

Media Today, 6th Edition

Chapter Recaps & Study Guide

Chapter 1: Understanding Mass Media, Convergence, and the Importance of Media Literacy

Chapter 1 sets the foundation for the rest of the book by differentiating mass communication from other types of communication, explaining the importance of convergence, and offering the tools you need to become media literate.

Chapter Objectives:

1. Discuss what mass media convergence means and why it is important.
2. Explain the differences between interpersonal communication and mass communication.
3. Explain why an unorthodox definition of mass communication makes the term especially relevant in today's media environment.
4. Explain the meaning and importance of culture's relationship with the mass media.
5. Analyze the ways in which the mass media affect our everyday lives.
6. Explain what the term "media literacy" means.
7. List the key principles involved in becoming media literate.

Introducing Media Convergence

- Media are means of delivering messages to us. In the past, messages were delivered through a particular medium, such as a vinyl record or a DVD. Accessing that content required a device designed to retrieve the content from that medium, such as a record or DVD player. Media convergence happens when the content of the messages is no longer tied to a particular medium and instead is rendered into a digital file. The digital format therefore requires no specific device to retrieve it. Music, for example, traditionally was retrieved via records, cassette tapes, and CDs. Digital music, however, allows access to songs through any number of devices, including cell phones, tablets, and computers. (3-4)

- This idea of convergence is driving the changes in media industries and in their audiences. These ideas will be developed in more depth throughout the book. (4)

Introducing Mass Communication

- The idea of a mass audience appears problematic in light of audience fragmentation, which is dividing audiences into smaller and smaller groups. (See Figure 1.1 on p. 5)
- The industrial nature of the mass communication process distinguishes it from other forms of communication, and refers to the ways in which industries create mass messages in order to reach anonymous mass audiences simultaneously. (6)
- Mass communication is one of several types of communication, including interpersonal communication and mediated interpersonal communication. (6) Figure 1.2 shows how the process works. (8)
 - The word “communication” refers to people interacting in ways that at least one of the parties understands as messages. (6)
 - A message is a collection of symbols such as words or signs used intentionally to convey meaning. (6)
 - The source is the originator of the message. (8-10)
 - Encoding is the process by which the source translates thoughts and ideas so that they can be perceived by the human senses—in this case, primarily sight and sound, though encoding may also involve smell, taste, and touch. (8-10)
 - The transmitter performs the physical activity of actually spreading—distributing—the message. (8-10)
 - Channels are the pathways through which the transmitter sends all features of the message, whether they involve sight, sound, smell, taste, or touch. (8-10)
 - Decoding is the reverse of the encoding process—it is the process by which the receiver translates the source’s thoughts and ideas to assign them meaning. (8-10)
 - The receiver is the person or organization that gets the message. (8-10)

- Feedback occurs when the receiver responds to the message with what the sender perceives as another message. (8-10)
- Noise is any element that interferes with the delivery of the message. (9)
- One way to understand the various kinds of communication is to compare interpersonal communication, mediated interpersonal communication, and mass communication. (Table 1.1, p. 9)
- Mass communication is the industrialized production and wide-scale distribution of messages through technological devices. (9) Figure 1.3 offers a model of mass communication. (10)
 - Mass media are the technological vehicles through which mass communication takes place. (9)
 - Mass media outlets send out messages via mass media. (10)
 - Mass media firms create commodities for sale in a high-risk marketplace and use research and development strategies to innovate and reduce risk as much as possible. (10-11)

Mass Media and Convergence

- An analog is a physical reproduction of content, such as a cassette tape holding a song. Digital turns the song into binary digits, and in turn allows the song to appear on CD. Convergence allows the songs, or digital content, to be accessed by different media. (11-13).

Mass Media, Culture, and Society

- How people use the mass media:
 - Enjoyment refers to the personal gratification an individual gets from the media. Social currency refers to the media content people use as part of their everyday discussions. (13)
 - Companionship, including parasocial interaction, which refers to the mental connections some people develop with celebrities. (14)
 - Surveillance - through media surveillance, individuals learn about the world beyond their immediate neighborhood. (15)
 - Interpretation - media are the source of explanations for what happens in the world. (15)

- Via the multiple uses of media content, particularly those that enable interactivity, which refers to the manipulation and response of media, particularly through smart phone apps. (16)
- Mass communication has many impacts on culture and society. (16)
 - Culture refers to the ways of life that people pass on to other members of society. (16)
 - Society refers to the larger groups that are bound by culture. (16)
 - Subcultures have traits and practices that might seem odd to the mainstream culture, but are generally not threatening. (17)
- Mass media present ideas of the culture in three broad and related ways:
 - The mass media identify and discuss codes of acceptable behavior within the society and how to talk about them. (18)
 - The mass media tell people what and who count in our world, and why. (18)
 - The mass media help people to understand themselves and their connection with—or disconnection from—others. (18)
- Criticisms of mass media's relation to culture include:
 - The use of stereotypes reinforces prejudices and political ideologies that reflect the beliefs of those who have the most power in culture. (19)
 - Tremendous mass media contributions to culture diminish cultural quality. (19-20)
 - The mass media also potentially have massive influence over audiences, encouraging political and economic manipulation. (19)
 - Some argue that these criticisms overlook how audience members respond to different media in different ways, such as through rejecting, modifying, or otherwise interpreting messages. (19)

Media Literacy

- Media literacy is the means to examine seriously media's role in your life.

- Six characteristics of a media literate person (20):
 - Knowledgeable about the influences that guide media organizations
 - Up-to-date on media-related political issues
 - Sensitive to media content as a means of learning about culture
 - Sensitive to the ethical dimensions of media activities
 - Knowledgeable about scholarship regarding media effects
 - Able to enjoy media materials in a sophisticated way
- Six principles of Media Literacy (21-23):
 - The media construct our individual realities.
 - Media are influenced by industrial pressures.
 - Media are influenced by political pressures.
 - Media are influenced by format.
 - Audiences are active recipients of the media.
 - Media tell us about who we are as a society.

Media Literacy Tools (See Figure 1.4 on page 21; also 23-25)

- Consider Authorship – *Who created this message, and why are they sending it?*
- Evaluate the Audience – *Who are the intended targets of these media materials? How might people understand these materials similarly and differently?*
- Determine the Institutional Purpose – *Why is the content being sent?*
- Analyze the Content – *What values, lifestyles, and points of view are represented in (or omitted from) this message?*
- Identify the Creative Techniques – *What creative techniques are being used to attract my attention?*

Benefits/Social Issues Raised by a Media Literate Perspective (25)

Media literacy allows for a more sophisticated reading into the power of media industries, processes, and impact on culture. Media literacy allows for raising questions about:

- Media conglomerate control of media channels
- Increasing portrayals of sex and violence
- Consequences of audience segmentation
- Privacy
- Global media, cultural values, and free speech