Media And Democracy Essay, Research Paper

Media is used to provide information to large audience, such as the general public. These forms of media include newspapers, magazines, motion pictures, radio, television and new media.

From the mankind s earliest days, humans have tried to transmit ideas to one another in a clear and easy way. First such an exchange took place in the form of inter-personal communication. One person told another person something. While this was good for small groups such as families and small villages or tribes, the growth of human population made it necessary to change the structure. The difference that the mankind chooses was the mass communication. The transfer of one idea to many people, started way before 3500BC, however the beginning of mass communication and journalism is with the Sumerians.

In the first 5000 years of journalistic history, innovation came slowly. However, the discovery of paper by the Chinese and the improvements in literature by the Greeks allowed for better innovations later. A printing press can not exist without something to be printed, and without something to be printed upon .

In the 250 years after the innovation of the printing press, western printers began to grow and expend their influence. Gutenberg with his press began a printing revolution. Also in Germany, over 1590 years after Gutenberg, a regularly printed newspaper appeared for the first time. In 22 years, one form of mass communication was born on the pages of a French newspaper.

This fact clearly shows how many people look for information and news. In addition, the beginning of printing press gave way to advertising to have an important place as it now enjoys; its origins start on the pages of a French newspaper 400 years ago.

In 1639, the first printing press came to colonies, and within 100 years the colonies had many newspapers. The desire for information was stronger in colonies, than Europe, simply because people in the colonies lacked information in all kinds. In addition to number of newspapers, the colonies also faced a growth in book publishing in a degree that was never experienced in any European state. But the most significant development was the establishment of a public library in Charleston, South Carolina at the beginning of the 18th century.

In the first half of the 18th century, newspapers began spreading all over the colonies. They began by reporting, but later became a source of information and critique. This critique helped notions of freedom and independence to spread among colonies. American Revolution, which took place in the final quarter of the 18th century, is evidence to this fact.

One of the most important American traditions, the political cartoons found a place in these newspapers, used to affect change of opinion. The first political cartoon was Franklin s join or die cajoling colonists to join against the French in 1754. The importance of Benjamin Franklin can not be neglected. He was America s first Renaissance man. In his youth, he succeeded in using mass communication as a tool of propaganda for his ideas on revolution. His works produced in this period were profound, however he was successful in using the materials provided by the early innovations.

Printing exploded in this time period, but so did other media.

Until the 19th century mass communication heavily depended on transportation. A message could only be sent by a ship or train, on horse back or even in the memory of human courier, until the invention of the telegraph, the first instantaneous system of information movement, in 1837 in the United States by inventor, Samuel F.B. Morse.

The first public telegraph line, completed in 1844, ran about 64km from Washington D.C. to Baltimore, Maryland. Over the next half-century wires were strung across much of the world, even under the Atlantic Ocean by undersea cable (about 1866) connecting Europe and North America.

Despite its achievements, telegraphic communication was limited. It too much depended on the building and maintenance of a complex system of receiving stations wired to each other along a fixed route. The telephone, patented by American inventor Alexander Graham Bell in 1876, required an even more complex system. The two great long distance communications were of no use to ships at sea and very little help to poor nations that could not afford the building of lines. The printed word remained the only medium by which large numbers of people could be addressed simultaneously.

Scientists worked to develop a device that could overcome these limitations of telegraph. In 1895 Italian inventor Guglielma Marconi transmitted a message in Morse Code that was picked about 3km away by a receiving that had no wired connection to Marconi s transmitting device. The invention was cold radiotelegraph (later shortened to radio) . The age of broadcasting had begun.

Broadcasting is a crucial instrument of modern social and political organization. At its peak of influence in the mid20th century, because of its capacity to reach large numbers of people, it was recognized as a significant means of communication.

Within 10 years, radio became a basic tool of the world maritime industry. In spite of all this commercial activity, little attention had been given to consumers in the general public. Instead, experimenters and hobbyists dominated non-maritime broadcasting. These people build their own transmitters and used them to make speeches, pass along information, recite poems, play live or recorded music, or otherwise entertain their fellow amateurs.

With the outbreak of World War I in Europe, wireless transmission became a valuable military tool on land, sea and air. Impressed by its strategic importance and uncertain of its potential as an instrument of mass propaganda, American President Woodrow Wilson banned nonmilitary broadcasting upon the entry of the United States into the war in 1917 .

Also in peacetime, the Westinghouse Electric Corporation established what many consider the first commercially owned radio station to offer a program to the general public. They charged no user fees to listeners and carried no paid advertisement, but was financed by Westinghouse in the aim of increasing their sales of home radios.

Other manufacturers soon followed Westinghouse s example. General Electric Company broadcast on station WGY. RCA (Radio Corporation of America) was another manufacturer aimed to produce home radios for entertainment. One more important early broadcaster was the American Telephone & Telegraph Company (AT & T). Its significance was its aim of being the first to explore the possibilities of toll broadcasting.

According to the estimates by the National Association of Broadcasters, in1922 there were 60000 households in the United States with radios, by 1929 the number had reached 10million. This was the Golden Age of radio. However, the sales could not further increase without advertisement. The sale of advertising time begun with the growth of American Broadcasting. By 1934 almost 600 radio stations were broadcasting to more than 20million homes in the United States. American commercial radio broadcasting had grown to$100million industry by the middle of that decade.

As a medium between the battlefield and listeners at millions hauses, radio reached its peak influence and prestige during the World War II (1939-1945. Both the German leader Adolf Hitler and American President Franklin Delano Roosevelt had often used the radio to bypass the press and directly address the general public.

Radios success urged technology companies to make huge investments in the research and development of a new form of broadcasting called television, or TV. Because of its complicated and expensive technology, the amateurs were not active in the development process of television as they were in radio. The invention of television was a long and coordinated process. The successful transmission of an image in 1884 by German inventor Paul Nipkow, with a mechanical system known as the rotating disk. This was future developed by Scottish scientist John Logie Baird who broadcast a televised image in 1926 to an audience at the Royal Academy of Science in London. The earliest U.S patent for an all-electronic television was granted in 1927 to Philo T. Farnsworth. Meanwhile, the three mass communication corporations- General Electric, Westinghouse and RCA were cooperating with each other closely. During the 1930s, several companies around the world were actively preparing to introduce TV to the public.

Two of the companies, MBC and CBS, had made vast fortunes from radio broadcasting and dominated the television industry. The remaining two, ABC and DuMont Television Network were competing with the disadvantage of having no background in commercial broadcasting business. Other companies not in the business of broadcasting, including Paramount Pictures and the Zenith Corporation, exposed postwar plans to enter the field but were effectively blocked by unfavorable governmental regulatory decisions that were lobbied for by the broadcasting giants. Due to lack of competition, during 30 years of American television, the Big Three s collective share in the business during the primetime hours was typically 95 percent or more.

By the early 1960s, 541 of 600 television stations were commercial and on air, broadcasting daily to about 90 percent of the houses in the United States. By the early 1990s, those numbers had increased 1062 commercial and 338 public stations, and broadcasts were reaching 98 percent of houses in the United States.

As it is understood from the historical development, process of media, the media and its instruments are improving in parallel to the technological developments. Today s media moves toward a dominant age of computers and Internet. Replacement of TV, Radio, newspapers and other instruments of media by online facilities, resulting in cheaper and utilized mass communication.

The final point reached in this marathon is the interconnection of more than 50 million computers all around the world. Although originally Internet was meant to serve simpler needs, nowadays it is becoming a medium of commercial activities and a source of information. People are exchanging their ideas, knowledge and feelings on the net rather than by conventional means of interpersonal communication. The rapid growth of this new type of media so far is certainly evidenced that there is more to come in the near future.

As an example, one important benefit of Internet being used by the whole population in a society may be the return to direct democracy. Can people decide on the issues of national politics even without leaving their homes ? Can this new medium of communication be used as a tool to realize what was once seen as the impossible ?

Certainly, the physical limitations are disappearing in small scale for now. However, the speed of technological advancement will one day overcome the problem of time and space and thus will enable democracy to be performed as it was in ancient Greece.

As presented up to this point, there is a mutual bond between media and democracy throughout history. In this entire time media has served democracy in various ways from election campaigns to warfare propaganda. However, this service has not yet reached its final limits. From the current situation it is obvious that media will be an indivisible part of democracy in the future by providing it its best form ever thought in the history of mankind.

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