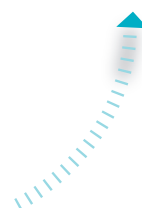


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Convergences



- Chapter 1 Introduction
2 Technologizing the word
3 A global view

Media studies involves tracing the media through the ways in which they participate in contemporary social and cultural life. It deals with various components of that process, including structures and organization of media, content, audience and effects.

In this book the authors will explore in detail each of the components of the mediation process in a global context. The book will introduce you to the world of media studies in an era where nations are becoming more interconnected through modern media networks.

This section is called 'convergences' because the authors, like many of our peers, have learned to recognize that convergence did not arrive with the computer and that all previous communications are moments of convergence. Convergence is the transformation of older media, like print, into new cultural or new technology forms, like online news. Different societies and cultures are dealing with convergence and globalization in different ways.

Globalization at the minimum involves networks – of media, goods, people – that cross national boundaries and can vary in their extent, intensity, tempo and influence. In this section the authors will introduce you to some of the key issues in media studies and globalization, and provide you with background to the history of convergence of media and the current global context.

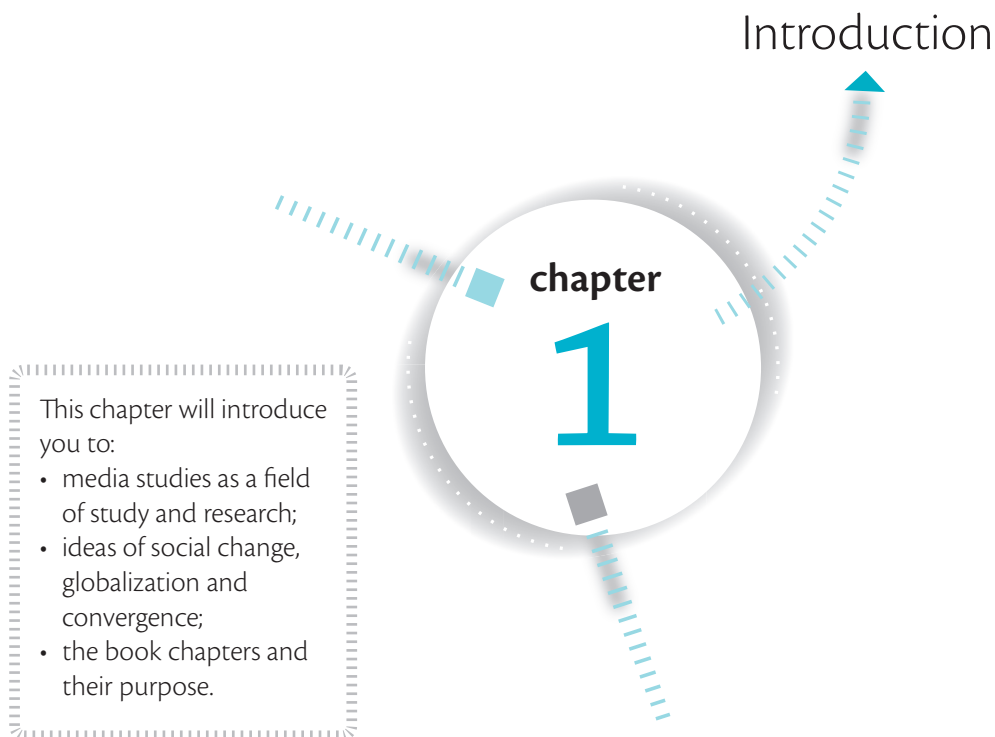
Chapter 1, Introduction, introduces the discipline of media studies and the ideas of globalization and convergence.

Chapter 2, Technologizing the Word, looks at the historical context of convergence, including:

- writing and the alphabet, an early technologization of the word;
- the printing press, enabling standardization of languages, grammars and spelling;
- broadcast media, introducing instantaneous worldwide and mass audience communication;
- computers and social media, combining the one-to-many possibilities of mass media with the many-to-many capability of personal networks.

Chapter 3, A Global View, puts convergence in a contemporary context and outlines:

- the terminology used to describe some of these global changes, and their implications for globalization;
- the problem of autonomy versus interconnectedness of cultures and the idea of a digital divide;
- the rise of mobile cultures as a global phenomenon.



Four-year-old Madeleine McCann disappeared from an apartment in Praia da Luz, in the Algarve, Portugal, on Thursday 3 May 2007. Madeleine, from Rothley in Leicestershire, United Kingdom, had, her parents said, been taken from her bed while they were eating at a restaurant in the same complex, close to the apartment. Kate and Gerry McCann told police that they had regularly checked on Madeleine and their two-year-old twins.

Madeleine was never found and the story went global. The parents soon became 'media' suspects in the disappearance and debate about their innocence or guilt became passionate and prurient conversation among those who did or did not support them. Meanwhile the parents set up a website, <http://www.findmadeleine.com>, to seek help in finding Madeleine and received contributions of millions of dollars to the cause.

The McCann story has all the elements of interest to media studies and this book. There is a global system that distributes the story. There are interpersonal Internet networks, such as blogs, where the story becomes a hotly discussed topic. There are complex cultural and intercultural interpretations of the symbolic content. Chinese and British reactions for example were different. There are issues of social class and media agenda setting. Did the McCanns receive overly supportive reporting and

coverage or overly negative reporting? Was the emphasis on their story to the detriment of other more deserving stories?

Roger Silverstone famously asked ‘Why Study the Media?’ (1999). And so we echo him. Why study the media and processes of mediation of symbolic content? Why study the McCann tragedy? Because media are central to our everyday lives. And every day people ask questions about the media. Who mediates the media? And how? And what are the consequences? Indeed, what are the aspects of the media that are ‘invisibly ideological’ (Silverstone, 1999)?

How do we assess the ways in which the struggles over and within the media are played out: struggles over the ownership and control of both institutions and meanings; struggles over access and participation, struggles over representation; struggles which inform and affect our sense of each other, our sense of ourselves? (Silverstone, 1999, 5)

Research into the media and the distribution of symbolic content helps us to better understand how our own society and other societies work. But it can also provide organizations and policymakers with key insights into planning for the future. For example, it was not long ago that many demographics and minorities in western countries were not represented in simple things like audience ratings measurement. Knowing who is missing from and who should be represented by audience ratings is important for equity purposes and fairness. Such knowledge is not esoteric, nor is it necessarily the product of idealism or of commercial greed. It can be applied by policymakers to rectify problems in measuring audiences, and making the media work better for more people.

Dennis McQuail (McQuail, in Downing et al., 2004, 1) in his overview of media studies says that media studies is a field that has ‘uncertain boundaries.’ Valdivia (2003, 3) further argues that defining the media studies field ‘remains a project fraught with difficulty.’ While this may or may not be true, we know, as Thompson (1997, 30) points out, that cultural forms in modern society have increasingly been mediated by the mechanisms and institutions of mass media or mass communication. For example, a mobile phone, as a cultural form, may signify wealth in one society and be a symbol of fashion in another. Now, you might say that a mobile phone is not a mass medium. Mass media and mass communication are often associated with newspapers, radio, television and other media that are one-to-many. Interestingly, a mobile phone can be a personal communication technology at one moment and, potentially, a receiver of broadcast advertisements at another. Either way though, it is possible to argue that whether operating as a personal or mass technology, a mobile phone is part of a process of mediating symbolic content. In all cultures we attach meanings to things, people and to practices as well as to our physical environment. The media are an intimate part of this process of distributing symbolic content and meanings. In media studies, this mediation, or **technologizing of the word**, has a long history and starts, at least in alphabetic writing systems, with the alphabet. Language is a medium as are speech, writing, print and audio-visual representation.

Technologizing of the word.
Describes the move to media – such as writing and the alphabet – as major revolutions in human evolution.

We can therefore perhaps again quote Silverstone and usefully describe media studies as *tracing the media through the ways in which they participate in social and cultural life* (Silverstone, 1999, 4).

In media studies, the technologization of the word – using media to convey meaning – is often discussed from different components of the process of distributing symbolic content. Traditionally, this includes theories, structures and organizations, audiences, content and effects.

- *Theories:* Theories are explanations. Media theorists or writers try to explain different phenomena in the process of mediation. For example, the question ‘Does

Empirical research.

Observations about the world using systematic quantitative or qualitative research methods.

Administrative research.

Refers to early US media research tied to commercial or governmental interests in audience behaviour and persuasion.

Critical research. Refers to early European theorizing about media, ideology and culture.

to recap...

Media studies involves tracing the media through the ways in which they participate in contemporary social and cultural life. It deals with various components of that process, including structures and organization of media, content, audience and effects.

showing violence in movies lead to violent people?’ raises causal questions about the effects of the media in society. There may be competing theories that come up with competing conclusions.

- *Structures and organizations:* Media, political and social systems all affect the process of mediation of symbolic content. Ownership and control of the media, media economics, and of course the media professions themselves, are all part of the structures and organization of media.
- *Content:* What we see, hear or read, whether today’s news in a newspaper or an SMS (text) message, are a part of the symbolic content of media. The symbolic content is what lies behind the actual content – the relationship between reader, sociocultural context and information that creates the symbolic ‘ness’ of the mediated information transfer. The distribution of symbolic content can, of course, be affected by the structures and organization of media as well as the culture within which we live. The construction of meaning from media content, or media texts, and ideological conflicts involved in these constructions are a major area of research in media studies.
- *Audiences:* Early media researchers had an intense interest in the behaviour of audiences or in fact what constituted ‘an audience.’ The study of audiences can be at individual, group or societal level.
- *Effects:* The process of mediation of symbolic content has effects. For example, in the United Kingdom advertising junk food to children who are watching television is considered harmful and, indeed, is banned. Effects research has an **empirical** tradition, also called **administrative research** in the United States. Early empirical or administrative research took a commercial interest in how public opinion was being shaped by media or how audiences were using media or advertising in their buying behaviour. **Critical research** in contrast, dealt with power and ideology and how culture had itself become an industry.

Social and global change

If media studies involves tracing the media through the ways in which they participate in contemporary social and cultural life, then we cannot ignore the global nature of this enterprise. The technology of digital media is expanding into complex networks. Indeed, the virtual world of multiplayer, globally accessed online worlds such as *Second Life* and *World of Warcraft* now involves hundreds of thousands of people. Massively multiplayer online role playing game groups (MMORPG) such as *World of Warcraft* now have budgets the size of the Gross Domestic Product of small nation states. They also set up new regional bases, with Korea, the US and increasingly China becoming centres of participation in these trends.

The modern discourse on the technology of media often uses statistics and comparisons to show the scale of technological change. In 1996, the ‘The Hitch-hiker’s Guide to Cybernomics’ in *The Economist* said:

Twenty-five years ago only about 50,000 computers existed in the whole wide world; now the number has rocketed to an estimated 140m. And that does not include any of the chips inside cars, washing machines or even talking greeting cards. A typical car today has more computer-processing power than the first lunar landing-craft had in 1969. In 1844 Samuel Morse launched the era of instant communication by telegraphing the prophetic words: ‘What hath God wrought!’ In 1960 a transatlantic telephone cable could carry only 138 conversations simultaneously. Now a fibre-optic cable can carry 1.5m conversations. (*The Economist*, 1996, S3–7)

Convergence. The transformation of older media, like print, into new cultural or new technology forms, like online news. Different societies and cultures are dealing with convergence and globalization in different ways.

The discourses on changes in the technology of media include discourses on changes in how media professions operate. Friedland and Webb (1996) describe how they set up *Online Wisconsin*, an online journal as part of their journalism course at the University of Wisconsin, beginning in 1993. They were driven to it by the realization that news was already being delivered in new ways. ‘The rapid pace of acceptance of new technologies means the vision of the “multimedia journalist” carrying a tape recorder, small format video camera, and notebook becomes less futuristic every day ... we can now define multimedia journalism as the combined application of hypertext, graphics audio, and video in a single journalistic publication on the Internet’ (Friedland and Webb, 1996, 55). As they point out, the move was already happening and was being led partly by traditional media organizations and partly by computer-based organizations.

The process of bringing together different media into one activity or one medium is called **convergence**. The Internet is a convergence technology because it brings together video, sound and text. Convergence can also mean new service types or corporate restructuring, for example telecommunications companies also becoming broadcasting companies and publishing companies. Convergence raises obvious questions about whether society has changed as a result of the introduction of new media. There are two main positions on the issue of social change in this world of global media. Webster (1995) distinguishes between those social theorists who think that contemporary society is a new kind of society, different from hitherto existing societies, and those for whom it is a continuation of established social relationships but with an intensified role of information and media.

The supporters of continuity over change tend to be *pessimistic* about the future. The supporters of contemporary society as a new kind of society tend to be *optimistic*. Those who support the idea of continuity in social and technological change tend to have ideology and issues of power, ownership and control as their predominant concern. Those who support the idea of radical change tend to have pluralism and issues of free flow of information, diversity and competing power bases as their predominant concern.

Influential to discussions on emerging technologies has been the work of Manuel Castells (1996; 1997; 1998) who introduced several ideas concerning the networked realm of globalization. ‘The rise of the network society calls into question the processes of construction of identity... thus inducing new forms of social change. This is because the network society is based on the systemic disjunction between the local and the global for most individuals and social groups’ (Castells, 1997).

Technology is, without a doubt, one of the most important contributory factors underlying the internationalization and globalization of economic activity (Dicken, 1998, 145) Since the development and expansion of telecommunication networks brought the concept of the ‘shrinking world’ to public knowledge, an idea derived from McLuhan’s (1962) concept of global village, the convergence of technologies such as the telephone, fax, and computer, has inspired debate about issues of societal transformation toward an information society. Manuel Castells in his early work motivated discussion on themes concerning the philosophical and theoretical basis of the information society. Works such as *Postmodern Geographies* (Soja, 1989) and *Collapsing Space and Time* (Brunn and Leinbach, 1991) heralded ideas that emphasized diversity and increased freedoms.

It was not, however, until the expansion of the Internet in the mid-90s and the analysis of experiences of networks, their meaning to users, their operability and other qualitative issues related to the communicational information systems, that critical

debate on the subject really took off. The development of data-transaction speed and the enormous increase in users resulted in the Internet being known variously as the *information highway*, the *electronic frontier* or the *virtual land of expression* (Adams, 1998). Graham crystallizes the main argument as follows:

Human life becomes liberated from the constraint of space and frictional effects of distance. Anything becomes possible anywhere and at any time. All information becomes accessible everywhere and anywhere. (Graham, 1998, 168)

Concomitant to the debates surrounding globalization and the new economy is the emerging interest in the politics of networks. This relates to the ideas of surveillance, political regulation, civic influence and their ensuing developments. With the convergence of the mobile phone, computer and GPS (global positioning system) it is now possible to track the geographical location and past time-paths of individuals. Currently there are attempts to legislate to protect the rights of the individual and, most recently, discussions on the Fourth Amendment in the United States.

In this book, the authors will provide examples to you that show both radical change and continuity. For example, in Figures 1.1 and 1.2 it is possible to see globally the extent and tempo of Internet exchanges as well as the density of Internet connections. North America and Europe have extensive contact with each other and much of the population has access to the Internet. But, as media studies thinkers, can we say more about these global interconnections? Is this a case of rich nations controlling technology and media flows? Or is there more to it?

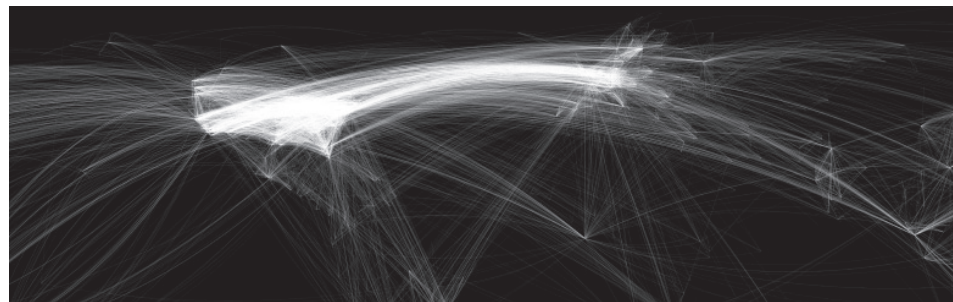
Figure 1.1 Map of density of Internet connections

Source: Reproduced with permission from Chris Harrison, Human-Computer Interaction Institute, Carnegie Mellon University.



Figure 1.2 City to city Internet connections

Source: Reproduced with permission from Chris Harrison, Human-Computer Interaction Institute, Carnegie Mellon University.



For example, Carlin is an Australian diver and salvage operator who has ‘discovered’ the wrecks of HMAS *Perth* and USN *Houston* in the Sunda Straits, Indonesia. Carlin was assisted in his search by a local Indonesian fisherman, who gave him a surprise:

As the fisherman pushed off, the Australian noticed he had a bucket sitting between his legs. Inside he was amazed to see a GPS. How a seemingly impoverished fisherman happened to have such a sophisticated device – and knew how to use it – still baffles him. (McBeth, 2002, 51)

A quantitative view of media diffusion, as in the Internet map above, does not tell us the full impact of digital media worldwide. There is also debate about the benefits of globalization and what it means for nations and cultures. For example, globalization according to Mittelman is a ‘coalescence of varied transnational processes and domestic structures, allowing the economy, politics, culture and ideology of one country to penetrate another’ (1996, 3). Note that Mittelman’s definition hints at control of one nation or country over another. Hjarvard’s (2003) definition of globalization, though, has a softer touch. He says that we can think about global connections and *globalization* in terms of:

- the extent and intensity of the global media links and networks (the distance and area covered, the complexity of the networks, how finely meshed they are);
- the tempo of media exchanges and the influence of the global media links (the degree of activity and interaction over long distances and the impact of that activity and interaction, including the volumes of goods, people, and communication flows).

How we think about globalization obviously affects how we analyse what we see. In this book the authors will present you with global examples that show the extent and intensity of the global media links as well as their impact. It will be up to you to decide whether societies and cultures are radically changing or if they are becoming more free or less free in a globalized, media, world.

to recap...

Globalization at the minimum involves networks – of media, goods, people – that cross national boundaries and can vary in their extent, intensity, tempo and influence.

Part I, Convergences, provides you with background to the history of convergence of media and the current global context. Chapter 2 investigates the first revolution in media, the rise of the alphabet, and the second major revolution before the broadcast era, the printing press. Chapter 3 provides background to the modern global, digital, media world.

Part II, Theories, gives you a detailed overview of the theoretical origins of administrative research (media effects), critical research (ideology and its impact) and the concepts of information and communication in the disciplinary literature. Chapter 4 summarizes the different empirical perspectives on diffusion, agenda setting, uses and gratifications, constructivism and assumptions about how influential the media, in fact, are. Chapter 5 looks at how the idea of ideology has been developed and used in the media studies field, especially notions like hegemony. Chapter 6 looks in detail at how concepts of information and, by extension, communication, have been defined by different theories, many in the communication and media fields. How we conceive of information as a phenomenon has a dramatic effect on how we think about communication and human interaction.

Part III, Content, Audiences and Effects, looks at the rise of information warfare as a specialist area of persuasion, how cultures are being transformed in a global media world, and games audiences. Chapter 7 will outline the concept of information warfare and the concept of propaganda. Chapter 8 discusses the concept of culture and intercultural communication and issues in cultural change created by globalization. Chapter 9 uses India and China as case studies of change.

Part IV, Structures and Organization, looks at key debates in media and democracy, digital identity, the media professions, media economics and research. Chapter 10

introduces the idea of e-democracy and the pressures on governmental and other organizations created by new media, including radical and rebellious media. Chapter 11 discusses how journalism and public relations have been affected by social media. Chapter 12 provides an overview of changes to media economics, especially the impact on ideas of currency in advertising. Chapter 13 studies the online and multimedia games phenomenon. Chapter 14 gives an insight into how research methods and ways of studying the audience and media are adapting to new media environments. Chapter 15 provides a summary of key issues that arise from discussion of the components of the mediation process.

Media Theories and Approaches complements the text with an online World Media Atlas. The Atlas maps media ownership, usage, and diffusion statistics, from newspapers to the Internet, together with an overview of trends in regulation.

Summary

The study of media involves more than mass media and, in a world increasingly characterized by global networks and links, can usefully be described as global media studies. In this book the authors aim to introduce you to some of the studies that have had a significant impact on the way media studies is studied but the authors have also tried to keep in mind that media studies is more than a field of study. The text will try to remind you that the concepts we write about are not remote theorizing but something you can see or apply at every moment of your waking life. The authors also try to relate them to your possible future careers. Much of this book is about newspapers, radio and television and the careers associated with them. The authors write about journalism, journalists and newsgathering, about the nature of news and about important fields from which much of it is drawn, such as politics. Moreover, the authors have diverse backgrounds with one a specialist in professional education, another a specialist in Chinese media and the other in South Asian media. It is their collective interest in the effects of the media in diverse cultures and situations that link them. The authors hope that the concepts in this book will prove to be not only part of your broad liberal education but also a useful adjunct to what you are practising as students of journalism, public relations, advertising and marketing.

At the conclusion of this chapter you should now be able to:

- think critically about what makes up the field of media studies;
- start thinking on the ideas of globalization and convergence and their impact.

Key themes

Defining the media studies field. Media studies differs from disciplines such as psychology or history. It draws on psychology, history and other disciplines but its boundaries are defined by the processes involved in the distribution of symbolic content in societies. The early debates about the impact of media in society or the influence of media on audiences drew on administrative research (media effects) and critical research (culture, ideology and media).

Globalization and social change. Analyses about media and social change and globalization tend to be either optimistic or pessimistic about the future. Some theorists see the global networks leading to greater interdependence and dependence on more powerful cultures. Others see the networks and links offering new possibilities for communication and global cooperation. There can be no doubt, however, that there are now global media networks and links and that convergence characterizes media at national and international levels. Understanding the extent and intensity of those networks and links and their impact requires analysis of the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of national and global media.

Discussion questions

- 1 If you were limited to only three aspects of the media, what would they be? What does this tell you about yourself? How do you use media? Is it a form of communication? A channel for information? A way of making yourself fit into society? If you were asked to specify a certain medium and describe its most important uses for you in everyday life, what would that be and what would be the constraints of having to choose only one medium to manage your needs?
- 2 Find a news story that has global impact, such as the McCanns' tragedy. See if you can get different national views on that story. Bring it to class and see if you can show how the different components of the process of mediation might come into play.
- 3 The immediacy of media in our lives may cause us to question our own sense of security and our chance of happiness. Do you agree with this? Bring to the class for discussion two contrasting examples from the media that affect your sense of security or happiness.
- 4 Look up the media table in the online World Media Atlas. What conclusions can you draw about how media technologies differ country by country, region by region?

Further reading

Silverstone, R. (1999). *Why study the media?* London: Sage.

Peer review

The Internet provides significant resources for the media studies discipline. However, you have to be careful in how you approach them. Traditionally, journals in the field are peer reviewed. When a media scholar submits an article to a particular journal for publication then a panel of experts reviews that article and checks that it meets best practice for the field. Peer review often involves a blind refereeing process where the author does not know the names of the reviewers and the reviewers do not know the name of the author of the paper. This helps to reduce bias and preserve independence in review. Not all sources on the Internet are peer reviewed. For example, Wikipedia sites can be useful but often they are not peer reviewed. The weblinks provided to you in this book, such as *Voice of the Shuttle*, are good first stops for you to gain an idea on what scholars and others are putting up as reference sites, but be careful in their use.

World Media Atlas

The online World Media Atlas, constructed by the authors, will provide yearly updates of statistics and regulation trends in the following areas:

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| 1. Ownership and control | 7. Kids |
| 2. Newspapers online | 8. Music |
| 3. Radio | 9. Expenditure (advertising in all media) |
| 4. Cinema | 10. Regulation |
| 5. TV ratings | 11. Media table |
| 6. Internet use | |

Voice of the Shuttle

<http://vos.ucsb.edu>

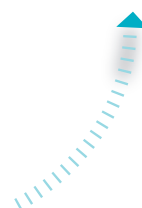
Other sites that may be of interest:

<http://www.mediaknowall.com/>

<http://www.intute.ac.uk/artsandhumanities/communications/>

<http://www.cultsock.ndirect.co.uk/index7.html>

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