

Chapter 2

Communication and Media: Types, Functions, and Key Concepts

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ABSTRACT

The field of communication is large and varied. There are different types and levels of communication. Mass communication allows for mass media: books, newspapers, magazines, recorded sound/music, film, radio, television, video games, and the internet. Scholars have identified a handful of common functions of the media. The chief function of media is that of entertainment – providing diversion. Though it varies from country to country, people are spending much more time with the media than at any time in history, often spending more time with media than sleeping. This chapter discusses a number of concepts and terms related to contemporary mass media: globalization, digitalization, convergence, consolidation, fragmentation, personalization, and (hyper) commercialization.

INTRODUCTION

Global Growth of Communication Programs

The field of communication is large and varied. This is seen in the many different variations of programs that deal with the subject at universities around the world. Some examples of the titles for these programs include “Media Studies” or “Communication Arts,” others are called “Public Communication Studies” or “Communication Sciences,” and so on. These schools also tend to feature different “tracks” (or avenues of study) in which students may major (or minor). Some of the more popular tracks would include “Journalism,” “Transmedia,” or “Film Studies,” as well as “TV, Radio, Film” or “Public Relations.” At the graduate level, there are even more tracks, and many of the newer ones are dealing with health communication, tourism/cultural, global, social media, and digital communications. That the field is large is also seen in the number and different kinds of professional communication associations that exist and which professors join to stay current in the field (e.g., ICA – International Communication Association; NCA – National Communication Association; and AEJMC – Association for Education

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in Journalism and Mass Communication). Many communication programs have their own dedicated schools (within larger university structures), others are simply part of other departments (often English, or others). Regardless of what they are called, or how many tracks they have, one thing for sure is that the popularity of communication studies has increased world-wide over the years (Cangara & Nadjib, 2017; Simonson & Park, 2015) and “it appears Communication Studies may be outperforming its humanity based peers on several measures” (Schmitt, 2014, n.p.). Further and related, “a worldwide movement in media literacy has been growing for the past forty years” (Cramer, 2015, p. 13).

Clearly, this is a huge field with many different divisions. Some of the divisions are based on the specific type of communication that is being taught or examined. Some technical schools may have courses dealing more with communications, with an “s”, which can be considered a different area, dealing chiefly with the industries and technologies that have developed around communication (and its technologies). Finally, the general field of ‘communication studies’ is said to touch upon aspects of both social sciences and the humanities. This sometimes creates issues as to whether writers in this field should use APA (American Psychological Association – leaning towards the social sciences) or MLA (Modern Language Association – leaning towards the humanities) to cite work in their study’s reference lists. Finally, the names used to define the discipline (of communication(s)), are far from uniform; in general, the terms ‘media’ or ‘communication’ will be found somewhere in the title of the various programs or schools, and to know the specific focus one would need to inquire of the faculty or leaders of the specific program in question. Not to confuse matters further, but there are different research traditions associated with schools in different locales as well.

The growth of media and communications programs around the world is of benefit on several levels. On the face of it, educating students in the art and skills of media content creation generates its own kind of media literacy. Although not all programs have a specific course dedicated to “media literacy” much of what is taught is directly related to student’s discovering and uncovering the realities of media and message making. Most classes have aspects of media literacy ‘baked in’, if you will, in that the very nature of the courses deals with teaching students how to analyze, evaluate, if not actually create media content. On another level, the growth of media programs along with the wide-spread diffusion of the technologies that make creation of media content possible means that more and varied voices from around the world may lead to a greater realization of McLuhan’s global village. Researchers have often noted that much of the traditional media flow has come from the Global North (Odeh, 2010; Thussu, 2006). With education and training, students in other parts of the world (Global South in particular) become better prepared to tell their own stories and enter the flow of global media (Morley & Robins, 2002; Sreberny, 2006). In the next section, a discussion of the types of communication, something that communication students are likely to learn in the first year of their studies regardless of a program’s concentration.

MAIN TYPES OF COMMUNICATION

Communication exists on a number of levels and in a variety of forms. There are a few distinct categories or types of communication that researchers have identified, and each has its own definition and details. If we were to make an exhaustive list, it could very well fill up the rest of this chapter. Therefore, we need to pick a handful that are most relevant for us. Here are a few types of communication (Figure 1).

Although media scholars and students are often mainly interested in the ‘mass’ category, and most of this chapter deals with mass communication, it is also beneficial to list and mention something about

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