

# CHAPTER 1

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## Mass Communication: A Critical Approach



# 2012 Presidential Election

- The rise of social media and political clout turned out to play a larger role than traditional television advertising in the most recent presidential election.
- It is worth asking whether TV will continue to play an outsized role in future federal elections.



# Culture and the Evolution of Mass Communication

- **Mass media** are the cultural industries that produce and distribute:
  - Songs
  - Novels
  - TV shows
  - Newspapers
  - Movies
  - Video games
  - Internet Services

# Eras in Communication

- Pre-Mass Communication
- Oral communication
- Written communication

- Written communication—a manuscript culture— came into conflict with oral communication tradition.



# Eras in Communication

- *MASS COMMUNICATION*
  - Printed communication
  - Electronic communication
  - Digital communication



# The Print Revolution

- The printing press paved the way for major social and cultural changes by transmitting knowledge across national boundaries and stimulating the rise of the middle class.



# The Electronic Era

- While the Industrial Age in America and Europe shifted the focus from farms to cities, new technology shifted the way people learned about their new society.
- The telegraph started the transformation of communication, which was continued by film, radio, and television.



# The Digital Era

- The ability to send words, pictures, and sound using a digital code allowed for modern communication technology, including the Internet and cable television. This led to the emergence of e-mail, blogging, and social media.





# The Digital Era

- Digital communication redefined news and social interaction.
  - Bloggers have become an important part of the news industry.
  - E-mail has assumed some of the functions of the postal service.
  - Social media like Twitter and Facebook connect people in a new way.



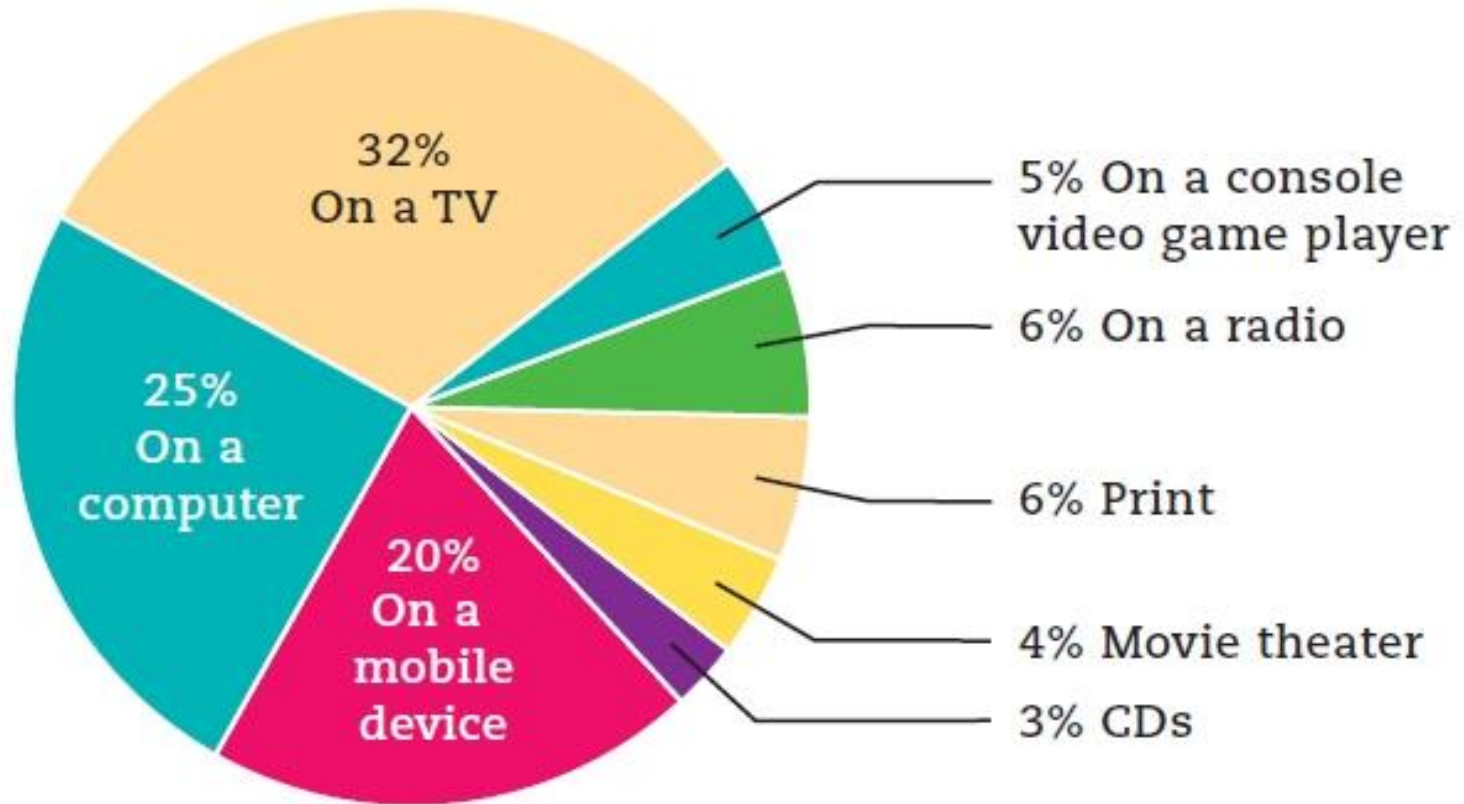
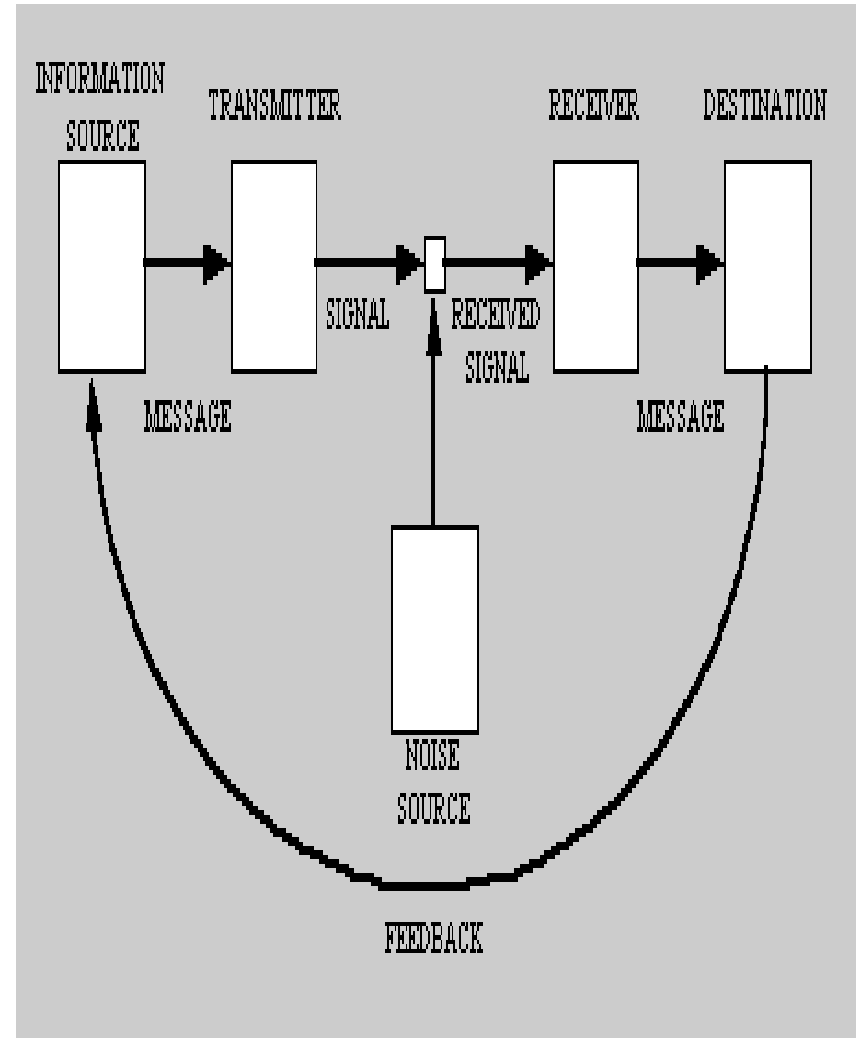


Figure 1.1: Daily Media Consumption by Platform, 2010 (8-to-18-year-olds)

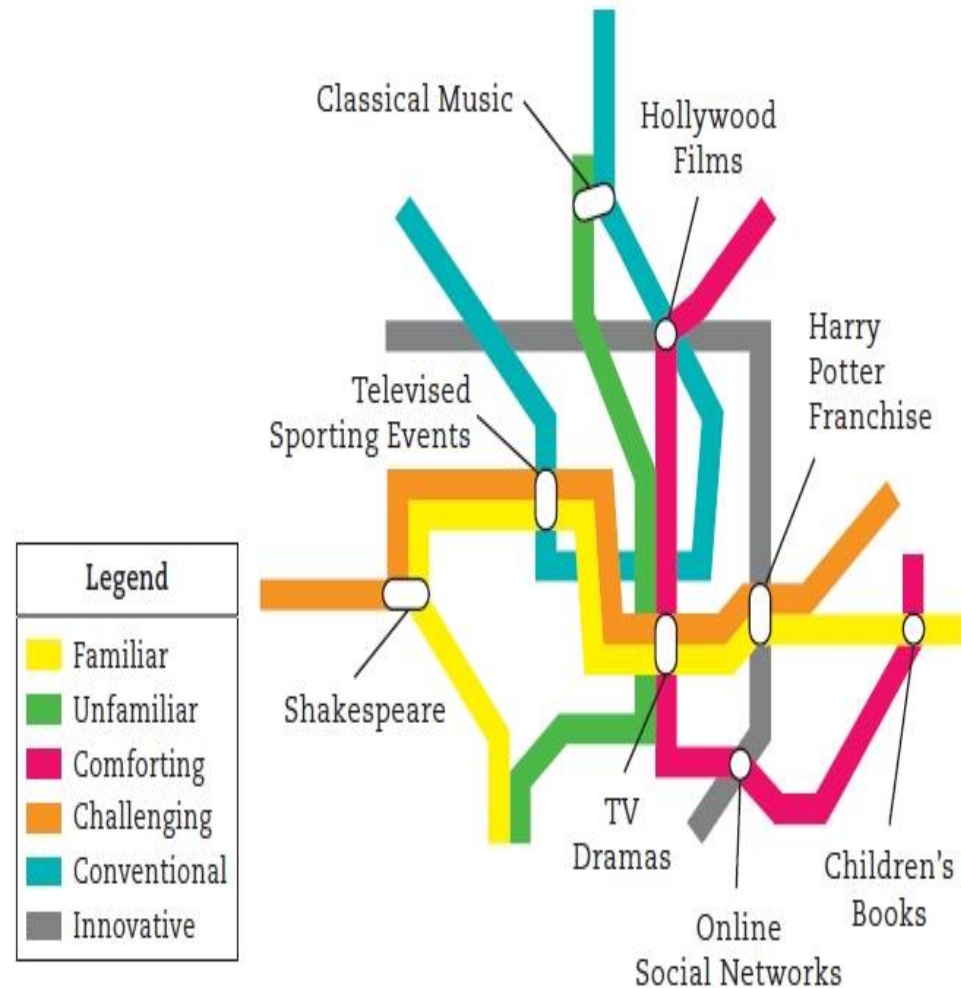
# The Linear Model of Mass Communication

- **Senders** (authors, producers)
- **Messages** (programs, ads)
- **Mass media channel** (TV, books)
- **Receivers** (viewers, consumers)
- **Gatekeepers** (editors, executive producers, media managers)
- **Feedback** (messages from receivers back to senders)



# Cultural Model for Mass Communication

- Recognizes that individuals bring diverse meanings to messages
- Audiences actively affirm, interpret, refashion, or reject the messages and stories that flow through various media channels



# The Evolution of a New Mass Medium

- Emergence or novelty stage
- Entrepreneurial stage
- Mass medium stage
- Convergence stage



# Media Convergence

- The term convergence is used by media critics and analysts to describe recent changes in media content and media companies.
- 1. The Dual Roles of Media Convergence. Media convergence involves the technological merging of content as well as cross-platform, the business model of consolidation of media holdings under a corporate umbrella.
- 2. Media Businesses in a Converged World. This business model is revealed through digital age strategies of companies like Amazon, Facebook, Apple, and Google.
- 3. Media Convergence and Cultural Change. The Internet and social media have changed the ways in which media culture is engaged and consumed. Media multitasking has led to growing media consumption, particularly for younger people.

# Media Convergence

- Dual roles
  - Technological merging of content across different media channels
  - **Cross platform**, the consolidation of media holdings under one corporate umbrella
- Media businesses
  - Companies like Google make money by selling ads rather than by producing content

# Media Convergence and Cultural Change

- Changes in how we consume and engage with media culture
  - Watch TV shows on Hulu and Netflix or DVR/On-Demand options
  - Make media choices based on social media recommendations
  - Upload our own media
  - Discuss programs as we watch them through “live-tweeting”



# 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.

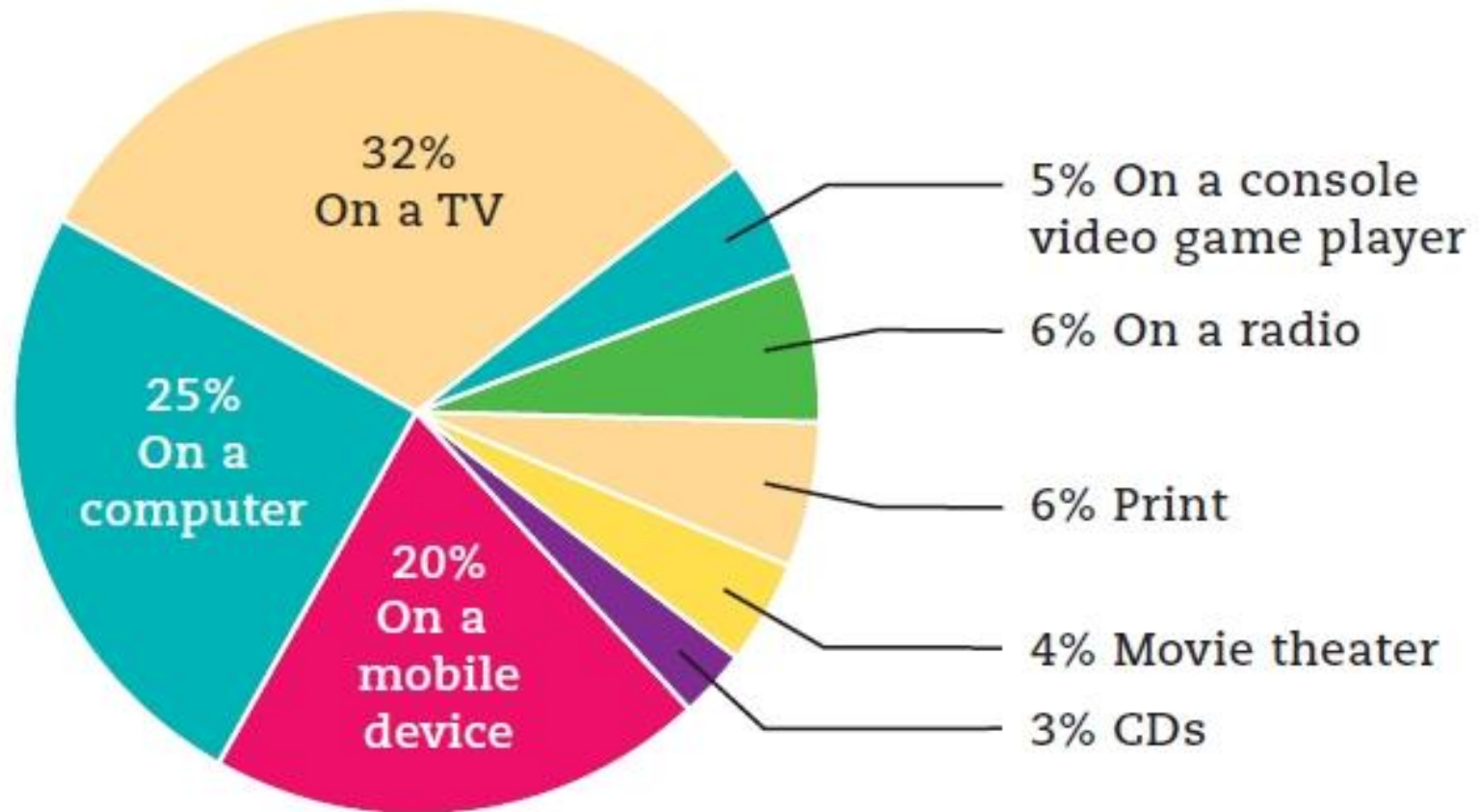


# Contemporary Culture

- 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.



Figure 1.1: Daily Media Consumption by Platform, 2010 (8- to 18-Year-Olds)



# Culture as a Skyscraper

- Top floors are associated with “good taste” or **high culture**.
    - Ballet, symphony, art museums
  - Lower floors are associated with popular culture or **low culture**.
    - Soap operas, rock music, video games
  - Different media for each, but many people consume both
1. An Inability to Appreciate Fine Art. Critics claim that popular culture distracts people from serious literature, art, and philosophy.
  2. A Tendency to Exploit High Culture. Powerful and complex themes get lost or trivialized in popular or commercial adaptations.
  3. A Throw-Away Ethic. Lower forms of culture are unstable or fleeting; higher forms have more staying power.
  4. A Diminished Audience for High Culture. Popular culture may be choking out higher forms of culture and cheapening public life.
  5. Dulling Our Cultural Taste Buds. Popular media may inhibit rational thought and social progress by distracting audiences with the promise of commercial goods. B

# Culture as a Map

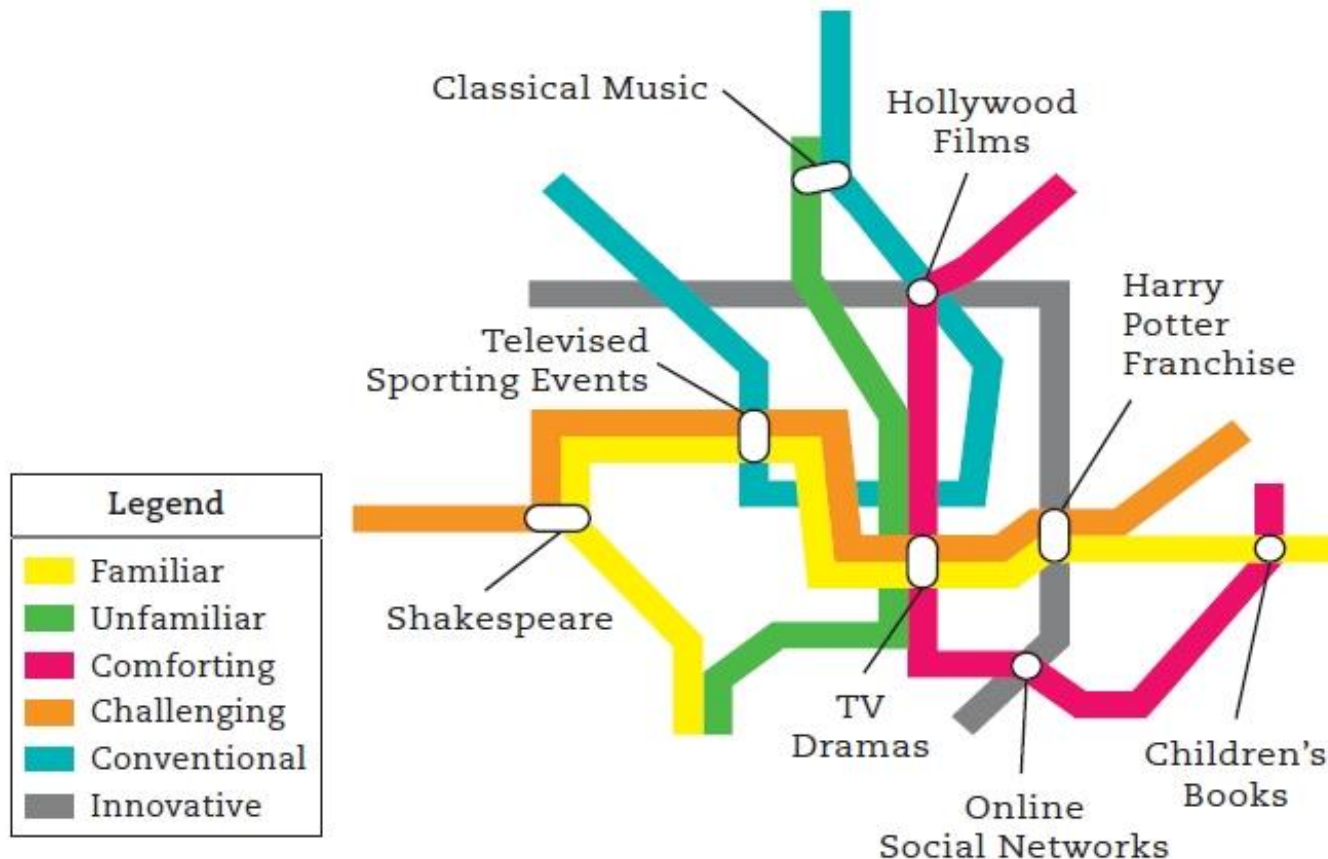
- Culture is an ongoing and complicated process.



- Forms of culture are judged on a combination of personal taste and the aesthetic judgments a society makes at particular historical times.

- Culture as a Map. Culture can also be interpreted as a map, which is a more flexible and multidimensional way of imagining culture than a high/low ranking.
- 1. The Comfort of Familiar Stories. Familiar stories offer the security of repetition and common landmarks on the cultural map.
- 2. Innovation and the Attraction of “What’s New.” In contrast to familiarity, individuals sometimes feel the need to explore new cultural places.
- 3. A Wide Range of Messages. Cultural products from Shakespeare to The Simpsons can contain layers of messages, from the simple to the complex.
- 4. Challenging the Nostalgia for a Better Past. Were the “good-old days” really that good?

# Figure 1.3: Culture as a Map





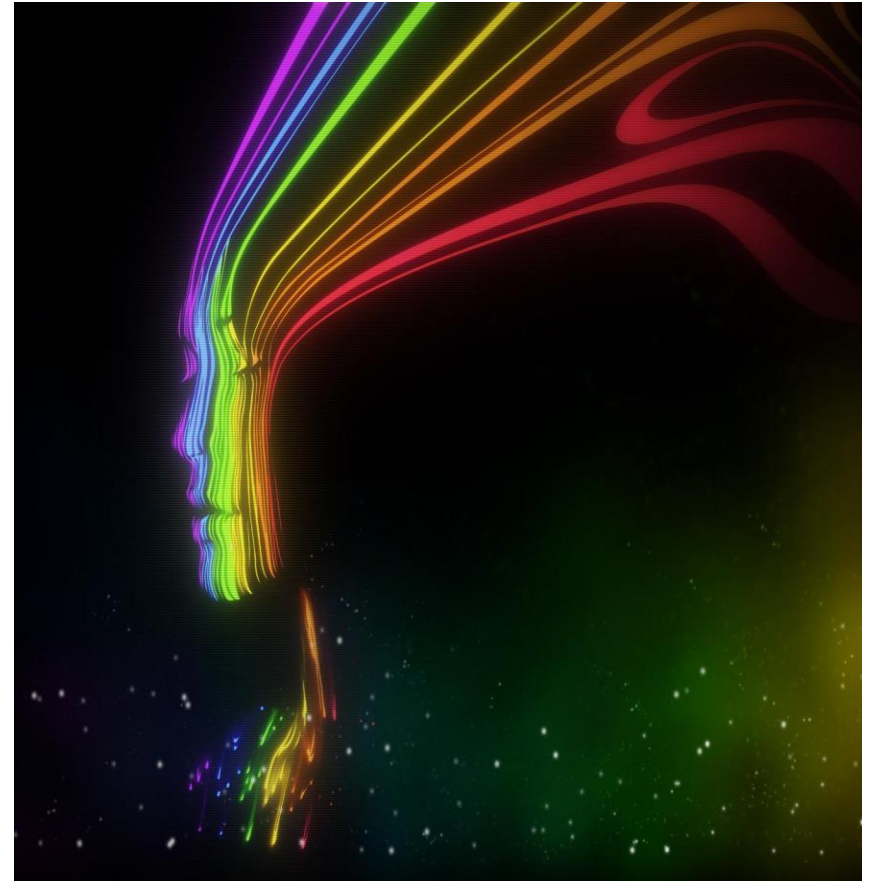
# Cultural Values of the Modern Period

- **Modern period**
  - Began with the Industrial Revolution and extended until the mid-twentieth century
- **Four key values:**
  - Efficiency
  - Individualism
  - Rationalism
  - Progress



# Shifting Values in Postmodern Culture

- **Postmodern period**
  - From the mid-twentieth century to today
- **Four features:**
  - Populism
  - Diversity
  - Nostalgia
  - Paradox



# Critiquing Media and Culture

- **Media literacy** is a critical process that takes us through the steps of:
  - Description
  - Analysis
  - Interpretation
  - Evaluation
  - Engagement



# Benefits of a Critical Perspective

- Allows us to participate in a debate about media culture as a force for both democracy and social progress
- New, blended, and merging cultural phenomena challenge us to reassess and rebuild the standards by which we judge our culture.