

Chapter 01: Essay

Essay

1. Explain how the printing press helped books become the first mass medium.

ANSWER: While paper and block printing developed in China around 100 CE and 1045, respectively, what we recognize as modern printing did not emerge until the middle of the fifteenth century. At that time in Germany, Johannes Gutenberg's invention of movable metallic type and the printing press ushered in the modern print era. Printing presses and publications spread rapidly across Europe in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Early on, the size and expense of books limited their audience to the wealthy and powerful, but as printers reduced their size and cost, books became available and affordable to more people. Books eventually became the first mass-marketed products in history because of the way the printing press combined three necessary elements: First, machine duplication replaced the tedious system in which scribes hand-copied texts. Second, duplication could occur rapidly, so large quantities of the same book could be reproduced easily. Third, the faster production of multiple copies brought down the cost of each unit, making books more affordable to less-affluent people.

2. What is the importance of the telegraph in media history?

ANSWER: The gradual transformation from an industrial, print-based society to one grounded in the Information Age began with the development of the telegraph in the 1840s. Featuring dot-dash electronic signals, the telegraph made four key contributions to communication. First, it separated communication from transportation, making media messages instantaneous—unencumbered by stagecoaches, ships, or the pony express. Second, in combination with the rise of mass-marketed newspapers, the telegraph transformed information into a commodity that could be sold. By the time of the Civil War, news had become a valuable product. Third, the telegraph made it easier for military, business, and political leaders to coordinate commercial and military operations, especially after the installation of the transatlantic cable in the late 1860s. Fourth, the telegraph led to future technological developments, such as wireless telegraphy (later named radio), the fax machine, and the cell phone, which ironically resulted in the telegraph's demise: In 2006, Western Union telegraph offices sent their final messages.

3. Explain the two meanings of the term *media convergence*.

ANSWER: Developments in the electronic and digital eras enabled and ushered in this latest stage in the development of media—convergence—a term that media critics and analysts use when describing all the changes that have occurred over the past decade, and are still occurring, in media content and within media companies. The term actually has two meanings—one referring to technology and one to business—and describes changes that have a huge impact on how media companies are charting a course for the future.

The first meaning of media convergence involves the technological merging of content across different media channels—the magazine articles, radio programs, songs, TV shows, video games, and movies now available on the Internet through laptops, tablets, and smartphones.

A second meaning of media convergence—sometimes called cross platform by media marketers—describes a business model that involves consolidating various media holdings, such as cable connections, phone services, television transmissions, and Internet access, under one corporate umbrella. The goal is not necessarily to offer consumers more choice in their media options but to

Chapter 01: Essay

better manage resources and maximize profits. For example, a company that owns TV stations, radio outlets, and newspapers in multiple markets—as well as in the same cities—can deploy a reporter or producer to create three or four versions of the same story for various media outlets. So rather than having each radio station, TV station, newspaper, and online news site generate diverse and independent stories about an important issue or a significant event, a media corporation employing the convergence model can use fewer employees to generate multiple versions of the same story.

4. Using an example, explain the four stages in the development of a new mass medium.

ANSWER: Media innovations typically go through four stages. First is the emergence, or novelty, stage, in which inventors and technicians try to solve a particular problem, such as making pictures move, transmitting messages from ship to shore, or sending mail electronically. Second is the entrepreneurial stage, in which inventors and investors determine a practical and marketable use for the new device. For example, the Internet had its roots in the ideas of military leaders, who wanted a communication system that was decentralized and distributed widely enough to survive nuclear war or natural disasters. The third phase in a medium's development involves a breakthrough to the mass medium stage. At this point, businesses figure out how to market the new device or medium as a consumer product. Although the Pentagon and government researchers helped develop early prototypes for the Internet, commercial interests and individual entrepreneurs extended the Internet's global reach and business potential. Finally, the fourth and newest phase in a medium's evolution is the convergence stage. This is the stage in which older media are reconfigured in various forms into newer media. However, this does not necessarily mean that these older forms cease to exist. For example, you can still get the *New York Times* in print, but it's also now accessible on laptops and smartphones. During this stage, we see the merging of many different media forms onto online platforms, but we also see the fragmenting of large audiences into smaller niche markets. With new technologies allowing access to more media options than ever before, mass audiences are morphing into audience subsets that consume and chase particular products, lifestyles, politics, hobbies, and forms of entertainment.

5. Describe the linear model of mass communication, and give at least one critique of the model.

ANSWER: The digital era also brought about a shift in the models that media researchers have used over the years to explain how media messages and meanings are constructed and communicated in everyday life. One older and outdated explanation of how media operate viewed mass communication as a linear process of producing and delivering messages to large audiences. According to this model, senders (authors, producers, and organizations) transmitted messages (programs, texts, images, sounds, and ads) through a mass media channel (newspapers, books, magazines, radio, television, or the Internet) to large groups of receivers (readers, viewers, and consumers). In the process, gatekeepers (news editors, executive producers, and other media managers) functioned as message filters. Media gatekeepers made decisions about what messages actually got produced for particular receivers. The process also allowed for feedback, in which citizens and consumers, if they chose, returned messages to senders or gatekeepers through phone calls, e-mail, web postings, talk shows, or letters to the editor. But the problem with the linear model was that in reality, media messages—especially in the digital era—do not usually move smoothly from a sender at point A to a receiver at point Z. Words and images are more likely to spill into one another, crisscrossing in the daily media deluge of

Chapter 01: Essay

product ads, TV shows, news reports, social media, smartphone apps, and everyday conversation. Media messages and stories are encoded and sent in written and visual forms, but senders often have very little control over how their intended messages are decoded or whether the messages are ignored or misread by readers and viewers.

6. Name the ways in which both "high" culture and "low" culture are identified.

ANSWER: High culture, identified with "good taste" and higher education and supported by wealthy patrons and corporate donors, is associated with fine art, which is available primarily in libraries, theaters, and museums. In contrast, low or popular culture is aligned with the "questionable" tastes of the masses, who enjoy the commercial "junk" circulated by the mass media. Whether or not we agree with this cultural skyscraper model, the high–low hierarchy often determines or limits the way we view and discuss culture today. Using this model, critics have developed at least five areas of concern about so-called low culture: the depreciation of fine art, the exploitation of high culture, the disposability of popular culture, the decline of high culture, and the deadening of our cultural taste buds.

7. Explain why thinking of culture as a map rather than as a skyscraper or hierarchy is more inclusive. Use your own example(s) to illustrate your answer.

ANSWER: While the skyscraper model is one way to view culture, another way to view it is as a map. Here, culture is an ongoing and complicated process—rather than a high–low vertical hierarchy—that allows us to better account for our diverse and individual tastes. In the map model, we judge forms of culture as good or bad based on a combination of personal taste and the aesthetic judgments a society makes at particular historical times. Because such tastes and evaluations are "all over the map," a cultural map suggests that we can pursue many connections across various media choices and can appreciate a range of cultural experiences without simply ranking them from high to low. Our attraction to and choice of cultural phenomena—such as the stories we read in books or watch at the movies—represent how we make our lives meaningful. Culture offers plenty of places to go that are conventional, familiar, and comforting. Yet at the same time, our culture's narrative storehouse contains other stories that tend toward the innovative, unfamiliar, and challenging. Most forms of culture, however, demonstrate multiple tendencies. We may use online social networks because they are both comforting (an easy way to keep up with friends) and innovative (new tools or apps that engage us). The map offered in the text is based on a subway grid. Each station represents tendencies or elements related to why a person would be attracted to particular cultural products. More popular culture forms congregate in certain areas of the map, while less popular cultural forms are outliers. This multidirectional, antihierarchical model serves as a more flexible, multidimensional, and inclusive way of imagining how culture actually works.

8. Describe the five-step critical process for developing media literacy.

ANSWER: Developing a media-literate critical perspective involves mastering five overlapping stages that build on one another.

A. Description: paying close attention, taking notes, and researching the subject under study

B. Analysis: discovering and focusing on significant patterns that emerge from the description stage

C. Interpretation: asking and answering "What does that mean?" and "So what?" questions about one's findings

D. Evaluation: arriving at a judgment about whether something is good, bad, or mediocre, which

Chapter 01: Essay

involves subordinating one's personal taste to the critical "bigger picture" resulting from the first three stages

E. Engagement: taking some action that connects our critical perspective with our role as citizens and watchdogs to question our media institutions, adding our voice to the process of shaping the cultural environment

9. Using your own favorite or familiar example from popular media (a hip-hop or an alternative rock song, a TV show, a magazine), explain how it works as culture (a term you will need to define).

ANSWER: One way to understand the impact of the media on our lives is to explore the cultural context in which the media operate. Often, culture is narrowly associated with art, the unique forms of creative expression that give pleasure and set standards about what is true, good, and beautiful. Culture, however, can be viewed more broadly as the ways in which people live and represent themselves at particular historical times. This idea of culture encompasses fashion, sports, literature, architecture, education, religion, and science, as well as mass media. Although we can study discrete cultural products, such as novels or songs from various historical periods, culture itself is always changing. It includes a society's art, beliefs, customs, games, technologies, traditions, and institutions. It also encompasses a society's modes of communication: the creation and use of symbol systems that convey information and meaning (e.g., languages, Morse code, motion pictures, and binary computer codes).

Culture is made up of both the products that a society fashions and, perhaps more importantly, the processes that forge those products and reflect a culture's diverse values. Thus, culture may be defined as the symbols of expression that individuals, groups, and societies use to make sense of daily life and to articulate their values. According to this definition, when we listen to music, read a book, watch television, or scan the Internet, we are not usually asking "Is this art?" but are instead trying to identify or connect with something or someone. In other words, we are assigning meaning to the song, book, TV program, or website. Culture, therefore, is a process that delivers the values of a society through products or other meaning-making forms. For example, the American ideal of "rugged individualism"—depicting heroic characters overcoming villains or corruption—has been portrayed on television for decades through a tradition of detective stories and police procedurals, such as PBS's *Sherlock* and *Endeavor* and CBS's *Elementary* and various incarnations of *NCIS*.

Culture links individuals to their society by providing both shared and contested values, and the mass media help circulate those values. The mass media are the cultural industries—the channels of communication—that produce and distribute songs, novels, TV shows, newspapers, movies, video games, Internet services, and other cultural products to large numbers of people. The historical development of media and communication can be traced through several overlapping phases or eras in which newer forms of technology disrupted and modified older forms—a process that many critics and media professionals began calling convergence with the arrival of the Internet.