Mass Communication and Society

The End of Mass Communication?

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Many people no longer consider the term *mass communication* to be an accurate descriptor of what it is that some communication scholars study. Developments in computing and information technologies over the last 2 decades have blurred the boundaries between the forms of communicating around which the academic field of communication was developed. Consequently, and as media convergence proceeds, some have suggested that the word *mass* in mass communication should be replaced with the term *media* (see Turow, 1992).[1] This change in terminology is not insignificant, as it implies a shift toward the view that media communication, rather than mass communication, is our focal topic of study. Further, it forces us to question whether mass communication is a fleeting idea, a purely 20th-century phenomenon. This notion is certainly shocking, but could it be true? What is the future of mass communication in the new media environment?

WHAT IS MASS COMMUNICATION?

Before evaluating the future of mass communication, we need to begin with a definition of what we are talking about, which is more difficult than it might first appear. Mass communication means different things to different people. For some, the core concept lies in the first word, *mass.* That is, the mass-ness of mass communication sets it apart from other forms of communication in human history in that it allows a communicator to reach a much larger and more geographically dispersed audience than ever before. T. S. Eliot's famous quip about how television allows us

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[1]The recent change in the title of the National Communication Association's flagship journal in mass communication from *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* to *Critical Studies in Media Communication* is another example of this movement.

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all to "laugh at the same joke at the same time" captures nicely this aspect of mass communication.

For others, the term *mass communication* is an oxymoron. These people tend to focus on the second word, *communication.* Because traditional definitions of communication are based on the idea of exchange, and because the technologies for mass communication (until recently) only allowed information to flow in one direction, true communication on a mass scale was impossible, according to this view. Most of us, however, think of mass communication in one or more of three ways: as a set of media institutions, as a societal problem, or as an academic field of study. We begin, then, with a brief historical overview of these three widely held conceptualizations of mass communication.

Mass communication as a set of media institutions.   A common view of mass communication is as a set of media institutions—the organizations that send mediated messages through various channels. In fact, most college-level introductory texts on the subject of mass communication are organized according to this view, with a chapter devoted to each of the mass media industries, including newspapers, magazines, books, film, radio, television, and their "support" industries, advertising and public relations.

The defining feature of these media institutions is their capacity for mass production and dissemination of messages. As Schramm (1954) and others have argued, the technologies powering the mass media unshackled communication from the bounds of time and space, thereby enabling for the first time in history instant communication with a large and largely anonymous audience. Media institutions such as film studios and television networks crystallized quickly to capitalize on and profit from the new opportunity for communication on a massive scale. These organizations were wildly successful, which enabled them to grow large, although the technologies themselves kept entry costs high, allowing only a few companies to dominate each media industry. Thus, by the middle of the 20th century, the mass media could be characterized by their "bigness and fewness" (Schramm, 1957).

Mass communication as a societal problem.   The bigness and fewness of the mass media meant that only a handful of gatekeepers made decisions about what media content would be distributed widely to the population. This situation elicited fear from social critics and gave rise to another view of mass communication: mass communication as a societal problem. This view was fueled by the realization that along with mass production came the possibility for mass persuasion. Seen as good at first, especially by companies that realized they could use the media to hock their products, by World War II, the idea that single individuals or companies could bend the entire world to their will using mass communication became a

widespread concern. From this perspective, the defining feature of mass communication was that the media had grown too big and powerful for society to control.

Fear of being unable to control the media stems in part from early assumptions about the vulnerability of the audience. A product of industrialization, mass communication emerged as urbanization was reaching new heights in American society and as those migrating to urban centers found themselves without their familiar social networks (e.g., Lasswell, 1930). The fact that the first audiences for mass media formed just as the social fabric was supposedly unraveling gave rise to the notion of audience members as socially and psychologically isolated, with few resources to resist media messages. For example, in popular writing of the time, audience members were often portrayed as atomized and helpless in the face of the powerful mass media's efforts to exploit them (Chaffee & Hochheimer, 1985; Katz, 1960).

Furthermore, it was in this milieu that media owners were consolidating their power, making efforts to control them increasingly difficult. Trends toward monopolization of the film and television industries began almost immediately, with the creation of the studio system and the rise of radio and television networks as examples. Centralized control of media content by professional and typically wealthy gatekeepers quickly characterized most mass communication. Given the financial barriers to entry and the physical scarcity of the airwaves, the average person had almost no opportunity for personal expression to reach a mass audience.

Also early on in the rise of the mass media, the industry's view of the audience shifted from an anonymous mass to a market that was both quantifiable and extremely profitable. Profit maximization in the production of mass communication meant aiming content at the lowest common denominator. Precise ways of monitoring the popularity of particular content became available from ratings services such as Arbitron and Nielsen, allowing the popular to be identified and repeated. The ultimate effect of these occurrences was a homogenization of media content that amused media audiences rather than enlightened them (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1972).

Mass communication was perceived to be uncontrollable for another reason as well. The mass media, particularly radio and television, were obtrusive in an unprecedented way. This perception was largely the result of the pervasive nature of the broadcast media. The fact that television came directly into the home and that viewers were to some extent a captive audience led people to feel that they were being stripped of the power to control their own living rooms. This was seen as especially problematic when violent and sexual content appeared in the media, and the official response to these concerns was to protect public morality and safety from the potential evil influence of the mass media (particularly broadcasting) through legislation. Policies such as licensing in the public interest, equal opportunities for political candidates, safe harbor, and the fairness doctrine were developed to ensure

that single individuals could not bend the world to their will or corrupt children with prurient and/or dangerous ideas.

Mass communication as an academic field.   Another view of mass communication is as a field of academic study. The defining feature of this conceptualization of mass communication is that it has knowable boundaries that are open to research. Early on, the study of mass communication focused primarily on applied problems, partly in response to the view of mass communication as a societal problem. Paul Lazarsfeld's Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University, with its emphasis on radio and other mass media effects, was a direct result of this focus (Schramm, 1997). The emergence of mass communication as an academic discipline came in the 1950s and has had three strands: basic education in mass communication practice, empirical research of mass communication processes and effects, and critical and cultural studies of the mass media.

Schools of broadcast, journalism, and film have been the primary training ground for media workers. There, such vocational skills as writing, reporting, editing, design, and production are taught to those who will then employ them in the media industries. Although most of these programs were once located in some of the largest universities in the United States, that is less true today. After World War II, many universities shifted their emphasis toward empirical research rather than vocational training in communication (Delia, 1987).

Over the last 50 years, thousands of empirical studies of mass communication have investigated aspects of mass communication, including the content, audience, and effects of the media, as well as evaluation research (e.g., the effectiveness of communication campaigns) and legal and policy issues surrounding the mass media (e.g., the impact of TV program ratings on viewing behavior). What these studies have in common is the application of behavioral science to perceived social problems or benefits that may be caused by the mass media, and the use of quantitative methods such as content analyses, surveys, and experiments to test hypotheses. Early researchers expected to prove that mass communication had significant effects on audiences, but their studies did not confirm this conclusion consistently. Instead, Bauer (1964) said that "the model that ought to be inferred from research is of communication as a transactional process of equitable exchange" (p. 319), rather than a model of exploitation and one-way influence.

Quantitative research was not the only academic approach to mass communication, however. Scholars researching the mass media from the perspective of critical theory and cultural studies have used mostly qualitative methods to study how the media are used to maintain power relationships in society or how media texts are consumed by individuals and groups in society, for example. For many of them, the media are ideological and, as such, research in this area has focused on such themes as elite domination of the media industries, reproduction of the status quo via the

mass media, and issues of democratizing access to the mass media, especially for oppressed groups such as women and minorities, to name a few examples.

The preceding three views lay out the defining features of mass communication as it has been conceived since the early 20th century: mass production, lack of individual control, and finite in available channels. The remainder of this article argues that these fundamentals of mass communication are not as true today as they once were, and that this is due to the emergence of new media for human communication. In short, the argument to be made is that contemporary media are "demassifying" mass communication. Some examples of today's new demassifying technologies include handheld devices such as cell phones or video games, but most important, Internet-based communication, including e-mail and the World Wide Web. This does not imply, however, that all demassified technologies are new. In fact, many older technologies allowed for narrowcasting to specific audiences and user control of content to some extent. In radio, FM and audiotape serve as examples; in television, UHF, cable, satellite, and videocassettes illustrate this point. What *is* different about the new media is a matter of degree, as we argue in the next section.

THE NEW MEDIA AND THE END OF
MASS COMMUNICATION

More than any other technologies for mass communication, contemporary media allow for a greater quantity of information transmission and retrieval, place more control over both content creation and selection in the hands of their users, and do so with less cost to the average consumer. The Internet serves as the best example and, through digital convergence, will form the backbone of most future mediated communication. The Internet was designed to be decentralized, meaning that control is distributed to all users who have relatively equal opportunity to contribute content. The increased bandwidth of the Internet further enhances users' ability to become content producers and to produce material that is fairly sophisticated at low cost. In addition, many of the new technologies are more portable and, therefore, more convenient to use compared with older mass media.

These characteristics of the new media are cracking the foundations of our conception of mass communication. Today, media institutions are changing such that mass production is less mass. The explosion of available channels afforded by the new technologies contributes to the demassification of the media by diffusing the audience for any particular media product. This has resulted in channel specialization, and the old model of broadcasting to the masses has given way to market segmentation and targeting to niche audiences. Although existing media institutions are well positioned to adapt to these changing conditions, the fact that the new me-

dia shrink the size of the audience for any particular channel is likely to create opportunities for others. That is, if smaller audiences mean reduced costs of production and distribution, then more content producers will be able to enter the media market. In the near future, the issue may be less about what media companies are doing *to* people and more about what people are doing *with* the media.

The notion of the media as a social problem because of their unchecked power over the means of mass expression is also breaking down with the emergence of the new media. As described earlier, this idea rested on mass society theory and particularly on the notion of a passive, atomized audience. Although the idea of an atomized society has never really been correct (a more accurate descriptor, both then and now, is a "molecular society" where individuals are embedded in small interpersonal networks), it is even more far fetched today as new technologies extend our networks across the globe and blur the boundaries between mass and interpersonal communication.

Furthermore, tight control over access to the media by elites and professional gatekeepers is waning as individuals and organizations of modest means become content selectors and editors in their own right. Opportunities for self-expression once denied by the old media are celebrated by the new media. This idea is encapsulated in the now well-worn phrase "on the Internet anyone can be an author." The threat of homogenized media content is diminished as new technologies enable many millions of individuals to become content producers and as audiences are reconceptualized as smaller and discrete "taste cultures," rather than as an amorphous mass.

Also, the trend toward redistribution of power over the media from elites to users makes obsolete the idea of a small handful of willful individuals attempting to impart a dominant ideology to maintain the status quo. For example, in addition to allowing a greater variety of voices and views into public discourse, the interactive capacity of the new media creates new ways of grassroots organizing and coalition building. Also along with media elites, the government is losing its power to control media content. The rationale for regulating the broadcast media, namely scarcity of the electromagnetic spectrum, is largely irrelevant with the new media and, consequently, the government's legal basis for protecting public morals and safety through content regulation is not easily applicable to this domain. In summary, as the mass-ness of the media declines and as new technologies continue to empower individuals, social control by elite groups in society may become more difficult.

The academic study of mass communication must also change as a result of new technologies, and not simply in name. However, this is less true for some aspects of the discipline than for others. The study and use of practical skills in the preparation of students to enter jobs in the media sector will continue as new media develop. Skills such as writing, editing, and production may be slightly different, but they are just as useful in the new media environment as they were in the old. The new media

do, however, seriously challenge the core assumptions of traditional empirical and critical mass communication research.

One of the assumptions of empirical studies of media content has been that the media are limited, identifiable, and, therefore, knowable through quantitative research. This is changing. An example of two content analyses of media violence serves to illustrate the point. The first report was commissioned by the Surgeon General in the early 1970s and involved researchers at several major universities around the country (Comstock & Rubinstein, 1971). To get a clear picture of the amount of violence in the media, a viewer survey was used to ascertain the most popular programs on television. Sixty-five program series were mentioned, all from the three major networks. Weekday prime-time and Saturday morning network television programs were then recorded for 1 week and analyzed to determine the amount of violence in each show.

In contrast to this, as part of the National Television Violence Study (1997), researchers at the University of California–Santa Barbara performed a content analysis in 1996–1997 with goals similar to the earlier report. However, the proliferation of television and cable channels quickly proved this task to be much more complex than it was in the early 1970s. For example, the researchers determined that 23 channels had to be included in the content analysis to capture the shows that the public was watching and, therefore, provide a realistic picture of the amount of violence that viewers were exposed to in the media. These channels are listed in Table 1. A viewer survey like the one done for the Surgeon General was not feasible in this study because the number of shows that viewers could select from would be overwhelming.

TABLE 1
Comparison of Studies of Media Violence

1971 (Surgeon General's Report)	1996–1997 (National Television Violence Study)		
Broadcast	Broadcast	Cable	Premium
ABC	ABC	A&E	Cinemax
NBC	NBC	AMC	HBO
CBS	CBS	Black Entertainment	Showtime
	Fox	Cartoon Network	
	KCAL	Disney	
	KTLA	Family	
	KCET	Lifetime	
		MTV	
		Nickelodeon	
		TNT	
		USA	
		VH1	

This example illustrates that the amount of material available from the new media is vast, which makes studies of media content much more difficult than ever before. In fact, Internet content is literally unbounded, and when traditional media migrate online (e.g., Web-based digital television), comprehensive analyses of content may be all but impossible. To exacerbate this problem, each individual user's experience with content may differ in the new media environment, as interactive technologies allow for users to select a subset of the available content on, for example, an entire Web site or follow different hyperlinks from page to page. Unlike most traditional media texts, researchers cannot assume that because two people visited the same Web site, they were exposed to the same content. On the other hand, network technologies will allow researchers to record with absolute accuracy the programs each user has accessed, at what time, and for how long. As Web content becomes tagged with descriptors in its markup programming language, it will be possible to ascertain the specific content the user has accessed in the future.

Studies of media audiences may suffer the same fate as audiences become harder to identify and monitor in the new media environment. Already, services that provide demographic profiles of Web site visitors have been launched, but problems of online privacy and user deception have prevented their widespread use, at least as of yet. Media effects studies, too, may be more difficult with audiences that are not as well assembled or accessible to researchers as they once were. In addition, mass communication law and policy will have to change dramatically given that the basis for media regulation is inapplicable to new technologies that do not rely on scarce resources and, thus, provide increasingly abundant opportunities for self-expression.

Finally, critical and cultural approaches to the study of mass communication will have to adapt as well. Many of the themes in this research, such as the focus on elite domination of the media, may not fit very well if the new media are able to upend traditional power structures in society. At the very least, scholars in this branch of the field will need to reassess the ways in which the most dominant media corporations exercise their economic power and how they try to maintain dominance through the marketing and distribution of their media products in the new media environment.

In summary, the mass media are changing in important and radical ways, as summarized in Table 2. Several of these changes have been mentioned already, for example, the number of channels going from few to many; the conception of the audience shifting from a unified mass of millions who "consume" messages to a diffuse group of even more millions, each of whom can, if desired, produce their own messages; the transfer of control from senders to users; and the model of transmission going from time-specific, one-way communication to two-way, interactive exchange. Also, as discussed earlier, traditional research on media content and its effects on audiences will become more complex because of the

TABLE 2
Summary of Differences Between "Mass" and "Media" Communication

	Mass Communication	*Media Communication*
Channels	Few	Many
Audience	Unified	Diverse
Control	Sender	User
Transmission	One-way, time-specific	Interactive, at convenience
Research paradigms	Content analysis, effects on audience	Interface design, information search
Typification	Television	Video games, Web sites
Motivation	Arousal	Need satisfaction
Ego concept	Identification	Self-actualization
Social control	Laws, professional ethics, public education	Technical devices, monitoring
Learning	Social modeling	Experiential
Scare statistic	Number of murders a child sees by age 18	Number of murders a child commits by age 18

vastness of media communication and the dispersion of the mass media audience. In its place will likely be studies of user interface design and information search strategies.

Other important differences are apparent as well. For example, mass communication is typified by television, whereas video games and Web sites may be considered the archetypes of media communication. User motivation also changes as communication moves from mass to media. If a major motivation for using mass communication was arousal regulation, as some have claimed (e.g., Zillmann & Bryant, 1985), in an environment that enables people to locate information easily and efficiently, users' motives may shift instead to more specific need satisfaction. Motivation is tied to the ego concept, and the process by which the ego concept is developed may change as well. With mass communication, the ego concept is developed through identification with attractive others, for example, television characters or celebrities. With media communication, it is likely to develop through self-actualization, as the ability to connect with people who share our personal interests and ideas is enhanced through the new technologies.

In the mass communication environment, social control is maintained through laws (e.g., content regulation), professional ethics, and public education. In the new media environment, technical devices and monitoring are used to keep people in line (e.g., software that prevents access to certain Web sites or removes offensive language from chat groups). The method of learning via mass communication was assumed to occur through social modeling (Bandura, 1986, 1994), but with the increased interactivity and user control of media communication, learning will be more experiential (Lieberman, 2001). Finally, the scare statistic with traditional mass communication was how many murders a child *sees* by the age of 18; with the

interactive media experiences afforded by new technologies, particularly video games, it is how many virtual murders a child *commits* by the age of 18.

THE END OF MASS COMMUNICATION THEORY?

Although some of these prophesies have yet to realize their full potential in today's media environment, many will come to fruition in the next 5 to 10 years. As these changes in the media environment challenge our long-standing conceptions of mass communication, many of our theoretical models will have to be reevaluated. For example, how will such core mass communication theories as agenda-setting, cultivation, and critical theory, all of which assume a centralized mass media system, work in the new decentralized and demassified media environment? Albeit a risky endeavor, some speculation is in order.

Agenda-Setting

A fundamental assumption of agenda-setting theory is that people get their news from a finite number of news sources or outlets. Furthermore, because news is selected by professional gatekeepers who operate under similar news values, the media agenda is thought to be uniform across those few outlets, at least on the national level. However, as the number of news outlets increases and the number of news consumers for any particular outlet decreases, the idea of a unified media agenda becomes problematic. Some have suggested that in place of a collectively shared agenda, fragmented and competing media agendas, and therefore public agendas, will emerge (Shaw & Hamm, 1997).

One result is that agenda-setting research will become a much more difficult enterprise. For example, measuring the media agenda, which is now accomplished through content analyses of major news outlets, will become particularly challenging as the available sources of news expand. Measuring the public agenda will be equally problematic as people filter and personalize their news using new media technologies. For example, Negroponte's (1995) idea of the "daily me," whereby new technologies are programmed to automatically select news and other media content that fit individual users' tastes and political perspectives, will make agreement among respondents' answers to the pollsters' "most important problem" question extremely unlikely.

Shaw and Hamm (1997) pointed out that this is bad news for the positive aspects of the media setting public and policy agendas, such as when the media help to achieve a critical mass of people who mobilize to solve some social problem. The outcry and subsequent assistance to millions of people starving in Africa during the 1980s as a result of media coverage is an example of the positive effect of

agenda-setting (Bosso, 1989). Through the daily me concept, the new media will allow people to isolate themselves from the larger public discourse and, in the process, undermine the very notion of a larger public discourse. The result may be that the kind of widespread collective action seen in the past may not be possible in the future. The problem is that the public will not be able to come together over common issues because there will not be any issues that they share in common. Of course, the extent to which audiences will prefer customizing their own news to news that has been preselected by expert news editors is an interesting question that will have to be addressed in future agenda-setting research.

New communication technologies may be good news, however, in combating the negative aspects of agenda-setting. Specifically, the interactive or two-way communication capacity and overall increased information flow associated with new technologies may give more power to people whose agendas would not normally be reported in the major mass media. Also, media communication enables people to not only set their own media agendas but to influence others' issue agendas by helping them locate and contact people who care about similar issues. The new media may also give people more power to set the policy agenda through direct electronic access to their political representatives and, particularly, through new opportunities for grassroots organizing with interested others. In addition, the availability of competing news interpretations or frames on the Internet may help audiences better understand issues, although this will depend on their motivation to seek out multiple sources of news, which may be low (Neuman, 1991). However, if these possibilities are realized, the key problem for agenda-setting theory will change from what issues the media tell people to think about to what issues people tell the media they want to think about.

Cultivation

Cultivation theory rests on the assumption that mass media content forms a coherent system, a worldview that is limited to certain themes (e.g., violence) due to economic constraints, such as the use of lowest common denominator programming to appeal to a mass audience (e.g., Gerbner & Gross, 1976). However, this assumption may break down with the new media as scarcity disappears and as content becomes increasingly diversified, and when mass audiences shrink in size for any given channel and become more selective. In cultivation terms, the ability of the media to homogenize or mainstream viewers to a single worldview may decline because so many different worldviews are increasingly available.

Some scholars have argued that the greater diversity of content and the user control afforded by new communication technologies spell the end of cultivation theory (e.g., Bryant, 1986). In fact, there is some evidence for this conclusion. Perse, Ferguson, and McLeod (1994), for example, found diminished cultivation effects

among owners of VCRs and other "new" technologies (i.e., cable television) that increase television viewers' channel repertoire. To the extent that the new media facilitate exposure to a multiplicity of truly diverse content, rather than simply extend the reach of traditional media messages, they will likely lead to reduced cultivation effects.

However, the end of the media's ability to mainstream audiences to a common symbolic environment does not necessarily mean the end of cultivation theory. Instead, as many worldviews are disseminated through the new media, cultivation theory may shift toward a vision in which individuals are cultivated to specialized worldviews of their own choosing. The new media's power to cultivate these self-selected worlds may be stronger because of *resonance,* which is the idea that cultivation effects may be boosted for those whose everyday reality matches the mediated reality to which they are exposed. That is, with narrowcasting and better ability to select and filter content, audiences for new media will likely opt for content that is consistent with their preexisting ideas and prejudices, thus allowing them to match their media experience to their own views with greater precision than ever before possible. Because of this, people will be able to live in a cocoon of self-reinforcing media, enhanced by like-minded others who they have found online.

Although the idea of media users being cultivated to the specific worldviews that they choose for themselves is not inherently dangerous, some of those views may be even scarier and more violent than that of broadcast television. Extreme perspectives, from hate groups to pedophilia, are thriving on the Internet where conventional social restraints on the expression of unpopular opinions are eliminated (for this reason, it has been suggested that the new media are bringing the end of the spiral of silence as well). These conditions give new opportunities for once disparate groups to grow into "loud minorities" who may feel empowered by the social support of extreme, but similarly inclined others (Sunstein, 2000).

Critical Theory and Cultural Studies

The implications of the new media for critical theory were touched on earlier. If new technologies shift power from elite groups to a greater proportion of media users, and particularly if media producers and receivers do become interchangeable, problems such as media-induced hegemony and democratic access to the media will be less pressing. Also, as opportunities for media audiences to define their own social reality and challenge the status quo are facilitated and even invigorated by the new media, ideological control by elite-owned media may become anachronistic.

However, critical theorists may point out that the history of every technology is toward greater centralized control by groups who are already in power, and the Internet is no exception (Beniger, 1996). Companies with familiar logos, large em-

ployee rolls, and profuse computing power are already lining up to take control of cyberspace, as the recent AOL–Time Warner merger illustrates. The real problem for anyone producing content in the new media environment will be in figuring out how to capture people's attention amid the plethora of competing options. Well-known companies with deep pockets and decades of experience honing their skills at attracting audiences may have the edge in the future in this regard, just as they have had in the past.

Critical theorists might also point out that although democratic access to the new media may be true in theory, it is far from what is happening in practice. The problem of the "digital divide" has received a great deal of attention in both the scholarly literature and popular press. The fear is that less privileged groups in society will be left behind during the information revolution because of their impaired economic ability to access new technologies. If past research on the diffusion of media technologies serves as a guide, this fear is well founded, although there is already some evidence that the digital divide might be decreasing, at least in the United States (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 1999).

The new media do present opportunities for cultural studies theorists, with their emphasis on audience reception research. Theories of how users create, interpret, and appropriate content will likely become central in the new media environment. For example, studies of fan cultures will be needed by media scholars and practitioners to understand how, in a situation of abundant choice, certain media texts can gain and hold people's attention. Also, insights gained from these theorists may help empower those who want to use the new media to subjugate the dominant ideology by offering alternative perspectives.

CONCLUSION

Thus, is this the end of mass communication? Should we abandon the term as well as our existing theoretical models? In some respects, the answer is yes. Certainly, people's everyday mass media experience will become more individualized as the new media continue to evolve and diffuse throughout society. Media producers will develop products tailored to smaller but more homogeneous audiences rather than to an undifferentiated mass. However, in other ways, the answer is no. First, according to Turow (1992), the "mass media are a part of the process of creating meanings *about* society *for* the members of society" (p. 107). In this way, mass communication serves an important and unique function in society, one that is unlikely to diminish in the future. For example, there is reason to believe that "media events" such as live war footage or the Olympics will continue to unite audiences on a mass scale, just as they have always done (Dayan & Katz, 1992). Second, although smaller than in the past, audiences for many of the new media channels will still be massive, numbering in the millions. As a result, what we have learned by

studying the techniques and effects of mass communication will continue to be applicable in the new media environment.

Furthermore, although some long-standing theories will become less relevant or at the very least will have to change their focus as mass becomes media communication, others will likely increase their stature in the field. For example, in addition to theories of audience reception, uses and gratifications approaches to new media, with their focus on audience motivations for media use, will probably become more important as audience members are more active, either instrumentally or ritualistically, in selecting and producing content for themselves (Morris & Ogan, 1996). In fact, any theories in which selective exposure plays a central part are likely to be reinvigorated in the new media environment.

More important, however, researchers need to resist the temptation to simply apply old models of mass communication to the new media. Because of fundamental differences between the old and new technologies that have been discussed in this article, new theories of media uses and impacts must be developed and tested. The new media bring challenges to our old models, as well as the occasion to reevaluate, extend, and perhaps even supercede them. Steve Chaffee began that task with his ideas in this article, and now he leaves it up to the rest of us to continue.

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