

HS7.301 Science, Technology and Society

Assignment 2

Write a social history of television.

Tips: How has this technology changed society? Who are the actors involved in designing, using, and manufacturing? What are their interests? How have various actors pushed the trajectory of the technology?

Word Limit: 1000-1200 words

Ans:

Invented in the late 1920s by John Logie Baird, television is one of the most significant inventions in the last century, which has had a profound and far-reaching impact and drastically changed society. It changed how people interact, inform each other, learn and entertain themselves. It allowed people to see, hear and learn about different cultures and social groups worldwide. Moreover, it also allowed people to communicate with each other through different channels on television. And apart from these, sitcoms and sporting events entertained people for a long time.

Television as a technology has a complex and prolonged social history. It includes various actors such as inventors, engineers, programmers, broadcasters, advertisers, and consumers. Each of these actors vividly pushed the trajectory of television differently by active involvement in the design, use and manufacturing of television and thus enjoyed tremendous benefits from the spread of television. Although it was invented in the 1920s, it could not become a regular part of everyone until the invention of transistors in the late 1940s, making televisions compact and affordable. The initial models were expensive, which only a specific section of society could have enjoyed. The lack of demand also resulted in minimal content available for the viewers. Therefore, television was initially limited to affluent households, and networks were the driving force for its development as they were responsible for aired programming and the technology behind its production.

As the networks were the primary actors and engineers in the initial era, the technology was limited and controlled. A significant change was when VCR was invented in the 1970s, allowing consumers to record and watch shows conveniently. This led to a decline in the popularity of network TVs. Further, the invention of cable boxes in the 1980s allowed people to access more channels, increasing the demand for televisions. With a drastic increase in the demand for television during various periods, broadcasters and advertisers also contributed their share in the social history of television. The invention of the internet in the 1990s enabled people to watch TV shows online. Therefore, television went through a digital revolution resulting in the popularity of streaming services such as Netflix and a decline in the number of cable TVs.

Throughout the discourse of television in history, broadcasters and consumers slowly became the most important actors in the spread of television. From being a mere device for entertainment, it became a powerful force in shaping public opinion and influencing history. It has brought people together and divided them. It has provided information and propaganda too. It has been a voice of the oppressed and showcased women as dumb characters in most sitcoms. Today, it has become the primary source of public news and information, entertainment for the general population, advertisements for broadcasters, and political propaganda.

Now we will discuss some specific components of society that played the principal actors in the spread of television throughout history. And one of the primary reasons for the spread of television was the relations between broadcasters who used to pay the programmers for their shows, who charged the advertisers for showing advertisements to the consumers, thereby opening new revenue channels for everyone.

One of the significant components influenced by the advancements in television is politics. Before the spread of news channels that provided insight into politics and news 24/7, newspapers were the only source for various leaders to spread their ideas and for the experts to analyse the government's policies. And the biggest problem with the newspaper was that it used to take at least 24 hours to deliver the information. And television provided real-time discussions on the politics and analysis of various events. It became convenient for the leaders of various parties to deliver the message to the ordinary public efficiently. Television has increased communication among various sections of society and reduced the gap between them with time. Also, the amount of freedom that television or media exercise in any country is a deciding

factor in the social life of the country and the freedom any democratic country exercises. For example, the media is hugely censored in North Korea and China. Television is a medium to deliver the ruling party's propaganda; therefore, the agendas are often delivered, dividing the public into various sections.

Another section that witnessed significant changes in the entertainment industry. Television has one of the most celebrated forms of entertainment for billions of people who consume sitcoms, sports events, and news daily. It started new forms of entertainment, such as sitcoms. It opened the sources and channels for revenue for the new movie producers, who were initially dependent only on the theatres and cinema halls for revenue and income. In contrast, television became another source of income for them. The entertainment industry started to boom when it got additional income from the rights to broadcast movies on television.

Moreover, television also has different parts of the world connecting. For example, people in non-English-speaking states now watch English movies. And along with the entertainment industry, sports are one of the most fundamental events that unite any society with various people to express themselves completely. Sportsmanship brings society together and connects several people with diverse traditions and cultures. Earlier, the only source where people could watch a sporting event was to either go to a stadium to watch it live or listen to the commentary on the commentators on the radio. Else, people would have to rely only on newspapers to get the information the next day. However, with the television broadcasting sports events live, it has become more convenient for consumers to enjoy their favourite sport in the comfort of their homes, even in remote areas. It opened new sources of revenue for the hosts of sporting events, which eventually helped spread the sports to a higher level. So, this is how we saw television shaping society by opening new sources of revenue for various actors and providing comfort to various actors in the discourse.