VIRGINIA NIGHTINGALE



GLOBAL HANDBOOKS IN MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

The
Handbook
of Media
Audiences



The Handbook of Media Audiences

Virginia Nightingale

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The Handbook of Media Audiences

Global Handbooks in Media and Communication Research

Series Editor: Annabelle Sreberny (School of Oriental and African Studies, London)

The Global Handbooks in Media and Communication Research series is co-published by Wiley-Blackwell and the International Association of Media and Communication Research (IAMCR). The series offers definitive, state-of-the-art handbooks that bring a global perspective to their subjects. These volumes are designed to define an intellectual terrain: its historic emergence; its key theoretical paradigms; its transnational evolution; key empirical research and case study exemplars; and possible future directions.

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About the IAMCR

The International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) (http://iamcr.org) was established in Paris in 1957. It is an accredited NGO attached to UNESCO. It is a truly international association, with a membership representing over 80 countries around the world and conferences held in different regions that address the most pressing issues in media and communication research. Its members promote global inclusiveness and excellence within the best traditions of critical research in the field. The current president of the IAMCR is Annabelle Sreberny.

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Series Editor's Preface

Welcome to the Global Handbooks in Media and Communication Research series. This grew out of the idea that the field needed a series of state-of the-art reference works that was truly international. The International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR), with a membership from over 80 countries, is uniquely positioned to offer a series that covers the central concerns of media and communications theory in a global arena.

Each of these substantial books contains newly written essays commissioned from a range of international authors, showcasing the best critical scholarship in the field. Each is pedagogical in the best sense, accessible to students and clear in its approach and presentation. Theoretical chapters map the terrain of an area both historically and conceptually, providing incisive overviews of arguments in the field. The examples of empirical work are drawn from many different countries and regions, so that each volume offers rich material for comparative analysis.

These handbooks are international in the best sense: in scope, authorship, and mindset. They explore a range of approaches and issues across different political and cultural regions, reflecting the global reach of the IAMCR. The aim is to offer scholarship that moves away from simply reproducing Westcentric models and assumptions. The series formulates new models and asks questions that bring communication scholarship into a more comprehensive global conversation.

The IAMCR (http://iamcr.org) was established in Paris in 1957. It is an accredited NGO attached to UNESCO. It is a truly international association, with a membership around the world and conferences held in different regions that address the most pressing issues in media and communication research. Its members promote global inclusiveness and excellence within the best traditions of critical research in the field.

This series supports those goals.

Annabelle Sreberny President of IAMCR and Series Editor London, December 2010

Acknowledgments

In 2007, the International Association of Media and Communication Research and Wiley-Blackwell reached agreement to publish a Global Media and Communication Studies Handbook series. As chair of the IAMCR Audience Section, I was invited to put together a proposal for a *Handbook on Audience Studies*. This book is the result.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the authors who responded so positively and excellently to my request for papers that addressed quite specific aspects of the field of audience studies. Most, but not all, have attended and presented papers at IAMCR conferences. However when commissioning chapters, my priority was to ensure first that as many as possible of the most significant academics studying audiences in 2010 were approached; second, that the diverse concerns that motivate academics to study audiences were included; and, third, that the anthology be able to make a significant impact both by reviewing the past of audience studies and also by providing directions and insights for future research. By presenting a range of perspectives from which audiences have been and are currently being studied, it is hoped that future audience researchers will find inspiration for innovative research designs and strategies. I am sincerely grateful to all the contributing authors for agreeing to participate in the project, and for their patience with the pace of my editing.

I wish to recognize the vision and hard work that Professor Annabelle Sreberny, president of IAMCR 2008–2010, has devoted to securing the agreement with Wiley-Blackwell, and convey my personal thanks that, along with the Political Economy Section, the Audience Section was invited to develop one of the initial proposals. I would also like to acknowledge the support and encouragement of staff from Wiley-Blackwell, particularly Elizabeth Swayze and Margot Morse, who have been more than generous with their time and good advice.

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Introduction

Virginia Nightingale

For most people, the study of audiences consists of little more than the information they read in the media, ironically "as audiences." The most consistently reported audience information is provided by ratings agencies that monitor shifting audience allegiances across the mediascape. Since audience ratings are primarily intended for industry consumption, they are often of limited interest to audiences themselves. So the main source of public information about audiences comes from journalists reporting on media activities that they represent as "dangerous," addictive, or shocking. Today these include cyber bullying, internet "addictions," online "stranger danger," and accessing prohibited content online, whether this is pornographic, political, or revolutionary. Such popular discourses on audiences are counterintuitive in terms of the day-by-day safe encounters with media that most people enjoy, and more importantly they distract us from what is really important about audiences, in particular the ways being an audience is essential to cultural participation, the ways it affects how we understand ourselves (our identity) and our power to control the world around us, and the ways familiarity with media use prepares us to take advantage of technological change as it sweeps through our everyday worlds. These are the types of issues addressed by the international scholars who have contributed to this book.

The contributors to this book hold a complex view of media audiences. They study people being audiences with diverse media technologies. They dissect the details of participation with media, the ways people engage with media content, and the implications they have for the experience of citizenship and public life. They explore how different methods of audience research might be used so that the realities of audience experiences can be better represented to the broader public. And they explore the challenges that particular audiences pose for research. The wealth of experience and knowledge they provide, and the futures they imagine for

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