



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

Media ≠ Mass Media

Defining Media as a General Phenomenon

The definition of media below represents particularly the ideas of the Canadian philosopher and communication theorist **Marshall McLuhan** (1911-1980) whom we will look at again in later classes. Indeed, the title of his famous 1964 book is: ***Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man***.

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

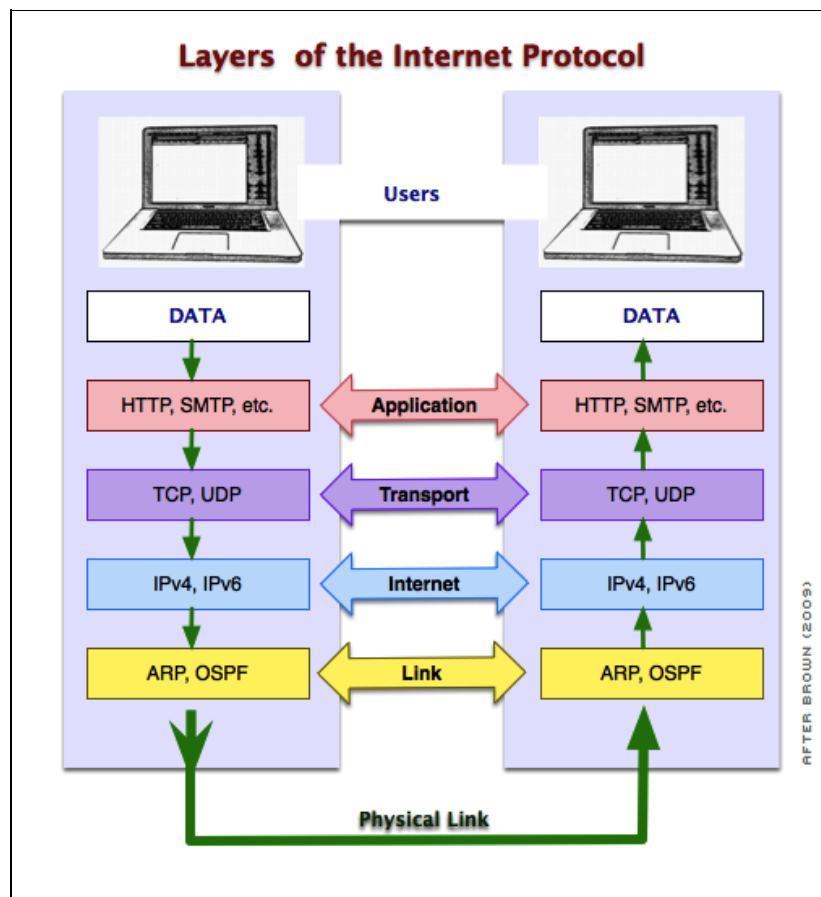
- (1) are extensions of human capabilities
- (2) deal with human objectives/goals/motivations, and
- (3) are layered systems or networks.

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: 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....



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 public 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: "Multiple Media Literacies" ([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?



Joshua Meyrowitz
Professor of Communications
University of New Hampshire

- Do the news stories featured on FoxNews or Drudge or National Public Radio influence viewers or listeners?

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)	Email Personal computer (PC, Mac) Phonograph (CDs) Photography (digital)	<i>Services</i> Blogging Facebook Foursquare Music (streaming,

Photography (film stock) Print Journalism/Ephemera* (newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, billboards, sales catalogs, greeting cards) Radio (broadcast) Telephone (landline) Television (broadcast & cable)	Portable digital music (iPod...) Radio (digital) Search Engines (Google, Yahoo...) Telephone (cellular) Television (satellite) Texting (SMS [Short Messaging System]) Video/voice conferencing (VOIP**, Skype...) Video gaming (Nintendo, Sega...) World Wide Web (WWW) ** Voice over the Internet Protocol	Spotify...) Podcasting SnapChat Spotify Twitter Wikipedia YouTube <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Hardware</i></p> Smartphone (iPhone, Android...) Tablet computing (iPad...) <p style="text-align: center;">-----</p> Video gaming (Wii, PlayStation, Xbox, Xbox Live...)
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Types of Media Today (Paul Levinson, 2012)

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

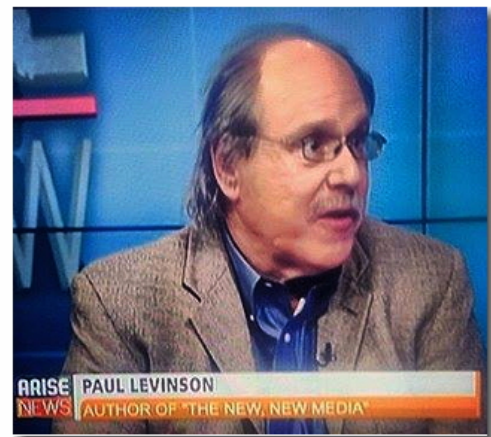
- Producers controlled/owned the media directed to consumers
- Consumers pay for the content (along with advertisers)
- Analog formats

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

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

- "Every consumer is a producer"



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

- "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 10 wealthiest people in the world? According to [Forbes' "Real Time Billionaires"](#) (March, 2024) they are

1. Bernard Arnault & Family (\$233.0B; was \$191B in 2022): Luxury goods, e.g., Tiffany
2. Elon Musk (\$195B; was \$244.2B in 2022): Tesla, SpaceX
3. **Jeff Bezos (\$194B; was \$169B in 2022): founder of Amazon**
4. **Mark Zuckerberg (\$177B; was \$108B in 2022): founder of Facebook**
5. **Larry Ellison (\$141B; was \$113B in 2022): CEO of Oracle (major computer software company)**
6. Warren Buffett (\$133B; was \$111B in 2022): Berkshire Hathaway
7. **Bill Gates (\$128B; was \$131B in 2022): co-founder of Microsoft**
8. **Steve Ballmer (\$121B; was \$92.1B in 2022): former CEO of Microsoft**
9. Mukesh Ambani (\$116B; was \$90.7B in 2022): founder Reliance Industries (petrochemicals, telecom, retail)
10. **Larry Page (\$114B; was \$112B in 2022): co-founder of Google**

Additionally,

11. **Sergey Brin (\$110B; was \$108B in 2022): co-founder of Google**
14. **Carlos Slim Helu & Family (\$102B; was \$81.2B in 2022): telecommunications (Mexico)**
16. **Michael Dell (\$91B; was \$55.1B in 2022) founder & CEO Dell Computer**

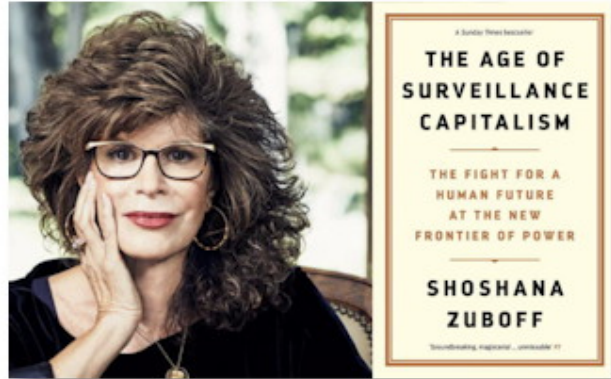
Which are the wealthiest public corporations in the world? According to [Investopedia](#), the ten most valuable public corporations (and their market capitalization [value of all stock] • date of founding) as of July 3, 2024* were

1. **Microsoft (MSFT) @ \$3.31 trillion • 1975**
2. **Nvidia (NVDA) @ \$3.22 trillion • 1993 [graphics processors and related software]**
3. **Apple (AAPL) @ \$3.22 trillion • 1976**
4. **Alphabet Inc. (GOOGL), parent company of Google, @ \$2.19 trillion • 2015 (Google 1998)**
5. **Amazon.com (AMZN) @ \$1.94 billion • 1994 [world's largest provider of cloud computing]**
6. **Saudi ARAMCO (2222.SR), Saudi Arabian Oil Co. @ \$1.78 trillion • 1933**
7. **Meta Platforms (META) @ \$1.27T • 2004 [Parent company of Facebook]**
8. **Berkshire Hathaway (BRK.A), diverse businesses @ \$885 billion • 1839**
9. **Eli Lilly & Company (LLY) @ \$842B • 1876 [pharmaceuticals/drugs]**
10. **Broadcom (AVGO) @807B • 1961 [semiconductors, software, security, data centers]**

- Among the 10 wealthiest people in the world, 6 owe their wealth directly to computing, telecommunications, electronics, 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 63 years old, and 4 were founded less than 31 years ago.

In the world of "New New Media" as Paul Levinson (2013) 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 (2019) 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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