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1 COMMUNICATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

After studying this chapter, you will be able to:

1.   Describe the nature and characteristics of the Communication Age.

2.   Define communication.

3.   Identify the various contexts within which communication occurs.

4.   Describe metaphors used to describe communication.

5.   Explain the importance of considering the ethics of communication.

Communication is the key to achieving many of the positive outcomes each of us desires. On the collective level, we may hope to build truly global communities and make lasting social change. On the more personal level, we may hope to fully and freely express ourselves, to stay connected with a network of family and friends, to build and nurture satisfying intimate relationships, to thrive in our careers, and to become our best versions of ourselves.

Communication is also central to overcoming the serious and unprecedented social and personal challenges we face. Some of you may be troubled by uncaring corporations, the economic downturn, cynical news media, or leaders who divide us and prevent us from getting things done. You may be concerned about environmental issues, social inequality, or the threat of a pandemic. You may worry about cultural and religious extremism and fear what may happen if we are unable to work through our differences. You may be anxious about living up to expectations and finding true love. And, in our rapidly changing high-tech social landscape, exasperbated by COVID-19, you may wonder how you will balance the multiple and often competing demands of everyday life: to find work that is both meaningful and profitable, to integrate your social life and your work life, to successfully prioritize how you spend your time and energy, and all the while to live up to your potential and make a difference. Whether you worry about a few of these issues or all of them, an understanding of communication equips you with the power to create the best possible outcomes.

Luckily, we do not face the future alone or unarmed. A rich past accompanies us on our journey. Centuries' worth of wisdom and knowledge are at our fingertips. For over 2,000 years, communication has been the subject of serious study. Philosophers and scientists have grappled with fundamental communication issues that are as relevant today as they were in the past. What is the nature of communication? What can communication accomplish? What characterizes communication as ethical, moral, and good? What makes communication successful for attaining goals? What degrades communication and robs it of its potential? In addition, communication has long played a starring role in understandings of identity, relationships, and community formation.

Many of the communication issues we face today are strikingly similar to those faced by generations long past. For instance, the dramatic increase in the use of digital communication technology—including text messaging, instant messaging, social networking, e-mailing, and blogging—is a cause of concern for many people. They worry that we may be paying a price for all this convenience, speed, and access in terms of losing the intimacy of face-to-face encounters, privacy, and control over our information. It might surprise you to learn that the ancient Greeks had similar concerns about the first communication technology: writing! The point is that the history of communication study is useful precisely because it teaches us about current issues.

Therefore, we approach the history of communication as a living conversation that awaits our perspectives and voices, not as a collection of dead facts and lifeless laws. Our challenge is to align the fundamentals of communication with the present moment and, in the process, to shed some new light on both. The following section paints a fuller picture of our present moment, by describing some seismic shifts in contemporary life.

THE COMMUNICATION AGE

Connection is everything, and the way we connect is changing. The **Communication Age** is an age in which communication, technology, and media converge and deeply permeate daily life. **Convergence** refers to the ways in which the many forms of technologically mediated and face-to-face communication overlap and intersect in our daily lives. For example, you continue a conversation with a friend in person that you began on Twitter about the TV shows *The White Lotus* or *Grey's Anatomy*, which you both streamed online. Your friend refers you to a good blog that poses a theory about the show's next episode, which prompts you to text her with your reaction to the post. Face-to-face communication and mediated communication were once treated as distinct and separate modes of interaction. Today, they are intimately interconnected. Perhaps no activity is considered as traditionally face to face as falling in love. Currently, though, more couples in the United States meet online than they do in person (Rosenfeld et al., 2019). Online activity is beginning to replace some traditional forms of meeting a mate, such as introductions through friends, family, or religious organizations, and this is especially true for same-sex couples (Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2011). For young adults, the rise of online dating is linked to a dramatic increase in the use of mobile dating apps, with 48% of 18- to 29-year-olds using these services, according to the Pew Research Center (Anderson et al., 2020).

This unprecedented level of convergence affects not only what we do but also what we are. For the first time in history, people have a bodily existence as well as a digital existence. We maintain a presence in both physical and virtual space. Think about it. Here you are, in the flesh, holding this book or scrolling its contents on a screen. You are physically present for anyone who happens to be near you. But your boundaries and your effects on the world extend far beyond the physical space you occupy. Digitally, you stretch across the vastness of space and time. The fact that you are reading right now does not stop your friends, family, and acquaintances from sending you an e-mail or posting on your social media pages in virtual space. And, at this very moment, any number of people may be viewing your latest posts, liking your images on Instagram, swiping your profile on Tinder, or viewing your résumé through LinkedIn.

One of the main effects of communication convergence is a massive increase in the number and types of opportunities to connect with others. Obviously, the positive potential of convergence is tremendous. On the other hand, convergence also introduces new challenges. As we multitask to take full advantage of technology, media, and communication, we may feel easily distracted, overcommitted, or spread too thin. Simply put, dividing our attention scatters our focus. As a case in point, reflect on how you felt when reading the previous paragraph. If you are like us, the mere mention of online activities or mobile applications is enough to cause momentary distraction. We are willing to bet that quite a few of you checked social networking sites or glanced at your phones for notifications. Even more of you let your minds temporarily drift to consider what you might be missing while you read this chapter.

The second characteristic of the Communication Age is that communication, technology, and media deeply permeate daily life. To permeate daily life means to saturate or infuse it. Younger generations are **digital natives**, or people for whom digital technologies such as

computers, cell phones, video games, and digital cameras already existed when they were born (Prensky, 2001). If so, you grew up in a permeated world. Those who are a bit older are sometimes called **digital immigrants**, a term used to refer to people who have adopted and learned digital technologies later in life. Digital immigrants have seen firsthand how communication technologies have become more and more prevalent in everyday life. Regardless of who we are, what we do, or where we go, we are never far from the presence of technology, media, and communication (see "Future of Work: Life in the Communication Age").

According to the Pew Research Center, 83% of U.S. teenagers and young adults sleep with their cell phones. Ninety-three percent of teens report going online daily (Rideout & Fox, 2018), and nearly half of them report being on the Internet "almost constantly" (Jiang, 2019). Fifty-face percent of all teens say they exchange text messages every day with people in their lives, which far surpasses the frequency with which they turn to other forms of *daily* communication, including face-to-face socializing outside of school (25%) (Lenhart, 2015).

This trend is only increasing. By 2020, over 90% of the global Internet population used a mobile device as a tool to connect to the Internet (Statista Research Department, 2021). Furthermore, futurists who are field experts at tracking current trends predict that we will quickly see even more radical levels of communication convergence and permeation. We might be the first generation to inhabit both the physical universe and a metaverse (a separate but complementary virtual world intimately interconnected with the real world).

Virtual worlds and augmented realities (a blend of physical and virtual realities) are already popular formats for games and other forms of entertainment. In the near future, our lifestyles may involve a seamless transition from virtual reality, artificial reality, and what we call "real life." As you read each chapter in this book, you will encounter a feature titled "Screen Break," which discusses situations in which the older, more traditional mode of communicating face to face, through the basic media of body and voice, may be preferable to using newer, computer-mediated forms of communication. Face-to-face communication is a powerful but potentially underutilized form of relating with others.

Distracted driving is a problem both caused and solved by communication technology.

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The permeation of communication, technology, and media into everyday life has advantages and disadvantages. Being able to instantly access information and stay in touch with people throughout your daily activities is convenient and often efficient. However, the ability to access information and people on demand has introduced new social problems. Families may worry about how "texting at the table" affects the quality of mealtimes. Lovers may worry about the hurtfulness of getting "dumped by text" or ghosted. Employers may worry that the time employees spend on social networking sites harms productivity. And, in extreme cases, the permeation of communication technologies into everyday life poses a public safety hazard. Cell phone dialing and text messaging while driving are responsible for a number of traffic accidents, injuries, and fatalities (Distraction.gov, 2016). In 2019 alone, some 3,142 people were killed on U.S. roadways by crashes involving driver distraction (U.S. Department of Transportation, 2019). Fortunately, following multimedia awareness campaigns led by the U.S. Department of Transportation and several tough new laws, the number of distraction-related fatalities has decreased significantly since 2009. In this case, communication technologies and new media are being used to address a problem created by those same technologies.

In this textbook, we treat face-to-face communication and computer-mediated communication as integrated counterparts of our daily lives. That is to say, we try not to favor one over the other, and we recognize that they are often used in tandem. Both have their advantages and disadvantages, depending on the situation. What is most important is to think critically about what is gained and what is lost when we choose to engage in face-to-face communication, computer-mediated communication, or some combination of the two. The advantages, disadvantages, and complexities of each form of communication are addressed throughout the textbook. At the conclusion of each subsequent chapter, we address the impact of convergence on the topic at hand. At this point, we hope you have gathered that this is an exciting time to study communication. The following section discusses some of the many benefits an understanding of communication may bring.

SCREEN BREAK
TO REFRESH YOUR MIND, TAKE A MEDIA FAST

How much time do you spend each day interacting with information on a screen? Perhaps you use the alarm clock on your phone, which makes it natural to browse your networks and check for messages when you first wake up. By the time you even get started with your day's activities, you may already have watched videos, sent and received texts, checked your e-mail, liked and commented online, and downloaded documents. At school or work, you likely spend considerable amounts of time behind a computer. Meanwhile, you keep your phone nearby should boredom or an urge to connect strike. Maybe, after getting home or finishing your last virtual class of the day, you watch a movie or your favorite show.

In the same way that it is sometimes advisable to take a momentary break, or "fast," from some of our foods, beverages, and habits, a media fast may be good for your system. Spending a set period of time unplugged can clarify for you the advantages and disadvantages of your media practices. Life without electronic devices momentarily separates you from constant distraction, online advertisements, and artificial blue light. You'll have more time for other things, like physical activity, face-to-face interaction, and even solitude. You'll also have the opportunity to reflect critically on how life in the Communication Age differs from older modes of living and connecting and engaging with the world.

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What to Do Next

To make the most of your time unplugged, try to:

- Decide how long your fast will last (a week, a few days, a single day, a few hours?) and what electronic devices or applications you will avoid (social media, entertainment media, Internet, all communication technology?). It may be wise to make voice calls an exception in case of true emergencies or the coordination of essential daily tasks.

- Let important members of your networks know you are taking a break from media and for how long. The announcement will prevent worry or adjust their expectations for your availability.

- Keep a record of your experience. When was being unplugged the hardest for you? What did you miss most, and why? What did you gain? What surprised you? How has your thinking about media and technology use changed? Will you make any adjustments to your normal living routine as a result of the media fast?

Communication increasingly involves technologically augmented realities.

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Benefits of Studying Communication

There are many benefits to studying communication. An understanding of communication helps you reach your personal potential and make a positive impact on your relationships, organizations, communities, and governments.

- Good communication abilities are associated with physical, emotional, and psychological health and well-being.

- Strong speaking and listening skills are associated with greater health literacy (Martin et al., 2011).

- The ability to communicate well is the key to fulfilling your need for a satisfying identity (Duran & Kelly, 1988; Duran & Wheeless, 1982; Hecht, 1993).

- According to employers, communication skills are among the most valuable abilities employees can possess (Indeed.com, 2021).

- Communication is a primary influence on social and personal relationships. Communication is what creates, maintains, transforms, and ends friendships, romances, and family relationships (Baxter, 2004).

- An understanding of communication promotes media literacy, or the ability to access, evaluate critically, and produce communication and information in a variety of forms and means (Potter & Byrne, 2007).

- Communication skills are critical to building healthy and vibrant communities (Edwards & Shepherd, 2007).

- Communication is the foundation of democratic citizenship (Dewey, 1916/1944).

- Communication drives social change and reform.

Because communication is a valuable professional skill, there are promising career paths for those who are trained in the discipline of communication. But even if you don't have a career in the communication field, your own professional development will be strengthened with an understanding of the fundamentals of communication theory and practice. In each chapter, the feature "Future of Work" includes skills-oriented, forward-looking, practical advice on using communication skills in the workplaces of today and tomorrow.

FUTURE OF WORK
THE COMMUNICATION AGE POST COVID-19

Think about the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the workforce. Many jobs now allow for hybrid arrangements, creating a mix of remote and face-to-face obligations. On a given day, you might have a meeting over lunch with someone in the office and a Zoom meeting as the next. The global crisis is dramatically reshaping global economies and individual prospects. Many of the jobs growing in demand involve communication skills, both online and offline, especially considering the pandemic. In fact, the Pew Research Center found that 62% of U.S. adults with a bachelor's degree or more reported that their work could be done entirely from home (Parker et al., 2020). Furthermore, over half of employed U.S. adults reported that they would prefer to continue working from home even after the pandemic.

While remote opportunities serve to protect public health, they also blur the boundaries between work and home (Maslach & Leiter, 2022). During times of lockdown or quarantines, parents and caretakers of school-aged children have spent their weeks navigating both their careers and their caretaking responsibilities, which can lead to burnout. Imagine needing to feed a 5-year-old lunch while attending an important business meeting via Zoom. As the workforce continues to change due to COVID-19 as well as advancements to communication technologies, observe what you do and do not value in how a company treats hybrid or remote opportunities.

Questions

1. After considering how the COVID-19 pandemic has shaped the way in which we work, what does your picture of the future look like?

2. How can you manage work and home responsibilities effectively?

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WHAT IS COMMUNICATION?

Communication Defined

Communication is the collaborative process of using messages to create and participate in social reality. The most important aspects of our lives—our individual identities, relationships, organizations, communities, cultures, and ideas—are accomplished through communication. Each of these aspects is a part of **social reality**, or the set of social judgments members of a group agree upon. Social realities emerge through social interaction. Therefore, communication enables us to actualize possibility and achieve change and growth, both for ourselves and for our communities.

Communication Is a Process

Communication is a dynamic, ongoing process. Unlike a thing, which is static, a process unfolds over time. As individuals exchange and interpret messages, their communication develops a particular history. The messages used in the past influence the nature and the interpretation of the messages used in the present and the future.

Communication affects self-concept and the way others see you.

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Communication Is Collaborative

The word *communication* comes from the Latin prefix *co-* (with, or together) and root word *munia* (sharing, giving, servicing). Therefore, communication requires the involvement of others. Just like many other things that you cannot do without the cooperation of others, such as sing a duet, be in a marriage, or count as a basketball team, you cannot communicate by yourself. Communication is a collective activity in which people work jointly to create and share meaning. Although we sometimes say "I communicated" or "You communicated," in reality, communication is not something that an I or a You can do alone. Communication must be accomplished by a We.

Communication Involves Messages

Messages rely on a common system of symbols, signs, and gestures to carry information and to generate shared meanings between participants. Individuals give unique contributions to communication interactions in the form of the verbal and/or nonverbal messages they use.

Communication Is Creative

It sometimes appears that the process of communication merely conveys information about the world "as it is," or that the messages we use simply describe a reality that already exists. In actuality, communication shapes and creates new social realities for ourselves and for others. Anyone who has witnessed the power of a label such as *bully, loser,* or *genius* to alter perceptions and reinforce behaviors has seen firsthand the ways in which communication creates reality.

Communication Is Participatory

In addition to playing a role in the creation of social reality, communication allows us to participate, or take part, in social reality. When people communicate, they rely on shared understandings to accomplish objectives. Communication allows us to entertain, persuade, inform, comfort, influence, and support one another.

The fact that communication involves both creation and participation demonstrates communication is fundamentally dual-natured. Communication makes and does. The ancient Greeks referred to the making and doing functions of communication as *poiesis* and *praxis*. Historically, most scholars and everyday people have paid more attention to communication praxis, or how communication can be used as an instrument to accomplish things. Recently, however, the creative (poiesis) aspect of communication has received greater appreciation. As we discuss in the communication metaphors section later in this chapter, understanding how communication brings new realities into existence has major implications for how to communicate and how to judge the goodness of communication. But, before we get to that, let's discuss the various contexts in which communication may occur.

CONTEXTS OF COMMUNICATION

Over the years, communication has been studied in many contexts, or circumstances forming different interaction settings. Each context or situation has unique characteristics or features that influence how messages are used and how meanings are constructed. Traditionally, the distinctions among communication contexts were based on the number of people involved and whether the interaction was face to face or mediated through a technology such as print, electronic broadcasting, or computers. **Face-to-face communication** refers to situations in which physically or bodily copresent participants speak directly to one another during the interaction. **Mediated communication**, on the other hand, refers to communication or messages that are transmitted through some type of medium. Communication media include writing, the telephone, e-mail, text messaging, and many other forms of technological and computer-mediated interaction, which also may encompass interactions with and through social robots and artificial intelligence. In the Communication Age, the boundaries between contexts are increasingly blurry and overlapping. Communication may, and often does, involve an intersection or a blend of more than one context. Each context includes the possibility for face-to-face communication, mediated communication, or some combination of the two. Some maintain, in fact, that all communication is mediated (Peters, 1999). Even face-to-face communication is mediated through the human body, with its intricate organic technologies of voice, hearing, gesture, and sight. The words whispered between friends must still travel gaps in time and space, as well as interpretation. We further rely on the body to mediate our experiences with other communication technologies. In this way, the body is "the medium through and with which all other media intersect and interact" (Killmeier, 2009, p. 33). The following paragraphs discuss the interpersonal, small group, public, mass communication, and masspersonal contexts.

Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication refers to communication with or between persons. The key feature of interpersonal communication is that it occurs between people who approach one another as individuals in a relationship, whether it is a personal/intimate relationship or an impersonal/public relationship. When we express our love for a romantic partner, resolve a conflict with a family member, post a comment on a friend's Instagram post, negotiate the price of a car with a salesperson, chat about the weather with a neighbor, or discuss an upcoming test with classmates, we are engaging in interpersonal communication. In all of these examples, the communication is between individuals who share a relationship of some sort. The communication that occurs will further influence and shape those relationships. Although interpersonal communication occurs

between any two people who share a relationship, most interpersonal communication scholars focus on our closest relationships, such as those between friends, family, and romantic partners. Despite the fact that interpersonal communication is often described as a distinct context, it is useful to understand that there is an interpersonal dimension to all communication (Miller, 1978; Shepherd, 2001). At its heart, communication always occurs between persons, whether they are part of a group, a public, or a mass media event. Chapter 7, "Interpersonal Communication," is devoted to a deeper look at the communication between people in personal relationships.

Communication allows us to participate in social reality.

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Small Group Communication

Small group communication refers to the communication among the members of a small group of people working together to achieve a common goal or purpose. Families, organizations, class-rooms, and athletic teams are common settings for small group communication. A pair or dyad has only two members, whereas a group must have at least three. Yet the group must be small enough that each person present makes an impression on the others who are present (Bales, 1950, p. 33). Currently, the nature of small group communication is changing due to new tech-nologies like Internet videoconferencing and virtual spaces. Small groups no longer have to meet in a face-to-face setting or be made up of members who are geographically close to one another. These changes in the characteristics of a small group are discussed in greater depth in Chapter 8, "Small Group and Team Communication."

Public Communication

Public communication refers to situations in which a person delivers a message to an audience. Rather than treating the audience as a collection of separate people, the speaker addresses the audience as a public, or a body unified by some common interest. One of the major jobs of a public speaker is to create a sense of unity and solidarity in a large and diverse group of people. The U.S. president's State of the Union address to Congress, a CEO's speech to stockholders, a student's oral presentation to classmates, a professor's lecture to a crowded hall, and a com-munity activist's speech about a local issue are all forms of public communication, or public speaking. Public communication is characteristically formal, structured, and purpose driven. It

is less reciprocal than many other contexts of communication because the audience has limited opportunities for providing feedback.

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However, advances in communication technology are expanding the opportunities for audience participation through online comments, listener rating systems, audience response systems (like classroom "clickers"), and personal blogs. Today's speakers can utilize the powers of communication technologies to share their messages with wider audiences through video sharing in sites like YouTube or TikTok. Chapters 11 through 15 focus on how to effectively prepare and deliver public presentations in the Communication Age. In those chapters, we discuss ways in which you can use technology to reach a wider audience and how to adapt your message to these forms of technology.

Mass Communication

Mass communication refers to messages transmitted by electronic and print media to large audiences that are distant and undifferentiated. In other words, these audiences are treated as a mass. TV shows, newspapers, books, webpages, magazines, recorded music, and web videos are all forms of mass communication. Most mass communication involves little interaction between the producer of the message and the audience. For this reason, mass communication has historically been described as one-way in orientation. However, the Internet has allowed mass communication to become far more interactive. Audiences now have the opportunity to provide near-instantaneous feedback through user comments, ratings, and popularity indexes, as well as through open-source programming that allows users to alter or expand existing mass communication messages. For example, Wikipedia.org is an online reference source maintained by millions of largely anonymous writers.

Furthermore, because mass communication is directed to large and diverse audiences, it tends to be less personal than other contexts of communication. To help overcome this limitation, producers of mass communication often focus on the demographics of the audience, or do niche marketing, to help personalize the message. For example, the USA Network's *WWE Raw* is aimed at the demographic group of males aged 18 years and older. *Cosmopolitan* magazine, on the other hand, focuses on appealing to females over age 18 but younger than 30. Advertisers then gain access to their target demographics by purchasing space on programs or pages geared toward their desired consumers.

How are the mass media you encounter targeted to your demographic?

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The Internet has opened opportunities for greater message personalization in mass communication. One of the main ways websites try to attract and keep an audience is through offering content customization. For instance, Zite is a popular application of the Daily Me concept, which is when users personalize their news feeds based on their interests. Likewise, Apple Music and Spotify allow you to create a personalized radio station that plays only the music and artists you like. Another way websites seek to gain an audience through personalization is by offering preference information and recommendations. Whether you are informed of the "most e-mailed" news article, the "most viewed" YouTube video, the "most downloaded" Spotify single, or simply that people who bought Egyptian cotton sheets also bought hypoallergenic pillow cases, you are witnessing the producers of mass communication attempting to personalize their messages to you. Meanwhile, complex computer data-mining operations are using all your online activities—from site visits, to search terminology, to purchase histories, to group memberships—to compile highly specific profiles of you that advertisers can use to customize, or narrowcast, their advertisements to you. In fact, digital media are blurring many of the old lines between mass communication and interpersonal communication.

Masspersonal Communication

Masspersonal communication occurs at the crossroads of interpersonal communication and mass communication. In other words, **masspersonal communication** happens when a person uses a mass communication context for interpersonal communication or when a person uses an interpersonal communication context for mass communication (O'Sullivan & Carr, 2018). Social networking posts are a perfect example of using a mass communication context for interpersonal communication. Primarily, we use posts for building and maintaining relationships. Our messages may convey affection, refer to a shared experience, or comment on the status of the relationship itself. Such messages are personal, but they are also public, being broadcast to all our friends and networks.

Likewise, traditionally interpersonal communication channels are sometimes used for mass communication. Prime examples include computer-generated telephone calls, mass text messages, and e-mail spam. In each of these cases, a medium that was once used primarily for

interpersonal communication (phone, messaging service, e-mail account) carries mass messages that are characteristically one-way and impersonal. Such messages can be experienced as irritating (answering the phone only to discover a robotic voice trying to sell you insurance) or even offensive (receiving another e-mail about "male enhancement"). Yet not every use of interpersonal communication contexts for mass communication is unwelcome. Many political supporters of then-candidate Barack Obama, for instance, welcomed his campaign's groundbreaking use of text messaging to announce rally locations and campaign decisions. Obama was the first presidential nominee to unveil his vice presidential choice by text message and e-mail.

Masspersonal communication seems to increase every year. As more people rely on mobile communication devices for connecting and engaging with others, we are likely to see even more blurring of the traditional contexts of communication.

In Chapter 10, "Communication and New Media," we will further explore mass media messages. But, at this point, let's turn our attention to gaining a deeper understanding of the process of communication by exploring the metaphors through which communication has been explained over the years.

COMMUNICATION METAPHORS

One of the best ways to understand any process is to use a metaphor. This is especially true when you explore a process as complex and important as communication. Metaphors work by comparing one thing to a different, usually more familiar, thing. The power of a metaphor lies in its potential to stimulate new ways of perceiving and talking about things.

Because communication metaphors tend to reflect the assumptions and perspectives of the points in history when they were created, they have evolved through time. Generally, metaphors of communication have become more complex, with greater attention to the many potentials of how communication works and what it can be used to do.

In this section, four metaphors of communication are presented in the order in which they were developed.

How does this interaction blend communication contexts?

AP Photo/Tom Williams

Communication as Transmission

One of the earliest models of communication was based on the workings of the telephone and radio (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). In this model, communication involves a linear, one-way transfer of information (see Figure 1.1). A source sends a message through a channel or a medium to a receiver in an environment of noise that serves as interference with effective transmission of a message.

Viewing communication as transmission allows us to see how communication can relay information from one person to another through a channel. In addition, by including noise as a factor, this metaphor draws our attention to the things that may get in the way of our attempts to communicate. However, the **transmission metaphor** portrays the receiver of a message as passive, even though communication is a two-way street. The interaction metaphor was created to address this flaw.

Communication as Interaction

The **interaction metaphor** of communication (Schramm, 1954) describes communication as a two-way process of reciprocal action. It takes the basic elements of the transmission metaphor and adds two important components: feedback and fields of experience (see Animation 1.1). **Feedback** refers to a receiver's response to a sender's message. Because of feedback, senders may adapt their messages in real time to increase the chances of communication success. In addition, because each sender and receiver is a unique person, this model includes **fields of experience**,

FIGURE 1.1 ■ Transmission Model of Communication
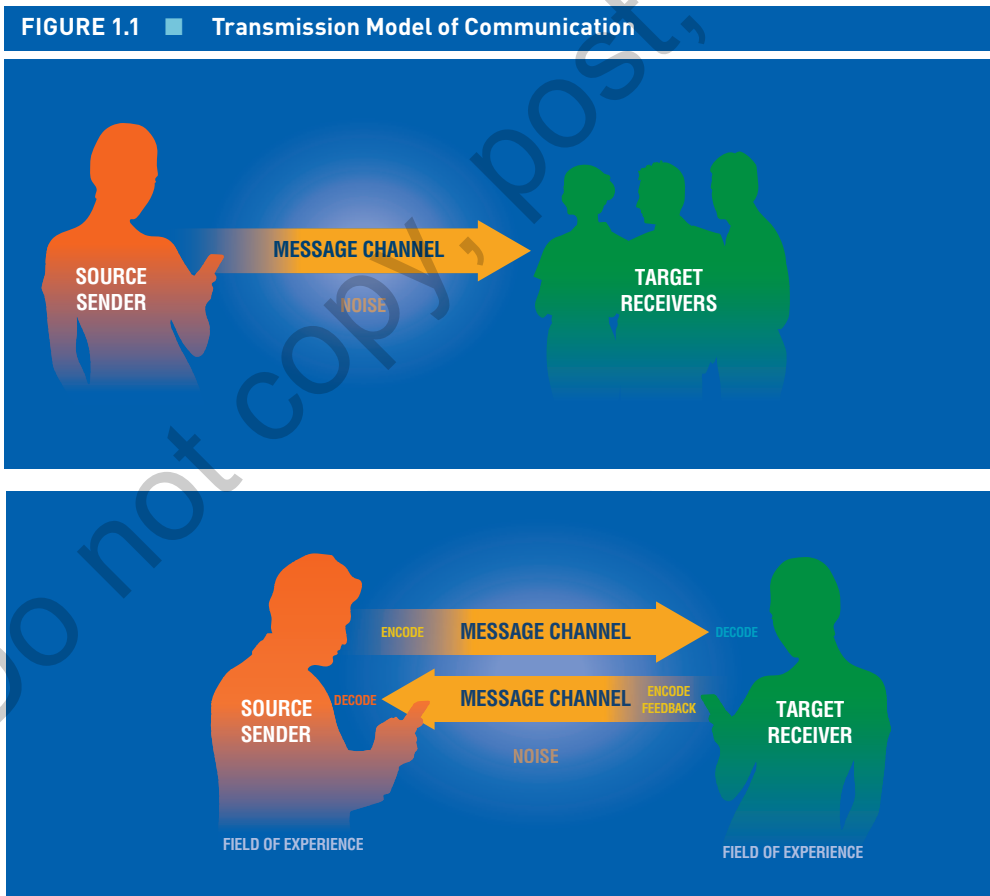
which refer to the attitudes, perceptions, and backgrounds each of us brings to communication. However, like the transmission model before it, the interaction model still treats senders and receivers as fundamentally separate and disconnected.

Communication as Transaction

The **transaction metaphor** of communication was introduced to acknowledge that people are connected through communication and that they accomplish something in communication beyond (*trans-*) merely relaying messages back and forth (see Animation 1.2). The transaction metaphor invites us to do away with the notion of a separate sender and a separate receiver. Instead, participants are simultaneous sender–receivers linked in relationship to one another. In communication, we not only exchange messages but also impact the people involved. Participants and their relationships emerge changed from communication, in ways large and small.

One of the reasons why communication impacts its participants is that every message has two dimensions: content and relationship (Watzlavick et al., 1967). The content of a message refers to its surface-level meaning, or what is said. The relationship dimension of a message refers to how a message is said, which always conveys something about the current relationship between participants and shapes their future relationship.

Communication as Social Construction

The **social construction metaphor** of communication further expands upon the idea that communication influences communicators. Specifically, the social construction model stresses the ways communication shapes and creates the larger social realities in which we operate (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Craig, 1999). Participants work together, knowingly or unknowingly, to shape what counts as factual, acceptable, good, ruthful, real, and possible. The social construction model assumes that we become who we are in relation to others through communication and that the social world becomes what it is chiefly through the process of communication.

How did Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. change social reality with his "I Have a Dream" speech?

Bettmann/Getty Images

Metaphors Matter

Each metaphor above builds upon the strengths of the previous metaphor to go one step further toward explaining the power of communication. First, communication was described as the mere transfer of information. Then, understandings of communication were expanded to appreciate the receiver's role in the process. Next, ideas about communication were broadened to understand its impact on participants in a communication transaction. Finally, descriptions of communication were enlarged to acknowledge its role in the creation of social reality. Thus, the evolution of the metaphors represents an unfolding of communication potential.

It is important to note that no one metaphor is the final word on the communication process, but each may be more or less useful for describing certain communication episodes or contexts. For instance, the transmission metaphor may be a useful guide for drafting an informational corporate e-mail but not for engaging in family conflict, which could require greater attention to the linkages between communicators and the social realities surrounding their situation. Research demonstrates that people who understand that communication may be used in all three of these ways, and who develop the ability to do so, have an advantage in communication competence (O'Keefe, 1988).

Communication Competence

Communication competence refers to the ability to communicate in a personally effective yet socially appropriate manner. In other words, being a competent communicator requires using messages that strike a delicate balance between pursuing one's own goals and meeting the needs and expectations of others, given the social circumstances. A major objective of this textbook is to provide you with the information and tools you need to strengthen your communication competence in a host of everyday situations. In addition to chapter content that focuses on how to be a competent communicator in a variety of circumstances, each chapter includes features labeled "Communication How-To." These boxes contain practical guidance for achieving communication goals in contexts ranging from interpersonal relationships, to small group encounters, to workplace interactions, to public presentations. You can also use the "Assess Your Communication" features in each chapter to size up your communication strengths and identify areas for personal growth and improvement. To begin, let's take an inventory of how competent you feel communicating in a variety of common settings.

In addition to striving for competence in our communication, it is important to consider whether our communication is ethical. The next section defines and discusses the topic of communication ethics.

ASSESS YOUR COMMUNICATION
SELF-PERCEIVED COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE SCALE (SPCC)

INSTRUCTIONS: Below are 12 situations in which you might need to communicate. People's abilities to communicate effectively vary a lot, and sometimes the same person is more competent to communicate in one situation than in another. Please indicate how competent you believe you are to communicate in each of the situations described below. Indicate in the space provided at the left of each item your estimate of your competence.

0 = Completely Incompetent and 100 = Completely Competent

_____ **1.** Present a talk to a group of strangers.
_____ **2.** Talk with an acquaintance.

_____ **3.** Talk in a large meeting of friends.
_____ **4.** Talk in a small group of strangers.
_____ **5.** Talk with a friend.
_____ **6.** Talk in a large meeting of acquaintances.
_____ **7.** Talk with a stranger.
_____ **8.** Present a talk to a group of friends.
_____ **9.** Talk in a small group of acquaintances.
_____ **10.** Talk in a large meeting of strangers.
_____ **11.** Talk in a small group of friends.
_____ **12.** Present a talk to a group of acquaintances.

Scoring: To compute the subscores, add the percentages for the items indicated and divide the total by the number indicated below.

Public   1 + 8 + 12; divide by 3.
Meeting   3 + 6 + 10; divide by 3.
Group   4 + 9 + 11; divide by 3.
Dyad   2 + 5 + 7; divide by 3.
Stranger   1 + 4 + 7 + 10; divide by 4.
Acquaintance   2 + 6 + 9 + 12; divide by 4.
Friend   3 + 5 + 8 + 11; divide by 4.

To compute the total SPCC score, add the subscores for Stranger, Acquaintance, and Friend. Then, divide that total by 3.

Source: McCroskey, J. C., & McCroskey, L. L. (2013). *Self-Perceived Communication Competence Scale (SPCC)*. Measurement Instrument Database for the Social Sciences. Retrieved from http://www.midss.org

COMMUNICATION ETHICS

Ethics is a code of conduct based on respect for yourself, others, and your surroundings. Simply, ethics relates to right and wrong conduct. The topic of being an ethical communicator has received a good deal of attention because ethical communication enhances the well-being of individuals and society. As communicators, we must concern ourselves with the ethical responsibilities of living in a democratic society. We must also consider communication ethics in the workplace, the family, the classroom, and the professions, including the legal, medical, and public relations fields. Our increasingly technological, global, and multicultural society requires us to be ever more sensitive to the impact of the words we choose, the images we portray, and the stereotypes we hold.

So, what counts as ethical communication? How do we determine whether or not our communication conduct respects self, others, and surroundings? Communication philosopher and ethicist Jürgen Habermas (1979) maintained that ethical communication is that which promotes autonomy and responsibility. Autonomy refers to individuals' rights to make choices and self-determine, whereas responsibility refers to being accountable for the welfare of others and the consequences of one's actions. Habermas warned of the potential dangers of communication that strips people of free will. Practices like manipulation, propaganda, or extreme censorship raise ethical questions because of their tendency to rob people of the chance to make informed decisions and control their own destinies. Yet Habermas insisted that in the process of exercising our freedoms, we take responsibility for ourselves, as well as fulfill our shared responsibilities to one another and our communities. As Voltaire said, and Ben Parker conveyed to Spider-Man, "With great power comes great responsibility."

A competent communicator uses messages effectively and appropriately.

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There is wisdom in applying this sentiment to the process of communication because our messages and interactions are powerful elements in the construction of social reality. In each chapter, we include an "Ethical Connection." These brief case studies highlight real-life communication dilemmas and invite ethical analysis.

Evaluating Ethical Communication

As metaphors of communication have evolved, so have standards for ethical communication. In other words, evaluating the ethics of an interaction often depends on an understanding of how communication is viewed and what it is being used to accomplish. In the transmission metaphor of communication, where a sender conveys a message to a receiver, being ethical is about the personal character of the sender and the factual integrity of the message. To be ethical when judged according to this model, a message must be honest. It must truthfully represent the real state of affairs.

In the interaction metaphor, which acknowledges the process of feedback and the fact that each person has a unique field of experience, ethical communication requires extending the opportunity for feedback and being responsive to it. The transaction metaphor proposes that we are connected to one another through communication and that our communication influences each of us. Therefore, ethical communication in this model requires that we are careful of the impacts our messages may have on the people involved and the relationship between them.

Finally, the social construction metaphor maintains that communication creates our social realities. Viewing communication as a process of social construction requires an appreciation of both agency and constraint. Agency refers to the power and freedom to use communication to create the social realities we desire. But we must also recognize that the social realities we create can be cages. Our social realities constrain, or limit, how we perceive others, frame events, and determine what is possible or not. Imagine you are registering for college courses. This activity involves a good deal of agency. You have a lot of freedom to pick the classes that are interesting to you, count toward your degree program, or allow you to sleep in a few days of the week. On the other hand, the schedule you create involves constraint. The classes you choose are limited by what's offered at the time, which sections still have seats available, and whether you meet the

prerequisites. You'll face later constraints when the schedule you built limits your social reality. You may have to turn down a vacation, a social invitation, or a job because you have to go to class. The same is true of social construction through communication. The social realities you build through communication always involve both agency and constraint.

Because we live in realities created by our communication, ethical communication requires careful consideration of the consequences of our words. Our tools for communicating are very useful but also very sharp. Communication theorist Eric Rothenbuhler (2006) puts it best: "What a nicer world it would be if we always stopped and thought before we spoke 'I will create a new reality, do I want to live in it?'" (p. 19). This chapter's "Ethical Connection" presents the National Communication Association's Credo for Ethical Communication.

CONNECTING AND ENGAGING IN COMMUNICATION

The process of communication is all about connecting and engaging. **Connecting** refers to the power of communication to link and relate us to people, groups, communities, social institutions, and cultures. Modern technology and mobility seem to make connecting with others easier than ever. Social networking sites link us effortlessly with an extended network of family, friends, and acquaintances. Furthermore, they suggest new contacts to us daily. Mobile phones keep our contacts available at the touch of a screen. Day or night, we can reach and be reached by virtually anyone we desire. News and information from around the world arrive with a few keystrokes or touches on a pad. Such connections are at the heart of communication as a process of creating and participating in social reality. We communicate in a dynamic and intricate system of personal and social relationships, and each of us is linked to all others by fewer degrees of separation than ever before. Yet connecting alone is not enough to fully realize the potential of communication in transforming our identities, relationships, communities, and social realities.

Communication also requires engagement. Simply "connecting" to the Internet or a social networking site fails to fully realize the possibilities of what we can achieve. Likewise, simply connecting up with the members of a group to which we have been assigned is not enough to fully accomplish the task at hand. We must also engage those with whom we connect. **Engaging** refers to the act of sharing in the activities of the group. In other words, engaging is participating. It requires an orientation toward others that views them always as potential partners in the creation and negotiation of social reality. In this way, being engaged in communication is like being committed in a close relationship. The engagement of two people in love refers to the promise to become one. Certainly, we cannot and should not promise to marry everyone with whom we communicate. But the idea of a promise to join and act together serves as an appropriate and uplifting metaphor of the attitude we can take when communicating with others. Because we jointly create the realities in which we live, we are, quite literally, in it with others, for better or worse, 'till death do us part!

Communication theorist Gregory Shepherd writes that "of all human desires, two are especially heartfelt: (a) that we have some say in the future, some measure of influence on our destiny— that we are not mere puppets of fate, cogs in wheels, or unanchored buoys at sea; and (b) that we are not alone" (Shepherd et al., 2006, p. 29). Communication has the capacity to help fulfill these deeply held desires. In its capacity to connect us, communication ensures that we are not alone. Through communication, we build common ground, relationships, and a shared vision of reality. In its capacity to engage us, communication ensures that we have a hand in shaping

our own destinies. Through communication, we participate and offer our own contribution in determining the realities and futures we seek. In a field of limitless possibilities, communication enables us to bring an element from the realm of the potential to the realm of the actual as we speak realities into being.

ETHICAL CONNECTION
NATIONAL COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION'S CREDO FOR ETHICAL COMMUNICATION

With great power comes great responsibility. Ethical communication involves promoting freedom and care for others.

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Questions of right and wrong arise whenever people communicate. Ethical communication is fundamental to responsible thinking, decision making, and the development of relationships and communities within and across contexts, cultures, channels, and media. Moreover, ethical communication enhances human worth and dignity by fostering truthfulness, fairness, responsibility, personal integrity, and respect for self and others. We believe that unethical communication threatens the quality of all communication and consequently the well-being of individuals and the society in which we live. Therefore we, the members of the National Communication Association, endorse and are committed to practicing the following principles of ethical communication:

- We advocate truthfulness, accuracy, honesty, and reason as essential to the integrity of communication.

- We endorse freedom of expression, diversity of perspective, and tolerance of dissent to achieve the informed and responsible decision making fundamental to a civil society.

- We strive to understand and respect other communicators before evaluating and responding to their messages.

- We promote access to communication resources and opportunities as necessary to fulfil human potential and contribute to the well-being of families, communities, and society.

- We promote communication climates of caring and mutual understanding that respect the unique needs and characteristics of individual communicators.

- We condemn communication that degrades individuals and humanity through distortion, intimidation, coercion, and violence, and through the expression of intolerance and hatred.

- We are committed to the courageous expression of personal convictions in pursuit of fairness and justice.

- We advocate sharing information, opinions, and feelings when facing significant choices while also respecting privacy and confidentiality.

- We accept responsibility for the short- and long-term consequences for our own communication and expect the same of others.

(Approved by the NCA Legislative Council in 1999)

Source: National Communication Association. (2017). *Credo for ethical communication.* Retrieved from https://www.natcom.org/sites/default/files/Public_Statement_Credo_for_Ethical_Communication_2017.pdf

Communication is all about connecting and engaging.

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In almost every aspect of our lives, we are presented with both opportunities for and challenges to connection and engagement. We are encouraged to be engaged citizens, engaged community and group members, engaged members of a workforce, and engaged relationship partners. A major goal of this textbook is to equip you with the knowledge and skills to effectively connect and engage through communication.

One of the ways we can do so is by engaging in **communication activism**, or direct energetic action in support of needed social change for individuals, groups, organizations, and communities (Frey & Carragee, 2007). In each subsequent chapter, we present a feature called "Make a Difference," which showcases how students, organizations, scholars, and everyday citizens have used communication to address important social issues.

WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED

Now that you have studied this chapter, you should be able to:

1. **Describe the nature and characteristics of the Communication Age.**

    In the Communication Age, communication technology and media converge and permeate day-to-day life. Convergence involves the overlapping and intersecting of technologically mediated and face-to-face interaction. Studying communication is useful to surviving and thriving in an increasingly digital landscape.

Know ...

- Communication Age
- Convergence
- Digital immigrants
- Digital natives

Review ...

1. What is the term used to describe the many ways in which face-to-face and mediated forms of communication technology overlap and intersect in daily life?

Reflect ...

1. In the Communication Age, communication, technology, and media converge and deeply permeate daily life. What do you see as the major advantages and disadvantages of convergence and permeation?

2. **Define communication.**

Communication is the collaborative process of using messages to create and participate in social reality. Communication makes (identities, relationships, organizations, communities, possibilities, social realities) and does (entertains, persuades, informs, regulates, educates, comforts).

Know ...

- Communication
- Social reality

Review ...

1. Define communication.

Reflect ...

1. Which aspect of the definition of communication do you think is most often overlooked in everyday life? Are people typically aware that their messages both get things done and create social reality?

3. **Identify the various contexts within which communication occurs.**

Communication occurs in contexts, which often overlap one another and may include face-to-face communication, mediated communication, or a combination of the two. Communication contexts include the interpersonal context (communication with another), the small group context (communication among three or more members working toward a common goal), the public context (communication between a public speaker and an audience), the mass context (communication transmitted by media to a large, undifferentiated audience), and the masspersonal context (using traditionally interpersonal channels to relay a mass message or traditionally mass channels to relay an interpersonal message).

Know ...

- Face-to-face communication
- Interpersonal communication
- Mass communication
- Masspersonal communication
- Mediated communication
- Public communication
- Small group communication

Review ...

1. Communication is between participants who are physically present to speak directly with one another; _____ is communication transmitted through some type of medium, often being technology or computer.

2. Briefly explain the five contexts of communication: interpersonal, small group, public, mass, and masspersonal.

Reflect ...

1. Think about how the different contexts of communication influence expectations of a communicator. How might you convey information differently if you were in the small group versus public communication context?

4. **Describe metaphors used to describe communication.**

A number of metaphors have been used to describe communication. Communication has been portrayed as transmission, interaction, transaction, and social construction. Each metaphor increases in terms of complexity and in terms of the power given to communication.

Know ...

- Feedback
- Fields of experience
- Interaction metaphor
- Social construction metaphor
- Transaction metaphor
- Transmission metaphor

Review ...

1. What is the transmission metaphor of communication? What are its major strengths and weaknesses in terms of its ability to describe human communication?
2. Explain the interaction and transaction metaphors of communication. What features make them unique from one another?
3. The _____ metaphor of communication stresses the ways in which people work together to create the social realities in which we live.

Reflect ...

1. Recall a recent conversation you had with a friend or family member. In what ways did your communication convey information? In what ways did your communication impact the relationship? How did your communication shape social reality?

5. **Explain the importance of considering the ethics of communication.**

Communication ethics refers to a code of conduct based on respect for yourself, others, and your surroundings that determines right and wrong communication behavior. Communicating ethically may involve honesty, listening to the other, considering relational consequences, perspective taking, and constructing only those social realities that are beneficial. Communication competence involves the ability to use messages that are both personally effective and socially appropriate to the context.

Know ...

- Communication competence
- Ethics

Review ...

1. What two abilities are required for communication competence?
2. Define communication ethics.
3. Recall a recent conversation you had with a friend or family member. In what ways did your communication convey information? In what ways did your communication impact the relationship? How did your communication shape social reality?

Reflect ...

1. Imagine that your friend approaches you wearing an unflattering outfit and asks, "How do I look in this?" To be both ethical and competent, how should you respond to this question? What factors would you take into account to produce an ethical and competent message? Would applying different communication metaphors (for example, transmission versus social construction) change the nature of an appropriate response?

KEY TERMS

Communication activism (p. 22)

Communication Age (p. 3)

Communication competence (p. 17)

Communication (p. 8)

Connecting (p. 20)

Convergence (p. 3)

Digital immigrants (p. 4)

Digital natives (p. 3)

Engaging (p. 20)

Ethics (p. 18)

Face-to-face communication (p. 10)

Feedback (p. 15)

Fields of experience (p. 15)

Interaction metaphor (p. 15)

Interpersonal communication (p. 10)

Mass communication (p. 12)

Masspersonal communication (p. 13)

Mediated communication (p. 10)

Public communication (p. 11)

Small group communication (p. 11)

Social construction metaphor (p. 16)

Social reality (p. 8)

Transaction metaphor (p. 16)

Transmission metaphor (p. 15)