

- * This chapter is concerned with defining basic concepts for the study of **mass communication** and explaining their origin in terms of the way the relationship between mass media and society has developed over the last century. Although new media have arisen and social and economic circumstances are very different, there are many continuities and many of the issues that faced the early media theorists and researchers are still with us, sometimes in more acute form. This overview of concepts provides a framework that can be applied to the issues listed in Chapter 1 (p. 9). In the second part of the chapter attention focuses on the main alternative perspectives and methods that have been adopted, with particular reference to the difference between critical and applied research and between quantitative, cause-and-effect methods and qualitative, cultural approaches.
- * Lastly, the chapter outlines four models that have been developed for **framing** and studying the mass communication process, each with its own bias, but also with distinctive advantages. They are not so much alternative as complementary.

Early Perspectives on Media and Society

The twentieth century can plausibly be described as the 'first age of mass media'. It was also marked by alternating wonder and alarm at the influence of the mass media. Despite the enormous changes in media institutions and technology, and in society itself, and also the rise of a 'science of communication', the terms of public debate about the potential social significance of 'the media' seem to have changed remarkably little. A description of the issues which emerged during the first two or three decades of the twentieth century is of more than just historical interest, and early thinking provides a point of reference for understanding the present. Three sets of ideas were of particular importance from the outset. One concerned the question of the **power** of the new means of communication; a second, the question of social *integration* or disintegration that they might cause; and the third, the question of public *enlightenment*, which they might either promote or diminish. These themes are dealt with in depth in Chapter 4.

The power of mass media

- * A belief in the power of mass media was initially based on the observation of their great reach and apparent impact, especially in relation to the new popular **newspaper** press. According to DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach (1989), newspaper circulation in the USA peaked in 1910, although it happened a good deal later in Europe and other parts of the world. The popular press was mainly funded by commercial **advertising** its content was characterized by sensational **news** stories, and its control was often concentrated in the hands of powerful press 'barons'. The First World War saw the mobilization of press and film in most of Europe and the United States for the national war aims of contending states. The results seemed to leave little doubt of the potency of media influence on the 'masses', when effectively managed and directed.

This impression was yet further reinforced by what happened in the Soviet Union and later in Nazi Germany, where the media were pressed into the service of **propaganda** on behalf of ruling party elites. The co-option of news and **entertainment** media by the allies in the Second World War removed any doubts about their propagandist value. Before the century was half way on its course, there was already a strongly held and soundly based view that mass publicity was effective in shaping opinion and influencing behaviour. It could also have effects on international relations and alliances. More recent events, including the fall of communism, the Balkan wars, two Gulf wars and the 'war on terror', have confirmed the media as an essential and volatile component in any international power struggle, where **public opinion** is also a factor. The conditions for effective media power have generally included a national media industry capable of reaching most of the population, a degree of consensus in the message disseminated (whatever its direction) and some measure of credibility and trust in the media on the part of audiences.

While by now, there is much more knowledge and also scepticism about the direct 'power' of mass communication, there is no less reliance on mass media in the spheres of advertising, **public relations** and political **campaigning**. Politics is routinely conducted (and also reported) on the assumption that skilful media presentation is absolutely vital to success in all normal circumstances.

Communication and social integration

Social theorists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were very conscious of the 'great transformation' which was taking place, as slower, traditional and communal ways gave way to fast-paced, secular, urban living and to a great expansion in the scale of social activities. Many of the themes of European and North American sociology at this time reflect this collective self-consciousness of the problems of change from small-scale to large-scale and from rural to urban societies. The social theory of the time posited a need for new forms of integration in the face of the problems caused by industrialization and urbanization. Crime, prostitution, poverty and dependency were associated with the increasing anonymity, isolation and uncertainty of modern life.

While the fundamental changes were social and economic, it was possible to point to newspapers, film and other forms of popular **culture** (music, books, magazines, comics) as potential contributors both to individual crime and declining morality and also to rootlessness, impersonality and lack of attachment or **community**. In the United States, large-scale immigration from Europe in the first two decades of the twentieth century highlighted questions of social cohesion and integration. This is exemplified in the work of the Chicago School of Sociology and the writings of Robert Park, G.H. Mead, Thomas Dewey and others (Rogers, 1993). Hanno Hardt (1979, 1991) has reconstructed the main lines of early theory concerning communication and social integration, both in Europe and in North America.

The links between popular mass media and social integration were easy to perceive in terms both negative (more crime and immorality) and individualistic (loneliness, loss of collective beliefs), but a positive contribution to cohesion and community

was also expected from modern communications. Mass media were a potential force for a new kind of cohesion, able to connect scattered individuals in a shared national, city and local experience. They could also be supportive of the new democratic politics and of social reform movements. Not least in importance was the contribution of mass media, especially the cinema, to making hard lives more bearable.

How the influence of media came to be interpreted was often a matter of an observer's personal **attitude** to modern society and the degree of optimism or pessimism in their social outlook. The early part of the twentieth century, as well as (or perhaps because of) being a high point of nationalism, revolution and social conflict, was also a time of progressive thinking, democratic advance and scientific and technological progress.

In our time, circumstances have changed, although the underlying theme remains the same. There is still concern about the weakness of the ties that bind individuals together and to their society, the lack of shared values, the lack of social and civic participation, and the decline in what has been called 'social capital' (Putnam, 2000). The ties of trade unions, politics, religion and family all seem to have grown steadily weaker. Problems of integration arise in relation to new ethnic groups and migrants that have arrived in industrialized countries from rural and culturally distant societies. There are new demands for communications media to provide for the **identity** and expressive needs of old and new minorities within larger societies as well as to contribute to social harmony. The individuating effects of the **Internet** have been contrasted with the positive cohesive effect of the traditional newspaper press and broadcast television (Sunstein, 2006).

Mass communication as mass educator

The spirit of the early twentieth century (modern and forward-looking) supported a third set of ideas about mass communication – that the media could be a potent force for public enlightenment, supplementing and continuing the new institutions of universal schooling, public libraries and popular education. Political and social reformers saw a positive potential in the media, taken as a whole, and the media also saw themselves as, on balance, making a contribution to progress by spreading **information** and ideas, exposing political corruption and also providing much harmless enjoyment for ordinary people. In many countries, journalists were becoming more professional and adopting **codes** of ethics and good practice.

The democratic task of the press in informing the newly enfranchised masses was widely recognized. The newly established radio institutions of the 1920s and 1930s, especially in Europe, were often given a public cultural, educational and informative mission as well as the task of promoting national identity and unity. Each new mass medium has been hailed for its educational and cultural benefits and has been feared for its disturbing influence. The potential for communication technology to promote enlightenment has been invoked once again in respect of the latest communication technologies – those based on the computer and telecommunications (e.g. Neuman, 1991). More fears than hopes are now being voiced about the enlightenment role of the major mass media, as they increasingly seek to make

profits in a highly competitive marketplace where entertainment has more market value than education or art. Public **broadcasting** is again being defended against market forces on the grounds of its contribution to public knowledge and societal solidarity. Arguments are heard for a similar public service presence in **cyberspace**.

The media as problem or scapegoat

Despite hopeful as well as fearful scenarios, the passing of decades does not seem to have changed the tendency of public opinion both to blame the media (see Drotner, 1992) and to demand that they do more to solve society's ills. There are successive instances of alarm relating to the media, whenever an insoluble or inexplicable social problem arises. The most constant element has been a negative perception of the media – especially the inclination to link media portrayals of crime, sex and violence with the seeming increase in social and moral disorder. These waves of alarm have been called '**moral panics**', partly because they are based on little evidence either of media cause or actual effect.

New ills have also been found to lay at the door of the media, especially such phenomena as violent political protest and demonstration, xenophobia, and even the supposed decline of democracy and rise of political apathy and cynicism. Individual harms now include references to depression, acquisitiveness, obesity (or its opposite) and lassitude. The most recent object of such waves of alarm has been the Internet, suspected of encouraging paedophilia, **pornography**, violence and hate as well as aiding terrorist organizations and international crime. Paradoxically or not, it has usually been the media themselves that have highlighted and amplified many of these alarmist views, perhaps because they seem to confirm the power of the media, but more likely because they are already popularly believed and also newsworthy.

The 'Mass' Concept

This mixture of popular **prejudice** and social theorizing about the media has formed the background against which research has been commissioned, hypotheses have been formulated and tested, and more precise theories about mass communication have been developed. And while the interpretations of the direction (positive or negative) of mass media influence show much divergence, the most persistent element in public estimation of the media has been a simple agreement on their strong influence. In turn, this perception owes much to various meanings of the term 'mass'. Although the concept of '**mass society**' was not fully developed until after the Second World War, the essential ideas were circulating before the end of the nineteenth century. The key term 'mass' in fact unites a number of concepts which are important for understanding how the process of mass communication has usually been understood, right up to the present.

Early uses of the term usually carried negative associations. It referred initially to the multitude or the 'common people', usually seen as uneducated, ignorant and

potentially irrational, unruly and even violent (as when the mass turned into a mob of rioters) (Bramson, 1961). It could also be used in a positive sense, however, especially in the socialist tradition, where it connoted the strength and solidarity of ordinary working people when organized for collective purposes or when having to bear oppression. The terms 'mass support', 'mass movement' and 'mass action' are examples whereby large numbers of people acting together can be seen in a positive light. As Raymond Williams (1961: 289) commented: 'There are no masses, only ways of seeing people as masses.'

Aside from its political references, the word 'mass', when applied to a set of people, has unflattering implications. It suggests an amorphous collection of individuals without much individuality. One standard dictionary definition defines the word as an 'aggregate in which individuality is lost' (*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*). This is close to the meaning which early sociologists sometimes gave to the media **audience**. It was the large and seemingly undifferentiated audiences for the popular media that provided the clearest examples of the concept. The main features attributed to the mass are given in Box 3.1. These include both objective and also subjective or perceived features.

3.1 The concept of mass: theoretical features

- Composed of a large aggregate of people
- Undifferentiated composition
- Mainly negative perception
- Lacking internal order or structure
- Reflective of a wider mass society

The Mass Communication Process

The term 'mass communication' came into use in the late 1930s, but its essential features were already well known and have not really changed since, even if the media themselves have in some ways become less massive. Early mass media were quite diverse in their scale and conditions of operation. For instance, popular films could be seen in village tents as well as metropolitan picture palaces. The newspaper press ranged from popular city dailies to small local weeklies. Even so, we can discern the typical form of mass communication according to certain general characteristics, which have already been introduced in Chapter 1.

The most obvious feature of the mass media is that they are designed to reach the *many*. Potential audiences are viewed as large aggregates of more or less anonymous consumers, and the relationship between sender and receiver is affected accordingly. The 'sender' is often the organization itself or a professional communicator (journalist, presenter, producer, entertainer, etc.) whom it employs. If not this, it is another voice

of society given or sold access to media channels (advertiser, politician, preacher, advocate of a cause, etc.). The relationship is inevitably one-directional, one-sided and impersonal, and there is a social as well as a physical distance between sender and receiver. The former usually has more authority, prestige or expertise than the latter. The relationship is not only asymmetrical, it is often calculative or manipulative in intention. It is essentially non-moral, based on a service promised or asked for in some unwritten contract with no mutual obligation.

The symbolic content or message of mass communication is typically 'manufactured' in standardized ways (mass production) and is reused and repeated in identical forms. Its flow is overwhelmingly one-directional. It has generally lost its uniqueness and originality through reproduction and overuse. The media message is a product of work with an exchange value in the media market and a use value for its receiver, the media consumer. It is essentially a commodity and differs in this respect from the symbolic content of other types of human communication.

One early definition (Janowitz, 1968) reads as follows: 'Mass communications comprise the institutions and techniques by which specialized groups employ technological devices (press, radio, films, etc.) to disseminate symbolic content to large, heterogeneous and widely dispersed audiences.' In this and similar definitions, the word 'communication' is really equated with 'transmission', as viewed by the sender, rather than the fuller meaning of the term which includes the notions of response, sharing and interaction. This definition is also limited by its equating the *process* of mass communication with the *means* of transmission. However, the two are not synonymous. In particular, we can now see that new media can serve both for mass communication and for personalized, individual communication.

We can also see that the true mass media also had uses that cannot be counted as mass communication (e.g. as a means passing time, companionship, etc.). There are other common uses of the same technologies and other kinds of relationships mediated through the same **networks**. For instance, the basic forms and technologies of 'mass' communication are the same as those used for very local newspapers or radio and they might also be used in education. Mass media can also be used for individual, private or organizational purposes. The same media that carry public messages to large publics for public purposes can also carry personal notices, advocacy messages, charitable appeals, situations-vacant advertisements and many varied kinds of information and culture. This point is especially relevant at a time of **convergence** of communication technologies, when the boundaries between public and private and large-scale and individual communication networks are increasingly blurred.

Mass communication was, from the beginning, more of an idea than a reality. The term stands for a condition and a process that is theoretically possible but rarely found in any pure form. Where it does seem to occur, it often turns out to be less massive, and less technologically determined, than it appears on the surface. The defining characteristics of the concept are set out in Box 3.2. All of these have an objective basis, but the concept as a whole is often used in a subjective and imprecise way.

3.2

The mass communication process:
theoretical features

- Large-scale distribution and reception of content
- One-directional flow
- Asymmetrical relation between sender and receiver
- Impersonal and anonymous relationship with audience
- Calculative or market relationship with audience
- Standardization and commodification of content

The Mass Audience

* Herbert Blumer (1939) was the first to define the mass formally as a new type of social formation in modern society, by contrasting it with other formations, especially the *group*, *crowd* and *public*. In a small group, all its members know each other, are aware of their common membership, share the same values, have a certain structure of relationships which is stable over time, and interact to achieve some purpose. The crowd is larger but still restricted within observable boundaries in a particular space. It is, however, temporary and rarely re-forms with the same composition. It may possess a high degree of identity and share the same 'mood', but there is usually no structure or order to its moral and social composition. It can act, but its actions are often seen to have an affective and emotional, often irrational, character.

The third collectivity named by Blumer, the public, is likely to be relatively large, widely dispersed and enduring. It tends to form around an issue or cause in public life, and its primary purpose is to advance an interest or opinion and to achieve political change. It is an essential element in democratic politics, based on the ideal of rational discourse within an open political system and often comprising the better-informed section of the population. The rise of the public is characteristic of modern liberal democracies and related to the rise of the 'bourgeois' or party newspapers described earlier.

The term 'mass' captured several features of the new audiences for cinema and radio (and to some extent the popular press) that were not covered by any of these three concepts. The new audience was typically much larger than any group, crowd or public. It was very widely dispersed, and its members were usually unknown to each other or to whoever brought the audience into existence. It lacked self-awareness and self-identity and was incapable of acting together in an organized way to secure objectives. It was marked by a shifting composition within changing boundaries. It did not act for itself but was, rather, 'acted upon' (and thus an object of manipulation). It was heterogeneous in consisting of large numbers from all social strata and demographic groups, but also homogeneous in its choice of some particular object of interest and according to the perception of those who would like to manipulate it. The main features attributed to the mass audience are summarized in Box 3.3.

The mass audience:
main theoretical features

3.3

- Large numbers of readers, viewers, etc.
- Widely dispersed
- Non-interactive and anonymous relation to each other
- Heterogeneous composition
- Not organized or self-acting
- An object of management or manipulation by the media

The audience for mass media is not the only social formation that can be characterized in this way, since the word 'mass' is sometimes applied to consumers in the expression 'mass market' or to large bodies of voters (the 'mass electorate'). It is significant, however, that such entities also often correspond with media audiences and that mass media are used to direct or control both consumer and political behaviour.

Within the conceptual framework sketched, media use was represented as a form of 'mass behaviour', which in turn encouraged the application of methods of 'mass research' - especially large-scale surveys and other methods for recording the reach and response of audiences to what was offered. A commercial and organizational logic for 'audience research' was furnished with theoretical underpinnings. It seemed to make sense, as well as being practical, to discuss media audiences in purely *quantitative* terms. In fact, the methods of research tended only to reinforce a **biased** conceptual perspective (treating the audience as a mass market). Research into ratings and the reach of press and broadcasting reinforced a view of the audiences as a mass market of consumers. *

The Mass Media as an Institution of Society

Despite changing technology, mass communication persists within the whole framework of the mass media institution. This refers broadly to the set of media organizations and activities, together with their own formal or informal rules of operation and sometimes legal and policy requirements set by the society. These reflect the expectations of the public as a whole and of other social institutions (such as politics, governments, law, religion and the economy). Media institutions have gradually developed around the key activities of **publication** and dissemination. They also overlap with other institutions, especially as these expand their public communication activities. They are internally segmented according to type of technology (print, film, television, etc.) and often within each type (such as national versus local press or broadcasting). They also change over time and differ from one country to another (see Chapter 9). Even so, there are several typical defining features, additional to the central activity of producing and distributing 'knowledge' (information, ideas, culture) on behalf of those who want to communicate and in response to individual and collective demand. *

While it is quite common to find the entire set of mass media referred to as an institution in such expressions as the 'effects of the media' or 'responsibilities of media in society', in free societies there is no formal institution of the media in the way that there is in respect of health, education, justice or the military. Nevertheless, the media separately or together do tend to develop institutional forms that are embedded in and recognized by, the wider society. The 'press' is a good example of this. There are no formal definitions or boundaries, but it typically describes all newspapers and magazines, journalists, editors and media owners. There is no formal external regulation, but there are voluntary codes of conduct and ethics. The press accepts some public responsibilities and receives some rights and privileges in return, especially a guarantee of freedom. Other media, such as broadcasting, develop their own institutional identity. There is enough in common between all media to justify a reference to a single 'media institution', the main conceptual features of which are shown in Box 3.4.

3.4 The mass media institution: main theoretical features

- The core activity is the production and distribution of information and culture
- Media acquire functions and responsibilities in the 'public sphere' that are overseen by the institution
- Control is mainly by self-regulation, with limits set by society
- Boundaries of membership are uncertain
- Media are free and in principle independent of political and economic power

Mass Culture and Popular Culture

*

The typical *content* which flowed through the newly created channels to the new mass audience was from the start a very diverse mixture of stories, images, information, ideas, entertainment and spectacles. Even so, the single concept of 'mass culture' was commonly used to refer to all this (see Rosenberg and White, 1957). Mass culture had a wider reference to the tastes, preferences, manners and styles of the mass (or just the majority) of people. It also once had a generally negative connotation, mainly because of its associations with the assumed cultural preferences of 'uncultivated', non-discriminating or just lower-class audiences.

The term is now quite dated, partly because class differences are less sharply drawn or clearly acknowledged and they no longer separate an educated professional minority from a large, poor and ill-educated working-class majority. It is also the case that the former hierarchy of 'cultural taste' is no longer widely accepted.

Even when in fashion, the idea of mass culture as an exclusively 'lower-class' phenomenon was not empirically justified, since it referred to the normal cultural experience of almost everyone to some degree (Wilensky, 1964). The expression 'popular culture' is now generally preferred because it simply denotes what many or even most people like. It may also have some connotation of what is popular with the young in particular. More recent developments in media and **cultural studies** (as well as in society) have led to a positive valuation of popular culture. For some media theorists (e.g. Fiske, 1987), the very fact of popularity is a token of value in political as well as cultural terms.

*

Definitions and contrasts

Attempts to define mass culture often contrasted it (unfavourably) with more traditional forms of (symbolic) culture. Wilensky, for instance, compared it with the notion of 'high culture', which will refer to two characteristics of the product:

- (1) it is created by, or under the supervision of, a cultural elite operating within some aesthetic, literary, or scientific tradition ... (2) critical standards independent of the consumer of their product are systematically applied to it ... 'Mass culture' will refer to cultural *products manufactured solely for the mass market*. Associated characteristics, not intrinsic to the definition, are *standardization of product and mass behaviour* in its use. (1964: 176, original emphasis)

Mass culture was also differentiated from an earlier cultural form – that of folk culture or a traditional culture which more evidently comes from the people and usually predates (or is independent of) mass media and the mass production of culture. Original folk culture (especially expressed in dress, customs, song, stories, dance, etc.) was being widely rediscovered in Europe during the nineteenth century. Often, this was for reasons connected with the rise of nationalism, otherwise as part of the 'arts and crafts' movement and the romantic reaction against industrialism. The rediscovery (by the middle classes) was taking place at the very time that it was rapidly disappearing among worker and peasant classes because of social change. Folk culture was originally made unselfconsciously, using traditional forms, themes, materials and means of expression, and had usually been incorporated into everyday life. Critics of mass culture often regretted the loss of the integrity and simplicity of folk art, and the issue is still alive in parts of the world where mass-produced culture has not completely triumphed. The new urban industrial working class of Western Europe and North America were the first consumers of the new mass culture after being cut off from the roots of folk culture. No doubt the mass media drew on some popular cultural streams and adapted others to the conditions of urban life to fill the cultural void created by industrialization, but intellectual critics could usually see only a cultural loss. The main features of mass culture are summarized in Box 3.5.

3.5 The idea of mass culture: main features

- Non-traditional form and content
- Intended for mass consumption
- Mass produced and formulaic
- Pejorative image
- Commercial
- Homogenized

Other views of mass culture

The rise of mass culture was open to more than one interpretation. Bauman (1972), for instance, took issue with the idea that mass communication media *caused* mass culture, arguing that they were more a tool to shape something that was happening in any case as a result of the increasing cultural homogeneity of national societies. In his view, what is often referred to as 'mass culture' is more properly just a more universal or standardized culture. Several features of mass communication have contributed to the process of standardization, especially dependence on the market, the supremacy of large-scale organization and the application of new technology to cultural production. This more objective approach helps to defuse some of the conflict that has characterized the debate about mass culture. In some measure, the 'problem of mass culture' reflected the need to come to terms with new technological possibilities for symbolic reproduction (Benjamin, 1977) which challenged established notions of art. The issue of mass culture was fought out in social and political terms, without being resolved in aesthetic terms.

Despite the search for a seemingly value-free conception of mass culture, the issue remains conceptually and ideologically troublesome. As Bourdieu (1986) and others have clearly demonstrated, different conceptions of cultural merit are strongly connected with social class differences. Possession of economic capital has usually gone hand in hand with possession of 'cultural capital', which in class societies can also be 'encashed' for material advantages. Class-based value systems once strongly maintained the superiority of 'high' and traditional culture against much of the typical popular culture of the mass media. The support for such value systems (though maybe not for the class system) has weakened, although the issue of differential cultural quality remains alive as an aspect of a continuing cultural and media policy debate.

Lastly, we can keep in mind that, as noted above, 'popular culture' has been widely 'revalued' by social and cultural theorists and largely deproblematized. It is no longer viewed as lacking in originality, creativity or merit and is often celebrated for its meanings, cultural significance and expressive value (see pp. 117-18).

Reassessing the concept of mass

The idea of a mass or a mass society was always an abstract notion, expressing a critical view of contemporary cultural trends. Today, it probably seems even more theoretical and less relevant. Nevertheless, some of the ills and discontents that it once referred to are still with us, sometimes under new names. These include: experience of loneliness and feelings of isolation; feelings of powerlessness in the face of economic, political and environmental forces outside our control; the sense of impersonality in much of modern life, sometimes made worse by information technology; a decline in togetherness; and a loss of security.

What is probably clearer now is that mass media can be as much a part of the solution as of the problem. Depending on who and where we are, they offer ways of coping with the difficulties of large-scale society, making sense of our predicament and mediating our relations with larger forces. The media are now probably less 'massive', one-directional and distant, and more responsive and participant.

But they are not always benign in their working. They can exert power without accountability and destroy individual lives by aggressive intrusion into privacy, by **stereotyping** and stigmatizing and by systematic misinformation. When they agree on some issue there is little tolerance of deviance, and when they decide to support the authorities there is no court of appeal. They can undermine as well as support the democratic political process. They have in fact some of the characteristics of benevolent despots – by turns endearing, capricious, ferocious or irrational. For these reasons, it is necessary to keep a long memory even for what seem old-fashioned notions.

*

The Rise of a Dominant Paradigm for Theory and Research

The ideas about media and society, and the various subconcepts of 'mass' that have been described, have helped to shape a framework of research into mass communication which has been described as 'dominant' in more than one sense. The 'dominant paradigm' combines a view of powerful mass media in a mass society with the typical research practices of the emerging social sciences, especially social surveys, social-psychological experiments and statistical analysis. The underlying view of society in the dominant paradigm is essentially normative. It presumes a certain kind of normally functioning 'good society' which would be democratic (elections, universal suffrage, representation), liberal (secular; free-market conditions, individualistic, freedom of speech), pluralistic (institutionalized competition between parties and interests), consensual and orderly (peaceful, socially integrated, fair, legitimate), and also well informed. The liberal-pluralist perspective does not view social inequality as essentially problematic or even unjust, as long as tensions and conflicts can be resolved by existing institutional means.

The potential or actual good or harm to be expected from mass media has largely been judged according to this model, which coincides with an idealized view of

western society. The contradictions within this view of society and its distance from social reality are often ignored. Most early research concerning media in developing or Third World countries was guided by the assumption that these societies would gradually converge on the same (more advanced and progressive) western model. Early communication research was also influenced by the notion that the model of a liberal, pluralist and just society was threatened by an alternative, totalitarian form (communism), where the mass media were distorted into tools for suppressing democracy. The awareness of this alternative helped to identify and even reinforce the norm described. The media often saw themselves as playing a key role in supporting and expressing the values of the 'western way of life'. Since the virtual extinction of communism, other enemies have emerged, notably international terrorism, sometimes linked (by the media and authorities) with religious fundamentalism or other 'extremist' or revolutionary movements.

Origins in functionalism and information science

* The theoretical elements of the dominant paradigm were not invented for the case of the mass media but were largely taken over from sociology, psychology and an applied version of information science. This took place especially in the decade after the Second World War, when there was a largely unchallenged North American **hegemony** over both the social sciences and the mass media (Tunstall, 1977). Sociology, as it matured theoretically, offered a functionalist framework of analysis for the media as for other institutions. Lasswell (1948) was the first to formulate a clear statement of the 'functions' of communication in society – meaning essential tasks performed for its maintenance (see Chapter 4). The general assumption is that communication works towards the integration, continuity and order of society, although mass communication also has potentially dysfunctional (disruptive or harmful) consequences. Despite a much reduced intellectual appeal, the language of functions has proved difficult to escape from in discussions of media and society.

The second theoretical element influential in the dominant paradigm guiding media research stemmed from information theory, as developed by Shannon and Weaver (1949), which was concerned with the technical efficiency of communication channels for carrying information. They developed a model for analysing information transmission that visualized communication as a sequential process. This process begins with a *source* that selects a *message*, which is then *transmitted*, in the form of a *signal*, over a *communication channel*, to a *receiver*, who transforms the signal back into a message for a *destination*. The model was designed to account for differences between messages as sent and messages as received, these differences being considered to result from *noise* or *interference* affecting the channels. This 'transmission' model was not directly concerned with *mass* communication, but it was popularized as a versatile way of conceiving many human communication processes, with particular reference to the effects of message transmission.

A third pillar of the paradigm is to be found in the methodological developments of the mid-century period. A combination of advances in 'mental measurement'

(especially applied to individual attitudes and other attributes) and in statistical analysis appeared to offer new and powerful tools for achieving generalized and reliable knowledge of previously hidden processes and states. The methods seemed able to answer questions about the influence of mass media and about their effectiveness in persuasion and attitude change. An additional contribution to the paradigm was the high status of 'behaviourism' in psychology and of the experimental method in particular, often based on one version or another of **stimulus-response** theory (see pp. 470–71). These developments were very much in line with the requirements of the transmission model. *

Bias of the paradigm towards studying media effects and social problems

According to Rogers (1986: 7), the transmission model 'was the single most important turning point in the history of communication science' and it 'led communication scientists into a linear, effects-oriented approach to human communication in the decades following 1949'. Rogers also notes that the result was to lead communication scientists into 'the intellectual cul-de-sac of focusing mainly upon the *effects* of communication, especially mass communication' (1986: 88). Rogers and others have long recognized the blind spot in this model, and more recent thinking about communication research has often taken the form of a debate with the model. Even so, the linear causal approach was what many wanted, and still do want, from communication research, especially those who see communication primarily as an efficient device for getting a message to many people, whether as advertising, political propaganda or public information.

The fact that communication does not usually look that way from the point of view of receivers, nor works as envisaged, has taken a long time to register. The theoretical materials for a very different model of (mass) communication were actually in place relatively early – based on previous thinking by several (North American) social scientists, especially G.H. Mead, C.H. Cooley and Robert Park. Such a 'model' would have represented communication as essentially social and interactive, concerned with sharing of meaning, not impact (see Hardt, 1991).

Against this background, the path taken by 'mainstream' mass media research is clear enough. Research has mostly been concerned with the measurement of the effects of mass media, whether intended or unintended. The main aims of research in the dominant paradigm have been the improvement of the effectiveness of communication for legitimate ends (such as advertising or public information) or the assessment of whether mass media are a cause of social problems (such as crime, violence or other kinds of delinquency, but also social unrest). Traces of the linear causal model are widely found in research and even the findings that have accumulated around its 'failure' have been paradoxically supportive. The main reason for the failure to find effects was thought to be the mediating role of social group and personal relationships. According to Gitlin (1978), out of 'failed' (read: no measured effect) research comes a positive message of health for the checks and balances of the status quo and also a vindication of the empirical research tradition.

Box 3.6 summarizes the ideas presented in the preceding section. The elements of the paradigm bring together several features of the case: the kind of society in which it might apply; some ideas about the typical purposes and character of mass communication; assumptions about media effects; plus a justification of the role of research.

3.6 The dominant paradigm of communication research: main assumptions

- A liberal-pluralist ideal of society
- The media have certain functions in society
- Media effects on audiences are direct and linear
- Group relations and individual differences modify effects of media
- Quantitative research and variable analysis
- Media viewed either as a potential social problem or a means of persuasion
- Behaviourist and quantitative methods have primacy

An Alternative, Critical Paradigm

The critique of the dominant paradigm also has several elements, and what follows is a composite picture woven from different voices that are not always in accord. In particular, there is a theoretical and methodological line of criticism that is distinct from normative objections. From a pragmatic point of view, the simple transmission model does not work for a number of reasons: signals simply do not reach receivers, or not those intended; messages are not understood as they are sent; and there is always much 'noise' in the channels that distorts the message. Moreover, little communication is actually unmediated; what evades the mass media is typically filtered through other channels or by way of personal contacts (see the discussion of 'personal influence' and the 'two-step flow' on pp. 472–3). All this undermines the notion of powerful media. Early notions of the media as a hypodermic syringe or 'magic bullet' that would always have the intended effect were swiftly shown to be quite inadequate (Chaffee and Hochheimer, 1982; DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach, 1989). It has been clear for several decades that mass media simply do not have the direct effects once attributed to them (Klapper, 1960). In fact, it has always been difficult to prove any substantial effect.

A different view of society and the media

Most broadly, the 'alternative paradigm' rests on a different view of society, one which does not accept the prevailing liberal-capitalist order as just or inevitable or the best one can hope for in the fallen state of humankind. Nor does it accept the

rational-calculative, utilitarian model of social life as at all adequate or desirable, or the commercial model as the only or best way to run media. There is an alternative, idealist and sometimes utopian **ideology**, but nowhere a worked-out model of an ideal social system. Nevertheless, there is a sufficient common basis for rejecting the hidden ideology of pluralism and of conservative functionalism.

There has been no shortage of vocal critics of the media themselves, from the early years of the twentieth century, especially in relation to their commercialism, low standards of truth and decency, control by unscrupulous monopolists and much more. The original ideological inspiration for a well-grounded alternative has been socialism or **Marxism** in one variant or another. The first significant impulse was given by the *émigrés* from the **Frankfurt School** who went to the USA in the 1930s and helped to promote an alternative view of the dominant commercial mass culture (Jay, 1973; Hardt, 1991; see Chapter 5, pp. 115–16). Their contribution was to provide a strong intellectual base for seeing the process of mass communication as manipulative and ultimately oppressive (see Chapter 5). Their critique was both political and cultural. The ideas of C. Wright Mills concerning a mass society (see p. 94) articulated a clear alternative view of the media, drawing on a native North American radical tradition, eloquently exposing the liberal fallacy of pluralist control.

It was during the 1960s and 1970s that the alternative paradigm really took shape, under the influence of the 'ideas of 1968', combining anti-war and liberation movements of various kinds as well as neo-Marxism. The causes at issue included student democracy, feminism and anti-imperialism. The main components of, and supports for, an alternative paradigm are as follows. The first is a much more sophisticated notion of ideology in media content which has allowed researchers to 'decode' the ideological messages of mass-mediated entertainment and news (which tend towards legitimating established power structures and defusing opposition). The notion of fixed meanings embedded in media content and leading to predictable and measurable impact was rejected. Instead, we have to view meaning as constructed and messages as decoded according to the social situation and the interests of those in the receiving audience.

Secondly, the economic and political character of mass media organizations and structures nationally and internationally has been re-examined. These institutions are no longer taken at face value but can be assessed in terms of their operational strategies, which are far from neutral or non-ideological. As the critical paradigm has developed, it has moved from an exclusive concern with working-class subordination to a wider view of other kinds of domination, especially in relation to youth, alternative subcultures, gender and ethnicity.

Thirdly, these changes have been matched by a turn to more 'qualitative' research, whether into culture, discourse or the ethnography of mass media use. This is sometimes referred to as a 'linguistic' turn since it reflected the renewed interest in studying the relation between language and society (sociolinguistics) and a conviction that the symbolic mediation of reality is actually more influential and open to study than reality itself. It is linked to the interest in exposing concealed ideological meanings as noted above. This has provided alternative routes to knowledge and forged a link back to the neglected pathways of the sociological theories of symbolic interactionism and phenomenology that emphasized the role of individuals in expressing and constructing their own personal environment (see Jensen and Jankowski, 1991). This

is part of a more general development of cultural studies, within which mass communication can be viewed in a new light. According to Dahlgren (1995), the cultural studies tradition 'confronts the scientific self-delusion' of the dominant paradigm, but there is an inevitable tension between textual and socio-institutional analysis.

The communication relations between the First World and the Third World, especially in the light of changing technology, have also encouraged new ways of thinking about mass communication. For instance, the relationship is no longer seen as a matter of the enlightened transfer of development and democracy to 'backward' lands. It is at least as plausibly seen as economic and cultural domination. Lastly, although theory does not necessarily lead in a *critical* direction, the 'new media' have forced a re-evaluation of earlier thinking about media effects, if only because the model of one-directional mass communication can no longer be sustained. The main points of the perspective are summarized in Box 3.7.

3.7 The alternative paradigm: main features

- Critical view of society and rejection of value neutrality
- Rejection of the transmission model of communication
- Non-deterministic view of media technology and messages
- Adoption of an interpretative and constructionist perspective
- Qualitative methodology
- Preference for cultural or political-economic theories
- Wide concern with inequality and sources of opposition in society

Paradigms compared

The alternative perspective is not just a mirror image of the dominant paradigm or a statement of opposition to the mechanistic and applied view of communication. It is based on a more complete view of communication as sharing and ritual rather than as just 'transmission' (see p. 70). It is complementary as well as being an alternative. It offers its own viable avenues of inquiry, but following a different agenda. The paradigm has been especially valuable in extending the range of methods and approaches to popular culture in all its aspects. The interaction and engagement between media experiences and social-cultural experiences are central to all this.

While this discussion has presented two main versions, it is arguable that both the 'alternative' and the 'dominant' approach each bring together two distinct elements – one 'critical' (motivated by strong value judgements of the media), the other 'interpretative' or 'qualitative' (more concerned with understanding). Potter et al. (1993) proposed a threefold division of the main paradigms for communication science: a 'social science' approach in which empirical questions about media were

investigated by means of quantitative methods; an interpretative approach, employing qualitative methods and emphasizing the meaning-giving potential of media; and a 'critical analysis' approach based on critical social theory, especially from a leftist or political economic perspective. Fink and Gantz (1996) found this scheme to work well in a **content analysis** of published communication research. Meyrowitz (2008) has suggested that there are root narratives about the influence of media and that underlie these and similar differences of approach that have been sketched. He names the narratives as, respectively, narratives of 'power', 'pleasure' and 'pattern'. The first relates to ideas about power and resistance to power and primarily to the dominant paradigm. The second narrative ('pleasure') points to cultural factors and personal choice as related more to influence. The third ('pattern') looks more to an explanation of influence to media structure and type, thus in part to **medium theory**, described later in the book (pp. 142–3).

Leaving aside these issues of classification, it is clear that the alternative paradigm continues to evolve under the dual influence of changing theory (and fashion) and also the changing concerns of society in relation to the media. Although value-relativist postmodernist theory (see pp. 128–30) has tended to demote concerns about ideological manipulation, commercialism and social problems, new issues have arisen. These relate, among others, to the environment, personal and collective identity, health and risk, trust and authenticity. Meanwhile, older issues, such as racism, war propaganda and inequality, have refused to go away.

The differences of approach between dominant and alternative paradigms are deep-rooted, and their existence underlines the difficulty of having any unified 'science of communication'. The differences stem also from the very nature of (mass) communication, which has to deal in ideology, values and ideas and cannot escape from being interpreted within ideological frameworks. While the reader of this book is not obliged to make a choice between the two main paradigms, knowing about them will help to make sense of the **diversity** of theories and of disagreements about the supposed 'facts' concerning mass media.

Four Models of Communication

The original definition of mass communication as a process (see p. 56) depended on objective features of mass production, reproduction and distribution which were shared by several different media. It was very much a technologically- and organizationally-based definition, subordinating human considerations. Its validity has long been called into question, especially as a result of the conflicting views just discussed and, more recently, by the fact that the original mass production technology and the factory-like forms of organization have themselves been made obsolescent by social and technological change. We have to consider alternative, though not necessarily inconsistent, models (representations) of the process of public communication. At least four such models can be distinguished, aside from the question of how the 'new media' should be conceptualized.

A transmission model

At the core of the dominant paradigm can be found (see pp. 163–4) a particular view of communication as a process of *transmission* of a fixed quantity of information – the *message* as determined by the sender or source. Simple definitions of mass communication often follow Lasswell's (1948) observation that the study of mass communication is an attempt to answer the question, 'Who says what to whom, through what channel and with what effect?' This represents the linear sequence already mentioned, which is largely built into standard definitions of the nature of predominant forms of mass communication. A good deal of early theorizing about mass communication (see, for example, McQuail and Windahl, 1993) was an attempt to extend and to improve on this simplistic version of the process. Perhaps the most complete early version of a model of mass communication, in line with the defining features noted above and consistent with the dominant paradigm, was offered by Westley and MacLean (1957).

Their achievement was to recognize that mass communication involves the interpolation of a new 'communicator role' (such as that of the professional journalist in a formal media organization) between 'society' and 'audience'. The sequence is thus not simply (1) sender, (2) message, (3) channel, (4) many potential receivers, but rather (1) events and 'voices' in society, (2) channel/communicator role, (3) messages, (4) receiver. This revised version takes account of the fact that mass communicators do not usually originate 'messages' or communication. Rather they *relay* to a potential audience their own account (news) of a selection of the events occurring in the environment, or they give *access* to the views and voices of some of those (such as advocates of opinions, advertisers, performers and writers) who want to reach a wider public. There are three important features of the complete model as drawn by Westley and MacLean: one is the emphasis on the *selecting* role of mass communicators; the second is the fact that selection is undertaken according to an assessment of what the audience will find interesting; and the third is that communication is not purposive, beyond this last goal. The media themselves typically do not aim to persuade or educate or even to inform.

According to this model, mass communication is a self-regulating process that is guided by the interests and demands of an audience that is known only by its selections and responses to what is offered. Such a process can no longer be viewed as linear, since it is strongly shaped by 'feedback' from the audience both to the media and to the advocates and original communicators. This view of the mass media sees them as relatively open and neutral service organizations in a secular society, contributing to the work of other social institutions. It also substitutes the satisfaction of the audience as a measure of efficient performance for that of information transfer. It is not accidental that this model was based on the American system of free-market media. It would not very accurately fit a state-run media system or even a European public broadcasting institution. It is also innocent of the idea that the free market might not necessarily reflect the interests of audiences or might also conduct its own form of purposeful propaganda.

A ritual or expressive model

The transmission model remains a useful representation of the rationale and general operation of some media in some of their functions (especially general news media and advertising). It is, however, incomplete and misleading as a representation of many other media activities and of the diversity of communication processes that are at work. One reason for its weakness is the limitation of communication to the matter of 'transmission'. This version of communication, according to James Carey (1975: 3),

is the commonest in our culture and is defined by terms such as sending, transmitting or giving information to others. It is formed off a metaphor of geography or transportation ... The centre of this idea of communication is the transmission of signals or messages over time for the purpose of control.

It implies instrumentality, cause-and-effect relations and one-directional flow. Carey pointed to the alternative view of communication as 'ritual', according to which

communication is linked to such terms as sharing, participation, association, fellowship and the possession of a common faith ... A ritual view is not directed towards the extension of messages in space, but the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs. (1975: 8)

This alternative can equally be called an 'expressive' model of communication, since its emphasis is also on the intrinsic satisfaction of the sender (or receiver) rather than on some instrumental purpose. Ritual or expressive communication depends on shared understandings and emotions. It is celebratory, consummatory (an end in itself) and decorative rather than utilitarian in aim and it often requires some element of 'performance' for communication to be realized. Communication is engaged in for the pleasures of reception as much as for any useful purpose. The message of ritual communication is usually latent and ambiguous, depending on associations and symbols that are not chosen by the participants but made available in the culture. Medium and message are usually hard to separate. Ritual communication is also relatively timeless and unchanging.

Although, in natural conditions, ritual communication is not instrumental, it can be said to have consequences for society (such as more integration) or for social relationships. In some planned communication campaigns – for instance, in politics or advertising – the principles of ritual communication are sometimes taken over and exploited (use of potent symbols, latent appeals to cultural values, togetherness, myths, tradition, etc.). Ritual plays a part in unifying and in mobilizing sentiment and action. Examples of the model can be found in the spheres of art, religion and public ceremonials and festivals.

Communication as display and attention: a publicity model

Besides the transmission and ritual models, there is a third perspective that captures another important aspect of mass communication. This can be summarily labelled a *publicity model*. Often the primary aim of mass media is neither to transmit particular information nor to unite a public in some expression of culture, belief or values, but simply to catch and hold visual or aural attention. In doing so, the media attain one direct economic goal, which is to gain audience revenue (since attention equals consumption, for most practical purposes), and an indirect one, which is to sell (the probability of) audience attention to advertisers. As Elliott (1972: 164) has pointed out (implicitly adopting the transmission model as the norm), 'mass communication is liable not to be communication at all', in the sense of the 'ordered transfer of meaning'. It is more likely to be 'spectatorship', and the media audience is more often a set of spectators rather than participants or information receivers. The *fact* of attention often matters more than the *quality* of attention (which can rarely be adequately measured).

While those who use mass media for their own purposes do hope for some effect (such as persuasion or selling) beyond attention and publicity, gaining the latter remains the immediate goal and is often treated as a measure of success or failure. The publicity strategies of multi-media conglomerates are typically directed at getting maximum attention for their current products in as many media as possible and in multiple forms (interviews, news events, photos, guest appearances, social media sites, etc.). The goal is described as seeking to 'achieve a good share of mind' (Turow, 2009: 201). A good deal of research into media effect has been concerned with questions of image and awareness. The fact of being known is often more important than the content of what is known and is the only necessary condition for **celebrity**. Similarly, the supposed power of the media to set political and other 'agendas' is an example of the attention-gaining process. Much effort in media production is devoted to devices for gaining and keeping attention by catching the eye, arousing emotion, stimulating interest. This is one aspect of what has been described as '**media logic**' (see p. 330–31), with the *substance* of a message often subordinated to the devices for presentation (Altheide and Snow, 1979, 1991).

The attention-seeking goal also corresponds with one important perception of the media by their audiences, who use the mass media for diversion and passing time. They seek to spend time 'with the media', to escape everyday reality. The relationship between sender and receiver according to the display-attention model is not necessarily passive or uninvolved, but it is morally neutral and does not, in itself, imply a transfer or creation of meaning.

Going with the notion of communication as a process of display and attention are several additional features that do not apply to the transmission or ritual models:

- Attention-gaining is a zero-sum process. The time spent attending to one media display by one person cannot be given to another, and available audience time is finite, although time can be stretched and attention diluted. By contrast, there is no quantifiable limit to the amount of 'meaning' that can be sent and acquired or to the satisfactions that can be gained from participating in ritual communication processes.

- Communication in the display-attention mode exists only in the present. There is no past that matters, and the future matters only as a continuation or amplification of the present. Questions of cause and effect relating to the receiver do not arise.
- Attention-gaining is an end in itself and in the short term is value-neutral and essentially empty of meaning. Form and technique take precedence over message content.

These three features can be seen as underlying, respectively, the *competitiveness*, the *actuality/transience* and the *objectivity/detachment* which are pronounced features of mass communication, especially within commercial media institutions.

Encoding and decoding of media discourse: a reception model

There is yet another version of the mass communication process, which involves an even more radical departure from the transmission model than the two variants just discussed. This depends very much on the adoption of the critical perspective described above, but it can also be understood as the view of mass communication from the position of many different receivers who do not perceive or understand the message 'as sent' or 'as expressed'. This model has its origins in **critical theory**, **semiology** and **discourse analysis**. It is located more in the domain of the cultural rather than the social sciences. It is strongly linked to the rise of '**reception analysis**' (see Holub, 1984; Jensen and Rosengren, 1990). It challenges the predominant methodologies of empirical social scientific audience research and also the humanistic studies of content because both fail to take account of the 'power of the audience' in giving meaning to messages.

The essence of the 'reception approach' is to locate the attribution and construction of meaning (derived from media) with the receiver. Media messages are always open and 'polysemic' (having multiple meanings) and are interpreted according to the context and the culture of receivers. Among the forerunners of reception analysis was a persuasive variant of critical theory formulated by Stuart Hall (1974/1980) which emphasized the stages of transformation through which any media message passes on the way from its origins to its reception and interpretation. Hall accepted the premise that intended meaning is built into (encoded) symbolic content in both open and concealed ways that are hard to resist, but recognized the possibilities for rejecting or re-interpreting the intended message.

It is true that communicators choose to encode messages for ideological and institutional purposes and to manipulate language and media for those ends (media messages are given a 'preferred reading', or what might now be called 'spin'). Secondly, receivers ('decoders') are not obliged to accept messages as sent but can and do resist ideological influence by applying variant or oppositional readings, according to their own experience and outlook. This is described as 'differential decoding'.

In Hall's model of the process of **encoding** and decoding, he portrays the television programme (or any equivalent media text) as a *meaningful discourse*. This is encoded according to the *meaning structure* of the mass media production organization and its

main supports, but decoded according to the different meaning structures and frameworks of knowledge of differently situated audiences. The path followed through the stages of the model is simple in principle. Communication originates within media institutions whose typical frameworks of meaning are likely to conform to dominant power structures. Specific messages are 'encoded', often in the form of established content genres (such as 'news', 'pop music', 'sport reports', 'soap operas', 'police/detective series') which have a face-value meaning and inbuilt guidelines for interpretation by an audience. The media are approached by their audiences in terms of 'meaning structures', which have their origin in the ideas and experience of the audience.

While the general implication is that meaning as decoded does not necessarily (or often) correspond with meaning as encoded (despite the mediation of conventional genres and shared language systems), the most significant point is that decoding can take a different course from that intended. Receivers can read between the lines and even reverse the intended direction of the message. It is clear that this model and the associated theory embody several key principles: the multiplicity of meanings of media content; the existence of varied 'interpretative' communities; and the primacy of the receiver in determining meaning. While early effect research recognized the fact of selective perception, this was seen as a limitation on, or a condition of, the transmission model, rather than part of a quite different perspective.

Comparisons

The discussion of these different models shows the inadequacy of any single concept or definition of mass communication that relies too heavily on what seem to be intrinsic characteristics or biases of the *technology* of multiple reproduction and dissemination. The human uses of technology are much more diverse and more determinant than was once assumed. Of the four models, summarized in comparative terms in Figure 3.1, the transmission model is largely taken from older institutional contexts – education, religion, government – and is really appropriate only to media activities which are instructional, informational or propagandist in purpose. The expressive

Model	Orientation of	
	Sender	Receiver
Transmission model	Transfer of meaning	Cognitive processing
Expressive or ritual model	Performance	Consummation/shared experience
Publicity model	Competitive display	Attention-giving spectatorship
Reception model	Preferential encoding	Differential decoding/construction of meaning

Figure 3.1 Four models of the mass communication process compared: each model involves differences of orientation on the part of sender and receiver

or ritual model is better able to capture elements which have to do with art, drama, entertainment and the many symbolic uses of communication. It also applies to the many new audience participant and 'reality' television formats. The publicity or display-attention model reflects the central media goals of attracting audiences (high ratings and wide reach) for purposes of prestige or income. It covers that large sector of media activity that is engaged in advertising or public relations, directly or indirectly. It also applies to activities of news management and media 'spin' carried out by governments in their own self-interest. The reception model reminds us that the seeming power of the media to mould, express or capture is partly illusory since the audience in the end disposes.

Conclusion

The basic concepts and models for the study of mass communication that have been outlined in this chapter were developed on the basis of the special features indicated (scale, simultaneity, one-directionality, etc.) and under conditions of transition to the highly organized and centralized industrial society of the twentieth century. Not everything has changed, but we are now faced with new technological possibilities for communication that are not massive or one-directional, and there is a shift away from the earlier massification and centralization of society. These matters are taken up again in Chapter 6.

These changes are already recognized in mass communication theory, although the shift is still cautious and much of the conceptual framework erected for mass communication remains relevant. We still have mass politics, mass markets and mass consumption. The media have extended their scale on a global dimension. The beliefs vested in the power of publicity, public relations and propaganda by other names are still widely held by those with economic and political power. The 'dominant paradigm' that emerged in early communication research is still with us because it fits many of the conditions of contemporary media operation and it meets the needs of media industries, advertisers and publicists. Media propagandists remain convinced of the manipulative capacity of the media and the malleability of the 'masses'. The notion of information transfer or transportation is still alive and well.

As far as a choice of model is concerned, we cannot simply choose one and ignore the others. They are relevant for different purposes. The transmission and attention models are still the preferred perspectives of media industries and would-be persuaders, while the ritual and decoding models are deployed as part of the resistance to media domination as well as shedding light on the underlying process. Neither party to this underlying conflict of purpose and outlook can afford to discount the way mass communication looks to the other side since all four models reflect some aspects of the communication process.

The four models are compared in Figure 3.1, which summarizes points made in the text and highlights the fact that each model posits a distinctive type of relationship between sender and receiver that involves a mutually agreed perception of its central character and purpose.