2 The Rise of Mass Media

- From the beginning to mass media 24
- Print media: the book and the library 25
- Print media: the newspaper 27
- Other print media 31
- Film as a mass medium 32
- Broadcasting 34
- Recorded music 36
- The communications revolution: new media versus old 38
- Differences between media 41
- Conclusion 45
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.

We have distinguished already between a process of mass communication and the actual media that make it possible. The fact 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, carried out especially within religious, political and educational institutions. 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 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. 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 Reformation and Counter-Reformation during the sixteenth century are evidence enough. It was the historical moment when the technology for mass communication irrevocably acquired a particular social and cultural definition.

In telling the history of mass media we deal with four main elements that produce distinctive configurations of application and 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 production and distribution;
- organized forms of governance in the ‘public interest’.

These elements do not have a fixed relationship to each other, and what is to be observed has depended very much on the circumstances of the time and place.
Sometimes a technology of communication is applied to a pre-existing need or use, as when printing replaced copying by hand. But sometimes a technology, such as film or broadcast radio, precedes any clear evidence of need. Even the third element of social organization may precede or follow the technology. 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 measure of freedom of thought, expression and action has been a 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, 2001b).

In general, the more open the society, the more inclination there has been to develop communication technology to its fullest potential. 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 is 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.

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 and the Library**

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).
McQuail’s Mass Communication Theory

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 a ‘media institution’. 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 the 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 triumphed. This close association remains.

Box 2.1 The book medium

- Technology of movable type
- Bound pages, codex form
- Multiple copies
- Commodity form
- Multiple (secular) content
- Individual in use
- Claim to freedom of publication
- Individual authorship

Print Media: the Newspaper

It was almost 200 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
McQuail’s Mass Communication Theory

book – newsletters circulating through 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 sphere of an activity that had long taken place for governmental, diplomatic or commercial purposes. The early newspaper was marked by its regular appearance, commercial basis (openly for sale), public character and multiple purpose. 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.

Box 2.2 The newspaper medium

- Regular and frequent appearance
- Commodity form
- Reference to current events
- Public sphere functions
- Urban, secular audience
- Relative freedom
From its early days, the newspaper was an actual or a 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. 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 intercountry differences in the extent of newspaper reading (see Box 2.3). 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.

**Box 2.3** Newspaper sales per 1000 adult population in selected countries, 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Sales per 1000</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Sales per 1000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>720</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>454</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: World Association of Newspapers, World Press Trends*
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 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. 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’.

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
The Rise of Mass Media

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 format, the term ‘tabloid’ has been widely applied to this type of newspaper and its contents, as in the phrase ‘tabloidization’ (Connell, 1998). This means a process of becoming more sensational, trivial and irresponsible.

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); a dependence on support from local advertisers.

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
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 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
The Rise of Mass Media

leaders of the film industry to discuss ways in which film could make a contribution to the newly announced ‘war on terror’.

Three 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. 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. However, it did not do the same for 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 broadband Internet. These developments have several potential consequences. They make film less typically a 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. 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 cinema has been subordinated to television in many ways, 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 loss of the cinema audience has been more than compensated by a new domestic film audience reached by television, video recordings, cable and satellite channels.
McQuail’s Mass Communication Theory

Box 2.4 The film medium

- Audiovisual technology
- From public performance to private experience
- Extensive (universal) appeal
- Predominantly narrative fiction
- More international than national in character
- Subjection to social control
- From mass to multiple markets

Broadcasting

Radio and television have, respectively, an eighty-plus- and a fifty-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 of 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, 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 centre–periphery pattern of distribution and the association of national television with political life and the power centres of society, as it became established as both popular and politically important. Despite, or perhaps because of, this 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.

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’ 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 are significant intercountry differences in its dominance of free time, as indicated in a summary way in Box 2.5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Viewing minutes per day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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. So far, many predictions that mass television would fragment into many different channels, along the model of the magazine, have only been partially realized, although the process is likely to accelerate as digitalization proceeds. Nevertheless one 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.
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. After a pirate phase, radio shed its burden of being 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 more 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.

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, nor 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 and music video – 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 (e.g. Ireland and Estonia). While the content of music has never been easy to regulate, its
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, 2002) 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. The still ongoing ‘communications revolution’ 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 are: 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). In practice there is no sign of this happening. 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, 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, etc., especially in digital form) 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. Beyond that, it is useful to distinguish between the implications of enhanced transmission and the emergence of any new medium as such.

In respect of transmission, the main changes so far have been in the capacity of the networks and the increased volume of traffic, at lower costs all round. Amongst this, one of the most important facts is the emergence of a somewhat new kind of interpersonal network based on the mobile phone, which is still in search of its uses. As far as the traditional media are concerned, there have not yet been major shifts in the type of content or in the range of uses.

**The Internet**

In respect of the emergence of any new medium, we can at least recognize the claim of the Internet (and World Wide Web) to be considered as a medium in its
own right on the grounds of its now extensive diffusion. It began primarily as a
non-commercial means of intercommunication and data exchange between pro-
essionals, 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 interpersonal communication (Castells, 2001). The medium is not yet
mature or clearly defined, in line with Lievrouw’s (2004) assessment that there is
‘no overarching killer application of online interaction’. 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. These authors believe it
will reach the same high penetration as television and the telephone in another
half generation. Actual use varies considerably in amount and type. The fact that
uses of the Internet are often clearly not mass communication is relevant but not
a decisive argument. 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 the public adopts the role of journalist) (see Boczkowski, 2004).

The Internet’s claim to recognition is based in part on its having a distinctive
technology, manner of use, and range of content and services, and a distinct image
of its own. The Internet 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).
However, those who use the Internet can be accountable to the laws and regula-
tions 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.

Box 2.9  The Internet as a medium

- Computer-based technologies
- Hybrid, non-dedicated, flexible character
- Interactive potential
- Private and public functions
- Low degree of regulation
- Interconnectedness
- Ubiquity and delocatedness
- Accessible to individuals as communicators
Differences between Media

It is much less easy to distinguish these 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 edging towards delivery of media content. 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 the physical and psychosocial characteristics. 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?

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
McQuail’s Mass Communication Theory

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. They also increasingly share the same communicative tasks as media with established editorial autonomy. The question remains in dispute for a number of reasons, among them the need for regulation for technical reasons or to prevent abuse of monopoly power.

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, 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 disenchanted. 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. In the last resort, books and print media generally are much less easy to monitor or to suppress. The same applies to local radio, while new possibilities for 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.

**Box 2.10  Social control of media**

*Types of control*

- Of content for political reasons
- Of content for cultural and/or moral reasons
- Of infrastructures for technical reasons
- Of infrastructures for economic reasons

*Conditions associated with control*

- More politically subversive potential
- More moral, cultural and emotional impact
- More feasibility of applying control
- More economic incentive to regulate
McQuail’s Mass Communication Theory

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 (Morley, 1986), 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 seems 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 definition television might tend to reinforce the latter trend, along with demographic trends to more one-person households, more divorce and fewer children.

Box 2.11 Differentiating media use

- 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.
Conclusion

This chapter has been intended to provide a history 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 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

McQuail’s Mass Communication Theory


Key Journal Readings

These journal articles can be accessed from the companion website to this book: www.sagepub.co.uk/mcquail5