

Evolution of mass communication



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Mass communication represents an important milestone in the history of mankind. While it is a relatively new phenomenon, mass communication is certainly one of those that made the most impact. Mass media refers to media that is explicitly meant to reach a very large audience, like an entire population of a country. The seed of mass media was planted as early as the 1400s when German inventor Johannes Gutenberg introduced the first mechanical printing. There is a debate over the degree of influence mass media have on its intended audience, with some saying that it has a "powerful influence," while others claim it has a "limited influence." However, the truth over the persuasive effects of mass media is incontrovertible.

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There had been past references to the power of mass media to influence its audience in a large measure, but it was in the 1920s and 1930s, through the growing influence of radio and newspapers, that theories were formulated.

One of the earliest theories on mass media is called Magic Bullet. This concept is anchored on the early thinking that messages were like magic bullets that struck the audience equally, creating uniform effects in terms of perception. It is postulated on the belief that everyone is passive and equally susceptible to media messages.

A classic application of the Magic Bullet Theory happened on October 30, 1938, when on the eve of Halloween, regular radio program was interrupted for the first time with a "news bulletin" that Martians had begun an invasion of Earth in Gower's Mill, New Jersey. About 12 million people in the United States heard the broadcast, with at least one million actually believing that a serious alien invasion was happening, creating a wave of hysteria that triggered traffic jams and clogged communication lines. The aftermath of the

broadcast suggested that media could manipulate a passive and gullible public, leading media theorists to believe the power of mass media.

Not everyone believed in this theory, suggesting other paradigms to explain the effects of mass media on its audience. Paul Lazarsfeld, for example, believes that mass media has limited effect on their audiences, especially depending on social factors, like preconceived beliefs. This paradigm is referred to as the "limited effects" or tradition, such that existing opinions are merely reinforced but not changed, and accepting and responding persuasive communications that are in line with their own predispositions. Certain studies were conducted, hypotheses were formulated, and conclusions were drawn from scholarly researches using empirical approaches with the end of persuasively selling a particular commercial brand or a candidate for an elective post using the mass media. While the truth over the persuasive effects of mass media is incontrovertible, debates continue to rage over the extent of its effectiveness.

Discussion

In the meantime, the mass media has developed into newer and more powerful strains, one that affects not just a particular territory, but one that covers a practically borderless domain through the advent of the Internet and the Worldwide Web. The battle for the hearts and minds of target audiences are no longer confined within a certain territory or a nation state, but in a borderless and global playing field.

With the advent of globalization, a term that refers to the increasing global connection of people and places resulting from advances in transportation and information technologies, there is then a need to redefine the effects of mass media in the context of a broader base of audiences fused together as

a result of a new era of political, economic, and cultural convergence.

My thinking is that we should redefine the debate over the extent of the influence of mass media not just within the confines of a nation-state, but within the realm of the new global reality where time and distance no longer serve that much of a communication barrier. Or put in another way, where time and distance no longer restricts the power and scope of influence of mass media.

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