

# Part I

The Nature and  
History of Mass  
Communication





The marriage of Prince William and Kate Middleton, watched by more than a billion people, is a clear example of mass communication.



# Chapter 1

## communication: mass and other forms

### This chapter will prepare you to:

- recognize the elements of the communication process
- understand the different types of communication settings
- identify the function of gatekeepers
- describe how the Internet has changed mass communication
- explain the various types of mass media convergence
- understand the technological, economic, and social forces that are transforming mass media

**T**his is a book about mass communication. Great, you might say, but what's mass communication? Well, that question is getting more difficult to answer all the time. Consider the following:

- More than a billion people watched on television as Prince William married Kate Middleton in 2011. In the United States, about 23 million people got up before dawn to watch the ceremony, carried by 11 U.S. TV networks. Across the globe, another few hundred million watched it via online streaming over the Internet.
- A teenage girl sends an average of 100 text messages per day.
- *Avatar*, a 2009 film directed by James Cameron, took more than four years to produce, including about a year for a University of Southern California professor to invent a new language spoken by the Na'vi characters in the film. *Avatar* cost around \$300 million to produce and at least another \$100 million to market. As of 2011, more than 130 million people had seen the film, which has grossed more than \$2 billion worldwide at the box office.
- As of 2010, there were more than 150 million blogs on the Internet.
- Rebecca Black is an American teenager whose mother paid a record label a few thousand dollars to produce a music video of Rebecca singing a catchy tune called "Friday." The video was posted on YouTube and as of mid-2011 had received more than 146 million views. (Of the 3.2 million people who rated it on

YouTube, about 90 percent disliked it. Nonetheless, the song made it onto *Billboard* magazine's Hot 100 chart, peaking at number 58.)

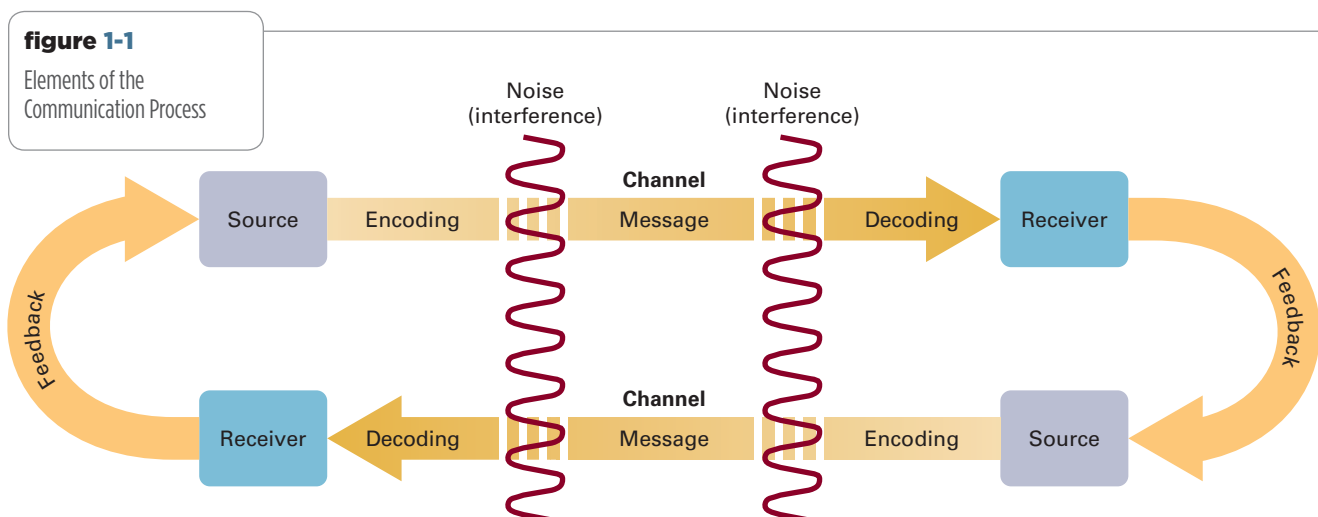
- Facebook reports its members post more than 60 million status updates per day.
- Google (the owner of YouTube) is an American company that receives about 95 percent of its revenue from advertising. Much of that revenue comes from the sponsored links that pop up next to the results of a Google search. (Precise numbers are hard to come by, but Google reports that it handles more than a billion searches a day.)
- In 2010, some 124 million Skype users spent 88.4 billion minutes on Skype-to-Skype phone calls.
- An unsuspecting information specialist in Pakistan unknowingly reported about the raid that killed Osama Bin Laden over his Twitter account. The first credible confirmation of Bin Laden's death came from the chief of staff of former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, who broke the news via Twitter about 20 minutes before it was reported by the major news networks and an hour before President Obama confirmed it. In the minutes after the networks announced Bin Laden's death, Twitter recorded as many as 5,000 tweets per second.
- Live Messenger, Windows instant message service, has more than 300 million active users a month and carries billions of messages every day.

Some of these examples would probably fit anybody's conception of mass communication: the billion people who watched the royal wedding, the 130 million who saw *Avatar*, Rebecca Black's video. In contrast, some of these examples would seem to fall outside a common-sense definition of mass communication: the teenage girl with her text messages, the Skype phone calls, an instant message. But what about all those blogs, or Facebook status updates, or the ad on a Google search page, or the news events that break on Twitter? Mass communication or something else?

We'll try to answer those questions, but first we need to back up and look at the basic process of how humans communicate. This examination will help us clarify the differences between mass and other forms of communication.

## the communication process

Figure 1-1 depicts the communication process. We will refer to this figure as we examine the process more fully.





## media *Sniff This* Probe

Conventional advertising relies on sight and sound channels. We use our eyes and ears—we read the text, hear the announcer, and see the images. But now advertisers are zeroing in on the nose.

Perfumes, naturally enough, rely most heavily on the olfactory channel. In the past whenever a reader opened a magazine such as *Allure*, he or she might be hit with a blast of fragrances. New technology has minimized this problem as magazines now embed scent strips on their ad pages. A reader has to scratch the strip to unleash the scent.

Scent strips are not confined to magazines. Kraft, the maker of DiGiorno pizzas, handed out scent strips in supermarkets so shoppers could get a whiff of its new garlic bread pizza. Avon encases scent strips in its product catalogue.

Premium movie channel Showtime caused a “scentsation” with a promotional campaign for its series “Weeds,” which features a drug-dealing soccer mom. Showtime added scent strips that smelled of marijuana to its magazine ads. Not everybody was pleased with that.

### Encoding: Transmitting the Message

To begin with, the **source** initiates the process by having a thought or an idea that he or she wishes to transmit to some other entity. Naturally, sources differ in their communication skills (“Garçon, I will have the Boeuf Haché Grillé au Charbon de Bois” versus “Gimmea-burger”). The source may or may not have knowledge about the receiver of the message. Sources can be single individuals, groups, or even organizations.

**Encoding** refers to the activities that a source goes through to translate thoughts and ideas into a form that may be perceived by the senses. When you have something to say, your brain and your tongue work together (usually) to form words and spoken sentences. Encoding in a communication setting can take place one or more times. In a face-to-face conversation, the speaker encodes thoughts into words. Over the telephone, this phase is repeated, but the phone subsequently encodes sound waves into electrical energy.

The **message** is the actual physical product that the source encodes. When you talk, your speech is the message. When you write a letter home, what you put on the paper is the message. When a television network presents *The Voice* or *American Idol*, the programs are the message. Human beings usually have a large number of messages at their disposal that they can choose to send, ranging from the simple but effective “No!” to something as complicated as Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*. Messages can be directed at one specific individual (“Dude!”) or at millions (*People* magazine). Messages can be cheap to produce (the spoken word) or very expensive (this book). Some messages are more under the control of the receiver than others. For example, think about how hard or easy it is for you to break off communication (1) in a face-to-face conversation with another person, (2) during a telephone call, and (3) while watching a TV commercial.

**Channels** are the ways the message travels to the receiver. Sound waves carry spoken words; light waves carry visual messages. Air currents can serve as olfactory channels, carrying messages to our noses—messages that are subtle but nonetheless significant. Touch is also a channel (such as braille). Some messages use more than one channel to travel to the receiver. For example, radio signals travel by electromagnetic radiation until they are transformed by receiving sets into sound waves that travel through the air to our ears.

### Decoding: Receiving the Message

The **decoding** process is the opposite of the encoding process. It consists of activities that translate or interpret physical messages into a form that has eventual meaning for a receiver. As you read these lines, you are decoding a message. If you are playing the radio while decoding these lines, you are decoding two messages simultaneously—one aural, one visual. Both humans and machines can be thought of as decoders. The radio is a decoder; so is a DVD playback unit; so is the telephone (one end encodes and the other end decodes); so is a film projector.



What we said earlier about encoding also applies to decoding: Some people are better at it than others. Many of you will not be able to decode “¿Dónde está el baño?”; others will. Some people are able to read 1,500 words a minute; others struggle along at 200.

The **receiver** is the target of the message—its ultimate goal. The receiver can be a single person, a group, an institution, or even a large, anonymous collection of people. The receivers of the message can be determined by the source, as in a telephone call, or they can self-select themselves into the audience, as with the audience for a TV show. It should also be clear that in some situations the source and receiver can be in each other’s immediate presence, while in other situations they can be separated by both space and time.

## Feedback

Now let us examine the bottom half of Figure 1-1. This portion of the figure represents the potential for **feedback** to occur. Feedback refers to those responses of the receiver that shape and alter the subsequent messages of the source. Feedback represents a reversal of the flow of communication. The original source becomes the receiver; the original receiver becomes the new source. Feedback is useful to the source because it allows the source to answer the question “How am I doing?” Feedback is important to the receiver because it allows the receiver to attempt to change some element in the communication process. Communication scholars have traditionally identified two different kinds of feedback—positive and negative. In general terms, positive feedback from the receiver usually encourages the communication behavior in progress; negative feedback usually attempts to change the communication or even to terminate it.

Feedback can be immediate or delayed. Immediate feedback occurs when the reactions of the receiver are directly perceived by the source. A speech maker who hears the audience boo and hiss while he or she is talking is getting immediate feedback. On the other hand, it might take weeks to determine the effectiveness of a multimillion-dollar advertising campaign.

## Noise

The final factor we will consider is **noise**. Communication scholars define *noise* as anything that interferes with the delivery of the message. A little noise might pass unnoticed, while too much noise might prevent the message from reaching its destination. There are at least three different types of noise: semantic, mechanical, and environmental.

Semantic noise occurs when different people have different meanings for different words and phrases or when the arrangement of words confuses the meaning. If you ask a New Yorker for a “soda” and expect to receive something that has ice cream in it, you’ll be disappointed. The New Yorker will give you a bottle of what is called “pop” in the Midwest. An article in a college newspaper included the following: “A panel of representatives from the sports world met to discuss performance-enhancing drug use at the Journalism School last night.”

Noise can also be mechanical. This type of noise occurs when there is a problem with a machine that is being used to assist communication. A TV set with a pixilated picture, a pen running out of ink, and a static-filled radio are all examples of mechanical noise.

Carrie Underwood’s “Before He Cheats” contains several examples of negative feedback.





## media *Communication Gone Awry*

# Probe

Communication between people is a fragile thing. Sometimes things go wrong. Examples:

- A prankster reprogrammed a digital video billboard on a main road in the heart of Moscow to show a two-minute clip from a pornographic movie. The result: a miles-long traffic jam.
- Customers using HTC Smartphones were surprised to receive text messages from the future. An apparent software bug dated all messages from the year 2016.
- A customer called a local pastry shop and ordered a cake for a going-away party. The customer said, "Please write on the cake 'Best Wishes Suzanne' and underneath that 'We Will Miss You.'"

When the customer picked up the cake, it read:

*Best Wishes Suzanne  
And Underneath That  
We Will Miss You*

- The Government Printing Office mistakenly posted on its Web site a confidential 266-page report that included maps showing the precise locations of stockpiles of fuel for nuclear weapons.
- In early 2011, a computer malfunction in a bank's ATM in Sydney, Australia, allowed customers to withdraw hundreds of dollars more

than they had in their accounts. News of the free money spread on Twitter and soon some ATMs had lines with 30 to 40 people waiting to take advantage of the glitch. (Bank executives reminded customers that they could look at withdrawal records to identify those who fraudulently withdrew cash.)

- Chef Wolfgang Puck's restaurants are pricey, but imagine the surprise of a Texas man when he got a Visa credit card statement indicating that he spent more than \$23 quadrillion on a meal at one of Puck's eateries. Another man in New Hampshire was also charged \$23 quadrillion after buying a pack of cigarettes at a gas station. A spokesperson for Visa said the charges were caused by, you guessed it, a technical glitch.
- On the other hand, nearly 10,000 residents of Ohio got a notice from the state tax department that they were due a tax refund of \$200 million. The letter stated that the amount of the refund was too large to be paid by direct deposit so they would be sent a check. Once again, a software problem caused the mega-overpayment.
- In South Carolina, one of those electronic message boards that usually flash messages about traffic delays was reprogrammed to read "Zombies Ahead."

A third form of noise can be called environmental. This type refers to sources of noise that are external to the communication process but that nonetheless interfere with it. Some

environmental noise might be out of the communicator's control—the noise at a restaurant, for example, where the communicator is trying to hold a conversation. Some environmental noise might be introduced by the source or the receiver; for example, you might try to talk to somebody who keeps drumming her or his fingers on the table.

As noise increases, message fidelity (how closely the message that is sent resembles the message that is received) goes down. Clearly, feedback is important in reducing the effects of noise. The greater the potential for immediate feedback—that is, the more interplay between source and receiver—the greater the chance that noise will be overcome.

## sound byte

### Beware Autocorrect

Machine-assisted communication works great—unless the machine screws up. Many smartphones and other devices have an autocorrect function where the machine corrects spelling errors and predicts intended words before they are fully typed. If a person doesn't proofread his or her messages, confusion can result. Here are a few examples taken from [Damnyouautocorrect.com](http://Damnyouautocorrect.com):

Intended message: "I'm going to be in the poor house."

Sent message: "I'm going to be in the outhouse."

Intended message: "I just found out I made the varsity cross country team."

Sent message: "I just found out I made the varsity cross dressing team."

Intended message: "I have to meet for a group project now."

Sent message: "I have to meet for a groin project now."

## communication settings

### Interpersonal Communication

Having considered the key elements in the communication process, we next examine three common communication settings, or situations, and explore how these elements vary from setting to setting. The first and perhaps the most common situation is **interpersonal communication**, in which one person (or group) is interacting with another

person (or group) without the aid of a mechanical device. The source and receiver in this form of communication are within each other's physical presence. Talking to your roommate, participating in a class discussion, and conversing with your professor after class are all examples of interpersonal communication.

The source in this communication setting can be one or more individuals, as can the receiver. Encoding is usually a one-step process as the source transforms thoughts into speech and/or gestures. A variety of channels are available for use. The receiver can see, hear, and perhaps even smell and touch the source. Messages are relatively difficult for the receiver to terminate and are produced at little expense. In addition, interpersonal messages can be private ("Whassup?") or public (a proclamation that the end of the world is near from a person standing on a street corner). Messages can also be pinpointed to their specific targets. For example, you might ask the following of your English professor: "Excuse me, Dr. Iamb, but I was wondering if you had finished perusing my term paper?" The very same message directed at your roommate might be put another way: "Hey, Space Cadet! Aren't you done with my paper yet?" Decoding is also a one-step process performed by those receivers who can perceive the message. Feedback is immediate and makes use of visual and auditory channels. Noise can be either semantic or environmental. Interpersonal communication is far from simple, but it represents the least complicated setting.

### Machine-Assisted Interpersonal Communication

**Machine-assisted interpersonal communication** (or technology-assisted communication) combines characteristics of both the interpersonal and mass communication situations. The growth of the Internet and the World Wide Web has further blurred the boundaries between these two types of communication. This section focuses on those situations that are closer to the interpersonal setting. The next section examines how the computer and the Internet have redefined many of the features of mass communication.

In the machine-assisted setting, one or more people are communicating by means of a mechanical device (or devices) with one or more receivers. One of the important characteristics of machine-assisted interpersonal communication is that it allows the source and receiver to be separated by both time and space. The machine can give a message permanence by storing it on paper, disk, or some other material. The machine can also extend the range of the message by amplifying it and/or transmitting it over large distances. The telephone, for example, allows two people to converse even though they are hundreds,

Microsoft's Bill Gates uses machine-assisted communication to get his point across at the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum. (Raymond Reuter/Sygma)





even thousands, of miles apart. A letter can be reread several years after it was written and communicate anew.

The source in the machine-assisted setting can be a single person or a group of people who may know the receiver or not have firsthand knowledge of the receiver.

Encoding in this setting can be complicated or simple, but there must be at least two distinct stages. The first occurs when the source translates his or her thoughts into words or symbols. The second occurs when one or more machines encode the message for transmission or storage. When you speak on the telephone, for example, you choose and pronounce your words (stage 1), and a machine converts them into electrical impulses (stage 2).

Channels are more restricted in the machine-assisted setting. Whereas interpersonal communication can make use of several channels simultaneously, machine-assisted settings generally rely on only one or two. E-mail, for instance, relies on sight; a phone call uses electrical energy and sound waves.

Messages vary widely in machine-assisted communication. They can be tailor-made for the receiver (such as e-mail) or limited to a small number of predetermined messages that cannot be altered once they are encoded. Messages in this setting can be private or public and relatively cheap to produce.

Decoding can go through one or more stages, similar to the encoding process. Reading a letter requires only one stage, but reading a text message requires two: one for the phone to decode electrical energy into patterns of light and dark, and another for your eyes to decode the written symbols.

The receiver in this setting can be a single person, a small group, or a large group. Receivers can be in sight of the source or out of view. They can be selected by the source (as with a Skype phone call) or self-select themselves into the audience (as when taking a pamphlet from somebody on the street).

Feedback can be immediate or delayed. A band playing at a concert will hear the audience applaud following a song. A band that provides streaming audio of a new song on its Web site might have to wait for days to see if people liked it. In many situations feedback is limited to one channel, as in a phone conversation. In some situations feedback can be difficult if not impossible. If the automatic teller gives you a message that says, "Insufficient funds," you cannot tell it, "I just made a deposit this morning. Look it up."

Noise in the machine-assisted setting can be semantic and environmental as in interpersonal communication, but it can also be mechanical. Interference with the message might be due in part to difficulties with the machine involved.

In the future, machine-assisted communication will become more important. Mobile media, such as cell phones and laptop and tablet computers, will become more and more popular and continue to expand the scope and impact of personal communication (see Chapter 3). The Internet may come to function more as an aid to interpersonal communication than as a mass medium (see Chapter 4). Finally, the differences between machine-assisted communication and mass communication will continue to blur. All of these trends will hasten the transition of traditional mass media into new forms of communication channels.

### Mass Communication

The third major communication setting is the one that we will be most interested in. The differences between machine-assisted interpersonal communication and mass communication are not that clear. Here is a traditional definition: **Mass communication** refers to the process by which a complex organization with the aid of one or more machines produces and transmits public messages that are directed at large, heterogeneous, and scattered audiences. There are, of course, situations that will fall into a gray area. How large does the audience have to be? How scattered? How heterogeneous? How complex must the organization be? For example, suppose a billboard is constructed on a busy street in a small town. Obviously, this would qualify as

## sound byte

### Punctuation Matters

From the cover of *Tails* magazine: "Rachel Ray finds inspiration in cooking her family and her dog."

machine-assisted communication (a machine was used to print the billboard), but is this better defined as mass communication? An automatic letter-writing device can write thousands of similar letters. Is this mass communication? There are no correct answers to these questions. The dividing line between machine-assisted interpersonal communication and mass communication is not a distinct one.

The line is even less distinct when the Internet and the Web are considered. Take an e-mail message, for example. It can be addressed to one person, much like machine-assisted interpersonal communication, or it can go to thousands, a situation closer to mass communication. Or take the case of a post on Facebook that might be seen by tens of thousands or only by a few friends, depending on privacy settings. The first case resembles mass communication; the second is more like machine-assisted interpersonal communication. In both cases, feedback is limited, a feature of mass communication, since the usual clues of tone of voice, gestures, and personal appearance are not present.

**Source** Until the advent of the Internet and the Web, the source in the traditional mass communication situation was typically a group of individuals who acted in predetermined roles in an organizational setting. In other words, mass communication was the end product of more than one person's efforts. For example, think about how a newspaper is put together. Reporters gather news; writers draft editorials; a cartoonist draws an editorial cartoon; the advertising department lays out ads; editors lay out all these elements on a sample page; technicians transfer this page to a master; other technicians print the final paper; the finished copies are given to the delivery staff; and, of course, behind all this is a publisher who has the money to pay for a building, presses, staff, trucks, paper, ink, and so on. This institutional nature of mass communication has several consequences that we will consider later in this book.

The advent of Internet-based mass communication changes this situation. Thanks to the World Wide Web, one person can become a mass communicator. The implications of this change are discussed further in Chapter 4.

For both traditional and Internet-based mass communication, the source usually has little detailed information about its particular audience. The author of a blog has little detailed information about individuals who visit the site. Traditional mass media may have collective data, but these are typically expressed as gross audience characteristics.

E-mail is fast and environmentally friendly; it uses no paper, and vehicles burn no gasoline delivering the message. It is no wonder, then, that American businesses send billions of e-mail messages every year.

The screenshot shows the Gmail sign-in page in a Mozilla Firefox browser window. The browser's address bar displays the URL: <https://accounts.google.com/ServiceLogin?service=mail&passive=true&rm=false&continue=http%3A%2F%2Fmail.google.com%3A>. The page features the Google logo and a sign-in form with fields for Username and Password, and a 'Sign in' button. Below the form are links for 'About Gmail', 'New features!', 'Switch to Gmail', and 'Create an account'. A section titled 'Latest News from Gmail' includes a snippet about 'Dynamic Views from Blogger' dated Tue Sep 27 2011. At the bottom, there are social media follow links and a footer with copyright information for 2011 Google.



The newspaper editor, for example, may know that 40 percent of the readers are between 25 and 40 years old and that 30 percent earn between \$20,000 and \$50,000, but the editor has no idea about the individual tastes, preferences, quirks, or identities of these people. They are an anonymous group, known only by summary statistics.

**Encoding/Sending** Encoding in mass communication is always a multistage process. Suppose a film producer has an idea. He or she explains it to a screenwriter. The writer goes off and produces a script. The script goes to a director, who translates it for the camera. Cinematographers capture the scenes on film. The raw film goes to an editor, who splices together the final version. The film is copied and sent to theaters, where a projector displays it on the screen, where the audience watches it. How many examples of encoding can you find in that oversimplified version of moviemaking?

Mass communication channels are characterized by the imposition of at least one, and usually more than one, machine in the process of sending the message. These machines translate the message from one channel to another. Television makes use of complicated devices that transform light energy into electrical energy and back again. Radio does the same with sound energy. Unlike interpersonal communication, in which many channels are available, mass communication is usually restricted to one or two.

**Decoding/Receiving** Messages in mass communication are public. Anyone who can afford the cost of a newspaper or a movie ticket or a TV set can receive the message. Additionally, the same message is sent to all receivers. In a sense, mass communication is addressed “to whom it may concern.” Of all the various settings, message termination is easiest in mass communication. The TV set goes dark at the flick of a switch; an automatic timer can turn off the radio; the newspaper is quickly put aside. There is little the source can do to prevent these sudden terminations other than bullying the audience (“Don’t touch that dial!”) or trying to stay interesting at all times (“We’ll be back after these important messages”).

Mass communication typically involves multiple decoding before the message is received. The radio decodes patterns of electromagnetic radiation into sound waves for our hearing mechanism. The TV receiver decodes both sight and sound transmissions.

**Receiver** One of the prime distinguishing characteristics of mass communication is the audience. First, the mass communication audience is a large one, sometimes numbering in the millions of people. Second, the audience is also heterogeneous; that is, it is made up of dissimilar groups who may differ in age, intelligence, political beliefs, ethnic backgrounds, and so on. Even in situations where the mass communication audience is well defined, heterogeneity is still present. (For example, consider the publication *Turkey Grower’s Monthly*. At first glance, the audience for this publication might appear to be rather homogeneous, but upon closer examination we might discover that members differ in intelligence, social class, income, age, political party, education, place of residence, and so on.) Third, the audience is spread out over a wide geographic area; source and receiver are not in each other’s immediate physical presence. The large size of the audience and its geographic separation both contribute to a fourth distinguishing factor: The audience members are anonymous to one another. The person watching the *CBS Evening News* is unaware of the several million others in the audience. Lastly, in keeping with the idea of a public message, the audience in mass communication is self-defined. The receiver chooses which film to see, which paper to read, which Web site to visit, and which program to watch. If the receiver chooses not to attend to the message, the message is not received. Consequently, the various mass communication sources spend a great deal of time and effort to get your attention so that you will include yourself in the audience.

**Feedback** Feedback is another area where there are differences between interpersonal and mass communication. The message flow in mass communication is typically one-way, and feedback, in many instances, is more difficult than in the interpersonal setting. This situation, however, is rapidly changing because of the Internet. Newspapers often



Encoding at the movies. Director Tim Burton on the set of *Alice in Wonderland*. A motion picture goes through several stages of encoding before it gets to the audience: concept, story, script, filming, and editing.

tic, environmental, or mechanical. In fact, since there may be more than one machine involved in the process, mechanical noise can be compounded.

Table 1-1 summarizes some of the differences among the three communication settings that we have talked about.

### Defining Mass Media

In the broadest sense of the word, a *medium* is the channel through which a message travels from the source to the receiver (“medium” is singular; “media” is plural). Thus in our discussion we have pointed to sound and light waves as media of communication. When we talk about mass communication, we also need channels to carry the message. **Mass media** are the channels used for mass communication. Our definition of a mass medium will include not only the mechanical devices that transmit and sometimes store the

include e-mail addresses of reporters to encourage reader feedback. Producers of TV shows scan Web sites and blogs to glean the latest reaction to their episodes. People tweet (send Twitter messages) while they attend newsworthy events. Systematic, large-scale feedback conducted by media research companies, such as the Audit Bureau of Circulations for newspapers and MRI for magazines, tends to be more delayed, but there are exceptions. Nielsen Media Research, for example, provides overnight ratings for network TV shows.

**Noise** Finally, noise in the mass communication setting can be semantic,

**table 1-1**  
Differences in Communication Settings

		Settings		
		Interpersonal	Machine-Assisted Interpersonal	Mass
Element	Source	Single person; has knowledge of receiver	Single person or group; has great deal of knowledge or no knowledge of receiver	Organizations or single person; has little knowledge of receivers
	Encoding	Single stage	Single or multiple stage	Multiple stages
	Message	Private or public; cheap; hard to terminate; altered to fit receivers	Private or public; low to moderate expense; relatively easy to terminate; can be altered to fit receivers in some situations	Public; can be expensive; easily terminated; same message sent to everybody
	Channel	Potential for many; no machines interposed	Restricted to one or two; at least one machine interposed	Restricted to one or two; usually more than one machine interposed
	Decoding	Single stage	Single or multiple stage	Multiple stages
	Receiver	One or relatively small number; in physical presence of source; selected by source	One person or small or large group; within or outside physical presence of source; selected by source or self-defined	Large numbers; out of physical presence of source; self-selected
	Feedback	Plentiful; immediate	Somewhat limited; immediate or delayed	Highly limited; usually delayed
	Noise	Semantic; environmental	Semantic; environmental; mechanical	Semantic; environmental; mechanical



message (TV cameras, radio microphones, printing presses) but also the institutions that use these machines to transmit messages. When we talk about the mass media of television, radio, newspapers, magazines, sound recording, and film, we will be referring to the people, policies, organizations, and technologies that go into producing and distributing mass communication. A **media vehicle** is a single component of the mass media, such as a newspaper, radio station, TV network, or magazine.

In this book we will examine eight different mass media: radio, television, film, books, sound recordings, newspapers, magazines, and the Internet. Of course, these eight are not the only mass media that exist. Billboards, comic books, posters, direct mail, matchbooks, and buttons are some other kinds of mass media one could choose to examine. The eight types of media we have chosen, however, have the largest audiences, employ the most people, and have the greatest impact. They are also the ones with which most of us are most familiar.

## mass media in transition

It doesn't take a genius to see that the mass media five years from now will be significantly different than they were five years ago. A combination of technological, economic, and social factors has made some traditional business models obsolete, and several media are struggling to reinvent themselves for the digital era. Other media are dealing with a fundamental shift in the ways they reach their audiences.

### Technology

On the technology level, the emergence of the Internet has created a new channel for mass communication. In the beginning, traditional media companies, such as newspapers and magazines, were unsure how to use this new medium and many posted content for free on their Web sites in an effort to promote the print editions. This ultimately siphoned off potential readers of the print edition, especially young readers, and circulation fell along

The World Wide Web has changed the nature of mass communication: Get yourself a blog page like Professor Scott Shamp, Director of the New Media Institute at the University of Georgia, and you too could become a mass communicator.

NMI Update

http://www.mynmi.net/NMIUpdate/index.html

New Media Institute  
University of Georgia

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2009

### [INSERT NAME HERE]'s AIDS Story

This story isn't exactly true – but the best ones rarely are. There is design in the deceit because I don't own the whole story and some facts do damage.

Pat was dying. The androgynous pseudonym is a necessary lie. Pat's classification as male, female, black, white, Hispanic, rich, poor, hetero or homosexual almost killed Pat.

Pat was wasting, listless, and unresponsive. Pat had been getting worse for months. And everyone from the family to the doctors was baffled. None of the standard tests you give to people like Pat provided answers. The last time they carried Pat to the hospital, we were told to come say goodbye.

Then a wet behind he ears intern suggested Pat be tested for HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. Pat with AIDS? Just another example of a wasted test adding to the costs of healthcare. But since the tests for dengue fever and the flesh eating virus had come back negative, and the HIV test only cost about \$40. What the heck?

ABOUT ME

GRADY COLLEGE /UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

Innovating with technology at the University of Georgia.

[VIEW MY COMPLETE PROFILE](#)

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LINKS

[Google News](#)

[Edit-Me](#)

[Edit-Me](#)

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PREVIOUS POSTS

[\[INSERT NAME HERE\]'s AIDS Story](#)

[This DBB \(Tu, 09/22, 12:30P, NMI\) -- WNEG-TV – UG...](#)

[NMI Classes and Certificate](#)

[The change in your hand – Personal Media / Public ...](#)

[This DBB \(Tu, 9/15\) – "Crash Course](#)

with advertising revenues. Consequently, the traditional print media are looking for new ways to prosper in the digital age. Publishers are hoping that mobile media, such as the smartphone and the tablet computer, will offer new sources of revenue (see below).

At the same time, the Internet opened the door for a host of new competitors for traditional media. Some Web sites simply replaced functions served by traditional media. Classified ads that might have gone to the newspaper went to Web sites such as Craigslist or autotrader.com. Online video sites, such as YouTube and hulu.com, cut into the audience and revenue of traditional TV networks and stations. Internet radio stations captured listeners at the office that previously had listened to broadcast stations. Other Web sites created new functions that captured audience attention and time. Instead of watching TV, many young people spent time on Facebook or Twitter or other social network sites. This increased competition forced the traditional media to reexamine their usual ways of doing business.

The primary reason behind this growth in competition is easy to see: The Internet brings down the cost of mass communication to a level at which almost anybody can afford it. A single individual can start a Web site for a relatively small sum (Facebook started in a Harvard dorm; Craigslist started as a hobby) and reach a potential audience of millions. Furthermore, the low cost means that individual sites can be supported solely by those who create them, thus removing the profit consideration from the equation. It's probably fair to say that the vast majority of bloggers, for example, blog for reasons other than profit. To sum up, in the past, established media companies were shielded from new competition because the costs to enter the market were so high. That is no longer the case. A whole new type of mass communicator has emerged to compete with traditional media organizations, and the choices available for the audience have mushroomed.

Of course, not everybody who puts up a Web site is engaging in mass communication. If nobody or only a few people visit the site, no mass communication takes place. The fact that Uncle Harold publishes a blog does not mean that Uncle Harold is on the same level as the *New York Times* as a mass communicator. The *Times* has a lot more resources with which to draw a mass audience. But technically speaking, the same could be said about traditional media. If no one reads the *New York Times*, then no mass communication takes place. In short, although the potential to be a mass communicator exists for everybody—including Uncle Harold and the *New York Times*—actually becoming one is more difficult for Uncle Harold.

## Economics

This transition was further accelerated by the economic downturn during the last years of the decade. Advertising money dried up, and as noted above, competition from Web sites siphoned off the profits of traditional media. Organizations that expanded during an era of easy credit all of a sudden found themselves burdened by massive debt. Not surprisingly, cutbacks, layoffs, and severe cost-cutting followed. Several media organizations went bankrupt; others struggled to find new revenue streams; still others totally joined the digital era by ending their traditional forms and going online. By 2011, the economic situation had improved somewhat, but mass media companies still faced financial challenges.

## Social Trends

Social change also hastened the transition. Consumers became accustomed to receiving their information and entertainment for free, and efforts to charge for Internet content met with resistance. Traditional passive media exposure was replaced by active participation in new social media such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. The recording industry watched as person-to-person file sharing skyrocketed and sales of CDs plummeted. People began to spend their time creating media content (more than half of teens have created a social networking site; more than 150 million people have started blogs) and less time consuming media content.

The chapters in Parts II and III of this book will provide more details about how the various media are coping with this transitional era.



## characteristics of media organizations

Describing the characteristics of mass media organizations was a lot easier before the Internet came along. As mentioned above, thanks to the Internet, the distinction between machine-assisted interpersonal communication and mass communication has become fuzzy. When we try to identify the typical characteristics of mass communication organizations, the distinctions become fuzzier. Some Web sites engage in mass communication; some don't. The *New York Times* Web site gets more than 19 million unique visitors every month; we would expect the *Times*' Web site to possess the typical characteristics of a mass media organization (and it does). At the other end of the spectrum, the average blog has about 10–20 regular readers; most would agree that this is more like machine-assisted interpersonal communication. It is unlikely that these sites would share the same distinguishing features as [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com). Nonetheless, at the risk of oversimplifying, and recognizing that some Web operations may represent exceptions, below are five features that have been traditionally used to define organizations that produce mass communication:

1. Mass communication is produced by complex and formal organizations.
2. Mass communication organizations have multiple gatekeepers.
3. Mass communication organizations need a great deal of money to operate.
4. Mass communication organizations exist to make a profit.
5. Mass communication organizations are highly competitive.

Let's examine each of these characteristics in turn and then examine how each has been transformed by the Internet and by the economic and social forces mentioned above.

### Formal Organizational Structure

Publishing a newspaper, making a movie, or operating a TV network requires control of money, management of personnel, coordination of activities, and application of authority. Accomplishing all of these tasks requires a well-defined organizational structure characterized by specialization, division of labor, and focused areas of responsibility. Consequently, traditional mass communication has been the product of a bureaucracy. As in most bureaucracies, decision making takes place at several levels of management, and channels of communication within the organization are formalized. Thus, many of the decisions about what gets included in a newspaper, TV program, or movie are made by groups. Further, decisions are made by several individuals in ascending levels of the bureaucracy, and communication follows predictable patterns within the organization.

Turning now to the Web, a formal organizational structure is found with some Web operations but not with others. Web sites can be produced and maintained by a single individual or a small group, and decisions do not have to be filtered through a hierarchy. The Drudge Report, for instance, has only a handful of employees. Keep in mind, however, that many Web sites that attract a large audience have organizational structures that resemble those of a traditional mass media organization. To illustrate, Facebook has more than 2,000 employees and offices in 15 countries. YouTube has 13 separate departments.

### Gatekeepers

Another important factor that characterizes the traditional mass communication organization is the presence of multiple **gatekeepers**. A gatekeeper is any person (or group) who has control over what material eventually reaches the public. Some gatekeepers are more obvious than others, such as the editor at a newspaper, the news director at a TV station, or the acquisitions editor at a book publishing company. More complex organizations have more gatekeepers.

The dismal economic climate has had an impact on gatekeeping. When newspapers and magazines lay off employees, editors are likely to be included among those losing their jobs. When media companies consolidate and simplify their corporate structure, it usually means fewer gatekeepers.



Getting past the gatekeepers in network television is difficult. ABC's hit series *Desperate Housewives* was first turned down by HBO, CBS, NBC, Fox, Showtime, and Lifetime.

Gatekeepers are far less numerous on the Web, but that doesn't mean they are nonexistent. Most newspapers, for example, have someone who scans comments posted on their Web sites and removes offensive or libelous posts. YouTube has several people who screen videos and remove the ones that are inappropriate or violations of copyright. Facebook removes illegal, offensive, and pornographic content, as does YouTube. These sites exemplify a feature of gatekeeping that is unique to the Web—they rely on audience members to do the monitoring. Facebook and YouTube, for example, have links that allow members to report content that they find objectionable.

In general, however, gatekeeping is not a principal feature of many Internet sites, a situation that has both positive and negative consequences. On the one hand, individuals have the freedom to post whatever they want without too much fear of censorship. On the other hand, there is no guarantee that what is made available will be accurate or worthwhile. Rumors, conspiracy theories, vitriol, and truly tasteless content abound on the Internet. There are no editors to sort out the credible from the lies or to distinguish merit from the trash.

### Large Operating Expenses

Traditionally, it has taken a lot of money to get into the mass communication business and more money to keep going. In 2009 cable giant Comcast acquired NBC Universal for about \$14 billion, and in 2011 Access Industries paid more than \$3 billion to buy Warner Music Group, the world's third-largest recording company.

Once the organization is operating, expenses can also be sizable. A radio station in a medium-size market might spend around \$1 million in operating expenses. A medium-market TV station probably spends \$5–10 million annually.

As we have already noted, the Internet has reduced start-up and operating costs, but this does not mean that Web operations don't need cash in order to grow and prosper. Indeed, if an entrepreneur wants his or her Web site to reach a mass audience, somebody has to pay the bill. YouTube, for example, might not have gotten off the ground without an \$11.5 million investment from a venture capital company. Facebook followed the same route, accepting about \$40 million from two venture capital companies. Evan Williams, one of the founders of Twitter, raised \$22 million from outside investors. (On the other hand, if your plans are less grandiose, Google gives members free blog space and Yahoo charges only \$10 a month to host a Web site.)

Companies that have strong financial resources are the likeliest to survive high operating expenses and are more likely to survive in a down economy. In 2010, a number of global media giants dominated the field. Table 1-2 lists these "megamedia" companies; these names will turn up frequently in succeeding chapters.

### Competition for Profits

In the United States, mass communication organizations exist to make a profit. Although there are some exceptions (the Public Broadcasting Service, for example), most newspapers, magazines, record companies, film studios, book publishers, and TV and radio stations strive to produce a profit for their owners and shareholders. Broadcast stations are licensed to serve the public interest and newspapers assume a watchdog role for their readers, but if they do not make money, no matter how noble their goals, they go out of business (as was illustrated several times during the recession of the late 2000s.)



**table 1-2**

Global Media Giants

Company (home country)	2010 Revenue (in billion U.S. dollars)*
Vivendi (France)	\$38.3
Walt Disney Co. (United States)	38.0
Comcast (United States)	37.9
News Corp. (United States)	32.8
Time Warner (United States)	27.0
Bertelsmann (Germany)	22.0

\*To give some perspective to these data, Wal-Mart revenue for the same period was \$422 billion; General Electric's was \$135 billion.

Profit ultimately comes from the consumer. When you download a song from iTunes or buy a movie ticket, part of the price includes the profit. Newspapers, radio, TV, and magazines make most of their profit by selling to advertisers the attention their audiences give them. The cost of advertising is then passed on to the consumer. The economics of mass communication is an important topic, and we will explore it throughout this book.

Since the audience is the source of profits, mass communication organizations compete with one another to attract an audience. This should come as no surprise to anyone who has ever watched television or passed a magazine stand. The major TV networks compete with one another for ratings, spending millions of dollars to promote their programs. Radio stations compete with other stations in their market. Record companies spend large sums promoting their recordings, hoping to outsell their competitors. Motion picture companies may gamble millions on films to compete successfully. As we have seen, the Internet has made competition even more severe.

As for Web sites, many exist to make a profit. Perezhilton.com contains advertising and sales pitches for merchandise, as does gawker.com. Amazon.com makes its profit by selling hundreds of different products. Other Web sites do not share the profit motivation; some exist to serve the public (such as the .gov sites) or to gain attention and/or prestige for their owners (blogs). In this latter case, competition will not be much of a factor.

To sum up, the Internet is home to millions of Web sites. Many of them fit the definition of mass communication and exhibit all of the traditional characteristics of mass communication organizations (such as CNN.com, ESPN.com, nytimes.com). Other operations also engage in mass communication and exhibit some but not all of the five traditional features. (Thesmokinggun.com strives to make a profit. It attracts about 4 million unique views a month but has only a handful of employees and relatively small operating expense since it gets all its material from public records.) Other sites are better defined as machine-assisted interpersonal communication. Once again, the Internet has forced us to reexamine the way we traditionally think about mass communication and mass communicators.

## the internet: mass and interpersonal channel?

As the Internet evolves, two distinct developments are becoming clear. The first suggests that the Web will become more important for interpersonal and social functions, as evidenced by the tremendous rise of social media. The operations that have been most successful on the Web most resemble interpersonal or machine-assisted communication. Blogs, e-mail, Skype, eBay, Facebook, Twitter, instant messages, Wikipedia, and all of the Napster-like file-sharing programs are not so much examples of mass communication as they are of machine-assisted interpersonal communication, facilitating communication between single individuals (writing on someone's "wall" in Facebook) or among relatively small groups of people (such as occurs with Google Groups). In addition, virtually none of the successful operations mentioned above were started by a big media company (but big media companies bought in when these sites became successful).

Second, many experts have predicted that traditional mass media content (TV, movies, newspapers, magazines, sound recording, books, radio) will eventually be

distributed mainly over the Internet, making the Net the single most important channel of mass communication. This trend is already taking shape with online newspapers and magazines; TV networks making their programs available on the Web (for example, hulu.com); movie studios making films available for download (for example, Netflix); downloadable books (for example, Amazon's Kindle e-book reader); and music (iTunes). There are dangers, however, associated with this development. If we become too dependent on the Internet, what happens if a natural disaster (such as a hurricane) or human-made calamity (such as a terrorist cyber attack) disables the system? In any event, the Internet is fostering both mass and machine-assisted communication at the same time.

Whatever its ultimate direction, the Internet has prompted mass communication scholars (and textbook writers) to rethink conventional definitions and categories of mass communication. It has also necessitated fresh models to describe the communication process, a topic that we will turn to next.

## models for studying mass communication

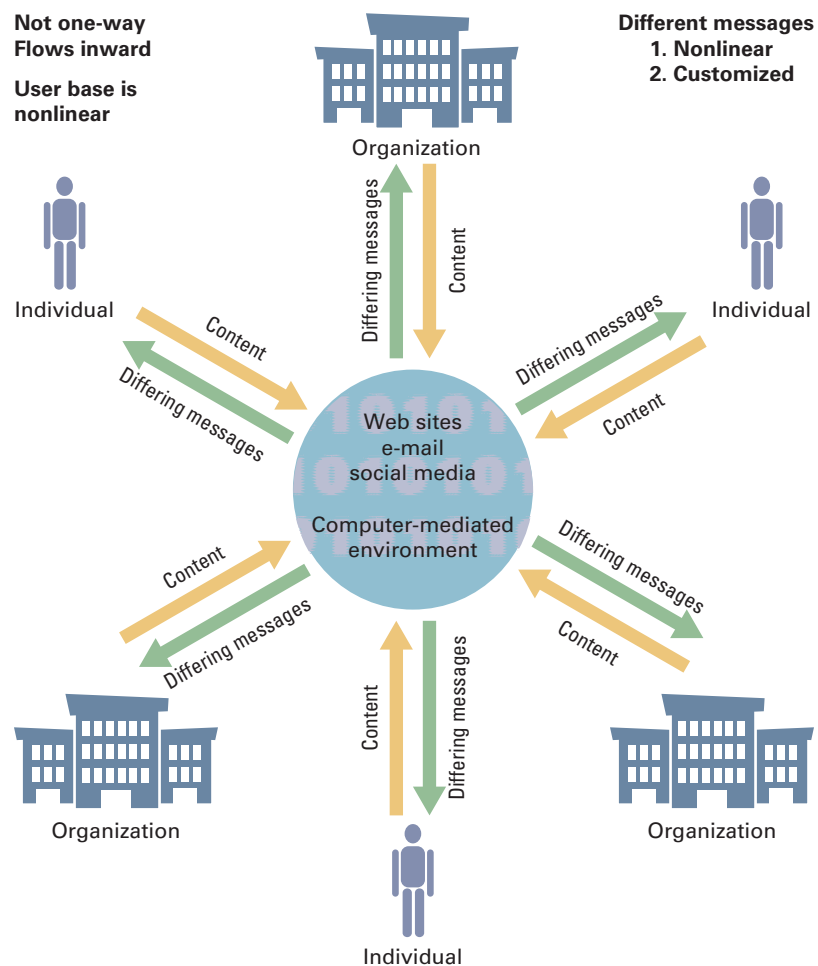
The traditional model of mass communication was a "one-to-many" model. It suggested that information from the environment (both news and entertainment) is filtered through a mass media organization (newspaper, TV network, movie studio) where it is decoded, interpreted, selected, and finally encoded into a message that is reproduced many times over and distributed through the appropriate channel. For example, newspaper reporters cover events and encode stories that are evaluated by editors (gatekeepers) to see if they should make it into that day's edition of the paper.

Once through the gate, the paper is reproduced and physically distributed to readers. The readers, the receivers of the message, decode and interpret the message. Some audience behavior (buying a product, watching a TV show, subscribing to a magazine) is monitored by the media organization and is used as feedback to help shape future messages. Under the traditional model there is little direct interaction between sources and receivers.

Figure 1-2 is a rough attempt to represent Internet communication, a new arrangement that makes possible several different levels of communication: one source communicating with one receiver (e-mail), one source communicating with many receivers (CNN.com), a few sources communicating with a few receivers (chat rooms, blogs), and many sources communicating with many receivers (YouTube, eBay).

Note that in this simplified model, content is provided not only by organizations but also by individuals. In this circumstance there are no organizational gatekeepers. A single individual performs the decoding, interpreting, and encoding functions. Also note that Figure 1-2 is not a one-way model. Communication doesn't proceed from left to right but flows inward. The traditional mass communicator no longer necessarily initiates the process. Instead, it is possible for the receiver to choose the time and manner of the interaction. Suppose you want to find out what happened in a game involving your favorite baseball team that went into extra innings and finished late at night. With the traditional media you have to wait for a newspaper to be published or for your favorite TV station, cable network, or radio station to report the score. With the Internet you can visit a sports news Web site and find the information immediately.

Another area of contrast between the traditional and Internet models is that the messages that flow to each receiver are not identical. For example, you have many different choices about what you can use as your starting page when you access the Internet. In addition, it's possible to customize the information you receive. MSN.com, for example, offers many different configurations that allow you to choose specific sports scores, news headlines, stock market reports, weather forecasts, and entertainment news. Each receiver can customize the information that he or she receives. Some writers have characterized the traditional mass communication model as a "push" model (the sender pushes the information to the receiver), whereas the Internet model is a "pull" model (the receiver pulls only the information that he or she wants).

**figure 1-2**Internet Mass  
Communication Model

Finally, Figure 1-2 shows that both individuals and organizations are linked through a computer-mediated environment. This makes interaction and feedback much easier. The online magazine *Slate.com*, for example, has a site titled “The Fray,” where readers can comment on stories in the magazine. This environment allows people and organizations to be linked in unprecedented ways, in totally new forms of interaction. The auction site eBay joins buyers and sellers all over the world. The Facebook “Causes” page brings together people who were probably never aware of one another and lets them unite in such endeavors as The Nature Conservancy (nearly a half-million members). All in all, the new model, incomplete as it might be, suggests a new way of conceptualizing communication in the age of the Internet.

## transition: emerging media trends

As media continue to evolve, several trends are already apparent: (1) audience segmentation, (2) convergence, (3) increased audience control, (4) multiple platforms, (5) user-generated content, (6) mobile media, and (7) social media. We will present a brief discussion of each term below, and subsequent chapters will point out additional examples.

### Audience Segmentation: The End of Mass Communication As We Know It?

Media audiences are becoming less “mass” and more selective. For example, in the 1930s nearly everybody tuned their radios to *Amos ‘n’ Andy*. Today the top-rated radio station in a major market is lucky if it captures 10 percent of the audience. In the 1950s *I Love Lucy*



was a top-rated TV show with about 50 percent of viewers tuning in. In the 1980s *The Cosby Show* was number one with about a 33 percent share, and in 2011, top-rated *American Idol* got about 13 percent.

About three out of every four adults read a newspaper in the 1960s; today that's down to about one out of two. *Reader's Digest* had a circulation of 18 million in 1976; today it's down to around 7 million.

All of these numbers illustrate the segmentation or fractionalization of the mass audience. What are some of the reasons for this change? First, for many in today's audience, time has become a scarce commodity, with much of it devoted to commuting, working, and child rearing. All of this means less time available for media, and when audience members do spend time with the media, they tend to look for content geared to their special interests.

Second, there are more media today to choose from: From just three TV networks in the 1950s to hundreds of cable and satellite channels, as well as DVDs, video games, and YouTube; from single-screen movie theaters to 18-screen multiplexes and movies on demand; and from a dozen or so local radio stations to hundreds of channels on satellite radio. Finally, advertisers have turned from mass to target marketing, paying a premium to reach those people most likely to buy their product or service. The ultimate consequence of all these factors is that the audience for any single media vehicle is reduced.

Does all of this mean that mass communication is no longer a meaningful term? Should this book be retitled *The Dynamics of Segmented Communication*? Or maybe just drop the "mass" and call it *The Dynamics of Media Communication*? Well, it may be too early to assign the notion of mass communication to the annals of history. First, the definition of mass communication given earlier still applies: Complex organizations use machines to transmit public messages aimed at large, heterogeneous, and scattered audiences. Consider the examples at the opening of the chapter. The billion people who watched the royal wedding, the 130 million or so who saw *Avatar*, and the 140 million plus YouTube views certainly justify the term *mass communication*. True, these are rare events, but even a flop TV show can reach more than a million households.

Second, the channels of mass communication are unchanged, but there are more and more mass media vehicles using these channels: a few hundred TV networks today compared to four in the 1980s; about 14,000 broadcast radio stations today compared to about 9,000 in the early 1980s; about 255 million Web sites today compared to 3 million in 1998. The messages sent by these mass media through the channels of mass communication have become more specialized as traditional and new media are aiming their content at defined audience niches, in part to meet demands of advertisers and in part because it's more cost-efficient. Consequently, it's harder for any one media vehicle to reach a large number of audience members. Nonetheless, the potential is still there for the right message in the right medium (such as the 2011 Super Bowl that brought 111 million people to the Fox TV network) to transcend the limits of specialized content and attract a mass audience in the broadest sense of the term.

## Convergence

The dictionary defines *convergence* as the process of coming together or uniting in a common interest or focus. Convergence is not a new idea (some past examples are sporks, clock radios, and brunch), but the word has enjoyed renewed popularity in recent years and has become the centerpiece in discussions about future trends in mass communication. It is a difficult term to discuss, however, because it has been used to refer to several different processes.

At one level it refers to **corporate convergence**. This trend started in the 1980s with synergy. Companies that were content providers, such as movie studios and record labels, acquired distribution channels such as cable TV. As digital technologies emerged, synergy turned into convergence, a vision of one company delivering every service imaginable.

The early years of the new century saw several attempts at corporate convergence, but most were unsuccessful. For example, the merger between "old" media Time Warner and "new" media AOL didn't fulfill expectations. They finally split up in 2009. In France the

## social Issues



### Too Much?

Alvin Toffler used the term “information overload” in his 1970 best-seller *Future Shock*. Information overload refers to the difficulty a person has in making a decision or understanding an issue in the presence of too much information. Or, as Toffler put it, “When the individual is plunged into a fast and irregularly changing situation, or a novelty-loaded context . . . his predictive accuracy plummets. He can no longer make the reasonably correct assessments on which rational behavior is dependent.”

Toffler wrote this a couple of decades before the Internet appeared, and information overload has only increased with the advent of new technologies. We are regularly plunged into fast-changing situations and novelty-loaded contexts. In the modern world, all of us are showered with information from the traditional print and electronic media, along with e-mail, text messages, tweets, Facebook postings, video links, smart phones, apps, Skype, and countless Web sites, all vying for our attention.

Some preliminary research suggests that dealing with this constant stream of information may not be good for us. One study noted that high usage of cellular phones and social network sites hindered long-term

memory and mental performance. Another study discovered that multitasking, such as watching TV, playing games on a smartphone, and texting, also impeded short-term memory.

Some authors worry that the flood of available information is decreasing our attention span. Many people report that it is difficult for them to get through a book, a movie, or a long conversation without checking e-mail, Facebook status updates, or their Twitter accounts.

The problem may be more pronounced among the younger generation. A study by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that 8- to 18-year-olds devote an average of 10 hours and 45 minutes to the media each day and for much of that time they are multitasking—for example, listening to an iPod while texting and checking Facebook.

Here’s the problem. People with short attention spans cannot solve many of the issues that face modern society. Some problems demand uninterrupted focus, long study, and undisturbed contemplation. As with many other things, when it comes to using communication technology, moderation may be the best strategy. (P.S. If you’ve read this far without checking your Facebook page, I’m very impressed.)

convergence between “new” media company Vivendi and “old” media Universal Studios and Universal Music failed. In 2005 Viacom “de-converged,” spinning off “old” media CBS, Infinity Radio, and a publishing house into a separate company while keeping “new” media MTV networks and a home video company.

Convergence made a mild comeback during 2010–2011. Software giant Microsoft acquired Skype for more than \$8 billion. Experts predict that Microsoft will use Skype’s calling capability to enhance the Xbox 360. In addition, satellite broadcaster Dish network bought Blockbuster, primarily to use Blockbuster’s streaming movie service to compete with Netflix.

Another type of convergence is **operational convergence**. This occurs when owners of several media properties in one market combine their separate operations into a single effort. For example, in Florida, TV station WFLA, the *Tampa Tribune*, and TBO.com operate a converged news department. In 2010, the *Deseret News* merged its newsroom with its sister stations, KSL TV and radio. All in all, an estimated 50 examples of this kind of convergence are currently under way. And if cross-media ownership rules are relaxed, this trend may accelerate.

The advantages of this type of convergence are obvious. It saves money because, rather than hiring a separate news staff for each medium, an operation can have the same reporters produce stories for the paper, Web site, and TV station. In addition, each medium can promote its partners. For instance, the TV newscast can encourage readers to visit the Web site or the print newspaper.

There are, of course, disadvantages as well. First, convergence may be synonymous with cutbacks as most merged newsrooms use smaller staffs. When the *Deseret News* merged with KSL, it cut its workforce by more than 40 percent. Second, reporters require additional training to master various media. This has generated some controversies among print reporters who are not eager to become “backpack journalists” (see Chapter 13) carrying around video cameras and audio recorders as part of their reporting tools. Further, many critics worry that converged operations mean fewer independent and diverse forms of journalism. Some conclude that, although operational convergence may be good for the media companies, it may not be good for consumers. In any case, the jury is still out on the merits of operational convergence.



## media *Bad Career Choices*

# Probe

A market research firm analyzed the revenue earned by 700 industries in 2010 and came up with list of 10 businesses that will probably not be around much longer:

1. Wired communication carriers
2. Mills
3. Newspaper publishing
4. Apparel manufacturing
5. DVD, game, and video rentals
6. Manufactured home dealers
7. Video postproduction services
8. Record stores
9. Photofinishing
10. Formal wear and costume rental

Note that six of the ten are media-related.

Finally, what may be the most important type of convergence is **device convergence**, combining the functions of two or three devices into one mechanism. Apple's iPhone, for example, is a phone, an MP3 player, and a camera, and it can connect to the Internet. The latest model video game platforms can also play DVDs. Some cell phones incorporate navigation systems. Experts predict that eventually the home PC will converge with the TV set in one information appliance that will include e-mail, phone, Internet, DVD playback, and TV functions. Of course, the fact that the functions of more than one device can be combined doesn't mean that consumers will buy it. (There probably isn't much demand, for example, for a combination cell phone/electric razor.) In addition, there is always the danger that convergence will result in a piece of equipment that is too complex for consumers to operate.

Device convergence is manifesting itself in yet another way. All media seem to be converging on the Internet as a major channel of distribution. Newspapers and magazines have online editions. Music downloads are fast replacing CDs as the preferred delivery method. TV networks are making their episodes available for downloading as well as starting their own broadband channels. Movies and books are also available in digital download forms.

### Increased Audience Control

Audience members are more in charge of what they want to see and/or hear and when they want to do it. Let's take television as an example. For many years viewers had to watch programs broadcast by local stations and the major networks according to the media's schedule. However, recent technological advances have given more power to the consumer. The VCR allowed time shifting, or recording a program to be viewed at a more convenient time. Remote controls made it easier for viewers to select what they wanted to watch. Cable and satellite channels offered hundreds of new viewing opportunities. Home video gave individuals the chance to make their own videos. In the past few years, digital video recorders (DVRs) such as TiVo have made time shifting easier and more efficient. Viewers can pause live TV, fast-forward through commercials, and store up to 80 hours of programming. Many cable companies now offer video on demand, enabling viewers to select content that they can watch at their convenience. In short, power has shifted from the source to the receiver.

The same trend is apparent in news. For many decades most Americans were dependent on the news provided by their local newspaper or TV network. Today audience members can choose from 24-hour cable news networks, Internet sites such as CNN.com that are devoted to news, and sites such as Google News that aggregate news from many different sources. If an audience member is not content with the traditional news outlets, she or he can read one of the hundreds of blogs that discuss news events.

Until recently, consumers were forced to buy recorded music packaged according to the wishes of industry executives. If an audience member wanted to buy just one or



two songs by an artist, he or she was out of luck. The consumer had to buy an entire album. The success of Napster and other file-sharing programs clearly demonstrated that individuals were not satisfied with that arrangement. The music industry was slow to respond, but now consumers can download individual tracks from iTunes and other online sources.

Before the Internet, consumers with something to sell had to rely on the local newspaper's classified ad section. Now they can create their own ads on eBay or Craigslist. Similarly, employers once had to depend on the "Help Wanted" section of the paper. Now, however, they can scan the résumés of hundreds of potential employees on Monster.com.

Subsequent chapters will contain other examples of this trend, but by now the point is probably clear: The audience is gaining more control over the mass communication process. As one expert put it, mass communication has gone from a sit-down dinner with a fixed menu to a Vegas-style buffet.

### Multiple Platforms

"Everything. Everywhere." This has been the mantra at many media companies as they try to adapt to the changing world of media technology. The strategy is to make content available to consumers using a number of delivery methods to a number of receiving devices (or multiple platforms, in the industry jargon).

Music videos may be the best illustration of this trend. For many years music video fans had to be content watching videos on MTV, VH1, Fuse, or one of the other cable/satellite networks. Then Web sites began streaming music videos. Recall that Rebecca Black's music video got more than 140 million views on YouTube. Recording companies realized that consumers were watching more videos on their computer screens than on their TV screens. Apple's video iPod, cell phones, and tablet computers opened up other possibilities. Today music videos still run on traditional TV screens, but the record labels have also struck deals with Apple and phone companies, such as Verizon, to take advantage of the new screens.

Television companies have also moved in this direction. NBC partnered with Fox to start hulu.com, where visitors can watch hundreds of current and past TV series as well as dozens of shorter video clips. ABC has selected episodes of its shows on ABC.com and has an application for the iPad. In short, the networks are trying to make their content available on as many screens as possible.

Other media are also taking advantage of multiple platforms. Almost all major newspapers and magazines have Web sites for their digital versions that usually include video clips. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, like many other newspapers, deliver news to smartphoners and tablet computers. Entertainment and news can be heard on a traditional radio set, a satellite receiver, or a computer and downloaded to an iPod.

We may not be quite there yet, but having everything available everywhere may not be that far in the future.

### User-Generated Content

User-generated content or peer production was a hot trend during the last few years but has recently slowed down. Of course, some Web sites such as YouTube, Flickr, and Wikipedia depend heavily on user-generated content. Members generate posts on Twitter and Facebook. Many news organizations accept video, photos, and audio sent in by citizen journalists. CNN, for example, has iReport and Fox News has a similar feature called uReport. On the other hand, magazine and book publishing, motion pictures, radio, sound recording, and entertainment television make relatively little use of user-generated material.

### Mobile Media

Much of modern mass communication involves people looking at screens. For the past couple of decades, the two main screens have been the TV screen and the computer screen. Now a parade of small screens has joined the lineup: the screens on smartphones, iPods,

Media on the go: More than one out of five U.S. adults now owns a tablet computer and eight out of ten own a mobile phone.



tablet computers such as the iPad, e-readers, and handheld gaming devices. More than 45 million people have smartphones; more than 15 million have an iPad or other tablet computer; and more than 3 million have the Kindle e-reader. In short, mass media have become increasingly mobile.

Mobile media can access the Internet through programs called applications (apps) rather than through the traditional Web browser (more on apps in Chapter 4). Media companies, especially newspaper and magazine publishers, are hoping that apps for mobile media will provide them with a new source of revenue.

Examples of mobile media are everywhere. People can watch movies and TV shows, read books, newspapers, and magazines, and surf the Internet on their smartphones or iPads. In addition to playing games, owners of Sony's PSP (PlayStation Portable) can download movies for later viewing. The iPod contains enough memory for thousands of songs and can play video. As suggested earlier, mobile media are another manifestation of the "anywhere" characteristic of multiple platforms.

The implications of this trend are of such great consequence that it is included in Chapter 3 as one of the significant milestones in the development of communication. In addition, the chapters in Part II of this book contain a section that details how each element of the mass media is becoming more mobile.

### Social Media

The last trend that is shaping the transition of the mass media goes by the name "social media." Although the label is simple, the concept is hard to define in a few words. At the risk of making things too simple, **social media** are online communications that use special techniques that involve participation, conversation, sharing, collaboration, and linkage.

Participation is the simplest technique that defines social media. It involves soliciting feedback from people about various issues or items. A news Web site that asks for opinions



## media *Desperately Seeking Sockets*

# Probe

Charging your electronic gadgets is no big problem when you're at home since there are usually plenty of electrical outlets around. But what about when you're not at home? People carry iPhones, iPads, Nooks, Kindles, Evos, BlackBerrys, laptop computers, and many other electronic devices. According to a wireless industry trade group, there were more than 300 million wireless devices in the United States in 2010 and they all had one thing in common: They needed to be plugged into an electrical outlet to be recharged. This situation has led to a new travel phenomenon: the pursuit of the plug.

Visit any Starbucks or Barnes & Noble store and you'll probably see several sockets in use. At one Barnes & Noble store in Manhattan, so many people were plugging in that customers were tripping over the power cords. Fearing that someone might get hurt, the manager finally covered the outlets with metal plates.

Airports present a real challenge. Now that most provide WiFi service, travelers are bringing more gadgets that need charging. At many older airports the demand for sockets usually exceeds the supply and you often see travelers lining up to use the available outlets. Some airports have recognized the problem and are quickly adding outlets. The newly remodeled Terminal 5 at JFK Airport in New York boasts 806 outlets. Installing new plugs is pricey: about \$200 per plug in a terminal under construction but about \$1,000 in an old terminal where walls have to be torn up.

Travelers, of course, are learning to cope with the socket shortage. Some carry battery packs that can be plugged in to provide additional power (of course the battery packs eventually have to be recharged). Some have become skilled at sniffing out hard-to-find plugs, usually behind a row of seats or on the backside of a pillar. Other travelers choose to fly first class where most seats have built-in power ports. One frequent traveler may have the most creative solution. He carries a multi-plug extension cord and if all the outlets are in use, he asks if he can share.

about a proposed new program and a Web operation such as Digg that lets people vote for their favorite online article or image are examples of participation.

Blogs and other Web sites that allow people to comment and to respond to one another are examples of the conversation function. Sharing is illustrated by YouTube, Flickr, and other sites where individuals can create and upload content for others to see. Wikis are social media that exemplify collaboration. The most elaborate social media involve linkage (more about linkage in Chapter 2). These are sites such as Facebook, MySpace, Google Groups, and Twitter where people can link up with friends (both close and distant) and form their own social networks and communities.

There is no doubt that social media have become popular. At the start of 2011, Facebook had more than 500 million users. If Facebook were a country, it would rank third in the world.

In addition to the Internet operations mentioned above, the Web sites of traditional media companies have incorporated the techniques of social media. About 75 percent of all newspapers allow readers to comment on stories, and about 60 percent allow readers to upload pictures and other content to their Web sites. The Web is filled with articles that explain how advertisers and public relations firms can use social media to promote their products and causes.

Businesses are turning to social media to market their products. Home Depot, for example, sponsored a video contest that asked consumers to illustrate the home improvement project that they would like to undertake. The company created a Web site where people could view all the entries and discuss their projects on a home improvement bulletin board. Social media may also reshape politics. The 2008 presidential campaign of candidate Barack Obama relied extensively on social media. The future president created a Web site, [my.barackobama.com](http://my.barackobama.com), that encouraged people to post blogs and link with other supporters (more than 2 million did); he also accumulated nearly a million MySpace friends, placed videos on YouTube, and started his own photostream on Flickr. After his election, he continued to rely on social media with a new Web site, [Change.gov](http://Change.gov), where people shared their opinions about important issues.

Social media have become influential in the mass communication process, and we will have more to say about them in Chapter 4 and subsequent chapters.



## main points

- The elements in the communication process are a source, encoding process, message, channel, decoding process, receiver, feedback, and noise.
- The three types of noise are semantic, environmental, and mechanical.
- The three main settings for communication are interpersonal, machine-assisted interpersonal, and mass communication.
- Each element in the communication process may vary according to setting.
- *Mass communication* refers to the process by which a complex organization, with the aid of one or more machines, produces public messages that are aimed at large, heterogeneous, and scattered audiences.
- Traditionally, a mass communicator was identified by its formal organization, gatekeepers, expensive operating costs, profit motive, and competitiveness. The Internet has created exceptions to these characteristics.
- New models have been developed to represent Internet mass communication.
- Communication content has become more specialized in the past 40 years, but the channels of mass communication still have the potential to reach vast audiences.
- Seven trends that characterize modern mass communication are audience segmentation, convergence, increased audience control, multiple platforms, user-generated content, more mobility, and social media.

## questions for review

1. What are the main elements in the communication process?
2. What are the three types of noise?
3. Compare and contrast interpersonal communication with machine-assisted interpersonal communication.
4. How has the Internet changed the characteristics of the sources of mass communication?
5. As far as the mass media are concerned, what is the difference between a fixed-menu dinner and a Vegas buffet?

## questions for critical thinking

1. What's the most embarrassing communication breakdown that's happened to you? Analyze why it happened. Was it due to semantic noise? Environmental noise? Mechanical noise?
2. Keep a media diary for a day. Tabulate how much of your time is spent in interpersonal, machine-assisted interpersonal, or mass communication. What conclusions can you draw?
3. What are some of the shortcomings of the communication model in Figure 1-2? Are there some elements that are missing?
4. Find additional examples of the seven trends that characterize modern mass media. Are there some media that will be less affected by these trends? Do you think these trends are positive or negative developments?

## key terms

source (p. 5)  
 encoding (p. 5)  
 message (p. 5)  
 channels (p. 5)  
 decoding (p. 5)  
 receiver (p. 6)  
 feedback (p. 6)

noise (p. 6)  
 interpersonal communication (p. 7)  
 machine-assisted interpersonal communication (p. 8)  
 mass communication (p. 9)  
 mass media (p. 12)  
 media vehicle (p. 13)

gatekeepers (p. 15)  
 corporate convergence (p. 20)  
 operational convergence (p. 21)  
 device convergence (p. 22)  
 social media (p. 24)

## internet resources

### Online Learning Center

On the *Online Learning Center* home page, [www.mhhe.com/dominick12e](http://www.mhhe.com/dominick12e), select *Student Center* and then *Chapter 1*.

1. Use the Learning Objectives, Chapter Outline, and Main Points sections to review this chapter.
2. Test your knowledge of the chapter using the multiple choice and flashcard features of the site.
3. Expand your knowledge of concepts and topics discussed in the chapter with additional Questions for Critical Thinking and Internet Exercises.

## surfing the internet

*Listed here are sites that deal with interpersonal and mass communication.*

[www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/Short/trans.html](http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/Short/trans.html)

A thorough and lucid review and critique of the transmission model of communication. Contrast this model with the one in Figure 1-2.

[www.mymissourian.com](http://www.mymissourian.com)

As the site's slogan indicates ("Grassroots Journalism by Mid-Missourians"), a good example of user-generated content.

<http://dcc.syr.edu>

The latest research on and experiments about convergence, sponsored by the Convergence Center at Syracuse University.

<http://social-networking-websites-review.toptenreviews.com>

As the URL says, a site that reviews the top 10 social networking sites. Includes a side-by-side comparison and reader comments.