TRADITIONAL AND MODERN MEDIA

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Contents

1. Introduction: Traditional, Modern, and Postmodern Media
2. Storytelling as the Core of Traditional and Modern Media
3. The Evolution of Puppetry as an Entertainment Medium
4. Potential for Entertainment Education
5. Technology Innovations in Traditional and Modern Media
6. Concern over Technological Developments
7. Conclusions
8. Defining Moments in Traditional and Modern Media History
Acknowledgments
Glossary
Bibliography
Biographical Sketch

Summary

Traditional media refer to conventional means of mass communication as practiced by various global communities and cultures from ancient times. Folk media are some of the most vibrant representations of traditional media because they reflect communication channels for, by, and of the common people of a society or region. In contrast to old-fashioned communication, modern media refer to mass communication characteristic of recent times, or the contemporary communication relating to a recently developed or advanced technology. Modern media are now being followed by postmodern media, which relate to mass communication that reacts against earlier modernist principles by reintroducing traditional or classical style elements or by carrying modernist styles or practices to extremes. Based on analyses of the evolution of traditional and modern media over the ages, this article features a wide range of perspectives on the primary role of storytelling in mass media, the evolution of puppetry as an entertainment medium, the potential of using media for entertainment education, technology innovations that have transformed mass media, neo-Luddite concerns over technological developments, and a chronological list of defining moments in traditional and modern media history. This article concludes that the mass media are among the most effective life support systems with the widest worldwide distribution and largest impact on the global future. As environmental and social problems continue to grow in this information age, the urgent necessity to shift to a sustainable economy has been recognized. In response to this call, there is an urgent need for a new generation of socially responsible mass media that adopt innovative strategies such as entertainment education to address complex, interconnected, global issues. Both traditional and

modern media could help promote improved levels of communication, and shared information that enables sustainable development on a global scale. In sum, a sustainable society must be an informed community.

1. Introduction: Traditional, Modern and Postmodern Media

Traditional media refer to the time-honored, conventional means of mass communication, such as street theater and puppetry as practiced by various global communities and cultures, or embodied in local custom or lore, generally involving the use of storytelling and especially communication arts that make up a distinctive culture, representative of a traditional way of life.

Folk media are some of the most vibrant forms of traditional media. Throughout the world, folk media refer to communication channels for, by and of the common people of a society or region. Folk media are representative of a traditional way of life based on customs, beliefs and arts that make up a distinctive culture. Folk media draw upon people's past, present and future, providing them with glimpses of reality that result in education and entertainment. In rural areas and developing nations, folk media represent the masses of people most deprived of specific messages. Thus folk media cover a wide range of traditional communication channels, including storytelling, street theater, puppetry, song and dance.

In contrast to communication of the ancient times, modern media such as the Internet (see *The Internet as a Mass Communications Medium*, EOLSS on-line, 2002), interactive media (see *Interactive Multimedia and Digital Technologies*), refer to mass communication characteristic of recent times, or the present or contemporary way of thinking, or communication relating to a recently developed or advanced style, technique or technology. The modern mass media address the serious problems of contemporary society, and the major public issues of our time (see *Books*, see *Magazines,* see *Newspapers, Newsletters and Pamphlets, see Television, see Radio*).

Modern media refer specifically to present times and also to forms of communication that are new. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the term was used to refer to the invention and application of new techniques in the media. Modern media are now being followed by postmodern media, which relate to mass communication that reacts against earlier modernist principles by reintroducing traditional or classical elements of style, or by carrying modernist styles or practices to extremes.

Postmodernism is a transitional cusp of social, cultural, economic and ideological history when modernism's high-minded principles and preoccupations have ceased to function, but before they have been replaced with a totally new system of values. The term postmodernism was first used (as early as the 1960's) to describe a style or movement in architecture. This style used various elements of past architectural styles and mixed them together in new buildings. There was nothing new or original in it other than the way it combined and reworked past styles. Postmodernism is a theory, which describes the situation after the dramatic changes brought about by modernity. While modernism represented the institutionalized norm of the present times, postmodernism emerged as a reaction to the widespread acceptance of modernism. Most examples of

postmodern media draw on and re-work known cultural artifacts, producing new meaning by recycling them. They demonstrate how the media world reflects inwards on itself, looking forward by looking back at other media products. Postmodern communication denotes new artistic, cultural or theoretical perspectives which renounce modern discourses and practices. Postmodernism is a fledgling position, one registering changes in society (e.g. the demise of colonialism, the spread of electronically mediated communication) that have only begun to revolutionize the structures of modernity.

Drawing upon unique features of traditional, modern and postmodern media, this article provides the framework for understanding the potential of traditional and modern media for promoting sustainable development. Based on analyses of the evolution of traditional and modern media over the ages, this article features perspectives on the primary role of storytelling in mass media, the evolution of puppetry as an entertainment medium, the potential of using media for entertainment education, technology innovations that have transformed mass media, neo-Luddite concerns over technological developments, and a chronological list of defining moments in traditional and modern media history.

This article also covers how both modern and traditional media have been combined to address needs for development and social change, the convergence of traditional media with its modern counterpart, and the ways in which the lines are blurring between different kinds of media. This article also addresses the tensions that media technology and globalization create for preservers of traditional forms of communication. For instance, feature films and modern dance performances have, in many cases, replaced traditional media.

2. Storytelling as the Core of Traditional and Modern Media

In many ways, the success of a mass medium lies in its power of storytelling. The mass media are a logical extension of storytelling because, at their most basic level, they present knowledge and information about the political, social, scientific and economic trends and events of a community. Through easy to comprehend reports that incorporate storytelling, the media narrate the success and failure of community members with historical, metaphorical, philosophical, and psychological implications.

Storytelling provides a means to document the news, history, character and identity of a community. Both traditional and modern media have adopted the forms of storytelling that have always existed in culture and have incorporated technological innovations, including interactive multimedia, digital technologies (see *Interactive Multimedia and Digital Technologies*, EOLSS on-line, 2002), animated content and computer-generated images. Thus, traditional and modern media, such as newspapers, street theater, television and the Internet can be seen as descendants and variants of types of stories and storytelling that predated the invention of those media. For instance, as an important narrative communication of contemporary times, mass media have taken on the functions served earlier by dime novels, serial novels, staged melodramas, wax museum displays, epic paintings and professional storytelling. These earlier forms continued into the past century and were supplemented by comic books, radio, television, popular films and the Web. However, this does not imply a replacement of the old media with the

new. In most cases, traditional and modern media have coexisted, with new technology simply re-mediating the old.

As the prime constituent of both traditional and modern media, storytelling has gone high-tech. Thousands of Internet sites are now devoted to all aspects of tale telling. Advanced digital technologies have significantly overturned traditional standards with interactive storytelling and visualization to the delight of an audience tired of old formulas. Most successful communicators, especially those in the mass media, recognize storytelling as a vital part of their work. For instance, many journalists write the way people talk and television reporters take their audience on a journey with the use of audio, video and the spoken word.

Storytelling can be used to teach moral values. For instance, Jamaica has an oral culture, so the history of the community has always been sustained and transmitted through storytelling. Thus people identify with characters in stories and this interaction greatly influences the acceptance of messages. The art of good storytelling unites people across cultures and times. From the beginning of time, people have always told stories or listened to them.

Storytelling has persevered and progressed to the point where it is today a strategic tool for communicators who have used strategies for sending the right message at the right time to the right people and through the right channel. Experts suggest that media practitioners should use a palette of communication strategies, different genres in different situations and contexts, to empower communities. Different genres, old or new, have something to offer. For instance, radio genres such as serial drama may work well to communicate with audiences because they better relate to taboo topics, rather than talk shows, where viewers may hesitate to call in to identify themselves.

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Biographical Sketch

Debashis "Deb" Aikat is an associate professor and media futurist in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. An expert on people, products and perspectives that are shaping the digital revolution, Aikat is an award-winning teacher and researcher on the impact of communication technologies, social aspects of the Internet, interactive media and the future of communication.

Along with published book chapters, Aikat's articles have appeared in refereed research publications of the Microsoft Corporation, International Radio and Television Society Foundation, Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) Special Interest Group for DOCumentation (SIGDOC), *Electronic Journal of Communication/La Revue Electronique de Communication*, and *Convergence: The Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*. He is a member of the editorial board of *Journal of Magazine and New Media Research* and has served as a reviewer for *Journalism and Communication Monographs* and several other journals.