



Understanding Media and Culture:
An Introduction to Mass Communication, v. 2.0

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CHAPTER 2

Media Effects



Section 1: Mass Media and Its Messages

Learning Objectives

1. Explain the different ways mass media affects culture.
2. Analyze cultural messages that the media send.
3. Explain the ways new media have affected culture.



Mass Media Affects Culture

- Many studies have been done that show that our behavior is influenced by media:
 - Through persuasion and propaganda
 - Through portrayal of violent behavior
 - Through sexually-themed content



The Media Sends Cultural Messages

- Starting in the mid-20th century, celebrities and other public figures have come to represent gender roles, athleticism, and cultural accomplishments to media viewers
- Some celebrities represented cultural stereotypes that marginalized certain groups



New Media Affects Culture

- The Internet and other digital communication forms:
 - Changed literacy and communication standards
 - Make a wealth of new information available
 - Are easier to access than print sources
 - Allow users to easily filter unwanted information
 - Deliver information rapidly
 - Encourage greater personal participation
 - Allow the flow of information across multiple platforms (convergence)



Section 2: Media Effects Theories

Learning Objectives

1. Identify the basic theories of media effects.
2. Explain the uses of various media effects theories.



Understanding Media

- In 1964, professor Marshall McLuhan wrote *Understanding Media*
- It illustrated how media had changed individual behavior and wider culture
- He coined the phrase “The medium is the message”



Basic Theories

- Scholars have developed many different theories about the effect of mass media on behavior
 - **Direct Effects**
 - **Agenda Setting**
 - **Uses and Gratifications**
 - **Symbolic Interactionism**
 - **Spiral of Silence**
 - **Media Logic**
 - **Cultivation Analysis**



Media Theories in Action

- Direct Effect – largely discredited by 1940
- Agenda-Setting and Uses and Gratification – give extra power to the media or to the consumer
- Symbolic Interactionism – gives media the power, through advertising, to create shared cultural symbolism
- Spiral of Silence – gives the power to the majority opinion
- Media Logic and Cultivation Analysis – show how media influences consumers' perceptions of reality



Section 3: Methods of Researching Media Effects

Learning Objectives

1. Identify the prominent media research methods.
2. Explain the uses of media research methods in a research project.



Media Research Methods

- The practical procedures for carrying out a research project include several methods:
 - **Content Analysis**
 - Surveys
 - **Focus Groups**
 - Experiments
 - **Participant Observation**



Research Methods in Action

- Test Subjects
 - Surveys
 - Depth interviews
 - Focus groups
 - Experiments
- Analysis of Media
 - Content
 - Style
 - Social roles
 - Archival analysis



Section 4: Media Studies Controversies

Learning Objectives

1. Explain some of the major objections to specific media theories.
2. Identify ways media studies are used to support political opinions.
3. Differentiate between proper and improper use of media studies.



Problems with Methodology and Theory

- Theorists are divided about audiences being active or passive
- Studies do not prove cause and effect
- Overall assumptions are unquestioned
- Broad claims discount individual differences



Politics and Media Studies

- Media studies are often used in politics to support various opinions.
- They are often oversimplified and can result in contradictory claims.
- Media bias claims have been made that the media favors a liberal view.



Media Decency

- Media studies are used in trying to establish decency standards
- Media studies cannot prove a word or image is indecent but they can discern its impact
- Groups with stated goals often adjust the language of the studies to fit their agendas