**Is mass media a thing of the past?**

Mass and digital media are two major types of communication that shape most people’s daily thoughts and feelings.[[1]](#footnote-1) With the rapid development of technology in the last 20 years or so, digital media has become as important a tool as mass media.

According to Belch (2021), mass media is a non-personal and non-interactive communication channel. Although it can send messages to millions of recipients, the recipient cannot respond to it. According to Belch, there are three types of mass media: broadcast media, print media and support media. Broadcast media are media tools such as television and radio that use sound and image.[[2]](#footnote-2) Although this type of media can easily reach millions of recipients, the target audience cannot be precisely selected. Secondly, print media are physically printed media such as newspapers and magazines. This type of media may have a smaller audience due to declining reading habits[[3]](#footnote-3). Therefore, the number of recipients is smaller than broadcast media. But its physical permanence is definitely longer as it is tangible. The last type is support media. In this medium, the main target is usually advertising. For example, posters hanging outside, billboards, advertisements on buses. With such advertisements, the advertisement is delivered directly to the audience, but the message is limited.

Digital media, in contrast to mass media, is a type of media in which the sender and receiver can communicate directly and quickly, especially using the internet. These media tools include electronic products such as computers and telephones. After the 1990s, digital media has become very important with the increase in the use of the internet and the subsequent spread of social media (Belch, 2021, p. 45), 2021). People now prefer digital media for quicker and easier access to information. In addition, the ability to respond to a message as a receiver is the point that makes a difference for the user. “Users can interact with other individuals by commenting on news content. In addition to all these, the user can not only consume content but also produce content. This two-way exchange is a key feature of digital media.

These two different types of media have different positive and negative features. One of the strongest arguments that mass media is a thing of the past is that digital media has a growing participation rate, even outpacing mass media year on year. Hongcharu (2024) reveals that with the growth of digital media, the roles of mass media have changed significantly.[[4]](#footnote-4) As shown in Table 1 (Hongcharu, 2024, p. 7), although mass media was used more than digital media until 2017, after 2017, the use of digital media far exceeded that of traditional mass media.

# Table 1

Comparison of Time Spent on Traditional Mass Media and Digital Media in the US (in Minutes)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Year | Traditional Mass Media (minutes) | Digital Media (minutes) |
| 2011 | 453 | 214 |
| 2012 | 448 | 250 |
| 2013 | 427 | 288 |
| 2014 | 402 | 309 |
| 2015 | 392 | 328 |
| 2016 | 362 | 343 |
| 2017 | 374 | 351 |
| 2018 | 364 | 384 |
| 2019 | 333 | 409 |
| 2020 | 331 | 470 |
| 2021 | 313 | 479 |
| 2022 | 297 | 489 |
| 2023 | 285 | 500 |

**Note.** From *The changing roles of mass media amidst the growth of the digital media*, by B. Hongcharu, 2024, *Cogent Social Sciences*, 10(1), p. 7.

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To understand the historical significance of mass media, it is beneficial to look at its development in the 20th century. According to Hiebert and Gibbons (1997), “In 1900, newspapers were the largest mass media, a role they had only entered in the previous 20 or 30 years. In 1900, the average person spent perhaps a few minutes a day on what we now recognize as mass communication. In the twentieth century, motion pictures, radio, television, and the computer evolved, and by the year 2000, the average American spent more than half of his or her leisure time (when not working, eating, or sleeping) in the mass media, mostly television” (p. 3). Although mass media shaped society in the past, its influence is now giving way to digital media.

Another analysis showing that mass media is a thing of the past is the 2023 Reuters Institute Digital News Report. According to this report, young people around the world prefer to follow news via digital media rather than mass media. “The main locus of news video consumption is online platforms (72%) rather than publisher websites (22%), increasing the challenges around monetisation and connection” (Newman, Fletcher, Eddy, Robertson, & Nielsen, 2023, p. 10).[[5]](#footnote-5) This data shows that traditional media organizations are struggling to engage with young users and generate revenue.

One of the key reasons why digital media has surpassed mass media in recent years is the successful implementation of the personalized algorithm. In order to clarify, the fact that the topics that people are interested in appear in front of the person is a feature that directly increases interaction. But there is no personalized news sharing in mass media. Posts target general audiences, which may fail to keep viewers engaged. Research shows that interaction and purchase intentions increase when ads are tailored to individuals’ personality traits and persuasiveness tendencies. This is particularly evident when sensitivity to authority is matched with authority-themed advertisements, while extroverted individuals generally show higher purchase and interaction intentions (Matz, Appel, Kosinski, & Stillwell, 2020, p. 5), Appel, Kosinski, & Stillwell, 2020). In this respect, mass media does not attract the attention of young audiences in particular.

However, since anonymity is easily achieved in digital media, it is very easy to share fake news. For example, according to an article by Central Methodist University (n.d.), “In an age of social media, where misleading information can be posted and shared in a matter of seconds, it is more important than ever to be able to recognize misinformation and other forms of manipulative or misleading content.” In mass media, it is obvious where a news story comes from, and if a false story is shared, it can be easily prosecuted.[[6]](#footnote-6) In this respect, mass media is careful to access professional and reliable sources of information. Before a piece of news or content is shared, it has to be approved by many people - a feature that is not generally practiced in digital media. In addition to the ease of fast news sharing in digital media, fake news can break the trust of users.[[7]](#footnote-7) This is why mass media is still relevant.

On the other hand, it is observed that especially older age groups have difficulty in getting used to the functioning of digital media. In addition to this group, there are still economically challenged people who cannot access digital media. There are many regions where there is no internet access and only newspapers and television are used.[[8]](#footnote-8) These masses can access mass media more easily. Therefore, mass media is still a functioning communication tool that has not lost its relevance. However, in the case of global news, digital media still provides more immediate and widespread access. In general, global news can be accessed much more quickly through digital media.

In addition to all this, in a way it may be meaningless to separate mass media from digital media. Because today, mass media companies (e.g. newspapers, television channels) are integrated with digital media.[[9]](#footnote-9) For example, newspapers also publish the news on their websites on a daily basis, or television channels upload the program that aired that day to platforms such as YouTube and continue to provide access from digital media. In other words, mass media and digital media are two intertwined means of communication and there are times when both need each other. Based on all of the above, while mass media may be considered obsolete in certain contexts, it continues to retain its relevance in specific audiences and scenarios. All things considered, while digital media reshapes the way we consume and interact with content, mass media continues to hold its ground in credibility, accessibility, and tradition—reminding us that progress doesn’t always mean complete replacement, but rather coexistence and adaptation.

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1. This classification is commonly used in media and communication studies to differentiate between one-way and interactive content delivery. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. These were historically dominant throughout the 20th century and still play a key role in news dissemination. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. A Pew Research Center study found a steady decline in newspaper readership, especially among younger generations. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. His findings are based on longitudinal data tracking U.S. media consumption patterns from 2011 to 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This shift also reflects the rise of algorithm-based content delivery on social media. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Traditional media undergoes editorial oversight and legal accountability not typically present in user-generated digital content. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. A 2018 MIT study found that false news on Twitter spreads six times faster than true news. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. According to the ITU, about 2.6 billion people worldwide remained offline in 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. This convergence is known as media hybridization, where legacy media adapts to digital platforms. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)