



## chapter 18



### ■ What Are the Mass Media?

Types of Mass Media  
Saturation and Convergence:  
The Sociology of Media

### ■ Media Production and Consumption

Culture Industries  
Multicultural Voices  
Media Consolidation  
The Importance of Advertising  
Celebrities

### ■ Consuming Media, Creating Identity

### ■ Regulating Media

### ■ Globalization of the Media

What Is Media Globalization?  
Cultural Imperialism

### ■ Media in the 21st Century: New Media, New Voices

**ON APRIL 20, 1999**, two seniors at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, walked through their school corridors, guns blazing, murdering their classmates. When their rampage was over, 12 students and one teacher lay dead, many others had been wounded, and the shooters had taken their own lives.

This horrific mass murder was only one of nearly 30 such “rampage” school shootings in our nation’s schools since the early 1990s. While virtually all other crimes of violence have decreased in the United States since 1990, these alone have increased. Why?

While some have blamed permissive parents, permissive gun laws, and psychological problems, nearly everyone agreed that the media had something to do with it. Then-President Clinton suggested that it was the Internet because Klebold and Harris had visited many violent racist websites. Others suggested it was violent video games or violent TV shows and movies.

The debate about Columbine repeats the debate our society has had for decades: Do the media *cause* violence, or do the media reflect the

# Mass Media



violence that already exists in our society?

Think of how many times we have heard variations of this debate: Does gangsta rap, or violent video games, or violent movies, or violent heavy metal music lead to increased violence? Does violent pornography lead men to commit rape? Or do these media merely remind

us of how violent our society already is?

The sociologist approaches this debate differently. To the sociologist, one does not choose between these two positions. It’s both: The media both reflect the society in which they were created and also affect our behaviors and

**The media both reflect the society in which they were created, and also affect our behaviors and attitudes. If they didn’t reflect our society, then they wouldn’t make any sense. And if they didn’t have some effect on our attitudes or behavior, then they wouldn’t “work.”**

attitudes. If they didn't reflect our society, then they wouldn't make any sense. And if they didn't have some effect on our attitudes or behavior, then they wouldn't "work"—which means that the entire advertising industry would be out of business.

Sociologists understand that the media had an effect on Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris's rampage at Columbine, but we also understand that the media no more caused it than watching *Law and Order* repeats increases the conviction rate. Sociologists are rarely interested in "whether or not," but rather "how" and "in what ways."

## What Are the Mass Media?

**Media** (the plural of *medium*) are the ways that we communicate with each other. If I am talking, I am using the medium of speech. I could also sing, gesture, and make smoke signals. In the Canary Islands, people used to communicate through the medium of whistling. Right now I am writing, or more precisely typing, using alphabetic symbols instead of sounds.

Technological innovations like the printing press, the radio, the television, and the personal computer have created **mass media**, ways to communicate with vast numbers of people at the same time, usually over a great distance. Mass media have developed in countless directions: There are books, newspapers, magazines, motion pictures, records and tapes, CDs and DVDs, radio and television programs, comic strips and comic books, and a whole range of new digital media. New forms of mass media are constantly being developed, and old forms are constantly falling into disuse.

Sometimes the new forms of mass media can revive or regenerate the old. Teenagers used to keep their diaries hidden in their rooms, with little locks to deter nosy siblings. Today they are likely to publish them on the Internet as blogs.

Sociologists are interested in the access to media by different groups with different resources and also in the effects of media—how they affect our behaviors and attitudes, how they bring us together or drive us apart, how they shape the very rhythm of our days.

For example, do your parents ever tell you that video games, MP3s, iPods, and the Internet rot your brain and make you passive and stupid? I'd bet that your grandparents said the same thing to your parents about television. They even called it the "boob tube" or "the idiot box." And *their* parents said the same thing about comic books and the radio. And *their* parents said the same thing about nickelodeons (machines that display moving pictures when you turn a crank) and "penny dreadfuls" (cheap, garishly printed books about crime and murder).

Mass media have allegedly been rotting brains for well over a hundred years. Every generation worries that its children are becoming mass media zombies with no initiative or imagination. Yet every generation is smarter, more literate, and better informed than the one before.

Who decides what gets put on television anyway? Or in movies, video games, or comic books? Are they tapping into the tastes and interests of the audience, or do they actually create new tastes and new interests?

Both. The media tap into our culture just as the media help to create it. The media provide a common language, a common set of reference points from which we draw in our daily conversations. At the same time, the media “segment” us into definable groups, based on class or age or race or gender.

Some media events unite us: When Hurricane Katrina struck in the summer of 2005, or the World Cup soccer tournament was played in the summer of 2006, the whole world was watching. Yet at the same time, the media world is divided into hundreds, maybe thousands, of separate audiences, markets, and special interest groups with little or nothing in common. For example, in my classes, I might refer to a song by Bruce Springsteen, which students under 30 and students of color find quaint, anachronistic, or just plain “White”; when I refer to Nelly or Shakira, students over 30 and some White students get a blank look. In a class in which students are varied by age or race, we struggle for a common language of media references.

This market segmentation occurs at the global level as well. Around the world, the staggering inequality between countries, and also within many countries, is reflected in media access and use. The vast majority of the world’s people cannot afford media, so media production and consumption are strongly oriented toward the wealthier members of the world’s population.



▲ Through media segmentation, some groups are connected to global cultural trends while others remain wedded to more local forms. These Argentine fans greeting Ricky Martin in 2006 may have more in common with American fans than they do with the rural poor in Argentina.

## Types of Mass Media

There are many types of mass media. All have experienced enormous growth since the nineteenth century, and today media animate—and some would say dominate—our everyday lives.

**Print Media.** People have been keeping written records for 5,000 years, on clay tablets, papyrus scrolls, the wooden tablets of Easter Island, and eventually books. But everything had to be copied by hand, so anything written was extremely rare and expensive. In *The Canterbury Tales* (1386), the Clerk is so obsessed with books that he owns 20 of them!

The printing press, which appeared in China in the eighth century and Europe in the fifteenth, changed the way we record and transmit information (Eisenstein, 1993). The new technology allowed media to be produced more quickly, more cheaply, and in larger numbers. Reading shifted from a privilege of upper-class males to a much wider population, and the literacy rate in Europe jumped from less than 1 percent to between 10 and 15 percent.

But even during the 1800s, most people owned only two or three books—the family Bible, an almanac, and maybe a book of poetry. In the first decades of the twentieth century, reading became a mass middle-class activity (Radway, 1999). People read cheap paperbacks, newspapers, and magazines.

The newspaper and the magazine were originally vehicles for general interest readers (the word *magazine* originally meant a storehouse where you would keep your excess flour or corn). In the nineteenth century, both flourished. Newspapers became a staple of middle-class life in the developed world (in the United States, over 11,000

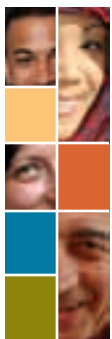


▲ While mass general-interest magazines have declined, there are thousands of special-interest magazines—for every imaginable hobby. These magazines unite small communities, but "buttonhole" them into separate and definable niches.

were being published in 1880), and mass-market magazines similarly reached an increasing range of readers, bringing novels, political and cultural information, artwork, and soon photography, plus tips, advice, and contemporary musings to millions of literate people in various countries of the world.

Today, the 13,000 magazines published in the United States are largely specialized publications, of interest to only a selected audience (Tebbel and Zuckerman, 2005). The number of daily newspapers in the United States has shrunk over the past century, to about 2,030 in 1935, 1,780 in 1955, and 1,457 in 2002, due in part to the consolidation of media empires like Rupert Murdoch's and the Hearst Corporation and in part to competition from radio, television, and the Internet (journalism.org). Newspapers seem to have been hit harder by the development of new media than books or magazines; however, most newspapers are now available online (worldwide, more than 5,000), and 45 percent of U.S. adults who went online indicated that they had visited a newspaper site during the last week (*Harris Poll*, 2004).

New technologies and new literate audiences have actually spurred sales of magazines and books. Today, despite widespread worries that the Internet has made the book obsolete, book publishing is a \$23 billion a year industry in the United States alone, with sales increasing every year ("Bound for Success," 2006). And magazine publishing is a \$35 billion business, with hundreds of new titles launched every year. In the first four months of 2006 alone, 101 new magazines were launched.



## Sociology and our World

### Do Women's Magazines Oppress Women or Liberate Them?

In 1963, Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*, a blockbuster bestseller that many say launched the modern women's movement. Friedan argued that women's magazines are the main way that culture brainwashes women into believing that their highest value is in fulfilling their femininity, that true happiness can only come from catching a man, marrying him, and becoming a homemaker and mother.

Some 40 years later, the discussion continues, but now some best-selling authors are blaming women's magazines for leading women astray—in the opposite direction. These critics now say women's magazines brainwash women into wanting careers and independence, leading them away from the homes and families that represent their true pursuit of happiness (Crittenden, 1999; Shalit, 1999).

Which is it? Are women's magazines instruments of women's oppression by keeping women in the home—or by forcing them

to seek fulfillment outside of the home? Are they guidebooks to fulfillment by encouraging women to marry and be mothers—or to build careers, businesses, and individual success in the world?

To the sociologist, the answer is not one or the other—it's both. From the very beginning, American women's magazines have presented readers with competing messages and have asked them to select which ideas to accept and which to resist and to resolve conflicting messages in their own ways (Aronson, 2002i).

That diversity of perspectives remains true today. Women's magazines remain highly profitable and popular; four women's titles—*Good Housekeeping*, *Family Circle*, *Women's Day*, and *Ladies' Home Journal*—rank among the top ten best-selling magazines in the nation. The major magazines also have international editions published in dozens of countries around the world. And modern versions still carry at least some of the competing messages that readers have long expected and enjoyed. See for yourself: Look at any popular women's magazine—*Glamour*, *O*, *Jane*, *Latina*, *Marie Claire*, *Cosmopolitan*—or check out even the great-grandmothers like *Good Housekeeping* or *Ladies' Home Journal*. See if you notice competing perspectives among the articles, the ads, and the editorials.

Globally, one can discern the difference between rich and poor nations by their newspaper circulation. Norwegians are the most avid newspaper readers in the world, with 554 issues sold per 1,000 people, more than one per household. It's 257 in Australia, 218 in the United States, and 122 in Russia. But look at the poor countries: 24 subscriptions per 1,000 people in Algeria, 6 in Bangladesh, 4 in Benin. Ethiopia is the lowest, at 0.3 (UNESCO, 2000). Obviously the newspapers in these countries are not suffering greatly from Internet competition: Most people are too poor to afford newspapers and unable to read them anyway (Ethiopia has a 36 percent literacy rate).

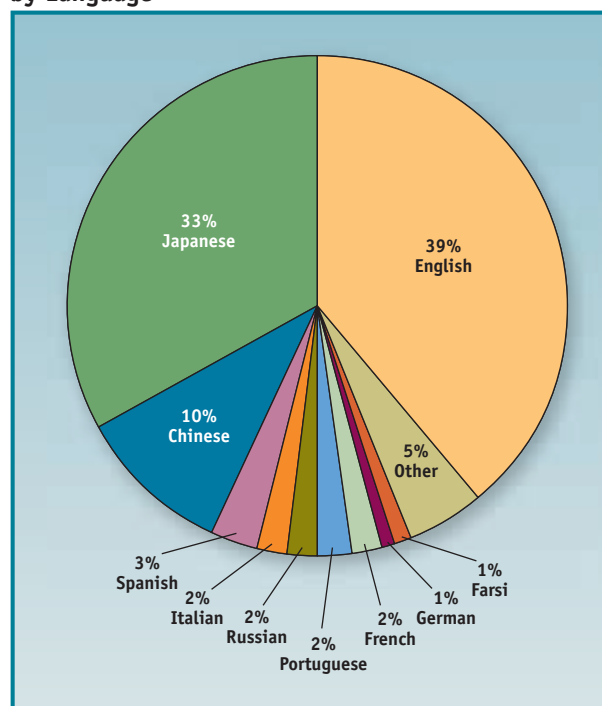
**Blogs: Online Print Journalism.** A **blog**, short for “Weblog,” is essentially an online personal journal or diary where an author can air his or her opinions directly to audiences. Some call it “personal journalism.” Others call it “citizen journalism.” Some say it doesn’t qualify as journalism at all. Blogs, you might say, put the “me” back in “media.”

Blogs have become amazingly popular: There are about 12 million of them (Lee, 2006; Nussbaum, 2004; Rich, 2006), with a new blog getting started every 5.8 seconds (Belo, 2004, Pew Study of Internet and American Life, 2004;). About 57 million Americans—39 percent of all U.S. Internet users—read blogs (Lee, 2006). A majority of bloggers are young people under 29 (Nussbaum, 2004), but many are also written by professors, journalists, scientists, and other adults of various professions. The “blogosphere” is a continually globalizing space; bloggers speak an array of languages (but English and Japanese are dominant; Figure 18.1). Some blogs resemble the editorial page of a newspaper, and others offer gossip, photography, or video content.

There is controversy about both the definition and the growing power of blogs. Are blogs the first form of journalism to truly harness the democratic potential of the World Wide Web? Are they the way ordinary citizens can speak up, voicing their views without having to get past media company gatekeepers, editors, or advertisers? Blogs became so influential in both fund raising and opinion making in the hotly contested 2004 U.S. presidential campaign that today it is considered a strategic essential for political candidates to have a “blogmeister” on staff. The most-linked-to American blogs are connected to many more sites than are the newspapers *usatoday.com* and *latimes.com*, the wire service *reuters.com*, or National Public Radio’s website, *npr.org* (Technorati, 2006). In 2006, Farsi, the language of Iran, also widely spoken in Afghanistan, moved into the top ten languages of the blogosphere, suggesting the potential importance of blogs and bloggers in world affairs (Technorati, 2006).

On the other hand, traditional news journalism, whether print, broadcast, or online, must meet established standards of fairness and accuracy. Bloggers are under no obligation to be scrupulous and diligent in their research, news gathering, and reporting. They never need admit when their reports are fraudulent, unfair, or wrong. In fact, quite the contrary—and to some that’s the whole point. The writer Andrew Sullivan, a former national magazine editor turned popular blogger, told the *Washington Post* that he sees his blog as “a way you can throw ideas around without having to fully back them up, just to see what response you get” (Rich, 2006). Given their growing influence, blogs are of significant interest to sociologists—and not just to those who write them.

**FIGURE 18.1** Blog Globalization: Blog Posts by Language



Source: Technorati, 2007. Reprinted by permission of Technorati, Inc., [www.technorati.com](http://www.technorati.com)

## Did you know?

The first recorded words in history were “Mary had a little lamb.” That’s what Thomas Alva Edison spoke into his tinfoil phonograph in 1877.

**Radio, Movies, and Television.** Before 1880, if you wanted music, you had to make it yourself or hire someone. Individuals who could play the piano or the violin were a big hit at parties because without them there would be dead silence. That all changed when Thomas Edison recorded his voice. Within a few decades, the gramophone (a machine that enabled you to listen to recorded music) was a staple of American life. And, at the same time, entrepreneurs sought to harness the power of transmitting sound via invisible “radio waves” and make them profitable. And movies were born with a 12-minute clip of *The Great Train Robbery* in 1903—and the media world changed forever.

The problem was, after the initial purchase, listening to the radio would be free; how could producers make any money? Eventually someone came up with the idea of sponsors: A company would pay for the production in exchange for regular advertising “plugs.” The first commercial radio station, KDKA, opened in Pittsburgh in 1920. By 1923, 7 percent of American households had radio receivers; by 1935, 65 percent.

Movies offered no such commercial resistance. By the mid-1930s, over half of the U.S. population went to the movies—every week. And this would include, typically, two full-length features, newsreels, serial dramas, cartoons shorts—and commercials. And television, introduced in the late 1940s, was geared to commercial sponsorship of shows. With variety shows and commercial spots every few minutes, the connection between selling products and consuming media was indelibly tightened. (European television and radio are state sponsored and, until the 1980s, had no commercials at all.)

The irony of American television is that between 1955 and 1985, television was arguably the most popular form of mass media in the United States. Virtually everyone was watching—and everyone was watching the same channels. There were only three national networks, NBC, ABC, and CBS. Whole generations were defined by their preferred television programs: *I Love Lucy* in 1955, *Bonanza* in 1965, *All in the Family* in 1975.

Today, the average American home has more television sets than people (Associated Press, 2006). But television is so fragmented that even the top-rated shows draw only a small percentage of viewers. Only 15 percent of all households with TVs tune in to *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, the top-rated show, compared to 74 percent who watched *I Love Lucy*, the top-rated show in the 1950s (Hof, 2006). Today viewers can choose from among hundreds of channels, and the traditional networks lose numbers every year in favor of specialized niche channels.

All these media have experienced increased audience and amazing new technologies. Movies are seen not only in theaters but on DVDs, televisions, computer downloads, and even on cell phones. Nearly half (46 percent) of the global movie market comes from DVD sales and rentals, 28 percent from television (network, cable, and pay-per-view), and only 26 percent from the box office (*ABN Amro*, 2000). Digital and satellite radio stations carry hundreds of digital channels, many of which are also streamed over the Internet, and boast deeper playlists than traditional radio.

Each new form of media brings the world closer together—satellite TV and radio broadcast shows around the world. And yet media also can fragment us into niches and exacerbate the gap between rich and poor (those who have media access and those who do not). Globally, television is similar to the newspaper, saturating rich countries, rare in poor countries. In the United States, there are 740 television sets per 1,000 people, less than half that in South Korea, but that’s more than enough to

## Did you know?

During the years 2005–2006, the average American household tuned in to TV for 8 hours and 14 minutes—per day (*Mediaweek*, 2006).

## Did you know?

The world’s largest movie industry is not Hollywood. It’s “Nollywood.” The Nigerian film industry produces more than 2,000 movies a year, most of them low-budget affairs (between \$15,000 and \$100,000) and two-thirds of them in English. The Nigerian film industry employs over a million people, making it the nation’s second largest employer (after agriculture). India’s “Bollywood” is second (“Nollywood Dreams,” 2006).

immerse the population in the latest game shows and reality series. Among poorer countries though—with 58 TVs per 1,000 people in India and 3.5 in Mozambique, for example—there is no unifying national television culture (CIA World Factbook, 2005).

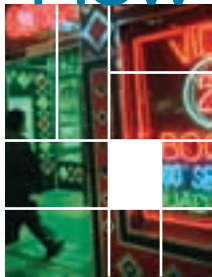
**Games, Gambling, and Porn: Guy Media.** Worldwide, more than 300 million people play video games. The global video game market totaled more than \$40 billion in 2006, outselling box office receipts for movies, books, CDs, and DVDs by a landslide. (Movies, in second place, made \$14 billion globally.) Over 225 million computer games—nearly two games *per household*—are sold every year. Three-fifths of Americans age 6 and older play video games regularly—and three-fifths of those players are men. Some games, like Halo, GTA, and Madden sports games, are played almost exclusively by males; others, like Sims, are far more gender equal (Roberts et al., 1999; Trend, 2007).

Young males are also the primary players of online poker. Daily on college campuses, hundreds of thousands of young men are playing for millions of dollars. According to PokerPulse.com, which tracks online poker games, some 88,000 players were betting almost \$16 million in online poker every day when the first World



▲ Many new media forms are marketed to, and enjoyed by, different groups. There are “his” and “her” video and computer games, but, as a genre, it’s mostly “his.”

## How do we know what we know?



### Does Watching Pornography Cause Rape?

What effect does viewing pornography

have on men’s attitudes and behaviors? Does watching porn cause rape? Social scientists (both social psychologists and sociologists) have tried to address this question from several different perspectives.

Early researchers showed men some porn clips and then asked them to either serve as jurors in a mock rape trial or to take a survey measuring rape myths (cultural beliefs about rape such as “women say no when they mean yes” and “women like it when you force them to have sex”). This research found that watching pornography increased the likelihood that male jurors would acquit a defendant in a rape trial and that they would support rape myths. But these

effects were not very long lasting and vanished within a day or two.

Research by psychologist Dolf Zillman (1993) tried to measure if watching pornography actually increased men’s aggression toward women. But his methodology reflected flawed assumptions. He measured aggression by how sexually aroused the men were—they wore a rubber band fitted with electrodes around the penis that measured arousal. Yet surely sexual arousal is not the same thing as sexual aggression.

Ed Donnerstein and his colleagues (1985) showed college age men three sets of images: (1) violence alone (no sex), like slasher movies; (2) sex alone (no violence, soft-core porn); (3) sexually violent material from hard-core porn. Men who watched the second set of images, sex alone, showed no changes

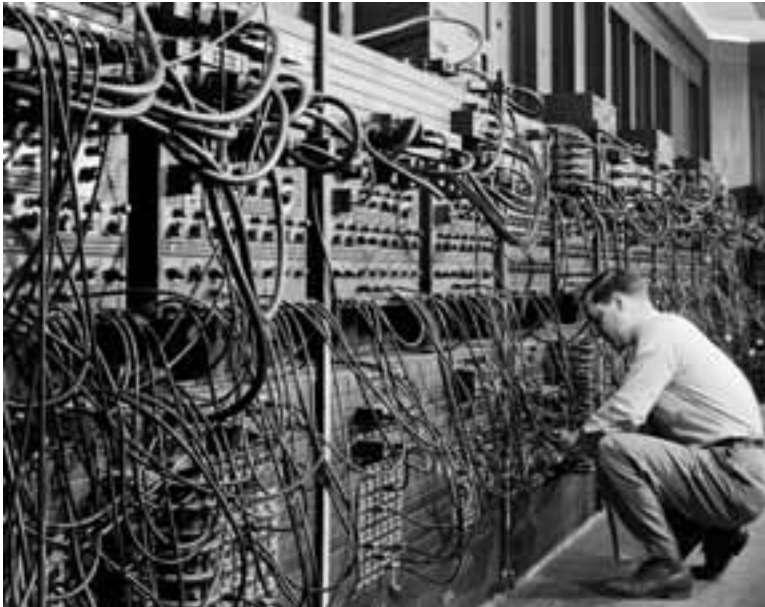
in attitudes or behaviors. But the images of both violence and sexual violence together changed both attitudes and behaviors—and in virtually identical ways. Donnerstein concluded that it was the violence in the pornography, not the sex, that caused the changes.

Finally sociologists Murray Straus and Larry Baron (1993) noticed a correlation between rape and pornography consumption. In the 1980s, they found that the states that had the highest subscription rates per capita of *Playboy*, *Penthouse*, and *Hustler* magazines also had the highest per capita rape rates.

But, Straus and Baron cautioned, correlation does not mean causation. Subscribing to a magazine may not cause rape. In fact, they found, those states (Wyoming, Montana, Alaska) also had the highest ratio of single men to single women—that is, the largest number of unattached males. And they also had the highest per capita subscription rates to *Field and Stream*—and no one was suggesting that reading *Field and Stream* might contribute to rape.



Personal computers, now nearly universal in the industrialized world, are the centerpiece of our interface with media—they store information, give access to the Web, store music, video, movies, TV, and old love letters. The first general-purpose computer, called the Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer (ENIAC), was built by the U.S. Army in the 1940s. It weighed 30 tons, was eight feet high, three feet deep, and 100 feet long, and contained over 18,000 vacuum tubes that were cooled by 80 air blowers. And it mainly stored information. ▼



Poker Tournament was held in 1997. Today, those figures have increased by a factor of ten—1.8 million players bet \$300 million online every single day. The single largest group of online poker players is young men, 14 to 22 years old, according to the National Annenberg Risk Survey (NARSY) in 2003 and 2004. One in eight college guys is betting on poker games online at least once a week (see Conley, 2005).

Pornography is a massive media category worldwide. In the United States, gross sales of all pornographic media range between \$10 and \$14 billion a year for the whole industry—more than the NFL, the NBA, and Major League Baseball combined, or, in media terms, with revenues greater than ABC, NBC, and CBS combined. Sales and rentals of videos and DVDs alone gross about \$4 billion a year. More than 200 new pornographic videos are produced every week. Adult bookstores outnumber McDonald's restaurants in the United States—by a margin of at least three to one. On the Internet, pornography has increased 1,800 percent, from 14 million web pages in 1998 to 260 million in 2003 (Williams, 2004). One study found that the adult entertainment is the number one thing people do online, outpacing even e-mail and search engine use (Grover, 2006).

What often concerns parents is the time boys spend using these media. They claim that these media have replaced social interaction with these solitary activities. What is of interest to sociologists, though, is that the use of these new media is so heavily gendered, and that young males seem to use them not in place of social interaction but as a form of interaction itself. Young males play video games together, play poker online together, and even watch pornography together. How does this new medium of interaction change the patterns of friendships and interaction?

**The Internet.** There was a home computer on the market as far back as 1975: the Altair 8800, which came unassembled, with a price of \$5,000 (in today's dollars, that would be \$18,000). Personal computers were a business tool, not a mass medium. But with the development of the World Wide Web in the 1980s, the computer had transformed the world yet again. Later called the Internet, online usage grew 300,000 percent per year: There were 10,000 network hosts in 1987, and 1,000,000 in 1992. By 2007, every country in the world, with a very few exceptions (Montserrat, the Isle of Man, Palau), was online (Abbate, 2000; Campbell-Kelly, 2004; *World Internet Statistics*).

As of 2007, the Internet was accessed by 76 percent of the population of Sweden, 70 percent of the United States, 67 percent of Japan. Beyond the core countries, penetration is considerably smaller: 16 percent in Colombia, 13 percent in Venezuela, 11 percent in Saudi Arabia, 10 percent in South Africa, 7 percent in Pakistan. In poor countries, Internet access remains an overwhelmingly elite activity, available to well under 1 percent of the population. But even there, change is coming. In 2000, Somalia had 200 users; today it has 90,000, an increase of 44,900 percent (*World Internet Statistics*).

The Internet became so integral to middle-class lives, both at home and at work, that it is hard to believe that it is only 20 years old, and most people in the world grew up without

it. Today if you have the money and the technical inclination, you can gain access to the Internet not only through home computers, but through laptops, BlackBerries, cell phones, and iPods (Figure 18.2). Libraries no longer catalog their books on little white cards; if you ask for a “card catalog” by mistake, younger librarians will not know what you are talking about, and older ones will direct you to a computer catalog. This book has been written primarily through online newspaper articles, journal articles, databases, and websites. We’ve set foot inside a library only to pick up books from interlibrary loan—and we ordered them online.

I often collaborate with other sociologists all over the world. Not that long ago, I’d write my section of our research paper, send it by “snail mail” and wait two months for a reply. Then I’d work on it again and send it off again. A paper would take us a year to write. At the end of the project, we’d often schedule a telephone call, but I was often so busy watching the second hand tick away on the clock, measuring how much the call was costing, that I could barely focus on the conversation. Today, I send a draft as an e-mail attachment in the evening. By the next morning, my European collaborators have replied. If we work well, what used to take us a year now takes less than a week. And we conclude our collaboration with a phone call on Skype, the Internet-based telephone service.

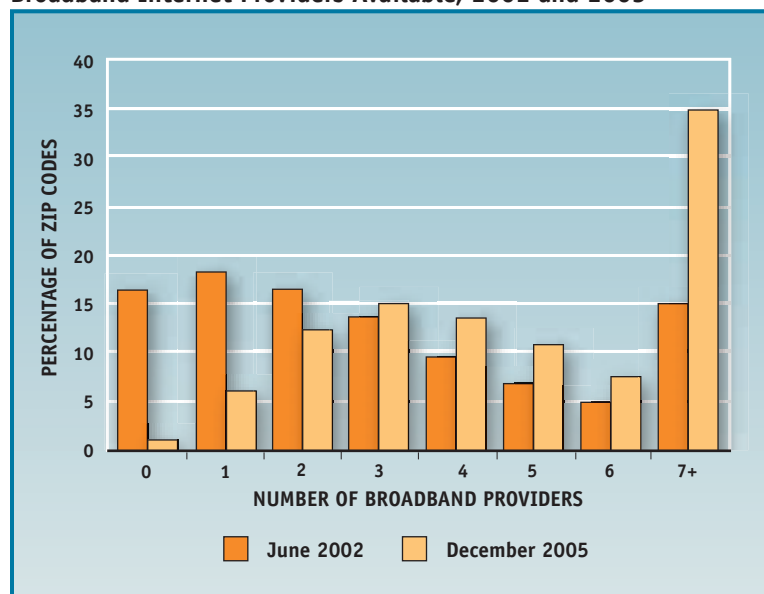
The Internet has not only transformed mass media but is a new form of mass media in its own right. A website is its own medium, like nothing that has ever come before, with text, graphics, and sounds combined in a way that no previous medium could do. Information is scattered across hundreds of sites in dozens of countries; and because there is little or no regulation of its content, it often becomes difficult to distinguish fact from opinion and opinion from diatribe.

The Internet has been accused of facilitating increased isolation—all those millions of teenagers who spend the time they should be doing their homework in chat rooms, playing online poker, or blowing up the galaxy on online games, downloading songs and pornography. But at the same time, it’s also a new form of community, a virtual town square, where you offer intimate details about yourself and your romantic (and sexual) desires, meet your friends on Friendster or Facebook, and interact with like-minded members of your virtual network. As President George W. Bush noted, “With the Internet, you can communicate instantly with someone halfway across the world and isolate yourself from your family and neighbors.” It’s not either/or—it’s both (Bumiller, 2006).

## Saturation and Convergence: The Sociology of Media

We live in an age saturated by the media. The average American home today has 3 television sets, 1.8 VCRs, 3.1 radios, 2.6 tape players, 2.1 CD players, 1.4 video game players, and at least one computer. American kids between 8 and 18 spend seven hours a day interacting with some form of electronic media—which may explain why

**FIGURE 18.2** Percentage of Zip Codes by Number of Broadband Internet Providers Available, 2002 and 2005



Source: Frey, William H., Amy Beth Anspach and John Paul Dewitt, *The Allyn & Bacon Social Atlas of the United States*. Published by Allyn & Bacon, Boston, MA. Copyright © 2008 by Pearson Education. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

# Try It Media Literacy and Sociology



Developed by Katherine R. Rowell, *Sinclair Community College*  
(based on suggestions in the chapter).

**OBJECTIVE:** Learn about the issue of media literacy and apply some basic principles while using a sociological lens.

**Directions:**

**STEP 1: Review**

Spend some time reviewing what is meant by media literacy by exploring the website created by the Center for Media Literacy.

**STEP 2: Research**

Choose one type of media (books, newspapers, movies, advertisements, music, websites, and the like) to explore further using the five key questions of media literacy as noted by the Center for Media literacy. Then find three examples of this media type to analyze (for example, if you choose to explore websites, you will need to analyze three different sites; or, if you choose movies, you will need to analyze three different movies). Then answer the following questions (developed by the Center for Media Literacy, 2005) for each one:

1. Who created this message? (For example, who created this movie, book, or the like?)
2. What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?
3. How might other people understand this message differently than I do?
4. What values, lifestyles, and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?
5. Why is this message being sent?

**STEP 3: Analyze**

Compare and contrast the following information to your textbook (be sure to look over the conclusion to the chapter again): How do the five core concepts of media literacy compare to the sociological perspective of media? How are they similar? How are they different? Why are both perspectives important in understanding the media? Do you think media literacy is important? Why or why not? You will need to write your responses to this step in a one-page paper.

The Center for Media Literacy argues that there are also five core concepts of media literacy.

1. All media messages are constructed.
2. Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.
3. Different people experience the same media message differently.
4. Media have embedded values and points of view.
5. Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power.

**STEP 4: Discuss**

Be prepared to share the information from steps 2 through 4 in class. Your instructor will inform you of any other expectations.

40 percent of 8- to 13-year-olds said they did not read any part of a book on the previous day, a figure that shoots up to 70 percent of kids 14 to 18.

TV is omnipresent: 58 percent of families with children have the TV on during dinner, and 42 percent are “constant television households”—that is, they have a TV on virtually all day, whether or not anyone is actually watching it. And while once restaurants and bars were a way to escape the isolation of being in front of the boob tube, now those restaurants and bars are as likely to have TVs mounted on the walls so you don’t miss a second.

Not long ago, the various types of mass media used to be vastly different, using distinct forms of technology. Now they are all digital. Even if a real book appears at the end of the production process, it is still written, edited, and produced in the form of word processing documents, spreadsheets, jpgs, mpgs, and wav files, and stored as computer files. The gap between forms of mass media is shrinking constantly. We can already access the Internet from our television sets, watch TV on our computers, and play video games on either. The difference is just a matter of social context: We tend to watch TV in a group, and the computer is a solitary device.

Someday soon, analysts believe, one machine will serve as a reception point for almost every mass medium (Consoli, 2005).

Convergence is not only happening in technology: The media objects themselves are converging. An increasing number of media objects have appeared simultaneously as movies and comic books, or as comic books and video games, and especially as both television series and Internet sites. *Lost*, the drama about airplane crash survivors in the South Pacific, is not only a television series; additional material, including interviews and new clips, appears as a podcast (a webfeed), accessible on the Internet, iPods, cell phones, and other devices (it can even be accessed on television, if you have Web TV!) (Davis, 2005).

Scholars have only just begun to speculate on the sociological implications of media convergence, but one effect is certain. Older people have always complained that the preferred mass media of their youth were far superior to the mass media today. Reading books was far superior to listening to the radio: You were active, engaged, and you had to use your imagination. Then: Listening to the radio was far superior to watching television, for the same reasons: active, engaged, used imagination. Then: Watching television was far superior to playing video games: active, engaged, used imagination. When every mass medium appears on flickering computer screens, there will be no nostalgic “active, engaged, imaginative” medium to look back on.

Both the cognitive demands that new media require from their viewers, and their effects, seem actually to be *more* engaging than those of previous generations. Surely, computer games require more manual dexterity and eye–hand coordination, as well as the ability to hold several different plotlines in your head simultaneously, while a TV show or radio show—not to mention sitting quietly and reading a book—required less physical connection. Radio and TV stories are far more complex than 20 years ago. The “good old days” of media may not have demanded any more from the consumer and certainly did not leave you as dizzy from so many choices.

## Media Production and Consumption

How do the media produce what they produce? For whom? What is the relationship between the producers and their audiences? How are audiences created and maintained? These are questions that animate the sociological investigations into both the production and the consumption of media.

For years, there seemed to be a strict division between production and consumption. A group of writers, editors, directors, actors, artists, and supporting personnel, all working for corporate executives in high-rise offices, produces and distributes the books, magazines, and television programs. The books, magazines, and television programs appear in their respective mass media, and we consume them. We have little input; a million irate letters failed to save *Star Trek* from cancellation in 1967.

This boundary is being increasingly blurred. (Think of the long history of TV shows about TV or radio shows—from *Mary Tyler Moore* to *Frasier* to *Martin* to *30 Rock* to *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip*—in which the plot centers around the corporate “suits” arguing against the irresponsible creative types.) Audiences increasingly run the show. Viewers of *American Idol*, for example, determine through their voting how the show turns out.

These days, media producers are all consumers themselves. The people who write, act in, and direct television programs go home every night and watch television



▲ In today's interactive media environment, the line between consumer and producer is becoming blurred—at least for those consumers with access to the technology. Network television stations add additional content as well as provide opportunities for interactions among fans of their most popular TV shows.

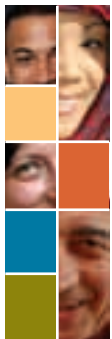
Source: Screen capture "Heroes" from the NBC website, [www.nbc.com/Heroes](http://www.nbc.com/Heroes), accessed October 24, 2007. Reprinted by permission.

themselves. The writers of *Lost*, for example, scour Internet chatrooms and message boards to determine the popularity of plot twists and even to get new ideas. Consumers are not just sitting idly by, consuming media as if they were popcorn; they create their own fan fiction, blogs, chatrooms, message boards. Consumers are also producers, using the same technologies to write books and magazines and produce movies.

However, the distinction between mass media production and consumption is still useful, particularly as we try to figure out exactly what happens as a message goes from my brain into words, sounds, and pictures (is encoded), is transmitted over a long distance through a mass medium, and then gets into your brain (is decoded). It's not at all like talking to you or showing you pictures face-to-face. To paraphrase Marshall McLuhan, the medium changes the message. Actually, the medium changes everything.

## Culture Industries

Like any other industry, mass media are characterized by industrial patterns such as hierarchy and bureaucracy. But the goal of most industries is to provide a product that you



## Sociology and our World

### Minorities in Media

Television helps sell products to everyone, majority and minority alike, so we would expect television executives to make a concerted attempt not to offend minorities by including them in the sitcoms, cop shows, and commercials. However, while most ensemble shows are far more diverse than they might

have been in the past, they are still disproportionately White and middle class. A report from *Children Now* (2005) found that 73 percent of prime time characters in the 2003–2004 season were White, 16 percent African American, 6.5 percent Hispanic, 3 percent Asian, and 1.5 percent other. Only African Americans were close to representing their real numbers. Sixty-five percent of prime-time characters were male and only 35 percent female, obviously disproportionately high for the men. Children, teenagers, and young adults were highly overrepresented: Only 16 percent of male and 6 percent of female characters were over 50 years old. Those youth, the most racially diverse population in America, are represented as even more predominantly White than other age groups—77 percent of prime-time characters

under 18 are Caucasian. The report doesn't mention GLBT people at all, but in 2006–07, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation counted 9 gay men and lesbians out of a total of 679 prime-time lead or supporting characters, or 1.3 percent, again an under representation (GLAAD, 2006).

Even when members of the minority group appear in a media text, the way they are presented sometimes reinforces negative ideologies. They may display negative stereotypes. On television, Latinos have begun to appear more frequently in prime time, but they tend to be cast disproportionately in low-status occupations and are four times more likely than other groups to portray domestic workers (*Children Now*, 2005). In popular video games, seven out of ten Asian characters are fighters; eight out of ten Black characters are sports competitors. Nearly nine out of ten Black women were victims of violence. Nearly 80 percent of Black men are shown as physically and verbally abusive (*Children Now*, 2001). Even those women and minority characters who are shown in authoritative positions, like district attorneys or police chiefs, are mostly seen but not heard, having few lines and/or little influence in the flow of the plot.

can use. The goal of the media is either to convince you that you need someone else's product or to entertain you sufficiently that you will be positively motivated to purchase someone else's product.

Much of the arts—classical music, visual arts, dance—remain shrouded in an aesthetic sensibility that makes it difficult to see their more sociological elements. Many of us subscribe to a notion of “art for art's sake”—the work of art is produced by an individual artist as an expression of his or her unique vision.

Sociologists often challenge such romantic views, generally by focusing on the more mundane elements of artistic production. In *Art Worlds*, for example, Howard Becker (1984) showed that much of the life of a painter or a musician is bureaucratic and routine; he or she goes to work, practices routine material, deals with money and sales receipts, talks on the phone, in a way that is quite similar to that of an office worker. In *Making News* (1978) Gaye Tuchman found that what gets seen, heard, and read as “the news” has less to do with human judgments about newsworthiness, importance, or social value than with the organizational structures within which reporters and editors do their jobs (see also Becker et al., 2000; Berkowitz, 1990; Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978).

In addition, sociologists examine the **culture industries**—the mass production of cultural products that are offered for consumption. Instead of crafting an individual work of creative genius, movie studios and radio stations are like assembly lines, producing cultural products as if they were loaves of bread. They may recycle the same tired images and themes over and over again because they are cheap and have been successful in the past. If you've seen one cowboy movie (or one episode of *CSI: Miami*), you've seen them all. Every sitcom covers the same territory, with the same jokes. As a result of taking in such material over time, some sociologists have argued, consumers become passive and uncritical. They absorb the simplistic, repetitive images with no questions asked, never having their preconceptions, stereotypes, and ideologies challenged (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1944; Steinert, 2003).

The concept of culture industries is helpful in explaining why so many mass media promote old-fashioned, even oppressive, ideologies. For instance, in a free-market economy, the producers must make the product appealing to as many potential consumers as possible. Therefore they select the themes and situations that are familiar to people, never challenging a preconception, a stereotype, or an ideology. Sociologist Todd Gitlin coined the phrase “the logic of safety” to describe the continuing tendency of media producers to repackage time-tested themes and formulas to capture established media audiences and markets, thus minimizing programming risks and maximizing profits (Gitlin, 2000). In so doing, the mass media also reinforce and may actually promote acceptance of inequalities.

But media production and media consumption are more complex than the kind of “hypodermic needle” idea that Horkheimer and Adorno's original “culture industries” idea proposed. Producers cannot churn out exactly the same old images audiences have seen before; some originality, some tweak, some spin is needed to attract an audience. Some mass media producers do have artistic visions in their own right, and sometimes they do challenge preconceptions, stereotypes, and ideologies.

What's more, media consumers are not the passive zombies Horkheimer and Adorno feared. Rather, audiences are active; we participate in the process of making meaning out of media. We actively interpret the words, images, and/or sounds that are referred to as the **media text**. Stuart Hall (1980) coined the term **encoding/decoding** to capture this dynamic relationship between how media texts construct messages for us and how, at the same time, people actively and creatively make sense of what they see, hear, and read. Encoding and decoding are connected because they are processes that focus on the same media text, but a particular decoding does not necessarily

follow from a specific encoded message. As audiences, we tend to take what we want from the media text and ignore everything else. We “misread” it. We create meanings that producers might never have intended. For example, soap operas and romance novels are formulas often said to reproduce gender stereotypes that are oppressive to women. Yet scholars such as Radway (1984) and Ang and Hermes (1991) have found that women audiences read and use these media in a variety of independent and self-affirming ways. The writer of the classic television comedy *M\*A\*S\*H*, Larry Gelbart, left his own hit show after only a few seasons because the message he thought he had encoded was not what audiences decoded when they watched. A chronicle of the daily life of a surgical unit during the Korean War, Gelbart wanted the show’s message to be that war was futile. But fans kept writing to say the show made war look like fun and that they couldn’t wait to sign up for the army. Gelbart’s content intentions were defeated by his active viewing audiences.

Multicultural and global viewers of mainstream media can be particularly active audiences. Katz and Liebes (1990) studied international audiences for the hit American prime-time drama *Dallas* and discovered that groups from different cultural backgrounds produced a variety of different ways of relating to the series and retelling stories from it. They may find their own ways into media texts that would seem to marginalize them. Gillespie (1995) found young Punjabis living in London who watched Australian soap operas; they identified with personal and familial struggles and used them to explore and resolve related tensions in their own lives and communities. Shively (1992) found that Native American viewers of classic John Wayne westerns identified not with the “Red Indian” characters, but with Wayne, because it was he who represented preservation of autonomy. Gay men and lesbians tend to be particularly skilled at taking and making their own messages from mainstream media, probably as a result of the pervasiveness of heterosexual norms in media messages (see Eldridge, Kitzinger, and Williams, 1997).

**Mass media can allow access to more and more people and enable previously voiceless minorities access to connection and visibility. Univision, the leading Spanish-language media conglomerate in the United States, creates its audience as it caters to it. ▼**



## Multicultural Voices

The Mohawk, one of the “Five Civilized Tribes,” once occupied a huge area of Quebec, Ontario, and New York. Today there are only about 3,000 speakers of Mohawk left, mostly older people. Children are rapidly losing sight of their ethnic identity because Native Americans are invisible in the mass media of the United States and Canada. So what did the tribal elders do? They started a website where you can learn some common Mohawk words and phrases, listen to traditional songs, learn about tribal traditions, and order many different CDs not available on [amazon.com](http://amazon.com): *Music from Turtle Island*, *Yazzie Girl*.

Gay adolescents used to be stuck in limbo. They rarely knew any other gay people, teenagers or adults. Their teachers and parents assumed that everyone in the world was straight. No organizations existed in their small towns, or they were afraid to contact them. So while their friends were happily planning dates and proms, they were doomed to years of loneliness and silence. Not anymore. An Internet search for “LGBT youth” yields hundreds of websites: Gay Youth UK, OutProud, the Gay Youth Corner, Toronto Coalition for LGBT Youth. Then there is *XY*, a glossy magazine with articles on sports, fashion, music, and celebrities.

Thus, mass media can be more democratic, spreading ownership and consumption of media to more and more

people and enabling previously voiceless minorities access to connection and visibility. For another example, Black Entertainment Television (BET) and Black-owned record companies, digital media companies, and magazines have identified and sustained a new media market and also, in the process, helped to create that market. Ethnic media markets have grown robustly in the United States in the twenty-first century. About 51 million Americans, 24 percent of the adult population, are either primary or secondary consumers of ethnic media today (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2006).

## Media Consolidation

But media can also, simultaneously, be less democratic, as those at the top can concentrate increasing amounts of media power. **Media consolidation** refers to the increased control of an increasing variety of media by a smaller and smaller number of companies. A small number of companies control virtually all the media in the United States today, and huge conglomerates own or hold large stakes in a variety of media. This consolidation raises fears about what gets produced and also about the quality and reliability of media products, particularly news.

During the past two decades, media ownership has rapidly become concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. Time and Warner Brothers merged into the world's biggest media company in 1989. Ten years later, Viacom and CBS set a new record for the largest corporate merger ever. Then the AOL-Time Warner merger in 2000 was several times bigger than that. Today's media consolidation raises fears about the access to the diverse sources of news and opinions that citizens in a democracy need to make informed decisions about how to vote and how to live. When a small group of people controls how information circulates, the spectrum of available ideas, opinions, and images seems likely to narrow. Moreover, big media companies will prefer programming and voices that conform to their own financial interests, and they are in a position to block most smaller, independent companies from rising to offer alternatives.

Any major music store in America is filled with thousands of selections from dozens of different labels in dozens of different musical categories: country, rap, house, bluegrass, Latin, rock, reggae, folk, R&B, and on and on and on. But do you think the producers of the \$37 billion worldwide music business are as various as their products appear? The truth is just five gigantic corporate conglomerates own all the different record labels, and so they distribute 95 percent of all music carried in record stores in the United States. They are called "the big five," and only one of them is a U.S. company. Warner is an American firm, but the others are Bertelsmann (Germany), EMI (U.K.), Universal Music Group (Canada), and Sony (Japan). They show us that the distribution of media products may have spread around the globe, but ownership has become more centralized with media globalization.

But as this example may suggest, the links between consolidation and diverse content are far from clear. Gamson and Latteir (2004) found that sometimes media giants homogenize content, and sometimes they don't. Sometimes these corporations stifle dissent, and sometimes they open up extra space for new people to be visible and vocal. It depends on numerous factors, not the least of which are the financial rewards owners can reap for doing one or the other at particular times in particular markets.

Journalistic integrity is yet another concern stemming from corporate media conglomeration. Now that a few gigantic corporations own most media producers in the United States, news is no longer produced by companies engaged primarily in journalism. When Time Inc. merged with Warner Communications and then AOL, the percent of its revenues from journalism dropped from 100 percent to 5 percent—even



though the company still controlled 35 percent of all magazines in the United States (Hargreaves, 2005).

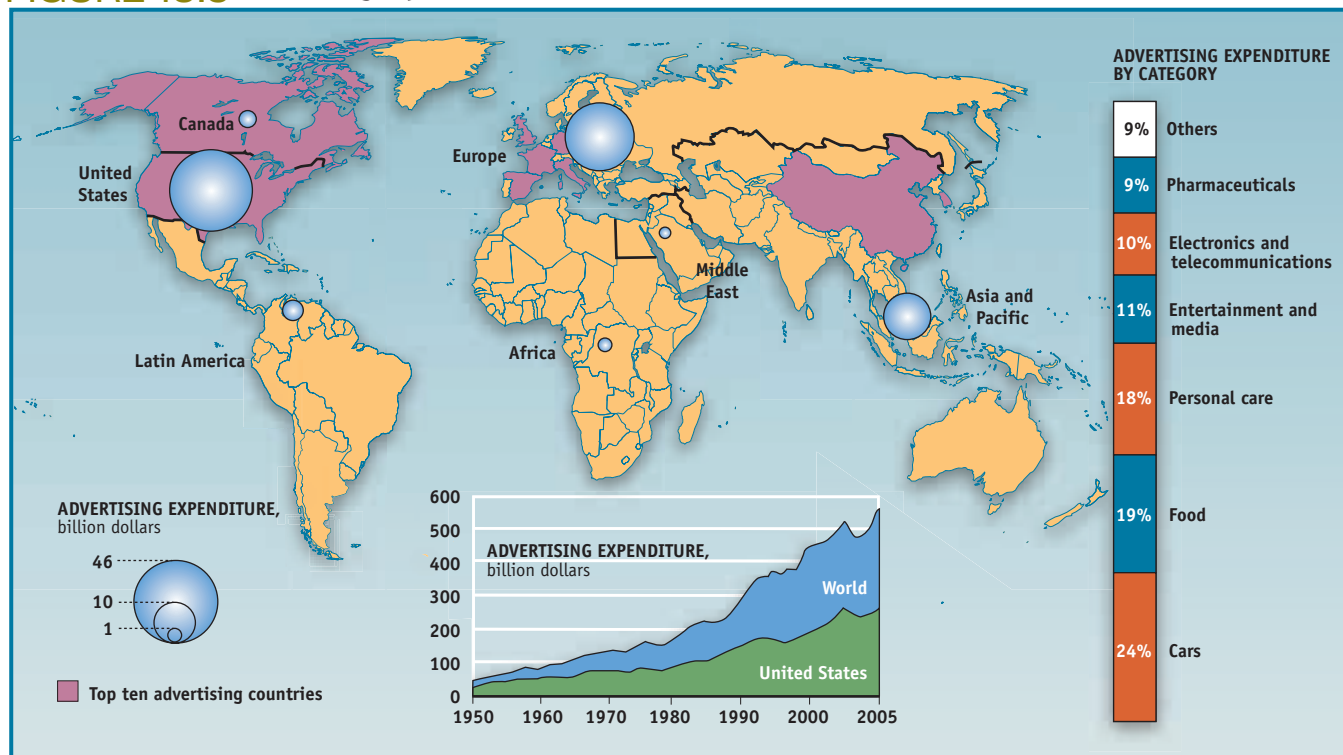
## The Importance of Advertising

Advertising is a form of mass media and also a kind of media text (Figure 18.3). Advertising can appear as phrases, pictures, songs, cartoons, or short films (“commercials”), but its purpose is always the same: to convincing prospective consumers that they want or need a product—soap, soda, sportscars—but also services (like monster.com for job seekers) and other media (“Must See TV”). Occasionally advertisements merely discuss the qualities of the product. But usually ads try to associate the product with a desirable quality or activity (Fox, 1997; Marchand, 1986; Samuel, 2002). The flavor of a soda is not nearly as important as the surge in popularity you experience with just one sip. Who cares about the nutritional content or taste of the cereal purveyed by the wizened old general store proprietor?

Advertising is an engine of media production; most media depend on advertising to survive and profit. Since most of these mass media forms themselves are free (like TV) or cheap (like newspapers or magazines), ads pay for most of the cost of production as well as the profits. As a rule, the more the medium depends on advertising for its revenue, the more it will shy away from challenging preconceptions and stereotypes (Pipher, 2000; Williamson, 1994). I have never seen an interracial couple on any television commercial, though they are increasingly common in real life (see Chapter 12, Family). Rarely, if ever, would you see a lesbian couple in an ad for some household product. This is probably because advertisers fear that someone, somewhere, might get offended and refuse to buy the product.



**FIGURE 18.3** Advertising Expenditures Worldwide



Source: "Consumption Appeal" by Emmanuelle Bournay from *Vital Waste Graphics 2*, 2006, which appears on the UNEP/GRID-Arenda, [http://maps.grida.no/go/graphic/consumption\\_appeal](http://maps.grida.no/go/graphic/consumption_appeal). Reprinted by permission.

Sociologists bring the same sorts of questions to advertising that they bring to other forms of mass media: What is the relationship between producers and consumers? Why do so many media texts promote stereotypes and oppressive ideologies? If consumers aren't passive zombies, under what conditions do media messages influence our attitudes, ideas, even behavior? The questions become more important for two reasons. First, we consume many more ads than anything else, dozens every day, hundreds every week. They are everywhere. And second, ads present by far the most pervasive stereotypes of any form of mass media: Almost every commercial shows affluent nuclear families in huge suburban houses, with Dad reading the newspaper and Mom in the kitchen. Dad does not mop the floor, and whenever he cooks dinner, he botches the job and takes the kids out to a fast-food restaurant.

How does a steady diet of such images affect our ideas about how life works or how it should work? Do most consumers really desire such a life, or are the commercials imputing desire where none existed before? Do mass media reflect or create desire?

## Celebrities

Every year, Gallup surveys Americans about the living man and woman that they admire most. In 2005, the top ten men included George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, Jimmy Carter—and Bono, the singer from the rock group U2 who has been working tirelessly to end poverty in Africa. The top ten women included Hillary Clinton, Laura Bush, Margaret Thatcher—and actress Angelina Jolie, an Oscar-winning actress and partner of Hollywood heartthrob Brad Pitt, who also does a lot of humanitarian work.

The surprising part is that more performers did not make the top ten. Actors and singers are among the most common mass media products. Many Americans cannot name their own senators and representatives, but nearly all of them know who Tom Cruise is and even about how in 2005 he jumped on the couch and howled on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. Celebrity news often makes the front page of newspapers in the United States and Europe, particularly in Britain. Why? Celebrity stories sell papers—and magazines, and products.

Mass media created celebrity. There were professional performers before, of course. But even the most diligent theatergoer might see the same actor only twice in a given year. With the advent of radio, listeners could hear their favorite comedians or singers every week. With movies, you could *see* your favorite performers almost as often. Celebrity magazines grew up around the American film industry, developing the thirst for details on the smallest doings of stars.

Television, however, is even more intimate than movies: You can see your favorite performers every week, in your own living room. These people are not simply performers; they are *celebrities*, famous not necessarily because of their talent or accomplishments but because they appear so often in mass media texts that audiences feel that they know them personally (Dyer, 1987; Gamson, 1994). And, in some ways, you do: In talk shows, magazine interviews, and fan articles, you learned every detail of their everyday lives, sometimes more intimately than your real friends. Of course, celebrities are not your friends; the intimacy is one-sided. You think you know everything about them, but they know nothing about you. Thus, the relationship between celebrity and audience is paradoxical. They are neither friends nor strangers; Richard Schickel (1985) calls them “intimate strangers.”

**The mass media crave celebrities—they sell papers and magazines, we watch them on TV. The media also create a cult of celebrity, drawing us to certain people sometimes for no other reason than the fact that they are featured and photographed. Paris Hilton, like Zsa Zsa Gabor, is “famous for being famous.” ▼**



What  
do you  
think?



18.1

MyLab

### Confidence in the Press

Conservatives claim the press has a liberal bias, but liberals claim the press has a right-wing bias. Most people probably don't think they are getting the entire truth from the media regardless of their political persuasion. In an age of globalization and media conglomerates, many sources of news are controlled by a small number of large corporations and powerful individuals. However, the rise of the Internet as a means of conveying information has changed the media landscape. So, what do you think?

**As far as the people running the press are concerned, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in them?**

- A great deal
- Only some
- Hardly any

See the back of the chapter to compare your answers to national survey data.

A Hungarian-born socialite named Zsa Zsa Gabor (1917–) was probably the first celebrity created purely by media exposure. She was technically an actress, with a string of bad movies to her credit. But she didn't become one of the most recognizable people in the world because of her movies. She appeared on talk shows to talk about her marriages, her diamonds, her appearances at posh functions, her jet-set lifestyle. She became “famous for being famous.”

Today, that's increasingly common. Celebrity itself has become the product—rather than a device for marketing films or music. Now there are “faux celebrities” everywhere—from the winners (and runners-up) of reality shows like *Survivor*, *The Bachelor*, *Joe Millionaire*, and others, to Anna Nicole Smith, to Jack and Kelly Osbourne, to Paris Hilton. Celebrities and their agents have now begun to collaborate with photographers and publications, staging shots that then appear to be intrusions in their private lives in exchange for more control over their image and a share of the profits.

## Consuming Media, Creating Identity

Whatever the producers may intend, consumers use media texts for their own ends. Through our consumption of media, we actively create our identities. In fact, it is largely *through* our media consumption that we know who we are and where we fit in society. Consumers have five broad goals in consumption:

1. *Surveillance, to find out what the world is like.* This is the main reason that we consume news and information programs, nonfiction books, magazines, and newspapers. However, we also acquire information from fiction. The best-selling novel

*The Da Vinci Code* is both a mystery and a guided tour of modern Paris and the art of its famous museum, the Louvre.

2. *Decision making, to acquire enough information on a subject to make a decision.* I may research housing markets online before deciding to move, or read Roger Ebert's movie review in the *Chicago Sun-Times* to decide what movie to see. The success of most advertising depends on my getting information at the right moment: That Pizza Hut commercial may be all the information I need to decide what to have for dinner tonight.
3. *Aesthetics.* Media objects are works of art because they create a particular vision of reality. I can appreciate the theme, style, and technique of *SpongeBob SquarePants* as easily as (maybe even more easily than) *Macbeth*.
4. *Diversion.* If we're being entertained, the reasoning goes, we are not engaged in big, important, useful work. What are we being diverted from? From improving ourselves, thinking about our problems, saving the world. We are wasting our time. However, diversion performs an important function. It's like a short vacation. By stepping outside of everyday reality for a moment, we are refreshed and better prepared to think about that big, important, useful work.
5. *Identity.* Consuming mass media texts allows us to create and maintain a group identity. If you belong to the upper class, chances are you will not listen to country-western music (or will keep the CDs hidden when company comes around), because your class identity requires that you like classical music instead. Men are "supposed" to like movies with lots of car chases, and women are "supposed" to like movies with lots of crying and hugging, so they will attend these sorts of movies to signify their gender identity.

There is no single, definitive meaning in media texts. Media texts may emphasize or "prefer" certain, hegemonic meanings over others, but, ultimately, meaning is in the mind of the beholder. Readers and viewers interpret what they see in different ways; they notice, follow, value, and understand things in different ways and so "create" the meaning of a media text for themselves. No single meaning is "correct": There are always multiple possibilities. John Fiske (1989) suggests three possible types of readings:

1. *Dominant/hegemonic.* The reader or viewer is fully complicit with the "preferred reading" (Hall, 1980). He or she completely agrees. In fact, the viewer may not even notice that it's there. All people are White, middle-class, and affluent, as they seemed in the cereal commercial. Every Mr. does have a Mrs. There may be a few exceptions, but it goes without saying that a man in a business suit in a suburban kitchen would fit this description.
2. *Ironic.* The reader or viewer notices the ideology put forward in the preferred reading, but distances him- or herself from it. Isn't this commercial ridiculous? Fortunately, he or she has moved beyond such limited ideas. The producers of the commercial may be idiots, but he or she realizes that not all yuppies in business suits are White and suburban and male, and not every Mr. has a Mrs., so there is no reason to portray them using this absurd, oppressive stereotype.
3. *Oppositional/resistant.* The reader or viewer believes that the text itself undermines the hegemonic ideology. Effectively, it disputes its own apparent claims. Sure, the announcer says the every Mr. has a Mrs., but he's the one so concerned about the taste and quality of the cereal. Who says the past was better than the present? The old geezer doesn't look as snappy as the yuppie and doesn't have the choices the yuppie has about what he wants and why.

We never consume media texts in a vacuum: We discuss them with family, friends, and co-workers. We join clubs and chat rooms. We take classes and get degrees. We understand media content within social groups, with whom we share certain strategies for interpreting and using media content. We consume the media text within an **interpretive community** (Fish, 1980; Lewis, 1992).

Interpretive communities are groups that guide interpretation and convey the preferred meanings of mass media texts. In subtle ways, they offer rewards for “correct” meanings and punishments for “incorrect” meanings. Sometimes the rewards and punishments are formal, like a grade in school. Usually, however, they are informal, approval or ridicule—just try to defend a “chick flick” if you are a guy, enjoy folk music if you are Black, or say the typical summer blockbuster is a mess of mindless explosions among teen or twenty-something friends!

Your friends represent an interpretive community; so does your school, your region, your age group, and your country. Back in the 1960s, Van Williams starred in a superhero adventure series, *The Green Hornet*. Martial arts expert Bruce Lee played his chauffeur and valet, certainly a subsidiary role—except in Hong Kong, where it ran as *The Bruce Lee Show*. The interpretive community of Hong Kong preferred a resistant reading that made Bruce Lee the star.

Interpretive communities also produce fans. A **fan** is someone who finds significant personal meaning through allegiance to a larger social group: a sports team, for example. In the media, fandom refers to a heightened awareness of and allegiance toward a specific text—a story, a series, a performer—so that the fan gains satisfaction by belonging to an interpretive community. There are varying levels of fandom, a continuum of fans from those who just

enjoy a media text; to those who spend money on books, DVDs, clothing, fan clubs, and conventions; to those who devote a good deal of their lives to the text; to, finally, those whose lives center around it and seem to be unable to live without it.

Fandom is a public affiliation, not just a private love. It is a public proclamation of identity, a choice that your allegiance to some media product reveals a core element of yourself. It was important for fans of Harry Potter to buy the latest installment in the series the second it went on sale—in part to display publicly to other fans (or themselves) the strength of their allegiance. Rap and hip-hop fans may express their affiliation through clothing, jewelry, verbal affections, social interactions. “Deadheads” will bedeck themselves in tie-dyed shirts (preferably with skulls on them) and, if they are male, wear their hair long. The hard core *Star Trek* fan might write fan fiction (sometimes complete novels), start websites, organize conventions, use the hand gesture and expression “live long, and prosper,” even walk around with Mr. Spock’s pointed ears.

The word *fan* comes from *fanatic*, and in the popular imagination, fans are crazy and escape into a world of fantasy. Actually, most fans are in touch with reality. They have understandable sociological reasons for their fandom: An interpretive community of fellow fans allows them to hold responsible positions, acquire prestige, and obtain social capital that they could not obtain in mainstream culture (Harris, 1998; Hills, 2002; Lewis, 1992).

Fandom is a good example of the ways the media both create and reflect audience desires. Movie studios, television producers, and record producers offer websites and merchandise schemes to entice and sustain existing fans. These and other devices reflect



▲ **Media also create interpretive communities, groups that cohere around similar media tastes and create a subculture. At Comic-Con International in 2005, a group of Bat-people pose as some Ghostbusters look on.**

the fandom of those who already like a particular star or show. But they also set the standard for “true” fandom: Suddenly you can’t be a “real” fan unless you subscribe to these magazines, wear these clothes, and purchase these products. The media both meet “demand” (offering services) and create the very demand they then service.

## Regulating Media

The fact that media can be both more and less democratic at the same time—creating access and concentrating power—means that eventually media will encounter government regulation. Currently there are laws that attempt to prevent the concentration of media in one company’s hands, but they generally mean that one company can’t own *all* the newspapers or *all* the radio stations in any metropolitan area. But they can, legally, own the biggest newspaper in *every* metropolitan area, and the largest-circulation magazine and the most popular radio station. Laws designed to prevent too much concentration in media ownership have been relaxing steadily since the 1990s (Croteau and Hoynes, 2003).

The other way in which the media is regulated has to do with the effects of media consumption on consumers. One side of the argument goes like this: If you watch a violent act in a mass media text, you will be more likely to commit a violent act yourself. It may validate your preexisting propensity to violence through group socialization, just as you are more likely to litter if you see someone else littering, or else it may create a propensity to violence where none existed before. (The same argument is used for sex: Watching a sexually explicit act will either incite your pre-existing desire or create a new desire.)

We’ve heard the argument before. Psychological experiments have demonstrated that people who view aggressive behavior of any sort, either on film or in real life, are slightly more likely to become aggressive themselves—for a few minutes. But then the effect fades away. Despite what many pundits and public figures suggest, most studies have failed to find a causal link between violent media and long-term violent behavior or violent crime (Comstock and Scharrer, 1999; Huesmann and Eron, 2006).

There was no indication that watching a violent movie, or a hundred violent movies, would make people more violent (Felson, 1996). For one thing, as with any media content, people’s varying identities, and their social and cultural contexts, shape the meanings they see in media and how they respond to them. In 1997, the largest ever study of media content conducted by several major universities—the National Television Violence Study—concluded that exposure to violence in the media was unlikely to cause violent behavior in most cases, but it may lead many people to think that violence is more pervasive than it is in society and cause them to be afraid (National Television Violence Study, 1997).

Yet we hear the argument every time a new form of mass media arrives. And every time there is a new tragedy, we hear it again (Trend, 2007). When Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold opened fire on their classmates at Columbine High School, everyone wondered: Why did they do it? Many commentators put the blame on the violent video game *Doom*, which was reputed to contain a layout of a high school, and on the movie *The Basketball Diaries*, in which Leonardo DiCaprio fantasizes about wearing a black trench-coat and shooting his classmates. However, an estimated 10 million people have played *Doom*, and about one million saw *The Basketball Diaries*, without shooting anyone.

On a societal level, it sometimes looks as if violent media actually decrease violence. Between 1978 and 1988, hundreds of movies appeared involving psycho-slashers who killed groups of teenagers in creatively gruesome ways: the *Friday the 13th*, *Nightmare*

on *Elm Street*, *Halloween*, and *Sleepaway Camp* series, plus *Prom Night*, *Graduation Day*, *Funhouse*, and nearly 200 others. They appealed mostly to teenagers.

By 1998, those teenagers were grown up. And according to the FBI, the number of serial killers in the United States remained relatively stable—there were 30 to 40. The violent crime rate had actually decreased from 44.1 to 36.0 per 1,000 people, the lowest rate ever. Between 1994 and 2005, violent crime rates have steadily declined, reaching the lowest level ever recorded in 2005 (U.S. Department of Justice). Did watching Freddie, Michael, and Jason decrease violent tendencies, or is there no valid social scientific connection whatever?

And what are we to do about it? In the days before mass media, adults and children were exposed to everything—good, bad, and in between. The first fairy tales told in front of the fireplace were for everyone (and they had a lot more sex and violence than today’s sanitized versions). Adults and children alike listened to folk songs with bawdy lyrics. But people weren’t alarmed about these messages until they couldn’t control the quantity or supervise the transmission of them. The mass media are seen as different; they are produced by strangers, probably transmitting insidious messages into children’s heads when their parents aren’t paying attention.

Worries about the media consumption by children has come in two forms. One argument is that media incite or create violence (and sexual behavior) because children are presumed to be highly impressionable. If they see a cartoon mouse hit a cartoon cat with a frying pan, the next thing you know, they’ll be trying it out on baby brother. The other worry is that children are not constitutionally able to handle “mature” themes: They will be confused, distressed, upset, and perhaps psychologically scarred for the rest of their lives (Dorr, 1986; Trend, 2007).

All media are censored—the question is not whether or not there is censorship but rather what should be censored and why. Books have frequently been banned. James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, now considered one of the greatest works in Western literature, was banned in the United States for years because it presumably contained explicit sexual situations (there really aren’t any). References to drugs and gay men got Allen Ginsberg’s “Howl” banned in 1956, but now it appears in anthologies assigned to freshman English classes. Few books are banned outright anymore, but when it’s a matter of consumption by children, books are quickly and easily removed from school libraries.

In the 1930s, movies were censored for such things as premarital sex, homosexuality, graphic violence, criminals who get away with it, bad words, and disrespect toward the U.S. government and organized religion. In the late 1960s, a new rating system was introduced: G (for all audiences), PG (parental guidance suggested), R (no one under 17 without a parent or guardian present), and X (no one under 17, period).

Even television cartoons have been carefully watched and controlled. In the 1970s, child advocates noticed that the old Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck cartoons being shown on Saturday mornings featured a lot of anvils dropped on people’s heads and bombs exploding in people’s faces. In real life, they would be killed by such encounters. Even without the violence, cartoon characters were often irreverent and disrespectful to authority figures. By the 1980s, censorship resulted in new shows

**While almost everyone agrees that some images are harmful to children, not everyone agrees what those images are. Some have criticized the Public Broadcasting System for “promoting homosexuality” (the friendship between Bert and Ernie on *Sesame Street*, Tinky Winky, the purple Telly-tubby, and Buster’s unproblematic visit to a lesbian couple in Vermont on a spinoff from *Arthur*). ▼**



like *Smurfs* and *Care Bears*, with characters hugging, learning, and finding nonviolent solutions to their problems. Whatever the potential social value of such messages, children of the 1980s recall them as excruciatingly dull (Hendershot, 1999).

With each new medium, there is renewed concern about controlling the harmful effects of its content, especially when it comes to children. Since the 1990s, there has been considerable concern about sexuality and, particularly, violence in video games. Critics of video game content argue that levels of violence and cruelty are at least as bad as on TV shows and that these images are even more threatening because video games allow users to act out the violence personally.

These debates have resulted in different controls in different countries. In the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, for example, video game companies have agreed to a basic, voluntary rating system. Some other countries have taken stronger actions. In China, new laws seek to restrict play of any video game to only three hours. After that, game programming will make in-game characters lose their abilities. (After a five-hour break, full powers will be automatically restored.)

For sociologists, censorship raises questions about context more so than content. What is considered “too violent,” under what conditions, and who decides? History has shown that censorship laws reflect the interests of whoever is in power to declare them. In Stalinist Russia, material with Christian themes was banned; in southern New Mexico in 2001, Harry Potter books were burned by a Christian group for purveying anti-Christian messages (BBC, 2001). In 2004, Harry Potter topped the list of the most frequently banned books, seeing 26 challenges to remove it from bookshelves in 16 states (American Library Association). Nobody wants a society with no limits at all on what is permissible to communicate to children—or to the rest of us. Nor do many of us want a world in which someone else is always making decisions about what is permissible for us to consume. The issue for sociologists is not whether or not there is censorship—there is, and always has been, and always will be. To the sociologist, the question is more about where we draw the line as a society about who can see and say what, what the criteria are for judgment, and who gets to make those decisions. That is: Censorship, like virtually every other social process, is about power, inequality, and choice.

## Did you know?

According to the American Library Association, these books were among the top ten most banned books in American schools from 1990 to 2004: *Scary Stories* by Alvin Schwartz—too scary; *Daddy's Roommate* by Michael Willhoite—Daddy is gay; *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou—sex and bad language; *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain—bad language; all *Harry Potter* books by J. K. Rowling—Harry is a wizard, thus anti-Christian; *Forever* by Judy Blume—a teenager has sex; *Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Paterson—occult/satanism. How many have you read?

## Globalization of the Media

A few years ago, I was visiting Morocco, and I stayed in a fourteenth century Moorish castle converted into a hotel. My room was furnished with ornate tile work, panels inlaid with lapis lazuli, fringed pillows. It was like moving into another world. I opened an ornately appointed armoire, and found that it hid a large television set—evidently they didn't want modern conveniences to interfere with the lush fantasy of the room. I turned on the TV. What were they watching in this ancient, mysterious country? *Beavis and Butthead*.

American movies were being shown around the world as early as the 1920s, but the immersion has increased dramatically during the last 20 years. *The Simpsons* is broadcast in Central and South America, Europe, South Africa, Israel, Turkey, Japan, South Asia, and Australia. On any given night, *The Bold and the Beautiful* is playing in Romania, *CSI* in Germany, *Sex and the City* in Spain, *Fairly Oddparents* in the Philippines. In China, the most popular programs are *Friends* and *Seinfeld*.



What  
do you  
think?



18.2

MyLab

### Free Press

Many people think it is important to have complete freedom of the press and news media in the United States. Others think the press too often invades the privacy of public figures like senators or members of Congress by printing stories that contain personal details about their private lives. So, what do you think?

**Which of these three statements comes closest to your feelings about balancing freedom of the press and the right to privacy?**

- There should be complete freedom of the press, even if the press sometimes invades the privacy of public figures.
- The government should keep the press from printing stories that invade the privacy of public figures.
- The press should develop a code of ethics to keep it from invading the privacy of public figures.

See the back of the chapter to compare your answers to national survey data.

The mass media have become truly global in nature. CNN broadcasts via 23 satellites to more than 212 countries and territories in all corners of the globe. Major sporting events are seen by hundreds of millions of people worldwide. The 2006 World Cup, for example, was watched by a cumulative television audience of more than 26 billion viewers across the globe (FIFA, 2007). The Internet is growing more global every day, allowing millions of users from all over the world to come online to seek and share information, post opinions and creative work, and shop for items previously available only to those who physically traveled to other countries.

In the 1960s, the path-breaking media scholar Marshall McLuhan predicted that the rise of global electronic media would bring the world closer together. He coined the term **global village** to describe an environment in which people everywhere could make their voices heard to one another, thus compelling “commitment and participation” and making human beings “irrevocably involved with, and responsible for, each other” (McLuhan and Fiore, 1967, p. 24). Four decades later, is that what globalization means?

## What Is Media Globalization?

Media globalization has two main concerns. First, there is the technological innovation that allows us to communicate instantaneously over vast distances. In many countries today, there is no need to be physically close by to work together; images, sounds, the thoughts of almost anyone, from anywhere, can potentially be available to billions of people. Technology is giving increasing numbers of people the power to produce culture. And technology is making it as easy to communicate with someone on another continent as it is with someone down the hall.

But media globalization also concerns the cultural products that are available around the world. In that area, sociologists are finding that McLuhan’s vision of a

global village is far from today's reality. Commercial interests, rather than humanitarian ideals of education, understanding, or equality, are driving media globalization. Large media conglomerates from a few wealthy industrialized nations are dominating global markets. In fact, both media production and consumption are strongly oriented toward the wealthier members of the world's population. As a result, the global media often function to highlight and help reproduce global inequality (Croteau and Hoynes, 2003).

## Cultural Imperialism

The media products of the West, especially of the United States, are so dominant in global markets that some sociologists call it **cultural imperialism**. Imperialism is economic control of one country by another. Cultural imperialism, then, is cultural control of one country by another. One culture's art, music, television, and film are defined and controlled by another. And from Latin America to Asia to the Middle East, the West, but particularly the United States, is decried for its pervasive cultural dominance around the world.

Cultural imperialism is not simply the cultural domination of poor countries by rich ones, however. Western and American media products certainly do have a very strong presence in poorer nations, but Europeans and Canadians complain of American media dominance too—and quite loudly. In Europe, for example, American movies make up anywhere from 54 to 92 percent of movies shown in theaters, while European films make up only 3 percent (Croteau and Hoynes, 2003). Of all movies shown on European television, over 50 percent are made in America (De Bens, Kelly, and Bakke, 1992). In Canada, 95 percent of films in theaters are American movies. U.S. firms control music distribution. Eighty percent of magazines sold are from the United States, as are two-thirds of all books. (Croteau and Hoynes, 2003; Escobar and Swardson, 1995)

The overwhelming majority of music in the global marketplace is sung in English—usually by Americans. In Japan, songs sung in English make up 50 percent of radio playlists. In Germany, it's 80 percent. In Brazil, where the people speak Portuguese, nearly three-quarters of songs on the radio are sung in the English language (Barnet and Cavanaugh, 1994; Croteau and Hoynes, 2003).

Of the top-grossing films of all time at the international box office, all of the top ten were American films (Figure 18.4).

The issue is not jealousy of American lifestyles or dislike of global media products like MTV, Hollywood films, English-language pop music, and American soap operas. The cultural imperialism thesis holds that this kind of Western media dominance, driven by the relentless desire for profits, will shape all the cultures of the world and ensure their Westernization. Playing everywhere and blocking out opportunities for local productions, this media dominance will substitute American values like individualism and consumerism for the local values of countries where media products are sold. Eventually, cultural distinctiveness will be eroded, threatening national and cultural identity. Other nations will be so thoroughly indoctrinated with U.S. cultural, political, and economic images and ideals that they will forget who they are.

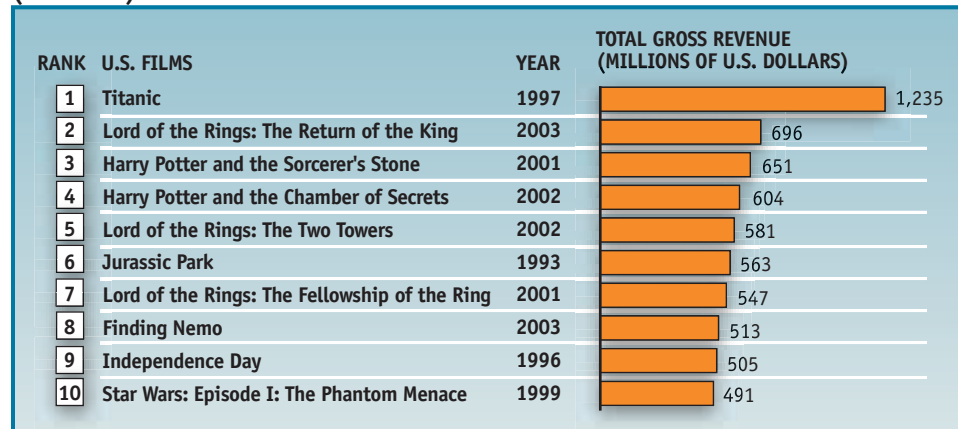
U.S. cultural products are having an immense impact around the world, but sociologists are finding that for a number of reasons the cultural imperialism thesis offers



▲ **Media globalization means both the technological innovations that allow us to communicate instantly over vast distances and the stock of media images that circulate around the world. Both could connect us to one another—or reinforce existing inequalities. Even in Oaxaca, Mexico, E.T. phones home.**

### Did you know?

The Middle Eastern Broadcasting Company in Dubai currently broadcasts a dubbed version of *The Simpsons* called *Al Shamsoun* to most of the countries in the Persian Gulf. In the Arabic version, Homer becomes Omar, and Bart is Badr. Some scenes have to be cut to avoid offending conservative Muslim censors: no girls in bikinis, no bacon for breakfast, and no alcohol. Homer cannot be shown drinking or talking about beer, and his after-work hangout, Moe's Tavern, no longer exists.

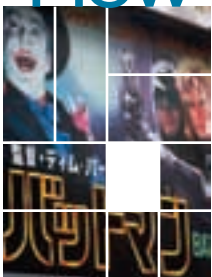
**FIGURE 18.4** Top Ten Grossing Films of All Time at the International (non-U.S.) Box Office

Source: From *The Human Development Report*, 2004.

only a partial picture. For now anyway, U.S. products are dominating some media and markets, while other media continue to be locally produced. Plus, different audiences still interpret foreign fare differently, and there are apparent limits to the appeal of Western—particularly U.S.—culture in other countries. Finally, different countries have created local variations of American or Western programs, giving imported formats a local resonance. Media globalization has induced successful “fusions” in film, television, and, perhaps especially, music, which circulate and sell well in originating countries and beyond. Many locally produced fusions have been so popular that they have allowed local producers to successfully compete with much larger media conglomerates.

Overall, then, it's not a question of domination or resistance, global or local, but both. Ironically, the relentless drive for corporate profits—the very basis for fears of cultural imperialism in the first place—is so far forcing media companies to adapt their products to speak to local customs and audiences.

## How do we know what we know?



### Interfering Variables

Most countries import a substantial number of their movies

from abroad, usually Hollywood. Look at the percentage of films imported from abroad between 1990 and 1995, according to the *UNESCO World Culture Report*. If we take level of globalization as the dependent variable, could we hypothesize that imported films are the independent variable—that is, that greater

the number of imported films, the higher the level of globalization?

Ethiopia	99%	Russia	72%
Australia	93%	France	63%
Norway	92%	Bangladesh	43%
Sweden	86%	Iran	47%
Mexico	83%	Japan	36%
Cuba	79%	United States	22%
Turkey	77%	India	14%

Actually, no. Is Cuba really more globalized than France, or Ethiopia more

than Australia? Sometimes variables that we hadn't counted on will *interfere* with the data, eliminating the effect of the independent (globalization) on the dependent (imported movies). Religion, for example: Conservative Muslim countries may disapprove of the excessive sexual content of Hollywood movies and not import many. Or poverty: Some countries may be too poor to produce many films at home.

## Media in the 21st Century: New Media, New Voices

Developments such as satellite TV and the Internet have allowed local groups to develop a voice that they never had before, no matter how strictly local governments may control media access. For instance, before around 1990, the West heard a single, monolithic Arab “opinion” on everything from Israel to Islam, even though there were 18 predominantly Arab countries stretching from Morocco to Iraq, with people from all ethnic groups, social classes, religions, and political persuasions. Minority opinions were censored. Now they are talking, and through approved channels. And their voices are fragmented. For instance, among Morocco’s 15 online newspapers and news websites are the progressive feminist *Femmes du Maroc* (published in French) and the socialist *Libération*. Saudi Arabia forbids its citizens from publishing or accessing any information that disagrees with official policy, but there are hundreds of clandestine groups, including over 500 on Yahoo.com.

Al Jazeera, an independent television network based in Qatar (on the Persian Gulf), is one of the most popular media sites in the world, with several specialized channels devoted to sports, music, and children’s programs and over 50 million regular viewers (it is available in the United States via satellite). Its main claim to infamy is its dedication to presenting alternatives to official policies of the Arab world. Several Arab countries have claimed that the network is too pro-Israel or pro-U.S. On the other hand, after the 9/11 attacks, when Al Jazeera broadcast statements from Osama bin Laden, many Westerners claimed that it was merely a front for terrorists. Journalists have had their credentials revoked in both Arab and Western countries, and when an English-language version of its website premiered in 2003, hackers immediately rerouted visitors to a picture of an American flag (Lynch, 2005; Rugh, 2004)

New media today are helping other cultures to preserve and help “alternative” voices to be heard. In the United Kingdom, for example, Sianel Pedwar Cymru, the Welsh fourth channel, is helping to support Welsh language and culture. In Mexico, the Zapatistas movement was able to bypass established media to communicate with the world via the Internet. Broadcasting among the Bedouin tribes of the Sahara has helped revive a sense of collective identity (Abu-Lughod, 1989; Williams, 2001).

In 2005, two new television networks were launched, each with a different approach to the same goal: bringing alternative voices to the public. One is Independent World Television (IWT), the brainchild of Canadian documentary filmmaker Paul Jay. IWT seeks to be an independent voice, free of corporate control over editorial content. The network is to be financed by Jay and other contributors and will allow no corporate ownership, underwriting, or advertising.

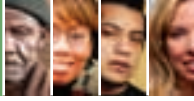
Telesur (“Telesouth”) is a homegrown Latin American television network that seeks to challenge Western media dominance and present a Latin American perspective to Latin American viewers. The new network is being financed mainly by Venezuela, which is footing 51 percent of the bill. But Telesur is also being supported by the governments of Uruguay (10 percent), Cuba (19 percent), and Argentina (20 percent).

Some are calling Telesur “the Latin American Al Jazeera.” Others say it will be little more than a mouthpiece for the governments that are paying its bills (Adams, 2005). A sociological perspective would suggest that both are true. Sociologists might be concerned about government control but fascinated by the idea of people speaking for themselves.

I sometimes show excerpts of old TV programs or films in my classes. They’re short, they require little background information, and they illustrate whatever sociological

issue we are covering in the lecture. But there are always two or three students who rebel against the idea of “wasting” valuable class time on something as inconsequential as a mass media text. “What difference does it make? It’s just a TV show,” they say.

Sociologists don’t see it that way. Media both unite and fragment us. They both marginalize and free us. They both reproduce patterns of inequality and challenge them. But a TV show is never just a TV show.



## Chapter Review

1. *What are the mass media?* Mass media are ways we communicate with large numbers of people; they are spurred by technological innovation and both reflect and create culture. Sociologists are interested in access to and the effects of media. Mass media include print media, radio, TV, and movies, as well as the Internet.
2. *How are media production and consumption related?* The production and consumption of media used to be divided but are now more interactive as producers consume and consumers produce. The media is considered a culture industry—a hierarchical and bureaucratic industry. This explains why so many mass media promote old or oppressive ideologies. Sociologists call this the “logic of safety,” or using time-tested formulas. But consumers are involved in both interpreting and creating meaning. Multicultural and global viewers are especially active and interpret through their particular lens.
3. *How are advertising and celebrity related to the media?* The purpose of advertising is to convince consumers they want or need a product or service by associating the product with a desirable quality or activity. Sociologists are interested in advertising because we consume more ads than anything else, and ads are full of stereotypes and lead to questions about consumer desire. Mass media created celebrity; now celebrity itself is a product that we consume.
4. *What role does the consumption of media play in creating identity?* We often figure out who we are and where we fit into society through our consumption of media. Consumers are doing five things: surveillance to find out what the world is like, decision making through information gathering, appreciating aesthetics, being diverted for fun, and creating and maintaining a group identity. You can interpret media in different ways. In the dominant/hegemonic reading, the reader agrees with the preferred reading. In the ironic reading, the reader sees the ideology but distances him- or herself. In the oppositional or resistant reading, the reader sees the text as disputing its own ideology.
5. *How are the media regulated?* There are some laws regarding monopolies, particularly with newspapers, but these laws are relaxing. Another way of regulating media is through examining the effects of consumption on viewers. There are claims that all new media lead to violence or the destruction of society, but these claims tend not to be backed up empirically. Worry about the effects on people, especially children, leads to attempts at censorship. Censorship varies over time and by culture and place and is usually propelled by concerns over sex and violence. Sociologists are interested in how censorship is determined by power, inequality, and choice.
6. *What is the interrelation of globalization and the media?* The mass media are truly global. Media globalization involves technological innovations that allow production and consumption and develop media as a global product. Global media work to perpetuate the dominance of the powerful and both highlight and increase global inequality. Some call the dominance of Western media cultural imperialism or cultural control. But there is resistance to the possible homogenization of cultures, and the media are reflecting that by adapting to local audiences. The media today help spread culture, help preserve local culture, and let alternative voices be heard.

## KeyTerms

Blog (p. 591)

Cultural imperialism (p. 611)

Culture industries (p. 599)

Encoding/decoding (p. 599)

Fan (p. 606)

Global village (p. 610)

Interpretive community (p. 606)

Mass media (p. 588)

Media (p. 588)

Media text (p. 599)

Media consolidation (p. 601)

## What does America think?

### 18.1 Confidence in Press

These are actual survey data from the General Social Survey, 2004.

**As far as the people running the press are concerned, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in them?** The GSS survey results for 2004 indicate that almost 44 percent of the population has hardly any confidence in the press. Almost half of respondents had only some confidence in the press. Those in the upper class were most likely to reporting having a great deal of confidence in the press and at the same time were also the group most likely to report having very little confidence in the press. The percentage of respondents reporting confidence in the press has steadily declined since 1972 for all social class categories.

#### CRITICAL THINKING | DISCUSSION QUESTION

1. Take a good look at the social class differences in responses. They are complex. How do you explain them?

### 18.2 Free Press

These are actual survey data from the General Social Survey, 2002.

**Which of these three statements comes closest to your feelings about balancing freedom of the press and the right to privacy?** In the 2000 General Social Survey, just over 20 percent of respondents felt there should be complete freedom of the press, even if the press sometimes invades the privacy of public figures. Sixty-four percent of the respondents felt the press should develop a code of ethics to keep it from invading the privacy of public figures. Almost 15 percent of respondents thought the government should keep the press from printing stories that invade the privacy of public figures. Respondents who identified as lower class were least likely to support complete freedom of the press.

#### CRITICAL THINKING | DISCUSSION QUESTION

1. Respondents in the middle class were least likely to favor government censoring of the press, while those in the lower class were most likely to favor it. How do you explain these social class differences?

- Go to this website to look further at the data. You can run your own statistics and crosstabs here: [http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harc\\_sda+gss04](http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harc_sda+gss04)

**REFERENCES:** Davis, James A., Tom W. Smith, and Peter V. Marsden. General Social Surveys 1972–2004: [Cumulative file] [Computer file]. 2nd ICPSR version. Chicago, IL: National Opinion Research Center [producer], 2005; Storrs, CT: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut; Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research; Berkeley, CA: Computer-Assisted Survey Methods Program, University of California [distributors], 2005.