

Module	Communications History
Course code	BACMH-CH
Credits	5
Allocation of marks	50% Continuous Assessment
	50% Final Examination

Module aims and objectives

The module provides an analysis of the historical evolution of human communication. The world we live in today is one where humans communicate and share information in an ever-growing range of media, from text to satellites, from billboards to blogs. The module introduces learners to the key events and epochs in the history of human communications. Learners analyse the impact of key changes in communications media, starting from the earliest known forms of media, through to the invention of the printing press, the emergence of a literate reading public, the development of newspapers, the invention of radio, film and television, and into the digital age.

Minimum intended module learning outcomes

On successful completion of this module, the learner will be able to:

- (i) Account for the transformative impact of writing on human society
- (ii) Outline the context within which various media emerged
- (iii) Analyse how media have impacted on politics and culture throughout history
- (iv) Discuss the likely social consequences of new communications media

Module content, organisation and structure

This module introduces learners to the key events and epochs in the history of human communications. Learners analyse the impact of key changes in communications media, starting from the earliest known forms of media, through to the invention of the printing press, the emergence of a literate reading public, the development of newspapers, the invention of radio, film and television, and into the digital age.

Underlying all of these successful media are three common conditions: in each case an identifiable social demand emerged for the product, a stable usable technology was developed and, it was a profitable business venture for those involved. Also, we find what is to be learned from media history, where, with the advent of each new media format the existing power structures in society were disrupted and a struggle for control of the new medium took place.

Module Curriculum

Indicative Syllabus

Origins and Development of Writing: explores how writing originated in the early agrarian civilisations as a form of record keeping and how it gradually evolved into more complex and versatile forms of communication. Its development is mapped through its links with law, state-organisation, commerce and religion.

Printing and the spread of literacy: looks at how the emergence of printing was linked to wider changes characteristic of Renaissance Europe and which in turn played a significant role in promoting religious and intellectual changes that encouraged a much wider spread of literacy, and of literate practices, including the rise of the novel.

Newspapers: this examines the early rise of newspapers and their role into the creation of a public sphere. It also explores the later development of mass newspapers and their relationship to the emerging democracy.

Radio: This topic looks at the development of radio from the early 20th century through to its later displacement by television as the major electronic mass media. It looks at the different models of radio that arose in the United States and Europe and how they came to shape the medium. It also examines the advantages and disadvantages of radio in comparison to newspapers.

Cinema: The cinema was simultaneous the major art form of the 20th century and a leading form of mass entertainment. This looks at the development of cinema from its origins, paying particular attention to its institutional and industrial consolidation.

Television: Television's rise and its links to the development of consumer societies; the erosion of barriers between advertising and entertainment (and increasingly news). How television has changed perceptions of politics.

Internet: explores the emergence of the internet and how it has rapidly become the most important means of communications across the globe. It looks at the economic effects of the internet alongside the political and cultural consequences of the rise of social media.

Media and power in the 21st century: the concluding topic looks at some of the key developments in 21st century media: globalization and the growing concentration of media ownership and increase use of media in mass surveillance.

Reading lists and other information resources

Recommended Reading

Briggs, A & Burke P (2010) 'The Print Revolution in context', chapter 2 of Briggs & Burke *A Social History of the Media*. Oxford: Polity.

Branston, Gill (2000) *Cinema and Cultural Modernity*, (especially the first three chapters)

Curran, James (2018) *Power without Responsibility*. London: Routledge.

Curran, James (2012) 'Re-interpreting the Internet', chapter one of J. Curran et al, (eds.) *Misunderstanding the Internet*. London: Routledge.

Diamond, Jared (1998) 'Blueprints and borrowed letters', chapter 12 of J. Diamond *Guns, Germs and Steel*. NY: Vintage

Harman, Chris (2017) Chapters 1 & 2 of *A People's History of the World*. London: Verso.

Kovarik, B, (2016) *Revolutions in Communication: Media History from Gutenberg to the Digital Age* 2nd Edition. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

McChesney, Robert W. (1999) *The New Global Media: It's a Small World of Big Conglomerates, The Nation*

Seaton, Jane (2018) 'Broadcasting History', chapter 2 of Curran & Seaton *Power without Responsibility*. London: Routledge.

Williams, Raymond (1990) *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, 2nd edition. London: Routledge

