7 EDITION

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MEDIA/SOCIETY

Technology, Industries, Content, and Users

SAGE

Media/Society

Seventh Edition

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Brief Contents

Detailed Contents

Preface

One challenge with studying media is that things that are old often get reimagined as new again. For instance, the day before sitting down to write the first draft of this preface, a reporter contacted one of us to comment on his story about how people use AirPods to carve out space for themselves on public transit. The trend, the reporter said, was individuals finding ways to use media to create imaginary bubbles for themselves even when crammed together with others. We agreed that some people very likely do this, but told the reporter that this certainly was not a new trend. To think of it as new is to ignore the 15 years people did this with regular headphones on MP3 players and smartphones, and the quarter century before that in which people did this with Walkmans and Discmans, or the entire history of mass public transit before that in which people did the same thing with books, newspapers, and magazines. That people use media to carve out personal space and time is surely one of the many ways that people use media today, but it's one of the ways people have *always* used media.

Our point is not that *everything* is the same. Clearly, there *are* many significant changes to contemporary media. However, our mission in *Media/Society* is to get readers to think critically about recent media developments as well as the many enduring relationships between media and society. In *Media/Society,* we take an interdisciplinary approach with a sociological focus, and the text is particularly relevant for media-related courses in media studies, communications, and sociology. Our approach to media allows us to cover a wide range of questions. We ask, for example,

- How has the evolution of technology affected the media and how we use them?

- How does the business of media operate, and why does this matter?

- How do the professional norms, economic influences, and regulatory constraints that characterize media institutions influence what we see (or don't see) in our media?

- How well does media content reflect the range of realities in our diverse society and our world?

- How do people use the media in their everyday lives?

- What influences do the media seem to be having on us and our society?

Though the answers to such questions have changed over the years, the questions themselves are among the enduring topics that have long concerned both media scholars and, often, the general public.

The revisions in this new edition incorporate recent scholarship and data that address such enduring questions, as well as new concerns raised by the role of digital platforms, the impact of misinformation online, the role of media during our recent pandemic, and more. These revisions include

1. Updates throughout the book of both examples and summaries of recent academic research, such as how news organizations frame social movements, and how global perceptions of life in the United States derived through media may not match reality.

2. A greater emphasis on the role of digital platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and Spotify in producing and consuming media, as well as the economies that surround them.

3. An update of all figures and statistics across the book to reflect the ever-changing features of our media environment.

This new edition of *Media/Society* is marked by the addition of a young new co-author. ("Young" at least by academic standards!) As an undergraduate student studying with Bill Hoynes, Clayton Childress read a much earlier edition of this book, which helped inspire him to focus his professional life on the study of culture and media. Now the author of an award-winning book about the publishing industry, *Under the Cover*, Clayton pursues his passion at the University of Toronto, where he teaches about media, culture, and society. Just as the study of media is enhanced by incorporating both ongoing trends and new developments, we think *Media/Society* has been improved by integrating Clayton's fresh perspective with the enduring framework and structure that have made the book a longtime favorite. We hope you agree.

Acknowledgments

As is the case for practically all media objects, there are many people who have helped make the seventh edition of this book possible. For this edition we are especially grateful to Jordan Kondo and Maleeha Iqbal. We are also grateful to Udbhav Agarwal, Kassia Arbabi, Henry Bartlett, Johanna Buchignani, Matthew Dillard, Dave Gray, David Hurley, Marilyn Kennepohl, Caroline Lee, Kristin Monroe, Corrina Regnier, Mollie Sandberg, Jacinthe Sasson-Yenor, Heather Tomlins, and Kate Wood for their research assistance over the years. Thanks to Stefania Milan for her contributions to the fourth edition. Thanks to the folks at Virginia Commonwealth University's Academic Learning Transformation Lab (ALT Lab), especially Tom Woodward, for provocative discussions about the promise— not just the perils—of the internet. Thank you to Pine Forge founder Steve Rutter for his assistance and encouragement on the first two editions of the book. We appreciate the support and assistance of the staff at SAGE as we prepared this new edition. We are grateful to the many SAGE and Pine Forge reviewers, who have provided very helpful comments on previous editions of *Media/Society*.

I

Introduction

Chapter 1 serves as an introduction and overview of the book. We note the central role media play in our lives and present a model for understanding the media that helps organize the book. This framework highlights the push-pull relationships between elements of the media system—the industry, users, content, and technology—all of which are embedded in a larger social context. Understanding these elements and how they interact is crucial for making sense of enduring questions about the media in any era.

Manan Vatsyayana/Contributor/Getty Images

Media/Society in a Digital World
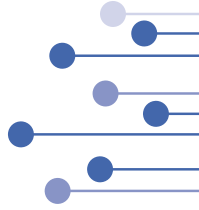
In the 21st century, we routinely navigate through a dense media environment that is unprecedented in human history. Our everyday lives are saturated with words, pictures, videos, and sounds that we access through phones, tablets, laptops, televisions, streaming devices, radios, game consoles, books, newspapers, magazines, movie theaters, and more. Not only are we audiences for this vast sea of media content, but sometimes we also help circulate and even create some of it through our social media posts, "likes," tweets, texts, video clips, online reviews, comments, and other activities. Yet for most of us, all of this is utterly unremarkable. We're so comfortable with media that we mostly take them for granted. They are like the air we breathe, ever present yet rarely considered.

In extraordinary times, such as during the global COVID-19 pandemic, media play an even more important role in our lives. In March 2020, the early days of the pandemic, the percentage of time people in the United States spent online via mobile devices accessing information about current events and global news more than doubled compared to the previous year. The amount of time people spent watching television, gaming, and using other media also skyrocketed because they stayed at home more due to public health restrictions (Nielsen 2020a).

This book asks you to step back and seriously reflect on important questions about the media environment in which we live, whether during routine or extraordinary times. It invites you to better understand your everyday media activities by placing them in a broader social, economic, and political context. In this book, we don't lecture about the "evils" of media, nor do we get caught up in the hype about the latest wonders of our digital age. Instead, we ask enduring questions about how the media work and why this matters:

Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, you will be able to

- **LO 1.1:** Describe the prevalence of radio, television, and devices in today's society

- **LO 1.2:** Compare the characteristics of interpersonal and "mass" communication, and describe how the development of the internet has complicated these models of communication

- **LO 1.3:** Outline the broader sociological perspective— specifically the concepts of structure and agency— that informs media and communication systems

- **LO 1.4:** Identify and explain how the four core components of the media model interact with each other and the social world

- **LO 1.5:** Document some of the push-pull dynamics involved in the civil rights struggles of the mid-20th century and the ongoing Black Lives Matters movement of recent years

- How have media technologies changed the way media operate?

- What can we learn about today's media by revisiting media from years past?

- How do companies like Google and Facebook shape what we see—and don't see?

- How are traditional media companies—in print, radio, television, film—still central to our media experiences?

- Why are some images and ideas so prevalent in the media, while others are marginalized?

- How do governments regulate media, and how does that affect media's operation?

- How does social inequality influence both what we see in the media and how we use media?

- How has the internet transformed politics and journalism?

- What is the significance of the ever-increasing globalization of media?

- What impact are media having on our society and on our world?

These questions and others like them are not simple to answer. Indeed, one of the arguments in this book is that popular answers to such questions often overlook the more complicated dynamics that characterize the media process. But these tough questions raise important issues with which we need to grapple if we are to understand the media and their important place in our society.

The Importance of Media

To realize the significance of media in our lives, consider all the media devices that surround us (see Figure 1.1):

- Radio is a nearly universal presence in U.S. households and automobiles, reaching 91 percent of adults in any given week, more than any other media platform (Nielsen 2020b).

- Television is in almost all homes, with 86.6 percent of TV households paying for access—either through traditional cable (72.7%), broadband only (8.6%), or a virtual multichannel video programming distributor

Figure 1.1   U.S. Adoption Rates of Select Media, 2019–2020

Households with . . .[1]

Category	Percentage
Radio	91%
Any TV	90%
TV by cable	68.6%
TV by satellite	30%
TV by fiber optic	8%
Virtual multichannel video programming distributor	7.7%
Broadcast TV only	13.4%
Broadband video only	10.3%
DVD/Blu-Ray player	57%
DVR	52%
Video game console	40%
Multimedia device (Roku, etc.)	46%

Adults (18+) with . . .[2]

Category	Percentage
Any cell phone	96%
Smartphone	81%
Desktop/laptop computer	74%
Tablet	52%
Home broadband access	73%

Sources: [1]Nielsen (2020b); [2]Pew Research Center (2019b).

(vMVPD) such as Sling or YouTube TV (5.4%)—while 13.4 percent rely on free, over-the-air broadcast television. Many TV households also have additional television-related electronic devices including DVD/Blu-Ray players (57%), DVRs (52%), video game consoles (40%), and internet-connected devices that enable streaming (48%) such as Roku, Amazon Fire TV, or Google Chromecast (Nielsen 2020b).

- Devices that can connect to the internet are available to most—although not all—Americans. About 96 percent of adults have a cell phone of

some sort; 81 percent have a smartphone (Pew Research Center 2019b). Nearly three-quarters (74%) of U.S. adults have a desktop or laptop computer, and 54 percent have a tablet. Seventy-three percent of adults have broadband internet access at home (Pew Research Center 2019b). Teens, too, use media-related technology, sometimes at a higher rate than adults. For example, 95 percent of U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 have access to a smartphone at home, and about 9 out of 10 (88%) of them have access to a desktop or laptop computer (Pew Research Center 2018).

On average, U.S. adults spend 12 hours and 21 minutes per day using a variety of media—amounting to more than 50 percent of their day (Nielsen 2020b).

As users embrace new technology, they continually change the landscape of media equipment. For example, the proliferation of smartphones led to the decline of telephone landlines. More than 9 out 10 U.S. households once had a landline; by 2019, only about 40 percent of adults and 30 percent of children lived in a household with a landline (Blumberg and Luke 2020). The growth of "connected televisions" (TVs with internet access) and video streaming services led to a steady increase in "cord-cutters," people who do not subscribe to traditional pay TV via cable, satellite, or fiber optics (Dawson 2017). Non-linear television is becoming increasingly prominent in U.S. households as Amazon Prime, Disney+, HBO Max, Hulu, Netflix, Peacock, CBS All Access, and so on provide a catalogue of film and television options to audiences. Voice-activated "smart speakers," such as Amazon's Echo devices and Google Home, are mostly used now for music streaming and their digital assistants (Consumer Intelligence Research Partners 2017). Increasingly, though, such devices will likely be the household hub for the "internet of things" (IoT)—the network of internet-connected objects that enables machine-to-machine (M2M) communication—that will link media devices with each other and with non-media gadgets, altering the landscape again.

All of these media devices are an indicator of the enormous amount of time Americans spend watching, listening to, reading, or otherwise using various forms of media. For example, Nielsen (a firm that measures media audiences) estimates that, on average, Americans spend about 6 hours a day watching television or video, including live TV (3:43), recorded programs (:33), streaming via multimedia devices (1:06), and video on a computer, tablet, or smartphone (:34). Obviously, people are often doing other things while the TV is on—cooking meals, getting ready for work, and so on. Still, over the course of a year that amounts to more than 90 days of TV exposure! Those numbers vary by age; older Americans watch more than double the amount of television that young adults do (see Figure 1.2). (That's just one of the ways that media use varies by social grouping.) With vast exposure to media at all ages, it can be argued that the media are the dominant social institution in contemporary society, supplanting the influence of older institutions, such as schools, religion, and sometimes even the family.

With the pervasive presence of media throughout our lives, our media and our society are fused: media/society. If that seems like a convenient overstatement

Figure 1.2 Daily Time Spent with Select Media by Age Group in Hours and Minutes, United States, 2017–2018
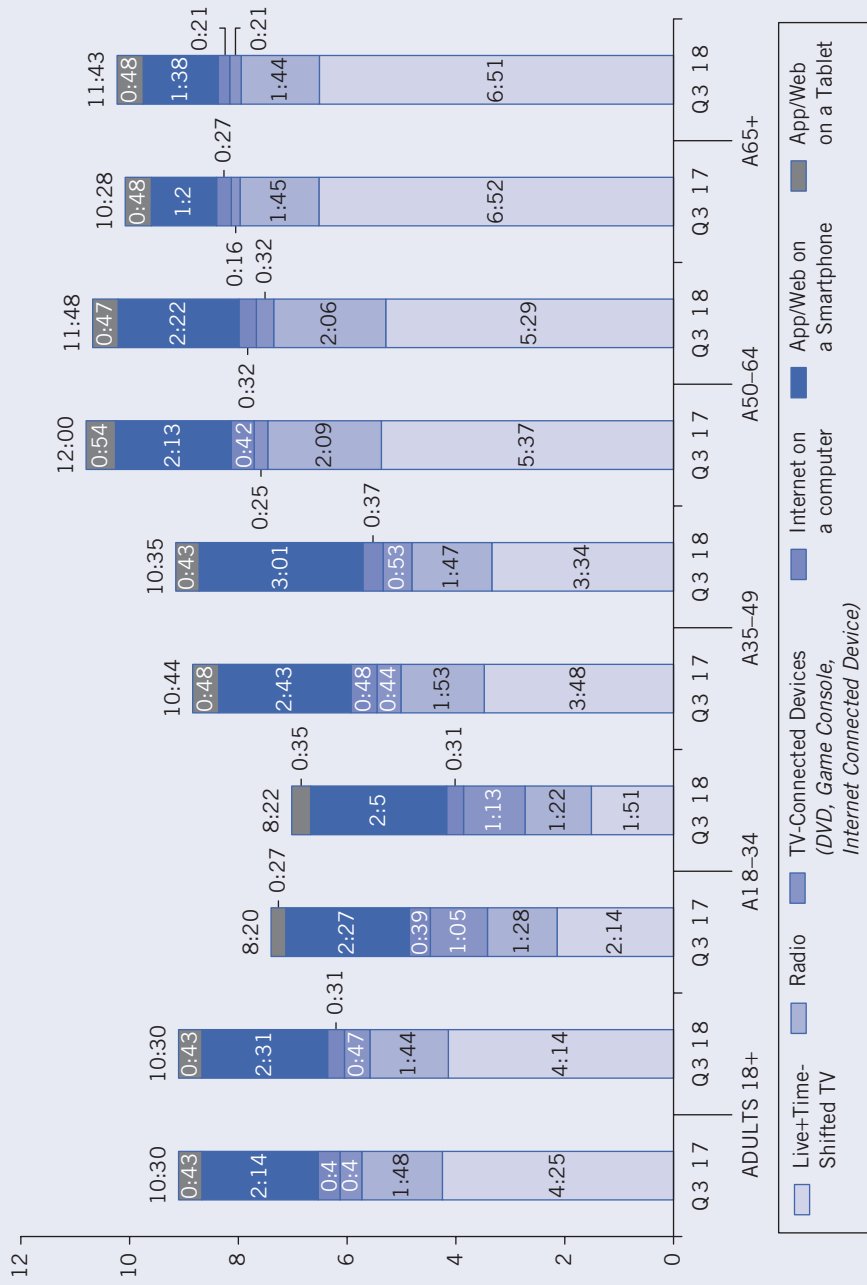
Photo 1.1
We live in a media/society. Media are so central to our daily lives that we often use more than one form at a time. Multitasking is common, and media devices—many of them portable—are deeply integrated into social life.

from the authors of a textbook titled *Media/Society*, then consider this simple thought experiment: Envision life *without* media. Imagine that you wake up tomorrow in a sort of parallel universe where everything is the same except that media do not exist: no smartphones, internet, or social media; no videos, shows, or movies; no recorded music or video games; no books, magazines, or newspapers.

If the media disappeared, nothing else would be the same. Our entertainment would be different. We would not watch sports on TV, game with our friends, or binge new shows to keep up to date and be part of the conversation. We would not use our phones to text or call friends. We would not post pictures or updates about ourselves—or look at others' posts—on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or other social media sites. Our understanding of politics and the world around us would be vastly different because we would not have websites, newspapers, radio, television, and books to explain what is happening in our world. Indeed, our world would be much "smaller" because we would know little beyond our direct experience. It would also be much "slower" because the pace of information reaching us would be greatly decreased. Even our perceptions of ourselves would be different because we would not have social media posts, television characters, and advertising images to compare ourselves against. For example, we might not concern ourselves so much with the latest fashions and celebrities if ads and social media posts did not imply that we *should* be concerned with such things.

With no media, we would have a great deal of time on our hands, and like earlier generations, we would probably spend much of it interacting with other people face-to-face. We might entertain ourselves by playing musical instruments or games. We might attend meetings and lectures or discuss politics and current events to learn what was going on. We might take up hobbies or learn new skills to pass the time. Our social lives—how and with whom we interact—would change radically in the absence of media. We would likely develop more intense local relationships while losing touch with people who are physically farther away.

Of course, changes would reach well beyond our personal lives. The behavior of politicians, business executives, and leaders in other fields would change without media. Presidents wouldn't tweet, campaign ads wouldn't exist, and government would operate differently. Without advertising, business would be fundamentally different. Education, religion, and every other social institution would also be different without media, as would social movements and citizens' organizations. Our point is not that the world would be objectively better or worse without

media. This isn't that type of book. Our point is that a world without media would be almost unrecognizably different.

So, yes, our media and society *are* intertwined and fused together in ways that make it difficult to imagine their ever being separated. In studying media, we are examining a central feature of our society and our daily lives. But before we go any further in our discussion, let's consider a question that is not as simple as it seems: What are "the media"?

Models of Communication Media

What are the media? Answering that seemingly simple question has gotten more complicated in recent years as media have evolved. But let's try to clarify some terms and their significance by reviewing some basic communication models (McQuail and Windahl 1993).

Interpersonal and "Mass" Communication

The word *media* is the plural of medium. It is derived from the Latin word *medius*, which means middle. Communication media are the different technological processes that facilitate communication between (and are in the middle of) the sender of a message and the receiver of that message (Figure 1.3). Print, telephone, radio, over the air and cable television broadcasting, film, and the internet are among the many types of media that exist.

This basic communication process applies to you talking on a cell phone to a friend. It also applies to, say, a radio station broadcasting a program to listeners. But there are crucial differences between these two types of communication. Your phone call is a one-to-one *interpersonal communication*; you are contacting a single person that is likely known to you. By contrast, radio is a one-to-many form of *mass communication*; a station uses airwaves to send a radio signal to an unknown and potentially mass audience (see Figure 1.4). Various mass media involve a known sender and generally anonymous receivers. For example, readers typically know the author of the book they are reading, but authors clearly cannot know who, exactly, is reading their book. When we watch a television program or go to the movies, the names of the producer, director, and actors are prominently displayed, whereas the moviegoers and television audiences are unknown to the creators.

Figure 1.3   Basic Communication Media Model

All mediated communication involves a sender, message, medium, and receiver. The different technologies that make up the medium are what result in different communication experiences.

Sender → Message → Medium → Receiver