

Leo Bogart, Commercial Culture,
New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995.

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What are “The Media?”

“Media.” The very notion is of recent origin. The word now accurately describes a phenomenon rather than an abstract category covering a number of unrelated institutions. It combines dissimilar forms of communication under a common heading. How did the term creep into everyday language? What do media encompass, what do they do, what accounts for their hold over us? This chapter begins by considering the idea of the media and their roots in advertising and journalism. These are the principal points I shall make:

- Media are a reality, not just an abstraction.
- They deal both in information and entertainment, but often disguise information as entertainment.
- Media attract audiences because they fill time predictably; the character of those audiences is shaped by differences in the way people use time.
- As free time expands, so do audiences, changing the relationship between them and those who address them.
- Media facilitate the passage of time by organizing their output into standardized formats.

The Notion of “Media”

The term, “the media” is now applied collectively to the newsgathering organizations, but the media encompass all the other forms of mass communications apart from those that package the news—including entertainment television and magazines.

Books and periodicals, television, radio, film and recordings—lumping together all these diverse forms of communication as “the media” is a relatively recent practice. It appears, appropriately, to have originated with advertising. “It is hardly