

# 2

## The Rise of Mass Media

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The aim of this chapter is to set out the approximate sequence of development of the present-day set of mass media. It is also to indicate major turning points and to tell briefly something of the circumstances of time and place in which different media acquired their public definitions in the sense of their perceived utility for audiences and their role in society. These definitions have tended to form early in the history of any given medium and to have been subsequently adapted in the light of newer media and changed conditions. This is a continuing process. The chapter concludes with some reflections on the two main dimensions of variation between media: one relates to the degree of freedom and the other to the conditions of use.

## From the Beginning to Mass Media

We have distinguished already between a *process* of mass communication and the actual *media* that make it possible. The occurrence of human communication over time and at a distance is much older than are the mass media now in use. This process was integral to the organization of early societies, which persisted for long periods and extended over large areas. Even the element of large-scale (mass) dissemination of ideas was present at an early point in time, in the propagation of political and religious awareness and obligations. By the early Middle Ages, the church in Europe had elaborate and effective means in place to ensure transmission to everyone without exception. This could be called mass communication, although it was largely independent of any 'media' in the contemporary sense, aside from the sacred texts. When independent media arrived in the form of printing, authorities of church and state reacted with alarm at the potential loss of control that this represented and at the opportunities opened up for disseminating new and deviant ideas. The bitter propaganda struggles of the religious wars during the sixteenth century are evidence enough. It was the historical moment when a technology for mass communication – the printing press – irrevocably acquired a particular social and cultural definition.

In telling the history of mass media, we deal with four main elements that are of significance in the wider life of society. These are:

- certain communicative purposes, needs, or uses;
- technologies for communicating publicly to many at a distance;
- forms of social organization that provide the skills and frameworks for organizing production and distribution;
- forms of regulation and control.

These elements do not have a fixed relationship to each other and depend very much on the circumstances of time and place. Sometimes a technology of communication is applied to a pre-existing need or use, as when printing replaced copying by hand or the telegraph replaced the physical transport of key messages. But sometimes a technology, such as film or broadcast radio, precedes any clear evidence of need. The combinations of the above elements that actually occur are usually dependent both on material factors and on features of the social and cultural climate that are

not easy to pin down. Even so, it seems probable that a certain degree of freedom of thought, expression and action has been the single most necessary condition for the development of print and other media, although not for the initial invention. The techniques of printing and even the use of movable type were known and applied in China and Korea long before Gutenberg, who is credited as the (European) inventor in the mid-fifteenth century (Gunaratne, 2001).

In general, the more open the society, the more inclination there has been to develop communication technology to its fullest potential, especially in the sense of being universally available and widely used. More closed or repressive regimes either limit development or set strict boundaries to the ways in which technology can be used. Printing was not introduced into Russia until the early seventeenth century and not in the Ottoman Empire until 1726. In the following summary of the history and characteristics of different media, a 'western' perspective and set of values are being applied, since the institutional frameworks of mass media were initially mainly western (European or North American) and most other parts of the world have taken up and applied the same technologies in a similar way. Even so, there is no reason why mass media need follow only one path in the future, always converging on the western model. There are diverse possibilities, and it is quite possible that cultural differences will trump technological imperatives. The history of media already shows up certain important differences between societies, for instance the large variation in the readership of books and newspapers or in the rates and pace of Internet diffusion.

In the following pages, each of the main mass media is identified in respect of its technology and material form, typical formats and genres, perceived uses and institutional setting.

## Print Media: the Book

The history of modern media begins with the printed book – certainly a kind of revolution, yet initially only a technical device for reproducing a range of texts the same as, or similar to, what was already being extensively copied by hand. Only gradually does printing lead to a change in content – more secular, practical and popular works (especially in the vernacular languages) as well as political and religious pamphlets and tracts – which played a part in the transformation of the medieval world. At an early date, laws and proclamations were also printed by royal and other authorities. Thus, there occurred a revolution of society in which printing played an inseparable part (Eisenstein, 1978).

The antecedents of the book lie in classical times when there were numerous established authors and when works of many kinds, both fictional and non-fictional, were copied and circulated for reading or verbal transmission. In the west, at least, the culture of the book largely disappeared after the end of the Roman Empire until revived by monastic activities, although some key texts were preserved for reasons of learning or religion.

In the early medieval period, the book was not regarded primarily as a means of communication. Rather, it was a store or repository of wisdom, and especially of

sacred writings and religious texts that had to be kept in uncorrupted form. Around the central core of religious and philosophical texts there accumulated also works of science and practical information. The main material form of the book at this time was of bound volumes of separate pages within strong covers (known as the *codex*), reflecting the requirements for safe storage and reading aloud from a lectern plus the demands of travel and transportation. Books were meant both to last and to be disseminated within limited circles. The modern book is a direct descendant of this model, and similar uses are embedded within it. The alternative form of rolls of paper or parchment was discontinued, especially when the printing press replaced writing by hand and required the pressing of flat sheets. This ensured the triumph of the medieval manuscript book format, even when miniaturized.

Another important element of continuity between writing and printing is the library, a store or collection of books. This remained similar in concept and physical arrangement, at least until the advent of digital libraries. It also reflected and confirmed the idea of a book as a record or permanent work of reference. The character of the library did not change much with printing, although printing stimulated the acquisition of private libraries. The later development of the library has given it some claim to be considered not only as a medium but even as a mass medium. It is certainly often organized as a means of public information and was envisaged from the mid-nineteenth century onwards as an important tool of mass enlightenment.

The successful application of print technology to the reproduction of texts in place of handwriting, about the mid-fifteenth century, was only the first step in the emergence of what we now call a 'media institution' (see p. xx) – an organized set of interrelated activities and roles, directed towards certain goals and governed by a set of rules and procedures. Printing gradually became a new craft and a significant branch of commerce (Febvre and Martin, 1984). Printers were later transformed from tradespeople into publishers, and the two functions gradually became distinct. Equally important was the emergence of the idea and role of the 'author' since earlier manuscript texts were not typically authored by living individuals.

A natural further development was the role of professional author, as early as the late sixteenth century, typically supported by wealthy patrons. Each of these developments reflects the emergence of a market and the transformation of the book into a commodity. Although print runs were small by modern standards, cumulative sales over time could be large. Febvre and Martin (1984) estimate that by 1500 up to 15,000 titles had been published, and during the sixteenth century more than a million copies of Luther's translation of the Bible had been printed. There was a thriving book trade, with much export and import between those countries with printing industries, especially France, England, the German states and Italy. In fact many of the basic features of modern media are already embodied in book publishing by the end of the sixteenth century, including the earliest form of reading public. There was the beginning of copyright in the form of privileges granted to printers in respect of certain texts. Various forms of monopoly practice were appearing, for instance the Stationers' Company in London, which was convenient for purposes of censorship, but also offered some protection to authors and maintained standards (Johns, 1998).

The later history of the book is one of steady expansion in volume and range of content and also of struggle for freedom of the press and the rights of authors. Nearly everywhere from the early sixteenth century onwards, government and church authorities applied advance censorship to printed matter, even if not with the effectiveness of a modern totalitarian state. The most famous early and eloquent claim for freedom from government licensing was made by the English poet John Milton in a tract published in 1644 (*Areopagitica*). Freedom of the press went hand in hand with democratic political freedoms and the former was only achieved where democracy had triumphed. This close association remains.

The key features of the book both as a medium and as an institution are summarized in Box 2.1. These typical features are interrelated in the idea of the book as it has been known since the sixteenth century. The 'medium' features relate to technology, form and manner of use and the wider institution of production and distribution.

## The book as a medium and institution: key features 2.1

### *Medium aspects*

- Technology of movable type
- Bound pages, codex form
- Multiple copies
- For personal reading
- Individual authorship

### *Institutional aspects*

- Commodity form
- Market distribution
- Diversity of content and form
- Claim to freedom of publication
- Subject to some legal limits

## Print Media: the Newspaper

It was almost two hundred years after the invention of printing before what we now recognize as a prototypical newspaper could be distinguished from the handbills, pamphlets and newsletters of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Its chief precursor seems, in fact, to have been the letter rather than the book – newsletters circulating via the rudimentary postal service, concerned especially with transmitting news of events relevant to international trade and commerce (Raymond, 1999). It was thus an extension into the public domain of an activity that had long taken place for governmental, diplomatic or commercial

as well as for private purposes. The early newspaper was marked by its regular appearance, commercial basis (openly for sale) and public character. Thus, it was used for information, record, advertising, diversion and gossip.

The seventeenth-century commercial newspaper was not identified with any single source but was a compilation made by a printer-publisher. The official variety (as published by Crown or government) showed some of the same characteristics but was also a voice of authority and an instrument of state. The commercial newspaper was the form which has given most shape to the newspaper institution, and its development can be seen in retrospect as a major turning point in communication history – offering first of all a service to its anonymous readers rather than an instrument to propagandists or authorities.

In a sense the newspaper was more of an innovation than the printed book – the invention of a new literary, social and cultural form – even if it might not have been so perceived at the time. Its distinctiveness, compared with other forms of cultural communication, lies in its orientation to the individual reader and to reality, its utility and disposability, and its secularity and suitability for the needs of a new class: town-based business and professional people. Its novelty consisted not in its technology or manner of distribution, but in its functions for a distinct class in a changing and more liberal social-political climate.

The later history of the newspaper can be told either as a series of struggles, advances and reverses in the cause of liberty or as a more continuous history of economic and technological progress. The most important phases in press history that enter into the modern definition of the newspaper are described in the following paragraphs. While separate national histories differ too much to tell a single story, the elements mentioned, often intermingling and interacting, have all played a part in the development of the press institution. The principal features of the newspaper are summarized in Box 2.2.

## 2.2 The newspaper as medium and institution: key features

### *Medium aspects*

- Regular and frequent appearance
- Print technology
- Topicality of contents and reference
- Individual or group reading
- Institutional aspects
- Urban, secular audience
- Relative freedom, but self-censored
- In public domain
- Commodity form
- Commercial basis

From its early days, the newspaper was an actual or potential adversary of established power, especially in its own self-perception. Potent images in press history refer to violence done to printers, editors and journalists. The struggle for freedom to publish, often within a broader movement for freedom, democracy and citizen rights, is emphasized in journalism's own mythology. The part played by underground presses under foreign occupation or dictatorial rule has also been celebrated. Established authority has often confirmed this self-perception of the press by finding it irritating and inconvenient (although also often malleable and, in the last resort, very vulnerable to power). However, early newspapers did not generally seek to offend authorities and were sometimes produced on their behalf (Schroeder, 2001). Then, as now, the newspaper was likely to identify most with its intended readers.

There has been a steady progression towards more press freedom, despite major setbacks from time to time. This progress has sometimes taken the form of greater sophistication in the means of control applied to the press. Legal restraint replaced violence, then fiscal burdens were imposed (and later reversed). Now institutionalization of the press within a market system serves as a form of control, and the modern newspaper, as a large business enterprise, is vulnerable to more kinds of pressure or intervention than its simpler forerunners were. The newspaper did not really become a true 'mass' medium until the twentieth century, in the sense of directly reaching a majority of the population on a regular basis, and there are still quite large inter-country differences in the extent of newspaper reading (see Box 2.3). There has been a gradual worldwide decline in newspaper reading over the last decade, despite the increase in literacy, with the rise of the Internet probably playing some part (Küng et al., 2008). It has been customary and it is still useful to distinguish between certain types or genres of newspaper (and of journalism), although there is no single typology to suit all epochs and countries. The following passages describe the main variants.

**Percentage of non-readers in the adult population of some European countries (2004/5) (Elvestad and Blekesaune, 2008: 432)**

**2.3**



Norway	4	Poland	30
Switzerland	9	France	39
Estonia	17	Spain	49
Germany	19	Greece	66
United Kingdom	26		

### The party-political press

One common early form of the newspaper was the party-political paper dedicated to the task of activation, information and organization. The party newspaper (published

by or for the party) has lost ground to commercial press forms, both as an idea and as a viable business enterprise. The idea of a party press, even so, still has its place as a component in democratic politics. Where it does survive in Europe (and there are examples elsewhere), it is typically independent from the state (though possibly subsidized), professionally produced, serious and opinion-forming in purpose. Its uniqueness lies in the attachment of its readers by way of shared party allegiance, its sectionalism and its mobilizing function for party objectives. Examples include the 'vanguard press' of the Russian revolutionary movement, the party-political newspapers (especially social democratic) of several Scandinavian countries and the official party press of former communist regimes.

## The prestige press

The late-nineteenth-century bourgeois newspaper was a high point in press history and contributed much to our modern understanding of what a newspaper is or should be. The 'high-bourgeois' phase of press history, from about 1850 to the turn of the century, was the product of several events and circumstances. These included: the triumph of liberalism and the absence or ending of direct censorship or fiscal constraint; the forging of a business-professional establishment; plus many social and technological changes favouring the rise of a national or regional press of high information quality.

The new prestige or 'elite' press was independent from the state and from vested interests and was often recognized as a major institution of political and social life (especially as a self-appointed former of opinion and voice of the 'national interest'). It tended to show a highly developed sense of social and ethical responsibility (in practice fundamentally conformist) and it fostered the rise of a journalistic profession dedicated to the objective reporting of events. Many countries still have one or more newspapers that try to maintain this tradition. By wide consensus, the newspapers still recognized as having an 'elite' status are likely to include the *New York Times*, *The Times* (London), *Le Monde*, *El Pais*, *NRC Handelsblad* (The Netherlands). Current expectations about what is a 'quality' newspaper still reflect the professional ideals of the prestige press and provide the basis for criticisms of newspapers which deviate from the ideal by being either too partisan or too 'sensational', or just too 'commercial'. The prestige press currently seems better placed than most to survive the current pressure on newspapers, by virtue of their importance to a political and economic elite, although to do so it may need to accelerate its transition to online forms.

## The popular press

The last main type of newspaper has been with us for a century or so without much change of essential character. This is the truly 'mass' newspaper that was created for sale to the urban industrial masses and designed to be read by almost everyone. It was a fundamentally commercial enterprise (rather than a political or professional



project) and was made possible by advances in technologies of scale, concentrations of population, the spread of literacy, low cost to the reader and large amounts of advertising revenue. In general, the popular press has always specialized in 'human interest' stories (Hughes, 1940), in dramatic and sensational styles of reporting and presentation, in the coverage of crime, disasters, crises, scandals, war and celebrities. Although not primarily interested in politics, it has often played a political role at key moments in national societies. Because of its typical smaller page format, the term 'tabloid' has been widely applied to this type of newspaper and its contents, as in the term 'tabloidization' (Connell, 1998). This means a process of becoming more sensational, trivial and irresponsible.

### The local and regional press

In many countries, the most important newspaper sectors have been and remain the local and regional press. The forms are too varied to be described as a single type. They can be serious or popular, daily or weekly, urban or rural, with large as well as small circulations. The main features they have in common are: a set of news values relevant to a local readership; a typically consensual and bipartisan approach (although there are exceptions); and a dependence on support from local advertisers. Some local papers are free, others are paid for and they have generally been most threatened by online news and advertising. The status as newspapers or free sheets, often largely devoted to advertising, and now a rapidly rising category, is questionable, although they are regarded as such by readers and some may define themselves as such.

### Other Print Media

The printing press gave rise to other forms of publication than book and newspaper. These include plays, songs, tracts, serial stories, poems, pamphlets, comics, reports, prospectuses, maps, posters, music, handbills, wall newspapers and much more. The single most significant is probably the periodical (weekly or monthly) magazine that appeared in great diversity and with wide circulations from the early eighteenth century onwards. Initially aimed at the domestic and cultural interests of the gentry, it eventually developed into a mass market of high commercial value and enormous breadth of coverage. The periodical magazine still belongs largely to the domestic and personal sphere and supports a wide range of interests, activities and markets. In the early twentieth century it was more like a mass medium than it is today, and its diffuseness and uncertain impact have led to a general neglect by communication research.

These comments apply to the commercial periodical. In many countries there has been and remains a significant opinion-forming or political periodical press, often with an influence beyond its circulation size. At key moments in some societies

particular magazines have played important social, cultural or political roles. In conditions of political oppression or commercial domination, the 'alternative' periodical has often been an essential instrument of resistance and expression for minority movements (see Downing, 2000; Huesca, 2003; Gumucio-Dagron, 2004).

## Film as a Mass Medium

Film began at the end of the nineteenth century as a technological novelty, but what it offered was scarcely new in content or function. It transferred to a new means of presentation and distribution an older tradition of entertainment, offering stories, spectacles, music, drama, humour and technical tricks for popular consumption. It was also almost instantly a true mass medium in the sense that it quite quickly reached a very large proportion of populations, even in rural areas. As a mass medium, film was partly a response to the 'invention' of leisure – time out of work – and an answer to the demand for affordable and (usually) respectable ways of enjoying free time for the whole family. Thus it provided for the working class some of the cultural benefits already enjoyed by their social 'betters'. To judge from its phenomenal growth, the latent demand met by film was enormous. Of the main formative elements named above, it would not be the technology or the social climate but the needs met by the film for individuals that mattered most. The most apparent are those for escape from humdrum reality into a more glamorous world, the wish for strong narratives to be caught up in, the search for role models and heroes, the need to fill leisure time in safe, affordable and sociable ways. In these respects, not much has changed.

The characterization of the film as 'show business' in a new form for an expanded market is not the whole story. There have been three other significant strands in film history. First, the use of film for propaganda is noteworthy, especially when applied to national or societal purposes, based on its great reach, supposed realism, emotional impact and popularity. The two other strands in film history were the emergence of several schools of film art (Huaco, 1963) and the rise of the social documentary film movement. These were different from the mainstream in having either a minority appeal or a strong element of realism (or both). Both have a link, partly fortuitous, with film as propaganda in that both tended to develop at times of *social crisis*.

There continue to be thinly concealed ideological and implicitly propagandist elements in many popular entertainment films, even in politically 'free' societies. This reflects a mixture of forces: deliberate attempts at social control; unthinking adoption of populist or conservative values; various marketing and PR infiltrations into entertainment; and the pursuit of mass appeal. Despite the dominance of the entertainment function in film history, films have often displayed didactic, propagandistic tendencies. Film is certainly more vulnerable than other media to outside interference and may be more subject to conformist pressures because so much

capital is at risk. It is a reflection of this situation that, in the aftermath of the 9/11 attack on the Twin Towers, US government leaders sought a meeting with leaders of the film industry to discuss ways in which film could make a contribution to the newly announced 'war on terror'.

The main turning points in film history have been: the 'Americanization' of the film industry and film culture in the years after the First World War (Tunstall, 1977); the coming of television and the separation of film from the cinema. The relative decline of nascent, but flourishing, European film industries at that time (hastened by the Second World War) probably contributed to a homogenization of film culture and a convergence of ideas about the definition of film as a medium, with Hollywood as a dominant model. Television took away a large part of the film-viewing public, especially the general family audience, leaving a much smaller and younger film audience. It also took away or diverted the social documentary stream of film development and gave it a more congenial home in television, where it appeared in journalistic magazines, special reports and 'public affairs' programming. However, it did not have similar effects on the art film or for film aesthetics, although the art film may have benefited from the 'demassification' and greater specialization of the film/cinema medium. For the first two generations of filmgoers, the film experience was inseparable from having an evening out, usually with friends and usually in venues that were far grander than the home. In addition, the darkened cinema offered a mixture of privacy and sociability that gave another dimension to the experience. Just as with television later, 'going to the pictures' was as important as seeing any particular film.

The 'separation of film and cinema' refers to the many ways in which films can be seen, after initial showing in a film theatre. These include television broadcasting, cable transmission, videotape and DVD sale or hire, satellite TV and now digital broadband Internet and mobile phone reception. These developments have several potential consequences. They make film less typically a shared public experience and more a private one. They reduce the initial 'impact' of mass exposure to a given film. They shift control of selection in the direction of the audience and allow new patterns of repeat viewing and collection. They make it possible to serve many specialist markets and easier to cater for the demand for violent, horrific or pornographic content. They also prolong the life of films. Despite the liberation entailed in becoming a less 'mass' medium, the film has not been able to claim full rights to political and artistic self-expression, and most countries retain an apparatus of licensing, censorship and powers of control.

Although the film/cinema medium has been subordinated to television in many respects, it has also become more integrated with other media, especially book publishing, popular music and television itself. It has acquired a greater centrality (Jowett and Linton, 1980), despite the reduction of its immediate audience, as a showcase for other media and as a cultural source, out of which come books, strip cartoons, songs, and television 'stars' and series. Thus, film is as much as ever a mass culture creator. Even the decline of the cinema audience has been more than compensated by a new domestic film audience reached by television, digital recordings, cable and satellite channels. Key features are summarized in Box 2.4.



## 2.4 The film medium and institution: key features

### *Medium aspects*

- Audiovisual channels of reception
- Private experience of public content
- Extensive (universal) appeal
- Predominantly narrative fiction
- International in genre and format

### *Institutional aspects*

- Subjection to social control
- Complex organization of and distribution
- High cost of production
- Multiple platforms of distribution

## Broadcasting

Radio and television have, respectively, a ninety and a sixty-plus-year history as mass media, and both grew out of pre-existing technologies – telephone, telegraph, moving and still photography, and sound recording. Despite their obvious differences in content and use, radio and television can be treated together in terms of their history. Radio seems to have been a technology looking for a use, rather than a response to a demand for a new kind of service or content, and much the same is true of television. According to Williams (1975: 25), ‘Unlike all previous communications technologies, radio and television were systems primarily designed for transmission and reception as abstract processes, with little or no definition of preceding content.’ Both came to borrow from existing media, and most of the popular content forms of both are derivative from film, music, stories, theatre, news and sport.

A distinctive feature of radio and television has been their high degree of regulation, control or licensing by public authority – initially out of technical necessity, later from a mixture of democratic choice, state self-interest, economic convenience and sheer institutional custom. A second and related feature of radio and television media has been their centralized pattern of distribution, with supply radiating out from metropolitan centres, with little or no return flow. Perhaps because of their closeness to power, radio and television have hardly anywhere acquired, as of right, the same freedom that the press enjoys, to express views and act with political independence. Broadcasting was thought too powerful as an influence to fall into the hands of any single interest without clear limitations to protect the public from potential harm or manipulation.

Television has been continuously evolving, and it would be risky to try to summarize its features in terms of communicative purposes and effects. Initially, the main genre innovation of television stemmed from its capacity to transmit many pictures

and sound live, and thus act as a 'window on the world' in real time. Even studio productions were live broadcasts before the days of efficient video recording. This capacity of simultaneity has been retained for some kinds of content, including sporting events, some newscasting, and certain kinds of entertainment show. What Dayan and Katz (1992) characterize as 'media events' (such as state visits, the Olympic Games, coronations, large political demonstrations) are often likely to have significant live coverage. Most TV content is not live, although it often aims to create an illusion of ongoing reality. A second important feature of television is the sense of intimacy and personal involvement that it seems able to cultivate between the spectator and presenter or the actors and participants on screen.

The status of television as the most 'massive' of the media in terms of reach, time spent and popularity has barely changed over thirty years and it adds all the time to its global audience. Even so, there is now some evidence of gradual decline in total audiences, although significant inter-country differences in its dominance of free time remain, as indicated in a summary way in Box 2.5.

### Differences in time spent with television, 2000 and 2007 **2.5**

Country	Viewing minutes per day	
	2000	2007
United States	299	297
United Kingdom	234	233
Italy	238	239
France	219	214
Netherlands	166	194
Norway	163	154
Czech Republic	19	194
Germany	233	203
Ireland	185	185

(Source: International Television Expert Group, [www.ip-network.com](http://www.ip-network.com))

Despite the fact that television has been largely denied an autonomous political role and is primarily considered a medium of entertainment, it plays a vital role in modern politics. It is considered to be the main source of news and information for most people and the main channel of communication between politicians and citizens, especially at election times. In this informally allocated role of public informer, television has generally remained credible and trusted. Another role is that of educator – for children at school and adults at home. It is also the largest single channel of advertising in nearly all countries, and this has helped to confirm its mass entertainment functions. In terms of its distribution, broadcast television

has fragmented in most countries into many separate channels. Even so, the typical pattern that remains is one in which a few (national) channels are very dominant in audience and financial terms. An enduring feature of the appeal of television seems to lie in the very fact that it is a medium that brings people together to share the same experiences in an otherwise fragmented and individuated society and not only in the circle of the family.

The main features of broadcast television and radio are summarized in Box 2.6.

## 2.6 Television as medium and institution: key features

### *Medium aspects*

- Very diverse types of content
- Audiovisual channels
- Close, personal and domestic association
- Low intensity and involvement experience

### *Institutional aspects*

- Complex technology and organization
- Subject to legal and social control
- National *and* international character
- High public visibility

Radio notably refused to die in the face of the rise of television and it has prospered on the basis of several distinctive features. Competition with television led to a degree of deliberate differentiation. The close supervision of national radio systems relaxed after the rise of television and there was a 'pirate' phase, in which amateurs and independent entrepreneurs set up competing illegal stations. Radio ceased to be a highly regulated national 'voice' and became more free to experiment and to express new, minority and even deviant sounds in voice and music. As a medium, it has much more channel capacity and therefore much greater and more diverse access. It is much cheaper and more flexible in production than television and also cheap and flexible in use for its audience. There are no longer limitations on the place where radio can be listened to or the time of reception, since listening can be combined with other routine activities. It has possibilities for interaction with its audience by way of the telephone and can accommodate many different genres. In fact, radio has flourished since the coming of television, even if it can no longer claim the mass audience of its glory days in the 1940s. The main features discussed are outlined in Box 2.7.

## Radio as medium and institution: key features 2.7

### *Medium aspects*

- Sound appeal only
- Portable and flexible in use
- Multiple types of content, but more music
- Participative (two-way) potential
- Individual and intimate in use

### *Institutional aspects*

- Relative freedom
- Local and decentralized
- Economical to produce

## Recorded Music

Relatively little attention has been given to music as a mass medium in theory and research, perhaps because the implications for society have never been clear, and neither have there been sharp discontinuities in the possibilities offered by successive technologies of recording and reproduction/transmission. Recorded and replayed music has not even enjoyed a convenient label to describe its numerous media manifestations, although the generic term 'phonogram' has been suggested (Burnett, 1990,1996) to cover music accessed via record players, tape players, compact disc players, VCRs (video cassette recorders), broadcasting and cable, etc.

The recording and replaying of music began around 1880 and records were quite rapidly diffused, on the basis of the wide appeal of popular songs and melodies. Their popularity and diffusion were closely related to the already established place of the piano (and other instruments) in the home. Much radio content since the early days has consisted of music, even more so since the rise of television. While there may have been a gradual tendency for the 'phonogram' to replace private music-making, there has never been a large gap between mass-mediated music and personal and direct audience enjoyment of musical performance (concerts, choirs, bands, dances, etc). The phonogram makes music of all kinds more accessible at all times in more places to more people, but it is hard to discern a fundamental discontinuity in the general character of popular musical experience, despite changes of genre and fashion.

Even so, there have been big changes in the broad character of the phonogram since its beginnings. The first change was the addition of radio broadcast music to phonogram records, which greatly increased the range and amount of music available and extended it to many more people than had access to gramophones or jukeboxes. The transition of radio from a family to an individual medium in the post-war 'transistor' revolution

was a second major change, which opened up a relatively new market of young people for what became a burgeoning record industry. Each development since then – portable tape players, the Sony Walkman, the compact disc, music video and ipod – has given the spiral another twist, still based on a predominantly young audience. The result has been a mass media industry which is very interrelated, concentrated in ownership and internationalized (Negus, 1992). Despite this, music media have significant radical and creative strands which have developed despite increased commercialization (Frith, 1981). The growth of music downloading and sharing via the Internet has added to the distribution traffic and seriously challenged the power of music rights holders.

While the cultural significance of music has received sporadic attention, its relationship to social and political events has been recognized and occasionally celebrated or feared. Since the rise of the youth-based industry in the 1960s, mass-mediated popular music has been linked to youthful idealism and political concern, to supposed degeneration and hedonism, to drug-taking, violence and antisocial attitudes. Music has also played a part in various nationalist independence movements. For instance, songs of protest and nationalism were a potent element in the pursuit of independence of Ireland from Britain. More recently, the end of Soviet control of Estonia was described as the ‘singing revolution’ because music enabled people to come together and express their aspirations for restoration of autonomy and the suppressed national culture. While the content of music has never been easy to regulate, its distribution has predominantly been in the hands of established institutions, and its perceived deviant tendencies have been subject to some sanctions. In any case, most popular music expresses and responds to rather enduring conventional values and personal needs, with no subversive aim or potential. These points about music are summarized in Box 2.8.

## 2.8 Recorded music (phonogram) as medium and institution: key features

### *Medium aspects*

- Sound experience only
- Personal and emotional satisfactions
- Main appeal to youth
- Mobile, flexible individual in use

### *Institutional aspects*

- Low degree of regulation
- High degree of internationalization
- Multiple technologies and platforms
- Links to major media industry
- Organizational fragmentation
- Central to youth culture



## The Communications Revolution: New Media versus Old

The expression 'new media' has been in use since the 1960s and has had to encompass an expanding and diversifying set of applied communication technologies. The editors of the *Handbook of New Media* (Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2006) point to the difficulties of saying just what the 'new media' comprise. They choose to define them in a composite way, linking information communication technologies (ICT) with their associated social contexts, bringing together three elements: technological artefacts and devices; activities, practices and uses; and social arrangements and organizations that form around the devices and practices. As noted above, much the same definition applies to 'old media', although the artefacts, uses and arrangements are different. As far as the essential features of 'new media' are concerned, the main ones seem to be their interconnectedness, their accessibility to individual users as senders and/or receivers, their interactivity, their multiplicity of use and open-ended character, and their ubiquity and 'delocatedness' (see also Chapter 6).

Our primary concern in this book is with mass communication, which is closely related to the old media and seems thus to be rendered obsolete by new media. However, as noted already, mass communication is not a process that is limited to mass media nor has it necessarily declined. The new media technologies also carry mass communication activities. Luders (2008) argues that distinctions between mass media and personal media have not been abolished but have become unstable. Even so, the rise of new media is seen by some as a revolt against mass communication, an idea that has a long history in critical theory (see Enzensberger, 1970). The two main driving forces of change were initially satellite communication and the harnessing of the computer. The key to the immense power of the computer as a communication machine lies in the process of digitalization that allows information of all kinds in all formats to be carried with the same efficiency and also intermingled. In principle, there is no longer any need for the various different media that have been described, since all could be subsumed in the same computerized communication network and reception centre (in the home, for instance). So far this has not happened, and it is bound to be a gradual process if and when it does. But we already see many signs of newspaper moving to a life online. Alongside computer-based technologies there are other innovations that have in some degree changed some aspects of mass communication (Carey, 2003). New means of transmission by cable, satellite and radio have immensely increased the capacity to transmit. New means of storage and retrieval, including the personal video recorder, CD-ROM, compact disc, DVD, ipod, etc., have also expanded the range of possibilities, and even the remote control device has played a part. While not directly supporting mass communication, the many new possibilities for private 'media-making' (camcorders, PCs, printers, cameras, mobile phones, etc.) have expanded the world of media and forged bridges between public and private communication and between the spheres of professional and amateur. Finally, we should note the new kinds of 'quasi-media', including computer games and virtual reality devices, that overlap with the media in their culture and in the satisfactions of use.

The implications of all this for mass media are still far from clear, although it is certain that the 'traditional' media have also benefited greatly from new media innovations as well as acquiring new competitors. Secondly, we can already conclude that the communications revolution has generally shifted the 'balance of power' from the media to the audience in so far as there are more options to choose from and more active uses of media available. Traditional mass communication was essentially one-directional, while the new forms of communication are essentially *interactive*. Mass communication has in several respects become less massive and less centralized.

## The Internet

Beyond that, it is useful to distinguish between the implications of enhanced transmission and the emergence of any new medium as such. The former means more speed, capacity and efficiency, while the latter opens up new possibilities for content, use and effects. The foremost claim to status as a new medium and maybe also a mass medium is the Internet. Even so, mass features are not its primary characteristic. The Internet began primarily as a non-commercial means of intercommunication and data exchange between professionals, but its more recent rapid advance has been fuelled by its potential as a purveyor of goods and many profitable services and as an alternative to other means of personal and interpersonal communication (Castells, 2001). The medium is not yet mature or clearly defined, in line with Lievrouw's (2004: 12) still valid assessment that there is 'no overarching killer application of online interaction'. Never the less, there is a case for seeing both search engines and social networking sites as dominant and unique applications. Initially, diffusion proceeded most rapidly in North America and Northern Europe. In the USA, it appeared to reach a ceiling of diffusion in 2001, at around 60% to 70% of the population (Rainie and Bell, 2004), but with much continuing flux. More recent figures indicate even higher household penetration in other countries (Küng et al., 2008). Actual use varies considerably in amount and type and overlap with the use of other media (e.g. music, film, radio). Some applications of the Internet, such as online news, are clearly extensions of newspaper journalism, although online news itself is also evolving in new directions, with new capabilities of content and new forms (as where a member of the public adopts the role of journalist).

The Internet's claim to full medium status is based in part on its having a distinctive technology, manner of use, range of content and services, and a distinct image of its own. However, the Internet has no clear institutional status and is not owned, controlled or organized by any single body, but is simply a network of internationally interconnected computers operating according to agreed protocols. Numerous organizations, but especially service providers and telecommunication bodies, contribute to its operation (Braman and Roberts, 2003). The Internet as such does not exist anywhere as a legal entity and is not subject to any single set of national laws or regulations (Lessig, 1999). Klotz (2004) said that no new legal paradigm for cyberspace has been realized, although it is at too early a stage of development to conclude that there never will be legal framework. At the time of writing, in 2009, this is still the position.

However, those who use the Internet can be accountable to the laws and regulations of the country in which they reside as well as to international law (Gringras, 1997). We return to the question of the Internet in Chapter 6 and elsewhere, but for the moment we can record its chief characteristics as a (mass) medium. Essential features of the Internet are summarized in Box 2.9, without distinguishing between 'medium' and 'institutional' aspects, since the former are so multiple and the latter so undeveloped.

### The Internet as a medium: essential features 2.9

- Computer-based technologies
- Hybrid, non-dedicated, flexible character
- Interactive potential
- Private and public functions
- Low degree of regulation
- Interconnectedness
- Ubiquity and de-locatedness
- Accessible to individuals as communicators
- A medium of both mass and personal communication

## Differences between Media

It is much less easy to distinguish these various media from each other than it used to be. This is partly because some media forms are now distributed across different types of transmission channel, reducing the original uniqueness of form and experience in use. Secondly, the increasing convergence of technology, based on digitalization, can only reinforce this tendency. Newspapers are already widely accessible as text on the Internet, and the telephone system is also delivering media content, especially by way of the Internet. The clear lines of regulatory regime between the media are already blurred, both recognizing and encouraging greater similarity between different media. Thirdly, *globalizing* tendencies are reducing the distinctiveness of any particular national variant of media content and institution. Fourthly, the continuing trends towards integration of national and global media corporations have led to the housing of different media under the same roof, encouraging convergence by another route.

Nevertheless, on certain dimensions, clear differences do remain. There are some obvious differences in terms of typical content. There is also evidence that media are perceived differently in terms of physical and psychosocial characteristics (see Box 6.4, Chapter 6). Media vary a good deal in terms of perceived trust and credibility, although findings vary from country to country. Here we look only at

two enduring questions. First, how *free* is a medium in relation to the wider society? Secondly, what is a medium good for and what are its perceived *uses*, from the point of view of an individual audience member?

## Dimension of freedom versus control

Relations between media and society have a material, a political and a normative or social-cultural dimension. Central to the political dimension is the question of freedom and control. The main normative issue concerns how media ought to use the freedom they have. As noted above, near-total freedom was claimed and eventually gained for the *book*, for a mixture of reasons, in which the claims of politics, religion, science and art all played some part. This situation remains unchallenged in free societies, although the book has lost some of its once subversive potential as a result of its relative marginalization (book reading is a minority or minor form of media use). The influence of books remains considerable, but has to a large extent to be mediated through other more popular media or other institutions (education, politics, etc.).

The *newspaper* press bases its historical claim to freedom of operation much more directly on its political functions of expressing opinion and circulating political and economic information. But the newspaper is also a significant business enterprise for which freedom to produce and supply its primary product (information) is a necessary condition of successful operation in the marketplace. Broadcast television and radio are still generally licensed and have limited political freedom in practice, partly because of their privileged access to scarce spectrum space (despite the proclaimed 'end of scarcity') and partly because of their believed impact and power to persuade. But they are also often expected to use their informative capacity to support the democratic process and serve the public good in other ways. Even so, the current trend is for market forces to have a greater influence on the conduct of broadcasting than either political control or voluntary social responsibility.

The various *new media*, using cable, satellite or telecommunications networks for distribution, still await clear definitions of their appropriate degree of political freedom. The key new medium in this respect is the Internet. Freedom from control may be claimed on the grounds of privacy or the fact that these are not media of indiscriminate mass distribution but are directed to specific users. They are so-called 'common carriers' that generally escape control over their content because they are open to all on equal terms and primarily for personal or business rather than public matters. They also increasingly share the same communicative tasks as media with established editorial autonomy. The unclear status of most new media in respect of freedom is still a matter of dispute, since they are *de facto* very free, but also give rise to widespread fears of misuse.

The intermedia differences relating to *political* control (freedom means few regulations and little supervisory apparatus) follow a general pattern. In practice this means that the nearer any medium gets to operating as a *mass medium*, the more it can expect the attentions of governments and politicians, since it affects the exercise

of power. In general, activities in the sphere of fiction, fantasy or entertainment are more likely to escape attention than are activities that touch directly on the ongoing reality of events and circumstances.

Virtually all media of public communication have a radical potential, in the sense of being potentially subversive of reigning systems of social control. They can provide access for new voices and perspectives on the existing order; new forms of organization and protest are made available for the subordinate or disenfranchised. Even so, the institutional development of successful media has usually resulted in the elimination of the early radical potential, partly as a side-effect of commercialization, partly because authorities fear disturbance to society (Winston, 1986). According to Beniger (1986), the driving logic of new communication technology has always been towards increased control. This generalization is now being tested with reference to the Internet and looks like being validated.

The *normative* dimension of control operates according to the same general principles, although sometimes with different consequences for particular media. For instance, film, which has generally escaped direct political control, has often been subject to self-censorship and to monitoring of its content, on grounds of its potential moral impact on the young and impressionable (especially in matters of violence, crime or sex). The widespread restrictions applied to television in matters of culture and morals stem from the same tacit assumptions. These are that media that are very popular and have a potentially strong emotional impact on many people need to be supervised in 'the public interest'.

However, the more communication activities can be defined as either educational or 'serious' in purpose or, alternatively, as artistic and creative, the more freedom from normative restrictions can usually be claimed. There are complex reasons for this, but it is also a fact that 'art' and content of higher moral seriousness do not usually reach large numbers and are seen as marginal to power relations.

The degree of control of media by state or society depends partly on the feasibility of applying it. The most regulated media have typically been those whose distribution is most easily supervised, such as centralized national radio or television broadcasting or local cinema distribution. Books and print media generally are much less easy to monitor or to suppress. The same applies to local radio, while desktop publishing and photocopying and all manner of ways of reproducing sound and images have made direct censorship a very blunt and ineffective instrument.

The difficulty of policing national frontiers to keep out unwanted foreign communication is another consequence of new technology that promotes more freedom. While new technology in general seems to increase the promise of freedom of communication, the continued strength of institutional controls, including those of the market, over actual flow and reception should not be underestimated. It is also becoming clearer that the Internet is not impossible to control, as once believed, since all traffic can be monitored and traced and some countries have effectively blocked websites and content they dislike and can punish users. There is also extensive self-censorship by service providers in the face of threats or legal uncertainty.

The main issues raised in this section are summarised in Box 2.10 dealing with social control, with particular reference to two aspects: means or types of control and motives.



## 2.10 Social control of media

### *Types of control*

- Censorship of content
- Legal restrictions
- Control of infrastructures
- Economic means
- Self-regulation or self-censorship

### *Motives for control*

- Fear of political subversion
- For moral or cultural reasons
- Combat cyber-crime
- National security

## Dimensions of use and reception

The increasing difficulty of typifying or distinguishing media channels in terms of content and function has undermined once stable social definitions of media. The newspaper, for instance, may now be as much an entertainment medium, or a consumers' guide, as it is a source of information about political and social events. Cable and satellite television systems are no longer confined to offering general programming for all. Even so, a few dominant images and definitions of what media 'are best for' do appear to survive, the outcome of tradition, social forces and the 'bias' of certain technologies.

For instance, television, despite the many changes and extensions relating to production, transmission and reception, remains primarily a medium of family entertainment, even if the family is less likely to be viewing together (see Chapter 16). It is still a focus of public interest and a shared experience in most societies. It has both a domestic and a collective character that seem to endure. The traditional conditions of family living (shared space, time and conditions) may account for this, despite the technological trend to individuation of use and specialization of content. The expected diffusion of digital radio and television might tend to reinforce the latter trend, along with demographic trends to more one-person households, more divorce and fewer children.



## 2.11 Dimensions of media use: questions arising

- Inside or outside the home?
- Individual or shared experience?
- Public or private in use?
- Interactive or not?

The questions about media use in Box 2.11 indicate three dimensions of media reception that mainly apply to traditional media: whether within or outside the home; whether an individual or a shared experience; and whether more public or more private. Television is typically shared, domestic and public. The newspaper, despite its changing content, conforms to a different type. It is certainly public in character, but is less purely domestic and is individual in use. Radio is now many things but often rather private, not exclusively domestic and more individual in use than television. Both the book and the music phonogram also largely follow this pattern. In general, the distinctions indicated have become less sharp as a result of changes of technology in the direction of proliferation and convergence of reception possibilities.

The newer digital media have added to the uncertainty about which medium is good for what purpose, but they have also added a fourth dimension by which media can be distinguished: that of degree of interactivity. The more interactive media are those that allow continual motivated choice and response by users. While the video game, CD-ROM, Internet and telephone chatline are clear examples where interaction is the norm, it is also the case that multi-channel cable or satellite television has an increased interactive potential, as do the recording and replay facilities of the domestic VCR. Interactivity has developed from a simple reaction possibility to the creation and supply of content, as with some social networking sites.

## Conclusion

This chapter has aimed a commentary on the evolution of mass media from the early days of printing in the late Middle Ages to the present age of information communication technology and the information society. It has told the story not as a narrative with dates and descriptions of events, but in terms of brief sketches of the mass media and their main forms, in chronological order. It has highlighted their main characteristics in terms of capacity to communicate, uses for an audience and regard by the larger society. Although the primary distinction is according to a type of technology, equal importance attaches to social, cultural and political factors. Certain technologies survived the evolutionary struggle, so to speak, and some others (not described here) did not make it. The same applies to the various uses to which the media have been put. There is no determining logic at work. Notable is the fact that all the media described are still with us and, in their own way, flourishing, despite recurrent predictions that one master medium would drive out weaker competitors. They have all found a means of adapting to changed conditions and new competitors.

## Further Reading

Briggs, A. and Burke, P. (2005) *A Social History of the Media: from Gutenberg to the Internet*, 2nd edn. Oxford: Polity Press.

A comprehensive overview of the key developments in society and media during the modern era, written by two historians.

## 46 Preliminaries

McLuhan, M. (1962). *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

A seminal book about the revolutionary part played by the printing press in changing European culture and society. With high literary quality and many imaginative insights and examples.

Williams, R. (1975) *Television, Technology and Cultural Form*. London: Fontana. An original analysis by a leading British critical scholar of the cultural consequences of technology, with particular reference to television. It still merits its seminal status.

### Online Readings

Flichy, P. (2006) 'New media history', in L. Lievrouw and S. Livingstone (eds), *The Handbook of New Media*, pp. 187–204. London: Sage.

Gunaratne, S.A. (2001) 'Paper, printing and the printing press', *Gazette*, 63 (6): 459–79.

Lehman-Wilzig, S. and Cohen-Avigdor, N. (2004) 'The natural life cycle of new media evolution', *New Media and Society*, 6 (6): 707–30.

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Stober, S. (2004) 'What media evolution is: a theoretical approach to the history of new media', *European Journal of Communication*, 19 (4): 483–505.