16 | Media and Technology

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The final chapter of the textbook introduces the reader to something we are all familiar with in one form or another: media and technology. Ways of communicating information and entertainment have expanded greatly over the past century and this is establishing new power dynamics within our society. Sociologists have examined the media with great interest as the content and technologies of communication can inform, persuade, and challenge our ideas, beliefs, and cultural norms in many ways.

Technology does not develop on its own and understanding the social aspects of this development is critical. Highlighting key theorists in Canada, the authors show that technology is often depicted by society as a solution for all human problems, but it many cases it may also be the causes of them.

Sociologists cannot study media without critically examining the role of technology. To place this in context, the authors explain the political economy of media and highlight the impact of public versus private media ownership. These include horizontal and vertical integration, cross-ownership, and conglomerate ownership. Following this, the chapter presents an overview of how the state works with the media institutions and subsequent media policies that intertwine and affect us.

The role of neo-liberal policy and globalization are also discussed. The authors distinguish between two aspects in this regard: cultural and economic globalization. The former refers to an increase in the deepening of worldwide media industries, most notably the American film industry. The latter refers to an emergence of an international division of labour that sees an expansion of multinational corporations.

The cultural studies of media are then examined, which focus on media content and issues of dominant ideology. Two central theoretical approaches are used to help understand the close link between technology and society in this context. Conflict theory examines issues such as the digital divide and the discrepancies in technological ownership among social groups. Feminism shows the gender imbalances within media and technology, examining the intersectionality of a number of key issues. Alternative-media, user-generated content, and self-presentation are also discussed as mechanisms for creating areas of contestation and conflict.

Understanding that the mass media are powerful institutions, representations of certain aspects of life and peoples across the world can be positive and also negative. The dominant ideologies can be imposed onto society through what is shown to the public. The working class, women and racial/ethnic groups can be portrayed in ways that maintain the status quo and/or perpetuate negative stereotypes.

KEY TERMS

Alternative media	Neo-liberalism	Technology
Digital divide	Ownership concentration	User-generated content
Digital skills	Self-presentation	
Dominant ideology	State	

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What are three issues to which researchers who specialize in the political economy of media devote particular attention? (p. 372)

2. Historically, Canada has had what two independent broadcasting regulators? (p. 373)

3. What is the difference between outsourcing and offshoring? (p. 374)

4. According to Wright, media institutions contribute to the maintenance of society by performing what four functions? (p. 373)

5. Globalization is being driven by a complex mixture of technological, economic, and political factors. Briefly explain each of these factors. (p. 374)

6. According to Hall, the dominant ideology is woven into media texts through encoding. How is this achieved? (p. 378)

7. How are working-class people represented in the media as opposed to the middle class? (p. 379)

8. Hall identifies what three possible ways of decoding media texts? Briefly explain each. (p. 379)

9. What did Ursula Franklin mean by arguing that technology is not "the sum of the artifacts"? (p. 371)

10. How might being a refugee affect your access to the Internet? (p. 382)

READINGS AND WEBSITES

Greer, Chris. (2010). *Crime and media: A reader.* **New York: Routledge.**

This book contains over 40 readings from various sociologists on media and crime. This book will be of particular interest to all students in large part because whenever we watch the news or read the papers, crime stories usually make the headlines. Yet as many of the authors of this book explain, many of the representations are over-emphasized and do not necessarily paint the portrait the mass media attempts to convey to its viewers/readers on the subject of crime. Sociologists/criminologists Jürgen Habermas, Marshall McLuhan, Jean Baudrillard, Noam Chomsky, and Stuart Hall are only a few of the well-known experts in this field in this book.

Vipond, Mary. (2011). *The Mass Media in Canada* **(4th ed.). Toronto, ON: James Lorimer and Company Ltd.**

The fourth edition of Vipond's book examines the rise of mass media in Canada during the twentieth century. She begins by taking a look at a rising Canadian sentiment of nationalism during the 1920s leading up to post-War Canada. Following the war, the traditional forms of mass media are examined more closely, with its impacts on family and society. The next part of the book is divided into several parts such as the economics of the mass media, culture and media, technology and media, and the government and the media.

Center for Internet and Society, the. (2017) *CIS.* **Retrieved from** http://cyberlaw.stanford.edu/

The Center for Internet and Society (CIS) is a public interest technology law and policy program at Stanford Law School and a part of Law, Science and Technology Program at Stanford Law School. CIS brings together scholars, academics, legislators, students, programmers, security researchers, and scientists to study the interaction of new technologies and the law and to examine how the synergy between the two can either promote or harm public goods like free speech, innovation, privacy, public commons, diversity, and scientific inquiry.

CNN. (2015, June 8). "Women in TV: From entry-level jobs to power players." [Video File]. Retrieved from http://www.cnn.com/videos/tv/2015/06/10/exp-the-seventies-women-tv-burnett-dnt-erin.cnn

Erin Burnett looks at how women on television and in real life have evolved from the 1970s to today. TV is seen as a medium that both influences society and also reflects key values and attitudes.

Lin, Hobson. [Hobson Lin]. "CMNS 253W: Social Media—Social Construction or Technological Determinism?" [Video File]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nISXXq6JXzY

Examining the theories surrounding technological determinism verses social constructionism, Hobson Lin explores both aspects and the role they play in social media.