers for Disease Control and Prevention deleted language saying that childhood vaccines do not cause autism. Instead, the following text appeared:

> *The claim 'vaccines do not cause autism' is not an evidence-based claim because studies have not ruled out the possibility that infant vaccines cause autism.*

The site's "key points" also said that "studies supporting a link have been ignored by health authorities."

Many public health workers believe that the spread of anti-vaccine content, mostly through social media, contributed to a record-setting surge of U.S. measles cases in 2025 and 2026.

In 2026, the chair of the federal Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, said that shots against polio and measles should be optional, even though the vaccinations are still required in most states for students to enter public schools.

As parents see an increase in anti-vaccine content through media sources, they are more likely to request exemptions for their children. CDC research showed that vaccinations among American kindergartners decreased for all reported vaccines during the 2024-2025 school year.



Public Domain Image

Arkansas is an example of some national trends. In Arkansas, approximately 3.5% of kindergartners had non-medical exemptions for vaccines in the 2024-25 school year. This reflected an increase since the 2014-15 school year, when just 1.2% of Arkansas kindergartners had a non-medical exemption, according to the CDC.

And in 2025, the Arkansas Department of Health reported cases of measles in the state. Arkansas had not previously reported a case of measles since 2018.

The politicization of formerly routine measles vaccinations created a trickle-down effect to news media content. The following opinion essay is a good example.

- Measles Took My Daughter. This Is What I Want Everyone to Know. – The New York Times

Beyond children and measles, adults can become confused by contradictory public-health messages about their own vaccine choices. For example, in late 2025 and early 2026 the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) blocked publication of research that found COVID-19 and shingles vaccines were safe.

As another example, Arkansas saw its highest levels of whooping cough (formally called pertussis) in 15 years, with 500 cases — and one death — in 2025, according to a

news release from the Arkansas Department of Health. The news release included this advice: "The best way to protect yourself and your loved ones against pertussis is to get vaccinated."

Media professionals who cover public health must provide information to increasingly skeptical audiences who may have become confused by conflicting guidance on vaccines, nutrition, addiction and more. Here's a New York Times' description of the landscape.

> *Americans have always been ambivalent about public health in general and the American regulatory project in particular. We want protection from bad food and bad medicine and other unsafe products, but we also want to draw the line between safe and unsafe for ourselves and to redraw it whenever we see fit.*

In the case of vaccinations, it's easy to see why parents may feel confused. In 2025, Florida officials made plans to end all vaccine mandates around the same time that prominent CDC vaccine officials resigned to protest changes in federal recommendations for childhood vaccinations. And one former researcher said that broader diagnosis standards for autism during the '80s and '90s, not childhood vaccinations, led to higher autism rates.

Amid so many conflicting media messages, how can media professionals improve their approach to offering reliable content about public health?

"Debunking health misinformation isn't just about correcting false claims," Naseem Miller, the senior health editor at The Journalist's Resource, wrote. **"It's about building trust, choosing words with care, and meeting people where they are, without compromising the facts."**

Your Media Landscape

To what extent does media content, including social media, affect your health habits? Do any specific examples come to mind? Have you encountered conflicting media guidance about health-related topics?

About Public Health

The brief presentation below provides an overview of many goals of the public health profession based on content from the American Public Health Association.

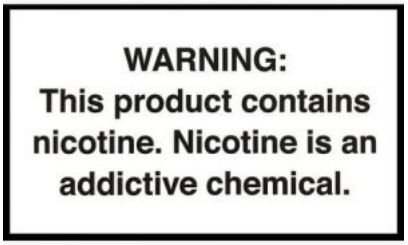
Study the following presentation slides by using the forward button or clicking on sections of the control bar. To enlarge any interactive presentation in this book, click on the lower-right full-screen option (arrows).

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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=2498#h5p-122

Beyond traditional advertising and news content, many 21st-century U.S. consumers now offer their own perspectives on public health through social media, user-generated videos or podcasts, and online reviews.

This is the first of two chapters about intersections between public health and the current media landscape. The remaining content in this chapter briefly examines media messages about vaping, cigarettes and alcohol, and it concludes with a research example about football.

Vaping Ads



Vaping has become a health concern for U.S. teenagers. One research study said that "most youth (63%) are unsure whether their products contain nicotine." As a result, they may not know that they are exposing themselves to nicotine through e-cigarettes. This confusion often exists despite warning labels on nicotine products.

A University of Arkansas professor in the Department of Sociology and Criminology said, "We're seeing kids who are developing lung disease and respiratory disease. With smoking, that takes a while."

According to statistics from the Arkansas Center for Health Improvement, 44% of high school seniors in Arkansas said they have tried vaping.

Adding to the nationwide epidemic, vaping advertisements make vapes seem not only healthier than cigarettes – which is only sometimes the case for long-term cigarette smokers – but also more enticing.

In 2020, the Massachusetts attorney general's office filed a lawsuit alleging that Juul had bought online advertisements on websites for Nickelodeon, Cartoon Network and *Seventeen* magazine. This lawsuit came amid other accusations that the company targeted underage customers.

Eventually, in 2022, Juul settled a multistate youth vaping inquiry for approximately $450 million. Below is an NBC News account of the settlement.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=2498#oembed-2

As another marketing example, Blu, also a company that makes vaping products, used the following promo script:

> *Take back your freedom to smoke when and where you want without ash or smell. Blu is everything you enjoy about smoking and nothing else. Nobody likes a quitter, so make the switch today.*

Supportive language such as "freedom," "enjoy," and "nobody likes a quitter" leads consumers to believe that a Blu product is a healthy choice that helps them maintain their individuality.

The American Lung Association compiled a list of advertising strategies that companies have developed to target younger users. More locally, some shops offer discounts to college students.



Click on the image above for an enlarged view.

20th Century Cigarette Ads

It's easy to draw a parallel between 21st-century vaping ads and 20th-century cigarette ads. From the 1930s to the 1950s, cigarettes were promoted as a way to stay happy and healthy – specifically for nerves and digestion. When concerns arose about the negative effects of cigarettes, advertisements began to feature recommendations from public figures, doctors and dentists as reassurance about the positive experiences and benefits of smoking. Below is an example.



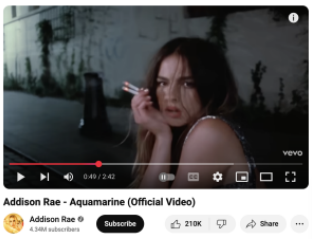
Courtesy of Stanford Medicine

Largely as a result of successful advertising, cigarettes were popular in America through much of the 20th century, across all social classes and professions. Today, packaging and advertisements for products containing nicotine and tobacco must include a warning label about negative health consequences. Also, the Federal Communications Commission banned cigarette ads from FCC-licensed radio and television broadcasting in 1971.

And as a sidetone about public health regulations beyond the United States, lawmakers in the United Kingdom have banned smoking entirely for people born after 2008.

Some current anti-smoking campaigns use a more modern storytelling style to let people share their instructive stories. Below is a CDC example from a video series titled "Tips From Former Smokers."

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Despite efforts such as the video above, some movies, TV

shows and music videos today show scenes that make characters look cool or powerful by smoking. For example, a scene from Addison Rae's "Aquamarine" video shows her smoking two cigarettes at the same time.

The cigfluencers Instagram account has documented this trend of on-screen smoking.

Overall tobacco usage remains a concern for public-health advocates. The 2025 Arkansas Health Survey, led by University of Arkansas Assistant Professor Michael Niño, showed that nearly one in four adult Arkansans had used tobacco in the last 30 days.

Partly due to cigarette and e-cigarette usage and decreased vaccination rates, Arkansas fell to 49th in the 2025 national health rankings from United Health Foundation. If you aren't from Arkansas you can check the rankings for statistics from all states.

Alcohol Ads

Although the FCC banned cigarette ads from public airwaves, alcohol advertisements still flood television screens, social media platforms and other digital spaces. And the alcohol industry now features influencer-branded products.

Just a few examples of this trend include Kendall Jenner's 818 tequila, Kylie Jenner's Sprinter vodka seltzer, Kyle Cooke's Loverboy seltzers, and Brother's Bond Bourbon from Paul Wesley and Ian Somerhalder, who played the Salvatore brothers in *The Vampire Diaries* television series.



Ian Somerhalder and Paul Wesley – photo by Dean Bradshaw

It is hard not to wonder whether the influential figures promoting their brands are encouraging more young people to drink alcohol. Non-profit organization Movendi International found that "young people who are exposed to alcohol advertising are more likely to start consuming alcohol at an earlier age and consume alcohol more frequently."

Movendi also suggested that increased consumption is at least partially due to "celebrities pushing alcohol as an aspirational lifestyle choice." Below is an ad from Smirnoff featuring Kaley Cuoco.

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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=2498#oembed-4

Despite ads like the one above, public health messages about the risks of drinking alcohol may be influencing U.S. consumers. A 2025 Gallup poll showed that approximately 55 percent of U.S. adults said they consumed alcohol, which was the lowest percentage in the 90 years that Gallup has collected data on drinking behavior. And the poll suggested that Americans who said they drink alcohol were consuming less.

Football: Worth the Risk?



Beyond cigarettes, vaping, drugs and alcohol, media professionals who work in public health encounter other instances when people know certain activities and behaviors are unhealthy or dangerous, but that doesn't change their attitudes or choices. They may conclude the rewards outweigh the risks.

For example, a 2025 survey of former NFL players found that 90% did not regret playing professional football . This was despite higher-than-normal rates of dementia, depression and physical disabilities compared to the general population at their ages.

The ESPN/KFF survey focused on NFL players who were part of the league in 1988. Many of these former players still encouraged their children to play football. However, 1 in 4 said that tackle football should be banned below the high-school level.

Due to research about the relationship between football concussions and early-onset dementia, youth tackle football has become an increasingly divisive public-health issue. Much of the ongoing debate takes place on our mass media channels and platforms.

On an encouraging note for youth sports, a press release from the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons said that a header restriction policy in youth soccer has shown a promising impact on concussion rates.

More to Come About Public Health

In the next chapter (part 2), we'll explore food, body image, social media and mental health.

True or False

The following questions highlight a few tidbits of information from the chapter. Use the forward button to advance through the questions.

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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=2498#h5p-124

Advertising Analysis for Alcohol or Vaping Product

Before you begin this assignment, review chapter 17 on advertising, especially the section that discusses ad strategies.

Find an advertisement that promotes **an alcoholic beverage or a vaping product**. You have a range of potential sources:

- a social media influencer post
- a magazine ad
- an online ad
- a video available through a streaming service (such as YouTube)

Analyze your ad based on the following questions.

1. What product is advertised?
2. What strategies does the ad use to appeal to consumers in general? *(refer to chapter 17 on advertising if needed)*
3. In what ways might the ad appeal to a younger audience more specifically? (Or why does the ad NOT appeal to a younger audience?)
4. To what extent does the advertisement acknowledge potential health risks for users?
5. What else do you think is noteworthy about the ad content?

If you are submitting this as a class assignment, you should include a visual of the ad or a link to the ad.

Use a Q&A format with at least two detailed sentences for each response. No AI needed for this analysis.

22.

PUBLIC HEALTH (PART 2)

By Alyssa Riley and Dave Bostwick



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In the previous section about public health and mass media, we primarily looked at advertisements for vaping, cigarettes and alcohol. In this section, we'll examine these additional topics:

- food ads and packaging
- the mukbang phenomenon
- ads for weight-loss products
- unhealthy body standards portrayed in media
- effects of social media on mental health
- the relationship between body image and mental health, especially for females

Your Media Landscape

Chapter 17 on advertising briefly looks at how advertisers sometimes use weasel words to make product claims that can't be proven. Here are a few examples of weasel words for food products:

- natural
- organic
- fortified
- low-fat

- real
- no added sugar

To what extent do ads and packaging that include these types of terms influence your purchasing decisions for food and drink products?

Food Ads and Packaging

Since the passing of the 1906 Pure Food and Drugs Act, which "marked a monumental shift in the use of government powers to enhance consumer protection," the U.S. government has required that food and drug companies truthfully label their products.

However, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) cannot always protect consumers simply by removing dangerous products from the market. Lengthy court cases are often involved in order for the FDA and FTC to prove deception and penalize companies for fraudulent products and advertising.



For example, promotional text for Poppi told consumers they could "get all the soda feels with 5g sugar, ingredients you can love and prebiotics." Poppi faced criticism – and even a lawsuit – for advertising and packaging claims that the product benefits gut health. According to Today, a California woman filed a lawsuit that included the following assertion:

> *Poppi's promises that its prebiotic soda is a good alternative to conventional sugar-loaded sodas are misleading. The product claims to be "gut healthy" due to its inclusion of "prebiotics," but there's not enough prebiotic fiber in a single can to produce "meaningful gut health benefits."*

Although Poppi representatives refuted the claims in the lawsuit, the branding that once claimed the product's support for gut health is no longer on cans or the Poppi website. Poppi eventually agreed to an $8.9 million settlement of a class-action lawsuit.

A New York Times feature on "gut soda" said that "the jury's still out" on whether prebiotic sodas contain enough fiber to have significant gut health benefits. Gary Wenk, a psychology and neuroscience professor at Ohio State University, said these drinks can still be a better choice than traditional soda because of fewer sweeteners.

Poppi is certainly not the only brand to be accused of using misleading labels on products, and consumers sometimes must conduct their own research about truthful packaging.

Misleading Food Ads for Kids

In the 21st century, obesity has garnered publicity as a nationwide health concern. One noted research study said that messages persuading people to adjust their behavior sometimes depict regret or disgust. However, other campaigns that confront obesity replace or augment depictions of obesity and excessive eating with "positive promotion of healthy food items."

The study said that crafting messages about "making the healthy food choice the easy choice" can be effective.

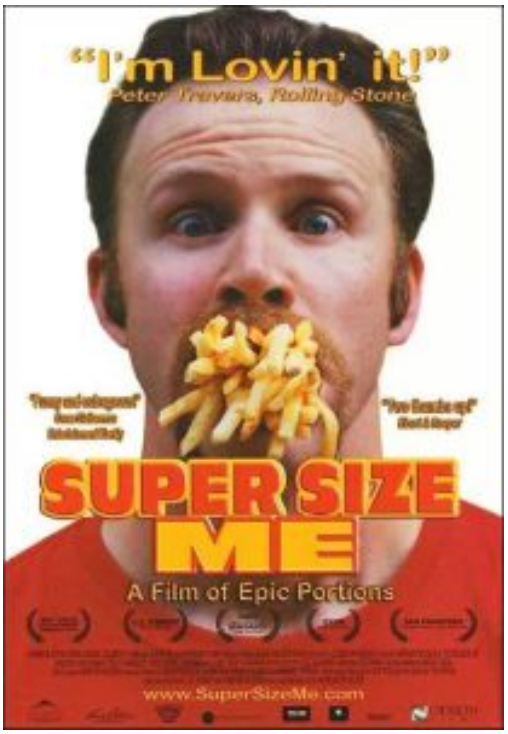
Another frequently cited research study focused on some fast-food restaurants' promotion of unhealthy meals by offering collectible toys, known as the Happy Meal Effect. According to the study's conclusion, public policies that restrict toy premiums to meals that meet nutritional standards may promote healthier eating at fast-food restaurants.

For historical perspective, here's one or the earliest ads for the McDonald's Happy Meal (1979).



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SUPER-SIZED OR NOT?



The 2004 award-winning documentary film Super Size Me showed director Morgan Spurlock eating nothing but McDonald's fast food. The documentary was routinely shown to school-aged children as a warning about the negative effects of fast food, including potential obesity.

However, the accuracy of Spurlock's documentary research came into question when he later admitted that he was also drinking alcohol during the month that the documentary was made. Also, other researchers could not replicate Spurlock's one-month weight gain or the extent of the negative impact that a McDonald's-only diet had on his body as shown in the documentary.

Nonetheless, public health concerns surrounding unhealthy eating persist today, and for good reason. One in five U.S. children are considered obese, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In the previous chapter, you watched videos created by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Below is a brief example of how the CDC's public-health messages can have a trickle-down effect to content generated by other news outlets (in this case KTVB in Boise, Idaho).

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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=2529#oembed-2

The Mukbang Phenomenon

Social media plays a role in current attitudes toward overeating. For example, a mukbang is a live-streamed video that shows a host eating large amounts of food. The videos can include "slurps, loud chewing, crunching, and all those sounds that come hand-in-hand with enjoying a good meal."

One notable mukbanger, Nicholas Perry, became known as Nikocado Avocado on Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. You can view part of Perry's video below as an example of a mukbang.

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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=2529#oembed-3

Originally a vegan, in 2014 Perry began creating and posting videos about his dietary lifestyle. When mukbang videos became popular, he gave up being a vegan and adopted the mukbang trend. In the process, Perry told audiences that he gained more than 200 pounds, causing a tsunami of criticism against mukbangs.

However, in 2025, Perry said that, through several medical procedures, he had removed at least 10 pounds of excess skin following dramatic weight loss of more than 200 pounds.

NBC News reported that Perry admitted to "hiding my loose skin by positioning my body at certain angles, like paying close attention to my clothing and the lighting, but the truth is, I have loose skin in my abdomen, arms, legs, my torso, back, even my neck."

The video below from All Things Nutrition explains the history and negative consequences of the mukbang trend.

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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=2529#oembed-4

Some social-media videos offer a less-extreme theme of "eat with me," often featuring specific meals but not enormous quantities.

If Weight-Loss Ads Told the Truth …

Advertisements for pills, diet plans and other products promote rapid weight loss. What if diet advertisements told the truth? The FTC published an article about the truth behind weight loss ads, which included the following advice.

> *Trying to lose weight? Watch out for false promises. It would be nice if you could lose weight simply by taking a pill, wearing a patch, or rubbing in a cream, but claims that you can lose weight without changing your habits just aren't true. And some of these products could even hurt your health.*



Creative Commons Image

The FTC listed false promises in weight-loss ads, such as these:

- "Lose weight without dieting or exercising."
- "You don't have to watch what you eat to lose weight."
- "You can lose 30 pounds in 30 days."
- "To lose weight, all you have to do is take this pill."

Ultimately, these types of product claims are not supported by scientific evidence.

Beyond the gimmicky promises listed above, weight loss is a frequent topic on news and current-events shows. Below is a CBS feature about the potential benefits and risks of some of the more reputable weight-loss drugs that gained popularity in the 2020s.

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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=2529#oembed-5

Body Standards and Mental Health

Research has found that adolescents and young adults are at vulnerable ages when the effects of social media content can be especially harmful.

According to a research analysis from the National Library of Medicine, "The inundation of idealized and often unattainable beauty standards on platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok can distort their perceptions of normalcy and attractiveness."

Because of social media, Gen Zers – primarily females – may struggle with self-esteem, feeling the urge to conform to unhealthy beauty standards and practices promoted by other social media users and influencers. Unhealthy standards for beauty can lead to eating disorders, distorted body image and mental health concerns.



AI-generated art (Google Gemini)

Some 21st-century public-health research has analyzed the impact of the thin-ideal media image on women. One study included these observations:

- *The thin-ideal woman often portrayed in the media is typically 15% below the average weight of women, representing an unrealistic standard of thinness (tall, with narrow hips, long legs, and thin thighs).*
- *This ideal stresses slimness, youth and androgyny, rather than the normative female body. The thin-ideal woman portrayed in the media is biogenetically difficult, if not impossible, for the majority of women.*
- *Theorists have argued that this image, combined with our culture's intense focus on dieting, has contributed to the current epidemic of eating disorders.*

For example, a TikTok trend called "What I Eat in a Day" may find its way to a 20-year-old woman struggling with body image. When she sees another woman eating small portions of ultra-healthy food, she may think she has to do the same to be attractive and then subsequently struggle with her body image and mental health.

Some health-related companies produce their own content about public-health concerns, including body image. CVS maintains a YouTube channel and produced the video below.

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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=2529#oembed-6

Social Media and Mental Health

Reliable research about the effects of social media usage can take years to compile. By the time a study is complete, it can already seem outdated in relation to current social media trends. Nonetheless, it's important to understand those effects, even if studying research results can feel like looking in a rear-view mirror.

The following video from ABC News examines how social media may negatively impact teenagers' mental health.



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https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=2529#oembed-7

A research study published in the medical journal JAMA revealed a statistical connection between addictive screen use (often through social media or video games) and suicide or suicidal thoughts among U.S. youth.

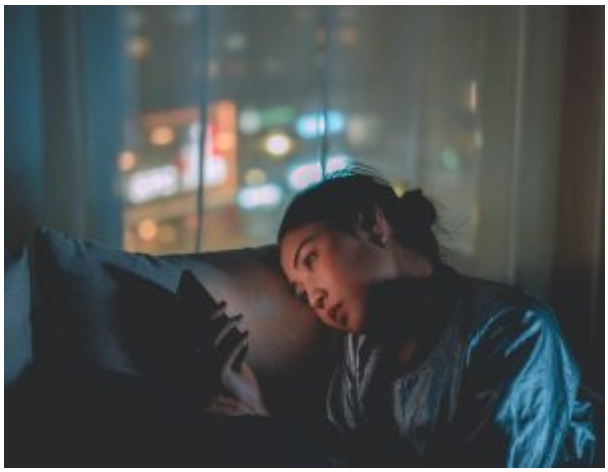
However, addiction was not based solely on amount of screen time. Children who showed signs of addiction were often unwilling to leave their screens, or they felt the need to increase their screen time.

In a Pew Center Research survey, 45% of U.S. teens said they spend too much time on social media. Roughly half of teens (48%) said that social media sites have a mostly negative effect on people their age, but only 14% think they are negatively affected themselves.

This echoes separate research from chapter 1 showing 70% of surveyed college students said they have somewhat high or very high media literacy skills, but only 32% rated the media literacy of their peers as somewhat high or very high.

Among adults, a commonly-used term related to screen addiction is doomscrolling. According to BottomLine, doomscrolling can be defined as "habitually scrolling through news feeds and social media for the latest bad developments."

Clinical research shows that doomscrolling can increase anxiety, worsen depression and affect sleep quality. In surveys of U.S. adults, approximately 30% say they doomscroll either "a lot" or "some of the time."



CC0 image

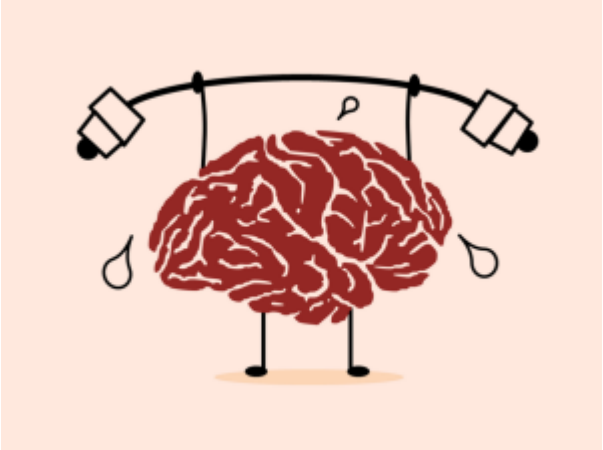
On a related note, the 2025 Arkansas Health Survey, led by University of Arkansas Assistant Professor Michael Niño, showed that nearly one in three Arkansans report symptoms of depression.

Wired magazine published suggestions to limit doomscrolling, including these simple strategies:

- Turn off notifications.
- Put your phone in another room for hours at a time.
- Set screen time limits within your phone's operating system.
- Set a bedtime for your phone.

Avoid Ultraprocessed Media Content

In an essay titled "There's a Good Reason You Can't Concentrate," Cal Newport, professor of computer science at Georgetown University and the author of the bestselling book *Deep Work*, emphasized the negative impact of digital technology on our ability to think. He also emphasized reading as "cardio for our brains" and made a clear connection cognitive fitness and overall health.



CC0 Image – Wikimedia Commons

Here's a key part of Newport's argument that being mindful of our media consumption is as important as being mindful of our food consumption.

> *We should consider taking as strong a stance against ultraprocessed content as we already do against ultraprocessed food. Which is to say: Most people should avoid these diversions most of the time. In the same way that you're unlikely to eat Twinkies as a regular snack or still believe that Pop-Tarts provide a balanced breakfast, stop consuming ultraprocessed content. Don't use TikTok. Don't use Instagram. Don't use X. Their sugar-high benefits aren't worth the costs.*

Women in Magazines

Media content's negative effects on mental health can also be caused by an older but still prevalent media form. Magazines that cover celebrity news, human-interest stories and pop culture – such as *People* and *Us* – can seem obsessed with gossip about which celebrities have lost or gained weight, who is experiencing the best body of their lives, and who doesn't look so good in swimsuit photographs taken by paparazzi.



Taylor Swift voiced her concerns in her *Miss Americana* documentary. And in an interview with *Variety*, Swift said this:

> *I remember how, when I was 18, that was the first time I was on the cover of a magazine. And the headline was like 'Pregnant at 18?' And it was because I had worn something that made my lower stomach look not flat. So I just registered that as a punishment. And then I'd walk into a photo shoot and be in the*

dressing room and somebody who worked at a magazine would say, "Oh, wow, this is so amazing that you can fit into the sample sizes. Usually we have to make alterations to the dresses, but we can take them right off the runway and put them on you!" And I looked at that as a pat on the head. You register that enough times, and you just start to accommodate everything towards praise and punishment, including your own body.

Judgmental analysis of celebrities' bodies not only affects the celebrities themselves; it also leads impressionable audiences to compare their bodies to what they see on magazine covers and in photo spreads.

Social Media Pros and Cons

Social media can be a good place to build community, but it doesn't replace the need for public health professionals.

Journalist and media critic Steven Brill cited research showing that when social media users search for health-care information, algorithms often serve up "posts by people with alarmist opinions over posts by doctors or dentists."

Brill also offered his perspective about relying on the internet and social media for guidance on personal health.

> *When you're getting brain surgery or wondering about a vaccine, you should want a certified brain surgeon or epidemiologist to advise you, not someone with an angry or paranoid opinion that generates the most likes and shares.*

Nonetheless, a study from Pew Research Center suggested that half of U.S. adults under 50 get health and wellness information from social media influencers or podcasts. Some of these sources have medical or public-health backgrounds, but others are simply entrepreneurs.

In response to growing concerns over medical misinformation on TikTok, Fox 32 in Chicago produced the video segment below. The video summarized research showing that the majority of social media influencers who gave medical advice on TikTok were not doctors. The conclusion noted, however, that social media can be a good place for some people to find emotional support.

> *Medical professionals suggest calling a doctor for health concerns and using social media to find a community of other people that may suffer from a condition that you have.*



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=2529#oembed-8

The Impact of AI

Some patients fear the cost of medical treatment or want quick, simple explanations, so they seek medical diagnosis and advice from AI tools such as ChatGPT or Google Gemini.

Using AI for medical advice can be risky, though. A Guardian investigation found that some Google Gemini summaries that appeared above search results generated inaccurate health information that increased the chances of risk or harm.

In one case, the investigation said that "Google wrongly advised people with pancreatic cancer to avoid high-fat foods," which experts said was "the exact opposite of what should be recommended, and may increase the risk of patients dying from the disease."

Furthermore, a New York Times video explained how hundreds of A.I.-generated doctors and wellness influencers on social media tout the benefits of supplements to American consumers.

- The Fake Influencers Selling Wellness on Your Feed – The New York Times

And as an extreme example of AI's effects on health care, an Arkansas Advocate articled chronicled the battle of AI vs. AI in the health-insurance industry. Some insurance companies use AI to approve or deny patient reimbursements, while some patients and doctors use AI tools to fight high medical bills or denials of insurance coverage.

True or False

The following questions highlight a few tidbits of information from the chapter. Use the forward button or click on sections of the control bar to advance through the questions.

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://uark.pressbooks.pub/massmedialandscape/?p=2529#h5p-126

Food Packaging and Promotion

For this assignment, you can analyze either packaging for a food product or an advertisement for a food product. The packaging or advertisement should include text that makes a claim that is not provable.

Analyze your ad based on the following questions.

1. What product is advertised?
2. Which text is not easily proven true or false?
3. In what ways does the text in question encourage consumers to think favorably about the health benefits of the product?
4. Do consumers face any potential health risks if they consume this product without doing their own research on the reliability of the text in question?
5. What else do you think is noteworthy about the ad content?

If you are submitting this as a class assignment, you should include a visual or a link for the product packaging or advertisement.

Use a Q&A format with at least two detailed sentences for each response.

PART II
RESOURCES

AI PROMPTS FOR CHAPTER 1: JOKES

Based on the AI jokes you read toward the end of Chapter 1, here's an AI option for exploration. Using one or more LLMs (Claude, ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexity), ask the chatbot to tell you some jokes. Here are some sample prompts to start:

- Are you very good at telling jokes?
- Tell me a joke about artificial intelligence.
- Tell me a joke about media literacy.
- Tell me a joke about the movie industry.
- Tell me a joke about the newspaper industry.

Takeaways

After you've generated a few jokes, consider the following questions:

- How predictable (and/or funny) are the jokes?
- Large-language models are dependent on the statistical probability of the next likely words or phrase. Do you think that hinders their usefulness for creative joke-telling?

AI PROMPTS FOR CHAPTER 2: ANALOGIES

Large-language models can sometimes generate interesting analogies. Based on the broad historical perspectives about media technology and language usage in Chapter 2, use AI to consider other aspects of our culture. Following are sample prompts, but you should also create your own analogies based on your personal interests:

- How does the history of media technology resemble the history of **health care**?
- How does the history of media technology resemble the history of **fashion design**?
- How does the history of media technology resemble the history of **architecture**?
- How does the history of movies resemble the history of **psychology**?
- How is the history of psychology reflected in the history of **product packaging**?

I recommend that you add some limitations following your question, such as this:

> Please include no more than 125 words in your response and use simple language.

FYI – Here's one sample AI answer to the health care question, courtesy of Claude:

> *They both struggled with similar big questions: Who gets access? How much should it cost? How do we make sure it's good quality? Both tried to help more people while dealing with new problems. Like how hospitals had to learn about germs, media had to learn about computer viruses and online safety.*

AI PROMPT FOR CHAPTER 7: MEDIA ETHICS

For a role-playing exercise in media ethics, you can copy and paste the following three paragraphs into an AI platform (such as ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, Perplexity, Microsoft CoPilot).

Let's do a role-playing exercise to help me learn about media ethics. I'll be a reporter at a local television station. You are my editor.

Two workers in city hall have provided me with emails showing the mayor and a local company have conspired to embezzle $100,000 from the city's recreation funds. I have confirmed that the emails are legitimate, but the emails are from private accounts that were illegally hacked.

You have allowed me to make my own decision about whether to report this local news story. What ethical questions would you ask me to help me make my decision? Make this conversational so that you ask no more than two questions at a time, with no more than 20 words per question.

Takeaways

After you finish the chat, consider how effectively the AI editor's questions and comments related to key points about media ethics in chapter 7. To what extent did the AI responses relate to the SPJ Code of Ethics?

AI PROMPT FOR CHAPTER 10: MAGAZINE STARTUP CONCEPT

For a role-playing exercise about magazines, you can copy and paste the three paragraphs below into an AI platform (such as ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, Perplexity, Microsoft CoPilot). Feel free to change the magazine's concept, target audience or other details in the prompt as you see fit.

Let's do a role-playing exercise for me to learn about the magazine industry. Please use no more than 30 words for each of your responses.

I want to launch a food-focused print magazine about restaurants and recipes for young people in the southern United States. The tentative title for my magazine is *Southern Yum-Yum*. The target audience will be 18-to-30-year olds who have steady incomes but can't afford expensive luxury restaurants. I have $100,000 in startup money for the first year. I will begin locally in the state of Arkansas, but I have dreams of expanding across Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, South Carolina, Tennessee and Georgia.

You are a veteran magazine publisher and editor who will ask me questions about my magazine proposal and give me advice based on my responses. I need ideas for branding, advertising, and promotion, especially with the magazine's initial launch.

Takeaways

After you finish the chat, reflect on the quality of the AI feedback. Do you trust an AI platform to give you reliable advice on business decisions?

AI PROMPT FOR CHAPTER 16: CRISIS PR ROLE PLAY

For a role-playing exercise in crisis public relations, you can copy and paste the following three paragraphs into an AI platform (such as ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, Perplexity, Microsoft CoPilot).

Let's do a role-playing exercise to help me learn about crisis public relations. I'll be the head of public relations for Johnson Brick Company. You'll be a news reporter from a local television station who is asking questions about a bribery allegation involving the company. You are planning to air a story about the allegations, which are as follows:

The chief executive officer of the Johnson Brick Company has been arrested and charged with bribing a state legislator. According to a police report, the CEO wanted the legislator to vote in favor of a construction project that would have led to a $5 million contract for the state to purchase products from Johnson Brick Company.

While playing the head of public relations, I need to practice answering the reporter's questions while protecting the public image of Johnson Brick Company and limiting negative publicity.

Takeaways

After you finish the chat, consider whether this was a worthwhile learning exercise for you. To what extent could AI role-playing exercises be used in future academic courses and employee training?

AI PROMPT FOR CHAPTER 18: AFFORDABLE FASHION OR HOCKEY

The following templated prompts use Northwest Arkansas as a location,. Feel free to change the location, the influencer topic, or other details in the prompts as you see fit.

Option 1 – Affordable Fashion

For a role-playing exercise in social-media influencing for affordable fashion, you can copy and paste the four paragraphs below into an AI platform (such as ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, Perplexity, Microsoft CoPilot):

Let's do a role-playing exercise for me to learn about social-media influencing.

I am 22 years old and still exploring potential career pathways. I want to be a social media influencer who promotes affordable fashion in Northwest Arkansas. I want to generate income by promoting local and national clothing brands. My first chore is to gain credibility and a large regional audience. To increase my chances of becoming a successful social media influencer with a significant following, I have decided to consult you, a local media executive who specializes in giving advice to social media influencers.

You live in Northwest Arkansas and like to give encouragement and advice to young adults seeking a career related to social media. You are supportive but honest about the realities and challenges of a media-related career.

Try to use no more than 50 words per response.

Option 2 – Hockey

For a role-playing exercise in social-media influencing about hockey in Arkansas, you can copy and paste the four paragraphs below into an AI platform (such as ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, Perplexity, Microsoft CoPilot):

Let's do a role-playing exercise for me to learn about social-media influencing.

I am 22 years old and still exploring potential career pathways. Ideally, I want to be a social media influencer who advocates for the sport of hockey. However, I live in Arkansas, where there are few hockey teams or venues where hockey can be played. Besides becoming an advocate for hockey in Arkansas, I also want to generate revenue to sustain my social media presence, so I hope to establish relationships with some sports-related companies that sell hockey equipment and apparel. I also want to make my audience aware of any

opportunities for people in Arkansas to watch televised or live hockey games. To increase my chances of becoming a successful social media influencer with a significant following, I have decided to consult you, a local media executive who specializes in giving advice to social media influencers.

You are a media executive in Northwest Arkansas. You like to give encouragement and advice to young adults seeking a career related to social media. You are supportive but honest about the realities and challenges of a media-related career.

Try to use no more than 50 words per response.

Takeaways

After you have finished your AI conversation, evaluate the quality of the feedback you received. Was it insightful or predictable? Were there any authentic takeaways?