

The Sociological Perspective

Sociology of the Mass Media

July 2, 2007

What is Sociology?

The study of:

- (1) Social *behavior* in humans
(interactions, action in social settings)
- (2) Social *relations* among humans
(e.g. class, race, gender, age)
- (3) Social *institutions* created by humans
(e.g. education, economy, religion)
- (4) Social *change* over time
(how structures evolve)

The Basic Argument

People interact →

People intuitively develop rules of interaction →

Over time and with repetition, people become accustomed to these rules →

The rules become normalized →

People internalize the norms →

The norms begin creating people's identity

What is the “Mass Media?”

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What are the Media?

“The communication media are different technological processes that facilitate communication between (and are in the ‘middle’ of) the sender of a message and the receiver of that message.”

~Croteau and Hoynes, p. 6-7

Constructing Relationships

People interact →

People intuitively develop rules of interaction →

Over time and with repetition, people
become accustomed to these rules →

The rules become normalized →

People internalize the norms →

The norms create people's identity

Institutionalized Relationships

Once norms become internalized, relationships take on a new dimension – they become institutionalized;

Institutions structure the nature of our relationships; institutions act as agents of socialization and transmit norms across generations.

Within institutions, particular statuses and roles are recognized, and conventions are created that guide appropriate behavior

Mediating Relationships

All relationships are mediated.

Face-to-face relationships are mediated by symbols, which allow us to form shared meaning.

Institutional relationships are mediated using more sophisticated technologies, which allow for the manipulation of symbols and meaning.

Communication Media

Face-to-Face Communication

Mediated by symbolic elements

Print Media

Personal Media

Notes

Letters

Post Cards

Mass Media

Books

Newspapers

Magazines

Scientific/Professional
Journals

Pamphlets/Brochures

Communication Media

Broadcast Media

Personal Media

Two way Radio

Mass Media

AM-FM Radio

Television

Also cable & satellite technologies

Common Carrier Media

Post Office

Communication Media

Broadband Media

Personal Media

E-mail

Mass Media

World Wide Web

Each new technology builds on and incorporates elements of previous technologies – e.g. broadcast & broadband both include written text.

Functions of the Mass Media

(1) Provider of entertainment

Books, movies, TV shows, music, games

(2) Producer of information

Liaison between institutions and people

(3) Creator of technology

Element of social change

(4) Facilitator of relationships

Allow people to have more relationships over longer distances

Open up possibilities for new types of relationships

Functions of the Mass Media

(5) Purveyor of commercialism

Creates a commercial system and identity

(6) Agent of socialization

Constructs society

Teaches youngsters

(7) Social integration

Creates common worldviews – systems of meaning, values, ideologies, perspectives, perceptions, customs

(8) Check on government

Watchdog against abuses of power

(9) ??????.....

Products of the Mass Media

(1) Social stratification

Legitimation of some groups, marginalization or exclusion of others

(2) Social reproduction

Perpetuation of dominant social forms, e.g. private enterprise, transnational corporations

(3) Rationalization & bureaucratization

Demands more systematic, professional relationships

(4) Globalization

Facilitates global finance, commerce, migration

(5) ????......

Points to Keep in Mind

- (1) There are a diversity of media, each with its own form of operation
- (2) Media structure and content change over time, reflecting (a) broader social change and (b) choices by media actors
- (3) Media are closely tied to information society and to processes of globalization (communications & transportation are facilitators of globalization)
- (4) ????.

What do the Media Do?

“Today’s journalism is more likely to produce confusion than understanding and informed action.”

~Robert W. McChesney, p. 72

Content

Analysis

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Content Analysis

Content Analysis is used to collect quantitative data for statistical analysis

Content Analysis quantifies elements of written, spoken or visual text, including words, photos, videos, symbols, or other representations

Content Analysis has existed for nearly a century, but has not been widely used in the social sciences

Content Analysis

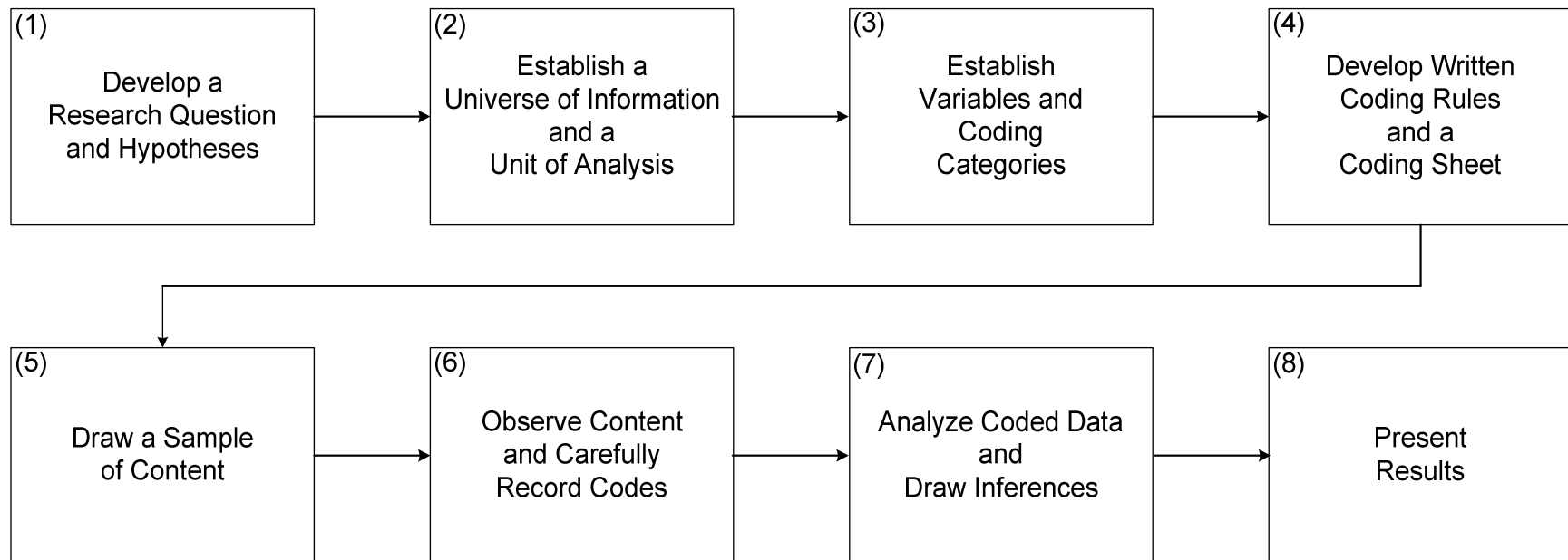
Information is converted to numerical data through a process of coding. The researcher establishes predetermined coding categories and rules, then applies these by systematically assigning numerical codes to concepts in a portion of written, spoken or visual text.

Appropriate Research Questions for Content Analysis

Content Analysis is appropriate
for research questions that:

- Look for underlying themes or assumptions in text
- Involve historical or remote texts
- Require a researcher to study large quantities of text

Steps in Conducting a Content Analysis



Content Analysis: Sampling

What is the *population* (or “universe of information”) in content analysis?

What is the *sampling element/case* (or “unit of analysis”) in content analysis?

Content Analysis: What Can Researchers Code?

(1) Frequency

(2) Direction

(3) Intensity

(4) Space

Content Analysis: How Can Researchers Code?

(1) Manifest Coding

(2) Latent Coding

Path Dependence

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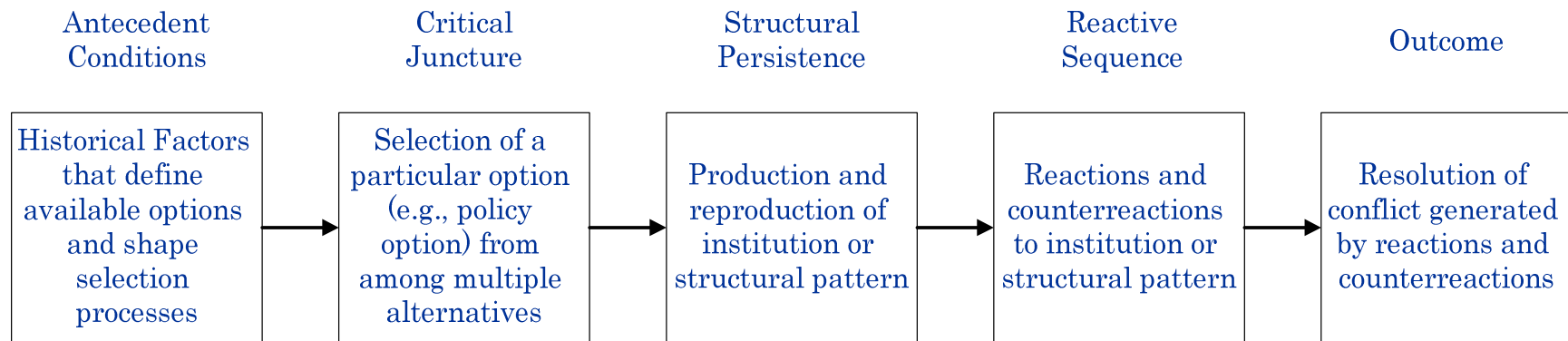


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Path Dependence

A method used to study processes of institutionalization. A key element is that once a group, community or society starts down a developmental path, it becomes increasingly difficult to go back to the initial conditions. The decisions made are conceptualized as causal elements to the outcomes.

Path Dependence



Analytic Structure of Path-Dependent Explanation

From: James Mahoney. (2001). *The Legacies of Liberalism: Path Dependence and Political Regimes in Central America*. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.

Bureaucratic Organizations

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Max Weber
(1864 – 1920)

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Weber on Bureaucracy

“The development of modern forms of organization in all fields is nothing less than identical with the development and continual spread of bureaucratic administration. This is true of church and state, of armies, political parties, economic enterprises, interest groups, endowments, clubs, and many others. [...] However many people complain about the “red tape,” it would be sheer illusion to think for a moment that continuous administrative work can be carried out in any field except by means of officials working in offices. If bureaucratic administration is, other things being equal, always the most rational type from a technical point of view, the needs of mass administration make it today completely indispensable. This choice is only that between bureaucracy and dilettantism in the field of administration.”

~ *Economy and Society*, vol. 1, p. 223

Characteristics of Bureaucracies

- (1) Specialization – rigidly defined activities
- (2) Hierarchy – roles & supervisory structure
- (3) Formal Rules – written rules & sanctions
- (4) Technical Training & Competence – product, not person, is what matters
- (5) Impersonality – individual is role
- (6) Formal, Written Communication – people are interchangeable in roles

The Dark Side of Bureaucracies

- (1) Alienation – divorces person from personality
- (2) Inefficiency – red tape, justifying position
- (3) Inertia – once structure is in place, it perpetuates itself
- (4) Oligarchy – concentrates on upper echelons
- (5) The Iron Cage – rigid control of one's identity

Professionalization in Bureaucracies

A professional code of ethics and behavior permeates bureaucracies. Each role has highly specialized, well defined expectations for behavior and output. These require people to conform their behavior and thoughts to the “company line,” which begins to form their identity and personality. New institutions emerge (e.g. schools, courts) that promote bureaucratic thought and action. Through all this, individuals become alienated from their own authentic selves.

Professionalization in Journalism

- (1) Journalism Schools (Knowledge & Skills)
- (2) Separation of Editorial Operations (Creation of Content) from Commercial Affairs (Sustaining the Business)
- (3) Establishing Standards (Objectivity, Nonpartisanship, Factual accuracy, Discrediting sensationalism)
- (4) Professional Organizations
- (5) Oppositional forces (Unions)

Products of Professionalization: Values in Journalism

- (1) Official sources provide legitimate news
(And are also fair game for criticism)
- (2) Events provide legitimate news
(Ongoing issues are not news; thus it is not a reporter's job to provide context)
- (3) Business is not a source of legitimate news
(News can report public relations efforts by business, but cannot scrutinize the operations of business enterprises)

Framing

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Framing

Framing refers to the set of assumptions that form the foundation of a story. As such, the frame represents the values embedded in the story.

Frequently the frame is more influential in the “take-home message” than the actual content of the story.

Professionalization

An insidious aspect of the development of a professional journalism is that it reallocates responsibilities. Frequently, professionals usurp responsibilities that used to be embedded in communities, and with the responsibility goes power. As bureaucracies grow, people can shift responsibility from themselves to other offices, and thereby avoid negative sanctions; however, at the same time they cloud who is responsible for various outcomes. Thus, the relative input of subjects, writers, editors and owners on any given story is not necessarily clear cut.

Framing and Professionalization

Authors use frames to provide a “hook” and to establish the starting point of a story, but editors and owners can influence the framing of a story, either through direct pressure on the writer, or by rewriting the story before publication.

Frames can carry political messages, by incorporating assumptions about the correctness of a political position or viewpoint. As these messages are “hidden” in the text, a seemingly innocuous story can carry a powerful political punch.

Examples of Messages that Can Be Conveyed by Framing

- Free markets are better than government control
- Messages from “official” sources are more legitimate than those from other sources
- Poor people are unreliable, lazy, dishonest, and/or scam artists
- Things that happen in New York and Los Angeles are more important than things that happen elsewhere (especially rural areas)

Hegemony

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Hegemony

Leadership, power and control, especially dominant control of one elite group over another marginal group.

Exercising influence and dominance through the control of ideas and culture; controlling the frames, worldviews and paradigms of the masses.

Exercising Control

(1) Coercion

Control by command & threat

People comply to avoid sanctions

(2) Cooptation

Control by incentives & enticement

People comply to gain benefits

(3) Conditioning

Control by socialization & internalization

People comply to fit in and live up to expectations

Agents of Socialization

Social institutions, including the mass media, operate as agents of socialization.

Institutions embody the statuses, roles, norms, and values that comprise society and culture. Through socialization into these structures, people internalize these characteristics, and conform to the social system.

Legitimation

Social institutions also produce hierarchies, and tend to legitimate the values of elite groups.

By controlling the very structures of society, elite groups are able to exercise hegemonic control over others, so that subordinate groups buy into and work to support the interests of elite groups.

Forms of Legitimate Authority

(1) Charismatic Authority

People buy into the claim to authority due to respect for the personal qualities of the leader & owe allegiance to the individual leader

(2) Traditional Authority

People buy into the claim to authority due to longstanding conventions & owe allegiance to the customary rulers

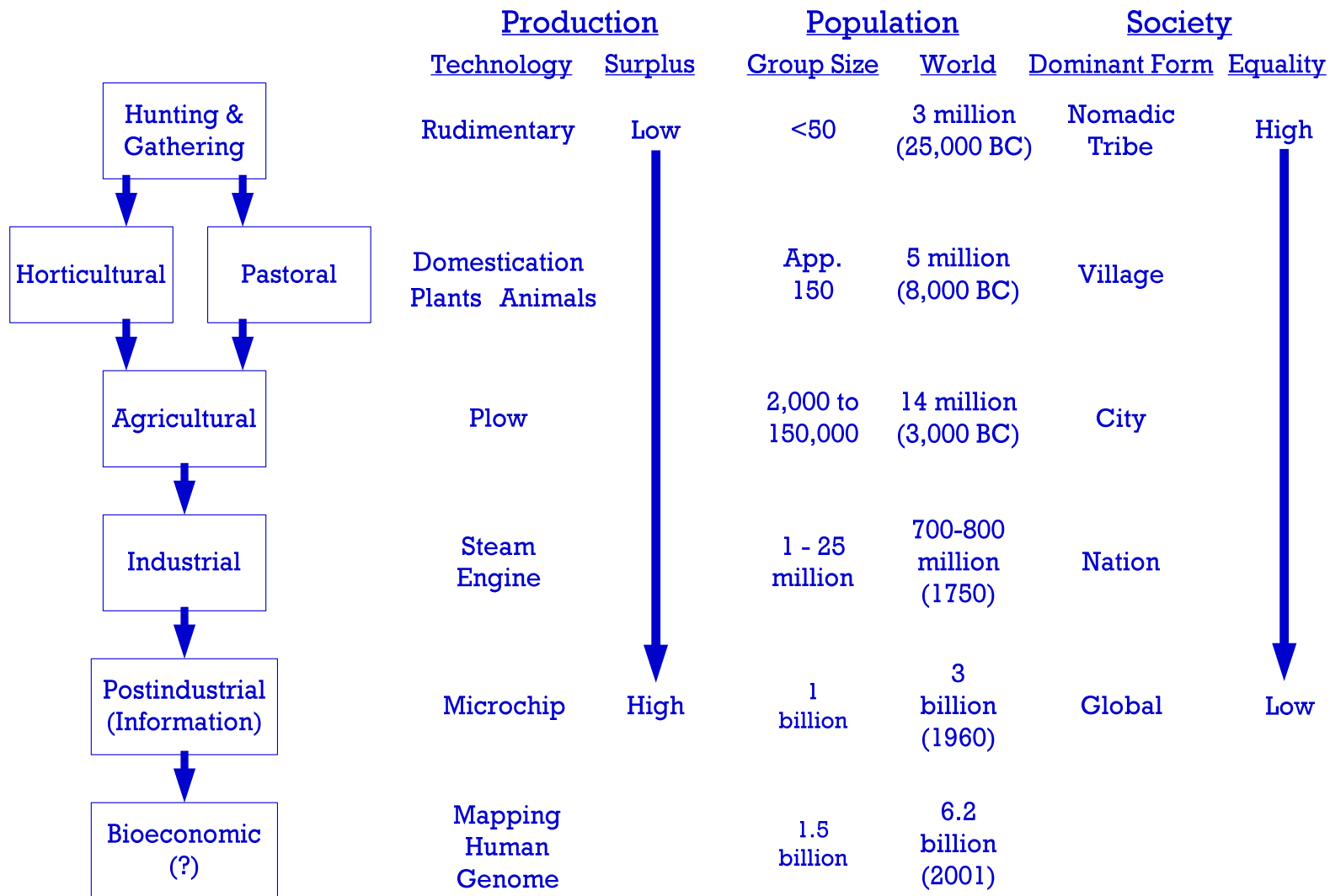
(3) Rational-Legal Authority

People buy into the claim to authority due to a belief in the fairness of the rational system & owe allegiance to the legally recognized offices

Technology and Social Change

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Technology and Social Change



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Marshall McLuhan

“The medium is the message”
(or “massage”)

“The new electronic interdependence recreates
the world in the image of a Global Village”

The Medium is the Massage (1967), p. 67

Mass Media and Technology

“Like any other extension of man, typography had psychic and social consequences that suddenly shifted previous boundaries and patterns of culture. In bringing the ancient and medieval worlds into fusion – or, as some would say, confusion – the printed book created a third world, the modern world, which now encounters a new electric technology or a new extension of man. Electric means of moving of information are altering our typographic culture as sharply as print modified medieval manuscript and scholastic culture.”

~Marshall McLuhan

Understanding Media: The Extension of Man (1964), pp. 171

Mass Media and Democracy

“Print technology created the public.
Electric technology created the mass.

The public consists of separate
individuals walking around with
separate, fixed points of view.

The new technology demands that
we abandon the luxury of this posture,
this fragmentary outlook.”

~Marshall McLuhan

The Medium is the Massage (1967), pp. 68-69

Mass Media and Society

“Socially, the typographic extension of man brought in nationalism, industrialism, mass markets, and universal literacy and education. For print presented an image of repeatable precision that inspired totally new forms of extending social energies. Print released great psychic and social energies in the Renaissance, as today in Japan and Russia, by breaking the individual out of the traditional group while providing a model of how to add individual to individual in massive agglomeration of power. The same spirit of private enterprise that emboldened authors and artists to cultivate self-expression led other men to create giant corporations, both military and commercial.”

~Marshall McLuhan

Understanding Media: The Extension of Man (1964), pp. 172–73

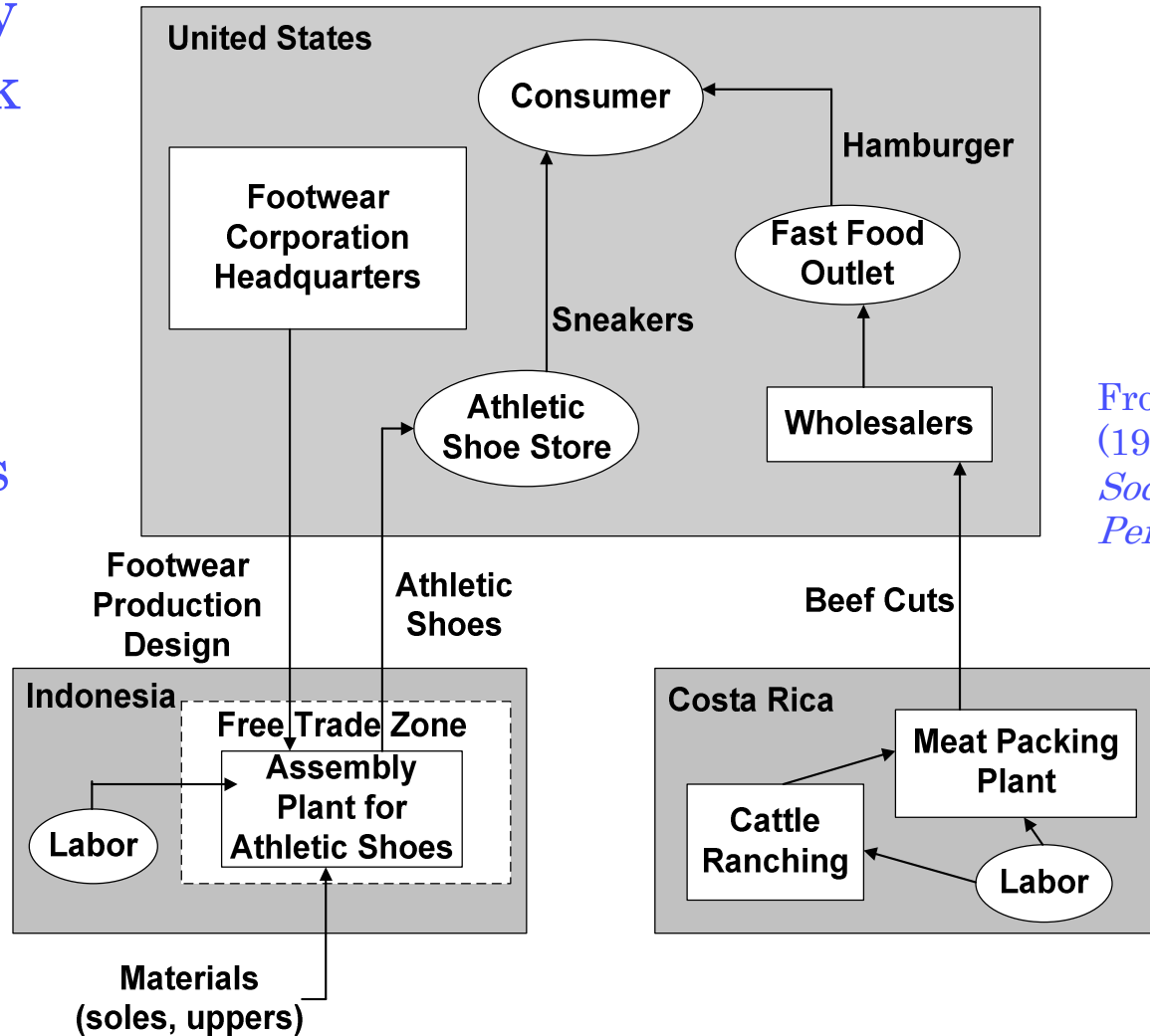
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Globalization and the Mass Media

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Commodity Chains

Commodity Chains link Global Production Sites with Global Consumers

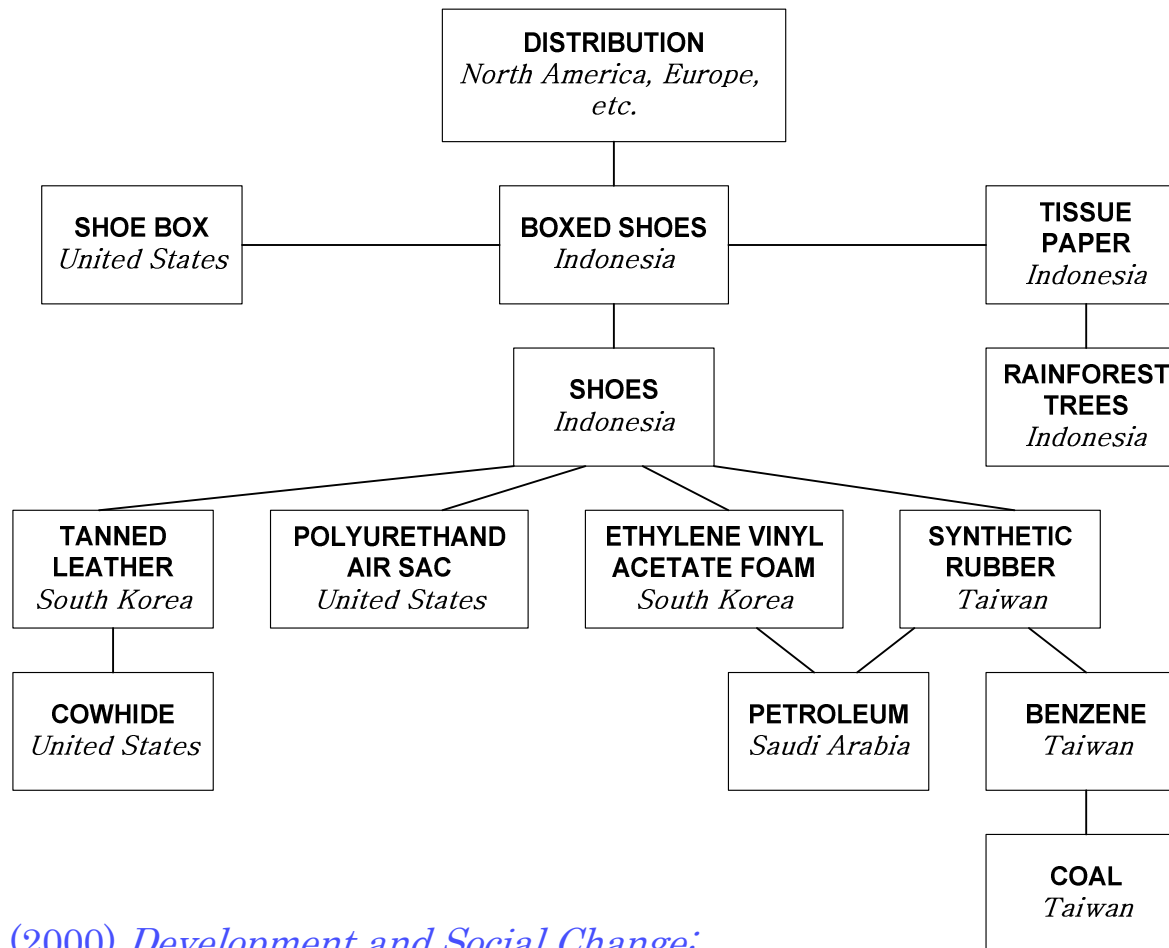


From P. McMichael (1996) *Development and Social Change: A Global Perspective*

Athletic Shoes

Fast Food

A Commodity Chain for Athletic Shoes



From P. McMichael (2000) *Development and Social Change: A Global Perspective, Second Edition*; developed from J.C. Ryan & A.T. Durning (1998) "The Story of a Shoe," *World Watch*

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A Commodity Chain for Hollywood Movies

