Mass Media: TV, Radio and Advertising in English

We are going to analyse how mass media communication entered in our lives and changed some aspects from a social and a cultural point of view. Public communication represented a new revolution, it is said that it is the second one after the Industrial Revolution. The term communication has several different meanings such as: to share, to impact, to transmit. These definitions stress the interaction that distinguishes communications from other messages, and stresses the effects of a message. The process of public communication changed greatly in the 20thc, due to the development of mass media. Although there have always been other means of communication such as pamphlets, ballads, broadsides, etc. It was the newspaper at the end of the 17th century which began the communication race in the world. Nevertheless, not until the invention of the radio and television that the idea of information and public communication changed radically and continues to do so today.

When referring to public communication we are speaking about three components.

1. An idea in the mind of a sender, this idea may or may not be sufficiently clear to be communicable to the receiver.
2. The formal expression (encoding) of the idea which constitutes the message, or the signal.
3. The receiver’s interpretation (decoding) of the message as received from the sender directly, and also as received indirectly via the various publics concerned with the issue.
4. The fourth component is the receiver’s response to the message reactions which ay or may not come to the attention of the sender of the original message. If they do they constitute a fifth component, the “feedback”; and the sender’s interpretation or decoding of this response to this message would complete one round of the communication cycle.

For each component there is a branch of study.

The second component— to express an idea persuasively to an audience is very important. There are also two basic factors that have to be considered in the process:

a) How to attract attention to a message, and
b) How to carry the message to the given audience.

The latter involves the techniques of adapting the message to the dominating values, motives and aspirations of the audience that the audience is inspired and eagerly welcomes the message.

The influence of audiences upon the public communications they receive is apparently greater than the influence of communications in the audiences. This new revolution started in the 20thc when new technologies
developed and enabled millions to hear, see and read the same messages at about the same time, where only hundreds could do so before. Great efforts were made to discover what the masses wanted to see or hear, to give them just that. The new mass media were very revolutionary in the sense that they shifted the origin of the mass messages from prominent individuals—statesmen, scholars, popular authors and others—to the masses themselves.

The effects of the messages transmitted by mass media are more interesting to more people, and have been studied in depth. This is why the two factors we have mentioned are so important and have clear effects.

a) Integrating the society by promoting consensus on basic policies.

b) Stabilizing the society supporting majorities against dissident minorities.

c) Facilitating public administration by advising officials of community problems and advising citizens of official policies and actions.

d) Strengthening national defences by reporting both external and internal threats to national security.

e) Extending the range of discourse by popularizing new terms, technical and cultural.

f) Reinforcing social customs, such as etiquette on personal health practices and

g) Stimulating fashions.

But the effects have not only been in the audiences themselves, but on all institutions, at least in western cultures. Many were restructured, including the basic institutions of government, church, justice, press, schools, commerce and industry. The degree of change depended on the extent of the previous arbitrary authority in the institution, and the size of the population directly affected by the institutions.

The more authoritarian and widely influential institutions were the more obliged to change in order to calm the popular criticism, as the mass media steadily increased the number of articulate critics by broadcasting the information needed to make their protest effective. Such institutions as the foreign ministries of major world power were forced to change their procedure, when both the problems and the approaches were broadcasted by the mass media. Thus, mass communications tended to change international negotiation into the broadcast of nationalist propaganda.

Focusing on commerce and industry we must say that mass media were first exploited in western industrialized nations by the advertising agencies, in the less industrialized nations by politicians.

The advertising industry became so rich that it could spend more money on communication research than any other institution, enabling advertising agencies to sell more goods and services, with inevitable inflationary effects on the national economies. Market analysis followed by mass advertising prove so efficient in selling commodities at a national level that the US government was persuaded to employ similar methods in selling its policies. Out of this, mass communication stimulated urbanizations, increasing social and geographical mobility, increased impersonality, accelerated social changes etc.

It was the press with newspapers, magazines, books which had a mass influence, it has been called slow media because its influence is delayed by the time required to read and react. As an advertising medium the
pres had certain advantages. Their efforts were targeted to the general public, writing what their readers wanted to be sold. Soon the readers influenced it more than the editors themselves. As far as editors, they would always try to keep their readers content, and reach as many readers as possible, that meant more revenue from advertising agencies. These agents wanted to place their ads in publications which a lot of people saw in order to sell more products.

Advertising has a direct relation with the article to be sold and it has an effect in the actual buyers or the potential ones. Before the promotion of an article begins a study of the market to see what public the article must be directed to. Advertising is generally done of luxury products which have a brand. When a brand advertisers its products it wants to attract the attention of the consumer. The advertising campaign seeks to find the appropriate message, the exact argument that will make the consumer not only want the product, but need it as well. In order to do this there is a selection of objective and subjective arguments which will cause a reaction in the consumer. The objective ones are specific characteristics of the product, but the decisive arguments are the subjective ones, because those are the ones that trigger the motivation in the consumer. The fusion of these arguments will be the centre of the campaign, that is to say the main ideas that the consumers must retain. These will vary depending on the objective that the campaign has set itself.

The next step is to translate those essential ideas and objectives into a message which has to attract attention and curiosity, and will convince the consumer.

At this point we find three different methods used by advertising:

- Automatic, which triggers an immediate mental reaction
- Rational and
- Suggestive, which create a need for the product by offering an atmosphere that trigger subjective motivations.

This last one is the most efficient. It uses a sensitive and symbolic language, preferably not verbal. This is why it has been developed mostly in audiovisual media. For instance, some years ago a company launched a campaign of some cocoa for kids in Brazil. The campaign was based on the healthy properties never achieved by any other similar product. The effect was tremendous and quick. Customers, mostly mothers, willing to purchase it. The answer was that they had to wait for a month because shops had run out of it. In fact, that new brand did not even exist yet. It had to be produced according to the consumer’s response. This proves that they created the need by the suggestive method and I would say that went further than that. It was a total success.

Such a success had been achieved through years of study, it has been coming gradually following patterns of consumer marketing.

If we have a look at the history of advertising with no doubt we must say that it has always existed. In the British Museum we can see a papyrus in which the advertiser offers a reward to whoever finds one his slaves who had disappeared, another example was seen in the ruins of Babylon, where archeologists found symbols which merchants used to describe the nature and quality of their merchandise. However, commercial advertising as a massive social event was not possible until the development of mass media. Ever since the beginning of the newspaper there was advertising, but commercial one as we understand it today, related to the media, did not began to develop till the end of the 19th century. It was Giradin, the first journalist, who promoted it in Europe, and used it to compensate the losses of his journalistic enterprise. Penny newspapers did the same, lowering their prices for the public and earning the money from advertising. Today the money
newspapers made from advertising is four times what they make from circulation. This had many consequences in the way newspaper was conceived, as editors try to reach as many people as possible in order to get more advertising revenue. The larger the public that reads the paper, the more advertising it will receive from the agencies.

Many newspaper only care about selling as many paper as possible, without worrying about the contents of the publication. Sensationalist and “yellow” newspapers became very popular at the end of the 19th c and the beginning of the 20th c. Advertising became an element of pressure in the form and the contents of periodicals. It was applied to radio and television from the moment they came into existence. At the end of the 19th c the first organizations were founded in defence of information and the public’s rights to know the truth, and against the excesses of advertising. But even though they were able to put some pressure, and governments passed laws to limit advertising to some extend, the world is being constantly bombarded with advertising messages.

Moving on to the linguistic message, probably the most important issue in advertising, we will have to point out that it is elaborated depending on the receiver. The linguistic message can be alone, as in the case of radio or be combined with images, as in the case of television. Our interest is in language, not image, and we will pay attention to this. We must keep in mind that the linguistic elements will vary greatly depending on whether the support is a newspaper, radio or television. In this study we will be talking about radio and television.

It is very rare the image that by itself produces an advertising message. The message normally needs words to accompany it in order to reach the objective of the advertising campaign.

The linguistic message does not necessarily have to have a direct relation with the product that is being sold. For instance, we may be seeing a car on our television screen, but the message we are receiving is about the social status of the person inside the car.

Texts tend to use rhetoric figures such as: comparison, taking an example we can quote “nothing tastes like camel filters”, a metaphor: “buy yourself a Rolex, it is a safety box” or an hyperbole: “Jim. Pure American cotton. The softest texture in the world”, also creating doubt, “Am I happy with Skip? Of course I am”, and finally with rhetorical questions like, “If you don’t by him Patrick’s, who will?”

It is also frequent to use rhymes and tunes that make the name or the brand of the product stay in the consumers’ mind even if he/she does not understand exactly what it is about. Here we are referring to jingles. A jingle is audible effect used in advertising. It must be easy to remember and short and catchy. An effective jingle will get stuck in your head and have you singing it all day long.

The objective is to shock and attract the consumers. Texts are usually short and do not have a verb, although often the imperative is used: “drink Coca Cola and learn how to enjoy life”.

There are also texts that are written in first person and with a doubtful attitude, such as: “Do I have with Wilkinson? Definitely, yes, or I prefer Pespsi, the real taste.

This brings us to the semantic field in the sense that writers always have in mind the audience they are writing for, whether it is young people or the elderly, men or women, etc because the connotations added to the message are very important. It is frequent to use sayings and expressions that the consumer already knows and feels familiar with.
Another element to take into account is the political and social situation of the country they are written for. In countries like the USA and the UK they choose actors that look like political figures to advertise some specific product and nowadays it is quite common to find celebrities advertising different products.

But advertisers not only want us to consume, this industry goes a bit further. Mass media is the ideal tool for political campaigns, they play an important role in politics. It is true that it has been demonstrated that this does not vary the intention of the voters, but it is also true that it has a big impact on citizens. The best example is the last campaign of Mr Obama with his famous “Yes, we can.” This slogan has been copied by many different companies just changing the subject but keeping the verb. It was the very Mr Obama that during the campaign and referring to his opponent Mr. McCain said “Borrow my ideas, not my slogans”. With this remark we can realise the extent and the proportion of influence of mass media in citizenship.

In the US the law allows a certain brand to put down a competitor as long as the message can be proved to be true. This gives the ad a credible tone. Another fact always taken into account is the social status of the consumer.

These examples above mentioned are intended for television, although some of them could be heard on the radio. These to medium were the ones which erupted and changed many things in communication as soon as they were born. Television especially changed the whole concept of mass media. Today, fibre optics and computers are doing the same thing. Let’s see some of the historical evolution of the two of them.

Radio started to be used in the 1920s. The first emission took place in 1919 in the Netherlands. The next one in 1920 in GB and it was directed by the Daily Mail. The same year Paul Gilson also organized an emission in Pittsburg. From them on it was slowly implemented all over Europe. As for television it was still in its technological infancy. The radio phonic styles began to consolidate, based on journalism and literature, with the compliment of musical programs. The programs developed as the tastes of the public did, we are mainly referring to words and music, creating a new dimension in the world of communication. The journalistic and literary genres changed in order to adapt to the new medium, and they started to have peculiar characteristics.

As for radio noise was very important, it was used to create emotion in specific situations, to set an atmosphere, to make up a world for the listener. When there was an interview with a famous person it had the incentive of being able to hear a person’s real voice, as well as when listening to the news reports they were transmitted as they occurred. For this reason radio was a very important factor in the popularization of music from the very beginning of its existence, anyone could listen classical music, jazz or dancing music.

After the second World War radio played an important part in this phenomenon, which still does today. Television became a real possibility after the invention of the munion valve. The device did not emerge from the laboratory until 1929 when the BBC cooperated in experimental transmissions. In 1932 the corporation took over transmissions itself. We can say that the post-war development of broadcasting consisted of two changes: the replacement of radio by television as the major medium, and the introduction and the growth of an alternative, commercial network.

The war itself transformed the BBC into an enormous organization. The commercial television channel opened in 1954, experimenting a growth after 1956 which is still on today. Although it was Europe the one that invented mass media it has been the US the one which has developed it, giving representations to society worldwide. Television is thought to be the main source of information nowadays and plays an important role on socialization. For instance, American television has changed the concept of the family. We, by no means, can affirm that there is only one kind of family, the traditional one, but many other kinds. We have also seen the impact on political campaigns since J.F. Kennedy, who was the first politician to appear on screen, till Mr.
Obama, the first black president of the US. We all are also acknowledged of the speech made by M.Luter King with his famous “I have a dream...” and many other examples are seen in every day life.

The world of communication has changed the world and obviously most language. Messages have to be clear, concise and appealing, we only have a certain amount of time and space and it costs a lot of money, so the campaign must be set up in the most efficient and effective way.

This topic will give us the material to show our students how dependent they may be on mass media, which is the extend they are influenced by mass media, and most important, as a tool of socializing, accepting different ways of lives and cultures. They have to be open-minded and they have to become critical citizens and in order to achieve this they will have to be fed with plenty of information and mass media is a wonderful way to get it.