

Symbols to Social Media: Tracing the Transformative Journey of Human Communication

Mass media and communication surround our modern existence, shaping how we connect with others, learn, and perceive the world around us. The history of mass media and communication is all about transformation. Early civilizations and The Gutenberg Revolution are necessary for media and communication today. By examining critical historical milestones and their interconnectedness, we gain insight into how these elements have profoundly impacted society, politics, culture, and the exchange of ideas.

The emergence of written language in early civilizations marked a significant milestone in the development of print and media. According to Chapter One in the textbook, "Symbols are things whose special meaning allows us to conceive, express, and communicate ideas" (Schmandt-Besserat, pg. 5). Symbolic systems began to emerge during the transition from the Paleolithic to the Neolithic period, including incised bones, tallies, and token systems. These early forms of communication were necessary because they allowed early civilizations to convey thoughts and information to others. In today's society, we still use forms of evolved symbols in everyday life. For example, emoticons. In an era dominated by texting, tone and emotion can be challenging to convey. Emoticons use expressive facial expressions and symbols to bridge this gap. They help to convey deeper emotions that text alone struggles to get across.

Our society relies heavily on visual symbols to communicate. An example of this is the stop sign. It is an instantly recognizable symbol that goes beyond language barriers and

efficiently conveys a simple but crucial message of "Stop." These examples help to illustrate how the early civilizations' use of symbolic communication continues to shape our modern world.

Another important historical milestone was The Gutenberg Revolution, catalyzed by Johannes Gutenberg's invention of the printing press in the 15th century. This was one of history's most transformative mass media and communication developments. As stated in chapter 10 of the textbook, "It is like mechanical inventions to spread widely from their original center, the spread of printing and the accessory arts upon which it depends, like that of papermaking, is one that wove into a single web the cultures of the East and West, with each part contributing its share to the final product" (Mumford, pg.85). What Lewis Mumford is saying here is that the spreading of printing technology and related processes, such as papermaking, had a unique quality, in contrast to the way that mechanical inventions typically grow and become popular from their place of origin. The invention of printing and related technologies did not cause culture to spread outward from a single place but connected and merged various civilizations, especially those of the East and West. As a result, the printing revolution's outcome was influenced by both Eastern and Western traditions. The invention of the printing press democratized access to printed materials, revolutionizing literacy. Gutenberg's press made books more accessible and affordable, expanding society's literacy. Books were no longer just an exclusive luxury for the wealthy and religious but a luxury everyone could enjoy. The transformative impact of the printing press and printed materials had a lasting effect on the world. It fostered a well-educated, literate population and encouraged society to engage with information, ultimately leading to a new era of enlightenment. This period was the foundation for the modern education systems and was responsible for developing a literate society.

Lastly, the mass media and communication world is ever-changing and growing. In a world with rapid technological advancements, mass media and communication's continued evolution remain most important, influencing how we interact and engage with one another and the nature of our societal, political, and cultural dynamics. The relevance of mass media and communication is intrinsically linked to the functioning of the public sphere. This idea came around by a German philosopher, Jürgen Habermas. According to him, the public sphere is "A realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed" (Habermas, pg.49). The public sphere served as a platform for spreading printed materials and forming public opinion. Individuals from diverse social backgrounds came together to engage in rational discourse on matters of shared interest, including politics, philosophy, science, and culture. This notion differed from traditional authority and hierarchical social structures, emphasizing the power of reason, dialogue, and informed public opinion. These media channels serve as a channel for information, opinions, and discussions, allowing individuals to engage in informed, diverse, and inclusive debates on matters of societal importance. As such, mass media plays a vital role in shaping the dynamics of modern democracies and influencing public discourse. A prominent example of mass media is the use of social media. Social media platforms give voices to more divergent opinions that affect people. The influence of mass media on politics, policy decisions, and social movements significantly influences society. Some examples of this happening are through television, newspapers, and social media. Mass media shapes cultural norms, such as portraying gender roles and cultural representations, or even influences a family dynamic. The media also has the power to shape the public's opinion and mobilize communities.

The ever-changing and evolving world of mass media and communication will remain relevant in today's society. As technology advances and new forms of media are created, their influence on society, politics, and culture will persist, driving us to critically examine their impact and the evolving nature of the public sphere. From the symbolic systems of early civilizations to the Gutenberg Revolution, we have witnessed the power of communication shaping literacy, knowledge, and societal progress. The printing press democratized access to printed materials, leaving a mark on the education systems and fostering a more literate society. In a period characterized by the digital revolution and information abundance, these channels serve as conduits for disseminating news, ideas, entertainment, and cultural exchange.

References

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