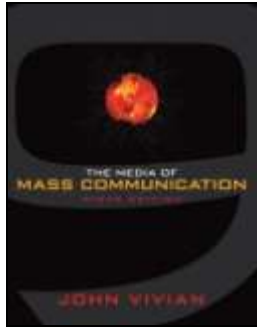


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## The Media of Mass Communication (9<sup>th</sup> ed.)

Vivian, John

Allyn & Bacon, 2009

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Since 1991, John Vivian's line of basic mass communication textbooks has spawned special updates, interactive and Web editions, and even Canadian editions. This year, the latest installment of Vivian's series, the ninth edition of *The Media of Mass Communication*, arrives. This textbook features an attractive, magazine-like layout, with plenty of color photographs, sidebars, case studies, and marginalia scattered through the main content of the book. The general organization of the book is to take a media industry approach in the beginning, then to flush out media messages and media issues in later chapters.

Overall, the book is a fairly effective summation of mass communication, providing a theory-light, "mile wide and an inch deep" glimpse so typical of introductory textbooks on media, for better or worse. The updating of content from the eighth edition is more significant than any other prior update in the series, finally beginning to embrace decade-old industry changes brought about by digital convergence. As a survey textbook for introductory mass communication courses, this book serves its basic purpose to expose students to the elementary knowledge of the field. However, based on my experience teaching from the Vivian textbook series, it seems unlikely that instructors can rely solely on this book for an entire term. Theory is handled in earnest in the chapter on media effects, and to some degree in the ethics chapter, but the remainder of the book is a smooth narrative without even footnotes to direct readers to deeper reading. Supplemental readings, particularly theory-rich readings, are necessary additions to this text, especially if a course using this text is expected to form a foundation for an eventual undergraduate major in mass communication.

The book is divided into three parts: The Mass Media, Media Messages, and Mass-Media Issues. The book opens with a chapter on media literacy, and this literacy framework reemerges throughout the book in case studies about media topics and in critical questions at the end of most sub-sections as “learning checks.” A chapter on media technology follows, establishing an organizational format for the subsequent industry-specific chapters. For each mass medium, the industry chapters provide brief historical sketches, overviews of industry structures and ownership trends, as well as select issues within each industry. Books, newspapers, magazines, sound recordings, motion pictures, radio, television, and the internet—each industry receives its own chapter-length treatment. Yet, the multi-billion dollar video game industry receives about five pages of coverage in the entire text, scattered through chapters on advertising and entertainment. The chapter on the Internet does little to address some of the latest trends in new media, as well, especially regarding developments in the so-called realm of Web 2.0 and revolutions in user-generated content. This is not entirely surprising, though. Consider the still-influential *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.) and its tendency to conclude each chapter with an obligatory and short-sighted acknowledgment that “the Internet is coming and may some day change mass communication,” even a decade after AOL's rise to dominance. So much of mass communication theory and research today still smacks of this empty observation of digital media, unwilling to more fully integrate new media theory and research into the guarded domain of mass communication. Vivian's textbook is but a distillation of this paradigm.

Part two, “Mass Messages,” covers news, public relations, advertising, entertainment, and media research. Vivian's chapter on news is particularly good, as is the industry chapter on newspapers and several historical segments in the book. Its strength lies in the way Vivian weaves historical snapshots into the text, touring the many eras of the newspaper industry, the evolving standards of journalism, and the colorful characters that have dotted the mass communication timeline. Despite my new media crusading above, this book does offer a great survey of the more established, traditional areas of the mass communication discipline. Vivian's writing style is clear and engaging as well, integrating the core knowledge of mass communication with intriguing—and current—vignettes and case studies. On public relations, Vivian includes a needed section to distinguish public relations from advertising, but the distinction between public relations and marketing—a far more common question from undergraduates—is absent. Instead, a section on integrated marketing communication (IMC) follows, describing IMC as a joining up of advertising and public relations. This sketch of IMC as a mash-up of advertising and public relations addresses only the tactical dimension of IMC and not the programmatic, data-driven, corporate commitment in IMC to align all marketing, public relations, and advertising messages according to the bottom line. Introductory textbooks understandably compile only the tips of great icebergs of communication research, and in no way can they be exhaustive. However, Vivian's portrayal of IMC, like a handful of other topics in the text, is so scant as to be a bit misleading.

The final part, “Mass-Media Issues,” includes chapters on mass media effects, global mass media, mass media and governance, mass media law, and ethics. The strongest chapter in this part, and in fact the strongest chapter in the entire book, deals with global mass media issues. Previous editions in Vivian's series kept discussions of the global in distant, abstract terms, with sidebars bringing concrete examples to bear. For the ninth edition, Vivian has included sections

in the chapter which each focus on specific cultures and global concerns. Media and terrorism, Arab media systems, Chinese media, and shorter sections on British, Indian, and Colombian media all add vibrant new facets to the book and encourage intercultural perspective in the study of mass communication.

I am still confounded by the insistence of so many textbooks in the entire communication discipline to tack the ethics chapter at the end of the book. Is not the purpose of this discipline to further effective *and ethical* communication practices? Why not an ethics chapter at the beginning, to trace a framework for inquiry for the remainder of the book? Or, better still, a full, seamless integration of ethics into the entire text might better serve the book's intended audience. Given that many mass communication departments require undergraduates to take an introductory mass communication course for which this textbook is designed, it makes sense that young, aspiring media professionals should be expected from the beginning to consider their professional responsibilities in ethical terms. Ethics is and has always been central to the study of mass communication, and a future edition of this textbook would be well served to front-load the ethics chapter.

Vivian's ninth edition of *The Media of Mass Communication* is certainly a step forward in the series. The book is still readable, well-designed, and a good pedagogical tool. New global perspectives are an improvement, and the media literacy foundation is a needed perspective. Despite this literacy framework, though, ethics remains the afterthought. A future edition ought to consider ways to encourage both intelligent consumption of media content *and* responsible production of media content. Finally, a future edition should consider ways to catch-up on trends in new media. If the book continues to adopt an industry-specific survey, it must eventually include a chapter on the important video game industry.

This book is appropriate for an undergraduate, introductory survey course on mass communication. The general lack of depth, the intentional avoidance of excessive theory and citation, and the absence of video game content warrants a supplemental reading list to make an introductory mass communication course relevant as a foundation for mass communication majors.