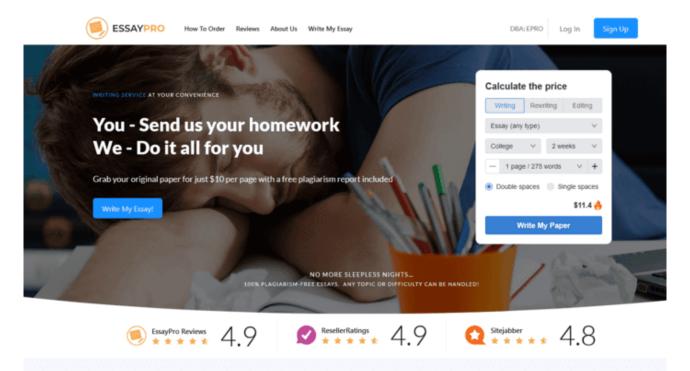# Technology and the Media

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Technology and the Media

In this essay, British historian and broadcaster Asa Briggs looks at how technological advances made in recent decades have created a revolution in the media, allowing people to communicate in ways they had never dreamed of. Briggs notes that although these new modes of communication—including the television, the personal computer, the Internet, and other digital technologies—are available throughout many parts of the world, these media may be used in different ways depending upon the prevailing political and social circumstances. [Briggs](#) also raises questions about the future of the media and how the unfolding media revolution will affect people's lives.

[Technology](#) and the Media

The sense that the world is in the middle of a continuing communications revolution has been strong since the 1960s when television made its great breakthrough. It was then that the Canadian writer on communications, Marshall McLuhan, made his memorable statements that "the medium is the message" and that the world was becoming a global village. It was then too that the word "media" became part of daily speech, covering not

only electronic media, live television, but older print media, particularly the press.

Comparisons were drawn between the progress and the development of television in the 20th century and the advent and diffusion of printing in the 15th and 16th centuries.

Yet much had happened between. It was not until the 19th century that the newspaper became the dominant pre-electronic medium, following in the wake of the pamphlet and the book and in the company of the periodical. It was during the 19th century also that the communications revolution speeded up, beginning with transport, the railway, and leading on through the telegraph, the telephone, radio, and motion pictures into the 20th-century world of the motor car and the airplane. Not everyone sees that process in perspective. It is important to do so.

It is generally recognized, however, that the introduction of the computer in the 20th century, followed by the invention of the integrated circuit during the 1960s, radically changed the process, although its impact on the media was not immediately apparent. It now became possible to combine thousands, later millions, of individual transistors on a single chip. Computers became smaller and more powerful. They became "personal...

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...ia—from books to motion pictures and from cable to satellite—endanger individual freedom? Will the opportunity of choice, offered to individuals, mean that the field of choice will be genuinely widened? May we not have more and more of the same thing?It is logical to separate out questions relating to technological developments from questions relating to ownership and control, but, in practice, visions of the future world involve bringing them together. It is difficult in present circumstances to avoid the blurring of "image" (seeing the world as it is presented to us or as we present it to ourselves) and "reality." Can "truth" survive? The media in their mediation can create what has come to be called "virtual reality"; and Internet can offer fantasy ways of escaping from the restraints of life as it is lived to a world of cyberspace. Cyber words have multiplied during the 1980s and 1990s—from "cybernaut" to "cyborg" through a whole new vocabulary.

It may well be that through an effort to chart the words that we use, and the dates when they were first used, we can achieve a greater understanding of a continuing historical process that encompasses the future as well as the past.

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