One way to understand the role and impact of the media in our lives is to understand the cultural context in which the media operate.

Culture is always changing. It includes a society’s art, beliefs, customs, games, technologies, traditions, and institutions.

It also encompasses a society’s modes of communication:

- The process of creating symbol systems that convey information and meaning (for example, language systems, dot–dash Morse Code, motion pictures, or one–zero binary computer codes – digital).
Culture may be defined as the symbols of expression that individuals, groups, and societies use to make sense of daily life and to articulate their values.

- In other words, we are assigning meaning to the songs, books, TV programs, or Internet sites.

- Culture, therefore, is a process that delivers the values of a society through products or other meaning-making forms.
The mass media are the cultural industries—the channels of communication—that produce and distribute songs, novels, newspapers, movies, Internet services, and other cultural products to large numbers of people.
Communication Eras

- Oral
- Written
- Print
- Electronic
- Digital
The last three phases feature the development of mass communication:

The process of designing and delivering cultural messages and stories to large and diverse audiences through media channels as old as the book and as new as the Internet.

Hastened by the growth of industry and modern technology, mass communication accompanied the gradual shift of rural populations to urban settings and the rise of a consumer culture.
Printed Words Revolutionize Everyday Life
3 Elements for Mass Production

- First, duplication, or machine copying, replaced the tedious manuscript system in which scribes hand copied a text several times to produce multiple copies.

- Second, duplication could be done rapidly, producing mass quantities of the same book.

- Third, the faster processing of multiple copies brought down the cost of each unit, making books more affordable to less affluent people.

- These three basic elements would provide the impetus for the Industrial Revolution, assembly-line production, modern capitalism, and the rise of consumer culture in the twentieth century.
Excerpt from Media History
In America, the gradual transformation from an industrial, print-based society to an informational era began with the development of the **telegraph** in the 1840s.
4 Major Contributions of the Telegraph

- First, it separated communication from transportation, making media messages instantaneous—unencumbered by stagecoaches, ships, or the pony express.

- Second, the telegraph, in combination with the rise of mass-marketed newspapers, transformed “information into a commodity, a ‘thing’ that could be bought or sold irrespective of its uses or meaning.”
  - By the time of the Civil War, news had become a valuable product.

- Third, the telegraph made it easier for military, business, and political leaders to coordinate commercial and military operations, especially after the installation of the transatlantic cable in the late 1860s.

- Fourth, the telegraph foreshadowed future technological developments, such as wireless telegraphy, the fax machine, and the cellular phone.
  - In 2006, the Western Union telegraph offices sent their final message.
The rise of film at the turn of the twentieth century and the development of radio in the 1920s were early signposts,

- but the electronic phase of the Information Age really began in the 1950s and 1960s. The dramatic impact of television on daily life marked the arrival of a new visual and electronic era.
Excerpt from Media History
the Information Age passed into a digital phase – digital communication

By 2006, the electronic and digital eras had fully ushered in the age of media convergence.
Figure 1.1: Daily Media Consumption by Platform, 2010 (8- to 18-Year-Olds)

- 32% On a TV
- 25% On a computer
- 20% On a mobile device
- 5% On a console video game player
- 6% On a radio
- 6% Print
- 4% Movie theater
- 3% CDs
Stories: The Foundation of Media

- Stories: The Foundation of Media.
- The common denominator between entertainment and information culture is the narrative.
- Stories we seek and tell are changing in the digital era.
  - Reality TV and social media dominate.
  - Ordinary citizens are able to participate in, and have an effect on, stories told in the media.
  - Media institutions and outlets are in the narrative business.
The Power of Media Stories in Everyday Life

- Euripides
  - Art should imitate life.

- Plato
  - Art should aim to instruct and uplift.

- Aristotle
  - Art and stories should provide insight into the human condition, but should entertain as well.
Cultural critics are concerned about:

- The quality of contemporary culture
- The overwhelming amount of information now available

How much the media shape society is still unknown.
Culture as a Map

- Culture is an ongoing and complicated process.
- Forms of culture are judged on a combination of personal taste and the aesthetic judgments a society makes at particular historical times.
Cultural Values of the Modern Period

• Modern period
  • Began with the Industrial Revolution and extended until the mid-twentieth century

• Four key values:
  • Efficiency
  • Individualism
  • Rationalism
  • Progress
Cultural Values of the Modern Period

- Efficiency

- Printing presses and assembly lines made major contributions in this transformation, and then modern advertising spread the word about new gadgets to consumers.

- In terms of culture, the modern mantra has been “form follows function.”
Cultural Values of the Modern Period

- **Individualism**

  The values of the pre-modern period (before the Industrial Revolution) were guided by a strong belief in a natural or divine order, modernization elevated individual self-expression to a more central position.

- Progressive thinkers maintained that the printing press, telegraph and the railroad, in combination with a scientific attitude, would foster a new type of informed society.
Cultural Values of the Modern Period

- Rationalism

- A leading champion of an informed rational society was Walter Lippmann – advocated a “machinery of knowledge” that might be established through “intelligence bureaus” staffed by experts.
Progress

The notion of being modern in the twentieth century meant throwing off the chains of the past, breaking with tradition, and embracing progress.
Postmodern period
- From the mid-twentieth century to today

Four features:
- Populism
- Diversity
- Nostalgia
- Paradox
Populism tries to appeal to ordinary people by highlighting or even creating an argument or conflict between “the people” and “the elite.”
Shifting Values in Postmodern Culture

- Diversity

- Emphasizes diversity and fragmentation, including the wild juxtaposition of old and new cultural styles.
Shifting Values in Postmodern Culture

- Paradox

- stresses integrating—or converging—retro beliefs and contemporary culture.

- so at the same time that we seem nostalgic for the past, we embrace new technologies with a vengeance.