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Understanding Mass Communication

***A Liberal Arts
Perspective***

Sixth Edition



UNDERSTANDING MASS COMMUNICATION



A Liberal Arts Perspective

SIXTH EDITION

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P R E F A C E

This sixth edition of *Understanding Mass Communication* has been significantly changed from previous editions. New chapters have been added, existing ones have been extensively modified, and those retained from the fifth edition have been updated in terms of their data about the media and their references to published works. Important new features have been added to the book to make it easier for the student to understand the nature and functions of contemporary mass media and the influences that they have on us as individuals and as a society.

Focus of the Book

Understanding Mass Communication amply covers the nuts and bolts of daily media content and how it is processed and delivered to a variety of audiences who selectively attend. Considerable attention is given to the ways in which professional communicators function within each media setting. However, *Understanding Mass Communication* differs from many of its competitors in that it is organized around three broad questions that go well beyond what a beginner's survey needs to include. These questions place each of the media within a broad *liberal arts perspective*. That perspective draws on concepts and conclusions derived from many disciplines that have helped us to understand the process and effects of mass communications. The three broad questions to which the book is addressed are

1. *How have our American mass media come to be organized in the way that they have?* What demographic, economic, political, and technological factors have shaped our nation's privately owned, profit-oriented mass media in such a way that they attract wide audiences mainly by presenting popular culture and entertainment?
2. *How do American mass media actually function?* How do professional communicators in each of the major media decide on the content that they select, modify it, and present it in various ways, using a variety of technologies so as to reach specific kinds of audiences?
3. *What effect does this flow of information from media to audiences have on us, both individually and collectively?* Does it have only minor influences on our thoughts and behavior as individuals and modify our culture and society in only limited ways? Or, is mass communication a powerful force that shapes both individual conduct and our nation's history?

New to the Sixth Edition

This edition of *Understanding Mass Communication* has new chapters and distinctive features that are not found in earlier versions of this text or in similar

books. Specifically, two completely new chapters have been added. Chapter 8, "The New Media," is organized around the great changes and convergences in our media system brought on by the digital transition, the widespread adoption of computers by Americans, and the rapid growth of the Internet with its World Wide Web. Chapter 14, "International Media," discusses the global reach of contemporary media and the changes that they bring throughout the world.

An important feature retained and expanded from the fifth edition is "Explaining Media Effects." These boxed inserts provide brief introductions to sixteen different *theories of mass communication*. Each is stated in the form of five basic propositions. The explanation and background of each theory is presented at a level that can be readily understood by beginning students. These theories address a question that such students often ask but to which they seldom receive clear answers: namely, how do mass media function and how does their content influence us, both as individuals and as a society? The theories show students that, as a result of scholarly analyses and massive amounts of research, we can now explain many aspects of how the media process and deliver content, how people respond to what the media provide, and what kinds of influences the media have on them. Each theory deals with a separate kind of process or effect. Each is also integrated into relevant issues discussed in the body of the text.

An important feature called "Trends in Media Use" has been retained and upgraded. Each trend includes a brief explanation to aid in interpretation of the charted numerical information. These trends and their accompanying charts show how Americans have increasingly or decreasingly used a particular medium over the years. The overall lesson presented by these materials is that we live in a complex and ever-changing media environment and that it is very unlikely that the specific technologies we have in our homes at present will be the same as those we will use in the future.

Chapter summaries are provided at the end of each chapter in the form of bulleted lists. These serve as aids to students in identifying the major points made.

The sixth edition continues to include a series of boxed inserts entitled "Media and the Liberal Arts." These brief essays explain significant issues that link the media to the traditional arts, sciences, and humanities. The overall lesson provided by this feature is that mass communication is not just a professional field to be studied only by those who will enter its labor force to pursue occupational careers. It is a field whose development and contemporary issues are intimately linked to major aspects of American history and closely intertwined with a host of topics that are central to the classical and liberal traditions at the heart of American higher education.

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To The Student

This book has been prepared by its two authors as a tool for you. Our goal has been to help you understand the increasingly important part played by mass communications in our society as part of your personal intellectual development. We sincerely hope that you find the book interesting and that it serves you well. If it does not, we will have to share part of the blame. For that reason, if you find any parts of this book to be difficult to understand, if we have failed to touch on matters that you feel are important, or if we have dwelled too long on issues that do not deserve such extensive treatment, we would like to hear from you. In fact, we would be delighted if you would offer any suggestions as to how we can make this book better. To that end, after you have finished any

chapter or the whole book, we invite you to write or send us an e-mail message and offer any kind of criticism or comments that you feel are important. You will have our full attention!

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▼ B R I E F C O N T E N T S

PREFACE xv

Chapter 1 Introduction: The Nature of Mass Communication 1

PART ONE ▼ *Print Media*

Chapter 2 Books: The Oldest Mass Medium 30

Chapter 3 Newspapers: The First Medium for the Mass Society 60

Chapter 4 Magazines: Voices for Many Interests 97

PART TWO ▼ *Audio, Visual, Multimedia*

Chapter 5 Film: Moving Pictures as a Medium 128

Chapter 6 Radio: The First Broadcast Medium 162

Chapter 7 Television: The Most Popular Medium 190

Chapter 8 The New Media: Computers and Communication 217

PART THREE ▼ *Media Industries and Audiences*

Chapter 9 News: The Information Function of the Press 236

Chapter 10 Popular Culture: Entertainment, Sports, and Music 279

Chapter 11 Advertising: Using the Media in the Marketplace 307

Chapter 12 Public Relations: Influencing Images and Actions 340

Chapter 13 The Audience: Demographics of the American Audience 371

Chapter 14 International Media: Communication Across Borders 409

PART FOUR ▼ *Media Influences and Issues*

Chapter 15 Limited Effects: Short-Term Media Influences on Individuals 426

Chapter 16 Powerful Effects: Media Influences on Society and Culture 458

Chapter 17 Controls: Policies, Politics, and the Media 490

Chapter 18 Ethics: Assessing the Behavior of the Media 525

NOTES AND REFERENCES 549

GLOSSARY 564

INDEX 577



▼ CONTENTS

PREFACE xv

▼ CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION: THE NATURE OF MASS COMMUNICATION 1

Mass Communication in Contemporary Society 2

Explaining Media Effects: Media Information Dependency Theory 3

Fundamentals of Human Communication 5

The Origins of Language 6 ▼ The Use of Verbal and Nonverbal Symbols 7
Human Communication: A Basic Linear Model 8 ▼ Communicating Complex
Messages 9 ▼ Communicating Accurately 10

The Mass Communication Process 12

Media and the Liberal Arts: Consequences of the First Great Communications Revolution 14
The Linear Nature of Mass Communication 15 ▼ Which Media Are Mass Media? 22

Comparing Face-to-Face and Mass Communication 23

The Consequences of Using Any Medium 23 ▼ The Consequences of Large,
Diverse Audiences 25

Chapter Review 28



PART ONE ▼ Print Media 29

▼ CHAPTER 2 BOOKS: THE OLDEST MASS MEDIUM 30

The Transition to Writing 32

From Glyphs to Alphabets 34 ▼ Portable Media 37

The Development of Books 37

The Need for Lengthy Documents 38 ▼ Copying Books by Hand 38

The Invention and Spread of the Printing Press 40

Gutenberg's Remarkable Machine 41 ▼ The Print Revolution 43 ▼ Book Publishing
in North America 44

Books as a Contemporary Medium 46

The Unique Character of Books 46 ▼ The Book Publishing Industry 46
Trends in Media Use 47

The Publishing Process 49

Types of Publishers and Types of Books 50 ▼ From Manuscript to Finished Book 51
The Publisher as Entrepreneur 53 ▼ The Future of Books 56

Chapter Review 58



PART TWO ▼ *Audio, Visual, and Multimedia* 127

▼ CHAPTER 5 FILM: MOVING PICTURES AS A MEDIUM 128

Magic Shadows on the Wall 129

Developing the Technology 130 ▼ The Movies Become a Medium 133

Media and the Liberal Arts: Literary Classics and the Movies 136

Trends in Media Use 138

Film as a Contemporary Medium 139

The Functions of Films 141 ▼ The Development of Themes and Styles 141

The Content of American Films 142

The Movie Industry 146

The Filmmakers 146 ▼ The Movie Audience 149

Cleaning Up the Movies 152

Sex and the Movies 152 ▼ Violence and Vulgarity 154

Explaining Media Effects: The Creeping Cycle of Desensitization Theory 156

Censorship and Politics 157

Evaluating Films: Criticism and Awards 158

The Critics 158 ▼ The Awards 159

Chapter Review 161

▼ CHAPTER 6 RADIO: THE FIRST BROADCAST MEDIUM 162

The Growth of Broadcasting Technology 164

Communicating over a Wire 165 ▼ Communicating with Radio Waves 167

The Development of Radio as a Mass Medium 170

The Period of Transition 170 ▼ Establishing the Economic Base of the New Medium 175

Trends in Media Use 177

Explaining Media Effects: Uses and Gratifications Theory 178

The Golden Age of Radio 178

Radio During the Great Depression 180 ▼ Radio During World War II 182

Radio and the Challenge of Television 183

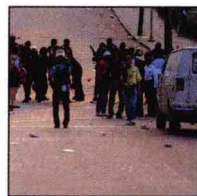
Radio as a Contemporary Medium 184

Radio's Role in the Media Mix 185

Media and the Liberal Arts: Talk Radio and the American Public 186

The Future of Radio 188

Chapter Review 189



▼ CHAPTER 3 NEWSPAPERS: THE FIRST MEDIUM FOR THE MASS SOCIETY 60

The Development of Newspapers 62

The First Newspapers 62 ▼ The Press in the American Colonies 64 ▼ Establishing Traditions in American Journalism 64 ▼ Characteristics of the Colonial Press 66

Newspapers for the Common People 67

The Emergence of the Penny Press 68 ▼ The Impact of Society on the Growth of Newspapers 70 ▼ The Era of Yellow Journalism 73

Trends That Have Shaped Today's Newspapers 74

Newspapers as Cultural Innovation 74

Explaining Media Effects: Adoption of Innovation Theory 75

Trends in Media Use 76

Trends in Media Use 77

The Growth of Wire Services 78 ▼ The Development and Role of Syndicates 79
Changing Patterns of Ownership 81 ▼ New Roles for Computers 83

The Newspaper as a Contemporary Medium 84

Types of Newspapers 84 ▼ Changing Functions and Content 87 ▼ Newspapers' Dual Identity and Built-in Conflict of Interest 89 ▼ How Newspaper Work Is Organized 90

The Future of the Newspaper 92

Chapter Review 95

▼ CHAPTER 4 MAGAZINES: VOICES FOR MANY INTERESTS 97

The First Magazines 99

The Development of American Magazines 100

Barriers to Development in the Eighteenth Century 100 ▼ Catalysts for Development in the Nineteenth Century 103 ▼ American Magazine Characteristics in the Nineteenth Century 107

Media and the Liberal Arts: Early Magazines as Media of Literary Expression 108

Trends in Media Use 110

Magazines in the First Half of the Twentieth Century 110

The Muckrakers: Magazines as a Force for Social Reform 111 ▼ The Challenge of Television 113 ▼ The Growth of Specialty Magazines 115

The Magazine as a Contemporary Medium 116

The Magazine as an Industry 117 ▼ The Influence and Importance of Magazines 122

The Future of Magazines 124

Chapter Review 125



▼ CHAPTER 7 TELEVISION: THE MOST POPULAR MEDIUM 190

The Birth of Television 192

Developing an Electronic System 193 ▼ The Early Broadcasts 194

The Period of Rapid Adoption 195

The Big Freeze 196 ▼ Becoming a Nation of Television Viewers 196 ▼ The Coming of Color 197

Trends in Media Use 197

Trends in Media Use 198

Television's Golden Ages 198

Alternatives to Broadcast Television 200

The Spread of Cable Systems 200 ▼ The Video Cassette Recorder 202

Trends in Media Use 202

Trends in Media Use 204

Direct Broadcast Satellite 205 ▼ Video via the Internet 206

Television as a Contemporary Medium 208

The Economics of Competing Systems 208 ▼ The Television Industry in Transition 211

The Future of Television 213

Chapter Review 216

▼ CHAPTER 8 THE NEW MEDIA: COMPUTERS AND COMMUNICATION 217

Factors Influencing the New Media 218

Convergence 219 ▼ The Internet and the World Wide Web 220 ▼ Convergence in Three Dimensions 222

Understanding Differences: Three Domains 224

Winners and Losers in the New Media 226

On-line Interactive Services 226

Media and the Liberal Arts: Electronic Democracy Through News Groups and Listserves 227

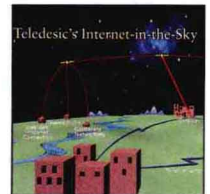
The Most Popular News Web Sites 228

The Information Superhighway 229

The Superhighway and Media Industries 230 ▼ Reflecting on New Media 231

The Future of New Media 232

Chapter Review 233



PART THREE ▼ *Media Industries and Audiences* 235

▼ CHAPTER 9 NEWS: THE INFORMATION FUNCTION OF THE PRESS 236

The News Process in Earlier Societies 238

Explaining Media Effects: The Theory of the Two-Step Flow of Communication 240

Categories for Surveillance 240

Territories, Topics, and Organizations 240 ▼ Time as a Category 242 ▼ Hard Versus Soft News 243

How News Facts Get Distorted 243

Media and the Liberal Arts: The Press as a Representative of the Public 244

Problems of Selective Perception 245 ▼ Compounded Selectivity 247 ▼ "Idealized" News Releases 248 ▼ Limitations of Public Documents 248

Encoding Strategies for Packaging the News 249

Traditional News Values 250

Explaining Media Effects: Lippmann's News Distortion Theory of the Press 251

Story Formats 253 ▼ Alternative Journalistic Styles 254 ▼ Social and Cultural Influences on Decisions in News Organizations 259

Explaining Media Effects: Gatekeeping Theory 261

Contrasting Conceptions of the Nature and Functions of News 263

The Market Approach: News as a Product to Sell 263 ▼ The Adversarial Approach: Watchdogs of the Public Interest 265

The Final Step: The Agenda-Setting Function of the Press 269

Transmitting the News: Unique Features of the Different Media 271

Explaining Media Effects: The Agenda-Setting Theory of the Press 272

The News Audience: Selection, Comprehension, and Recall 274

How Closely Do People Follow the News? 274 ▼ The Influence of Personal and Social Characteristics 276

Chapter Review 278

▼ CHAPTER 10 POPULAR CULTURE: ENTERTAINMENT, SPORTS, AND MUSIC 279

The Nature and Importance of Popular Culture 281

The Media and Popular Culture 281 ▼ A Definition 282 ▼ Why Studying Popular Culture Is Important 283

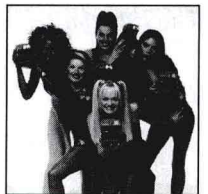
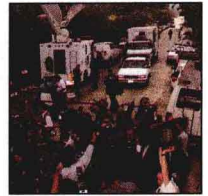
Media and the Liberal Arts: The Strange, Sad Case of Amy Fisher as Popular Culture 285

Popular Culture as Entertainment 288

Media Influences on Consumer Art 289

Explaining Media Effects: The Theory of Origins and Functions of Popular Culture 293

Taste Publics as Markets for Media Presentations 295 ▼ Implications of Popular Culture Theory 298



The Feature Syndicates as Sources for Popular Culture 298

What the Syndicates Provide 299 ▼ How the Syndicates Work 300 ▼ The Influence of Syndicates 301

Sports as Popular Culture 302**Chapter Review 305****▼ CHAPTER 11 ADVERTISING: USING THE MEDIA IN THE MARKETPLACE 307*****Advertising as Communication 310***

What Is Advertising? 310 ▼ The Content of Advertising 311

Advertising in America: A Brief History 314***The Contemporary Advertising Industry 317***

Advertising Agencies 319 ▼ Media Service Organizations 322 ▼ Advertising Departments 323 ▼ Advertising Media 323

Advertising Research 325

Studying the Effects of Advertising 325 ▼ Consumer and Lifestyle Research 326
An Age of Market Segmentation 327

Criticism and Control of Advertising 328

Economic and Social Criticisms 328

Media and the Liberal Arts: How Advertisers Persuaded Americans to Smoke 330

Children and Advertising 332 ▼ Sources of Control 334

Chapter Review 339**▼ CHAPTER 12 PUBLIC RELATIONS: INFLUENCING IMAGES AND ACTIONS 340*****The Development of Public Relations 342***

Birth of the Public Relations Agency 343 ▼ Defining Public Relations Today 344
Public Relations Versus Advertising 346

Public Relations Settings and Activities 347

Typical Tasks and Work Assignments 349 ▼ Public Relations Campaigns 351

Media and the Liberal Arts: Shaping a Sympathetic Image of Kuwait During the Gulf War 352

Managing Election Campaigns 354

Public Relations and the Media 356

The Agenda-Setting Process 356 ▼ A Relationship of Mutual Dependency 357

Lobbying as Public Relations 357***Public Relations as an Emerging Profession 360***

Public Relations Education 361 ▼ Public Relations Research 362 ▼ Ethical Issues and Criticisms 364

The Future of the Field 366

Computer Technologies 367 ▼ The Video News Release 368

Chapter Review 369

▼ CHAPTER 13 THE AUDIENCE: DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE AMERICAN AUDIENCE 371

Explaining Media Effects: The Selective and Limited Influences Theory 374

The Changing American Population 374

A History of Rapid Growth 375 ▼ Immigration and Cultural Diversity 377
Internal Population Movements 381 ▼ Implications for Mass Communication 381

Contemporary Sources of Diversity 383

Age 383 ▼ Gender 385 ▼ Education 386 ▼ Income 387 ▼ Implications for Mass Communication 388

The Changing American Family 389

Trends in Family Size 390 ▼ Relationships Between Husbands and Wives 391
Female Participation in the Labor Force 394 ▼ Implications for Mass Communication 394

Assessing Audience Composition and Attention 395

Media and the Liberal Arts: How the Audience Rules in "Adopting" New Technologies 396
Measuring Circulations of Print Media 399 ▼ Assessing Movie Audiences 400
Ratings and the Broadcast Audience 400 ▼ Ratings and Audience Diversity 406

Chapter Review 408



▼ CHAPTER 14 INTERNATIONAL MEDIA: COMMUNICATION ACROSS BORDERS 409

Dimensions of International Communication 410

How World Media Are Organized 411

Changes at the End of the Cold War 412 ▼ Contemporary U.S. Versus European News Models 413 ▼ The Developed Media of Western Europe 413 ▼ Asia's Dynamic and Distinctive Media 415

Developmental Journalism and Information Imbalances 416

Media and the Liberal Arts: American Media Imperialism and Dominance 418

The Elite Press: Influencing the Influential 419

Explaining Media Effects: Cultural Imperialism Theory 420
Influential International Newspapers 421 ▼ Other Newspapers and Magazines with International Reach 421

Covering the Global Village 422

New Media Worldwide 423 ▼ International Media Organizations 424

Chapter Review 424



PART FOUR ▼ *Media Influences and Issues* 425

▼ CHAPTER 15 LIMITED EFFECTS: SHORT-TERM MEDIA INFLUENCES ON INDIVIDUALS 426

Early Evidence Supporting a Belief in Maximum Effects 429

Explaining Media Effects: The “Magic Bullet” Theory 430

Research Begins with the “Magic Bullet” Theory 430

The Payne Fund Studies of Movies and Children 431 ▼ Radio Reports the Invasion from Mars 435



Beyond the Magic Bullet: Selective and Limited Effects 438

The “Why We Fight” Film Experiments During World War II 438 ▼ Effects of the Media in a Presidential Campaign 440

Audience Uses and Gratifications in the Selection of Media Content 445

The Foundation Studies 445

Explaining Media Effects: Uses and Gratifications Theory 446

Assessing a New Medium 447 ▼ Children’s Uses of Television 448

The Issue of Television and Violence 450

The Report to the Surgeon General 450 ▼ The Second Report to the Surgeon General 454

The Bottom Line: The Research Evidence Reveals Only Weak Effects 455

Chapter Review 456

▼ CHAPTER 16 POWERFUL EFFECTS: MEDIA INFLUENCES ON SOCIETY AND CULTURE 458

Theories of Long-Term Influences 460

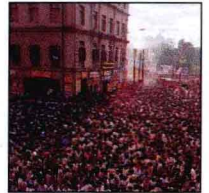
Accumulation Theory: The “Adding Up” of Minimal Effects 460

Media and the Liberal Arts: The Media’s Role in Defining Environmental Issues 464

Adoption of Innovation Theory: The Role of the Media 465

Explaining Media Effects: The Theory of Accumulation of Minimal Effects 466

Implications of Long-Term Theories 468



Socialization Theories: Incidental Lessons on Social Behavior 469

Modeling Theory: Adopting Behavior Portrayed by the Media 470

Explaining Media Effects: Modeling Theory 471

Social Expectations Theory: Learning Group Requirements 472 ▼ Implications of Socialization Theories 474

Explaining Media Effects: Social Expectations Theory 475

Theories of Word-Meaning Relationships 476

Constructing Personal and Shared Understandings 476 ▼ Stereotype Theory: Negative Meanings for Minorities 480

Explaining Media Effects: The Word-Meaning Theory of Media Portrayals 481

Explaining Media Effects: Stereotype Theory 482

The Mentally Ill: A Case Study in Stereotype Theory 484 ▼ Implications of Word-Meaning Relationship Theories 488

Chapter Review 489

▼ CHAPTER 17 CONTROLS: POLICIES, POLITICS, AND THE MEDIA 490

Political Protections: The Constitutional Framework 494

The Historical Legacy 495 ▼ The First Amendment 496 ▼ Technology's Role—From Printing Presses to Cyberspace 498

Protection from Libel 500

Libel Laws and the Media 500 ▼ Multimillion-Dollar Libel Suits 501 ▼ Libel and Congress 503

Trial by Media 503

Moral Values: Obscenity and Pornography 506

The Government's Secrets During National Crises 508

Direct Censorship in Wartime 511 ▼ Challenges to Government Secrecy 512

Protection for Reporters' Sources 514

Political Constraints: The Agents of Control 516

The Courts 516 ▼ The Legislatures 517 ▼ The Executive Branch 518
Regulation and Other Controls 520 ▼ Controls by the Federal Trade Commission 521
Deregulation of Communication 522 ▼ Outside Pressures on the Media 523

Chapter Review 524

▼ CHAPTER 18 ETHICS: ASSESSING THE BEHAVIOR OF THE MEDIA 525

What Is Unethical Is Not Always Illegal 527

Growing Concern Over Media Ethics 529

Special Privileges, Special Responsibilities 534

Beyond the First Amendment 535 ▼ The Long Struggle for Professionalism 536

Media Criticism and Media Ethics 537

A Double Standard 540 ▼ The Link to Individuals and Content 540

Dimensions of Ethics for the Media 541

Accuracy and Fairness 541 ▼ The Behavior of Reporters 542 ▼ Conflict of Interest 543

Alternative Approaches to Ethics 544

Situational Ethics 544 ▼ The Continuing Search 544 ▼ Credibility Studies and Market Research 545

Ethics, Technology, and the Future 545

Chapter Review 548

NOTES AND REFERENCES 549

GLOSSARY 564

INDEX 577

