# Youth and New Media:
# Studying Identity and Meaning in an Evolving Media Environment

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## 1. Introduction

The media landscape continues to change rapidly with the evolutions in digital media and online socializing. The fracturing of the very conception of audiences as consumers complicates mass communication research into current media practices and influences. Contemporary media research could benefit from a reconceptualization of the relationship among the media themselves, the consumers and producers of new media, and peoples' engagement with media, particularly for research involving young people.

This review begins by outlining a working definition for the term *new media*, then an outline of historical theorizing about the overlapping nature of subject and cultural construction of identity, the role of media in society, the importance of everyday practices in media research, and ultimately how these relate to new media environments.

The review next presents an overview of media research on influence on society, with a focus on the role of young people in such research. Traditional media research has viewed young people as a special group in need of protection from media and their potentially negative influences. However, research has begun to recognize young people as good subjects for research on media engagement, although the literature remains minimal to date. As early adoptors of new technologies, young people tend to be at the forefront of new media interaction, thus shaping it through their practices. As a result, young people can serve as excellent indicators of future trends in new media. Next, this review considers a body of research on the ways new media transform youth culture in the home and at school. Finally, the review identifies new epistemological frameworks for media research in the digital age. This includes the logic of new media, the participatory practices that define the contemporary users of digital media, and issues surrounding risk and privacy for young people using social networking sites.

### A. New media: A definition

The terminology surrounding the social phenomena under study is often vague. Defining on-line media practices using terms like "digital," "virtual," and "interactive" tends to delimit the scope of analysis in different ways. "New media" has become something of a catchall term used to describe any and all emerging and evolving digital technologies, mostly the result of the last two decades of innovations in personal computing, the Internet, and cellular telephony (Croteau & Hoynes, 2003; Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2002). This analysis uses the term "new media" to broadly describe "the intersection of traditional media with digital media" (Ito, 2010) and the "remediation" (Bolter & Grusin, 2000) that inevitably follows the emergence of each new medium. Remediation describes the process by which a medium "appropriates the techniques, forms, and social significance of other media and attempts to rival or refashion them in the name of real" (p. 66). This process of remediation has existed as long as media themselves, but digital media greatly accelerates it. Therefore, in this review, the "new" in new media refers to digital communication formats but also to old forms of media reconstituted and redistributed as digital media content over the Internet to personal computer, cellular phones, iPods, and so on.

Moreover, by using the term "new," we must recognize that media encompassed by this term are currently new, but "always on the verge of growing older" (Ito, 2010). For this discussion, the media under study are new at this historical moment: This discussion describes the social interaction with the new technologies for on-line representation, but without a value judgment about their relative "newness." Time and posterity may ultimately need to decide how we define and remember the current condition.