

## **Mass media through the ages**

Any mention of the media and people automatically think of newspapers and magazines, television and the Internet, entirely modern methods of communication. This is understandable. The 20th century saw the introduction of communication technologies that have completely revolutionised the way we work, play, relax, and interact with other people. These fast-paced, ground-breaking changes do not look likely to slow down in the near future, either.

Whilst the tools of communication we now have at our fingertips have changed, so too has the general perception of the media. We tend to look back fondly on times when journalists could be trusted not to be the perpetrators of harmful fake news stories, and TV was not full of violence and aggression. But the past, in many ways, is not the nostalgic place we dream about. In any form of communication, there is room for misinterpretation and misunderstanding. It's true that modern media dominates our lives, but the will to communicate is perhaps what makes us human, and people have found ways to record their thoughts, feelings, and lives since the beginning of time. Here, we take a look back on some of the most important forms of media and human communication through history.

Prehistoric cave paintings are often considered to be the oldest form of human artistic expression, but every artist has a story to tell, and every painting holds a message. So what is the message behind these paintings? Many of them depict hunting scenes and are often thought to represent how these early people lived. However, we now know they survived on a diet of reindeer meat, whereas the paintings show bears, wild cats, and even rhinos. Rather than their reality, it could be their dreams and aspirations that are on show. Or perhaps these early people wanted to show themselves as having greater strength and bravery than they actually possessed. Either way, there is some confirmation that dissatisfaction with life may not be a modern invention at all.

Writing was, of course, another milestone in the growth of the media. Various systems of writing evolved in different civilizations around the world, increasing in accuracy until it became possible for a reader to reconstruct the meaning conveyed by the writer. This can be dated to around 3200 BC, although it is difficult to be exact about dates. The invention of paper in China in 100 BC meant books could be handwritten and be more easily circulated, but it was the introduction of the printing press 1500 years later that really enabled the mass media to take off.

The printing press enabled knowledge to be distributed to a much wider audience. It also did much to spread literacy, with more and more people learning how to read and write, and for that reason is often held up as one of the greatest inventions of our time. However, it can be associated with a number of drawbacks which can't be overlooked. Mass printing quickly became and remained a privilege of the rich and

educated. More importantly, the people at the very top of society have typically always held all the power, and the printing press gave them an even greater ability to exert control and spread the information that suited them. Whilst 'fake news' only became word of the year in 2017, it seems the concept is as old as time.

Rather than feeling down about our inability to get to the truth, we can look at the positives of our current situation. Personal blogs allow anyone to express their opinion online. One might say that the result is we are bombarded with too much information and shouldn't trust anyone. I'd rather see it as a fantastic opportunity to read widely, engage with various opinions, and finally make up my own mind about the information I am given. It has never been easier to speak your mind, and this can only be a positive thing, in my opinion.