PSY 355 Psychology & Media in the Digital Age

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What Is The Nature of Media?

In our first class, I indicated that human beings are embedded in a very complex environment...including our social and cultural worlds that envelop us in multiple ways. The worlds in which we each live include more and more comprehensively what we may call "media". And, so, to understand how humans today live, let's examine what we mean by "media." I will argue below that media is far broader a reality than most people suspect.

What is/are your earliest memories of media?

What sorts? What did you do?

What did you like (or not like)?

How old were you?

Did you use these media along with your parents or siblings or friends?

What do we mean by "media" (plural of "medium")?

Television? Recorded music? Radio? Movies? Newspapers? Magazines?

Of course these forms equal the "mass media" (the term was coined in 1923)

But, what about these elements of modern life? Are they media?

- Theme and amusement parks like Walt Disney World or Universal Studios Hollywood
- Shopping malls including Destiny USA or the Mall of America®
- A neo-Gothic Catholic cathedral like St. Patrick's (NYC) or a Christian Evangelical mega-church like the Fellowship Church (Grapevine, TX)
- Typical American colleges or universities such as Le Moyne or SU
- The Hubble Space Telescope or the Large Hadron Collider at CERN
- Sports complexes such as stadiums and arenas like the SU Carrier Dome
- Supermarkets such as Wegmans or Tops

<p align="center">Media ≠ Mass Media</p>

Defining Media as a General Phenomenon

1. **Any extension of the human sensory-perceptual, cognitive, and motor-expressive systems** which augments, replaces, or otherwise permits human persons to experience or do things that they would not ordinarily or otherwise be able to do. As extensions of these systems, each media form **interfaces** with human persons in ways specific or peculiar to that form and the person.

2. These extensions (media) are directed toward **human objectives** & include one or more of the following aims (linked to the nature of the human person as described in our last class):

- *Transportation* (Material Being, e.g., cars, jet planes, ships)
- *Protection & physical well-being* (Material Being; Biopsychological Organism, e.g., weather forecasts, military supplies)
- *Information acquisition and analysis* (Biopsychological Organism, Social Actor, Symbol-using Agent, e.g., news, encyclopedias, fiction & nonfiction writing, computers)
- *Communication* (Material Being, Social Actor, Symbol-using Agent, Story-Making Author, e.g., telephones, computers, Skype & FaceTime, social media apps,)
- *Recreation or diversion such as relaxation, entertainment, pleasure, enjoyment* (Social Actor, Symbol-using Agent, Story-Making Author, e.g., sports stadiums, music recordings, films, television, video & online games, poetry)
- *Exaltation, wonder, enchantment, and awe* (Witness to the Transcendent, e.g., art, music, photography, virtual reality apps, cathedrals & churches)

3. Each media form is also **a more or less complex layered system or network** in which there are physical (mechanical), technical-scientific, and social components associated with individual layers within the system.

In summary, all forms of media

(1) are extensions of human capabilities

(2) deal with human objectives/goals/motivations, and

(3) are layered systems or networks.

At heart, media are a culture's technologies, but our focus in this course will generally (but not exclusively) involve digital forms of **communication**, **information**, & **recreation (entertainment) as media**.

What do I mean by the notion of media as a layered system or network? Consider how each form of media below:

Painting   Album   Landline Telephone   Personal Computer

- Painting: Physical materials, painter, genre, purpose/commissioning, function...

- Album: Physical setting (studio, etc.), material (disc, vinyl, digital file), songwriters...

- Land-line Telephone: Physical unit (speaker, microphone...), connective layer, protocols....

- Personal Computer: Physical unit, operating system, software, network connections....

Layers of the Internet Protocol
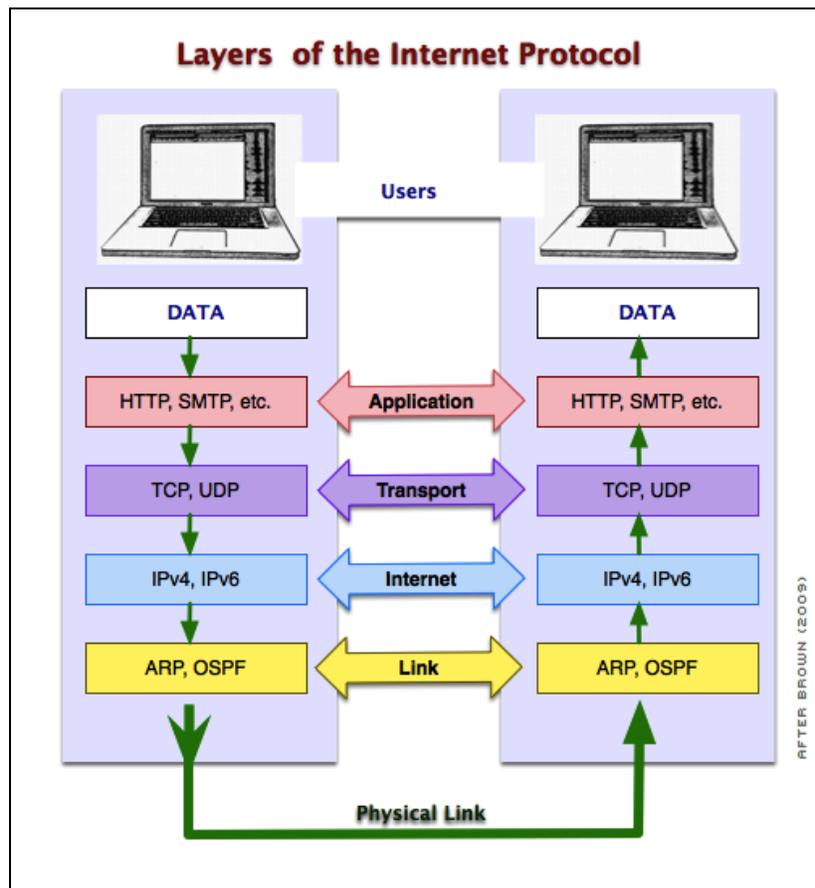
Why is it important to notice the layered system of media?

- Do you know how to program your computer?

- What is the difference between mp3 and FLAC audio compression formats?

- If your smartphone syncs with your personal computer, does this eliminate the need for you to put in address & phone number information twice?

- If you are playing a video game with someone in Germany or Canada, does it make a difference whether you use a Mac or a PC?

Some qualities that technical layers of media have to have:

- Technical layers need to be as **transparent or unobtrusive** as possible (ease of use, etc.)

- **Constant struggle** between giving the pubic access to the technical layers and walling those layers off (issues of ownership, licensing, quality control, etc.).

- **Inter-operational quality** of the layers: how well do they work together? (Smoothness of operation, consumer ease, extending capabilities by cross-platform interaction, etc.)

Approaches to Studying Media (Joshua Meyrowitz, 1998)

- Media as **content** (messages) delivered to users
- Media as distinct sets of **languages**
- Media as creating an **environment** (an **ecological system**)

1. Media as content (messages) delivered to users

- Metaphor: Media is a pipeline, a conduit, a delivery vehicle which brings messages to users

- Focus is upon the **effects** of media's content, for example:
  - Does violence experienced in visual media translate into violence in real life?
  - Does the portrayal of different genders or ethnicities or sexual orientations affect how people respond?
  - Do the news stories featured on FoxNews or Drudge or National Public Radio influence viewers or listeners?

Joshua Meyrowitz
Professor of Communications
University of New Hampshire

2. Media as distinct sets of languages

- Metaphor: Each form of media is a language which has its own distinctive grammar

- Focus is upon the **grammar** of each medium's type of language
  - Grammar involves the **rules** that each type of media follow.
  - **HOW** does a particular medium achieve its goal?

3. Media as creating an environment (an ecological system)

- Metaphor: Media functions like an ecological system, that is, a surrounding environment in which each medium has its own specific characteristics that affect individuals and social groups within that environment. The notion of ecology being used here is metaphorical in that it moves beyond just the biological world to consider how different interacting parts of the physical, technological, and human worlds form systems which involve dynamic processes of change or innovation, grow, decay, etc. as they seek to achieve differing goals.

- Focus is upon **specific features of each medium as they interact** with human users (e.g., visual vs. auditory systems; passive vs. active cognition required; use of hands, fingers, arms, body, etc.). For example,
    - Does the world of screens in digital equipment (smartphones, iPads, computers) cut people off from interacting with others in real life?
    - Does the easy availability of information 24/7 change how people use their cognitive skills?
    - Do social media create a kind of community which screens out others while linking users into a tight-knit group?

Old Media • Traditional • "Legacy" Media	New Media	New New Media (Levinson, 2013)
Books (printed) Film/Cinema (film stock) Phonograph (records, tape) Photography (film stock) Print Journalism/Ephemera* (newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, billboards, sales catalogs, greeting cards) Radio (broadcast) Telephone (landline) Television (broadcast &	Email Personal computer (PC, Mac) Phonograph (CDs) Photography (digital) Portable digital music (iPod...) Radio (digital) Search Engines (Google, Yahoo...) Telephone (cellular) Television (satellite) Texting (SMS [Short Messaging System]) Video/voice conferencing (VOIP**, Skype...)	*Services* Blogging Facebook Foursquare Music (streaming, Spotify...) Podcasting SnapChat Spotify Twitter Wikipedia YouTube *Hardware* Smartphone (iPhone, Android...) Tablet computing

| cable) | Video gaming (Nintendo, Sega...) World Wide Web (WWW) ** Voice over the Internet Protocol | (iPad...) ------- Video gaming (Wii, PlayStation, Xbox, Xbox Live...) |

Types of Media Today (Paul Levinson, 2013)

Traditional ("Legacy") Media: Developed before the "digital age" (before the late 1970s or early 1980s)

- Producers controlled/owned the media directed to consumers
- Consumers pay for the content (along with advertisers)
- Analog formats

New Media: Media emerging from the late 1970s until the turn of beginning of the 21st century

- Digital formatting
- Centered on central processing units (CPUs)
- Static/fixed forms & usually not controlled by the consumer
- Little interaction of one user with another
- Online activities require relatively limited bandwidth
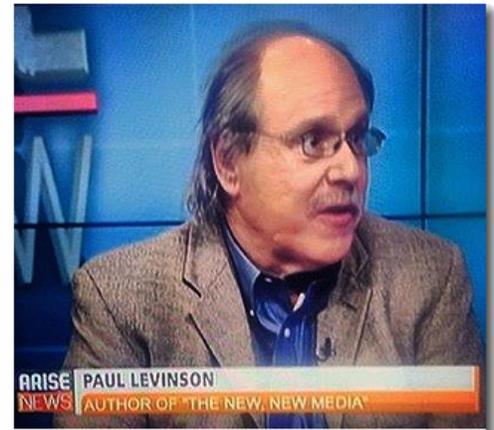
Paul Levinson
Professor of Communications
Fordham University
Appearance on Arise TV, 7 Sept 2014, talking about celebrity photo hacking; this photo of TV screen by Molly Vozick-Levinson

New New Media: Innovative media (hardware & software) arising in the 21st century

- "Every consumer is a producer"
- "You get what you don't pay for"
- "Competitive and mutually catalytic"
- "More than search engines & email"
- "Ultimately beyond the user's control"
- Increasingly higher bandwidths required to use

Surveillance Capitalism (Shoshana Zuboff, 2019)

Who are the wealthiest people in the world? According to Forbes' "Real Time Billionaires" (checked on 1/23/2022) they are

1. Elon Musk ($244.2 billion): Tesla, SpaceX
2. Bernard Arnault & Family ($191 billion): Luxury goods, e.g., Tiffany

3. Jeff Bezos ($169 biliion): founder of Amazon
4. Bill Gates ($131 billion): co-founder of Microsoft
5. Larry Ellison ($113 billion): CEO of Oracle (major computer software company)
6. Larry Page ($112 billion): co-founder of Google
7. Warren Buffet ($111 billion): Berkshire Hathaway
8. Sergey Brin ($108 billion): co-founder of Google
9. Mark Zuckerberg ($108 billlion): founder of Facebook
10. Mukesh Ambani ($95 billion): founder Reliance Industries (petrochemicals, telecom, retail)

Which are the wealthiest public corporations in the world? According to Investopedia, the ten most valuable public corporations (and their market capitalization [value of all stock] • date of founding) as of Dec. 21, 2021 were

1. Apple (AAPL) @ $2.9 trillion • 1977
2. Microsoft (MSFT) @ $2,.6 trillion • 1975
3. Alphabet Inc. (GOOGL), parent company of Google, @ $2.0 trillion • 2015 (Google 1998)
4. Saudi ARAMCO (2222.SR), Saudi Arabian Oil Co. @ $1.9 trillion • 1933
5. Amazon.com (AMZN) @ $1.7 billion • 1994
6. Tesla Inc. (TSLA), electric vehicles @ $1 trillion • 2003
7. Meta Platforms (FB), owner of Facebook @ $918 billion • 2004
8. NVIDIA Corp (NVDA), graphic processors & software @ $755 billion • 1993
9. Berkshire Hathaway (BRK.A), diverse businesses @ $648 billion • 1839
10. Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing (TSM) @ $618 billion • 1987

- Among the 10 wealthiest people in the world, 6 owe their wealth directly to computing and online activities.
- Among the 10 wealthiest corporations in the world, 7 are either internet- or computer-based businesses. None of them is more than 46 years old and 4 were founded less than 30 years ago.

In the world of "New New Media" as Paul Levinson calls it, there have been other terms and theories suggested about what has been happening over the last 15 to 20 years. The most compelling notion, in my opinion, is the emergence of what Shoshana Zuboff calls "Surveillance Capitalism." (Here is the overview of the concept at Wikipedia.).

Wikipedia's short definition of *Surveillance Capitalism* is "is an economic system centered around the commodification of personal data with the core purpose of profit-making. The concept of surveillance capitalism, as described by Shoshana Zuboff, arose as advertising companies, led by Google's AdWords, saw the possibilities of using personal data to target consumers more precisely."
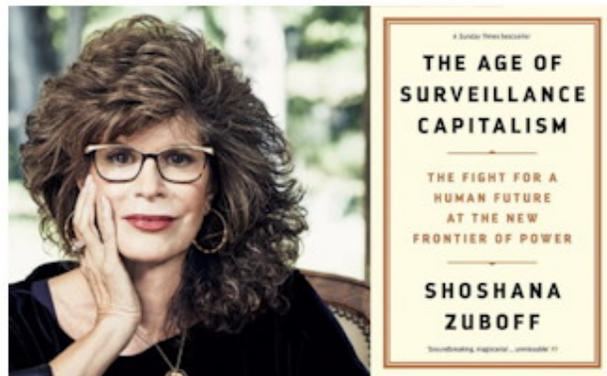
According to the OED, **commodification** means "The action or process of treating a person or thing as property which can be traded or whose value is purely monetary; the treatment of a person or thing as a commodity; commercialization." Some examples:

- Selling the names and addresses of the subscribers of a magazine to other magazines in hope that they can increase their subscribers

- Selling the names and email addresses of persons who buy a product on Amazon to companies that produce similar types of products
- Selling a list of all the items bought at a Tops or Wegmans Supermarket along with the names of those who bought these goods to merchants who produce similar types of goods. For example, the name and (email) address of a person purchasing baby diapers at Wegmans might be sold to a baby food company or a company that makes infants' clothing.
- Selling the name and email address of someone who makes a lot of airline trips by an airline or ticket company like Expedia to rental car companies or to motel/hotel chains.

Under the notion of surveillance capitalism, anything that we do online can become information or data that has monetary value to some company or institution.

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