

# INTRODUCTION

### PRIMER QUESTIONS

1. Where have you been in the world? What countries have you visited?
2. What countries or regions of the world do you feel that you have some familiarity with?
3. What countries or regions of the world do you feel that you know very little about?
4. What kinds of foreign newspapers, radio programs, television shows, and web sites from other countries have you been exposed to?
5. What are the main sources of information in your life (media sources and nonmedia sources) that have taught you about those countries and regions of the world that you have not visited?

The world is so big that trying to conceptualize its size, even in the most general of terms, is intimidating—to say the least. Try picturing in your head all the land on the surface of the world, an area that covers some 93 million square kilometers (about 58 million square miles). As large an area as this is, all that land covers a mere quarter of the world's total surface area. The other three quarters (some 280 million square kilometers—about 174 million square miles) is covered by water. These massive, abstract numbers can be made more tangible by considering that it would take the average passenger airplane two full days of nonstop flying to circle the equator all the way around the world. Along the way, the plane would pass through 22 different time zones.

The gargantuan size of the world is rivaled not only by the number of people who live on it, but also by the number of languages those people use to communicate. In 2004, the total population of the world was approximately 6.5 billion, collectively speaking some 7,000 languages. Because China has the largest population in the world, more people speak Chinese than any other language (about 885 million people). Next is Spanish, spoken by about 332 million people. Then comes English, spoken by about 322 million people. Even though there are more people in the world who speak Chinese than English, and more people who speak Spanish than English, in fact English is spoken in more places than either Chinese or Spanish. One reason for the worldwide reach of English is that it is the most frequently used language in media content circulating to more places around the world. For example, according to [internetworldstats.com](http://internetworldstats.com), in 2004 the English language comprised 35.9 percent of total internet use, followed by Chinese (13.2 percent), Japanese (8.3 percent), German (6.8 percent), and Spanish (6.7 percent).

The world has about 200 countries. Considering how many countries and how many people there are, plus all the means of transportation that are available, it is truly incredible that most people experience only a minuscule portion of the world. Consider these statements: The average person travels to just *a few* of the world's 200 countries in a lifetime. Most people do not even visit *most* of the world's countries. Hardly anyone visits *all* of the world's countries. And either by choice or circumstance, plenty of people never leave the *one* country where they live. When you put these statements together, it becomes astonishing that the vast majority of people see only a minuscule portion of the world in their lifetimes—even people who travel quite a bit.

So how do most people come to know what they think they know about the world's countries? Well, it should come as no great revelation that people learn about the majority of the world's countries not by experiencing them directly, but instead by gaining secondhand information from friends, family, teachers, coworkers, and of course the media. The term **media** can have a very broad definition, as in any technology that carries a message—ranging from a T-shirt to a telephone to a television. But the term *media* can also be divided into two more narrow definitions: *mass media* (e.g., newspapers, magazines, radio, and television) and *personal media* (e.g., mobile [cell] phones, pagers, fax machines, and personal digital assistants [PDAs]). **Mass media** tend to distribute standardized messages to mass audiences, whereas **personal media** tend to distribute customized messages to smaller audiences or to individuals. Mass media traditionally have been used for synchronous (at the same time), “point to mass” communication (e.g., a radio song heard by thousands of listeners driving cars). Personal media traditionally have been used to facilitate asynchronous (at different times), “point to point” communication (e.g., an email message from a sister read the next day by a brother).

However, the traditional distinction between these two media is breaking down because the internet is radically challenging previous paradigms of media distribution patterns. For a start, the internet is both an auxiliary outlet for content already created for newspaper, radio, and television media, as well as a primary outlet for web page content in its own right. The internet also allows for point-to-point communication that is both asynchronous (e.g., sending an email) and synchronous (e.g., instant messaging), plus it allows for point-to-mass communication that is both asynchronous (e.g., a mass email) and synchronous (e.g., a web blog).

At any rate, it is clear that what we think we know about the world is largely facilitated by a combination of newer and older media technologies constantly bringing information into our homes, our modes of transportation, our places of employment, our eating and drinking hangouts, and really just about anywhere we travel. When it comes right down to it, media are probably responsible for nurturing most of our ideas about unfamiliar locations across a world that is so gargantuan we hardly experience it directly.

## MEDIA FROM AROUND THE WORLD

People experience media in radically different ways across the countries of the world because each country has a unique set of conditions that influence the accessible media content. Identifying and exploring these fascinating differences is what this book is all about. To take one example: Across different countries, are newspapers routinely purchased at shops or are they delivered to homes? Do people normally read newspapers in the morning or in the afternoon? How do governments, advertisers, audiences, and other entities influence the content that appears in newspapers? How and why do some influences serve to block certain

kinds of content such as nudity, while permitting or even mandating other kinds of content such as truthful advertising? These questions reveal how interesting it is to compare the similarities and differences of newspapers across various countries of the world.

If enough of these kinds of questions are asked not just about newspapers, but about electronic media as well, a larger and more intriguing question soon emerges: What do we learn when we compare media from around the world? That is the central question pursued in this book. It is a question that produces a global perspective of the world's media rather than a local perspective from the vantage point of a single country. Thus, *Comparing Media from Around the World* attempts to provide insights into how the media that we access in a particular country help to shape perceptions of ourselves, of countries that we have never visited, and ultimately of the entity we call the world.

Four media in particular are compared in this book: newspapers, radio, television, and the internet. Individually, each of these media distributes content on a daily basis—unlike film or magazines. Collectively, newspapers, radio, television, and the internet distribute the bulk of media content around the world, and their combined impact on the daily lives of people across the world is colossal. Therefore, comparing these four media across various countries will provide a heady study of the interplay between people, governments, media companies, and media content around the world.

Yet, though these four media have much in common in terms of both worldwide reach and regular distribution of content, fundamentally the internet stands apart from the others—which to some extent presents an awkward fit for this book. What makes the internet so different from the other media is that it truly is a global medium, confined less by cultural or geographical factors than by audience accessibility. In other words, the internet is more about whether people can get to it, how long they have to access it, and how fast it is, than about what content it distributes. This fundamental difference between the internet and the other media is why, in several chapters of this book, the sections on the internet are shorter than the sections on newspapers, radio, and television. However, in the chapter that has to do with how audiences use media (Chapter 12), the material on the internet is much greater than the material on the other three media. Despite their fundamental differences, however, the four media of newspapers, radio, television and the internet can be studied as a group because they are pervasive across the sprawl of world media, and because they are continuously producing and distributing content to people all over the world.

Studying media content from around the world cannot be done in a vacuum. For example, examining a television show by itself does not tell us very much about how that television show came into being. This larger question is addressed only by studying elements of a larger media system that produced the television show. The elements of a media system that are studied in this book include the following: cultural characteristics of eight countries, philosophies for media systems, regulation of media, accessibility of media, media content, news reporting, imports/exports, financing of media, and media audiences. Taken together, these elements of a media system facilitate a process in which human beings generate ideas and then transform those ideas into media content that gets distributed to audiences across the world.

As you read this book and study how the elements of media systems compare across different countries, you probably will be exposed to new kinds of media content. This in itself can be exciting. However, even more appealing is the prospect that when you study

world. The UK has an extensive global reach in the distribution of media content because of the pervasive use of English around the world, and because of the UK's associations with Commonwealth and former colonial countries.

### **The USA (United States of America)**

The USA's media system is the largest overall media exporter in the world. Television content originating from the USA occupies large portions of television broadcasts in other countries. Relative to other countries, imported media are not easy to find in the USA. The government in the USA for the most part prefers market forces to regulate media content, but takes an active role in restricting potentially obscene media content.

## **LIMITATIONS AND STRENGTHS OF THE EIGHT SELECTED COUNTRIES**

In Map 1.1, the eight countries selected for comparison are shaded to show how they are spread out geographically across the world.

Of course, with approximately 200 countries in the world, it is natural to wonder about countries that could have or should have been included in this book, and to critique weaknesses of those selected. For example: Three of the countries have English as a first language (Ghana, the UK, and the USA). Three of the countries are located in Europe. Six of the countries are predominantly Christian (China is predominantly secular; Lebanon is 60 to 70 percent Muslim). And all of the countries are in the Northern Hemisphere. Readers concerned about these issues may also be concerned about other issues, such as whether China offers the best representation of Asia, or whether Ghana offers the best representation of Africa, or whether Lebanon is Muslim enough, and so on.

However, the countries selected for this book are not meant to be a representative sample of the media systems across the world. Rather, the prime directive of this book is to select countries that present a fascinating study of media systems around the world—media systems that happen to embody a considerable range of operations, policies, and content. Moreover, it is not necessary for this book to contain all the countries you would have selected, because its chapter structure is designed to allow you to extrapolate information so you can pursue your own comparisons and derive your own findings about additional countries or regions in which you have particular academic or personal interests.

## **BEYOND COUNTRY AS A UNIT OF ANALYSIS**

Because media tend to spread across clusters of countries, the use of country as a unit of analysis in this book should serve only as a necessary starting point for revealing broader themes and trends in media systems that cross national boundaries into global regions. Accordingly, you should approach the material in *Comparing Media from Around the World* as a means of stimulating your own investigation and observation of themes and trends that exist in media systems from any or all countries across the world. Whatever the countries and regions are that you would like to examine, you should be able to inform your

endeavor by applying the terms, concepts, theories, and analysis presented in this book. Especially in Chapters 4 through 12—which compare elements of the individual media systems that exist in these eight countries—the material should provide you with potent concepts that you can use to compare elements of media systems found in countries not discussed in this book. Therefore, by design, this book is not just about the media systems of eight countries. Rather, this book is written to enable you to apply the concepts discussed to any countries or regions in the world, including countries you have experienced, as well as countries with which you have little familiarity.

Obviously, a study of media across different countries cannot inventory and examine every newspaper, radio station, television channel, and web site that is distributed. That task is impossible not only because the universe of available media is so bountiful but also because the selection of media is in a constant state of flux. Therefore, the comparisons of media across the eight countries in this book are performed on examples of media that are understood to represent general and interesting themes of what is available. Above all else, the specific examples of media chosen for this book are intended to capture the spirit of a country's media system.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF COMPARING

*Comparing* is an important word in the title of this book. Comparing is a fundamental tool of analytical thinking that enables distinctions to be drawn between two or more things. Moreover, comparing is a tool that we start using very early in life when we assess, for example, that some people are taller (or shorter) than others. A basic comparison of this sort is not about rendering a judgment as to which object is better or worse, but rather about evaluating how two or more objects are similar or different.

Yet, comparing can produce a more profound impact on our learning process than simply identifying similarities and differences. Comparing can produce a deeper understanding of the self. This understanding is made possible by discovering the **point of reference** by which we evaluate other objects and experiences. When we compare two or more objects, we often make assessments about those things that are different from what we have experienced; therefore, the process of comparing inadvertently helps us to identify the reference points that form conceptions of the self. In other words, when observing objects and experiences that are different, we also are defining ourselves by the things that are familiar rather than those that are unfamiliar. When it comes to comparing media systems, it is possible to define the points of reference that have been cultivated in you through your experiences with a particular set of media from particular countries or regions.

Furthermore, the use of comparing as a methodological tool to study media across the world is essential in overcoming the tendency to unfairly evaluate another country according to the values of your own country. In the book *Images of the U.S. Around the World* (1999) edited by Yayha Kamalipour, I describe the hasty affliction of **cultural myopia**, wherein people who are not exposed to another country through a range of media content are prone to evaluating that country with shortsighted negativity when they do come across basic information about that country. In essence, the shortsightedness makes unfamiliar objects in the foreground blurry (information about an unfamiliar convention in

another country, which lacks an evaluative context), but makes familiar objects in the background clear (information about a familiar convention in the “home” country, which includes an evaluative context). Because of the tendency to resolve the ambiguous foreign-country information using unambiguous home-country background information, misjudgments can occur. For example, have you ever heard someone ask whether it is true that the British drink warm beer? The underlying judgment in this question might really be: How can the British drink warm beer as it must taste really bad? In actual fact, the British commonly drink ales—a type of beer that is traditional in the UK—at 13°C/55°F. This temperature happens to be warmer than the usual temperature (7°C/45°F) at which lagers—a different kind of beer served in many other countries around the world—are commonly served. Therefore, on closer inspection the term *warm* is not as appropriate as the term *warmer*, a subtle mistake indicating that cultural myopia may be at play in evaluating ales by using familiar standards of the home country rather than standards of the UK. What does a beer description have to do with cultural myopia and the use of media? Well, it is a simple example of how cultural myopia can arise in the absence of basic background knowledge about habits of another country that otherwise could be obtained through media content. In the beer example, someone who has either visited the UK or who has watched certain television shows set in the UK (those with scenes taking place in pubs) would probably not use the term *warm* to describe beer served in the UK. Therefore, as a methodological tool, comparing media helps us to avoid cultural myopia in making shortsighted assessments about countries and cultures with which we are unfamiliar.

In this book, Chapter 3 introduces the variables (called elements) to be compared across media systems in France, Sweden, the UK, the USA, México, China, Ghana, and Lebanon. Though the concept of a media system is formally defined in Chapter 3, for now it can be understood as a collection of elements that interact with each other to produce media content. Beginning with Chapter 4 and continuing through Chapter 12, one element at a time is defined and then compared across the media systems of the eight countries. Identifying and defining elements of a media system helps to ensure that the comparisons of media systems in the eight countries are balanced and fair.

## A RHETORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In the final analysis, this book would be of limited value if the discussions stopped at the level of comparison. To gain a fuller understanding of media from around the world, the analysis must lead to interpretations of the findings. Interpretation is derived from analyzing what a finding **means**. This book seeks to identify what the findings mean in terms of how the elements of a country’s media system affect the content that is available, how that media system relates also to cultural characteristics that are unique to a country or common to a region, and how audiences within countries are led to interact with media.

This book uses a rhetorical perspective to help answer what the comparisons in this book might mean. As Martin Medhurst and Thomas Benson explain in *Rhetorical Dimensions of Media* (1984), a **rhetorical perspective** can offer an analysis of how media “invite” a particular audience to think, feel, or behave, given a particular context. For example, a

rhetorical perspective can offer an analysis of how the overall selection of television channels that are accessible in a particular country invites an audience to watch some programs at the expense of other kinds of programs and, more important, to have a certain outlook as a result of, or in association with, the television viewing. A rhetorical perspective is particularly appropriate for a study of media around the world for two reasons. First, a rhetorical perspective does not conclude that there is one fixed meaning to a phenomenon; instead, it concentrates on reasonable meanings for a message, given the audience and the context. The key here is an underlying assumption that the audience plays an active role in making meaning from a message. In this book, **audience** has two definitions: (1) as readers of this book and (2) as the people who access the media content described in this book. The rhetorical perspective will be applied to both audiences to help interpret meanings from the comparisons of media across different countries.

Second, a rhetorical perspective provides a way to analyze what it is that we think we know through the media. Sometimes the outcomes of such an exercise are not so endearing. Part of this analysis involves identifying options for selecting media content that are available in some countries but not in others. Put another way, a rhetorical perspective analyzes how thoughts and opinions are shaped by routine sources of information and entertainment, which in turn are shaped by unique elements that make up a country's media system. Thus, when you see phrasing in this book such as the television show "invites" the audience to believe . . . or the newspaper "leads" the audience to think . . . , you are witnessing a rhetorical perspective being applied to the analysis. In other words, a rhetorical perspective is being used to indicate a reasonable meaning of an aspect of a media system that is being examined, given a context and an audience.

Because a rhetorical perspective can operate in the background of a study, it sometimes is difficult to spot when you are reading the results of the study. Therefore, it might satisfy your curiosity to know that a rhetorical perspective is at work in certain sections of all the chapters. The first rhetorical section is the Primer Questions at the beginning of each chapter. These questions are designed to involve you as the reader, as the audience for this book, in helping to make meaning from the material that is presented. In essence, the Primer Questions presented before the chapter's reading material begins should invite you to actively participate in the learning process. The second rhetorical section is the introduction to each chapter, wherein important conceptual material is provided as a setup for the ensuing comparisons of an element of media systems across the eight countries. Within this introductory material, you will find definitions of key terms to help tap into a common understanding of the categories of information that are being investigated. The third rhetorical section is the Comparative Summary at the ends of Chapters 4 through 12. In these three sections, rhetorical statements are made about the degrees of difference or similarity between the elements of media systems across the eight countries. These statements are designed to capture reasonable judgments about the major areas in which the media systems are different or similar. In addition to these three sections, you can spot a rhetorical perspective at work in most of Chapter 12 on media audiences and in Chapter 13, the conclusion. While Chapter 12 focuses on how audiences use media in the eight countries, Chapter 13 attempts to round up the findings from the previous chapters and then to speculate reasonable implications not only for the eight countries that were studied in this book but also for media systems across the world.

**SUMMARY**

The world is so large it is difficult to grasp as a whole, made up of individual countries. Media are instrumental in teaching people about most of the world's countries. Countries serve as a good starting point for comparing media across the world because each country possesses a set of unique characteristics that define the indigenous media system. A selection of eight very different countries—France, Sweden, the UK, the USA, México, China, Ghana, and Lebanon—provides a rich cross section of media systems to compare. Applying a rhetorical perspective to the comparisons helps to provide reasonable interpretations of observations about how media differ across the countries. Organizing book chapters by comparing elements that cut across the media systems of each of the eight countries helps us assess similarities and differences more clearly than organizing chapters by countries or regions.