

# Mass Communication and Its Digital Transformation

Many Netflix subscribers eagerly await the release of the newest season of its most popular, award-winning series *Orange Is the New Black*, about prisoners in a minimum-security women's prison in Connecticut. Based loosely on Piper Kerman's 2010 memoir *Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Women's Prison*, the TV comedy-drama covers the lives and back stories of the various inmates while it critiques larger social issues such as the consequences of privatizing prisons, guard and prisoner relations, and the difficulties ex-convicts face in reintegrating into society.

Netflix itself became a crime victim when hackers intercepted ten episodes of season 5. Netflix refused to pay a ransom, so hackers released the episodes more than a month before the planned June 9, 2017, release date.

The hacker or hackers, which go by the name darkoverlord, claim to have episodes from other networks, such as Fox, ABC, and National Geographic. The material seems to have been stolen from Larsen Studios, a production facility, in 2016.

Streaming services like Netflix have become increasingly popular, challenging traditional television networks and cable services and their advertising-based business models with a subscription business model that can be watched via the Internet. Some may consider it poetic justice that an industry disruptor like Netflix is, in turn, being disrupted by an illegal activity like hacking, but the example shows just how much convergence has blurred the lines between traditional media, the Internet, and social media.

Furthermore, the hack does raise issues of Internet security as it reminds us of how interconnected we are and how even one weak link in our online network can affect a much greater number of people and companies. Although Netflix executives no doubt hope that darkoverlord may one day be wearing an orange prison jumpsuit, the chances of finding the hacker or hackers and bringing them to justice is slim, especially if they are overseas.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- >> Define convergence.
- >> Discuss the main types of convergence and their implications for communication.
- >> Explain the eight major changes taking place in communication today because of convergence.
- >> Define mass communication.
- >> Describe the basic theories of mass communication.
- >> Identify the basic components and functions of the mass-communication process.

The media of mass communication have long played a fundamental role in people's lives. The media inform, educate, persuade, entertain, and even—or perhaps especially—sell. Media can provide personal companionship and public scrutiny. They can shape perception on matters great and small. They can function in countless and increasing ways as extensions of one's self, and play a fundamental role in shaping our identities.

We will examine the nature of mass communication and how it is changing in the digital and social media age when people are connected globally by electronic networks. Specific technological advances are producing widespread societal, cultural, and economic changes as media producers and consumers face a new world of media symbols, processes, and effects.

Few communications technologies better encapsulate the fundamental aspects of convergence than two seemingly very different devices: the telephone and the television. We will first look briefly at the history and evolution of the telephone as a communications device because it touches on almost every important issue that we are dealing with today regarding the Internet and digital media. Furthermore, the phone continues to be at the heart of some of the most innovative changes taking place in how we communicate with each other and how we interact with the world and with media. At the end of the chapter, we will take a brief look at television, how it continues to be at the forefront of convergence, and how it is changing our relationship with the media.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** Keep a diary for a day of the media you consume (and create). Note the sources of your news, the types of online communication you use with friends and family, and the frequency of your phone use (talking and texting). What did you learn from the diary?

## Telephony: Case Study in Convergence

Although nowadays we may take the portability of our cell phones for granted, this mobility has important repercussions for many activities. First, we are no longer tied to a specific place when making or answering a phone call. The question "Where are you now?" when calling a friend's landline need not be asked—your friend is obviously at home; otherwise, he would not have answered the phone.

By being able to communicate anywhere and anytime, you are able to coordinate with others with greater spontaneity than in the past. Prior to widespread use of cell phones, if you had a sudden change of plans (or change of heart) regarding a meeting with someone, you had very limited ways to let the person know you would not show up. Coordinating meeting times and places among several people in a group took much more effort and did not allow for last-minute changes. Also, consider how much more we use a phone we carry, as opposed to when you had to travel to the location of the phone (e.g., home, a phone booth). This makes us more likely to call or text to share information on the spot—sometimes to the annoyance of those around us as we communicate with distant others and ignore people nearby.

Our familiarity with the phone belies its revolutionary character from a communications standpoint. Before the phone, people could not talk directly to others whom they could not physically see. In an emergency, the only way to inform the

effects of mobile phones on pop interaction

proper authorities was to physically go where they were and let them know. The phone played a major role in changing our patterns of communication with each other and thereby changing social relations. But it was the telegraph created more than thirty years before the telephone, that first revolutionized our speed of communication.

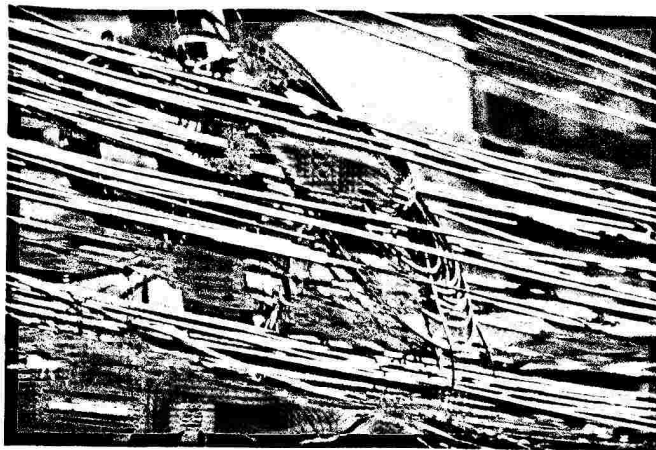
The telegraph was the first means of electronic communication, using a series of taps on a keypad that represented dots and dashes to spell out words. These signals were transmitted over telegraph wires connecting one location to another. Telegraph operators were specially trained to code and decode messages, and the result was a thriving new industry that grew during the mid- to late nineteenth century. This innovative form of instantaneous communication led to entirely new kinds of business enterprises, including personal messaging services and "newswire" services such as Reuters and the Associated Press.

Telephones adopted the principles discovered with telegraphy but allowed voice to be transmitted. Although Alexander Graham Bell is the inventor of record for the telephone in 1876, others were also working on how to transmit voice electronically through wires; and there is some evidence that Bell's invention may have borrowed liberally from existing, similar patents. Still, after years of lawsuits, it was Bell who won out. This parallels the many suits and countersuits seen today as companies claim patent infringement on Internet or software inventions and technologies (e.g., Nokia and Apple's 2016 suits against each other regarding infringing patents).<sup>1</sup>

Regardless of who can claim credit for inventing the telephone, it was easier for the general public to use than the telegraph. Even so, it was not immediately thought of as an interpersonal communication device, largely because it was expensive and difficult to connect every single household to the telephone network. This parallels the "last mile" issue in twenty-first-century broadband, or high-speed, Internet connections coming directly into homes and touches on the importance of networks in our communication environment. It also highlights how seemingly obvious uses for new communications technologies become apparent only much later. How they may be used or adopted is very much an open question that relies not only on the technology alone but on a range of economic, social, and cultural issues at the time.

Despite the dramatic changes it would bring to communications, the phone was initially either ignored or thought of as simply a novelty. With subsequent technological improvements that made it easier to hear and to increase the number of voices that could be carried on a single wire, the telephone became more widely accepted. The ring of the telephone was a death knell for most telegraph companies, just as later media technologies rendered earlier technologies obsolete and changed entire industries in the process.

Initially, especially in Europe, the telephone acted as a kind of early radio. Wealthy patrons paid a fee to listen to music performances that were sent along the wires, and some public venues would pipe in sermons or performances for their patrons.<sup>2</sup> For several years in Budapest, Hungary, Telefon Hírmondó delivered news over the telephone, with subscribers dialing in at certain times to listen to someone reading the news of the day. A similar service was also tried in 1911 in Newark, New Jersey, but lasted for only a few months before closing.



As the telephone network spread, telephone lines started to clutter the landscape.

Tech. Determinism vs. Soc. Tech.

Delivering news over telephone wires is not something new with the Internet, and it also shows a public desire for information and entertainment "on demand," much like we get our media through online streaming services. What was still missing at that time was an economic model that could support a business such as telephone newspapers. This issue is commonly dealt with today by media companies that need to see a return on investments before they are willing to experiment with new ways of doing business.

private - 504  
tech dev.

[ The decision whether to make the telephone a government-run agency or a private enterprise was an important crossroad, and the choices made in Europe (government) differed from those made in the United States (private enterprise). ] Even into the twenty-first century, these choices have had profound repercussions for the actual and perceived development, use, and control of the Internet. And it continues to be the case that new technologies often inherit the baggage of political or social decisions made much earlier.

Leaving the early development of American telephone systems to private enterprise resulted in many incompatibilities among competing systems. Local telephone companies sold their own telephones, which would often not work with other telephone systems. The issue of compatibility between systems is still seen today in the form of competing computer operating systems, gaming systems, Internet browsers, and other electronic devices, including ebooks and tablet computers.

During the formative years of the telephone industry, the U.S. government sought to eliminate such incompatibilities in the phone network by granting one company, AT&T, a monopoly on the telephone system. This, too, had important repercussions for later developments in telecommunications. Just as the monopoly telegraph company, Western Union, had done in the late 1800s when it became apparent the telephone was a threat to its business, AT&T in the 1960s and 1970s tried to hamper the development of a new kind of network that would potentially hurt its business. The network needed to develop the Internet was not compatible with the AT&T system. Even though AT&T realized the new network was more efficient, the telephone company feared losing dominance and initially refused to adopt it.

Government regulation or private enterprise, monopoly powers, and business interests at the expense of the public interest are issues still very much with us today. How much we pay for services, how services are bundled and how they set up payment plans, and a variety of other business decisions are influenced by the laws and regulations that have been created, often as a result of industry lobbying efforts.

Just as economic factors may influence how we use the telephone, such as what types of data plans we have, social and cultural factors play an equally important role in determining whether a technology is adopted. Initially, people do not know how to act or interact with a new technology. Consider the classic story of the farmer, for example, who in the early days of the telephone went to town to place an order for supplies. The store clerk told him to place his order directly with the company over the phone, so the farmer dutifully wrote out his order, rolled it up carefully, and then jammed the rolled note into one of the holes of the phone handset and waited.

If this seems too silly to be true, recall your own reactions when you have to use an unfamiliar TV remote control. The variety of functions seen in phones today stretches its very definition compared to even twenty years ago. Young people today in much of the world would consider a phone that does not take pictures or play video games or provide an address book a dinosaur. In short, the phone continues to evolve as a multifunctional communications device. The smartphone connects us to our friends and to the world of information and entertainment through the



Internet via almost one billion mobile applications (apps). It provides a nearly seamless interface between interpersonal and mass communication, as we access via a favorite app a review of a restaurant and then subsequently snap a photo of our meal to share via Instagram. We might even wirelessly post our own review on the spot, after which it can be seen by potentially millions of people worldwide.

All these aspects of the development and use of the phone—ranging from the technical, legal, and regulatory to the economic, social, and cultural—touch on the notion of media convergence. But as we will see, convergence is a debated concept and has multiple layers of meaning. As we explore this phenomenon, we will unpack its many layers and reveal how they encompass some of the most dramatic transformations taking place in communications today.



Today's cell phones typically have a variety of functions that have nothing to do with the traditional functions of the phone.

## Three Types of Convergence

**Convergence** is known broadly as the coming together of computing, telecommunications, and media in a digital environment. It is important to study and understand convergence because what might first seem like wholly technological or media issues profoundly influence our economic, social, and cultural lives as well.

There is some disagreement among scholars over a single definition of convergence, an indication of the far-reaching consequences of the changes taking place in mass communication today. Indeed, many transformative forces for which we have still to develop adequate descriptions are in play, changes whose effects are also uncertain. For now, the term "convergence" seems to come closest to encompassing many of these forces. Some argue that convergence has already occurred, and in many respects you could say that is true. But we believe that convergence is an ongoing and dynamic phenomenon that continues to shape the world of traditional media.

We can look at three main categories of convergence as in Figure 1-1 as ways to frame our understanding of the changes taking place today in the media industries: technological convergence, economic convergence, and cultural convergence. As you will see, these three categories actually overlap in many respects.

Definition

### convergence

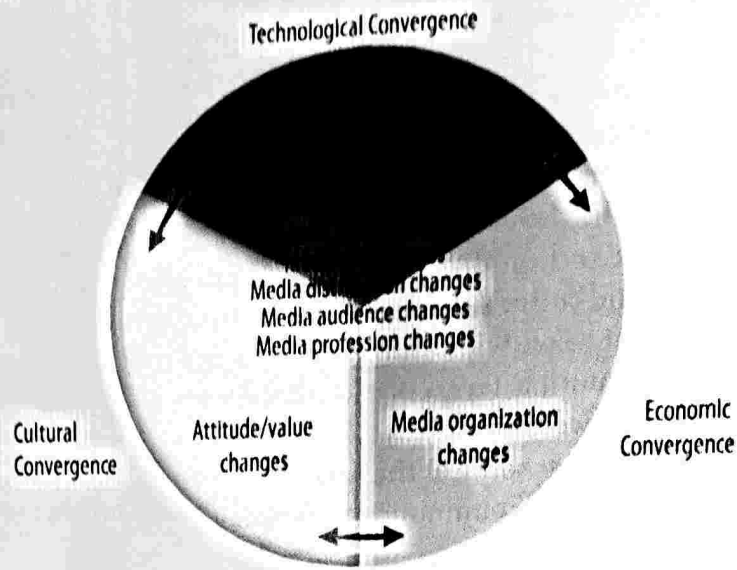
The coming together of computing, telecommunications, and media in a digital environment.

## TECHNOLOGICAL CONVERGENCE

Perhaps the most easily visible aspect of convergence is the rise of digital media and online communication networks. Technological convergence refers to specific types of media, such as print, audio, and video, all converging into a digital media form <sup>Def.</sup> Such types of convergence are easily apparent in news organizations—for example, where today's journalists often need to be able to tell stories using text, <sup>e.g. news article</sup> audio, video, and even interactive media.

Digital media often change the very nature of their traditional counterparts and affect how we use and perceive them. For example, although you can look at an ebook on a Kindle as simply digital print, the fact is that a Kindle ebook alters the reading experience. One obvious way is that because of its storage capacity, you can easily carry many books in one device. Furthermore, you can change the text size to make reading more comfortable, look up words, annotate and index sections, and even purchase new books on the spot through a wireless Internet connection.

FIGURE 1-1 Three Types of Convergence and Their Influence on Media



Precisely because users can alter the look and size of the text they are reading, the notion of page numbers also becomes meaningless on a Kindle—much to the chagrin of students who realize they need to cite quotations taken from a book. You can even share your highlighted passages with others, making book reading a collaborative experience, much like it was in the early days of books when reading was generally done aloud.

Most of these activities, such as looking up an unfamiliar word in a dictionary, already occur with printed books. The significant difference, however, is that a single device now allows for all these actions, eliminating the need to carry a separate dictionary or permanently mark a book. Activities that used to be separate or cumbersome are now easier and folded into the media experience. Not simply a matter of convenience, these changes fundamentally alter how we interact with our media. We may be far more likely to look up a word on a Kindle than if we had

to walk to the shelf to get the dictionary, for example. The music, television, and film industries, which we will look at in later chapters, provide other examples of how our media use changes thanks in large part to changes in technology.

This form of convergence, although highly relevant for today's communications professionals, is not the only way to think of convergence. The changes that come from new technologies also affect business models and established industries, which often see the upstarts as threats to their dominance. These fears can be valid, as sometimes these new companies become larger and more powerful than established ones. Google, founded in 1998, is a case in point. Started as a search engine, today it generates much of its revenue from advertising due to its popularity as a search tool. Even so, in August 2015 Google itself announced that it would change its company name to Alphabet, with Google simply being one part of a corporation. Today you can see Google expanding into the field of self-driving cars, for example, and in many other areas not directly related to media or online searches.



Ebook readers such as the Kindle and the Nook have transformed the reading habits of people around the world, not to mention the book industry. **CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS:** How do you think ebooks are influencing the notion of books and reading? Are ebooks better or more useful than traditional books? Which would you rather read, and why?

## ECONOMIC CONVERGENCE

Economic convergence refers to the merging of Internet or telecommunications companies with traditional media companies, such as Comcast with NBC Universal. Traditional media companies have grown fewer and much larger in the past fifty years through mergers and acquisitions, a process we define as **consolidation** not convergence. Economic convergence occurs when formerly independent media enterprises further the success of one another because they fall under the same **corporate umbrella**. Entertainment companies may own news stations; large corporations traditionally outside of the media business, such as GE, may purchase media companies like NBC. This can result in conflicts of interest when corporate parents don't want some aspects of their businesses covered in the news or when a news outlet gives prominent coverage to a movie produced by a studio also owned by the corporate parent.

Economic convergence also has important repercussions for the nature of the media, telecommunications, and computing industries. A telecommunications company that also owns a media company can speed the transmission of its own content and slow the content from competing companies, thus influencing customers to watch more of its own material. It could also control the type of content its customers see by blocking material from certain websites.

The Internet is not causing this type of behavior: There are numerous historical examples of media owners censoring content or blocking public access. But what makes this issue more significant and prominent is the combination

### consolidation

A process whereby traditional media companies have grown fewer and much larger in the past fifty years through mergers and acquisitions.

(not neutrality)



### MEDIA PIONEERS

## Oprah Winfrey

You may be surprised to learn that Oprah Winfrey, known as "the Queen of All Media" and considered in some rankings to be the most influential black woman in the world, came from very humble beginnings.

Born to a teenage single mother in 1954, Oprah Winfrey lived in poverty during her childhood and claims to have been molested as a child and early teen, resulting in pregnancy at fourteen. Tired of people mispronouncing her name as "Oprah" rather than Orpah, she finally just let it become Oprah.

Oprah started in radio at nineteen, and helped develop a more confessional style of radio and later television talk show that Phil Donahue had pioneered. *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, which was nationally syndicated from 1986 to 2011, was the highest rated show of its kind in television history.

The popularity of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* created something called the "Oprah effect," which referred to her popular book club segment on the show. When she discussed a book on the segment, even obscure titles quickly became bestsellers.

Oprah's power as a media personality and business can be seen in the way she has successfully bridged

traditional media and online media. She has launched several magazines, including *O, The Oprah Magazine*, and published a memoir in 2017. She also had a satellite radio contract and continues to appear on television regularly.

Although not necessarily an Internet pioneer in the sense of creating new online business models, products, or apps, her website [oprah.com](http://oprah.com) attracts 6 million users a month, complementing and expanding her media empire.

That media empire has propelled her to become North America's only black multibillionaire, and the richest black person in the United States. She has also been generous with her wealth: She was named as one of America's top philanthropists by *Businessweek* in 2004.





of consolidated media giants and ever larger audiences. Despite the explosion of channels and media content, our choices may be narrower than they appear. Consider the increasingly frequent temporary blackouts of channels as cable companies and media conglomerates fight over "carriage rights": agreements to broadcast a company's signal. In 2012 over 20 million DirecTV subscribers were blocked by Viacom (owner of CBS, Comedy Central, and MTV, among many others) as the two companies negotiated fees. In late 2014 and into early 2015, satellite provider DISH Network stopped carrying Fox News and Fox Business channels because of disagreements over licensing charges.

It is difficult to determine a true winner in the court of public opinion, as the agreements tend to lead to higher cable bills for consumers, who are encouraged by the companies to apply public pressure but who seem to have limited clout. However, in a cultural shift, the relationship between the audience or public and media producers is changing, and here we are able to see greater disruption.

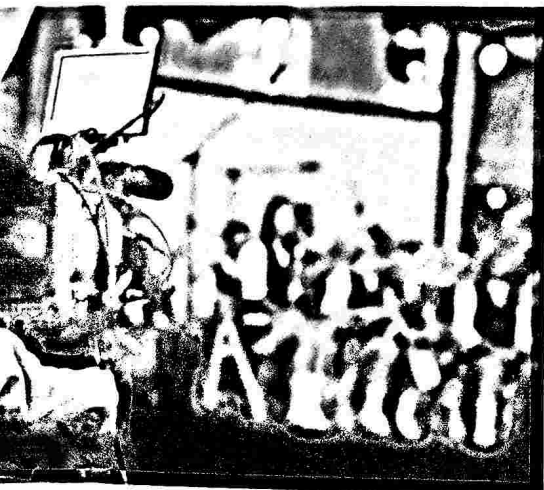
## CULTURAL CONVERGENCE

Culture refers to the values, beliefs, and practices shared by a group of people. It may refer to a population at large, such as Americans, or to various subgroups within a larger group who may share certain ethnic, social, or professional traditions and practices, such as Irish Americans, video gamers, or corporate attorneys.

A powerful aspect of cultural convergence occurs through the globalization of media content when, for example, crime procedural dramas like *CSI*, *NCIS*, or *Criminal Minds* are top-ranked shows in several European countries; or when Japanese anime, or animation, finds popularity in the United States. The popularity of such shows across a variety of nations speaks to some aspect they possess that foreign audiences identify with or aspire to. On the downside of cultural convergence, however, a significant concern is the impact of global media on multiculturalism, or the diversity of culture, especially internationally.

But we can also look at cultural convergence from the perspective of how we consume, create, and distribute media content. The shift from an audience that was forced to be largely passive and silent, simply consuming content produced by large-scale media companies to a public that can now produce and share content with others cheaply and easily is one of the major themes of this book and a crucial component of cultural convergence.

participation  
media

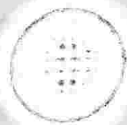


Digital technology has allowed more people to create professional-quality videos and other media content.

Although mass communication will continue, in the sense that media companies and others will continue to produce messages for large audiences, a significant trend involves more personalized and frequent messages tailored to the needs of individuals. Furthermore, what was traditionally considered interpersonal communication, such as email, can also be widely distributed by individuals through online networks, making the dividing line between interpersonal and mass communication increasingly hard to distinguish.

The ability of companies to better target people with personalized advertising and messages by tracking their online activities raises important issues of privacy, consumer rights, and media business economic models. Whether people will become more active in media production and more engaged in civic or political activities than in the past remains open to debate, with some scholars taking an increasingly critical look at how media corporations and





## INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

# A "Comedy" of Cultural Convergence

Given the current tensions between North Korea and the United States, the release of the Seth Rogen comedy *The Interview* in late 2014 and early 2015 almost seems like a comedy in its own right. The movie seemed an unlikely candidate to spark an international incident that became a cause célèbre for free speech, increased fears about cyberwarfare between nations, and led to U.S. sanctions against North Korea, but that is exactly what happened. This curious chain of events also highlights—often unexpectedly—just how much digital media has transformed mass communication.

North Korea was vocal in its displeasure about the planned Christmas Day release of the comedy *The Interview* in which Rogen and James Franco play a pair of celebrity tabloid-show producers chosen by the CIA to assassinate North Korean leader Kim Jong-un.

On November 24, Sony Pictures, distributor of the film, learned that its computer systems had been hacked. In the days that followed, sensitive corporate data—including a string of embarrassing emails between executives, early versions of screenplays, and executive salaries—were leaked to the public. Sony and some cybersecurity experts, including those in the FBI, blamed a North Korean group, while other experts were doubtful.

On December 17, after receiving threats that theaters showing *The Interview* would be blown up, Sony cancelled its theatrical release, an executive decision widely criticized as a blow to free speech. Less than a week later, Sony reversed itself and announced that the movie would play in theaters that still supported it and be available to rent on video-on-demand (VOD). Just before New Year's, several cable and satellite companies announced deals with Sony to show *The Interview* for pay-per-view, on iTunes, Xbox Video, YouTube Movies, Google Play, and other on-demand services, long before

the usual three-month window between theatrical release and airing on cable or DVD. Between December 24, 2014, and January 4, 2015, *The Interview* earned \$31 million, making it Sony's number 1 online film.<sup>3</sup>

Several ironies make this fiasco worthy of its own comedy feature film. First, it was not government that threatened free speech but corporate interests, ranging from Sony Pictures itself to theater owners who refused to show the movie. Second, the United States issued more sanctions against North Korea in early January, even though cybersecurity experts were still debating who was actually responsible for the hack. Third, it showed that even when confronted with a legacy of artificial constraints from an earlier mass-communications era, convergence will prevail, especially when there are other distribution channels available such as home entertainment systems.



companies, in general, are turning online public participation to their advantage through online tracking and targeted advertising. In one future, there is an engaged public who uses digital media and online networks to further interactivity and democracy prevails; and in another, there are established media conglomerates and technology companies that hijack public interests for their own ends, including stifling political dissent or unpopular opinions. Such tensions and concerns will shape the nature of the Internet and digital media use far into the twenty-first century.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** Discuss ways in which you have engaged with others through social media or on websites. Do you think this has made you more politically active? Why or why not?

## Implications of Convergence

Whether an Internet-connected world will ultimately and fundamentally improve society is impossible to say; yet, for better and for worse, digital media have changed and will continue to transform the relationship between mass-communication industries and the public. Media organizations face many challenges, but so do media consumers as the nature of our media environment changes. Some general trends can be discerned that will provide a better perspective on how our digital-media use is changing our media world and, by extension, our social and cultural worlds.

Clearly, the changes brought about by convergence have had dramatic implications. Within the larger framework of the three types of convergence, these changes affect eight different areas, recurring themes addressed throughout this book:

1. Media organization
2. Media type
3. Media content
4. Media use
5. Media distribution
6. Media audience
7. Media profession
8. Attitudes and values

### MEDIA ORGANIZATION

In the world that predated convergence, media content was created and published or broadcast on predetermined schedules by centralized media organizations in which a central unit or individual controls content production and distribution as well as marketing and other functions. A newspaper was printed and distributed daily or weekly; a television show appeared at a certain time on a certain day, and audiences often scheduled their social lives around these known schedules. The economics of the media system throughout most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries heavily favored a mass-production model with centralized control. Only large companies could bear the costs of content creation, production, marketing, and distribution.

Internet-based media can be less centralized, partly because many of the associated costs have been greatly reduced. Of course, movies, television shows, and many other types of mass-produced media still rely on the old production and distribution models; but now new marketing avenues on the Internet make it easier to mass distribute media products, as illustrated by Sony Pictures' *The Interview* example.

Unlike public service media, most media companies throughout the world operate to make a profit. Advertising is one of the main sources of revenue for these

De-centralized

organizations, and advertisers today are spending less in traditional media and more online. The gap is beginning to narrow, although many media companies are still not making up the difference with online advertising. This has increased the financial pressure, especially in print media, which, having seen the largest drop in advertising, has led to layoffs, reduced printing and pages of newspapers and magazines, closings, and buyouts of struggling companies.

Concentration of media ownership, or consolidation, was a growing trend even before digital media. Convergence is in some ways fueling media consolidation by leading traditional media giants such as Time Warner to join with a former online colossus such as America Online, giving rise in 2001 to the short-lived AOL Time Warner. In 2010, AOL, long jettisoned from Time Warner, bought one of the most popular blogs on the web, *The Huffington Post*, yet another illustration of how the boundaries between traditional technology companies and media companies have blurred. Furthermore, the much-maligned Time Warner Cable, the second-largest cable company in the United States, was purchased in 2015 by Charter Communications for nearly \$80 billion and rebranded as Spectrum.

consolidation

The trend is clear: Analog and digital media are rapidly being consolidated into the hands of a few very large, very powerful, and very rich owners, an economic structure referred to as an **oligopoly**. These media enterprises are increasingly likely to be part of large, global media organizations publicly owned and accountable to shareholders, whose main interest is the financial bottom line. When traditional telecommunications companies, such as Comcast, join with large media companies, such as NBC Universal, it gives the companies a tremendous centralized control over what access and content are available to media consumers, which is problematic.

#### **oligopoly**

An economic structure in which a few very large, very powerful, and very rich owners control an industry or collection of related industries.

Related to changes in media organization and structure are changes in the types of media or ways in which we get our media content. The seemingly insignificant decision to watch a television program on a TV on a specific day and time or on demand on a mobile device actually has significant consequences for media organizations, advertising revenues, and audience analytics, which help determine advertising rates.

## **MEDIA TYPE**

Just what constitutes a television or radio receiver, or TV or radio programming, is in a state of flux. Once, it was simple. Radio programming was what a listener heard on a radio. Today, however, radio stations can transmit their programming via Internet or satellite and listeners can tune in via car radios, computers, or smartphones and may even choose to download content to listen to later. Moreover, these radio station websites can include images, graphics, text, and video. The audience can sometimes even choose how they want to get content, such as watching the video, listening to the podcast, or reading the story.

Media empires have been built on owning certain kinds of media, and complex governmental laws regulate different media industries and media ownership. In the United States, for example, print media enjoy more free-speech protections than the more tightly regulated electronic broadcast media, and cable providers similarly enjoy greater freedom than broadcast networks. This raises the question of how text on the Internet should be treated—does it have the same First Amendment protections as its print counterpart because it is simply words? Or should it be treated as electronic media because it is delivered electronically? And now,

imp. ??

as more people watch TV on mobile devices, what are the responsibilities of the Internet provider in all of this, as simply the distributor but not the creator of the content itself? Many of these questions have yet to be settled.

## MEDIA CONTENT

### hyperlink

Clickable pointer to other online content.

more  
interactive

Stories told in a digital, online medium can connect with other types of content and other stories much more easily than in any other medium. This is done primarily through the use of **hyperlinks**, clickable pointers to other online content. Online interactive advertisements encourage visitors to click on the ads and go to the sponsor's website, or play a game, or take a survey. In entertainment programming, hyperlinked content allows a viewer to explore a story in a nonlinear narrative, whose outcome may be determined by the user's choice of links. Advertisers are increasingly demanding results in terms of how many people actually clicked on their ads or performed some other function, rather than simply being satisfied with how many viewed the page on which the ad appears.

On-demand content has become increasingly popular. In the traditional media world, the publisher or broadcaster set the schedule for news, entertainment, and marketing information. Children growing up in an on-demand media world of YouTube, podcasting, digital video recorders (DVRs) and streaming services may not readily understand why the same options don't always exist while listening to the radio or watching a traditional television channel that has no on-demand features. The changes have happened so fast and been so extensive that new terms have been created to highlight the differences between a generation that has grown up with digital technologies and those born in the analog era. **Digital natives** are the postmillennial generation that has grown up with digital and social media, whereas **digital immigrants** are older generations that may also use digital media, but that generally have more trouble adapting in varying degrees to the digital media world.

**Digitization**, the process that makes media computer readable, is transforming both how and when media organizations distribute their content. Delivery no longer occurs solely through traditional channels but also via the Internet, satellites, mobile devices, and a host of other digital technologies. Increasingly, content is available twenty-four hours a day, with news organizations updating news continuously and for a worldwide audience.

Digital technology is similarly transforming the production cycle and process as illustrated by Figure 1-2. In fact, the transformation may be even deeper in terms of media-content production. Whether in Hollywood motion pictures, television shows or news, books, magazines, newspapers, or online, producing media content has rapidly become almost an entirely digital process. Shot with digital cameras and edited on computers, movies can be sent by high-speed Internet to digital movie theaters. Reporters working for news operations capture their raw material with digital devices as well, writing, producing, and editing their stories digitally. Even book authors typically compose on a computer, with digital words remaining the norm throughout the production process, being read on e-readers, smartphones, or tablets.

Digital media are challenging our understanding of media content as static or unchangeable. This is especially evident in a **wiki**, a website that can be edited by anyone. Wikis have grown in popularity, revealing the demand among web users for such a function. The wiki owes much of its success to Wikipedia, where the

### digital native

A term coined in 2001 by author Marc Prensky for a member of a younger generation that has grown up with and is consequently very comfortable using digital media and adapting to rapid technological changes.

### digital immigrant

An individual who grew up in the analog media era and who generally has more trouble adapting to new digital technologies, despite perhaps a desire to use and understand them.

### digitization

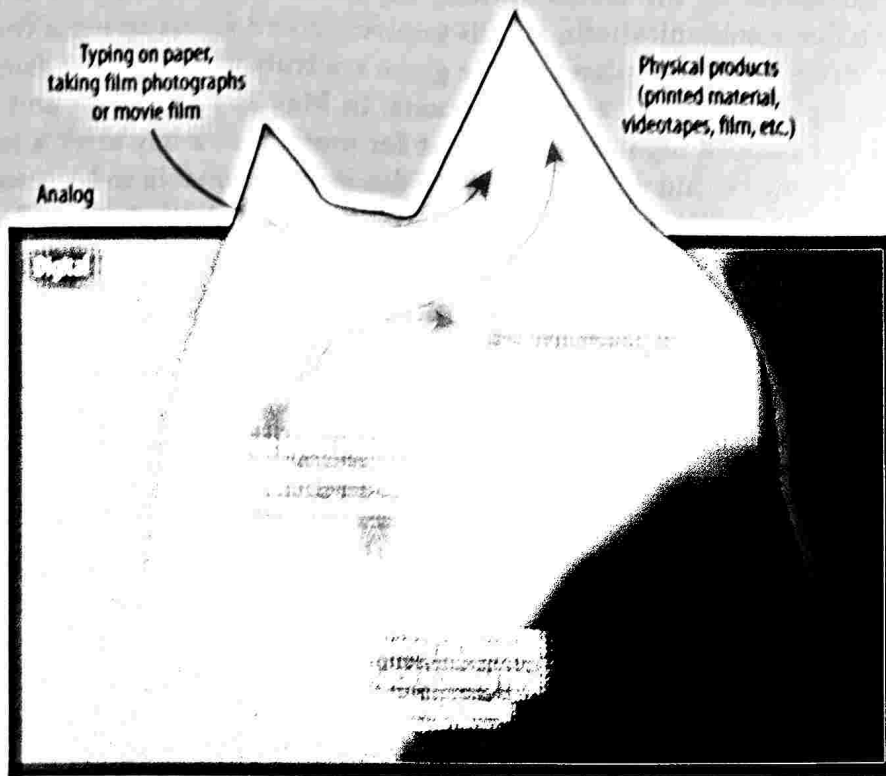
The process that makes media computer readable.

### wiki

Website that lets anyone add, edit, or delete pages and content.



FIGURE 1-2 "Media Iceberg"



stuffy and authoritative encyclopedia article became a collaborative hybrid of encyclopedia and breaking news updated by users.

Of course, content was never actually unchangeable; it just seemed that way. A book could be reprinted as a new edition, yet for most readers the changes between editions were, practically speaking, impossible to discern. An online book is a much more fluid and dynamic document, with discussion forums on book material incorporated into the contents, ongoing online discussions between the author and readers, and interactions among readers.

Similarly, mash-ups of existing media have become common thanks to digital editing tools for music and video. Any popular item produced from mass media (e.g., advertisements, movie trailers, music videos, political speeches) has the potential of being quickly transformed into a number of user-generated parodies or send-ups, most done simply for the fun of creating something rather than for commercial gain. Consider the many mash-up videos of President Trump "playing" an accordion as he speaks and gestures with his hands. Online discussions and mash-ups exemplify increasing audience interaction and participation, one of many changes in media use.

*parodies, memes, sendups*

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** Discuss any media content you have created in the past week or so (posting pictures to social media, forwarding videos or stories, etc.) and what happened with that media. Did you check your uploaded content to see how many likes or shares you received? Who saw the content you posted, and did it reach a wider audience than you thought it would?

## MEDIA USE

The pervasiveness of the media system, expanded exponentially by modern global satellite communications, entails unprecedented access to mass communication. Fewer and fewer places on the globe are truly isolated, even famously remote and physically inaccessible locations. In May 1996, climber and guide Rob Hall was trapped high on Mt. Everest for more than a day after a sudden storm hit. Facing certain death—unable to descend and unable to be rescued—Hall was nonetheless capable of speaking to his pregnant wife in New Zealand by satellite phone.<sup>4</sup>

An always on, always present media environment, which had begun to emerge even before the advent of the Internet, has arrived. This environment has several implications for industries and for consumers, how we use media, and what we expect from them. Media companies have to find content to fill the time, and thus we are seeing more encore performances of hit shows or movies on channels like TNT, showing the same movie two or three times in a row and on multiple nights. Streaming services such as Netflix show popular television series from the past, even creating modern-day revivals such as *Fuller House*, *Twin Peaks* or *Gilmore Girls: A Year in the Life*.

Although the TV is still the first screen or the most used, it is often employed in combination with a tablet or a smartphone, a phenomenon called "the third screen" or "the fourth screen," depending on the relative position of the movie screen in terms of public use. Playing video games or watching videos on smartphones make media even more ubiquitous. Research shows we live in a multiscreen world where the tablet has begun to replace the personal computer or laptop.<sup>5</sup>

Pervasive mass communication means better access to entertainment, information, and news—in theory. It can also mean that media organizations can turn us into super-consumers of media of questionable social or civic value. One might, for example, question the value of viewing a lowbrow reality show on your mobile phone while riding the bus or spending hours at home watching funny cat videos on YouTube.

All the activities mentioned here are predicated on the broad assumption that individuals have ready access to computers, a broadband Internet (wired or Wi-Fi) connection, and the knowledge and skills to use them. Many in advanced, industrialized countries take these as givens, but these digital advantages are far from universal, even within developed countries.

Better Internet access has neither arrived equally to all nor allowed everyone to benefit equally from that access. People in lower socioeconomic groups in industrialized countries have lagged in almost every category of Internet access. The high cost of telecommunication services, including broadband Internet, keeps many from being able to develop the skills and knowledge that can help them participate fully in society.

Although above the worldwide average for Internet speeds, the United States is still far behind dozens of other countries. It has been making gains in high-speed Internet penetration and affordability of available services, as well as Internet speed, however. In the first six months of 2016, the United States achieved average download speeds above 50 Mbps (megabits per second) for the first time ever, a 42 percent increase year-over-year.<sup>6</sup> However, there are still great disparities of broadband access between urban and rural areas, with as many as 39 percent of people in rural populations below the FCC target speeds of 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload speeds.<sup>7</sup> South Korea is widely considered to have the fastest

Digital  
Divide

Internet in the world, although several Scandinavian countries also typically rank highly, along with Asian countries like Japan and Singapore.

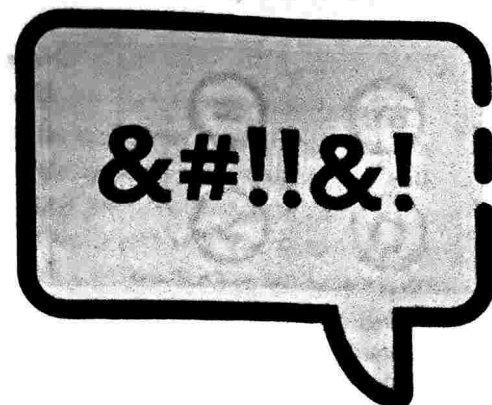
## MEDIA DISTRIBUTION

Content is much more fluid, dynamic, and rapidly transmitted around the globe in an online environment. The expansive reach of global media and instantaneous communications is not without its perils, however, for events in distant places can have far-reaching repercussions. False rumors about political or company leaders can demonstrate the power and danger of rapid global communication. For instance, a fake tweet in the spring of 2013 from a hacked Associated Press account claiming President Obama had been injured in an explosion temporarily wiped out \$130 billion in the stock market.

[The Internet enables audiences around the world to participate in a dialog about global events and issues, bringing individuals separated by thousands of miles and various political and cultural boundaries into direct contact with each other] It is not clear what the net effect of this sea change in communication will be, but it is clear the foundation is potentially being laid for a more connected and engaged global public. Increased connectivity and engagement do not necessarily mean more rational discussion or civilized debate, though, especially as people discover that what they may consider cultural common sense others may consider heresy. Consider the vitriol displayed in many discussion groups, even among people of the same culture but whose opinions differ.

Audiences are increasingly active in their communication with each other and with the creators of mass-communication content, a trend that can decrease corporate power as it increases consumer control. Through **viral marketing**, the online equivalent of word-of-mouth advertising, a popular website, product, or piece of content can rapidly reach millions of online users, all without corporate promotion or advertising dollars. The success of **peer-to-peer (P2P)** file-sharing programs demonstrates how an Internet audience can shift the balance of power from media organizations to consumers, even though those organizations created and provided that content in the first place.

Digital media make it easier than ever for the public to create and distribute media content, whether it is **user-generated content (UGC)** such as an original drawing done via illustration software, an animation or video, or a song sampled and mixed from current hits by famous recording artists. Writing and music have led the way in consumer-created content—especially music, where remixes of previously recorded (and copyrighted) material are common. This is not to say that the average person now has the same ability to produce and create a hit song as a major recording label, for most individuals lack the marketing and promotion resources that a recording label has at its disposal; but the basic capability of producing and distributing at least exists. Media companies have failed to control the channels of media distribution as they once did, and the Internet continues to threaten their business models. This has led to important changes in how consumers view and use content while changing the relationship between media companies and their audiences.



Comments to online articles can often be rude and obnoxious rather than polite and helpful to truly foster further understanding and thoughtful discussions. **CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS:** Have you ever made rude or demeaning comments on articles or posts online? Have you ever received such comments based on posts or stories you've done? What was your reaction, and how did it make you feel?

### viral marketing

Promoting a product, service, or brand online through word of mouth, usually via online discussion groups, chats, and emails.

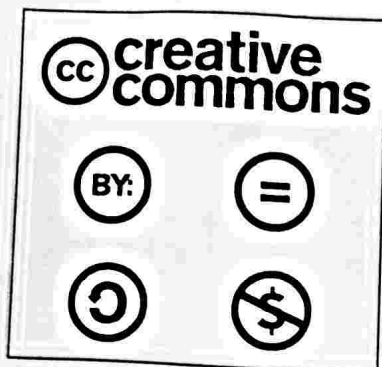
### peer-to-peer (P2P)

The basis of file-sharing services, a computer communications model and network whose computers are considered equal peers who can send, store, and receive information equally well.

### user-generated content (UGC)

Content created by the general public for distribution by digital media.





Creative Commons tries to ensure that content creators retain control of their works and allow it to be used as widely as possible by keeping it in the public domain rather than under copyright restrictions. **CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS:** Visit the

Creative Commons website and click on the "Find CC-licensed works" link (under the Explore heading). Search for some content of interest, such as "hip hop" via SoundCloud (Music) or ccMixter (Music). Do you think Creative Commons is a good idea, and if so, how are artists supposed to earn money if they do not copyright their material and make it easy for anyone to copy?

### producers

Audiences who no longer are simply consumers but also produce content.

Creative Commons, a nonprofit organization, has made a range of "copyleft"—playing on the notion of "copyright"—contracts for content creators that help ensure creative works remain in the public domain. Under the various contracts, creators allow their content to be used by anyone for free but with certain stipulations, such as they must be credited or the content can be used only if it isn't sold. Another common stipulation within the community is that people using the content must allow it to remain free for public use.

## MEDIA AUDIENCE

Traditional mass communication is largely one way, from the sender of a message to the receiver. Relatively large, heterogeneous, and anonymous audiences have relatively few means by which to communicate either with each other on a mass scale or with the creators and publishers. Audiences in the age of convergence can now more easily and quickly communicate with each other and with those who create and publish mass-communication content via social media, email, online forums, and other interactive media. In addition, they can create the content themselves and reach far larger audiences with less expense than was possible with traditional media. They are generally not anonymous because they can be tracked through user names or IP addresses.

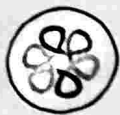
Audiences aren't willing to wait for the evening news or the next day's newspaper for developments in a breaking story. They can get their information and entertainment from literally thousands of sources around the world. Audiences are no longer content to sit back and listen in silence to what the media report; they actively seek, relay, and question the most recent information on social media, blogs, instant messaging, and other informal communication channels. There have been cases of employees finding out about looming company layoffs through websites hours before the company officially announced its plans, and military family members learning of the death of a loved one in combat through social media before the military was able to inform the family.

Digital media do not cause people to become active media producers, called "**produsers**" by some media scholars in an attempt to capture how we now use and produce (not just consume) content. Nevertheless, digital media provide people who are so inclined with ready tools to produce media far more cheaply and easily than with analog alternatives. Active audiences have two important implications for media companies: They may compete for the limited time of target audiences, and they may become more critical consumers of mass communication, which is relevant to media literacy, the topic covered in Chapter 2.

As produsers, people learn to become more critical of the media and to raise questions about the quality of the news, information, and entertainment they receive. Interactive media let the public speak to a general audience and directly to traditional media producers, thereby imparting a sense of shared experience, even perhaps community, as people see that others may feel as they do; such as finding a particular advertisement offensive or considering a certain show rather lame. An interactive public is more likely to be an active public, organizing and working together on common problems. Those who have developed trusting relationships through interaction are less likely to perceive themselves as anonymous faces in a crowd or isolated individuals who have no voice.

Risks accompany these changes, however. Actively choosing the media you want to see, hear, or read can narrow the scope of news or entertainment that you





## CONVERGENCE CULTURE

# A Star Is Born: PewDiePie and YouTube

Felix Kjellberg (pronounced "shell-berg"), otherwise known as PewDiePie (rhymes with "cutie pie"), is the most subscribed user on YouTube, with over 54 million subscribers as of April 2017 and over 15 billion video views since he started his channel in 2010.

His profanity-laced outbursts and humorous comments as he plays video games have helped propel some indie games to massive popularity in a YouTube version of the Oprah effect.

And although he is nowhere near the size of Oprah's media empire, he did make \$15 million in 2016, according to Forbes, thanks in part to his YouTube Red series *Scare PewDiePie* and his book *This Book Loves You*. In 2013, only three years after he started his channel, it was estimated he made \$4 million, rising to about \$7 million each of the next two years.

PewDiePie's success is an exemplar of an interesting convergence of new media types and genres and old media business models, namely advertising. YouTube gives a percentage of its ad revenue, and with such high viewership numbers PewDiePie can earn six figures on that revenue alone.

What's more, his genre, known as "Let's Play," is relatively simple and easy to produce because it consists entirely of capturing on video a game player as he or she plays a game, commenting along the way. The casual style feels like you are sitting alongside a friend and watching him or her play a game.

People raised on traditional video programming may wonder what is so interesting about watching someone sit and play a video game, but 54 million subscribers apparently think otherwise.

However, the limits of the amateurish, casual media culture that YouTube helps popularize can be seen when someone rises to PewDiePie's stature and gets sponsored by the likes of Disney's Maker Studios, as he did.

In February 2017 the *Wall Street Journal* reported that some of PewDiePie's non-gaming videos contained anti-Semitic remarks and Nazi imagery. Although some other YouTube stars defended PewDiePie's comments as jokes that were taken out of context, Maker Studios nonetheless cut ties with him. PewDiePie later posted a video apologizing for his comments, although he still blamed media coverage for taking his comments out of context.



would otherwise get. The late Michael Dertouzos, former MIT Media Lab director, called the tailoring of news to one's specific interests "The Daily Me." Today it is known also as a filter bubble, and technology often plays a role in tailoring what content we see based on our past online habits. Some scholars worry that this phenomenon could fragment audiences into small groups of like-minded individuals who avoid interacting with other groups and who see and select only news and information that reinforces their beliefs and values. Many have blamed this trend for the polarization of political views in the United States, as seen especially during the last presidential election.

## MEDIA PROFESSION

Obviously, all the changes that convergence has brought to mass communication will also change the way communications professionals do their jobs. Just as digital media absorbed traditional print, video, and audio, divisions between print and electronic journalists, and between advertising and public relations practitioners, will fade. In addition to writing effectively, more newsrooms today expect reporters to use video and audio to tell stories. To better reach and persuade audiences, those in advertising and public relations find themselves increasingly using tools that were previously the sole domain of the other profession.

To take advantage of digital media, new skills have to be learned, and it will be more important than ever not to abandon the fundamental principles and ethics of each profession in the inexorable march toward the digital realm. This is no easy order given how corporate parents can exert pressure to blur the lines between news and entertainment or news and promotion.

Giving the audience a chance to respond to and interact with journalists as well as provide their own news coverage in the form of citizen journalism is another important development in journalism today. A mistake in a story can be publicly countered in the discussion section of the story, and then corrected in a revised version. Citizens can provide news content such as raw video or audio, or report on stories of relevance to their locales that big news operations may not deem newsworthy or that may not have the resources to cover.

### citizen journalism

The gathering and sharing of news and information by public citizens, particularly via mobile and social media, sometimes via traditional media.

## ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Changes in audience interactions and the ability for almost anyone to potentially be a broadcaster have had repercussions for companies. United Airlines suffered a public relations crisis in April 2017 when several passengers on a flight recorded a passenger being forcibly dragged off the plane when he refused to give up his seat. The videos quickly went viral worldwide, sparking others to come forward to share their negative experiences with United.

Because most people on the web do not physically make contact with each other and know one another only through their online interactions and communication, establishing a sense of trust has become crucial. A growing number of reputation systems aid users in this effort, such as votes on Reddit and "karma points" on Slashdot, a popular technology news and discussion website. Managing an online reputation is serious business for companies as well as for individuals. Imagine the potential impact of bad reviews on eBay for someone trying to make a living by selling items on the site. Companies are also vulnerable and can fall prey to disinformation campaigns, which makes monitoring rival blogs and online discussions important.

Reputation and transparency rely on digital relationships founded on trust and respect. Media companies that do not realize this will suffer in the long run. For many, it means a shift in corporate policies or philosophies and a loss of the control they have enjoyed through much of the mass-communications era. Conventional wisdom among some executives is that today employees are more willing to spend company time doing personal things, like shopping online, than they were in the past. But, on the other hand, companies, which also may expect to answer business emails while at home or on vacation, must accept that the blurring of company time and private time is a large-scale trend.

The convergence of digital media has led to confusion over our traditional notions of privacy, both for individuals and for companies. Although privacy laws

in a number of cases have clearly been violated, even by traditional standards, often what is acceptable or even legal and what is not is still a source of confusion. A person writing a blog, for instance, may consider it a private journal. So if a potential employer mentions inappropriate postings during a job interview, the candidate may be angered by what she feels is an invasion of her privacy. Similarly, information that always has been public but too cumbersome to retrieve, such as property deeds or police arrests, is now easy to find online. An arrest for a minor incident while in college may still appear online years later with an easy search by name and school, for example, following the person long after the deed has been done.

One component of privacy is alone time, and these moments have become increasingly rare in an age of pervasive media. Maintaining a sense of privacy can be difficult when we are getting barraged with updates from Facebook friends or receiving text messages. Some even argue that digital natives raised on social media have lost the ability to appreciate or even tolerate solitude, once a coveted commodity. Other studies have shown that people who regularly use Facebook are not as happy as those who do not, mostly because we tend to compare what we are doing with what others in our group are doing and feel our activities are not as fun or exciting as what others are doing, a phenomena typically called **FOMO** or fear of missing out.

Wireless communication between devices, without the need for specific human direction—such as swiping a debit card at a supermarket checkout—makes it easy to establish a profile of a person simply through his electronic transactions over a short period of time. The ability to track consumers with such accuracy, especially on the web and through mobile devices, means that we can personalize our media content; but it also means that companies can create very detailed profiles of us as consumers, even without our express permission, for **behavioral targeting** in their advertising campaigns.

Mass-communication organizations can keep detailed and updated records on their audiences by tracking their paths within their websites through intelligent software agents and programs known as **cookies**. Cookies make it easier for you to visit websites because they “remember” you, so you do not need to log in every time you access the Internet. They also give you personalized content based on your settings and past browsing history. Cookies provide invaluable information for media organizations to better understand an audience’s media behaviors, preferences, and habits. Advertisers on websites also add cookies to your computer so they can track your browsing behavior as well. Surveillance is an increasingly powerful tool, as the data collected is sold to other companies and used to estimate advertising rates. However, it raises serious concerns about the erosion of privacy.

So far we have discussed how convergence has been changing the media industries and their business models, the issues communications professionals have faced with the advent of new technologies, the nature of the relationship between media producers and audiences, and legal and ethical matters that have yet to be addressed.

## **FOMO**

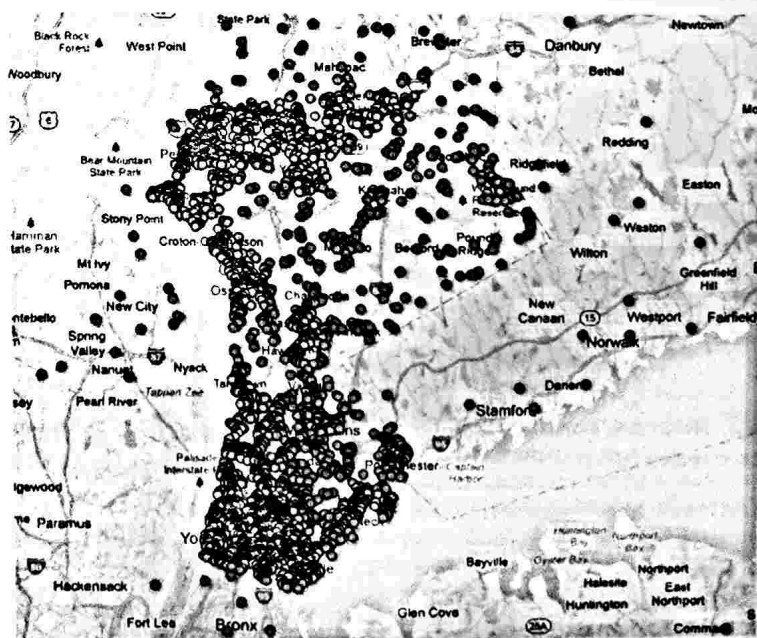
Fear of missing out, or the feeling when we look at friends’ Facebook posts that they are doing more exciting things than we are doing and that we are missing important group interactions.

## **behavioral targeting**

Advertisers tracking individuals’ web-browsing behavior to provide ads that closely match the topics of sites visited or searches made.

## **cookies**

Information that a website puts on a user’s local hard drive so that it can recognize when that computer accesses the website again. Cookies also allow for conveniences like password recognition and personalization.



In 2012, the Poughkeepsie (NY) *Journal News* published online an interactive map providing the names and addresses of all registered handgun owners in New York and Rockland counties. Although perfectly legal, the map sparked many debates among people on both sides of the gun rights issue. **CRITICAL THINKING QUESTION:** Is it ethical to make these data so easily and widely available for all? Should media make such personal information available if it helps foster more debate about important topics, regardless of ethical concerns?





## Do You Pay More if You Own a Mac?

Web analytics allows people to see much more information about site visitors than traditional media ever could. As an example, even a free service like Google analytics allows you as a site owner to see what page users came from to your site, how long on average they stayed on your site (and even particular pages), what countries they came from, what links they clicked on, what search terms were most commonly used to find your site, what percentage of people viewed your site on mobile devices or computers, and what operating systems they used, such as Apple, PC, or Linux. You can even see what time of day is the most popular for visitors to your site.

This unprecedented level of surveillance has created whole new job categories of professionals based on analyzing and strategizing content around analytics. It has also created more work for communications professionals, as many journalists, for example, now have to track their stories and may adjust their publishing schedule to maximize views—especially if their income depends on how much their stories are shared on social media.

Advertisers demand analytics data in order to better target their advertising, claiming that such data helps them

provide more relevant and helpful ads for users (never mind that users may not want ads in the first place).

However, the very same analytics data provided to site owners and advertisers has been used to target different users unequally. In 2012, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that the travel site Orbitz priced hotels differently for PC users compared to Apple users, with Apple users seeing ads for hotel rooms at prices as much as 30 percent more than what PC users saw.

The same principles could be applied to any advertisement, or even website content itself. For example, a Mac user could see an ad for an expensive foreign car, while a PC user could see an ad for a cheaper domestic one. Or a PC user could get a certain restaurant or store discount that a Mac user may not get, or that may not be discounted as much.

Do you think it is ethical for companies to target different audiences with different offers based on the amount of information they can glean from their typical online behavior? What could some of the positive implications be of such targeting? What are some of the negative implications?

You have gotten a glimpse of the powerful transformations taking place today in mass communications and the media and will see even more detailed examples in subsequent chapters.

But before we can move forward, we have to take a step back and look at what mass communication itself is and how media scholars theorize it operates. We will then be able to use these foundations to better understand the changes taking place today.

### Interpersonal communication

Communication between two or more individuals, often in a small group, although it can involve communication between a live speaker and an audience.

### mass communication

Communication to a large group or groups of people who remain largely unknown to the sender of the message.

## Mass Communication in the Digital Age

The traditional mass-communication model differs from other forms of communication, such as **interpersonal communication**, which is communication between two or more persons. Interpersonal communication often interacts and intersects with **mass communication**, communication to a large group or groups of people that remain largely unknown to the sender of the message.

### INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Interpersonal communication is usually interactive, or flowing at least two ways, and tends not to be anonymous. Think of chatting with a friend or a small group



Responses are generally immediate, and the speaker or speakers will often adjust their messages based on the responses they receive. Interpersonal communication involves both verbal and nonverbal messages: not just what was said, but how it was said.

These same principles apply to live public speaking, even though this is a one-to-many model, and opportunities for audience feedback will be more limited than in a casual small-group setting. The speaker and the audience can communicate through a variety of nonverbal cues such as facial expressions, physical contact, or body language. If speakers see looks of boredom or audience members yawning, they can adjust their presentation accordingly in an effort to make it more interesting.

Interpersonal communication can also take place through a **medium**, or communication channel, such as the telephone, when texting or talking, or the Internet, when participating in a chat room or on a discussion board, for example. Note how the mediation limits some aspects of interpersonal communication compared to face-to-face interactions. Visual cues are absent either on the telephone or online (unless using a webcam), and meanings can be misconstrued in text messages (even those supplemented with emoticons). The online medium also blurs the line between interpersonal and mass communication, as a private email or text can be forwarded to many other people.



Interpersonal communication takes place between two or more people, is interactive, and can happen face-to-face or through a medium. It can also involve nonverbal cues, such as body language, that can indicate participants' emotions.

### medium

A communication channel, such as talking on the telephone, instant messaging, or writing back and forth in a chat room.

## MASS COMMUNICATION

Media of mass communication refer to any technological means of communicating between large numbers of people distributed widely over space or time. Ever since Johannes Gutenberg invented the Western world's first mechanical printing press in Germany in 1455, one general model of communication has traditionally characterized mass media, whose central features, as articulated by different theorists, are also outlined in Table 1-1.

According to this framework, media companies create content they believe the audience will want and distribute that content to an audience who has very few ways to provide immediate feedback. This premise has characterized all media of mass communication—books, magazines, newspapers, broadcast television or radio, cable or satellite TV, recorded music, or motion pictures. Digital media, however, have radically changed that model, as we will see throughout this book.

In the traditional mass-communication model, content creators play a fundamental role in society by representing and defining reality (consider the work of journalists or other communication professionals) or by creating fictional works to explain, interpret, or entertain (consider the work of artists, authors, and film auteurs). Authors and artists create stories about issues and events; they write books and articles; they create music or motion pictures; and then they publish, broadcast, or present their creations at set dates or times and in set locations.

Some mass-communications models, such as live television or broadcast radio, are **synchronous media**, which require the audience to be assembled simultaneously for the broadcast, transmission, or event. Others are **asynchronous media**, such as newspapers or magazines, or recorded television or audio programming, for example, which do not require the audience to assemble at any given

### synchronous media

Media that take place in real time and require the audience to be present during the broadcast or performance, such as live television or radio.

### asynchronous media

Media that do not require the audience to assemble at a given time, such as printed materials and recorded audio or video.

TABLE 1-1 Traditional Theories or Models of Analog Media

THEORY OR MODEL	MAIN FEATURES OR CHARACTERISTICS
General Mass Media	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Communication flow is largely one-way, from sender or source to receiver or audience.</li> <li>2. Communication is from one or a few to many (i.e., one or a few sources generate and distribute content to large, heterogeneous audiences).</li> <li>3. Communication is anonymous (sources typically do not know their audiences, and audiences do not know the sources, except at a general level).</li> <li>4. Audiences are seen as largely passive recipients of the messages distributed by the media, with little opportunity for feedback and practically no opportunity for immediate feedback or interaction with each other.</li> </ol>
Shannon and Weaver Transmission Model (see p. 357)	Information source Transmitter Channel Receiver Destination
Schramm's Simplified Communication Model (see p. 358)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A source, who encodes</li> <li>2. a message, or signal, which is transmitted (via the media or directly via interpersonal communication) to</li> <li>3. a destination, where the receiver decodes it.</li> </ol>

**time shift**

Recording of an audio or video event for later listening or viewing.

time. With today's digital recording devices, we can easily **time shift** and record a live concert or sporting event so that it can be watched anytime, thereby turning synchronous media into asynchronous media.

**MASS COMMUNICATION AND CONVERGENCE**

Digital media and online networks have blurred the line between interpersonal and mass communication. The media companies built on mass-communication models, despite facing many challenges in the digital era, are not disappearing anytime soon, and neither will certain fundamental aspects of mass communication.

What is changing, however, is the interplay between mediated interpersonal communication and mass communication: Interpersonal communication is capable of adopting some characteristics of mass communication, and mass communication is trying to adopt certain characteristics of interpersonal communication in an attempt to remain relevant to audiences. Let's examine some examples.

Email is considered a form of mediated interpersonal communication, yet, as anyone who has had his or her inbox clogged with forwarded jokes from Aunt Gertrude can attest, it can also be broadcast to many recipients, following the one-to-many model typical of mass communication.

Despite their interpersonal tone and scope, some weblogs, or **blogs**, have become very influential among the public or among decision makers, with readership greater than that of many well-established mainstream publications. Blogs may allow immediate feedback or discussion from readers, who often must be registered to post feedback and are therefore not anonymous—thereby weakening

**blog**

Short for weblog, a type of website in which a person posts regular journal or diary entries, with the posts arranged chronologically.

two of the linchpins in the definition of mass communication. Yet it is hard to claim that the most popular blogs are not a type of mass communication because of the numbers of audience members reading them and the lack of interaction between the blog author and a respondent.

Twitter also follows a blended mass-communication and mediated interpersonal-communication model, as people broadcast their tweets to thousands or even millions of followers, yet the followers can retweet and interact with each other and their followers in a way that more closely emulates mediated interpersonal communication than it does mass communication.

The fragmented nature of audiences on the web complicates attempts to define a "mass." Some websites have small but dedicated followings, while others have millions of visitors a month, reaching far more people than your typical local newspaper. Yet the local newspaper would traditionally be considered a type of mass communication, unlike an early viral YouTube video such as "Charlie Bit My Finger—Again!," despite over 848 million views ten years after being posted and well over two thousand various remixes and spoofs, including videos of the two brothers several years after the original video.

It is important to remember that much of the interaction and conversation that occurs online does so because of the information and entertainment generated from mass communication. Consider a TV series like *Star Trek*, which ran for only three seasons in the late 1960s but continues to have a thriving fan subculture that consumes—and creates—content about the series and its actors, not to mention the various movies and television-series spin-offs from the original *Star Trek*. Even videos such as "Charlie Bit My Finger," for example, have given rise to a handful of fan clubs on Facebook (including a Mexican one)—but these would generally be much more limited in scope and duration than the fan subculture that has arisen around a series like *Star Trek*. The daily mix of news, information, and entertainment that we consume through mass-communication channels gives us fodder for remixes, blogs, interactions with each other—and reactions to media producers who provide the content.

## Functions of Mass Communication

Defining mass communication was once straightforward. The media were relatively stable and well known. The functions of mass communication in society were also relatively well understood and thoroughly researched. Studies by Harold D. Lasswell, Charles Wright, and others suggest that these functions have tended to fall largely into four broad categories: surveillance, correlation, cultural transmission, and entertainment.<sup>8</sup> These functions can be a useful lens through which to examine various forms of mass communication.

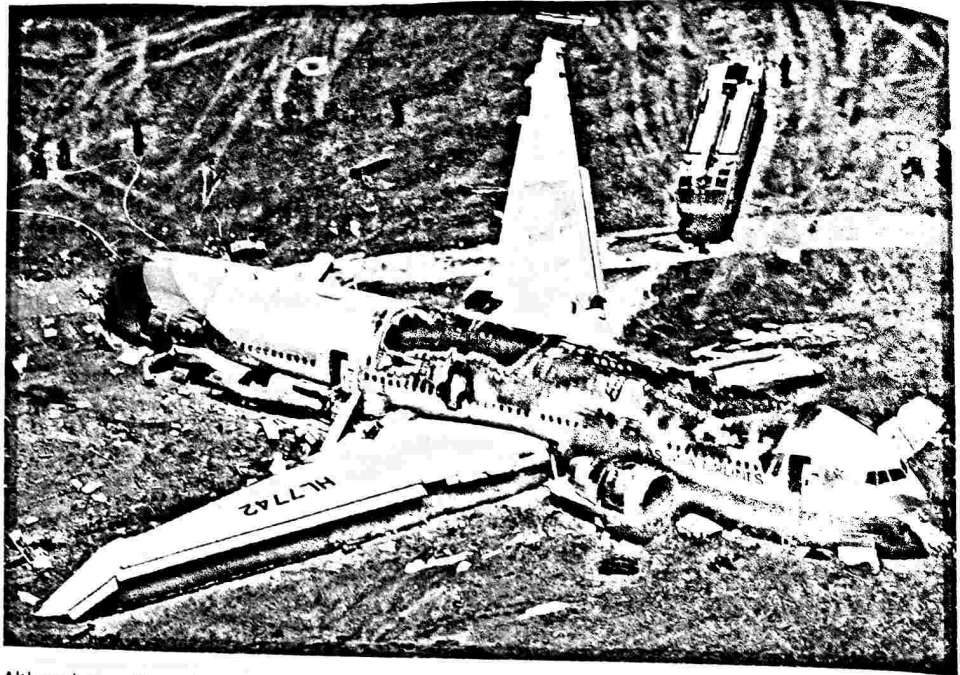
### ( SURVEILLANCE

In mass communication, **surveillance** refers primarily to the role that journalism plays in providing information about processes, issues, events, and other developments in society. This can include news on the latest military activities, weather alerts, and political scandals. Aspects of advertising and public relations as well as educational communication can also serve surveillance functions.

#### surveillance

Primarily the journalism function of mass communication, which provides information about processes, issues, events, and other developments in society.





Although surveillance is an important function of mass communication, repeated exposure to a story can have negative effects. After you hear about a plane crash, are you more concerned about flying for an upcoming trip?

One weakness in the surveillance function is that an excess of news about disasters, murders, or other unusual events can skew the audience's perception of what is normal in society. Receiving too much information on a particular topic can also promote apathy. Consider how media coverage of shark attacks, for example, can make people believe that there has been an increase in attacks when, in fact, there has not. Excessive coverage of celebrity scandals may seem like trivial examples that lead to audience apathy, but skewed or apathetic responses to coverage of wars or disasters, especially in developing countries, are more significant and problematic.

### correlation

Media interpretation ascribing meaning to issues and events that helps individuals understand their roles within the larger society and culture.

## 2. CORRELATION

**Correlation** refers to the ways in which media interpret events and issues and ascribe meanings that help individuals understand their roles within the larger society and culture. Journalism, advertising, and public relations all shape public opinion through commentary, criticism, or even targeted marketing campaigns. Polls or surveys allow individuals to learn what others think about an issue and where their views fit within mainstream opinions. People may even shift their views or beliefs subtly to better align themselves with a desirable social group.

By correlating one's views with those of other groups or perceived notions of general public opinion, the media can help maintain social stability, although this function can be taken too far, and the media can thwart social change or block a full range of views from being disseminated to a mass audience. Interpretation can also tend to favor established business or elite interests over disadvantaged or minority groups, increasing the apparent credibility and authority of the dominant culture.

## 5. CULTURAL TRANSMISSION

**Cultural transmission** refers to the transference of the dominant culture, as well as its subcultures, from one generation to the next or to immigrants. This includes socialization, which the media perform by teaching societal rules and depicting standards of behavior. This function is especially important for children but also necessary for recently immigrated adults adjusting to a new culture.

Not all aspects of cultural transmission are viewed favorably. It has been criticized for creating a homogenized culture that promotes mindless consumerism as a means to achieve happiness rather than imparting more humanistic, and ultimately more rewarding, values such as an appreciation of multiculturalism and diversity.

### cultural transmission

The process of passing on culturally relevant knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values from person to person or group to group.



Wartime propaganda posters provide windows into how public opinion can be shaped.

## 6. ENTERTAINMENT

The entertainment function is performed in part by all three of these activities (surveillance, correlation, and cultural transmission) but also involves the generation of content designed specifically and exclusively to entertain. Although some claim that this function helps raise artistic and cultural taste among the general populace, others disagree, arguing that mass media encourage escapism and promote lowbrow entertainment at the expense of high art.

Entertainment can also perpetuate certain stereotypes about various groups, wittingly or unwittingly. These can be especially hard to detect because they are often presented as part and parcel of a story line that makes oversimplified characters seem natural in context. For good and for bad, powerful cultural principles and symbols permeate entertainment, transmitting specific sets of values that can go unquestioned.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** Consider your own use of social and digital media. What is the source of much of what you discuss with your friends online—does it come from news or politics or primarily entertainment sources such as television, movies, and music? What implications do you think your habits have for notions of the public?

## Television: The Future of Convergence

We started this chapter by looking at the telephone, an example of a communication technology whose role in convergence you may not have considered. We will end by looking briefly at television, particularly at how convergence has shaped television today and how it will affect its future.

We will discuss the invention and development of television in Chapter 5 and focus here on the role convergence has played for this quintessential mass-communication technology. Television's dominance as a mass medium in the latter half of the twentieth century through today means it has been much discussed, debated, and studied. Television has been blamed for everything from a decline in young people reading to a rise in societal violence. Few mass-communications technologies have shown such a striking impact. Despite disagreement about the

### product placement

A form of advertising in which brand-name goods or services are placed prominently within programming content that is otherwise devoid of advertising, demonstrating the convergence of programming with advertising content.

### superstation

A local TV station that reaches a national audience by beaming its programming nationwide via satellite to local cable systems.

degree to which television may affect our culture and society, the belief that television has certain detrimental (or beneficial) effects has influenced everything from government regulation to the kinds of commercials and programming we see. The enormous popularity of television makes it a powerful instrument for teaching people culture and social norms—or at least idealized norms.

Television viewing habits changed with the advent of the remote control. Channel-surfing made it easy for people to later name and understand the process of web surfing that occurs on the Internet. Digital video recorders (DVRs) also changed TV viewing habits. The use of **product placement** has grown in response to advertisers' fears that viewers fast-forward through commercials when watching recorded programming. Product placement shows a convergence of normal programming with advertisement content, often not recognized as such.

Over the years, television has been able to adapt to new methods of distributing content. Over-the-air broadcast towers used to be the primary way that people received their television signals; today cable and satellite systems are dominant, with streaming services like Netflix, Hulu, or Amazon Prime quickly ascending in popularity. However, cable television systems are not new. They were first created in 1948 so that viewers in areas where over-the-air signals could not easily reach could get television programming, long before most households had cable systems.

The first transatlantic satellite signal was sent in 1962, when television as a mass medium was still not even fifteen years old.<sup>9</sup> Entertainment, especially movies and sports programming, played a role in encouraging the growth of cable and satellite-cable partnerships in the 1970s. Today, entertainment is a driving force with the growth of streaming services, many of which are increasingly creating original programming to rival that of the big networks and cable companies like HBO.

In 1978, Ted Turner launched WTBS Atlanta as a national **superstation**, a local TV station that reaches a national audience by beaming its programming nationwide via satellite to local cable systems, which then transmit to local subscribers. In 1980, Turner employed the same technological combination to launch the first twenty-four-hour TV news network, the Cable News Network (CNN). Today, many countries use similar systems for their own national broadcasting. In a country like Indonesia, which has hundreds of islands, a cable system between islands is simply not practical. Using satellite to beam programming to local cable operators, who connect viewers in their areas with cable, has proven to be an economical solution.

Television is a major communications industry in its own right. But when it began as a mass medium in the late 1940s, its rapid rise in popularity was seen as a threat by the film industry, which blacklisted actors if they performed on television shows. It took several years for the film industry to realize that television could replace the second- and third-run movie theaters as a source of additional revenues for older films. The specter that the movie industry feared of mass audiences staying home and watching television instead of going out to the movies never materialized; people still went in droves.

Today, the tug-of-war between the movie industry and television for attracting audiences continues, even as some film companies own television channels through the process of consolidation. The latest battles have been taking place in the area of 3D, which used to be seen solely in movie theaters. Not only has 3D viewing technology for movies gotten better, but television screens have rapidly caught up; and now 3D television is also on the market.





Perhaps one of the biggest areas of convergence is the melding of the television and the personal computer or mobile device. Television is becoming more interactive, encouraging viewers to do things like vote for their favorite *American Idol* contestants (although still not through the television—they use mobile phones for that). At the same time, a growing number are watching television programming on their PCs, tablets, or smartphones. In the future, it may not matter much whether we think of television as merged with mobile device or mobile device as merged with television; we will simply have a high-definition screen with which we can interact, accessing the web or social media even as we watch our favorite programs.

We see convergence taking place in altered viewing habits, thanks in large part to streaming services. We can watch entire seasons of series, and Netflix-original series are usually released with all episodes available for viewing at once, rather than a weekly scheduled release like broadcast television series. These changes in distribution and availability have led to **binge-watching**, or watching many episodes of a series over several hours.

#### binge-watching

Watching a television series, usually on a streaming service such as Netflix, over several hours at a time.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** Consider watching the same film on TV, a PC, a tablet, or in a theater. List several ways in which these viewing experiences differ, and identify the relative advantages and disadvantages of each.

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## LOOKING BACK AND MOVING FORWARD

This book takes the premise that mass communication as we have known it is fundamentally changing, perhaps to the point where this term is no longer a relevant or accurate description of current communication. Convergence is, broadly speaking, the process where we are seeing these transformations take place on technological, economic, and sociocultural levels. Many of the ramifications of convergence will likely not be realized or fully known for years to come, while others seem to have had immediate and dramatic effects on our media landscape.

What we have today is a fascinating and confusing mixture of mass-communication industries and business models combining with various emerging digital technologies and communications practices that simultaneously threaten and hold great promise for traditional media companies and the communications professions. Issues of consumer privacy, of copyright, and of affordable access to the Internet, among other legal, regulatory, and ethical issues, have yet to be worked out, and the decisions that will be made will have far-reaching consequences for industry, the media, and the general public.

The public may finally have some say in the matter in the new digital media environment. Through communication tools that give the public unprecedented power to share information with each other and to “talk back” to those in power, people are able to connect and organize on any number of issues important to them, affecting policy changes through online and offline means. We have already seen the power of online organizing for various politicians in terms of getting donations and engaging young people to participate in political campaigns. Will the Internet and other digital media flourish and produce a rich montage of diverse

voices? Or will the emerging global media system be a homogenous blend of commercial banality where news and entertainment are little more than commodities that sit with equally insipid user-generated content? It is still an open question, but dealing responsibly with issues like these is the moral mandate of mass communication in the digital age. In this book, we hope to give you the tools to do so.

**MEDIA MATTERS**

## THE NATURE OF "INTERMASS" COMMUNICATION

Even before the Internet era, scholars were asking how mass media and interpersonal communication affected each other.<sup>10</sup> Where is the dividing line between interpersonal and mass communication in your media world? Is the line disappearing?

1. How long have you had a Facebook page?
2. How often do you update or add content to the page, and what prompts you to do so?
3. How would you feel if your professor or a potential employer insisted that you friend them so they can see your page?
4. Are you starting to spend more time on social media sites other than Facebook? Which ones? Why are you changing your usage patterns?
5. Are you typically on the web or social media when you watch TV?
6. Do you often text or chat online with friends while watching the same program?
7. Have you ever uploaded music, videos, or other content to file-sharing sites?

According to World Internet Project research, chances are good that you have participated in many if not most of these activities.<sup>11</sup> This shows that the line between interpersonal and mass communication is a blurry one indeed.