

## INTRODUCTION

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# Approaches to Media History

The significance of the media can hardly be overestimated. They transmit, create and store information and in so doing influence perception, knowledge and memory. They put their seal on politics, economy and culture and are an important part of free-time activity and daily discourse. Exceptional events such as wars and revolutions are bound up with the media, as are long-term developments and interpretive patterns like nationalism, religious and ideological groupings and gender roles. Seen in this light, the media are not merely a virtual 'mirror' of something 'real', but are themselves part and parcel of social realities. The family sitting in front of the television and the politician reading a newspaper are as real as the media themselves, their contents and their creators. They often seem invisible. Yet the simple act of believing in the media's power can cause people to change the way they act and speak. Nowadays, the media themselves regularly emphasise their own importance, and the role of the media in elections, armed conflicts and in society in general has become newsworthy.

The historical significance of the media did not begin with the Internet age. If the media are interpreted in the broadest sense as a means of communication, then they have been an essential component of human history since the beginning, because gestures, speech and writing have always structured human communication. Even if one considers 'only' the technical 'mass media', as this book does, it is clear that these have played a defining role at least since the advent of printing, which gave numerous people regular access to collective communication sources. Furthermore, each new medium in its turn altered perceptions, actions and meanings because one and the same concept is formulated, understood and interpreted differently depending on whether it appears on parchment, in a pamphlet or on television.

Thus this book shows how new media have emerged and have been used since the invention of printing and how they have influenced societal developments. The social and cultural history of the media rather than the history of technology and ideas will be given priority. It is the intention of this book

to provide an overview of the evolution of media and their impact on societies, and to point out various approaches and suggestions to encourage future research.

Almost every international study has and maybe needs a certain point of view. Unlike other studies, this book does not focus mainly on the American or British perspective. On the one hand, it looks at international and transnational developments in the Western world and in other countries in which a new media market emerged. Besides Western Europe and the United States, China and Japan in particular will be addressed. On the other hand, the German perspective stands in the centre of this transnational study, as it might offer a different view to the familiar debates and research in the United States and Britain.

There are good reasons to choose such a perspective. Many new media emerged in early modern Germany, like the printing revolution in the fifteenth century and the first newspaper in 1605. Germany was the biggest media market in the world in terms of the number of journals, newspapers and pamphlets published up until the nineteenth century. Even in the twentieth century, when the United States became the leading country in the development and distribution of media, German film studios, printing houses and broadcasting stations were still amongst the strongest internationally. Furthermore, German mass media were to a great extent part of transnational networks and developments. German book printers spread their knowledge throughout Europe and founded newspapers in other countries. In the twentieth century, German media stood in the centre of international conflicts – due to the world wars, Allied occupation and the Cold War, but also due to globalised media markets. Especially those chapters about media and fascism and about the Cold War will analyse East and West Germany in the context of Western and socialist developments. Finally, there is a long and rich German tradition of research in national and international media history, which is not that well known in the English-speaking world so far. Consequently, this book offers an alternative view to those very few books on international media history, which take an anglophone perspective and seldom pick up German literature (cf. Briggs and Burke 2002; Chapman 2005; Simonson et al. 2012).

At the same time, this introduction into media history wants to break up the traditional national master narratives and perspectives of single countries. For instance, the history of book printing did not start in Europe, but in East Asia. Consequently, this book starts with the history of printing in China and Korea and compares these developments to those in Europe, and especially Germany. And due to the fact that popular journalism first arose in the United States and Britain, these countries and their influence play a significant role in the chapters concerning nation building and modernity. Media have always connected across borders, even when they stimulated national movements or

prejudices against other countries. Consequently, the research of media should have an international perspective, especially when we look at the circulation of news or media techniques.

## Research Traditions

Analyses of media development have a long tradition. Studies about newspapers abounded in Germany as early as the last third of the seventeenth century, including the first Ph.D. thesis on newspaper developments (sources in: Kurth 1944; Pompe 2004: 35f.). In the middle of the nineteenth century in particular, comprehensive accounts intended to underline the historical power of the press appeared in many West European countries in the wake of liberal movements: in France they were authored by Léonard Gallois (1845) and Eugène Hatin (8 vols, 1859–61), in England by Frederick Knight Hunt under the programmatic title *The Fourth Estate* (1850), and in Germany by Robert Prutz, who described journalism as one of the ‘excellent tools’ for the ‘democratic principle of history’ (Prutz 1845: 84). An early international newspaper history, including a descriptive summary, even appeared at this time (cf. Coggeshall 1856). Since the end of the nineteenth century, numerous studies on a variety of media have followed, carried out in the disciplines of economics, history, sociology and philology.

At the same time, examining the historical role of the media is a certain novelty. This is especially true concerning historical scholarship, which did not begin an intensive debate of their significance until the 1990s. Also, media studies have expanded their historical research in recent decades. This increased historical interest is due to the media’s omnipresence in the Internet age. In this process, computer and Internet have historicised the now ‘old’ media, rendering them objects of research. Furthermore, this ‘cultural turn’ has strengthened awareness of communication, focusing the attention of researchers on popular culture as well as media-based perceptions and discourses. In fact, even our present-day term ‘media’ is new. The American expression ‘mass media’ had already surfaced in the 1920s, but it was not until the 1950s that this term (‘Medien’) was adopted in a country like Germany to describe communication tools capable of reaching a vast audience (for the history of the term, see Hoffmann 2002). Researchers initially spoke of ‘journalism’ or ‘communication’.

The question of defining the term ‘media’, but also the methods and focal points of media history are highly controversial, especially among German researchers. Anglo-Saxon media accounts are much more pragmatic: usually they eschew debates about terminology, and proceed from the vernacular meaning of ‘media’ in the sense of ‘mass media’ and use this in their media history (Briggs and Burke 2002; Chapman 2005; Williams 2010). Also,

studies titled as ‘communication history’ prefer a general definition of communication and concentrate on mass media like print, film, radio, television and ‘new media’ (Simonson et al. 2012: 1). In Germany the concepts of ‘media’ and ‘media history’ operate very differently, depending on which research field is at work. The approaches taken by media historians of the social and communication sciences (*Kommunikationswissenschaft*) are very clearly differentiated from those of cultural media studies (*Medienwissenschaft*, often translated as ‘Media Culture Studies’).

Communication studies is the discipline that has been analysing media history for the longest. It was established in the United States during the 1920s as a way to examine the function of public opinion with the tools of social science. In the 1920s, many American scholars published studies on the historical content and impact of the press and publishers. During the following decade, the propaganda of European dictatorships was the primary factor triggering empirical research of media influence, with Harold Lasswell and Paul F. Lazarsfeld conducting groundbreaking studies about radio and opinion polls. In general, the 1970s are seen as the period when communication history emerged as an important field (see a brilliant survey in Simonson et. al. 2013: 13–57).

In Germany, and in Western Europe generally, studies of journalism and newspapers (*Zeitungswissenschaft*), which use the approaches of historians and the humanities, have also gained a foothold at several universities since the 1920s. Since the 1960s the field of communication studies in (West) Germany has increasingly adopted American approaches, which are more sociological in character. To the present day a narrow concept of ‘the media’ (i.e. press, radio, cinema and television) is typical here, interpreting them primarily as technical tools ‘suitable for disseminating messages to a potentially unlimited public’ (Wilke 2008: 1; Stöber 2003, Vol. 1: 10).

In marked dissociation from traditional studies on press history so far, media studies oriented towards cultural studies have been established in many Western countries since the 1970s. One starting point was the new openness of literary studies towards pop culture; another was the wide reception of Marshall McLuhan’s interpretation of the media. McLuhan propagated a wide definition of media: he saw them as bodily extensions, among which he included things like eyeglasses, money and the wheel (McLuhan [1964] 2001). According to McLuhan, the actual message of a medium lies in its social effects, the alteration of the yardstick, speed or pattern it brings to the human condition. Consequently, many Western countries have witnessed the appearance of studies that inquire into the relationship between media and cultural practices, and postulate the defining power of media practices for the general developments of societies in certain periods (e.g. Poe 2010). Within the sphere of media studies there are heterogeneous schools with ethical, philosophical or technical

focal points, united predominantly by their culture-studies approach and their broad interpretation of the media concept. Thus their media accounts quite openly define the object of their research as ‘interaction coordinators’ (Hörisch 2004: 66) or as ‘complex, entrenched transmission facilities that organise and regulate communication’ (Faulstich 2006a: 8). Because of this broad interpretation, their media histories often begin in pre- or early history or in antiquity. Thus ‘Woman and the Sacrificial Rite’ were considered the first media, since they represented ‘sacred communication principle’ (ibid.: 18), or fire, tools and the human voice (Hörisch 2004: 30–39). Depending on the school of thought, priority is given to the aesthetic analysis of various media products (especially films) as well as the changes that have taken place in knowledge, order, practices and perceptions during the course of media formation. The wide reception of the cultural study approaches of the ‘Birmingham School’ (like Stuart Hall and John Fiske) has led to a different perception of the audience as active individuals decoding messages.

Historical scholarship dealing with research in media history lies somewhere between these disciplines. Media analysis was long frowned upon by historians, since journalists and journalistic sources were held to be dubious and historical scholars used archival sources as a means of establishing distance. The German historian Martin Spahn made an early attempt in 1908 to re-evaluate media sources at the International Congress of Historical Sciences, where he voiced the prognosis that the press ‘would become the most valuable of all sources for every chronicler of modern history’ (Spahn 1908). Consequently, as a professor in Cologne, he called for the establishment of a national newspaper museum and sponsored many papers on press history. Moreover, since the end of the nineteenth century a number of historical studies on individual media have appeared. These have addressed aspects of journalistic policy and control, specific media such as pamphlets and newspapers, and leading figures in publishing. At least some newspaper histories were published in the first half of the twentieth century. However, most historians continued to regard the media merely as sources to be accessed occasionally for the purpose of enlivening an illustration or unobtrusively investigating causes and effects.

A first increase in historical media studies can be found in the 1970s, when the emergence of social and cultural history supported the interest in popular culture and media history. Seminal writings about the underground press and the rumours circulating prior to the French Revolution were especially influential in this context (Darnton 1982). International research on printing in the context of the Reformation received additional impetus as well (like Elizabeth L. Eisenstein 1979). Nevertheless, only since the late 1990s has there been an overwhelming increase in the number of publications on media history that differ in their methodology.

The concept of media as now understood in the context of historical scholarship has become quite diverse. Yet historians tend to prefer a narrow interpretation of the term, and they concentrate their studies on technically produced mass media for broad audiences. The majority of historians define media as artefacts whose purpose it is to enable communication and fulfil tasks such as recording, storage, transmission, multiplication and reproduction, playback and processing of information (Crivellari and Sandl 2003: 633). In general, the media history branch of historical scholarship concerns itself less with the media themselves than with their respective social, cultural and political significance.

If one makes up a balance sheet of these examples of research trends, there has been a change from studying media history towards studying the mediality of history (Crivellari et al. 2004: 30). From this perspective, the historical view of the media not only represents a new specialisation within historical scholarship (like political, social or economic history), but is grounded in modernity, and in particular in modern historical processes, contemporary experience and personal memory (Lindenberger 2004). This does not mean that one must proceed from a kind of media-technological determinism, as some media scientists postulate (Poe 2010). The nature of the roles played by the media depends on prevailing social parameters and media users. Furthermore, one must be wary of concentrating too strongly on the effects of media, which can hardly be determined in detail in any case.

Media respond to societal needs and thus are a part of history as a whole. The million-fold increase in demand that determines their function and modus operandi was not created simply through technical innovations but rather by a social framework and users, who in turn generate needs. In any case, the new media have always concurrently changed the old and occasionally pushed them aside. Now and again the new media have taken on the structures of the old, establishing their own logics that in turn redound on society. Why new media come into existence at all, and then manage to assert themselves, has been attributed to various needs, such as higher speed as a power resource (Virilio 1989), new technology for waging war (Kittler 1995), greater focus on the senses (Hörisch 2004: 14) and improving the function of previous media (Stöber 2003 Vol. 2: 216).

The assumption that there would be continual media innovation was contrasted with the concept of compacted 'media upheavals' that would manifest themselves in discourse, society and technology (Käuser 2005). Such upheavals in media history tend to go hand in hand with history in general. Seen in this light, the introduction of printing in Europe marked the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Modern Era; the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century corresponded to the establishment of periodicals, and the late nineteenth century, which witnessed the birth of the mass press,

telegraphy, photography, phonograph and film, is considered the beginning of Classical Modernity. The expansion of digital media during the 1990s also corresponded to a new epochal turning point.

Accounts that discuss the international media history are rare. Next to a few international handbooks about the history of specific media such as newspapers (Smith 1979) or films (Nowell-Smith 1996), two studies have recently appeared that proceed from British and American perspectives in making international comparisons. The British scholar Jane Chapman published a well-written, concise introduction to the history of journalism and the media since 1789, but focusing primarily on the twentieth century (Chapman 2005). The most comprehensive study so far is the *Social History of the Media* by the historians Asa Briggs and Peter Burke (2002), which is even more concerned with the respective historical roles played by the media, especially the mass media, since the introduction of printing.

## Current Research on German Media History

Research on German media history has a long tradition, but it is in many respects not as advanced as the one in Britain or the United States. Anyone interested in getting information about the broad development of German media history already has a few very different overviews at his/her disposal. An example of the German cultural media studies communication science (*Medienwissenschaften*) is Jochen Hörisch's (2004) essayistic account in which he takes an original look at media in the broadest sense, presenting attributes ascribed to the media, beginning with fire. However, he gives less information about concrete media producers, users or contents. Several publications from the perspective of the German cultural media studies were published by Werner Faulstich (abridged version: Faulstich 2006a/b; multi-volume 1996ff.). His 'cultural history of the media' asks which control and orientation functions were taken over by the respective media, from the 'human media' (woman, priest, etc.) and 'formative media' (wall, sheet, etc.) to print, electronic and digital media. However, mass media are rarely mentioned here and reviewers criticised many fundamental mistakes in Faulstich's books. The German *Handbuch der Mediengeschichte* [Handbook of Media History] (Schanze 2001) and the partly historical *Handbuch der Medienwissenschaften* [Compendium of Media Studies] (Leonhard et al. 1999–2002) focus more on high culture (like theatre, music, books and film) and also briefly introduce various approaches to the subject, such as media law, media sociology and media pedagogy, but neither book gives specific consideration to historical scholarship. A new introductory work for undergraduates (Böhn and Seidler 2008) gives a brief presentation of typological characteristics of each

individual media innovation. Previous media histories from the field of communication science clearly had a different emphasis; they concentrated mainly on the specific history of press, radio and television as well as their producers, and on the dissemination, control and reception of these media (Stöber 2003; Wilke 2008). These studies are similar to introductory works about other Western countries like Great Britain (Williams 2010) and the United States (Fellow 2005). However, they were less interested in the historical context and more in the media itself.

Looking at current studies on German media history, one can highlight different main areas of research. Since historians have long accorded politics a privileged position, one aspect receiving much attention is the relationship between the media and politics. Older studies stressed the methods of censorship and repression that targeted both media and public, whether these were found in absolutistic regimes, constitutional monarchies, dictatorships or democracies. Newer studies have more closely examined the deliberate participation of rulers in public communication, ranging from the 'propaganda' of monarchs to the types of communication used in wars or political campaigns (Gestrich 1994; Burkhardt 2002). Most recently, the question has been posed in reverse: How has change in the media caused political change? The latter is analysed as a communication space whose symbolic make-up is strongly defined and constituted by the media (cf. e.g. Bösch 2009). In this perspective it even becomes possible to study the prevailing media foundation of such classic 'arcane areas' as foreign policy (Geppert 2007; Bösch and Hoeres 2013).

Another focal point of German media history, which is much more related to social history, is the examination of public spheres. This analysis first came up with Jürgen Habermas's book *Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (1962/1989), and continued on an international scale after it was translated into English nearly thirty years later as *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989) (cf. e.g. Calhoun 1992; Barker and Burrows 2002). In the forefront were the questions of who could participate in public communication, what consequences this would have for the formation of social groupings, and how media and personal communication would interact. By now, public spheres were quite openly being defined as generally accessible communication spaces. The plural here underlines the assumption that there are also sub-spaces that may differ in ideological, functional and regional ways (Requate 1999; Führer, Hicketier and Schildt 2001). Many studies exist for the Early Modern Era, but this concept was hardly used for contemporary history. Recent research has analysed how the public spheres interacted in the media and in assemblies – for example at protests, in social movements and in parliaments (Stamm 1988; Vogel 2010).

Only a few studies researched the concrete usage of media and their significance for daily life. Here too one finds important impulses originating in the



Early Modern Era, such as studies on reading practices (Würgler 2009: 97). Studies dealing with the twentieth century have researched public and private usage of the 'mass media' based on social class differences (Schildt 1995; Führer 1996; Ross 2008). Up to and into the 1950s, it was difficult to discover exactly which media people chose to access, what significance these had for their daily lives and how they spoke about them, since no surveys on media usage are available for this period. For this reason researchers have used, for instance, informers' reports about audience behaviour in cinemas during dictatorships (Paech and Paech 2000; Stahr 2001), or about conversations about newspapers at the time of the German Empire (Bösch 2004). Media usage in the GDR was determined by questioning contemporaries (Meyen 2003).

More and more studies on German media history became interested in the question how newly evolving media transformed society, social practices and perceptions (methodology based on communication science: Behmer et al. 2003). At the same time, new media are themselves understood as components, expressions and consequences of societal change. There were early studies on the societal effects of new media technology in relation to book printing (Eisenstein [1979] 2005), as well as to fields like the history of crime (Curtis 2001; Müller 2005), consumption, brand name products in everyday life (Gries 2003), and the role of the media in the urban culture of Berlin around 1900 (Fritzsche 1996). In the course of this, the concept of 'medialisation' (or 'mediatisation') was established as a means of understanding the media's increasing penetration of societal systems, their socialising effects and the mutual impact of media and social change (Meyen 2009; Daniel and Schildt 2010: 23).

In contrast to British and American media history, studies on Germany have seldom used biographical approaches. While several biographies of major Anglo-Saxon publishers like Lord Northcliffe and William Randolph Hearst are available, nothing comparable as yet exists for German media moguls like Ullstein, Scherl and Mosse, and there is only a very recent biography of such a key figure as Axel Springer, who was the biggest news publisher in Europe post-1945 (Schwarz 2008). The most groundbreaking studies are those dealing with group biographies among nineteenth-century journalists from the standpoint of social history (Requate 1995), and the transition to critical journalism around 1960 from a generational vantage point (Hodenberg 2006). It would have been especially desirable to have more studies on the daily work routine of 'ordinary' journalists in the twentieth century, and of foreign correspondents (Esser 1998; Bösch and Geppert 2008).

Instead, manifold studies concentrated on the contents of print media. Before the 1980s, many of these viewed historical events as they were reflected in specific newspapers and journals and occasionally in films, but hardly ever in radio or television content. Although they revealed the ideological profile of

individual media, there is good reason why this approach has lost importance. There has been a recent flurry of approaches that analyse discourse, examine the contents of various media to discover changes in interpretive patterns and relate these to more general changes (for instance about media and religion: Hannig 2010). A cultural history of this type can make use of events and processes to explain the interpretations called up by the media and the consequences that ensue (cf. Lenger and Nünning 2008).

Recent studies are less interested in printed articles than in Visual History. They analyse repetitive forms of pictures and their symbolic content. Since the 1990s this has been freed from the high-culture aesthetics of art history and has tapped into pictorial sources like simple prints, postcards, photographs, films, caricatures and advertisements (Jäger 2009). The plea for an Iconic Turn or Pictorial Turn at the same time stressed the claim that pictures do not merely illustrate something but rather generate an independent symbolism beyond their textual sources. Now the concept of Visual History has established itself in historical scholarship, in order to 'examine pictorial sources as media that condition ways of seeing, define patterns of perception, convey means of interpreting history and organize the aesthetic relationship of historical subjects to their social and political reality' (Paul 2006: 25). Iconic pictures from the twentieth century that demonstrate this can be found in the two famous volumes of *Das Jahrhundert der Bilder* (The Century of Pictures), edited by Gerhard Paul (Paul 2008/9), which has no equivalent in international research as yet. However, historical scholarship on German media history has hardly concerned itself with the moving pictures of television. Some initial studies on how television deals with the Nazi past (Horn 2009) and on the cultural and political upheavals of 1968 (Vogel 2010) have opened up new avenues.

Historical media research remained nation-oriented for a long time. In recent years the interest in transnational and comparative approaches on German media history has been growing, too. Some transnational studies have inquired into mutual relationships and transfers spanning several countries, for example wartime journalism in the Early Modern Age (Schultheiß-Heinz 2004), media communication and diplomacy (Hoeres 2013), or in the Cold War (Imre 2013). Other transnational studies looked at telegraphy in the nineteenth century (Wenzlhuemer 2010) and broadcasting (Badenoch, Fickers and Henrich-Franke 2013). Future studies on the general transnational or global history would be well advised to consider the impact of media structures, which often make transfer processes possible.

The state of the sources might be another reason why media-historical research has so far developed slowly in Germany. What exists is a wilful conglomerate of abundance and scarcity: on the one hand mass media sources such as pamphlets, newspapers, films and television programme guides have been preserved in almost daunting numbers, and this demands a methodically

well-considered choice. On the other hand there is an extremely poor state of transmission history for sources providing historical contextualisation: editorial files for newspapers, publishing houses and radio stations are often not available in German archives. The same applies to unpublished journalistic works, and sources and data about media users and reception prior to 1945. There is also only scant information about radio programmes of the 1920s and 1930s, and television broadcasts of the 1950s and 1960s. The source situation is also worse in Germany than in neighbouring countries. While American and British journalists began to write their memoirs and donate their correspondence to archives at a fairly early date, in Germany even the collected material of large publishing houses is very limited for the period before 1933. Accessing radio sources is especially difficult in Germany. Countries like Italy, France and the United States have provided online access for some important film and television sources, but in Germany examining radio and television archives is extremely expensive and access is often arbitrarily regulated. The digitalisation of pre-1945 German newspapers is also comparatively underdeveloped, whereas in the United States, Britain and Austria a great deal of historical press material is digitally accessible. Nevertheless, there are sufficient sources available for future research on media history. For example, there are numerous detailed editions of printed graphics (e.g. Harms 1985ff.; Paas 1984). Newspapers from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are on file in the *Institut für deutsche Presseforschung* in Bremen and in the newspaper section of the State Library in Berlin. The ‘ZDB-Opac’ displays the editions and locations of all newspapers and periodicals. Also, at least a few German newspapers are digitally accessible – some free of charge, like the *Augsburger Ordinari Postzeitung* (1770–95) – while others like the *Vossische Zeitung* (1918–34) and the *FAZ* (from 1949) can only be viewed by licence in major libraries. The film department of the Berlin branch of the Federal Archives collects sources for films of all genres dating back to the beginnings of cinema. Accessing radio and television programmes is more difficult, but the German Radio Archives in Frankfurt and Babelsberg (for GDR material) has enabled an initial entrée. Sources for individual (West) German programmes can be found in the archives of the different broadcasting stations. If one looks for German (TV) films, a good alternative is provided by the media libraries of universities, which can be used for purposes of research.

The present volume has been written from the German perspective and from the perspective of a historian. Nevertheless it often makes use of approaches and findings from other disciplines. Its intention is to highlight the development of new media and their respective societal significance on the basis of research. Hence it addresses the momentous role played by the respective media during various epochs and their significance for such pivotal events in human history as the Reformation, revolutions, wars and

dictatorships. Beyond that, the comparative and transnational orientation of this book will attempt to set some new accents of its own. Because its size necessitates some limitations, this volume will concentrate on 'mass media' – technological media that enable indirect communication with an anonymous, widely scattered public. For this reason some important technological means of communication like the phonograph record, photography and the telephone will only be dealt with in passing. As far as the time frame goes, 'only' the six hundred years since the end of the Middle Ages will be addressed. Also, the computer and the Internet will only be considered within the context of a summing up in the Epilogue, since digitalisation has only relatively recently begun to exert broad social and cultural influence.

This study tries to focus on Germany on a transnational basis. However, it must be said that, especially in regard to the twentieth century with its great media-historical complexity, comparisons can only be made by means of examples. The state of research also sets boundaries because the media-historical studies that exist are mainly concerned with the industrialised countries of the West and only in a limited way with Eastern Europe, South America, China and Japan.