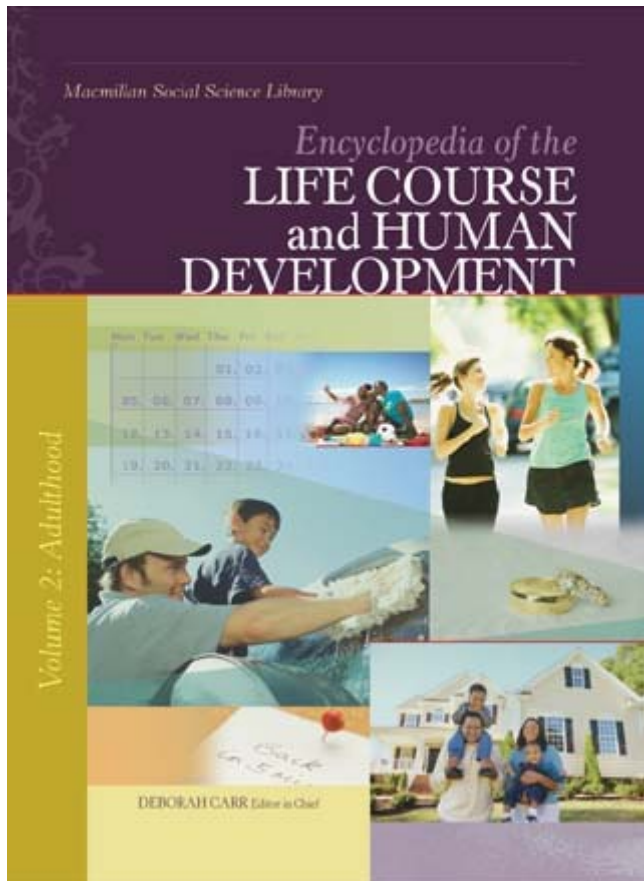


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MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY USE, ADULTHOOD

Classic mass media (television, radio, newspapers, magazines, movies, and books) and information and communication technologies (ICT) (telephones, mobile phones, and the Internet) play a central role in everyday life. Media and technology use is one of the most important leisure activities and thus accounts for a great deal of time use over the life course. In addition, media and ICT are important in shaping the life course. The technological environment is a critical part of the historical and structural contexts in which people live their lives. For example, people coming of age at the beginning of the 21st century are doing so in the so-called information society, in which mass media and ICT are much more important for individuals, organizations and companies, nations, and global society than they were in the middle of the 20th century.

This fundamental social change has altered many aspects of life; for example, ideas about the speed and frequency of interpersonal communication have been transformed by the availability of cell phones and the Internet. These technologies also are important for the messages they convey about everything from the appropriate timing of life events to the kinds of consumer goods one needs to mark those events (e.g., what new parents need to purchase). Thus, whether or not they represent reality accurately, media and ICT are a means of conveying cultural ideas about the life course and society. ICT in particular have changed the nature of social relationships over the life course in that contemporary people are embedded not only in real social networks but in virtual social networks on the Internet that may span the globe.

ACCESS TO MASS MEDIA AND ICT

Access to mass media and ICT is an indispensable precondition for their use. Research shows that some subgroups of individuals are less likely to have access to these technologies. However, history shows that these access gaps usually diminish or disappear over time as a technology is diffused throughout society. For example, in European and North American societies there are few gaps in access to classic mass media; the U.S. Census estimates that more than 95% of poor households own a color television. When specific types of media are examined, gaps are apparent. Thus, even though television and radio sets are found in well over 90% of households, access gaps arise because not all content is freely available, such as cable and satellite programming. Similar differences can be observed in comparing access to free versus paid newspapers and magazines. This contrast is impor-

THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

There are differences in access to and use of mass media and information and communication technologies (ICT) among global regions (e.g., northern hemisphere versus southern hemisphere), countries with different political systems (e.g., democracy versus autocracy), regions within countries (e.g., urban versus rural), social traits (e.g., age, income, education, and ethnicity), and individual characteristics (e.g., literacy, psychological traits). In the case of most media and technologies the ability to afford the cost of the device (television, radio, computer) or the service fee (newspapers, pay television, cinema, Internet) is a precondition for use. The term *digital divide* refers to unequal access to and use of the Internet (Norris, 2002). Therefore, the main digital divide parallels the financial divide. In addition, women in most countries are less likely to have access to the Internet and, if they have access, use it less intensely. However, in 2007 a higher percentage of U.S. women than U.S. men used the Internet (Center for the Digital Future, 2007). Access to the Internet exposes individuals to new information and enables the development of skills. Thus, unequal access to these resources may contribute to further inequalities over the life course.

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tant because of the quality differences between free and paid media.

MOTIVES FOR USE OF MASS MEDIA AND ICT

Research on mass media before the 1970s tended to examine the impact of media on users, viewing them as passive actors causally influenced by powerful media organizations. Beginning in the 1970s, the focus shifted to the motives underlying the use of mass media. The central research question was no longer "What do media do with their users?" but "What do users do with media?" (Rosengren, Wenner, & Palmgreen, 1985). This so-called uses and gratifications approach is still prominent in mass media research.

Media and Technology Use, Adulthood

Researchers categorize the gratifications of using media in various ways, depending on the theoretical approach and research question. One of the most general and widely used categorization distinguishes four gratifications: cognition, affection, social interaction, and integration/habitus. Cognitive gratification refers to the need for information and learning, whereas affective gratification includes aspects such as entertainment, diversion, escapism, and excitement. Social interaction combines two kinds of interaction that are fostered by mass media. On the one hand, mass media provide topics for everyday conversations and therefore for social integration. On the other hand, electronic media such as television and radio can provide parasocial interaction. For example, people may feel personally addressed by news anchors saying “good evening” or “see you tomorrow at the same time” and feel that they are engaging in a social interaction.

The habitus gratification is based on the human need for rituals, stability, and structure. Mass media offer a reliable structure for the rhythm of days, weeks, and years. People often adjust their lives to enable or accommodate their use of media. They may take a different route to work to pick up a free newspaper or buy a magazine, align their dinnertime with the evening news, and not go out when their favorite television shows are screened; major sport events are important landmarks in the yearly calendar. Research has compared the relative importance of these motivations for types of mass media (e.g., television versus newspapers) and examined how the motivations for media use differ from those for other everyday activities (e.g., watching talk shows versus meeting friends). One of the core findings of this line of research is that television outreaches most other mass media on nearly all dimensions. Only newspapers obtain higher ranks on the cognitive function.

PATTERNS OF MASS MEDIA AND ICT USE

In many cases the mass media are financed substantially or solely by advertisements, and the purpose of every advertisement is to reach as many people in a target group as possible. Therefore, media producers want to know in as much detail as possible how many and which people use their products. Thus, a great deal of quantitative research on patterns of media use is conducted by private companies or industry associations. An international comparative analysis showed that nearly every household in the industrialized world has a television set: Central and Eastern Europe 94.1%, Western Europe 95.3%, Japan 99.4%, United States 98.2% (IP/RTL Group, 2007). Even though access to television is widespread, viewing patterns differ significantly between countries and differ within individual countries on the basis of age, gender, race, social class, and other demographic characteristics.

Country	Age Group	Minutes per Day				Year
		Television ¹ (2006)	Other Media ²			
			Newspapers	Radio	Internet	
United States	18+	295	28	191	32	2001
United Kingdom	16+	232	30			2005
Spain	16+	228	13	110	27	2005
Germany	14+	227	28	221	73	2005
Japan	20+	213	27	94	71	2003
Switzerland (Italian speakers)	15–74	182				
Switzerland (French speakers)	15–74	175				-
Denmark	12+	160	19	188	18	2004
Norway	12+	156	46	133	30	2005
Switzerland (German speakers)	15–74	147	37	94	43	2005

¹SOURCE: IP/RTL Group, 2007.
²SOURCE: World Association of Newspapers, 2006.

Table 1. TV, newspaper, radio and internet use in selected countries. CENGAGE LEARNING, GALE.

Table 1 shows the average number of minutes per individual per working day spent viewing TV in selected industrialized nations. People in the United States spend the most time watching television; Americans spend twice as many minutes per day as do people in the German-speaking part of Switzerland, who spend the least amount of time. Especially in Europe, television use and newspaper reading are inversely related (both on the individual and national level). Whereas newspapers are read widely in middle and Northern Europe (e.g., Switzerland, Germany, Norway), television is the major mass medium in Southern Europe (e.g., Spain).

It is difficult for researchers to make direct comparisons of time spent using specific media because inconsistent measures and operationalizations are used across media types and across contexts. Whereas television use is measured with devices attached to the television set and is therefore reliable, reading time usually is measured by self-reports, which are less reliable. Cultural influences on media use are apparent in Table 1, which shows that the three different language regions of Switzerland have different levels of television viewing. Viewing patterns also vary by cultural and national context. For example, Figure 1 shows the percentage of the audience that watches television throughout the day in Denmark, Japan, and Spain. In Denmark viewing levels are low during the day; the 30% point is reached only with the evening news at

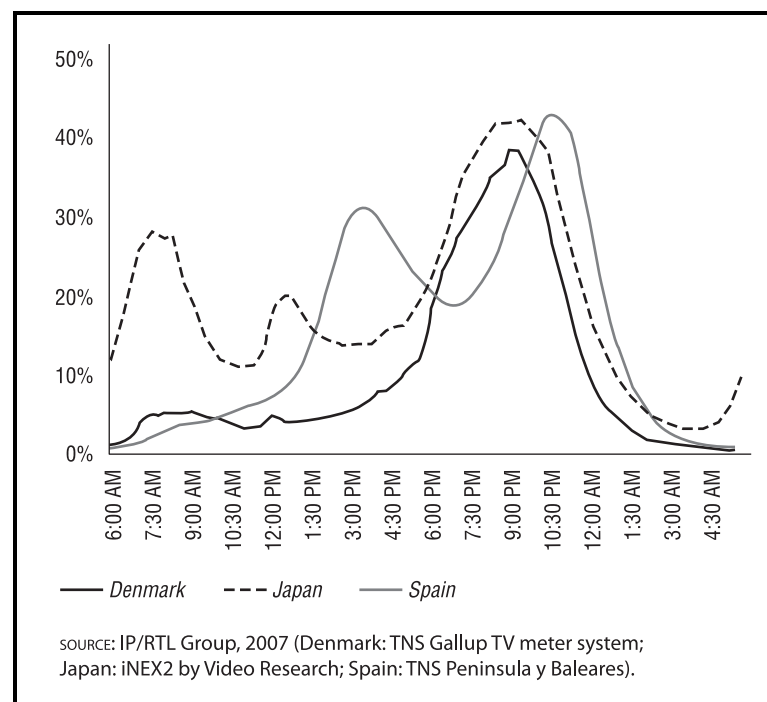


Figure 1. Daytime TV viewing pattern of selected countries. Percent of population watching television at a particular time on a week day. CENGAGE LEARNING, GALE.

7:30 P.M. Japan reaches a first peak of 29% audience viewing in the early morning. In Spain there is a clear siesta peak in the late afternoon and a much later prime-time peak, and at midnight 30% of the audience still has the television on; in contrast, that share is only 10% in Denmark.

Researchers have noted that use of media during recreational time has reached a saturation level; that is, usage rates have reached a ceiling and cannot increase much more. Thus, use of new media devices such as the Internet leads to a reduction in time spent using other media or to a pattern of parallel use: The radio and television are on while people surf the Internet, read a magazine, or do non-media-related activities.

EFFECTS OF MASS MEDIA AND ICT USE

Researchers have long been interested in the effects of mass media use on individuals, social groups, and societies; that interest has extended to ICT. Contemporary research questions cover issues related to entertainment (e.g., “Does violent and pornographic content in movies affect real-life behavior?”) as well as news (e.g., “Does the press influence political opinions?”) and interpersonal communication devices (e.g., “Are social networks affected by the Internet?”).

The most influential theoretical approaches in this field are agenda setting, framing, and cultivation. The

agenda setting perspective assumes that mass media do not have a strong influence on what people think but are effective in influencing what people think about. Thus, whether an issue is perceived as important by the public is not just a result of its true importance. Instead, people’s perceptions are biased by the mass media, and issues are perceived as more important when they are covered extensively by the media. The framing approach is related to this perspective and can be treated as second-level agenda setting. The media are assumed to influence people by telling them how to think about a certain topic. The same topic can, for example, be framed as an economic, moral/ethical, technical, or conflict issue. Empirical research shows that there are often situations in which these agenda setting and framing effects of mass media can be observed. However the influence of mass media is far away from deterministic and reverse effects in which the public sets the media agenda are observed as well.

Whereas agenda setting and framing refer more to the short-term and medium-term effects of media on users, the cultivation approach studies longer-term effects. In the 1970s George Gerbner and associates coined the term *cultivation approach* to refer to the finding that mass media use evokes a biased perception of the real world by establishing distorted stereotypes (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan, 2002). Research in this area focused initially on violence but later was applied to

Menopause

gender, minority, age roles, family, and other topics. Findings show that heavy users of television have a more biased perception of the real world. For example, those viewers have a disproportionately high estimate of the number of criminals, police officers, medical doctors, and lawyers in the population because of the overrepresentation of those occupations on television (Gerbner et al., 2002).

In addition to these three approaches there is a more sociologically oriented approach that focuses on the effects of mass media and ICT on social relationships. This perspective emerged in the 1980s and 1990s from concern that heavy use of television and computers would lead to social isolation. As a result of the widespread use of the Internet and its possible interactive use (e.g., instant messaging enables communication between people), the question was reformulated as whether ICT use leads to a shift from offline to online relationships or whether increases in the size of a person's social network facilitate the creation of new relationships and the maintenance of distant relationships. Online communities are often related to hobbies or professions but are used only by a minority (15%) of U.S. Internet users (Center for the Digital Future, 2008). However, among U.S. users who are members of an online community, 43% say that "they feel as strongly about their virtual communities as they do about their real world communities" (Center for the Digital Future, 2007, p. 1). A survey in the United Kingdom showed that students are most likely to make online friends (42%) but that the employed and the retired are more likely to meet those new friends offline (Dutton & Helsper, 2007).

FUTURE RESEARCH

Research linking media, ICT, and the life course is relatively limited because the concept of the life course is not widely known in communication science, and life course research incorporating media and technology use is extremely limited. In light of the increasing importance of ICT and the enduring importance of mass media, an integration of these fields seems overdue. The shortcomings of existing research on media and technology use with regard to the life course lie primarily in their regional focus and their segregation in different scientific disciplines. Cross-national comparative research is very limited because of different research traditions, settings, and methods. Furthermore, research on media and ICT use is biased by the interests of applied research and the focus on target groups of economic relevance.

SEE ALSO Volume 2: *Cultural Images, Adulthood; Leisure and Travel, Adulthood; Time Use, Adulthood.*

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MENOPAUSE

Menopause can be defined as an event, a transition, and a set of stages. As an event menopause is marked by the last menstrual period in a woman's lifetime. Unlike other events, such as a birthday, menopause as a definitive event can be defined only retrospectively. Menopause also represents a transition from menstruating episodically (having periods) to the permanent absence of menstrual cycling. As a transition or passage from one stage of life to another, menopause can be quick, straightforward, easy, and uncomplicated or protracted and disruptive. Although physiologically most women enter a postreproductive, postmenstrual phase of life, societies and cultures assign additional and variable meanings to that phase.

Menopause has been scientifically, though equivocally, demarcated as a set of stages through which women progress. Premenopause is the stage in which most adult women experience regular menstrual cycles. Perimenopause, during which a woman experiences significant changes in menstruation, is characterized by changes in cycle length and the intensity of menstrual bleeding. Postmenopause is the postmenstrual and postreproductive stage. The perimenopausal stage also is referred to as the climacteric and is associated most closely with "the menopause" or, more euphemistically, "the change." Along with unpredictable menstrual bleeding, underlying changes in a perimenopausal woman's